

Sunday – October 1, 2017

Preparation

This week of Daily in the word will take us through the last four books of our Old Testament (Zephaniah-Malachi), and into the first four chapters of our New Testament (Matthew 1-4). As we begin the ending of the Old Testament, Zephaniah 1:7 and 14 set the tone for the final four books as it states, “Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.” Zechariah 14:1 continues by prophesying these words, “Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.” As far as “Preparation” and to close out the Old Testament, Malachi 4:1-2 states, “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.”

Looking back over the past several books we’ve read, God has done an incredible job of emphasizing what is the most significant event in history. What better “preparation” can we make than to learn all we can about the Second Coming of Christ, to the intent of “preparing” us for the days ahead? As Habakkuk 2:14 prophesied concerning “that day”, “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Without doubt, that is truly something to be “prepared” for.

When the Lord makes His appearance the second time, it will be something so completely different than what the world can even imagine. Paul had an understanding of the importance of the “appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”, to the intent that his life was a daily “preparation” for that day. As he wrote in Titus 2:11-15, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Paul’s “preparation” for the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ was to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts”. Simple enough, right? Yes, it is,

however, we make it hard by fulfilling our “ungodly and worldly lusts”. It seems as though the more time we spend in the word of God, the more God reiterates certain principles. Yet, ultimately, God’s requirements from us are indeed quite simple. Be reminded of 1 John 5:3 which states, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

As we enter into the New Testament, we switch gears in our approach to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, in that, we’ll begin looking at His first coming. Although we probably have a better understanding of His “first coming” in comparison to His “second coming”, there is still much for us to learn and apply to our lives, for the purpose of “preparing” us for His return.

As always, let’s spend time in prayer, considering the words we are about to read, and allowing the Holy Spirit to “guide us into all truth” by taking the time to “compare spiritual things with spiritual”. There is not much time left on this earth, therefore, not much time remains for us to prepare for that great and terrible day. May we learn, apply, and share with others all that we can, thereby, allowing our lives to be the God honoring vessels He truly desires each of us to be for His eternal glory.

Monday – October 2, 2017

TODAY'S READING: ZEPHANIAH 1 – HAGGAI 2

OVERVIEW:

God's judgment of Judah (Zeph. 1:1-2:3); God's judgment of the Gentile nations (Zeph. 2:4-3:7); God's restoration of His people (Zeph. 3:8-20); A call to build (Hag. 1:1-15); A promise of glory (Hag. 2:1-9); A problem of defilement (Hag. 2:10-19); A promise to a servant (Hag. 2:20-23).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Zephaniah is one of the strongest preachers in the entire Bible. Verse 1 merely introduces him, providing us his background and placement in history, and in verse 2 he is already going for the jugular! *"I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD"* (1:2). Zephaniah's message is a message of judgment. There are only 53 verses in the entire Book, and there are at least 20 references to *"the Day of the LORD"*! (See how many you can find — i.e. *"the day of the LORD"*, *"that day"*, *"the day"*, *"same day"*, *"at that time"*, etc.).

The "day of the Lord" is a two-edged sword. On one side, it is an horrendous day. For evildoers, Zephaniah says, *"That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness"* (1:15). Zephaniah adds that it is a day when the earth's mightiest men shall *"cry bitterly"* (1:14), and the earth's wealthiest men will see the futility and worthlessness of their *"silver"* and *"gold"* to *"deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath"* (1:18).

On the other side of the "day of the Lord" sword, it is a glorious day. For the Lord's faithful, Zephaniah exhorts, *"Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel: be glad and rejoice with all the heart"* (3:14). In verse 17, Zephaniah adds, *"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."* This two-edged sword describing the day of the Lord can also be seen in Paul's words to the Thessalonians in II Thessalonians 1:7-10: *"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the LORD Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our LORD Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the LORD, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day."* Note that while those who know not God are the recipients of His vengeance and

punishment, on that same day, He is the recipient of glory and admiration from those who do know Him.

