

AUGUST

August 1
Isaiah 1-4

Over the past hundred years, there has been insistent questioning as to whether Isaiah was the real author of all of this book. The biggest questions revolve around the prophet's age: He places his start during Uzziah's reign, but also prophesies about the return of the Judah exiles from Babylon.

He would have needed to be born about 760 BC and to have died no sooner than 535 BC. Could he have lived to be 225 years old? Not likely. If his prophecies about the return of the Judah captives from Babylon had been shown him a couple hundred years before it actually happened, only an incredible miracle could explain the detail with which he spoke.

Personally, I don't dwell on it! Nothing in Isaiah depends upon it being written by one man. If the book was written by two or three prophets over the space of a couple centuries, it doesn't lose its power.

Isaiah calls God's people to faithfulness. They would have to really make a 180 degree turn to escape God's coming wrath, but that's what the prophet calls them to do. They were just going through the motions with their religion. God wanted their hearts!

After beginning with strong judgment language, chapter 4 is a bit of relief. How soon will this "Branch" come to bless the survivors in Jerusalem? (We know Jesus was the promised "Branch", HUNDREDS OF YEARS LATER.)

August 2
Isaiah 5-9

Does God despise riches? Reading 5:8-10 might give you that impression. It's the self-centeredness that has God so inflamed, though. Disregard for others need not accompany riches.

In Isaiah's call to be a prophet for God (chapter 6), he asks God how long he must call the people to change their ways. God tells him to continue even if they never respond! That is our call, too, in our time. For as long as we live, we must call people to come to God. There is no retirement age.

The prophet speaks great threats of God's wrath. They are much more than threats, though; God's judgment is already moving forward. Isaiah never says, "If you don't change, this judgment will come." Rather, it's time to beg and plead with God, and to drop all unrighteousness like a hot rock. No 'adjustment' will help now, only total repentance.

Amidst dire judgment we find scraps of prophecy about the Messiah (Jesus),

who will come at some unspecified time in the future to bring God's kingdom to earth. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:1-7 are part of this prophecy.

August 3

Isaiah 10-14

Isaiah prophesies against both Assyria, who will conquer Israel, and Babylon, who will conquer Judah. Assyria and Babylon will be tools of God to bring judgment on His unfaithful people. By not giving God the credit for their victories, these foreign powers bring judgment on themselves.

Occasionally, we may be used to correct other Christians. Beware that you don't give yourself credit for being righteous---God may have chosen you as his tool for correction IN SPITE OF your faults.

Most every Bible scholar credits Isaiah with writing 13:17 more than a hundred years before the Medes (mentioned here) came to prominence. That's an amazing vision of the future. Maybe Isaiah did write this whole book, and was given the ability by God to see so clearly into the future that he could name places and prominent rulers no one had yet heard of!

Chapter 11 again teases us with prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus. The peaceful scenes in 11:6-9 see even further into the future.

August 4

Isaiah 15-21

Punishment was forecast for the country of Moab. Why? Because they had been an enemy to Israel, over many centuries. They were descendants of Lot, a man whose life had been miraculously saved by God before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Still, the Savior that Isaiah prophesied for Israel will also be available to any refugees from Moab (16:4-5).

Isaiah prophesies doom and destruction for most all of Israel and Judah's neighbors. If God's "chosen people" deserve punishment for not following God's ways, I guess the other countries have been even less 'God fearing'.

The prophet is only temporarily addressing other nations. His main body of work will be warning the people of Judah about their approaching punishment.

August 5

Isaiah 22-26

Chapters 25 and 26 are a surprise!

After a long time of telling us of the soon-to-be judgment on Jerusalem and all its neighbors, of death and siege, of captivity, the prophet Isaiah suddenly begins a song of praise. It is a strange kind of praise, revering God because his judgment is righteous. The nations deserved punishment! It's great to know that evil is rewarded with punishment, and that righteousness will prevail.

You've got to have standards. Children may not enjoy correction by their

parents at the time it is enforced, but eventually they will praise their parents for their training in righteousness.

