

Week 30

July 23 - July 29

2 Kings 20:20-22:2; 2 Chronicles 32:32-34:7; Isaiah 40-66;
Jeremiah 1:1-2:22

"If a man had half as much foresight as he has twice as much hindsight, he'd be a lot better off." –Robert J. Burdette

The theme of the week is primarily that of learning from the past, although there is a great deal of looking to the future as well. As you explore what learning from the past really means, you will need to discover the place for proper perspectives and earnest applications. It is truly a journey we are on, so may we learn as we go.

July 23rd

Isaiah 40:1-44:5. "Learning Lessons Through Time"

From chapter 40 of Isaiah on to the end of the book you will read of specific events to take place several centuries into the future. Isaiah will describe the Babylonian captivity of Judah and then Judah's release from 70 years of captivity (almost 200 years after Isaiah prophesies). Isaiah prophesies the fall of the Babylonian empire, and its method. Isaiah also details the coming and suffering of Jesus Christ (700 years later).

Isaiah's message no doubt exhorts the hearers to follow after God and turn from disobedience. The miracle of looking ahead to what the future holds gives obvious credence to that fact. Yet so does the ability to look back. At one point he condemns the idols people honored, and asked, "Can those things tell us what happened long ago or what the future holds? ...They are less than nothing and can do nothing at all" (41:22-24). Humans have more ability than that. In the next chapter the people are criticized for "not applying the lessons from the past" (v. 23). Learn from the lessons of time.

July 24th

Isaiah 44:6-48:11. "What is Your I Focused On?"

"You can always recognize an egotist by the gleam in his I." That "I" can get us in a lot of trouble. The center of pride is "I". Ignore begins with "I".

We can get in trouble ignoring something pride keeps us from following. In chapter 48, verse three, God tells the people, "Time and again I warned you about what was going to happen in the future. Then suddenly I took action, and all my predictions came true. I know how stubborn and obstinate you are."

Once more it has been made clear to us that we can learn from the past, and moreover we had better heed what God says about the future. Furthermore, don't let "I" get in the way. We have the natural tendency to get wrapped up with "I". We buy and achieve to make "I" look good, but it is possible that an obsession with "I" could pave the way to one day allowing "disaster to overtake us suddenly" (47:11).

May the gleam in your I be for your Savior.

July 25th

Isaiah 48:12-52:12. "Who's Forsaking Who"

"Be strong and courageous! ...the LORD your God will go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). Joshua and the Hebrews who were about to enter the Promised Land found great comfort in those words.

After floating around in the ark for a year I would imagine Noah could have wondered if God had forgotten about them. After 70 years in captivity apparently some of the Jews felt God had forgotten about them (prophetically declared). God's reply was, "Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for a child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on my hand" (49:15).

Will God forsake us? No. Can it feel as though He has? Yes, but it's not coming from His direction. Perhaps the feeling comes from discipline we are enduring like the Jews, or from a lack of patience and trouble resting in God's timing, or most likely from the fact that we have put God on a back burner.

July 26th

Isaiah 52:13-57:21. "Old Testament Gospel"

From 52:13 to the end of chapter 53 nearly every verse has a prophetic statement of Jesus Christ and the suffering He was to endure. It is central to the passage from chapter 40 to the end. The section is broken up into five stanzas of three verses each. The passage is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage. In fact, it is often referred to as the "gospel" in the Old Testament.

The Hebrews anticipated a messianic (anointed) deliverer coming to save them from their enemies. Generally, they felt He would come in the figure of a great political ruler. Therefore, passages such as this one in Isaiah tended to be ignored. The concept of a suffering Servant Messiah was one they would rather overlook.

Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah. Still, there is something somber to be reminded of His suffering. Let the written descriptions become a visual description. Don't allow the words to let you miss the image, the pain, the humility, the rejection, the injustice, the price, the love, the sacrifice, etc.

July 27th

Isaiah 58:1-63:14. "The Right Time"

A sign over a clock in school read, "Time will pass. Will you?"

Many of this week's passages have been providing us with unique perspectives on time, past and future. Yet at the close of chapter 60 we have one of the best statements about time: "I, the LORD, will bring it all to pass at the right time." It's not just the aspect of perfect timing, but it is also the facet of the perfect controller, the LORD. Man will not bring it to pass at the perfect time. Neither creation nor chance will bring it to pass at the right time. Only God can bring it to pass at the right time, and only God knows what to bring and how to bring it to pass at the right time.

There is a "right time" for everything, whether it is for us personally this week or for all of mankind 1,000 years from now. Although I may have my struggles from time to time with impatience or discontentment, I truly am genuinely glad to know God has the timing for everything all figured out.

July 28th

2 Kings 20:20-21; 2 Chronicles 32:32-33; Isaiah 63:15-66:24. "Looking In"

"How ignorant can they be?" I can read passages day after day that describe how people mess up, everyone from a king to a common Israelite. Seemingly one minute they will see the hand of God in a powerful way and then two sentences later they have totally turned the wrong way. There are two things I need to remind myself of. One, from one sentence to the next you could have a gap of 20 years. Perhaps not overnight, but in time each of us have the capacity to become more complacent and less committed. The second thing I need to be aware of and evaluating is my personal walk. Do I have rebellious or spiritually ignorant tendencies? Am I negligent in feeding the hungry, working for justice, obeying God's Word, caring for the poor, or serving wholeheartedly? Do I faithfully stand with a humble and contrite heart, trembling at the Lord's word? (see Isa. 66:2)

If God chose to dedicate a section of Scripture to describing your life how would it read?

July 29th

2 Kings 21:1-22:2; 2 Chronicles 33:1-34:7; Jeremiah 1:1-2:22. "How Bad is Your Past?"

How bad is your past? Is it as ugly as Manasseh's? He led the nation of Judah to do more evil than even the pagan nations were guilty of. He built pagan altars everyone, even inside the Temple. He worshipped everything from stars to idols. He practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and consulted with mediums and psychics. He even sacrificed his own sons in the fire. I doubt your past was that bad.

It took capture by the enemy to reduce Manasseh's pride. The Assyrians put a ring through his nose, bound him in chains, and led him away. While a prisoner, "in deep distress," he cried out humbly to God. "He prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved by his request for help. So, the Lord let him return to Jerusalem and to his kingdom" (2 Chr. 33:13).

If God can forgive the past sins of Manasseh, there is no doubt that he can forgive anyone. Don't become so guilt-ridden that you fail to come to the One who has the power to heal and forgive anyone.

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Is hindsight always 100%? What could make it less than 100%? Or, is there something we can do to make use of the 100%?

We know we can learn from the past, but why are we not proficient at doing so?

What part does prophecy and fulfilled prophecy play in looking back? (see July 26 devotional)

How can pride hinder learning from the past or preparing for the future?

When it comes to forgiving sins, or more specifically God's removing them from us, how far does God look back? (Jer. 31:34) Where do our feelings of guilt about the past come from?

Personal application: Spend time to list some of the things you have learned from the past.