Though the Book of Zephaniah is built around the day of the Lord, another key word in the Book is the word *“remnant.”* In fact, the theme of the Book is the salvation of Israel’s remnant. Interestingly enough, the name Zephaniah means “Jehovah hides” or “Jehovah protects/treasures.” That is exactly what God will do with Israel’s believing remnant during the outpouring of His incredible wrath in “the day of the Lord.” (Rev. 12:13-17).

A brief breakdown of the Book is as follows:

In 1:1-2:3, Zephaniah reveals GOD’S JUDGMENT OF JUDAH. Notice in 1:4-6, that Judah, like Laodicea, had three kinds of sinners: 1) Those who have totally forsaken God and worship idols; 2) Those who worship (or think they worship) both God and idols; 3) Those who at one time followed the Lord, but have totally and openly forsaken Him and want nothing to do with Him.

In 2:4-3:7, Zephaniah reveals GOD’S JUDGMENT OF THE GENTILE NATIONS. After describing His judgment upon them, God makes an appeal to His own people (3:1-7), saying in effect, *“If I will judge the heathen nations for their sins, how much more will I judge this sin of the nation that I separated out of all the nations of the world to be holy unto Me?”*

In 3:8-20, Zephaniah reveals GOD’S RESTORATION OF HIS PEOPLE. The Book of Zephaniah ends with the incredible promise that God will one day punish the Gentiles, and regather and restore Israel and Judah to Himself and to their land. Notice that 3:8 is most definitely describing the Battle of Armageddon when the Lord Jesus Christ will return out of heaven to rescue Israel from the Gentile nations who will gather against her when He comes on the great “day of the Lord” to establish His millennial kingdom (Rev. 19:11-12; Zeph. 3:8,15). The Lord’s closing message to Israel through Zephaniah is that *“At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord”* (3:20). That promise has yet to be fulfilled, but certainly will be in the very near future!

Today’s reading also includes the two chapters that comprise the Book of Haggai (the second shortest Book of the Old Testament).

In order to understand the ministry of the last three prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi), you must understand that they prophesied after the exile in 520

B.C., and thus, their Books are referred to as post-exile Books. Here's a simple way to get the setting of these Books in your mind:

In 536 B.C., Ezra led approximately 50,000 Jews back into their land after the Babylonian captivity. Under Ezra's leadership, they rebuilt the altar, reinstated the sacrifices, and in 535 B.C., laid the foundation for the rebuilding of the Temple. Because of the incredible opposition they faced, the work on the Temple ceased. It was through four godly men that the work finally continued and was ultimately brought to completion: Zerubbabel, the governor; Joshua, the high priest; and Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets.

When Haggai begins his prophecy (1:1), recognize that the date is September 1, 520 B.C. It has been 16 years since the construction on the Temple began, but rather than walls covering the foundation, it was covered with weeds. Interestingly, though God's house lay desolate, they had found the time and money to make sure that their own houses were completed. Haggai's message to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two leaders of the nation, was: "The people have made a priority out of their own houses and careers, and it's high time priority is given to the Lord's house and His cause!"

The Book of Haggai breaks down into four sections. Each one is a "sermon" Haggai preached, and each one is prefaced by the date in which it was delivered (1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20). In each "sermon," Haggai points out a particular sin that will keep us from fulfilling God's will and accomplishing His work.

1) Making self a priority instead of the Lord. (1:1-15 c.f. II Timothy 3:1-2) 2) Looking back instead of looking ahead. (2:1-9 c.f. Phil. 3:13-14) 3) Failing to be cleansed of sin. (2:10-19 c.f. II Cor. 7:1) 4) Unbelief. (2:20-23 c.f. Heb. 3:12-4:2)

What work has God called you to accomplish that you have not finished? (See I Cor. 15:58).

