

1. The goal of our study (which is 2/3 of the way done!) is to be people who know God's Word and practice its principles and precepts in every area of our lives.

2. The tone of Paul's letter changes sharply in Chapter 10, as Paul again deals with the issue of his apostolic authority.
 - A. Perhaps this is the "painful letter" he has alluded to earlier.
 - B. Or perhaps this is a new attack with which he is dealing.

3. The Corinthian church was still racked by "dissensions and infighting" in 96AD - the 1st and 21st century church both struggle with an anti-authoritarian attitude.

4. The criticisms against Paul:
 - A. He is not an apostle, or at least not as worthy of being followed as their "super apostles."
 - B. He is not even a true Christian.
 - C. He is not as gifted as the "super apostles."
 - D. He tricked and exploited the Corinthian believers.
 - E. He is bold in his letters but timid in person.

5. Paul's response: 'Examine the fruit of my life. I lived among you like a nursing mother and a nurturing father.'

6. Paul's "Fool" speech (to which he felt he had been driven by their criticisms):
 - A. He worked harder.
 - B. He had been in prison more frequently.
 - C. He had been flogged more severely.
 - D. He had been exposed to death over and over again (lashed, beaten stoned, shipwrecked)
 - E. He had been in danger from nature and men and in different sorts of places.
 - F. He had labored without sleep.
 - G. He had been hungry and thirsty, cold and naked.
 - H. He faced the daily pressure of concern for all the churches.
 - I. He took no money from them and ministered to them while he was suffering greatly.
 - J. He tells the story of his vision from God.
 1. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" - his "messenger from Satan": Satan is trying to hinder, perhaps even destroy Paul; God is using it to bless Paul by teaching him through it that: "My grace is sufficient for you; my strength is made perfect in weakness." (Peter's experience is another example of this, and so is Job's.
 2. The nature of this "thorn in the flesh" (2 views):
 - a. It was a recurring demonic attack.
 - b. The more common view - it was a physical ailment (either malaria or a chronic eye ailment), which would mean that it is not always God's will to heal. Sometimes He has a better plan.

1. Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, so we are backtracking historically as we read this book. When we finished the Book of Jeremiah, the people of Judah had gone into exile. Habakkuk writes sometime after the reforms of King Josiah and before the Babylonian exile.
2. We know little about Habakkuk except that he was a man with the courage to speak the words of God.
3. The five parts of this book:
 - A. Part 1 - 1:1-4: Habakkuk is complaining to God that the judgment about which he and Jeremiah have been prophesying has not yet come.
 - B. Part 2 - 1:5-11: God answers that He will use the Babylonians to execute His judgment.
 - C. Part 3 - 1:12-2:1: Habakkuk challenges God to answer why He would use these evil people to punish His own people.
 - D. Part 4 - 2:2-20: God's response - Justice is not forgotten; Babylon will be judged.
 - E. Part 5 - 3:1-19: Habakkuk's response of faith to what the Lord has shown him, based on a thorough acquaintance with the mighty acts of God in history.
4. Habakkuk's circumstances have not changed, but he has. (3:16-19: "...yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior...")
5. The devotional book Hinds Feet on High Places is taken from the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk and worth reading. "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights." (3:19)
6. Habakkuk's difficulty:
 - A. God is omnipotent - He has all power. God is omniscient - He has all knowledge. God is good. He reasoned that a good God would intervene to uphold the righteous and punish the wicked, but complained that he did not see this happening.
 - B. This book is totally relevant to us today as we live in a world we can't completely understand or adequately control - we face the same difficulty Habakkuk did.
 - C. God's answer: Hab. 4:2: "...but the righteous will live by faith." Paul builds the Book of Romans around this verse.
 1. God IS omnipotent...God IS omniscient...God IS good...He wants us to TRUST Him.
 2. Habakkuk's hymn of faith (chapter 3) shows us that he decided to trust.
 3. I cannot know what the future holds, but I know the One who holds the future.
7. From Fear to Faith is a devotional commentary on the Book of Habakkuk. That title provides a good way to summarize this book.

1. Today we read Zephaniah, another of the 12 “minor” prophets. The prophets were not “minor” - that refers to the length of their books, the last 12 of the Old Testament (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

2. Zephaniah prophesied in Judah in the years leading up to the Babylonian captivity, so he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and probably Habakkuk. Zephaniah lived in a time when the majority of the people in Judah were practicing idolatry, lusting after material wealth and quite at home in a society characterized by greed and violence.

3. Zephaniah’s subject is “the day of the Lord” - Judgment Day.

A. The double focus of passages dealing with this subject:

1. The short-range judgment that is near at hand, in this case Nebuchadnezzar arriving at the gates of Jerusalem - Zephaniah’s words apply mostly to this judgment.

2. The far-off ultimate judgment coming at the end of history, that will come to the whole human race and in which only the righteous will remain unscathed - Zeph. 1:18, 3:8 are examples of this far-off prophecy.

