The new arrivals in Israel needed to know: God’s people have always had enemies who want to embarrass, harm, and scandalize them. God’s people also pay the price when they are sinful. “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (10:13-14). Saul’s chapter was not one of Israel’s best.

The page turns to King David, who had men loyal to him even before his anointing (12:1-40) and a band of mighty men who would sacrifice everything for him. His troops included men from all over the land working together for a common purpose (11:10-47). They all served David and honored Yahweh even when that presented inconvenience or sacrifice, yet the events surrounding Uzzah’s death teach honoring God does not mean ignoring His commands. Zeal without knowledge can be deadly.

Saturday, August 26, 2017—1 Chronicles 14-16

The last days of August usually include parents preparing their children for another school year. Especially for those parents sending a child away from home, these days include lots of check lists and advice. What lies ahead requires preparation and clear thinking.

For those returning to Israel, the stakes were even higher. They were going to a new place never to return. They had the calling and favor of God on their lives, and they needed to make the most of it. Chronicles informs them of their past to prepare them for the future.

King David was Israel’s greatest king, so his life provided ample lessons and truths. As king, he had allies in Tyre. Every nation who does not follow Yahweh is not an enemy. The Philistines, however, were indeed enemies, but David did not rely simply on military might and skill. For this know enemy, he sought the wisdom and direction of the Lord (14:14). As a result of his humility and obedience, “David’s fame spread throughout every land, and the Lord made all the nations fear him” (14:17).

David was willing to learn from his mistakes. Because the Levites had not carried the ark on poles as God instructed, Uzzah lost his life when God’s anger broke out (15:13). He corrected this mistake after he prepared a place for it in Jerusalem, and he worshiped heartily as it traveled (15:28). He also wrote a psalm of thanks for the provision of God (16:7-36).

Give thanks to God for His love and willingness to teach.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 34

Sunday, August 20, 2017—Jeremiah 50-52

Jerusalem was falling, and God was encouraging His people to endure the Babylonians. They were His chosen instruments for Israel’s discipline. One day, however, God was going to bring punishment on them for their arrogant attitude and vicious disposition (50:11). Assyria and Babylon both would suffer, and Israel would be restored.

“In those days . . . search will be made for Israel’s guilt, but there will be none . . . for I will forgive the remnant I spare” (50:20). “The people of Israel are oppressed, . . . Yet their Redeemer is strong; the Lord Almighty his name. He will vigorously defend their cause . . .” (50:33-34). “For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the Lord Almighty, though their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel” (51:5). How refreshing and invigorating these words must have been to those beginning a difficult season of life under Babylon.

“For the time will surely come . . .” God told them (51:47). That time was not now. Jeremiah had said that time would not be for a while, so they were to build homes and plant gardens, but they could be certain Babylon would fall because of what they did to Israel (51:49). “Remember the Lord in a distant land, and think on Jerusalem” (50:50).

When life is difficult, examine what hindrances and sin might be causing it. Repent. Endure and trust in His promise to restore and revive.

Monday, August 21, 2017—Lamentations 1-5

On August 21, 2017, a solar eclipse was visible in the continental United States. This rare phenomenon parallels some cataclysmic events in Scripture when the sun was darkened as God poured out judgment. The witness of nature to the design and power of God is truly humbling.

While he did not see a solar eclipse, what Jeremiah observed in Jerusalem was devastating. The once-bustling city of Jerusalem lay deserted. The queen had become a slave (1:1). Those who once honored her now despised her, and she groaned at the sight of her weakness (1:8). Allies betrayed her, and there was no one to comfort her. Jeremiah called on God to judge the wickedness around him as He had judged Jerusalem.

Jeremiah wrote these laments because of the profound grief he experienced at the fall of Jerusalem. “He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger” (2:1). This act of God was totally inconceivable, though God had promised it for generations (2:17). Jeremiah’s only response was to lament their plight. In doing so, however, he called to mind the steadfast love of the Lord. His mercies were new every morning, and His faithfulness was great Jeremiah knew God was good to those who waited on Him (3:22-25).

The only hope Jeremiah had was in the restorative power of God (4:22, 5:21). The one who controls creation is in charge of your life. When all is dark, look to Him as the Light.

