

Week 34

August 20 - August 26

2 Kings 24:20b-25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 21, 32-34, 39; 40:1-6; 52:3b-27; Lamentations 1; Ezekiel 17-28; 29:1-16; 30:20-31:18

We just spent the weekend with longtime friends who have fully restored the home he grew up in. It is a beautiful place on a tremendous piece of property. They could tell you firsthand of the work, planning and money spent to tackle such a project. He now has a plethora of new stories about planning departments, architects, permits, unrealistic estimates, and on and on.

There may well be a downside to restoring anything (work, money, etc.), but there is also an upside, and that is the finished project. God offers restoration (reconciliation, salvation and forgiveness) to us, and in a similar way there was a downside. A tremendous cost was necessary; the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

As you read this week's passages, note the emphasis on various aspects of restoration.

August 20th

Ezekiel 17-19. "Hope at the End of the Trial"

Adolph Hitler was an avid believer in astrology and consulted with his special astrologist before making any decisions. One day in consulting with him, Hitler asked, "On what day will I die?" "You will die on a Jewish holiday," replied the astrologist. "How can you be so sure of that?" asked Hitler. "Any day you die will be a Jewish holiday," replied the astrologist.

As we continue reading through the books of the prophets, we will frequently be hearing warnings of coming judgment for Israel. Yet there are statements of hope sprinkled throughout the passages that we dare not miss. They are wonderful words of inspiration, promise and hope. In today's passage Ezekiel prophesies of judgment and then ends with words of hope: And the Sovereign LORD says, "I will take a tender shoot from the top of a tall cedar and I will plant it on the top of Israel's highest mountain. It will become a noble cedar..." (17:22).

Occasionally the time of hope is many years away (like this passage referring to the time of the Messiah), but hope is nonetheless there. There is hope.

August 21st

Ezekiel 20:1-22:16. "Preventing Decay"

One of the aspects of the dictionary definition for "restore" is "to recover from ruin or decay." The importance of that spiritually is enormous. Restoration is expressed throughout Scripture, and the facet of its recovering something from decay is foundational. We are ruined and decaying because of sin, and we need the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. Even as believers, each day we must strive to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We need to avoid following the desires of our old sinful nature (Gal. 5). If we choose to go down that road we will be in need of some restoration. In today's passage the people were in need of a purging, a cleaning (20:38). And even at that, there was hope in the end. God said, "When I bring you home from exile, you will be as pleasing to me as an offering of perfumed incense" (20:41). God cleanses thoroughly.

"Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin... Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Psalm 51:2, 7

August 22nd

2 Kings 24:20b-25:2; Jeremiah 39:1; 52:3b-5; Ezekiel 22:17-24:14. "In the Cooking Pot"

Have you ever felt like you were in the "cooking pot"? In the 1987 AFC Championship football game between Cleveland and Denver, Ernest Byner fumbled the ball just as he got ready to score a touchdown. That mistake cost the Cleveland Browns the championship, a trip to the Super Bowl and is what most people remember about Ernest Byner. Even though Ernest Byner had an otherwise stellar fourteen-year career in the NFL and was ranked 16th on the all-time rushing list, many angry Cleveland fans will not forget the "infamous fumble." His fumble ruined an otherwise impressive performance, as he finished the game with 67 rushing yards, 7 receptions for 120 yards, and 2 touchdowns.

When you're in the "cooking pot" you wish you could do things over. No one felt that more than Judah. They were under siege for 2 ½ years. If they could back up the clock for a do-over they would. But they had ignored the warnings cried out for years by God's prophets. Maybe not from a fumble, but most of the time we wind up in the "cooking pot" we have gone there willfully.

August 23rd

Jeremiah 21, 34; Ezekiel 24:15-25:17; 29:1-16; 30:20-31:18. "Crime but No Time?"

Picture the familiar scene: A wrong has been done, a punishment must be made, and the offender is suddenly sorry. It is possible to apologize for getting caught and not for the offense. This was the case with King Zedekiah. He had been warned time and again of God's coming judgment if he would not change. Now the judgment came and suddenly he wanted it taken away. He requested of Jeremiah, "Please ask the LORD to help me... perhaps He will do this for me... and this..." (21:2). He did not admit his sin. He was only sorry for getting caught and having to reap the penalty of which he had been warned often. And then he suggests a few things the Lord could do.

Make it personal as you consider three of the factors in that situation: Have you been guilty of expecting God to get you out of the trouble you put yourself into? Is it easier to ignore God's warnings when things are going well? Is it possible to just use God when it's to our advantage?

