

May 17: 2 Kings 15-17 and John 6: 1-21

Judah and Israel continue to become weaker and weaker. Azariah becomes king of Judah. He does what is right in The LORD's sight, BUT the high places remain. Azariah does not remove the pagan shrines throughout the land. He himself does what is right, but he does not lead the nation to follow Yahweh. The text here omits it, but we will learn what he did to earn his skin disease in Chronicles. The reason he lived the rest of his life in quarantine was because he chose to perform a duty that was designated for the priests.

Zechariah becomes king of Israel. He again does what is evil in The LORD's sight. He is killed by Shallum who takes the throne. Shallum reigns in Samaria for a month and is killed by Menahem. When Menahem becomes king, he attacks Tiphshah. He too does what was evil in The LORD's sight. After he dies, Pekahiah becomes king of Israel. Pekah conspires against him and becomes king. Hoshea becomes king over Israel after him. He is the last king of Israel. Israel falls around 722 BC. The text is quite clear on why Israel fell. They did evil things. They made their children pass through the fire, a euphemism for child sacrifice. After the exile, other people move into Israel. Rather than abandon their gods, they continue worshipping them, but they give some honor to Yahweh. They do not go all in for Him.

Judah remains. Jotham is a good king. He does what is right in The LORD's sight. Ahaz, on the other hand does not. Instead, he plunges the people into idolatry. Judah's days are numbered. They have not learned from the mistakes of their brothers to the north.

In John, we read about Christ's miracle of feeding 5,000 with just five loaves of bread and two fish. God can make a lot out of a little. The people are so happy with Him for this miracle, they rush to make Him king. He has to get out of there. Christ is rightfully the King. However, the people do not want to place Him on the throne because of who He is, but for what He can do for them. He escapes to the mountains. Evening comes and His disciples are already underway. Jesus walks across the water to them. The disciples are terrified by this sight. They have no need to fear, though. Similarly, we have no need to fear the things of this world. We follow the One who can walk on water. He is mighty and strong to save. We have nothing to fear when we have Him as our Lord and Savior!

May 18: 2 Kings 18-19 and John 6:22-44

Israel has fallen. For now, Judah remains. They have the good king Hezekiah leading them now. Hezekiah removes the high places, shatters the sacred pillars, and cuts down the Asherah poles. He even destroys the bronze snake Moses had fashioned during the Exodus because some folks were burning incense to it and worshipping it. Hezekiah will have no pagan worship in the kingdom.

Things are going well, but the Assyrians prove to be an issue. Instead of fighting back, Hezekiah bribes the Assyrians, giving them the gold from the temple complex and other treasuries. That prevents the Assyrians from waging war for now, but they continue to threaten Judah. The Rabshekah is an honorary title that was bestowed on Assyrian men with a specific title. The Rabshekah addresses the people of Judah. He accuses Hezekiah of dishonoring God because he

has removed all of the places of worship and is forcing them to worship at the temple. The irony here is that they were supposed to worship at the temple complex and nowhere else. The Rabshekah thinks that Hezekiah has gone against God's commands. From his speech we learn that Judah is forming a weak alliance with Egypt.

The people remain silent at the Rabshekah's speech just as Hezekiah had directed them. Hezekiah is distraught at what is happening. He receives some encouragement from Isaiah, a prophet we will read extensively later this year.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells the people about the bread that truly satisfies. Jesus is the bread of life. He is the only thing that is going to satisfy. The people demand that He give them the bread then, not knowing exactly what He is talking about. When He explains that He has come down from heaven, the people get upset, stating that Jesus is Mary and Joseph's kid. This text also gives us an indication of a saving faith that is not lost. Once someone comes to know Jesus, there is nothing that will keep them separated. I have known people to profess Christ as Lord and get baptized. Later on, they fall away completely and become apostate, abandoning their faith altogether. In a situation like that, we have to ask ourselves if that person truly had a relationship with Jesus to begin with. I have certainly not been a saint in my walk. However, as I look back on my life, I can see measurable growth in my relationship with Him.

May 19: 2 Kings 20-22 and John 6: 45-71

Hezekiah has been a good king, but he starts slipping toward the end of his reign. He becomes terminally ill. Isaiah approaches him with a word from The LORD. He will die and not recover. Upon hearing these words, Hezekiah turns to God and begs Him to remember what he has done, walking faithfully before Him. God responds by sending Isaiah back to Hezekiah. He will recover.

The Babylonians come to Judah. Hezekiah takes them into the treasury and shows them everything that they have. When Isaiah learns this, he delivers the message that a time is coming when everything in the palace and the treasury will be taken to Babylon. None of the treasure or precious items will remain in Judah. However, this will not happen during Hezekiah's lifetime. Hezekiah responds with relief. He thinks this word is good since it means that he will experience peace during his lifetime. We would think that this warning would have moved him to try to prevent the future and protect the kingdom's future. It does not, though. Instead, he worries only about himself.