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE KING OF ISRAEL, EVEN THE LORD – Zeph. 3:15 (John 1:49)

Tuesday – October 3, 2017

TODAY'S READING: ZECHARIAH 1-8

OVERVIEW:

A call for repentance and exhortation to fathers (1:1-6); the eight visions designed to encourage the people to rebuild the temple (1:7- 6:8); Joshua is crowned the high priest (6:9-15); Jews from Bethel inquire concerning the continuance of fasting (7:1-8:23).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Because of the significant content and length of the Books of Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah, it is certainly no surprise that they are the most quoted Books in the New Testament. Do you realize, however, that the little Book of Zechariah (only 14 chapters) is quoted almost 40 times in the New Testament?! That is certainly because of the messianic emphasis in this Book. It is without a doubt the most Christ-centered of all of the Minor Prophets, and contains more messianic prophecies than perhaps any other Book in the entire Old Testament.

Notice that verse 1 says, *“the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo”* (1:1). The name Zechariah means “Jehovah remembers.” His father’s name means “Jehovah blesses.” His grand-father’s name means “His time.” If you put the meanings of these three names together it states “Jehovah remembers and blesses in His time.” You may need that subtle reminder to be a word of encouragement to you today (Prov. 15:23;25:11), but the historic and prophetic significance of the “Lord remembering and blessing in His time” has to do with Jews and Jerusalem. In fact, the city of Jerusalem is mentioned 39 times in Zechariah. Verses 14-17 of chapter one are really a concisement of the theme of the Book, stating that God, the great “I AM,” is jealous for Jerusalem; He remembers what the heathen did to His city; and, one day He will bless Jerusalem with prosperity and peace.

Do note that Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries who ministered to the same people, yet their lives, their ministries, and their Books are filled with contrasts. Haggai was an old man; Zechariah was young (2:4). Haggai preached sermons; Zechariah shared visions. Haggai’s ministry was marked by exhortation; Zechariah’s ministry was marked by encouragement.

Zechariah’s prophecy begins in verse 1:2 with a statement that could be made in our day just as aptly as it was his own: *“The LORD hath been sore displeased*

with your fathers.” One of the most horrific things about the Laodicean Church Period is what has taken place in the whole realm of fathering. As we have previously discussed, the devil has waged an all-out attack on fathers because they possess the title God wants us to relate to our relationship with Him. Fathers, how are you doing in carrying out your seven biblical responsibilities to your children? If the Lord were to comment on your fathering as He did in Zechariah’s day in verse 2, would He say He was pleased, or as in their case, *“sore displeased,”* or somewhere in-between? Listen to and find encouragement in the promise in verse 3: *“Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you!”* Turn to your heavenly Father today!

As we have seen all through the Bible, the problem in fathering is that unless something supernatural takes place in a man’s life, he invariably becomes like his father. And most often, that isn’t a good thing (1:2), and thus the admonition of verse 4, *“Be not as you fathers.”* Zechariah continues on in verse 4 to say that though the prophets were crying out to the fathers to turn from their *“evil ways”* and *“evil doings,”* they paid absolutely no attention whatsoever to them, much less obey! In verse 5 God asks, *“Where are they now?”* This might be where “Dr. Phil” would ask, “How’d that kind of life work out for ‘em?” Zechariah states in verse 6 that had they taken hold of God’s words and statutes, His words and statutes would have taken hold of them! They could have received blessing from the Lord, but because they refused to listen and turn, they willfully chose cursing. Oh Dads, you might miss some of the things concerning Zechariah’s “visions” in the first 6 chapters, but please don’t miss the message in the first 6 verses!

What follows this powerful exhortation to fathers in 1:1-6 is a series of eight visions that Zechariah received and was commanded to share with the people. The eight visions which span 1:7-6:8, were designed by God to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple. Each vision is introduced with phrases such as, *“I saw,” “I lifted up my eyes and looked,” “He showed me,”* etc.

The eight visions and a brief concisement of God’s message through it is as follows:

- 1) The Man Riding on a Red Horse. (1:7-17) God is displeased with the Gentiles who are at ease while His people are afflicted. He will punish the nations and restore His people.
- 2) The Four Horses and Four Craftsmen. (1:18-21) God will destroy the four Gentile world powers.

