

Written For Our Learning

Sermons With A Focus On The Old Testament



“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4)

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Published by the Zion Church Of Christ, Zion, Illinois, USA

Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

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Preface

The older I get, the more I realize how shallow the preaching was at the congregations my parents attended as I was growing up. Preachers often presented “canned lessons” with little depth, and their knowledge of Old Testament manners and customs was either non-existent or just wrong.

This little book of sermons contains some of my favorite lessons dealing with Old Testament themes. I claim originality for absolutely nothing in this book! Some of the notes I have used in developing these outlines were made many years ago, and I wasn’t always as careful back then about citing my sources as I should have been.

You will probably find many things mentioned in this book that you have never heard anyone preach on before—and that is my goal. I have no desire to preach “new doctrines,” but I do enjoy preaching on topics that many brethren have neglected over the years.

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Written For Our Learning

Introduction

- I. The words of the Old Testament have been preserved for our learning (Rom 15:4).
- II. Many passages speak of the end of the Mosaic Law (Col 2:14; 2 Cor 3:7-14).
- III. How can we *learn* from the Old Testament if we don't study it?

Discussion

I. New Testament Declarations

- A. All Scripture has been given by inspiration (2 Tim 3:16-17).
- B. Timothy learned of salvation from the Old Testament (2 Tim 3:14-15).
 - 1. Example of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:30-35)
 - 2. Example of Paul at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3).
 - 3. Example of Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).
- C. The Old Testament has revealed things that minister to *us* (1 Pet 1:10-12).
 - 1. The righteousness of Abraham (Rom 4:22-25).
 - 2. The journey in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:5-13).
- D. Two main principles we learn from the Old Testament:
 - 1. God demands total obedience.
 - a) Naaman had to dip seven times in the Jordan River (2 Kgs 5:1-14).
 - b) Saul was told to destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:1-23).
 - 2. Substitution is equal to disobedience.
 - a) Cain (Gen 4:1-8).
 - b) Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2).
- E. In the rest of this lesson, we want to show *how* New Testament writers used the Old Testament Scriptures.

II. The Gospel Of Matthew

- A. The gospel of Matthew contains 67 quotations from the Old Testament.
 - 1. Matthew was a Galilean Jew, usually referred to as "Matthew the tax collector" (Matt 10:2).
 - 2. While Matthew does not state his purpose like John (John 20:30-31).
 - 3. However, it is obvious to even the casual reader that he wrote to prove that in Jesus of Nazareth is to be found the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecy.
- B. There are more than forty Old Testament passages quoted in Matthew concerning even the minor details in the life of our Lord (Matt 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 17-18; 3:3; 4:13-16; 8:16-17; 13:35).
- C. Matthew omits explanations of Jewish customs (cf. Mark 7:3-4; 13:3-4; 14:12).
 - 1. He devotes more attention than others to the fulfillment of prophecy.
 - 2. He is the only gospel writer to give the line of ancestry by which Jesus was heir to the throne of David.
- D. Another use of Old Testament is in ascertaining the origin of certain words and phrases (cf. Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-5).

III. The Book Of Acts

- A. Written by Luke the “beloved physician” (Col 4:14).
- B. Most of the Old Testament quotations in Acts appear in early sermons.
 - 1. The selection of Matthias was a matter of prophecy (Acts 1:20; Ps 69:25; 119:8).
 - 2. Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:17f, 25, 34; Joel 2:28–32; Ps 16:8–11; 110:1).
 - 3. On Solomon’s Porch (Acts 3:22–25; Deut 18:15, 18).
 - 4. Stephens history of Jews (Acts 7 contains 11 Old Testament quotations).

IV. The Book Of Romans

- A. The book of Romans contains 60 Old Testament quotations.
- B. The premise of book (Rom 1:16–17) is quoted from Habakkuk 2:4.
- C. Chapter 3 proves that all have sinned by appealing to the Old Testament.
 - 1. Romans 3:4 quote from Psalms 51:4.
 - 2. Romans 3:10–18 is a collection of many Old Testament passages (Ps 14:1–3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7–8; Ps 36:1).
- D. Chapters 9–11 show how God has not cast away the entire Jewish race—there are 31 quotations in the 60 verses of these three chapters.

V. The Book Of Hebrews

- A. The book of Hebrews contains 59 quotations from the Old Testament.
- B. Half of the first chapter is from the Old Testament.
- C. You can not understand the book of Hebrews without a good knowledge of the Old Testament.
- D. The book assumes you have such a knowledge (Heb 9:2–5; 5:9–11).

VI. The Book Of Revelation

- A. The book of Revelation does not contain a single *direct* quote from the Old Testament, but it has over 400 allusions to the Old Testament in just 404 verses.
- B. John’s mind was saturated with Old Testament (cf. KJV English in our prayers).
 - 1. First century readers would have recognized and appreciated this.
 - 2. Many people are too lazy to read Psalms, Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah.
 - 3. Promise of blessing to those who understand (Rev 1:3).
 - 4. If we could read this with the imagery of the first century readers!
- C. Phrases today that will mean nothing to our children...
 - 1. Tie your shoes.
 - 2. Clockwise.
 - 3. Newspaper.
 - 4. Reading a book.

Conclusion

- I. Though we can learn much from the Old Testament, we will not be judged by it—we are going to be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48).
- II. We must listen to God’s Son (Heb 2:1–3).

Life Under The Law

Introduction

- I. The Law of Moses revealed what sin was and it's consequences (Rom 7:7-12).
 - A. The Law was designed to bring life, but it brought death in the sense that there was no provision for the forgiveness of sins in under the Law.
 - B. These verses testify of Paul's lifelong reverence for the Law of Moses, which was consistent with his meticulous observance of it.
 - 1. This attitude had been with him from his youth, since he was "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6).
 - 2. It would have been strengthened by his studies under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
 - C. Paul concluded by saying that the Law of Moses was "holy and just and good."
 - 1. Paul echoes the words of the Psalms (Ps 19:8-9; 119:137, 142, 151, 160).
 - 2. Paul's view of the Law of Moses is not shared by many Christians today.
 - 3. Many today look upon the Old Testament with disdain and will not even acknowledge it's value for us today (Rom 15:4).
 - 4. The Law was a tutor (*schoolmaster*, KJV) to bring the Jews to Christ (Gal 3:24) and it holds many valuable lessons for us today.
- II. What was it like to live as a Jew under the Law of Moses?
 - A. Where did you get your ideas from?
 - B. Is it possible that your picture of life under the Law of Moses is wrong?
 - C. In this lessons I want to try to get you to look at the Law through the eyes of an observant Jew.

Discussion

I. **Leviticus: A Neglected Book**

- A. Unfortunately, most people look upon the Old Testament book of Leviticus as one of the driest, most boring books of the Bible!
 - 1. The book of Leviticus was a guidebook for God's newly redeemed people, it showed them how to live, worship and serve God.
 - 2. It told them how to be holy people (Lev 19:2).
 - 3. The book focuses on worship and living with God.
 - 4. In the book of Exodus we see how Israel was redeemed from the land of Egypt and called to be a holy nation before God (Exod 19:4-6).
 - 5. In Leviticus these people were shown *how* to live as God's holy people.
 - 6. It covers the whole realm of life: animal sacrifices, sin offerings, thanksgiving offerings, kosher foods, feasts, festivals, moral and ceremonial laws, civil law (including compensatory and punitive damages), and laws of sexual morality.
- B. The book of Leviticus is one of the most neglected books of the entire Bible.
 - 1. Christians often look at it as just a bunch of dry rules and regulations.
 - 2. The Jews looked at it as a handbook for holiness and happiness—they really believed that this book would improve their lives.
 - 3. Our view of it would change dramatically if we could see it through Jewish eyes, not filtered through modern-day thought and our preconceived ideas about what life was like under the Law of Moses.