August 24th

Jeremiah 32-33; Ezekiel 26:1-14. "Fully Restored"

God's encouraging words of restoration came in the form of promise to Israel. His promises of restoration were part of His plan for Israel. It's important for us to remember that His plan covers everything; the beginning, middle, and end.

His restoration is not haphazard. I can think of some building projects I've been involved in that were not thought through. For instance, a building restoration is a well-planned process. First, you must know the original state or condition of the building. Second, you must know the full extent of decay/disrepair of the current condition. Third, having an accurate picture allows you to know the true cost for the restoration project. Final, after the price is paid and the work completed; the building is once again the beautiful building it was originally created to be.

God had a plan from the beginning concerning Christ's restoration of the kingdom (see Acts 3:21). God also had a plan concerning our restoration: "He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result... you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault" (Col. 1:22).

August 25th

2 Kings 25:3-7; Jeremiah 39:2-10; 52:6-11; Ezekiel 26:15-28:26. "Restoration Prophecies"

Bible prophets often spoke of a future restoration of the land of Israel. Many of those prophets lived during times in which their homeland was being conquered and destroyed by a succession of ancient empires. Today, we can see with our own eyes what some of those prophets saw with theirs—the current restoration of Israel—a nation that until 1948 had not been a united and sovereign nation for nearly 3,000 years. Perfect restoration will not come until Christ's return.

Below is a partial list of prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel as a nation: Is. 27:12-13, restore Jews; Is. 35:1-2, restoration of Israel; Is. 43:5-6, worldwide return; Jer. 32:44, Jews buy back land; Ez. 4:3-6, Israel re-established; Ez. 11:17, Israel as their country; Ez. 20:34, Jews return; Ez. 22:14-15, Jews scattered; Ez. 34:13, return to "their own land"; Ez. 36:8-10, restored and repopulated; Ez. 36:11, prosperity; Ez. 36:24, re-gathered; Ez. 36:33-35, rebuilt and resettled; Ez. 37:10-14, brought back to life; Ez. 37:15-19, a united people; Ez. 37:21-22, re-established; Joel 2:22, become prosperous land; Amos 9:11, 13, rebuilt; Amos 9:14-15, regain control; Mic. 7:8-11, rise again; Zech. 8:12, again fruitful.

August 26th

2 Kings 25:8-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 39:11-40:6; 52:12-27;
Lamentations 1. "Time's Up!"

"The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD's anger could no longer be restrained and there was no remedy" (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

Contrary to what many think, the Lord's patience does have a limit. Peter noted, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise... No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time... But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief..." (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

Restoration is a beautiful thing, but there will be a time when its offer runs out. You can't rely on waiting until the last minute of your life to get things in order. You may not have that opportunity. The same will be true for mankind historically. There will be a day when the whistle blows, when the trumpet calls. Don't wait too long to receive God's promise of restoration, reconciliation and salvation.

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:

What part does hope play in the life of the believer and why does it matter?

Define restoration (see Aug. 21). Describe the process (some possible hints are found in the Aug. 24 devotional).

A great testimony was shared in church some time back in which the individual described time in "the cooking pot" (a difficult time). And one of his comments was a desire to back up the clock and do it over. The Aug. 22 devotional describes the same thing. Is there an upside to time spent in "the cooking pot"?

Walk through the questions at the end of the August 23rd devotional.

There are many prophecies describing the restoration of the nation Israel. Things have already been fulfilled concerning Israel that many did not think possible. There's a fascinating prophecy in chapter 26 about the city of Tyre along the Mediterranean. It prophesies how the ancient city would be destroyed so completely that its surface would be smooth and its stones would be cast into the sea. Well, just a few years after the prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar laid a 13 year siege against the city, but didn't totally fulfill all the details of Ezekiel's prophecy. He bothered it enough that the city rebuilt itself offshore on an island, and became again very strong, proud and wealthy. But 250 years after Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, 332 BC, determined to seize the city, and to do so he created a causeway to the island produced from the ruins of the former ancient city, moving every stone out. Prophecy was fulfilled perfectly.

What impact does fulfilled prophecy have on us?

How does knowing God's patience does have a limit affect the believer and the unbeliever?

Personal application: (Specific to August 23) Make it personal as you consider three of the factors to that situation: Have you been guilty of expecting God to get you out of the trouble you put yourself into? Is it easier to ignore God's warnings when things are going well? Is it possible to just use God when it's to our advantage?