Isaiah delivers a message that brings hope, though maybe not a guarantee of pleasure. God will love righteousness. God will welcome back a people who learn repentance.

August 6
Isaiah 27-31

In chapter 27, Isaiah tells the people they are being punished differently from their neighbors. Israel will rise again, and be gathered together again, but the other countries will not. Israel is being disciplined as a son or daughter, to let them start over afresh.

Verse 30:18 suggests that, even at this late date with the Lord's punishment on its way, still God would be compassionate enough to forestall it. His people, though, will not seek him. They insist on empty religious practices, and on trying to get military help from Egypt. Do we do the same, seeking to solve our problems by any means other than God's help?

Again, in 31:4-5, the prophet speaks of a day beyond the coming exile, when his people will be "passed over" from destruction. This is a reference to Jesus, who will become our "passover lamb", saving many from destruction, bringing salvation.

August 7
Isaiah 32-37

We have entered the kingdom of righteousness described in 32:1-8. Jesus opened the doors with his life, death, and resurrection. Christians are "like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert," (32:2) because we can connect folks to Jesus. There is a new standard for righteousness, even among non-Christians. Another section about the kingdom begins in 32:15: "Til the Spirit is poured upon us from on high" refers to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Chapter 35 is pure prophecy. Isaiah is writing down what God has revealed to him. Some refers to the time of the return of the captives from Babylon (545 BC), some refers to Jesus' day, some refers to the end of time. He doesn't try to put it all in order; he just writes.

Chapters 36-37 describe an event we already read about in II Chronicles 32. Though not prophecy, it makes sense that it should appear in Isaiah's book, since he was such a major player.

August 8
Isaiah 38-42

Hezekiah recovers from illness, and writes a song of praise to God. It sounds like he's recovered from cancer; the tumor has left because of a fig mixture spread

on it. This is obviously God's work. Figs have never been used so magnificently.

Back in great health, Hezekiah receives visitors from Babylon bearing gifts. In his hospitality, he shows his guests all the good things of the kingdom, all the treasures, never suspecting that Babylon would soon be a great empire, and would take all those treasures away.

The good tidings (40:9-11) Isaiah brings are for a future time after the Exile. He prophesies often about the coming of the Messiah, usually as if it would come right after the Exile. It must have been quite a disappointment to the returning exiles to see a land broken down and overrun with weeds and bushes. (See Nehemiah 1.)

Isaiah 40:28-31 is always a source of strength. It just strikes a chord of hope in us. We all want a day of renewed strength; God is always available to bring us a better day.

August 9
Isaiah 43-46

It's hard to understand the incredible love of God. We are like our ancestors, a rebellious people that seek do things our own way instead of God's way. Not only is that an affront to his holiness, but it hurts God to see us choosing a way to live that will hurt us in many ways. Yet God makes a way for us to be redeemed, to come back to him when our ways mess up our lives. Who else can we turn to? There is no other God.

The prophet has his best description of the foolishness of idols in 44:13-20. How can an artisan make a gorgeous figurine and then bow down to it as his god? That's foolishness! You made it yourself, yet you worship it as something incredibly more powerful than you.

Cyrus was a chosen instrument of God. Cyrus led the Persians in swallowing up the Babylonian Empire to become an empire in themselves. When Cyrus and the Persian Empire took over, Cyrus decreed that any Jewish captives were now free to go back to their homeland, and to even rebuild the temple with Persian government money. Cyrus, though, was never a God-follower.

August 10
Isaiah 47-51

Babylon had its own gods, and they seemingly were smiling on them. The empire had grown, with many military conquests. As with any group that serves false gods, though, it is really a self-worship and reliance on their own might. That is no match for the power of God. Empires come and go, some lasting a hundred years or more, but God has been worshiped for thousands of years. A living God can be a real help in time of crisis, an anchor in any storm.

God will save his people, after their time of punishment. Verse 49:6 is eye-popping to the Jews, though: The Savior will also be a "light to the Gentiles"!

See the Christ in 49:16: "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." When Christ rose from the grave, he showed his disciples the scars on his hands, a

symbol of his eternal love for us.