- C. Consider the movie, “*The Ten Commandments*,” by Cecil B. DeMille.
1. The movie is told from a “Christian” point of view, not a Jewish viewpoint.
 2. It reflects American theology as it existed in 1959.
 - a) If the movie were to be made today, much of it would have to be rewritten to reflect modern views.
 - b) Most Jews would not portray Moses as bare-headed after he received the Ten Commandments—Jews cover their heads during prayer.
 - c) “Christians” portray Jesus and other “holy men” with bare heads—so that image of Moses was used in the movie.
 3. Charlton Heston (who played the part of Moses in the movie) sounds like a Southern Baptist preacher, not a Jewish Rabbi.
 4. The only character in the film who seems “Jewish” to the average person is the villain, Dathan, played by Edward G. Robinson.
 5. Out of all the Hebrew characters, Dathan speaks with a Yiddish accent—which is funny because Yiddish language originated during the Middle Ages in Europe.
 6. Dathan evokes everything negative about how Jews are often portrayed (i.e., dishonest, money-hungry, manipulating, self-serving, etc.).
 7. Children watching this film tend to see Dathan as “the Jew” and everyone else as “good Christians.”

II. Jewish Custom And Law

- A. How could I find out what Jews believed and practiced under the Law of Moses?
1. Obviously, you would start by reading the Old Testament itself.
 2. The Hebrew name for the Old Testament is *Tanakh*.
 3. The word is an acronym (*TaNakh*) for the three different categories of books that comprise the Hebrew Bible:
 - a) The **T** is for the word *Torah*, used in its restricted sense as the five books of Moses.
 - b) The **N** is for the Hebrew word *Neviim*, the prophets.
 - (1) This division includes the books which, as a whole, cover the chronological era from the entrance of the Israelites into the Land until the Babylonian captivity of Judah.
 - (2) However, they exclude Chronicles, which covers the same period.
 - (3) The *Neviim* are often divided into the Earlier Prophets, which are generally historical, and the Later Prophets, which contain more exhortational prophecies.
 - c) The **K** is for *Ketuvim*, writings, divided into such categories as:
 - (1) The wisdom books of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs.
 - (2) The poetry books of Psalms, Lamentations and Song of Solomon.
 - (3) The historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.
 4. Jesus referred to this division (Luke 24:44-45).

- B. Once synagogues were established after Babylonian captivity, every Jewish child began his instruction in Torah at the age of five.
1. In addition, at the age of ten they would learn the *oral law* which had been handed down through the ages.
 2. The Torah notes that there was a possibility problems would arise that could not be solved by simply reading the Torah itself (Deut 17:8–9).
 3. The decisions reached by these judges were repeated orally through the priests, scribes and rabbis.
 4. The Jews had always placed a high degree of importance on oral instruction.
 5. The Midrash *Tanbuma* says, “As one is prohibited from reciting any portion of the Torah by heart, but must read it out of the written scroll, so is he who expounds any portion thereof not allowed to read his exposition from anything written, but must deliver it by word of mouth.”
 - a) Jewish children learned Judaism from a human being, not a book.
 - b) You could not just memorize a book!
 6. After the destruction of Jerusalem, these oral traditions were written down, and we have those traditions in book form, called the *Mishnah*.
 7. The *Mishnah* was completed around 200 A.D. to keep the oral traditions alive.
 8. You will often hear Christians make fun of these Jewish traditions.
 - a) Yes, our Lord did decry some of the man-made traditions of the Pharisees.
 - b) However, Paul honored some of these traditions.
 9. Paul was a trained Rabbi who knew the Old Testament as a Rabbi knew it.
 - a) He said the Law was given through angels (Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2; cf. Acts 7:53).
 - (1) This is not mentioned in the Old Testament.
 - (2) However, it was taught as a fact among the Pharisees.
 - b) Paul claimed that the Law was given 430 years after Abraham (Gal 3:17).
 - c) Paul spoke of “the rock that followed them” (1 Cor 10:4).
 - (1) Jewish scholars (such as Rashi) claimed that an actual rock followed the children of Israel in the desert.
 - (2) “This claim strikes the reader of today as fantastic, although such connections were not considered odd or inappropriate in Paul’s day. Targumic writings (*Tosefta Sukkah* 3:11; *Targum Onqelos* Num. 21:16–20), Philo of Alexandria, and Pseudo-Philo all make similar, though original, interpretations of the same OT account. Philo, a contemporary of Paul, interpreted the water-giving rock of the exodus story as the presence of preexistent Wisdom among the wandering Israelites (*Allegorical Interpretation* 2.86), so Paul’s christological rereading of the story is but one interpretation of the ‘identity’ of God’s saving presence among the Israelites.” (Marion L. Soards, *New International Biblical Commentary*, on 1 Cor 10:4)

10. The *Mishnah* has six main sections, or orders:
 - a) *Zera'im* (seeds), dealing with agricultural laws, laws for food and blessings.
 - b) *Mo'ed* (appointed times), dealing with the Sabbath and the Festivals.
 - c) *Nashim* (women), dealing with marriage, divorce, sexual relations, and issues between men and women.
 - d) *Nezikim* (damages), dealing with civil law, such as buying and selling, civil suits involving claims and damages, as well as criminal law.
 - e) *Kodashim* (sacred things), dealing with the sacrificial system.
 - f) *Tohorot* (purities), summarizing the laws of ritual purification for service in the Temple.
- C. For 300 years after the writing of the *Mishnah*, Jewish rabbis and sages commented on the *Mishnah* itself and those opinions were written down in the *Talmud*.
 1. The *Talmud* consists of two parts: the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara* (which is the commentary on the *Mishnah*).
 2. There are two Talmuds: *The Babylonian Talmud* is held to be more authentic, and *The Jerusalem Talmud* is held to be of little value today.
 3. Another well-known source book is the *Tosefta*, which acts as a supplement to the *Mishnah* (compiled around A.D. 200).
- D. Unfortunately, what most Christians know, or think they know, about the *Mishnah*, *Talmud* and *Tosefta*, comes from non-Jewish sources.
 1. When most Bible commentaries refer to Jewish customs and regulations, they will either quote from or allude to a set of books by John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*.
 2. Jewish rabbis are quick to point out that Lightfoot was an anti-Semite!

III. The “Burden” Of The Sabbath

- A. Were the Sabbath day regulations a *burden* to the Jews?
- B. Most Christians think only about what Jews were *prohibited* from doing:
 1. No work from sunset until sunset (Exod 20:8–10).
 2. They could not pick up sticks (Num 15:32–36).
 3. They could not carry a burden (Jer 17:19–23).
 4. They could not light a fire (Exod 35:3).
 5. They could not go more than a Sabbath day’s journey {2,000 cubits, which is about 3/4 mile} (Acts 1:12; Exod 16:29; Isa 58:13).
 6. Some Jews of the Maccabean period allowed themselves to be massacred on the Sabbath rather than to profane it by self-defense (1 Macc 2:38–41).
 7. Orthodox Jews today will not answer the phone or watch TV on the Sabbath.
- C. What were Jews encouraged to do on the Sabbath?
 1. It was to be a day of rest.
 2. They would read and meditate on the Scriptures.
 3. Rabbi Benjamin Blech said it was a time to be “re-Jew-venated.”
 4. In the days of the Old Testament, the priests carried on their duties about the Tabernacle and could circumcise a child (Lev 12:3).

- D. Most Christians think of the Sabbath only in terms of what a burden it was to keep and of all of the things you were prohibited from doing.
 1. From God's standpoint, the Sabbath was to be considered a joy and privilege.
 2. It was to be a day of "delight" (Isa 58:13-14, CJB).
 3. Nehemiah commanded the people to eat and drink (Neh 8:9-13).
 4. The Sabbath day was also a feast day in the home.
- E. If you are an observant Jew, what book of the Old Testament would you read *every* Friday night to help you keep the Sabbath?
 1. Would you be surprised to learn it was the Song of Solomon?
 2. The Song of Solomon tells of a love story between a shepherd and a beautiful maiden girl.
 - a) The book begins with the girl expressing her deep desire for physical expressions of love by her lover.
 - b) She longs to express her love to him, and she wants him to reciprocate.
 - c) The book also mentions another man, the king, who falls violently in love with the girl.
 3. Catholic scholars have claimed that the Song of Solomon was a story about Christ and His church.
 - a) In Catholic theology, "marriage is a concession to the flesh."
 - b) In their perverted thinking, sex within marriage is looked upon only for procreation.
 - c) Manuals for confessors composed in the late Middle Ages provide some striking information—they said sexual relations in marriage were usually considered to be at best a concession to the weakness of the flesh and were often categorized as venial sin.
 - d) Part of the reason for this attitude toward sexual relations in marriage was that celibacy was exalted as the ideal.
 4. Most Protestants look at the book and see *courtship*: holding hands and saying sweet nothings in the ear of your beloved.
 5. Jews look at the book and see sex!
 - a) Religious Jews read the Song of Songs every Friday night, after the Sabbath meal, to prepare them for marital relations.
 - b) Rabbi Akiva said, "If the other books of the Bible are holy, the Song of Songs is 'holy of holies'" (*Understanding Judaism*, p. 89).