- 3) The Man with a Measuring Line. (2:1-13) God will restore Jerusalem.
- 4) Joshua the High Priest. (3:1-10) God will cleanse and restore the priesthood, which is representative of the nation.
- 5) The Golden Candlestick and Two Olive Trees. (4:1-14) Israel, God's light bearer, will rebuild the Temple by the power of the Spirit of God (pictured by oil) under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel.
- 6) The Flying Roll – i.e. Scroll. (5:1-4) God will judge the sin in the land.
- 7) The Woman in the Ephah (a basket used for measuring). (5:5-11) Wickedness (the woman) will be carried from the land back to the land of its origination; Babylon.
- 8) The Four Chariots. (6:1-8) God controls the nations. His enemies have been shut down, and Jerusalem is safe.

In 6:9-15, for the first time, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah without being in the form of a vision. Joshua, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, a “priest-king” referred to as “The BRANCH,” would build the Temple and sit on the throne!

Chapters 7 and 8 form somewhat of an interlude in the Book. In these chapters, God addresses the subject of fasting. The only required fast in the Old Testament was the fast on the Day of Atonement, but the Jews had included fasts to remember the fall of Jerusalem. (We might equate it with remembering the fall of the Twin Towers on 9/11.) Zechariah uses this as an opportunity to teach about God's intention through fasting.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the BRANCH – Zech. 3:8; 6:12 (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15).

As the STONE THAT REMOVES SIN – Zech. 3:9 (Rom. 9:31-33).

As JOSHUA (Hebrew word for Jesus) THE PRIEST-KING – Zech. 6:11-13

TODAY'S READING: ZECHARIAH 9-14

OVERVIEW:

Zechariah's first "burden" or oracle, emphasizing Christ's first coming (Zech. 9:1–11:17); Zechariah's second "burden" or oracle, emphasizing Christ's second coming (Zech. 12:1-14:21).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The Bible is the most incredible history Book the world has ever seen. Obviously, it's a thousand times more than just that, but in terms of history, it is in a class totally by itself. No other history book in the world even dares write about events that haven't yet taken place! (See Isaiah 42:9; 46:9-10). Back in the 1950's people worried about "red power". In the 1960's and 70's, it was "black power". In the 80's it was "white power", and the 90's it was "yellow power". Now that we've moved into the 21st century, it seems people are worried about all of the above!

Actually, there is only one power to which the world really needs to concern itself, and that is "Jew power"! And the fact is, as the prophet Zechariah reveals, even if all of the nations of the world combined military forces and together converged upon Israel (which is exactly what is going to happen at the infamous Battle of Armageddon!), it still wouldn't (won't) be enough to stop them! Not necessarily because their military power and prowess is so great, but because Israel's coming King is so great, and so infinitely powerful!

People spend a lot of time wondering:

- What will ultimately come of the conflict in the Middle East between the Arabs and Jews?
- Will the Jews actually be able to hold their land and their beloved city of Jerusalem?
- What nation will ultimately be the world power when all of the dust from 9/11 settles, and the war on terror is over? Will it be the U.S.? Russia? China?

With the prophecies revealed through Zechariah there is no wondering necessary. Zechariah emphatically says that Jerusalem will stay in the hands of the Jews, their borders will be established according to God's specific design, and after the military rampage of the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming,

Israel will dominate the world under the rule of their Messiah and King, the Lord Jesus Christ! At that time, Isaiah 9:7 will be a reality: *“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to established it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. (And you gotta love this next line —) The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this”* (Also see Luke 1:32b-33).

The remainder of the Book of Zechariah is broken down into two different oracles that God calls *“burdens”* (9:1; 12:1), against specific nations. In 9:1-8, Zechariah describes the judgment that would come against Israel’s neighbors. We now know that this passage is actually describing the conquest of the Greek general, Alexander the Great. Though Alexander would conquer many cities, one city he did not destroy was Jerusalem!