Throughout the Old Testament, and even into the New, there is a persistent reference to the parting of the Red Sea, as in 51:10. This is something God wants to really plant in our minds: He can make a path for us when we think it is impossible.

August 11
Isaiah 52-57

A people that have lived in a hopeless situation find it hard to believe in the dawning of a brighter day. Will it really come? They would naturally rather have some solid evidence, but God calls us to believe before we see evidence. It should be enough for us that God says he will bless us.

Similarly, Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah will have little about him that makes us believe (52:13- 53:12). Faith will be required to follow the Savior.

The idea of someone dying for our sins, yet living again, is in 53:10. It's an amazing concept. Did they understand? Will Isaiah bring it up over and over, to try to get through to them (us)?

Though salvation is for all, we must seek it (55:6), we must choose to have salvation.

August 12
Isaiah 58-63

Chapter 58 discusses fasting, a woefully neglected Christian discipline. Fasting is not just going without food! (One of my many past diets included a 4-day fast, with nothing spiritual about it.) Fasting is a time to turn directly toward God, beginning with the time you'd usually spend on meals and their preparation (our second most adored activity). This chapter makes a clear distinction between fasting as mere religious duty and fasting as worship.

In Isaiah's prophecy of future events, he sees great things in Israel's future. We are certainly living in a time of blessing, now that Messiah has come; chapter 60 goes beyond that to describe life in eternity (60:18-20). I think it's all such a glorious future vision that the prophet can't see the distinction between our Christian era and heaven. From our viewpoint, we can see that Isaiah predicted three kinds of good news for the Israelites that had been taken captive out of their land. First, they would be allowed to return to their homeland. Second, a Messiah would bring salvation for all people. Third, at the end of time, we will all live together in the New Jerusalem. Isaiah's prophecies don't differentiate between these three all that well.

August 13
Isaiah 64-66

I guess it's not unusual to feel like the prophet does in chapter 64: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!" (64:1) Or, "God, if you'd step in with a show of power, everybody would follow you." Yet when God stepped into our world, he came (Jesus) as a vulnerable baby. Later, in his ministry, Jesus was compassionate rather than threatening.

The last chapter, 66, speaks of punishment and deliverance, a replica of the entire book. The final word, though, is that God will be for all people. No longer will there be a chosen country or a chosen people. God will be for everyone! Verse 66:20 tells us that we will bring others to the Lord as an offering to God. Have you brought your offering lately?

August 14
Jeremiah 1-3

Much of the rest of the Old Testament will be the words of various prophets, pleading to the people of Judah to be faithful to God. The Jews will be taken out of their land by a foreign power, God has said. Yet God has been known to respond to radical shows of love and devotion. What will it take to inspire a complete turnaround by this people?

Jeremiah is the 'weeping prophet'. He is obedient to deliver God's stern warnings to the people, but it breaks his heart. God chose him to be a prophet before he was born, so what choice did he have? He loved God above all else.

So, suddenly a young prophet appears in Jerusalem. As Jeremiah preaches, many are meeting him for the first time. What a first impression! He can forget about making a lot of friends – he will have to consider his relationship to God as the only friendship He'll need.

God speaks to the people through Jeremiah as a lover who has been jilted. What has God ever done to make them turn away? How can their new love compare in any way to Him?

God speaks to them as a husband who has lost his wife, not as just a boy who has lost a girlfriend. God had made a covenant with them, and never strayed from his side of the contract.

August 15

Jeremiah 4-6

The concept of a circumcised heart appears in 4:4. The original idea of circumcision involved cutting the flesh to symbolize total devotion to God, marked for life. God makes it clear here that the skin need not have been cut - the devotion is what had value. Without the “circumcision” (devotion) of the heart, the circumcision of the flesh was a meaningless gesture.

Even as the prophet declares disaster, God tells the people He will relent if they’ll make a sudden turn directly toward Him.(4:12) I just don’t think that’s possible for these folks. They don’t know God very well any more, and certainly don’t love Him.