IV. Women Under The Law

- A. Most Christians are under the mistaken impression that women were nothing more than property or chattel under the Law of Moses—they had no rights and they lived a life barely better than that of a dog.
 1. If you believe that, where did you learn it from?
 - a) I know you did not read it in the Mosaic Law.
 - b) I know you didn't read it from the writings of Jewish Rabbis!
 - c) You might have misunderstood the laws dealing with the dowry, while at the same time forgetting to read about what a man owed his wife.

2. If you were at the wedding of an Orthodox Jewish couple, what difference would you notice when the couple exchanged vows under the *chuppah*?
 - a) A *chuppah* symbolizes the home the couple will build together.
 - b) The man promises to “bring pleasure” to his wife.
 - c) And yes, it is talking about sex—and when they say, “pleasure” it means exactly what you think it means.
 - d) The woman does not promise that to the man!
 - e) Does that surprise you?
 - f) Where did they get this idea?
 - g) Sex was intended for “pleasure” (Gen 18:12; Deut 24:5).
3. The *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* speak about the frequency of marital relations between a husband and his wife.
 - a) They set a minimum of twice a week for the pleasure of the wife—the wife had the right to demand relations at least twice a week!
 - b) If a man wanted to take a new job out of town and would have to be gone more, he had to get his wife’s permission!
 - c) There was an exception for the man who wanted to go away to study the Torah—he could be gone up to thirty days without his wife’s permission.
 - d) Does this sound like women were just pieces of property with no rights?
 - e) The New Testament teaches the same principle (1 Cor 7:3–5).
 - f) Unlike Roman Catholicism, Judaism never regarded sex and marriage as a “necessary evil,” they looked upon it as primarily for pleasure—and both husband and wife had equal rights.
- B. Women were excluded from several important precepts that depended upon a given time of the day or year for performance.
 1. They were exempt from wearing the *tzitzit* (fringed four-cornered garment).
 2. They were exempt from reciting the *Shema Yisrael* prayer.
 3. They were exempt from the annual trips to Jerusalem to keep the feasts.
 4. They were exempt from the *mitzvah* to study Torah.
- C. Please note, they were *exempt* from these observances—they were not *excluded*.
 1. It was not because the sages thought women intellectually incapable of learning that they exempted them from study.
 2. On the contrary, they believed that “women are endowed with greater intuition, intelligence and understanding” than men and did not bar the way to those few women who chose to study (Lambeth, *A Short Guide To Judaism*, 11).
 3. Though women did not have social standing, that did not bar them from wielding considerable influence on society.

Conclusion

- I. The Law of Moses was perfect in doing what God intended it to do, i.e., serve as a tutor to lead the Jewish people unto Christ (Gal 3:24).
- II. The weakness of the Law was that there was no provision for the remission of sins.
- III. Jesus shed His blood for the “remission of sins” (Matt 26:28; Acts 2:38).

Your Closest Friend

Introduction

- I. Proverbs 31:10–31 is an acrostic poem in the Hebrew language (each verse begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet).
 - A. The virtuous woman described in this passage is devoted to the well-being of her household (Prov 31:10–12, 20–21).
 - B. She makes her home the center of her life, gives generously to the poor and instructs her children and household workers in true kindness.
 - C. As a result of her godly life her husband and children enjoy their lot in life and honor her (Prov 31:27–31).
 - D. “The heart of her husband safely trusts her” (Prov 31:11).
 1. “Her husband trusts her from his heart” (Prov 31:11, CJB).
 2. Her husband has “full confidence” (Prov 31:11, NIV) in her in every area of life; he trusts in her good sense, her fidelity, and her industry.
- II. The Bible teaches us that your spouse is not only your partner by *covenant*, but also your *companion*—your closest friend (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14).
 - A. I believe most of the preaching done on marriage revolves around the *covenant* aspect, i.e., God binds a man and woman together for life in marriage.
 - B. The idea of your spouse being your *companion* often gets little notice!
 - C. The truth is that your spouse is to be your closest friend—the one who gets your undivided attention, heartfelt loyalty and well-deserved trust.
 - D. Full confidence and trust in your spouse is essential for a good marriage.
 - E. However, there are things married couples often do that harm or destroy the trust and confidence that one spouse has in the other.
 - F. I want to start by looking at a rather obscure ritual from the Law of Moses...

Discussion

I. Law Of Jealousy

- A. Numbers 5 contains what is sometimes referred to as the Law of Jealousy, or the *Law of Sotah* (the section of the *Mishnah* that deals with a suspected adulteress).
 1. The passage discusses what to do when a man *suspected*, but could not *prove*, that his wife had been guilty of adultery.
 2. “As any suspicion cherished by a man against his wife, that she either is or has been guilty of adultery, whether well-founded or not, is sufficient to shake the marriage connection to its very roots, and to undermine, along with marriage, the foundation of the civil commonwealth, it was of the greatest importance to guard against this moral evil, which was so utterly irreconcilable with the holiness of the people of God, by appointing a process in harmony with the spirit of the theocratical law, and adapted to bring to light the guilt or innocence of any wife who had fallen into such suspicion, and at the same time to warn fickle wives against unfaithfulness.” (*Keil & Delitzsch*, Commentary on the Old Testament)

3. If there were witnesses to the woman's unfaithfulness, the death penalty would follow (Gen 20:3; Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22).
 4. Without witnesses, no judge could condemn on the grounds of mere suspicion.
 5. Where there was doubt, the matter had to be left in the hands of God who knows all things.
- B. Consider the ritual described in Numbers 5:11-31.
1. Was this rite degrading to women? No!
 2. Imagine the consequences of a woman falsely charged with adultery by an angry husband in a context in which there was no provision for her innocence to be demonstrated.
 3. Being taken to the priest was an act of mercy!
 4. An innocent woman, unjustly accused by her husband, need not be apprehensive of the outcome and will be able to live free of guilt and condemnation.
 5. The trial she is going to have is not a kangaroo court; it is in the precincts of the holy tabernacle, under the jurisdiction of the priests, in concert with a solemn sacrifice—she places herself under the hand of the Lord.
- C. How was this rite applied in ancient Israel?
1. The *Mishnah* (a written record of the oral traditions of the Jews) has an entire section (tractate) dealing with this problem.
 2. The *Tosefta* and the *Babylonian Talmud* also discuss this matter in great detail.
 3. We will note how the ritual was applied in just a moment.
- D. Who was subject to this rite?
1. Jewish oral law said it was only a woman who had already been warned twice by her husband, in the presence of two witnesses, to not talk to a certain man.
 2. She had to have been alone with the man long enough to have sexual relations.
 3. If the husband is jealous and witnesses have seen her in the presence of the man she was forbidden to talk to, then they would go to the Tabernacle.
 4. Let me hasten to add that if you continue to associate with someone your spouse has asked you not to talk to—you are a fool!
 - a) Whether you are the husband or the wife, you do not belong to yourself, but to your spouse (1 Cor 7:3-4).
 - b) In the normal realms of life, a Christian's body is his own, to take care of and to use as a gift from God.
 - c) In the deepest spiritual sense, of course, it belongs to God (Rom 12:1).
 - d) However, in the marital realm, it belongs to your marriage partner.
 - e) Some years ago I had a friend who grew a beard and his wife hated it—I told him he had to get rid of it—he had no right to have it.
 - f) I seen women get a new hair style and other women will tell them how wonderful it looks, and then the woman will sometimes say, "Oh, my husband really hates it!"
 - g) Ladies, why don't you just admit you're selfish?
 - h) You have no right to displease your spouse in that way!