In striking contrast to the judgment pronounced on Israel’s neighbors, God promised His people a King whose worldwide reign would establish the world in peace (9:8-10). Rather than this King making His entrance into Jerusalem on a regal charger (first coming), Zechariah saw Him on a lowly donkey *“beast of burden”* (Matt. 21:4-5; John 12:12-16). What would be the outcome? Zechariah tells us in 11:12, He would be sold for the price of a slave (Matt. 27:3-10); He would be arrested and smitten (Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31); He would be wounded in the house of His friends (Zech. 13:6; Matt. 26:47-50); and would be pierced on the cross (Zech. 12:10; John 19:32-37). Ironically, Jerusalem, the city of Peace, crucified its King, the Prince of Peace.

Keep in mind that Zechariah prophesied a full 500 years before Christ’s first coming and yet every detail of Zechariah’s prophecy concerning Christ’s coming came to pass exactly the way he said they would. What does that tell you about Zechariah’s prophecies concerning Christ’s second coming? You can bank on it; they’re all going to come to pass with the same impeccable precision!

The glory that Zechariah describes as he brings his prophecy to a close is hard to put into words. He provides an awe-inspiring panorama of what God has in store for Israel *“in that day”* (note that that phrase appears no less than 15 times in chapters 12-14 alone!).

From a topographical standpoint, Zechariah says the Mount of Olives will split in two when Christ sets foot on it at His second coming (Zech. 14:4; Matt. 24:3). From a military standpoint, Zechariah says that all the nations that mess with Israel will be obliterated (Zech. 12:9; Rev. 16:14-16; 19:19-21). From a spiritual standpoint, all of the godless idols and false prophets and spirits will be removed from the land (Zech. 13:2-3). From a political standpoint, Zechariah says that the

Lord Jesus Christ alone will be King of the entire earth (Zech. 14:9)! And that my friend, is why it is called “the day of the Lord”! It’s the “day” the Lord set apart unto Himself and blessed way back in Genesis 2:1-3, and the day to which all of humanity is pointing. It’s that glorious day when His Son finally receives the glory that is due His name. *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (Rev.22:20).

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

The COMING KING – Zech. 9:9 (Matt. 21:4-5).

The ONE SOLD FOR 30 PIECES OF SILVER – Zech. 11:12 (Matt. 27:3-10).

The ONE WOUNDED BY HIS FRIEND – Zech 13:6 (Matt. 26:47-50).

The ONE WHO WAS PIERCED – Zech. 12:10 (John 19:32-37).

The SMITTEN SHEPHERD – Zech. 13:7 (Matt. 26:31).

The LORD WHO WILL RETURN TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES – Zech. 14:4 (Matt. 24:3)

TODAY'S READING: MALACHI 1-4

OVERVIEW: Introduction (1:1); Israel questions God's love (1:2-5); the priests dishonor God (1:6-2:9); God's people's treacherous dealing with one another (2:10-16); Israel's perversion of good and evil (2:17); the promise of "*the messenger of the covenant*" (3:1-7); Israel robs God (3:8-12); Israel's arrogant words against God (3:13-15); God's message of reassurance (3:16-4:3); exhortation to remember the law of Moses (4:4); the promise of Elijah's return before the day of the Lord (4:5-6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

When you have completed today's reading you will have read the last of the 929 chapters, 23,214 verses, 592,439 words, and approximately 2,728,100 letters that comprise the Old Testament in our King James Bible. Perhaps this is a good time to remind you that the goal of the 365 Days of Pursuit is not simply to get through the Word of God, but for the Word of God to get through us!

Several things make the little Book of Malachi unique.

First, it is unique, in that the exact date of the Book is not known. It is generally accepted that Malachi lived approximately 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah, and is associated with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. To help place his ministry, keep in mind that a remnant returned from captivity in 536 B.C. Under Haggai and Zechariah's leadership, the Temple had been rebuilt in approximately 520-516 B.C. After another 60 years, Ezra came on the scene to re-establish the nation spiritually (457 B.C.), and after another 13 years (444 B.C.), Nehemiah was used of God to rebuild the wall. Malachi is most likely a contemporary of Nehemiah, because they faced the same exact spiritual problems: a profane priesthood (Mal. 2:1-9 c.f. Neh. 13:27-30), mixed marriages with the heathen (Mal.2:10-16 c.f. Neh. 13:23-29), the withholding of tithes from God's house (Mal. 3:8-12 c.f. Neh. 13:10-13), and an overall spiritual apathy in the hearts of God's people. The date of the Book is placed approximately at 450- 400 B.C.