Jeremiah loves his country, but his words are harsh. He speaks only what God commands him, keeping his own feelings to himself. Jerusalem still has a lingering respect for prophets, but Jeremiah’s words are obviously treason, telling the country they will be defeated in battle and taken prisoner. How long can the people stand to hear this? I’m sure mothers had to cover the ears of their listening children, lest they cry uncontrollably.

August 16 Jeremiah 7-10

Jeremiah speaks in chapter 7 at the temple gate. This is the cream of the crop in Jerusalem , the good people, he speaks to. God’s words surely sound more like insult to them than correction. Verse 7:3 still gives hope that they can avoid disaster, but the people won’t listen.

It’s time to repent, God tells them. The birds know when to migrate, but the people can’t recognize that it’s time to turn back to God.

As Jesus preached later, verse 8:8 says the *meaning* of God’s word has been changed by the scribes.

At the end of chapter 8, Jeremiah voices some of his anguish for his people. He believes God’s word that he speaks, and hurts for this people that won’t turn back to God. Their coming punishment is very vivid to him.

The most basic complaint of God against His people is that they worship man-made, useless idols instead of Him. It is hard, even in our day, to worship the God you cannot see instead of relying on conventional solutions. Yet God has the power to save us from any trouble, and to make a way where there is no way.

August 17
Jeremiah 11-14

Jeremiah's resolve is tested when he learns of a plot to kill him. Jeremiah passes the test: He asks God to take care of those enemies, then goes on with his stern prophecy.

Jeremiah again prophesies a coming army from the north, which will destroy the land and take the people captive. Now, in chapter 14, God brings a famine as a last warning to the punishment. Jeremiah asks God to "do something for the sake of your name."(14:7). God denies help.

Jeremiah finds himself at odds with all the other prophets, who see prosperous times ahead. God will deal with them for their lies.

At the end of chapter 14, Jeremiah again pleads for his people. What a heart this guy has! The whole nation is corrupt, they've even plotted to kill him, yet he asks leniency from God for them. Looks like a great model for us: Name the sins that need to be repented of, yet love the sinner and pray for them.

August 18
Jeremiah 15-18

After Jeremiah's heartfelt plea for the Jews in chapter 14, God now gives His response. "Forget it! It's too late for all that." If there is such a thing as absolute right, justice must finally arrive.

A leopard can't change its spots. God could not forgive this people for turning their backs on him---for centuries! God has been *incredibly* merciful. I firmly believe that the Jews would have had to get a heart transplant, to completely change who they were, for God to forgive them at this point. If they could have accomplished a complete makeover, I think God still might have granted mercy. Otherwise why send Jeremiah? Only becoming permanently new creatures could have changed God's mind. (See the connection to Jesus? He makes us a new creation.)

Boy, I sure was surprised to see the reference, in 16:16, to fishers of men! I wonder if Peter and the others thought of this when Jesus said he would make them "fishers of men"?

The person who trusts in the Lord "will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream."(17:7-8) Though God has promised judgment, some will handle it better than others.

Jeremiah interrupts his prophecy, in chapter 18, to pray to God for *himself*. He is again threatened, and speaks no mercy for his enemies. He's feeling like, "It's you and me against the world, Lord."

August 19 Jeremiah 19-22

Jeremiah is now really getting under the skin of government officials. It's easy enough to ignore his speech, but now God makes him use 'visual aids'. The broken pot, which Jeremiah tells the elders and priests "is like Jerusalem," will not be easily forgotten. While he has their attention, the prophet predicts that Jerusalem will be besieged, with people actually eating their children to stay alive.

This does more than make their ears tingle. The priest Pashur has him beaten and put in stocks for a day. In a fit of depression, Jeremiah sounds like Job when he asks God, "Why was I even born? Curse the man who brought my father the news that he had a son born to him."

Jerusalem does still have respect for a prophet, but Jeremiah speaks treason when he tells the people to surrender to the Babylonians if they want to live. He also speaks words of disaster about the king. How long will they let Jeremiah go on like this?