- E. What happened at the Tabernacle (and later at the Temple)?
1. This ritual proved the justice of God.
 2. The accused woman presented herself *before the Lord* and His priest for vindication or condemnation; the results would be seen in her own body.
 3. God was the only one who knew the truth of the situation and the One Who must ultimately mete out the appropriate justice.
 - a) The woman who has been brought to the Tabernacle will not take this issue lightly.
 - b) Public humiliation, shame, anger with her spouse, and exposure before the priests and people were all terrifying prospects.
 - c) Neither would her husband take these issues lightly.
 - d) He was not just spreading rumors about his wife in the privacy of their home.
 - e) He, too, was coming before the Lord, and he, too, might be judged.
 - f) This ritual was an expression of the mercy of God to women who are so often abused by prideful men.
 4. The woman was charged by the priest to tell the truth concerning this matter.
 5. She could *confess* and say, “I am unclean.”
 - a) In the second Temple period the woman was taken to the Nicanor Gate and the priest would rip her clothing—her breasts would be exposed—and loosen her hair (a shameful act) and he would take her jewelry away.
 - b) Women were allowed to come stare at her.
 - c) She was not put to death because she was not caught in the act.
 6. If she *denied* any wrongdoing, she would take an oath affirming her innocence before God and His people.
 - a) She would then drink the water that had been provided by the priest.
 - b) The water itself was not bitter—it became bitter only if she was lying.
 7. A small amount of soil from the floor of the tabernacle was not likely to bring about a *bitter* taste to the water.
 - a) Rather, we should think of the notion of the holiness of the place, hence, the holiness of the ground on which the tabernacle is placed.
 - b) It is holy dust that is added to holy water, not to change the taste, but to emphasize the holiness of the matter.
 - c) The bitterness of the water was potential, not actual; the cursing associated with the water was also potential, not essential.
- F. If she was guilty and had lied under oath before God, she would then bear her guilt in her body and the inner chambers of her heart.
1. The NIV translation has a margin note for Numbers 5:22 that says the water “causes you to have a miscarrying womb and barrenness.”
 2. Because of her deceit she would be barren for the rest of her life.
 3. Childlessness in the ancient Near East was believed to be a curse from God and subjected one to shame, ridicule, and reproach from others.
- G. What happened if the woman was innocent (Num 5:28)?
1. She was blessed with more children—symbolic of God’s blessing (Ps 127:3–5).
 2. Her husband would have been shamed before the entire assembly and exposed as being a jealous man.
- H. I have discussed this ancient ritual to remind us of the terrible crime of adultery.

II. Adultery Destroys The Soul

- A. The patriarch Job said adultery was *wickedness* (Job 31:11)
 - 1. The KJV and ESV call it a “heinous crime.”
 - 2. The NIV say it is “shameful, a sin to be judged.”
- B. Adulterers are covenant breakers (Mal 2:14–16; Prov 2:16–17).
 - 1. The person who commits adultery never commits just one sin!
 - 2. Adulterers lie to their spouse, the witnesses who stood by them at their wedding, and their God!
- C. We are told to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18).
 - 1. “There is force and emphasis in the word *flee*. Man should escape from it; he should not stay to reason about it; to debate the matter; or even to contend with his propensities, and to try the strength of his virtue. There are some sins which a man can resist; some about which he can reason without danger of pollution. But this is a sin where a man is safe only when he flees; from pollution only when he refuses to entertain a thought of it; secure when he seeks a victory by flight, and a conquest by retreat. Let a man turn away from it without reflection on it and he is safe. Let him think, and reason, and he may be ruined. The very passage of an impure thought through the mind leaves pollution behind it. An argument on the subject often leaves pollution; a description ruins; and even the presentation of motives against it may often fix the mind with dangerous inclination on the crime. There is no way of avoiding the pollution but in the manner prescribed by Paul; there is no man safe who will not follow his direction. How many a young man would be saved from poverty, want, disease, curses, tears, and hell, could these two words be made to blaze before them like the writing before the astonished eyes of Belshazzar (Dan. V.), and could terrify him from even the momentary contemplation of the crime.” (Albert Barnes, *I Corinthians*, Notes On The New Testament, pp. 106, 107)
- D. Adultery destroys the soul (Prov 6:20–35).
- E. Not only did the writer of the book of Proverbs warn his son about the dangers of adultery, he also told him how to avoid it by spending time with his wife, the woman who was supposed to be...

III. Your Closest Friend

- A. The book of Proverbs unashamedly calls for seeking fulfillment of intimate desires within marriage for the enjoyment and good of both husband and wife.
- B. The consequences of adultery should motivate a person to avoid it (Prov 5:7–14).
 - 1. The writer warns that consorting with an adulteress will rob a person of health and prosperity.
 - 2. The price of infidelity may be high; for everything one works for—position, power, prosperity—could be lost through such indiscretion.

- C. As a strong preventive to marital infidelity, the writer of Proverbs admonishes husbands to “drink from your own cistern” (Prov 5:15–23).
1. “The wife is a cistern, well, spring, stream or fountain because she is able to satisfy the desire of her husband. In the ancient Near East, a spring on one’s property was regarded as very valuable and significant. The idea, then, is this: be content with marital relations with your own wife. Find your delight and satisfaction in her rather than going elsewhere to taste the wells and springs of others. Faithfulness to your own wife is so natural and so pleasant that the question must be asked, Why would you ever be attracted to anyone else? What is more, remember that all of your life is directly viewed by God—and that includes the bedroom!” (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Peter H. Davids, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*)
 2. The advice of Proverbs is so applicable to our culture in which adultery is so common.
 3. In contrast to much of what we read, see, and hear today, this passage urges couples to look to each other for lifelong satisfaction and companionship.
 4. Many temptations entice husbands and wives to leave when marriage becomes dull to find excitement and pleasures elsewhere.
 5. However, God designed marriage and sanctified it, and only within this covenant relationship can we find real love and fulfillment.
 6. Don’t let God’s best for you be wasted on the illusion of greener pastures somewhere else.
 7. Instead, rejoice with your spouse as you give yourselves to God and to each other.

Invitation

- I. God never intended marriage to become boring, lifeless, and dull.
- II. Intimacy in marriage a gift God gives to married people for their mutual enjoyment.
- III. Real happiness comes when we decide to find pleasure in the spouse God has given us and to commit ourselves to meeting their needs.
- IV. The real danger is in doubting that God knows and cares for us.

The Nazirite Vow

Introduction

- I. Numbers 5 warned about those times when a Jew sinned and *broke fellowship* with God.
 - A. Numbers 5:5–10 discussed unfaithfulness to the Lord.
 - B. Numbers 5:11–31 discussed the law of jealousy (the bitter waters that would reveal the truth about a case of suspected adultery).
 - C. God not only exposes sin, He also desires that men live for Him.
- II. When devout Jews desired *closer fellowship* with God they could voluntarily assume the vow of a Nazirite (Num 6:1–12).
 - A. In short, a Nazirite was one who separated himself *from* others by consecration *to* God with a special vow.
 - B. There were two different types of Nazirites: temporary and lifelong.

Discussion

I. What Is A Nazirite?

- A. “The term ‘Nazirite,’ from the Hebrew *nazir* describes this person who has marked out a special time of separation or consecration for a specific period of unusual devotion to God. This text speaks of a restricted period of time for the Nazirite vow, but there were some persons who took the vow for a lifetime. The word *Nazirite* is sometimes confused with *Nazarene*, the word used to describe Jesus in terms of his hometown origin (see Matt 2:23; Mark 14:67; 16:6; Acts 24:5). While these words are based on the same root (*nazar* ‘to vow’), they are distinctive words.” (Ronald B. Allen, *Numbers*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary)
- B. The basic purpose of a Nazirite vow is *separation*:
 - 1. Separated *from* the fruit of the vine, the cutting the hair, and the dead.
 - 2. Separated *unto* total devotion to God.
 - 3. The Nazirite was not expected to entirely withdraw from society or to become a celibate.
 - 4. Nazirites could be women (Num 6:2) or even slaves, but their vows and service had then to be approved by their husbands or masters (Num 30:6–8).
- C. Three areas of life were impacted during the period of a Nazirite vow:
 - 1. His *diet* would separate him from wine and intoxicating drinks.
 - a) Some think this was aimed at maintaining the holiness of the Nazirite.
 - b) However, not only were intoxicating drinks prohibited, but also fresh or dried grapes, raisins, grape juice, vinegar, grape seeds and even the skin of a grape (Num 6:3–4).
 - c) This restriction is more extensive than the prohibition placed upon priests, who are limited from consumption of such drinks only during the period of tabernacle or temple service (Lev 10:9–10).
 - d) Raisin cakes were a staple of the diet (1 Sam 25:18; 30:12; 2 Sam 16:1).
 - e) Abstention from the fruit of the vine could point to the renunciation of earthly joys in order to find all joy in the Lord.