Manasseh takes the throne after Hezekiah. He is excessively evil, making his son pass through the fire and worshipping a variety of gods. He passes away and his son Amon takes the throne at the age of 22. He continued with his father's worship of false gods and other detestable practices. Amon is executed by his servants. Josiah becomes king at eight years of age.

Josiah is a good king. He does what is right in the eyes of The LORD. He works to repair the temple. While his people are working, they come across the book of the law. It is incredible to me that such an important document had been lost! They find it, though, and actually read it. Josiah is beside himself and tears his clothes when the law is read. He realizes just how far off

they had been and the severity of their sin against The LORD. The prophetess Huldah is consulted. She gives word that Judah will fall, but it will not be in Josiah's lifetime.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus continues teaching about Himself. He explains that the people must rely on His body and blood. If they eat the body and drink His blood then they will be in Him and He will be in them. This frustrates many that have been following Him. They complain that these sayings are hard. As a result, many walk away from Him. Christ's disciples remain, though. When He asks them if they are going to leave too, Peter responds by asking, "where will go?"

May 20: 2 Kings 23-25 and John 7: 1-31

Josiah takes the throne of Judah. He sets about a sweeping reform of religious observation throughout Judah. He gets rid of all of the pagan idols, he has the bones of pagan sorcerers pulled from the grave to be burned and thrown out. Josiah even enforces the Passover to be observed by the people. We learn from this reading that the Passover had not been celebrated (even though God commanded it) since the time of Judges up until Josiah's reign. Unfortunately, all of these reforms are not enough to assuage The LORD's wrath. Judah will fall, just as He said it would.

Jehoahaz takes the throne from Josiah. His reign is only three months. He too did what was evil in God's sight. The Pharaoh takes him prisoner and makes Jehoiakim, Jehoahaz's son, king of Judah. He reigns for 11 years, doing evil. During Jehoahaz's reign, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon attacks Judah and makes Jehoiakim his vassal.

Jehoiachin takes the throne and reigns for three months. He also did what was evil in God's sight. Nebuchadnezzar begins deporting people from Judah. Zedekiah becomes king of Judah. After nine years of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar advances against Jerusalem. Judah falls and the people are exiled to Babylon. Some of the exiled men are told they should go and serve Nebuchadnezzar because things will go well for them. Instead, these men decide to resist. They fight their captors and flee to Egypt. This is not the first time we have read about a Jew fleeing to Egypt for safety.

In John, Jesus' brothers tell Him to go to the city and do His works and wonders there. They want Him to do that because they do not believe Him either. Christ tells them to go on ahead. Eventually, Jesus enters the city disguised. While He is there, He starts teaching in the temple complex. The people are amazed at what He is saying and how well He knows Scripture. Eventually, they turn to accusations against Him. Jesus responds by stating that He has done one work. He fully acknowledges that the work was done on the Sabbath. He asks an interesting and difficult question. If it was bad for Him to make a man fully whole and healthy on the Sabbath, is it not bad to circumcise a Jewish boy on the Sabbath? Jewish boys had to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth. Certainly, some of them would have gone through that rite on a Sabbath day. Even though Jesus' argument is sound, they still deny Him and His goodness.

May 21: 1 Chronicles 1-2 and John 7: 32-53

The word Chronicles in Hebrew means “ongoing account.” They are like meeting minutes or other important documents. First and Second Chronicles are part of a four-book series with Ezra and Nehemiah. These four books provide a priestly history from the time of Adam to rebuilding the temple complex.

The two books of Kings taught us about why the fall of Israel and Judah happened. The Chronicles provide more detail on why God would allow the Israelites to take their land back. When they get back, tracing out the lineage of every single priest is incredibly important. The priests had to be from the line of Levi in order to fill the position. That is why 1 Chronicles starts all the way at the beginning. Today, we read about Adam and his descendants. We also read about some of the Edomite kings before the kings had been established in Israel. On the surface, it might seem dry to look at these names, but these words provide vital information. In the Navy, we have these things called Maintenance Requirement Cards (MRCs). That material is incredibly dry, but a technician has to read it word for word to ensure that he or she is doing the maintenance correctly. I know some folks like to skip over the genealogies, but I encourage you to read through them. They must be important since they are in the text!

In John, Jesus continues debating with the people at the feat of Tabernacles. Some of the people think that Jesus must be the Messiah because of what He has done. Others believe He is simply deceiving people. The chief priest and Pharisees send the temple police to take Jesus into custody. When the temple police come back empty handed, the state that they did not bring Him back because no one else had ever talked like this. The Pharisees ask if they are fooled as well. Nicodemus intervenes, reminding them that the law does not judge a man before it hears from the man and knows what he is doing. Rather than take a step back and realize that Nicodemus is right, the others begin to mock him, asking if he is from Galilee as well.