August 20 Jeremiah 23-25

I've always wondered about the continuance of King David's family line. You remember in II Samuel 7 that God promised David his family line would always continue in ruling Israel. When the kingdom divided after his son Solomon's rule, still David's descendants ruled over Judah. At times, God's promise seems to mean that David's descendants must be *faithful* for the promise to hold, but at other times it's not clear. Now Jeremiah prophesies about God raising up "a righteous branch to David", which we understand to be speaking of Jesus. His kingdom will endure forever.

Chapter 23 reminds us of the increased responsibility of leaders. The priests and prophets will face much stronger punishment when the Babylonians come, because they not only went astray themselves, but led many others astray also.

The vision of two baskets of figs in chapter 24 is significant because it's not apples, or some other fruit where you can eat around a bad spot. When a fig goes bad, it's the whole fruit, not just a portion.

Jeremiah is very specific about where the invading army will come from. He names the king of Babylon specifically, Nebuchadnezzar. That reemphasizes that the destruction is coming soon, while he is still the king. Jeremiah is also specific about how long the exile in Babylon will be --- seventy years. This roughly corresponds to when the temple was rebuilt, not when the very first group of exiles returned.

August 21

Jeremiah 26-28

God calls Jeremiah to make it plain one more time to the Jews: Follow my ways, and the words of the prophets, or this country will become like Israel (which fell to the Assyrian empire about 130 years earlier). This kind of proclamation can be hazardous to a prophet's health! The whole city of Jerusalem surrounds Jeremiah after he speaks these words of God and, well, you know what usually would come next---they were ready to stone him to death.

The only thing that saved the prophet was a handful of elders that stepped forward to remind the mob of a former prophet in King Hezekiah's days, Micah. Nobody stoned Micah, and look what good came, as we repented of our sins. The mob dispersed.

As Jeremiah gets more experienced, he hears God's voice more and more clearly. (TAKE NOTE: THAT'S TRUE FOR ANYBODY.) In chapter 27, he names the emperor that will bring their defeat (Nebuchadnezzar), and that the exile will last through his reign and that of his son and grandson.

It's much more fun to be a prophet that speaks pleasing words. Hananiah confronts Jeremiah about his bad forecast for Judah, and I guess Jeremiah wins: He makes the point that a prophet can be tested by whether or not his prophecy comes true. Hananiah's prophecy of peace and victory for Judah did not come true. Jeremiah's word from God that Hananiah would die within a year did come true, in only seven months. I guess you could say that Hananiah brought about his own disaster.

August 22

Jeremiah 29-31

Jeremiah must put up with sounding like a traitor. He is only saying what God tells him, but it must sound incredibly disloyal to the people of Judah. "Prophets" that only speak their own ideas are constantly trying to turn the people against Jeremiah, and are quite successful. *Because he boldly speaks God's messages*, Jeremiah always seems to have a few loyal friends, though they keep their friendship hidden.

After all that Jeremiah has been going through, God mercifully takes this opportunity to send *good* news through the prophet. Judah will be restored, and its enemies will be taken captive themselves.

How did the Jews miss 31:1? God speaks through Jeremiah that He will be the God of *all* clans of Israel. Yet, when the captives from Judah return to their land after the years of exile, they will not accept those tribes that were from the former northern kingdom of Israel. The Jews' excuse was that these others had intermarried with foreigners, and so weren't pure enough to participate with them.

I'm always curious about passages like 31:31-35. Jeremiah is prophesying about the new covenant made through Jesus. How much does he understand about what he's speaking? How much do his listeners understand?

August 23
Jeremiah 32-33

Though Jeremiah has been prophesying destruction to Jerusalem for years, and for all of Judah, God calls on Jeremiah to buy the field his cousin puts up for sale. Why?!? If everyone is going into exile to Babylon, isn't that just throwing money away?

Jeremiah has also promised that the land will be restored, and the people will be gathered by God from where they've been scattered. Jeremiah's purchase of his cousin's land gives visible proof of what he's prophesied: God will bring us back. It's like our old saying, "Put your money where your mouth is."