2. His *appearance* would separate him from others.
 - a) A man was not allowed to shave his head during the time of the vow.
 - b) Allowing the hair to grow probably symbolizes the dedication of personal strength and vitality to the Lord—at the end of the period of the vow the hair was shaved and cast into the fire of sacrifice (Num 6:18).
 - c) “The Nazirite knew that the whole body belonged to God including the hair, so a razor never touched his skin (Judg 16:17) until his service was ended (Num 6:18)” (“Hair,” *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).
 - d) “Hair carried symbolic as well as religious social or political overtones. Kings and priests were anointed with oil poured over their head. Spit running down one’s beard could depict insanity (1 Sam 21:13). Joab took Amasa by his beard, perhaps as an outward sign of greeting, while he killed him with a hidden weapon (2 Sam 20:9). As a sign of his total allegiance to God the Nazirite did not cut his hair (Num 6:5) until his time of separation with God was completed; then he shaved his head and burned the hair (Num 6:18; cf. Judg 16:22). Levitical priests were to trim their hair and not let their locks grow long nor shave their heads (Ezek 44:20).” (“Dress and Ornamentation,” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 2:234)
3. His *associations* (or lack thereof) would separate him from others.
 - a) One who had taken a Nazirite vow could not touch or go near a corpse, even that of his nearest relative (Num 6:6–7).
 - b) Even a Levitical priest was expected to care for the dead body of his near kin (Lev 21:1–4).
 - c) The avoidance of contact with the dead symbolized his priorities: God came first and no duty to mankind could take its place.
- D. A Nazirite took vows *similar* to those of a priest.
 1. A priest could not serve if he was drunk (Lev 10:8–11; Ezek 44:21).
 2. A priest could not serve if he was contaminated by a corpse (Lev 21:10–12).
 3. A priest could not make a bald place on his head (Ezek 44:20; Lev 21:5).
- E. There is only one clear mention of the Nazirites by the prophets (Amos 2:11–12).
 1. This passage shows concern for protecting the status of the Nazirite.
 2. Amos said the Lord had given Israel the prophets and the Nazirites as spiritual instructors and examples.
 3. However, the people gave wine to the Nazirites and had offered inducements to the prophets to refrain from prophesying.
- F. At the end of his vow the Nazirite had to offer various sacrifices (Num 6:13–20).
 1. The Nazirite had to present himself at the door of the sanctuary with...
 - a) A male lamb of the first year for a *burnt-offering* (cf. Lev 1:10–13).
 - b) A female lamb of the first year for a *sin-offering* (cf. Lev 4:32–35).
 - c) A ram for a *peace-offering* (cf. Lev 3:6–11).
 - d) The customary *grain and wine offerings* (Lev 2:4–13; Num 15:1–12).
 2. After these sacrifices were offered by the priest, the Nazirite cut off his hair at the door and threw it into the fire under the peace-offering.
 3. “Burning the hair signified the completion of the vow. That it was burned and not kept as a trophy or a memorial demonstrates that the act of the Nazirite was in devotion to the Lord” (Allen, *Numbers*, EBC)

II. Why Take Such A Vow?

- A. The law given in Numbers implies that living as a Nazirite was a matter of choice.
 - 1. A vow might be assumed by a parent before the birth of a child.
 - 2. A vow might be taken by one in some sort of distress or trouble.
 - 3. A vow might be taken by a woman suspected by her husband of unfaithfulness in their marriage relationship until the suspicion could be removed.
- B. The *Mishna* (in the tractate “Nazir,” “The Nazirite Vow”), gives a few of examples of why one would take this vow:
 - 1. “I will be a Nazir when a son is born to me” (*Mishna*, Nazir 2:7).
 - 2. “Lo, I am a Nazir when a son will be born to me and a Nazir for a hundred days” (*Mishna*, Nazir 2:10).
 - 3. “If my son comes home from war whole and in one piece, I shall be a Nazir for seven years” (*Mishna*, Nazir 3:6).
- C. Normally the Nazirite vow was for thirty days (*Mishna*, Nazir 6:3), but it could last for months, years or even a lifetime.
- D. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentioned a large number of Nazirites sponsored by Herod Agrippa I (*Antiq* 19:294).
- E. During the Maccabean days, a number of Jews became Nazirites as a matter of protest against the Hellenistic practices and demands of Antiochus Epiphanes.

III. Nazirites In The Bible

- A. Samson (Judg 13–16; esp. 13:1–5).
 - 1. Although he had been consecrated to the Lord since before his birth, Samson did not live a devoted life and was careless about his vow.
 - a) He disobeyed the prohibition of approaching a dead body (Judg 14:8–9).
 - b) He had immoral relations with a prostitute in Gaza (Judg 16:1).
 - 2. He is probably best known for his relationship with Delilah (Judg 16:4–20).
 - a) Delilah wore down Samson’s resistance and his capture by the Philistines led to his degradation and imprisonment (Judg 16:17).
 - b) Samson’s uncut hair was only the symbol of his Nazirite vow, and its cutting led to the withdrawal of the Lord’s power.
 - c) Judges 16:20 is one of the saddest verses in the Old Testament.
 - 3. While imprisoned at Gaza he was able to kill more Philistines in his death than he had during his life (Judg 16:21–30).
 - 4. The Hebrew writer lists him as one of the heroes of faith (Heb 11:32) because his strength came from God and his dying act was one of faith.
- B. Samuel (1 Sam 1–25).
 - 1. Samuel was born in answer to barren Hannah’s sorrowful prayer (1 Sam. 1:10).
 - 2. Like Samson, Samuel was dedicated to the Lord before his birth (1 Sam 1:11).
 - 3. As the firstborn male to open Hannah’s womb, he was “lent to the Lord” for all his life (1 Sam 1:28).
- C. John the Baptist (Luke 1:13–17).
 - 1. It is *possible* that John was a Nazirite, but the title was not directly applied to John, nor are we told that he avoided the dead and left his hair uncut.
 - 2. His abstention from wine and strong drink might have just been an indication of his ascetic lifestyle (Luke 7:33).

- D. Paul, on his second missionary journey, in the midst of his work at Corinth, took on himself the Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18).
 - 1. When Luke tells us that Paul “had his hair cut off at Cenchrea,” and this would indicate the termination of his Nazirite vow.
 - 2. It also explains Paul’s eager desire to return to Jerusalem, where the other rites of the discharge of his vow would then be performed at the Temple.
- E. Later, Paul assumed the heavy expense of purifying four other men that had such vows on them (Acts 21:17–26).

Invitation

- I. Our Lord assumed that there would be times that His disciples would devote special periods of time to fasting and prayer (Matt 6:16–17; Mark 2:18–20).
- II. All Christians are to be separated from the world and unto God (Rom 12:1–2).

Tisha B'Av

Introduction

- I. On the Jewish calendar, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av is known as *Tisha B'Av* ("the Ninth of Av").
 - A. Tisha B'Av falls in July or August on the Western (Gregorian) calendar, but Jews follow the lunar calendar.
 - B. Tisha B'Av is regarded as the saddest day on the Jewish calendar and a day which was destined for tragedy.
 - C. At sunset on the evening before Tisha B'Av devout Jews began a 24-hour fast.
 - D. In addition to the fast, as a sign of mourning, it is customary to refrain from bathing or grooming, wearing perfume or leather shoes, and having sexual relations.
 - E. No Jew will get married on Tisha B'Av—there are no Bar Mitzvahs, no birthday parties, no celebrations, no walks on the beach on that day.
 - F. In fact, all pleasurable activities are forbidden.
- II. If you were to visit a Jewish synagogue on Tisha B'Av, you would see the congregation assemble after sundown in a darkened synagogue, their feet wearing slippers, and people talking in the hushed tones like they were in a funeral home.
 - A. There are no greetings, no hand shakes, no smiles.
 - B. After evening prayers, the congregants sit on low stools or on the floor, touch ashes to their foreheads, and with candles or flashlights follow the chanting of the funeral dirge over Jerusalem, the Book of Lamentations.
 - C. They sing medieval mourning songs, the *Keenos*, with funeral melodies.
 - D. They leave the synagogue as silently as they came and disperse to their homes without farewells.
- III. The fast on Tisha B'Av commemorates the destruction of both the First Temple and Second Temple in Jerusalem, which occurred about 655 years apart (586 B.C. and A.D. 70 respectively), but many other travesties have occurred on the same date on the Hebrew calendar.
- IV. "On the Ninth of Ab (1) the decree was made against our forefathers that they should not enter the land, (2) the first Temple and (3) the second [Temple] were destroyed, (4) Betar was taken, and (5) the city was ploughed up [after the war of Hadrian]. When Ab comes, rejoicing diminishes." (*Mishnah*, Ta'anit 4:6)
- V. In this lesson we want to notice the tragic events associated with Tisha B'Av.