May 22: 1 Chronicles 3-5 and John 8: 1-20

We read more about the genealogy of the Israelites in Chronicles. As we read through David’s descendants, we see that Tamar is mentioned in the list. She is the only female mentioned in David’s list of descendants. David’s descendants after the exile are also named. This information will be vitally important when the Israelites return to their land.

In chapter four, we read about a personal prayer given by Jabez. Jabez fervently begs that God give him more land. He prays that God’s hand will be with him and that God will keep him from harm. The prayer is selfish and nothing in the text indicates that we should pray similar prayers. However, the prayer is an example for us because of its honesty and fervency.

In John, a woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus. The intent is to trap Jesus. If He dismisses what this woman had been doing, then He is guilty of breaking the Mosaic Law. However, if Jesus went along with the stoning, then He would lose support from His followers. We know that this was a trap since the man that she was caught with is not mentioned. There are theories as to where the man was. Some scholars believe that the guilty man was among the party wanting to stone her. Others believe that the man remained hidden in his home. Either way, the fact that the guilty man is not brought before Christ is suspicious.

Jesus does not play their game. Instead, He stoops down to the ground and starts writing. The scribes and Pharisees press Him to make a decision about the woman's fate. Jesus tells them that whoever is without sin should cast the first stone. After that, He stoops to the ground and starts writing again. The men start to leave, the oldest departing first and then they youngest. None of us have the right to condemn another because we are just as guilty as anyone else. None of us are without sin and we should not act as if we are better than anyone. Jesus called these men out on their sinfulness and eventually, it is just Jesus and this woman caught in adultery. Jesus asks, "Has no one condemned you?" She responds that no one has. Then Jesus says that He does not condemn her either. He then tells her to go and sin no more.

As believers, we are sinners, but we are forgiven. Just because Jesus has wiped away the sin from our lives does not give us the right to continue living sinful lifestyles. We will never be perfect on this side of heaven. However, we should be striving to live holy and sinless lives.

May 23: 1 Chronicles 6-7 and John 8: 21-36

We read details about Levi's descendants. The chronicler is writing this after the exile so detailing the line of Levi was vitally important. Anyone seeking to serve as a priest in the newly built temple had to trace his line back to the tribe of Levi. Aaron's line was the most crucial in the tribe of Levi. Tracing the priests back to him was vital.

The tribe of Issachar is mentioned mainly to show how many soldiers came from it. The first few listings of Benjamin's descendants emphasize the number of soldiers in the tribe. Saul, the first king of Israel, was from this tribe. Ephraim was one of the leading tribes, rivaling Judah. When the kingdom split, Ephraim was the greatest among the 10 northern tribes.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus tells them that He is leaving. Since He tells the people that they cannot follow Him, they assume that He will kill Himself. This was a great sin within the community, so the people are shocked that Jesus would say such a thing. Jesus explains that they are from below and will die in their sin. He is from above. Therefore, Christ will return from where He came.

As Jesus is speaking, many come to believe in Him. Jesus explains to them that if they continue in His word then they really are His disciples. They will know the truth and the truth will set them free. As believers, we know the truth. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. As His followers we should strive daily to keep in His word.

At the mention of freedom, Jesus draws ire from some critics among them. They state that they are descendants of Abraham and have always been free. There is a level of irony there since Abraham's descendants eventually all wound up in Egypt and enslaved there. They are not free at this time either since they are stuck dealing with the Roman occupation. Rather than point these facts out, Jesus explains to them that anyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin. Jesus came to free us all from the big enemies, the enemies of sin and death. He has given us freedom over the grave!

May 24: 1 Chronicles 8-10 and John 8: 37-59

The descendants of Abraham are recorded again, but with more detail. Benjamin was the last of Jacob's sons. He had five sons that would establish large clans within the tribe.

The decree for the Israelites to return was issued by Cyrus of Persia. The decree to return also directed them to rebuild the temple. Not everyone was able to come back. Judah, because of their unfaithfulness, was exiled to Babylon. The first to return to their towns were the priests, Levites, and temple servants.

The chronicler then takes us back to when Saul was king and gives detail about his family. We also have the death of Saul and his sons recounted in chapter 10. The chronicler recounts that Saul had killed himself because he knew that the Philistines would torture him. His armor became a decoration piece in the Philistines' temple.

In John, Jesus continues defending Himself. The people continue to say that they are from their father Abraham. Jesus explains that they are not from Abraham. If they were from Abraham, then they would act like Abraham. Instead, they are of their father the Devil. The Devil was a murderer from the beginning and when he lies, he shows his true nature because he is the father of lies. This drives the people to argue that Jesus has a demon. Jesus states that He does not have a demon. He has come from the Father. He honors the Father, but the people dishonor Jesus.

Jesus promises them that whoever keeps His word will not taste death. He then reveals that He has been around since before Abraham. Jesus has been around since the beginning. The Jews could not see it, though. They look at Jesus, who is in His early thirties, and ask Him how He has seen Abraham since He is so young.