Tuesday, August 22, 2017—1 Chronicles 1-3

Those who study the Bible often wonder where everyone came from. They ask first when they study the Garden of Eden. They ask a second time after the flood of Noah. While the chapter gives a broad-brush view, the reader can see the explosive growth that is possible within a few generations of Noah’s sons’ leaving the ark. The names of many of the nations surrounding Israel in the biblical narrative are in 1 Chronicles 1. In the mysterious economy of God, there are common roots for everyone.

In 1 Chronicles 2, the writer hints at God’s desire to reach the nations. “These three were born to him by a Canaanite woman” (2:4). He also hints here at His ability to work despite the failures of His people. “Tamar, Judah’s daughter-in-law, bore him Perez and Zerah” (2:4). In 1 Chronicles 3, the writer writes of the royal line and God’s continuance of it despite the exile.

Why would the writer spend so much time and give such detail? The people of God had spent 70 years in exile in Babylon. For most who returned to Jerusalem, they had never seen the city or the Temple. They had various levels of exposure to the stories of God and the history of His people. Chronicles provides the new settlers with an important overview of who God is, what He has done, and what He desires for His people. That story begins with lots of names, real people in whom God did real work.

Thank God for the historical proof of a legitimate faith.

Wednesday, August 23, 2017—1 Chronicles 4-6

The Chronicler wrote for the people of God who were returning to Israel after the Babylonian exile. They were starting a new life in their ancestral home and needed to know their history so they could align themselves for their future. In the genealogy of Judah, they heard names of people and places that shaped their past, but they also heard of Jabez who could exemplify their future. Born in pain, Jabez cried out to God in prayer. He did not want his past to define him but, instead, wanted to live in the blessing and service of God, and God answered his prayer (4:9-10). God is looking for those whose hearts are surrendered to Him. He wants His people to find their purpose in Him and His power and not in their circumstances.

The people of Simeon “kept a genealogical record” (4:33), and they fought for land when God allowed them to return (4:41-43). During battle, the Reubenites “cried out to him during battle” (5:20), and He answered their prayers, “because they trusted in him.” Following God’s lead and becoming the people He wants His people to be are not passive pursuits. Faithfulness and obedience require constant attention and effort. Chapter 6 gives an extensive genealogy of Levi, the tribe who led in Temple activities. God’s people cannot be fully obedient without regular, corporate times of worship and celebration, and each tribe provided for Levi so the Levites could give full attention to their task.

God hears prayer and empowers obedience. Pray and obey.

Thursday, August 24, 2017—1 Chronicles 7-9

Reading through the genealogies in the Old Testament is rarely anyone’s choice for stimulating material, yet God always has truth available for those who seek it. He commanded the biblical writers to preserve these family trees, so there is reason for their being recorded and read.

One reason surely is the reminder of God’s preserving power. The tribes of Israel find their ancestors in these pages. After spending 70 years away from the Promised Land, they returned home to hear these words and remember how God long ago had settled His people and multiplied them beyond imagination. He would do it again.

A second reason is the reminder that following Him is never easy. Many of the genealogies count the number of fighting men. Occupying the land and maintaining spiritual and practical purity would not come easily. Also, the record of Saul mentions divorce (8:8). Those who follow Him will not simply obey Him and discover daily showers of blessing. They have to live life and deal with reality, and sometimes the brokenness of sin and self taint what God is trying to do and provide.

Proclaiming His faithfulness is a third reason. This new season for Israel deserved recording for future generations. God works now for future glory for Himself and to fulfill promises and bring blessing for His people.

Some of the first to resettle were priests, Levites, and temple servants (9:2). God deserves first place in every area of life, preventing the traps of unfaithfulness that plagued the past (9:1).

Remember. Endure. Worship.

Friday, August 25, 2017—1 Chronicles 10-13

Chronicles tells the story of Israel for the benefit of a new generation of settlers in the Promised Land. Chronicles seeks to tell a broad history in a brief span. After the genealogies of the opening chapters, Chronicles turns to the age of the kings and the ever-present enemy, the Philistines. After a fierce battle, the Philistines took King Saul’s head and hung it and his armor in their temple of Dagon. Brave men went and took them back and buried them properly.