Discussion

I. The Promised Land

- A. As you might recall, two years after the people of God left slavery in Egypt they came to the border of the Promised Land.
 1. God told Moses to send spies into the land to bring back a report concerning the quality of the land and the morale of its inhabitants, probably with the intention of strengthening the faith of the Israelites (Num 13:1-2).
 2. The spies covered some 220 miles from the Negev, the arid region south of Beersheba, right up to the north, Rehob, about 47 miles north of Damascus (Num 13:17-24).

3. The spies went on their mission during our month of July since it was “the season of the first ripe grapes” (Num 13:20).
 4. From the Valley of Eschol they brought back a large cluster of grapes and carried them on a pole between two men (Num 13:23).
 - a) The Department of Tourism in Israel uses that image of two men carrying grapes today in their advertising.
 5. While the land was indeed bountiful, a “land flowing with milk and honey” as God had promised, there were also “giants” in the land (Num 13:26–33).
 6. Talk of giants and fortified cities made it easy to forget about God’s promise to help.
 7. The people believed the evil report of the ten spies and rebelled against Moses, Aaron, and the Lord (Num 14:1–4).
- B. When the Israelites accepted the false report, they wept over the false belief that God was setting them up for defeat.
1. That night the people cried—Jewish teaching is that it was the Ninth of Av that became a day of weeping and misfortune for all time (*Mishnah*, Ta’anit 4:6).
 2. When the chorus of despair went up, everyone joined in.
 3. Their greatest fears were being realized.
 4. Losing their perspective, the people were caught up in the emotion of the moment, forgetting what they knew about God’s character.
 5. Consequently that generation of Israelites never entered the Holy Land.
 6. Only their children have that privilege, after wandering in the desert for another 38 years (Num 14:28–34).
- C. The sin of the spies really makes no sense.
1. Why were the people so scared? Because of giants? Fortified cities?
 2. Didn’t they just witness the Ten Plagues and the parting of the Sea?
 3. Weren’t they subsisting daily on a well which followed them in the desert and manna which fell from heaven?
 4. Did they really not know what any small child is taught today—that God is all-powerful, that He can do anything?
 5. Were they really afraid that the Creator of heaven and earth could not fight against a bunch of giants that He Himself created?
- D. “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19).

II. Destruction Of The First Temple

- A. King Solomon began work on the Temple in Jerusalem during the 4th year of his reign (c. 966 B.C.) and 480 years after the exodus from Egypt (1 Kgs 6:1).
- B. Solomon’s Temple stood for over 400 years, until king Nebuchadnezzar’s troops sacked Jerusalem on *Tisha B’Av* (the 9th of Av) 586/7 B.C.
- C. The Babylonians destroyed most of the buildings on the temple mount and demolished the city walls, after a two-year siege (2 Kgs 24:18–25:7).
- D. Nebuchadnezzar took “all the vessels of the Lord’s house” to Babylon (Jer 28:1–4).
- E. Nothing remained of the glorious city of David and Solomon!

- F. The city of Jerusalem, once great among the nations, was now desolate.
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar deported practically all of the inhabitants of Judah over a fifteen-year period.
 - 2. The Babylonians stripped the gold from the palace and sacked the Temple and all of the treasures.
 - 3. They destroyed the city walls, the houses and the Temple (Lam 2:5–9).
- G. Today the Book of Lamentations—a lament for the destruction of the First Temple—is recited in the synagogue on Tisha B'Av (cf. Zech 7:3).
 - 1. On Tisha B'Av night Jews sit on the floor of the synagogue and read from the Book of Lamentations.
 - 2. They grieve for a Temple that was destroyed.
 - 3. In a mournful voice they chant (Lam 1:1–4).
 - 4. This is the prophet Jeremiah's song of sorrow for Jerusalem's destruction.
 - 5. The nation of Judah had been utterly defeated, the Temple destroyed, and captives taken away (exiled) to Babylon.
 - 6. Jeremiah's tears were for the suffering and humiliation of the people, but he also wept because God had rejected the people for their rebellious ways.

III. Destruction Of The Second Temple

- A. Babylonian exile ended in 538 B.C. when king Cyrus of Persia issued his decree that allowed all captive peoples to return to their homelands.
 - 1. The Second Temple was built on the site of the First Temple 70 years after its destruction.
 - 2. Construction began in 538 B.C. and was finally completed in 516 B.C..
 - 3. The process is described in the Bible in the Book of Ezra.
 - 4. This Temple was refurbished and enlarged by King Herod during the 1st century B.C.
- B. The destruction of the Second Temple was predicted by our Lord in Matthew 24:2–35 and parallel accounts which are recorded in Mark 13:1–37 and Luke 21:5–36.
- C. Jesus called the destruction of Jerusalem the “the days of vengeance” (Luke 21:22).
 - 1. The destruction of Jerusalem was an act of God's vengeance and judgment, not Rome's—these would be the days when people were punished for their sins.
 - 2. The destruction of the holy city was not an accidental or arbitrary act, but the just recompense of reward for those who rejected God's Son.
 - 3. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus (A.D. 39–81).
- D. When the Roman legions arrived at Jerusalem they camped on Mount Scopus (Josephus, *War* 5:67–70).
 - 1. Immediately after the arrival of Titus a five-mile long stone wall was erected around Jerusalem in just three days that totally enclosed the city (Josephus, *War* 5:508–509).
 - 2. After the city was surrounded and escape was impossible, a famine of unimaginable proportions descended upon the Holy City.
 - 3. It took four years from start to finish, but eventually it was over.
 - 4. And when the Jews looked at their calendars, they recoiled with horror at the realization that the Temple went up in flames on the Ninth day of Av—exactly the same day on which their first Temple had been destroyed.

5. What did this amazing coincidence mean?
6. Clearly it proved that it was no coincidence!
7. God must have been behind these two great tragedies.
8. According to Josephus, after the battle, as Titus viewed the massive walls of Jerusalem, he said, “We have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no other than God who ejected the Jews out of these fortifications; for what could the hands of men, or any machines, do towards overthrowing these towers!” (Josephus, *War* 6:411)

IV. Jerusalem Plowed Under

- A. Quintus Tineius Rufus was a Roman Senator and the provincial governor of Judaea from at least A.D. 130 to 132.
 1. Work on the Roman city of *Aelia Capitolina*, as Jerusalem was to be called, commenced in A.D. 131.
 2. The governor of Judaea performed the traditional Roman foundation ceremony, which involved plowing over the designated city limits.
 3. The Romans issued a coin inscribed *Aelia Capitolina* which featured Tineius Rufus standing behind the plow.
- B. This “Plowing up the Temple” was seen as a religious offense and further turned many Jews against the Roman authorities.
- C. The date the plow dug into the ground on the Temple Mount? The Ninth of Av, of course.

V. The Massacre At Betar

- A. In the second century A.D., the Jews in Israel again rebelled against Roman rule.
- B. But their hopes were cruelly dashed in A.D. 135 as 580,000 Jewish rebels were brutally butchered in the final battle at Betar (*Beitar*, *Bethar*), a city located just seven miles south-west of Jerusalem.
 1. The Betar fortress was an ancient, terraced farming village in the Judean highlands.
 2. There were 400 synagogues in the city.
 3. The city was the stronghold of Bar Kokhba, the leader of the Jewish Revolt during the time of the Roman General, and later Emperor, Hadrian.
- C. Hadrian sent several of his Roman legions to capture the city.
 1. According to historical records, the city was besieged for three and a half years before it finally fell, and its defenders (including children who were found in the city) were put to death.
 2. The horrendous scene after the city’s capture could be best described as a massacre.
 3. The date of the massacre?
 4. Of course—the Ninth of Av!