3. That a judgment day is coming is both an Old Testament and a New Testament truth (as we saw in 2 Corinthians last week). It is important because it focuses us on living our lives in light of the reality of eternity.

a. We shy away from proclaiming this truth so as not to be seen as fanatics.

b. But people need to be warned that this is truth, so they can respond.

4. Zephaniah cries out the warning for people to wake up - the Day of the Lord is coming. Every revival begins with a clear understanding that this is true.

a. This should energize us to share the Gospel, not frighten us.

b. For us, Zephaniah has great words of comfort: 3:13, 17: “The remnant of Israel...will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid...The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

c. 3:20: “At that time (on the Day of the Lord) I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes.”

1. The Book of Ezekiel may seem intimidating and difficult to understand, but it is important and has a message for us.
2. Ezekiel follows Jeremiah both in biblical order and chronology. Ezekiel is in exile in Babylon, but the complete destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar has not yet occurred.
3. Ezekiel is 30 years old, already a priest and about to become a prophet. He holds two of the 3 important offices in ancient Israel - only Jesus has all three (prophet, priest, king).
4. Ezekiel's call:
 - A. Like Isaiah's call, it comes in the form of a vision. A vision differs from a dream in that the recipient may be wide-awake, but seeing the world that is behind the physical universe.
 1. Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Apostle, Peter, Paul - all had visions.
 2. During a vision, the prophet is out of control of himself.
 3. It is difficult for Ezekiel to find human words to describe the vision.
5. "The wheel within the wheel beside which the 4 living creatures stood" vision:
 - A. The living creatures somehow represent all the creatures that God has created.
 - B. There are interesting parallels to the books of Isaiah and Revelation in describing the appearance of heaven and the figure upon the throne, who is the Lord.
6. The proper response of a human to a glimpse of the divine: "I fell face down!", Ezekiel says.
7. Reading the Book of Ezekiel will give us a much better framework upon which to build when we get to Revelation. (We will note about 15 connections between the two in our readings.)
 - A. Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 1:
 1. The descriptions each offer of the Lord
 2. The prophet (and John) given a scroll, told to eat it, and it tastes like honey - in preparation for prophetic ministry.
 3. Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 - the description of heaven itself
8. Ezekiel is warned that the people to whom God is sending him are not a responsive lot.
 - A. They should understand - it is in their language and they are God's people.
 - B. The faithfulness of the messenger is not contingent upon the receptiveness of the audience.
 - C. God tells Ezekiel he is a watchman.
 1. Chapter 3 is important because we, too, are called to be "watchmen."
 2. The watchman is accountable to deliver the message, or "have blood on his hands." This is motivational.
9. The city of exile in Babylon was called Tel Aviv - this is now the name of the capital of the "new" homeland of the Jews. Is this because they are awaiting the time when the capital can again be Jerusalem, just as they were awaiting their return to Jerusalem from captivity?
10. God alerts Ezekiel to the fact that he will be a peculiar type of person, doing the unusual things God asks him to do, doing a humbling job, so that the people will know he is speaking for God.

1. Ezekiel is asked to do the strange things God warned him about in yesterday's reading:
 - A. Building sand castles, drawing a picture of Jerusalem on a clay tablet, laying siege works against the drawing with model camps and iron pans for walls.
 - B. Laying on his left side for 390 days (one for every year of Israel's sin) and then 40 more days on his right side (for Judah's sin); doing this in a public place while eating food cooked over a manure fire.
 - C. Shaving off his hair - burning 1/3, striking 1/3 with a sword, throwing 1/2 to the wind
2. Why is he asked to do these strange things?
 - A. This is the pattern of Scripture: God tells His people in advance what He is going to do; after the warnings, the event occurs as God says it would; after the event, God gives the interpretation.
 - B. God chooses a method of communication to His people in exile that humiliates the messenger (there are many examples of this in Scripture) in order to:
 1. draw the attention of the world in a very dramatic way to His message
 2. confute the wisdom of the world - He uses "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise..."
 3. protect His servants from pride
 4. make sure that the glory goes to God, and is not diverted to the messenger
3. Peter probably remembered Ezekiel's argument with God about not wanting to eat food prepared in a way that would make him ritually unclean when he had his vision on the rooftop in Joppa (see Acts 9).
4. Two expressions that recur in today's reading:
 - A. "This is what the Sovereign Lord says" - 5:5, 7, 8, 6:3, 11 - Ezekiel's whole job and authority are based on his claim that he was speaking entirely for God.
 - B. "Then they will know that I am the Lord" - 5:13, 6:7, 10, 13, 14 (and many more times throughout this book) - God wants Israel and the surrounding nations to know that He alone is the Lord; Jehovah is God.
5. God has a special name for His servant Ezekiel. He calls him "Son of Man". Jesus called himself that. That title is found here and in Daniel 7.