Second, the Book of Malachi is unique in the style in which it is written. Malachi uses a question–and– answer format to reveal the absolute spiritual cluelessness of the people due to their arrogance and apathy. There are at least 25 questions recorded in these four brief chapters!

Third, this Book is unique in that 47 of the 55 verses in this Book are actually

spoken by God. That is certainly the highest percentage of any of the Books of the prophets.

Fourth, the Book of Malachi is the only one of the prophets whose Book ends on a note of condemnation and judgment, rather than restoration and hope. The word God chose to use to conclude the entire Old Testament is quite interesting and revealing. (If you don't know what it is, take a second now to look it up.) That word points us to the reality of man's sinful condition, and makes us long for a remedy that is satisfying to God's justice and holiness. (Can you think of one? See I John 2:2.) And then fifth, this Book is unique because when Malachi penned the final word in 4:6, there was no more new revelation from God for a period of approximately 400 years. We often refer to them as "the 400 years of silence." You might could say the last Book of the Old Testament foreshadows the first Book of the New Testament, as John the Baptist breaks the silence by declaring, "*Prepare ye the way of the Lord*" (after reading Malachi 3:1, turn over a few pages and read Matthew 3:1-2).

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the LORD, WHOM YE SEEK, (WHO) SHALL SUDDENLY COME TO HIS TEMPLE – Mal. 3:1 (Mark 11:15-17).

As the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS – Mal. 4:2 (John 9:5).

Friday – October 6, 2017

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 1- 4

OVERVIEW:

The Genealogy of the King (chapter 1); the Birth of the King (chapter 2); the Announcement of the King (chapter 3); the Testing of the King (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

When you turn the page in your Bible after the Book of Malachi and you come into the Book of Matthew, recognize that there has been a 400 year gap between these Books. Sometimes when we are talking in terms of history, 400 years doesn't seem like an extremely long period of time. To help to put it in perspective, however, realize that 400 years ago, the King James Bible did not yet exist! 400 years is a long time!

And keep in mind that in that 400 year period of time between the Testaments, God had remained completely silent in terms of new revelation. Though He had been silent in the world, He certainly had not been absent! During those 400 years, God was busy orchestrating the events of history to prepare the world for the coming of His only begotten Son. Remember, Galatians 4:4 says, *"But when the FULNESS OF TIME WAS COME, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."*

But also understand that the world had changed in that 400 year period. Hebrew by this time was a dead language, with Greek and Aramaic now the languages of common communication and commerce. There are different sects and parties that are now on the scene that were not found in the Old Testament.

The Scribes – These were men regarded with great reverence by the Jews as the interpreters and teachers of the Scriptures. Ezra was perhaps the first of this sect, but by the time of Christ, they had degenerated greatly from Ezra's character and godliness. They were constantly in opposition to Christ, and some of Christ's most harsh words were directed to the Scribes, and another key sect:

The Pharisees – These men were also highly regarded by the Jews. They saw themselves as holy and zealous guardians of the law, and were ultra-conservative in all aspects of their beliefs and external behavior. They, too, brought the Lord Jesus Christ tremendous opposition, and were denounced by Him quite frequently.

The Sadducees – If the Pharisees were the religious “right,” the Sadducees were the religious “left.” For the most part, they were a part of the wealthy, influential, priestly parties, and were rationalistic and liberal in their beliefs, denying the immortality of the soul, as well as the resurrection.

The Herodians – This was not a religious group, but a political party who took their name from Herod. Because of their zealousness for the Roman government, they viewed Christ as a threat to Rome’s authority, viewing Christ as a political revolutionary.

The Zealots – These were extreme and radical defenders of a theocratic form of government (God rules), and were involved in acts of violence against the Roman government to champion their cause.