VI. Other Tragic Events

- A. The Jews were expelled from England in A.D. 1290 on, you guessed it, Tisha B'Av.
- B. In 1492, the Golden Age of Spain came to a close when Queen Isabella and her husband Ferdinand ordered that the Jews be banished from the land “for the greater glory of the Church and the Christian religion.”
 - 1. The edict of expulsion was signed on March 31, 1492, and the Jews were given exactly four months to put their affairs in order and leave the country.
 - 2. What was the date on the Hebrew calendar on which no Jew would be allowed any longer to remain in the land where he had enjoyed welcome and prosperity?
 - 3. Oh, by now you know it—the Ninth of Av.
- C. World War II and the Holocaust, historians conclude, was actually the long drawn-out conclusion of World War I that began in 1914.
 - 1. Barbara Tuchman wrote a book about that first great world war, which she called *The Guns of August*.
 - 2. Had a Jewish scholar written the book, perhaps it would have been titled with a date more specific than just the month.
 - 3. Yes, amazingly enough, the First World War also began, on the Hebrew calendar, on the Ninth day of Av, Tisha B'Av.
- D. On August 2, 1941, SS commander Heinrich Himmler formally received approval from the Nazi Party for *The Final Solution*.
 - 1. As a result, the Holocaust began during which almost one-third of the world's Jewish population perished.
 - 2. On the Hebrew calendar it was the ninth day of Av.
 - 3. Ready for just one more?
 - 4. On July 23, 1942, the SS began the mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, en route to the Treblinka death camp.
 - 5. Again, on the Hebrew calendar it was the ninth day of Av.

Conclusion

- I. What do you make of all this?
 - A. Jews see this as another confirmation of the deeply held conviction that history isn't haphazard.
 - B. Events—even terrible ones—are part of a Divine plan and have spiritual meaning.
 - C. I agree with them on that point!
 - D. I see the hand of God moving throughout human history.
- II. God is the Creator and sustainer of human history.
 - A. He started it; He will bring His purpose from it; and He will bring it to a close when that purpose is fulfilled.
 - B. If you want to understand what God is doing in history, you have to look at Jesus.
 - C. He is the explanation of God's words and actions throughout all of history.
- III. History's creator is God, and that means that we are not animals or accidents of nature.
 - A. We are created beings with a past, given to us by God.
 - B. That is really good news!
 - C. A Christian should never see history as a meaningless string of events.
 - D. Instead, we should look at history as study of God's hand as they mold, direct, and shape history for His own purposes.

- IV. We look for the return of Jesus, “but of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt 24:36).
- A. Jesus will return during normal times and without warning (Mark 13:32–37).
 - B. “He made this world. He came to dwell in it. He will return at the end of history to wind it all up. That is the Christian hope. History is moving steadily towards that grand day. We shall not go out like a light. We shall not be blown sky-high in a nuclear holocaust. We shall not destroy the Earth by our environmental vandalism. This world will not, however, go on for ever.” (Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today, 250)

How To Study The Bible

Introduction

- I. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).
 - A. This command sets Timothy in sharp contrast to the false teachers.
 1. They ultimately seek human approval.
 2. Timothy was to seek God’s approval.
 - B. *Be diligent* means “to make haste” and “denotes zealous effort.”
 1. KJV uses the word *study*, which is included, not but the whole story.
 2. The ESV translates this as “Do your best to present yourself to God...”
 - C. “A worker who does not need to be ashamed.”
 1. It is the picture of a man faithfully performing his duty, so that when he looks over what he has done, he will not blush.
 2. His life and work are such that bring to honor Christ and the gospel.
 - D. Timothy is urged in this passage to *rightly divide* the word of truth.
 1. The Greek word translated as *rightly divide* is interesting.
 2. It is *orthotomein*, which literally means *to cut rightly*.
 3. The Greeks themselves used the word in three different contexts.
 - a) They used it for driving a straight road across country.
 - b) For plowing a straight furrow across a field.
 - c) For the work of a mason in cutting and squaring a stone so that it fitted into its correct place in the structure of the building.
 4. So, the person who rightly divides the word of truth drives a straight road through the truth and refuses to be lured down the muddy byways.
 - a) Such a person plows a straight furrow across the field of truth.
 - b) Or, he takes each section of the truth and fits it into its correct position, as a mason does a stone.
 - E. “Do all you can to present yourself to God as someone worthy of his approval, as a worker with no need to be ashamed, because he deals straightforwardly with the Word of the Truth” (2 Tim 2:15, CJB).
- II. Every Christian should desire to be a worker for God—one who handles the word of God properly.
 - A. When you read the Bible, do you *read* the Scriptures or *study* them?
 - B. Many Christians have a practice of reading the Bible through every year.
 1. This is certainly commendable, but *reading* the Scriptures is not the same as *studying* the Scriptures.
 2. As you study the Bible, there are some questions you need to ask as you study any passage—these mark the difference between reading and studying.

I. Who Is Writing?

- A. Luke has the distinction of being the only Gentile writer in the Bible.
 - 1. He is referred to by Paul as “Luke the beloved physician” (Col 4:14).
 - 2. It has been observed that preachers usually see men at their best, lawyers see men at their worst, and doctors see men as they really are.
 - 3. As a physician, he is more exacting in his use of language.
 - 4. When he refers to a leper he uses the exact medical term to describe the condition, i.e., “full of leprosy” (Luke 5:12).
 - 5. In Mark 3:1 we read of the man with the withered hand whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath—Luke adds it was his *right* hand which was withered, something a physician would note (Luke 6:6).
 - 6. It is the physician who notes that in the Garden our Lord’s “sweat became like great drops of blood” (Luke 22:44).
- B. David was a shepherd boy who became king and he made use of the common scenes of his childhood to teach Bible truths (cf. Ps 23).
- C. Paul spent much of his time around Roman soldiers, so his writings reflect scenes he was familiar with (cf. Eph 6:10–17).

II. Who Are They Writing To?

- A. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony.
 - 1. In 356 B.C. Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, seized this city—and it bears his name.
 - 2. In 42 B.C. Mark Antony and Octavian (Augustus Caesar) combined forces to defeat the armies of Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, at Philippi—this was one of the most significant military engagements in Roman history.
 - 3. In celebration of the victory, Philippi was made into a Roman colony—this entitled its inhabitants to the rights and privileges usually granted to those who lived in the cities of Italy.
 - 4. When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi he used terms that those retired soldiers would have understood.
 - a) “Depart” (Phil 1:23).
 - b) “Caesar’s household” (Phil 4:22).
- B. The city of Colosse was filled with people who desired worldly wisdom, so Paul warned them of the dangers of human philosophy (Col 2:8–10).
- C. The book of Hebrews was written to Judean Jews who were now Christians, but some of them wanted to go back to the old Law (Heb 10:1–4).

III. Why Are They Writing?

- A. Peter stated the purpose of his second epistle (2 Pet 3:1).
- B. It is obvious that Matthew wrote his account to prove that in Jesus of Nazareth is to be found the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecy.
 - 1. Some have commented that the gospel of Matthew was written by a Jew, about a Jew, to other Jews—and this is certainly the case.
 - 2. Try to picture a Greek opening the gospel of Matthew for the first time.
 - 3. Within the first few verses he would read of the genealogy of Christ.
 - 4. Among the Jews this would have seemed both logical and appropriate, but to a Greek it would have been unintelligible.
 - 5. He would also read of Jesus being the *Messiah*—a term which no Greek would have been able to fully comprehend.
 - 6. The gospel of Matthew was never intended for a Greek audience.
- C. Mark presents Christ as the ideal servant.
 - 1. Unlike Matthew, Mark does not give us the genealogy of Christ, for the genealogy of a servant is not important.
 - 2. Furthermore, Mark does not mention the Law of Moses and the Old Testament is quoted only one time in his narrative.
 - 3. Since Mark was not writing to a Jewish audience he had to explain Jewish customs and settings to his readers.
- D. Luke sets forth the humanity of the Son of Man and presents in chronological order the life of Christ (Luke 1:1–4).
- E. Unlike other writers, John states the purpose of his book (John 20:30–31).
 - 1. The purpose of the gospel of John was to prove the Deity of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Instead of giving the genealogy of Christ like Matthew and Luke, John goes back into eternity (John 1:1–4).