Chapter 33 is written during a time of siege. The Babylonian army, led by the emperor Nebuchadnezzar, has surrounded Jerusalem and is starving them of food and water by not allowing any provisions to enter its gates. If Jerusalem does not soon surrender, the strategy is to build a ramp to gain access *over* the walls of the city. Already, most citizens of Judah have been previously taken captive to Babylon (except the poor and least skilled). The capital city has not yet surrendered.

Jeremiah himself is in prison within Jerusalem, being punished for telling everyone that God says to surrender. His speech now about a future after exile seems weird, I'm sure.

Jeremiah speaks God's words, of a coming Savior (the "righteous branch") who will continue David's line. It's not plain here that the Branch himself will be the continuance of David's kingly line into eternity; I'm sure Jeremiah's listeners were thinking of the line continuing from father to son to grandson to great-grandson, etc. We know, from our perspective, that Jesus is the descendant of David who is now king forever. Jesus is also the one to fulfill the promise in 33:18, a priestly line that continues forever.

August 24
Jeremiah 34-36

Good grief, King Zedekiah has no respect at all for God, even when he's facing the worst of circumstances! Fierce trials will often drive a wise man to prayer, sometimes not really believing but grasping for any possible hope. Zedekiah can be called many things, but not wise.

It's not clear what strategy caused Zedekiah to proclaim freedom for all slaves in the besieged city of Jerusalem. Whatever the reason, God is pleased.

God's proclamations had already decreed, centuries before, that all slaves must be freed every seventh year. There were many commandments the people ignored, but at least they got this one right *one* time! Maybe you can understand God's anger when Zedekiah went back on his words about freedom for the slaves.

In the first century of United States history, many saw nothing wrong with owning slaves. Slavery was even defended in our pulpits, citing Old Testament rules about owning slaves and making twisted references to God's punishment of Noah's son, Ham. Though it is unfortunate for anyone to willfully sell him or herself into slavery to pay off a debt, God made provision that no person should be a slave beyond seven years. *God doesn't approve of slavery.* God believes in paying debts, but not in a permanent slave status.

God calls on Jeremiah to put all these dire warnings he'd been preaching onto a scroll, and have his assistant take it to the temple and read it. When Baruch does so, most everyone is filled with remorse, fear, and repentance---they are ready to seek God's forgiveness. The king, however, had the scroll burned and wouldn't lead the country to repent. According to 36:30-31, **GOD WOULD HAVE HAD MERCY!!!** God will forgive, even when it seems too late. What a fool. Zedekiah would indeed see Nebuchadnezzar face to face...but wouldn't see much after that.

August 25
Jeremiah 37-40

Jeremiah is always faithful to speak the truth God gives him, no matter what consequences he might face. God promised, back in chapter 1, to always "rescue" Jeremiah. In hindsight, that didn't mean that the prophet would not have horrible trials, only that God would protect his life. God kept his promise.

Zedekiah, who was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar after the Babylonian emperor took King Jehoiachin captive to Babylon, wanted to hear Jeremiah. The prophet always spoke plainly to Zedekiah, that God would have the most mercy on him if he did not rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah was stubborn, though, and would not listen. Verses 39:5-7 tell his horrible fate.

Jeremiah makes it through the years of conquest and siege by the Babylonian army, and is actually freed by Nebuchadnezzar to go wherever he wants to. The emperor believes Jeremiah, that the God of this land used Nebuchadnezzar as his chosen instrument. Jeremiah actually made the conquest easier, by persuading many that it was God's will they give themselves up to be taken to Babylon. Given the choice to go to Babylon or stay in Judah among the poor and a ruined land, the prophet chose to stay in Judah.

August 26
Jeremiah 41-44

Nebuchadnezzar had left Jeremiah under the protection of the new governor, Gedaliah. Wasn't it just like God to have Jeremiah *someplace else* when the assassins killed Gedaliah and "all the Jews that were with him"?

As I read chapter 42, Jeremiah is too plain when he speaks to the "remnant": Don't go to Egypt ! God's word is so forceful that, well, you can tell that they have just about decided to go to Egypt .