We will run into these sects repeatedly throughout Matthew and the other gospels and it is important to understand who they are to really understand the social, political, and religious world of the New Testament.

As we move into the Book of Matthew today, because the events are easily understood, perhaps the best use of our time will be in providing an analysis of the Book as a whole:

1. Information About The Author

- His name: Matthew.
- His name means: Gift of the Lord (or Jehovah).
- He was a Publican. (Mt.10:3; 17:24-27; Ro.13:1-7)
- He is also called Levi. (Mk. 2:13-14; Lk. 5:27-29)
- He was born a Jew. (Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27)
- He is the son of Alphaeus. (Mk. 2:14)
- He has 2 brothers James and Judas. (Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:16)
- He was chosen to be one of the 12 disciples. (Lk. 6:12-16; Mt.10:1-4; Mk. 3:13-19)

2. Facts About the Gospel

- Approximate date of writing: 64-66 A.D.
- Written from: Jerusalem.
- Dates of the recorded events: 4 B.C. – 33 A.D.
- Theme: Christ, the King of the Jews.
- Christ is seen as: The Promised King.
- Key Verse: Matthew 27:37.

- Key Word: Kingdom (56 times).
- Chapters: 28
- Verses: 1, 071
- Words: 24,755

3. Features of This Gospel

- The only gospel that uses the phrase “*kingdom of heaven*” (32 times).
- The only gospel that uses the phrase “*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken*” (9 times)
- Contains 60 references to the Old Testament.
- Contains 25 fulfilled prophecies.

4. A Simple Outline of This Gospel

Two Rejections

- Rejection #1 - of the Kingdom (Chapters 1-12).
- Rejection #2 - of the King (Chapters 13-28).

Saturday – October 7, 2017

Reflection

Because nothing can ever be said to overemphasize this matter, this week's Reflection will allow us time to further expound on the importance of the birth of Christ. This is not to take away from the importance of the Second Coming, for there is no day in the future that will bring more glory and honour to God than the day that His Son, Jesus Christ, is sitting on the throne and, as Revelation 11:15 writes, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." At that very moment, Isaiah 45:23 will come to pass as God prophesied, via Isaiah penning, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." It will be then that all men, both those that rejected and those that accepted, will be in agreement with the word God preserved in Isaiah 45:22, which says, "I am God, and there is none else." Living in such a sinful world, full of hate toward our Lord Jesus Christ, it's not difficult to become tired, perhaps wearied, from all the trash we see around us. However, it is that "day of the LORD" that should give hope us because we can rejoice that one day soon, the Lord will have His day and all mouths will be stopped. This being the case may our lives be reflective, each and every day leading up to "that day", of the glory in which the Lord Jesus Christ rightfully deserves, for He alone is worthy. With each day that passes, may the conversation of our lives draw men to seek the Lord, because, again, we may be the only Bible many will ever read.

In considering the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we understand that the Second Coming would be impossible had there not been a First Coming. As we mentioned in yesterday's devotional, yes, the Second Coming of Christ is the greatest day on God's prophetic calendar. At the same time, the First Coming of Christ should very much so be the greatest day on our historical calendar. The reason being, there would have been no death, therefore, no perfect sacrifice to satisfy the sin debt which we all owe. Again, as Matthew 1:21 states, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Indeed He did; praise the Lord! As Isaiah prophesied over 700 years before "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14), chapter 9:6 tells us, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father,

The Prince of Peace.” Indeed He is all that and so much more! Concerning the First Coming of Christ, Paul says it like this in Philippians 2:5-8, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” The writer of Hebrews penned it like this, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:14-19) What’s left to say other than, “Amen!” and “Praise the Lord!” May this Reflection of His birth and life, provoke a rejuvenated joy in our lives for the new birth He provided, thereby, giving to us His life in exchange for ours.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

Haggai 1:5 “Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.”

Zechariah 8:23 “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.”

Zechariah 12:1 “The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.”

Malachi 1:11 “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.”

Matthew 1:21 “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”