IV. How Are They Writing?

- A. Much of the Bible is written in narrative form.
 - 1. When writing a novel an author only gives you the information he wants you to have; every sentence is there by choice.
 - a) The reason(s) for certain sections are not always immediately made known by the author.
 - b) Some sections are later explained; some are left for you to draw your own conclusions about.
 - c) Tom Clancy was a master at weaving a story with a global backdrop and it is not until the final chapter that all the pieces were put together.
 - 2. When reading Bible narratives keep asking, “Why am I being told this?”
 - a) Look for repetition, contrasting characters, irony and symbolic items.
 - b) Also look for seemingly irrelevant details (nothing is in the Bible by accident).

- B. Prophetic books cover over one-quarter of the Bible, yet no section of the Bible is more neglected.
 - 1. Since we are no longer under the Law of Moses, some assume we no longer need to study the Old Testament (Rom 15:4).
 - 2. Some claim that since we do not have to know about the prophets to get to heaven, we can neglect them (minimal Christians).
 - 3. It takes too long to get through the Prophets.
 - 4. Their message dealt with the sins of the people and pointed out God's hand moving behind the scenes in the affairs of nations (Dan 2:21; 4:25).
 - 5. Sometimes the prophets use signs and symbols (Rev 1:1).
- C. The book of Proverbs contains (no surprise here) proverbs.
 - 1. The word *proverb* simply means "a comparison."
 - 2. The book of Proverbs is "a collection of moral and philosophical maxims of a wide range of subjects presented in a poetic form" (*Easton's Bible Dictionary*).
- D. The Bible also contains books of history.
 - 1. While books like Joshua and Judges contain the *history* of God's people, they are not *history books* in the truest sense of the word.
 - 2. They reflect one main viewpoint, i.e., God's view of national Israel.
- E. The New Testament also contains personal letters (epistles).
 - 1. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:2).
 - 2. Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome (Rom 1:7).
 - 3. Paul's letter to the Christians in the region of Galatia (Gal 1:1-2).
 - 4. Paul's letters to Philemon, Timothy and Titus.
 - 5. Paul's letters were intended to be shared (Col 4:12-16).

V. What Tools Should I Use?

- A. Consult other *translations* of the Bible, especially for difficult passages.
 - 1. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, while the New Testament was written in Koine Greek.
 - 2. King James I of England ascended to the English throne in 1603.
 - a) He is best known today because he commissioned the greatest piece of religious and literary work in the world—the Authorized King James Version of the Bible.
 - b) In 1604 he appointed 54 men to a translation committee.
 - c) These men were not only the best linguists and scholars in the kingdom but in the world.
 - d) Much of their work on the King James Bible formed the basis for our linguistic studies of today.
 - e) This group of great scholars had qualifications that have never been rivaled before or after them!
 - f) The KJV was an excellent translation in its day, but I don't know anyone who speaks, let alone understands, Elizabethan English!
 - 3. I recommend you at least have the *New King James* (1982), *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (1999, 2003), *The English Standard Version* (2001, 2011), the *New International Version* (1973, 2011), and the *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998).
 - 4. Use translations, not a paraphrase, such as the *Living Bible*.
 - 5. Also, stay away from translations that were designed to reflect one particular religious group, such as the *New World Translation*.

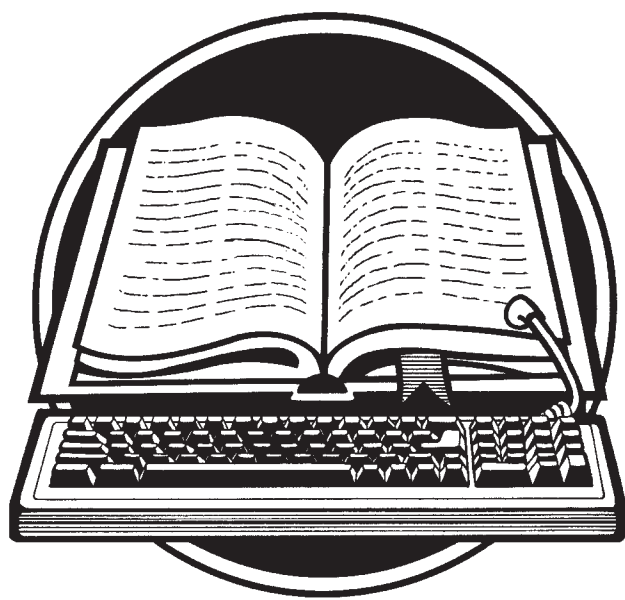
- B. A *concordance* lists key words in the Bible along with where they occur.
 - 1. A concordance will allow you to find that verse you were looking for, and save you from calling the preacher!
 - 2. You need to select a concordance that is adapted to the translation you are using (KJV, NKJV, ASV, etc.).
- C. The proper use of Bible dictionaries can prevent some of the more common problems in Bible study, i.e., the definition of Bible words.
 - 1. You will not get very far in your Bible studies if you are using an English dictionary to define Bible words.
 - 2. Don't be like Humpty Dumpty: "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" (Lewis Carroll, *Through The Looking Glass*).
 - 3. *Strong's Dictionary* (included in Strong's Concordance) is **very** basic.
 - 4. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* is acceptable, but still rather basic.
 - 5. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* had been a standard for over 100 years, but it is a bit dated now.
 - a) The book was printed long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
 - b) Read the forward to the book!
 - 6. *Kittle's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* contains 10 massive volumes and is one of the best unabridged works you can purchase on New Testament words.
- D. Books on Bible lands and customs can help us overcome the fact that we are more than 6,000 miles and nearly 2,000 years removed from the days and location of the New Testament church.
 - 1. Books on archaeology and ancient civilizations can help you understand the customs of the ancient near east that seem so strange to most of us.
 - 2. A good Bible atlas can help you visualize the travels of Bible characters.
 - 3. A picture really is worth a thousand words, so purchase some books that show the lands of the Bible.
 - 4. Secular histories such as Josephus, Tacitus and Suetonius will help set the stage for the story of the Bible.
- E. Commentaries explain Bible verses, but they also reflect the bias of the author—and no man is exempt from this.
 - 1. I would much rather people own no commentaries than to own just one.
 - 2. When I started preaching a lot of brethren in the South had *Johnson's Notes on the Bible*, and it included the Bible text!
 - 3. Be careful of "study Bibles"—some people cannot tell the difference between the comments and the Bible text.
- F. Computer based Bible study programs will include many of these reference works, and save you hundreds of dollars.
 - 1. You can start with a very basic program for under \$30, or easily spend more than \$20,000 dollars (I have).
 - 2. Some of the programs allow you dual use on your iPad or iPhone.
 - 3. The problem with some of the programs is that they make extensive use of old reference books to save money (old books that are no longer protected by copyrights).
 - 4. Would you want your medical doctor getting his medical information the 1901 edition of *Gray's Anatomy: The Anatomical Basis of Clinical Practice*?

VI. What Can I Learn?

- A. Let me suggest a plan of action for you.
 - 1. As you study a Bible text, read it from the translation you normally use.
 - 2. Underline any words you do not understand.
 - 3. Read a few translations to see how they handled the word.
 - 4. Be careful of coming up with a new “translation” on your own.
 - a) All of my life I’ve read passages in Bible classes and had people suggest a “better” way to translate certain words.
 - b) If the translators of the KJV, NKJV, ESV, ASV, NASV, and the NIV translate the word a certain way, I’m probably not going to trust your translation since you don’t even know the Greek alphabet.
 - c) There are probably rules of Greek or Hebrew grammar you are not familiar with.
 - d) I like to use the translator’s handbooks published by the United Bible Society to help me understand why certain words are translated the way they are.
- B. You need to make some written notes and observations on your studies.
 - 1. A computer is excellent for this!
 - 2. Some Bible programs allow you to store personal notes.
 - 3. The Bible classes we have on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings are meant to act as a starting place for your studies.

Conclusion

- I. Your study of the Bible is a means to an end, not the end itself (Ps 1:1–2)!
- II. We accomplish little unless we put it into practice what we have studied (Jas 1:22–25).



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