Chapter 43 tells us that the "remnant" did indeed go to Egypt , taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them. Jeremiah speaks God's new words to them: "You'll die here, by famine or sword." God will not tolerate disobedience; He has really had enough of it.

August 27
Jeremiah 45-48

God sends a message to Jeremiah's assistant, Baruch, in Chapter 45: Quit complaining! You *are* well off, compared to those around you. Don't expect to be unscathed in the midst of disaster. (I'll bet there's a message in that for *us*.)

In the same way, the Jews are well off. Though taken into exile, they still have a sizeable remnant alive. As we read of Philistia and Moab , we see how much worse their destruction is than that of Judah . Even the terror described for Egypt seems exceedingly worse than what Judah experienced.

God is making it plain to the whole region that the false gods they worshiped are empty, useless idols. Punishment is fierce, for all the countries had their chance to recognize the real, living God of Israel and Judah, and refused.

Nebuchadnezzar, the emperor of the Babylonian Empire, has been told and has accepted the fact that he is the instrument of God. Can he keep his perspective and reverence? God is watching.

August 28
Jeremiah 49-50

The nations will greatly suffer during this era of God's wrath. Many will be destroyed, to never rise again, others will be only a shadow of their former selves.

National pride can be a good thing. It unifies a country, helping its citizens work together for a common, national good. Patriotism must retain its proper perspective, though: God is above all. No nation, no matter how powerful, can

exalt itself as all-powerful and self-sufficient. God is supreme, and all nations will recognize that either voluntarily or after God's strong hand comes against them.

God would have all nations recognize that we are all the sheep of His pasture. Compassion must cross national borders. Cooperation must surpass compassion. Hearts of stone must be replaced by hearts capable of feeling the suffering of all peoples.

Babylon exalted itself above God, and is no more.

**August 29
Jeremiah 51-52**

How could Babylon hear, accept, and act on Jeremiah's words of warning? He was a prophet from a captured land... so how powerful could this God of his be?

Jeremiah spoke plainly, even telling Babylon who their conquerors would be. The kings of the Medes would come from the north, and lay desolate the capital city of Babylon . Verse 51:39 turns out to be very true: Babylon will be subject to a surprise attack during a drunken feast. (See Daniel 5.)

Jeremiah's words end with chapter 51. The last chapter was added later, with historical information to 'wrap it up'.

Jeremiah had few friends and little money. His faithfulness to fulfill his calling has blessed us for thousands of years.

**August 30
Lamentations 1-2**

Sometimes we forget how heartbroken Jeremiah was as he faithfully delivered God's message of wrath to God's people in Judah . Jeremiah loved his country. He loved the people . To speak words of wrath, of treason, of destruction was painful to him. He wept with God.

Lamentations is a record of Jeremiah's personal anguish at the destruction of Judah and the exile of its people. It sheds a softer light on his words of wrath recorded in Jeremiah. "My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed." (1:11)

Now that the destruction and defeat of Judah and Jerusalem is complete, Jeremiah paints quite a bleak picture. He not only mourns his people, but even more mourns their refusal to reform. God would have relented! This did not have

to happen. They chose to listen to false prophets. They chose to continue to ignore God's commands. They chose their fate.

August 31

Lamentations 3-5

I recognize the feelings Jeremiah describes, of being forsaken by those around him. He speaks of plots and deeds against him, of times when he has no one but God to turn to. It's the heart's cry of David when pursued by Saul, the feelings of Job as he sat in the ash heap scraping himself with a potsherd, the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. Even you and I have felt this deep place of the soul. It is a pure and desperate clinging to only God. And it is good.

The first ten verses of chapter 4 describe a state of siege. It is not pleasant reading! As all sources of food and water are cut off by the surrounding enemy army, the people slowly but surely go through physical and mental decline. Jerusalem was besieged for over a year. Jeremiah witnessed it all.

Perhaps a happy ending would have been nice, but but Jeremiah never saw the restoration of Jerusalem, decades after his death. His satisfaction came from faithfully carrying out his calling as God's prophet.