

July 30-Aug 5

Week 31

This week we are squarely in Act 2, scene 7, “Kings and Prophets: The Southern Kingdom as God’s People.” We will begin the week by finishing the majestic work of the prophet Isaiah. Watch for passages that anticipate New Testament writings. In the balance of the week, we will read about contrasting kings and two prophets. On the one hand, we read about the evil king Manasseh and his son, Amon, two of the worst kings in Judah’s history. On the other hand, we will read about Amon’s son, Josiah, who, along with Hezekiah and their ancestor King David, was an outstanding king. Josiah brought about extensive reforms and turned the heart of the nation back to the Lord. Watch for the key to Josiah’s spiritual sensitivity.

Finally, we will read two of the Minor Prophets, Nahum and Zephaniah. The former prophesied about the powerful nation of Assyria and proclaimed God’s sovereignty over the nations. The latter, probably written prior to Josiah’s reforms, offered a powerful message of God’s judgment. As you read these prophets, you will see striking parallels to our world situation today. Arrogance, sin, and the need for salvation among the nations are never out of date.

Day 1

Read Isaiah 59-63

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 18

Isaiah 59 begins with the topic of sin, which builds barriers between God and his people. In Romans 3:15-17 Paul quoted Isaiah 59:7-8 to describe our sinfulness as human beings. Thankfully, as seen in Isaiah 59:15b-21, God is a God of salvation.

Isaiah 60:1–63:6 points to the future glory of Jerusalem, which sits on Mount Zion. Although the words were given to comfort people of Isaiah's time, this section hints that Isaiah prophesied about God's people in the future. The complete eradication of violence and God's serving as Jerusalem's light, without need of the sun, anticipate Revelation 21:3-4,22-27.

In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus used the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 to characterize his ministry, and Isaiah predicted a time when all of God's people would be called priests (see 1 Peter 2:9). In short, these chapters speak of God's faithful love being poured out on his people.

How does God pour out his love on you? Thank him for his faithful love.

Day 2

Read Isaiah 64-66

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 19

These final chapters of Isaiah present a striking contrast between judgment on the rebellious and the great blessings to be poured out on the righteous. Notice that judgment comes on those who violate God's law at numerous points, while the righteous tremble at God's word. God's great desire is to bless his people by blessing Jerusalem. Again we see in these chapters a strong eschatological bent, relating to the age to come, when Christ will rule over the new heavens and earth (see Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:1).

Think about the great blessings God desires for his people, as described in these chapters. Thank God that he desires your good. Thank him for the good things he has given you. Thank him for the good he has planned for his people in the creation of the new heavens and earth at the end of the age.

Day 3

Read 2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 20

The reign of King Manasseh and his son, Amon, formed a dark chapter in the history of Judah. The account in 2 Chronicles differs from that in 2 Kings in that the former includes Manasseh's repentance, a point 2 Kings does not include. Maybe the writer of 2 Chronicles had a historical source or sources to which the author of 2 Kings did not have access, or the writer of 2 Kings may have wanted to emphasize the pervasive evil of Manasseh's reign. In any case the evil of these two kings had serious consequences, and they formed a great contrast with Amon's son, Josiah.

What consequences of evil regimes do you see in the world today? Pray against that evil.

Day 4

Read Nahum

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 21

Nahum presents wonderfully crafted prophetic poetry that conveys a powerful message about the fall of the Assyrian Empire and its main city, Nineveh. At the time Nahum wrote, Assyria, a cruel and brutal nation, was at the height of its power, and Judah was its vassal. In the words against Assyria, Nahum proclaimed God as sovereign over the nations and the Savior of his covenant people.

As you read, watch for parallelism and powerful figurative language (ask, “What truth does this image communicate?”). Nahum begins with God as warrior (see 1:2-8), followed by a proclamation of Nineveh’s ruin and Judah’s salvation (see 1:9–2:2). The visions and taunts that follow in Nahum 2:3–3:7 tell of Nineveh’s fall.

Think about oppressive governments in the world today. Praise God that in his timing he will bring those governments to justice. Celebrate God’s victory over evil in the world through the cross and the resurrection of Christ.

Day 5

Read Zephaniah

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 22

Remember that the key parts of the prophets' messages were a call to covenant faithfulness and the need for repentance, impending judgment if there was no repentance, and the hope of renewal or a remnant. The book of Zephaniah has all of these elements. Written in the time of King Josiah, perhaps prior to the good king's extensive reforms, Zephaniah used powerful language in anticipating the day of the Lord, a time of devastating judgment both on Judah and on the surrounding nations.

Zephaniah was also fond of hyperbole, strategic exaggeration. Notice, for instance, that in 1:2-3 he alluded to the flood story of Genesis 6 to say that everything on earth would be wiped out. Yet there was hope of renewal (see Zephaniah 3:9-20).

Judgment is not a popular topic today. Meditate on the importance of judgment in a biblical view of the world. How do you think God's judgment relates to his love and justice and the renewal he desires to bring in the lives of people?

Day 6

Read 2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 23

Good King Josiah ruled from 640 to 609 BC. He started his reign at eight years of age, became serious about following the God of Israel at age sixteen, and initiated religious reforms at twenty years of age. When Josiah was twenty-six, the law of God was found in the temple, and 2 Kings especially emphasizes this event as the impetus for radical reforms throughout the land.

Notice in 2 Kings the extent to which pagan religions had permeated the culture and the extent to which Josiah went to remove their presence, even desecrating those religious places by placing human bones on the pagan altars. Josiah was characterized by a Deuteronomy 6:5 commitment to God, for he loved the Lord his God with all his mind, heart, and strength (see 2 Kings 23:25). He also reinstituted the Passover observance and proper worship in the temple.

Josiah's example raises questions for us: How serious are we about eradicating the idols in our lives that detract from worship of the one true God? Are we humble, and are our hearts tender when we hear the Word of the Lord that we have violated?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 31

The kings after Hezekiah were idolaters (Manasseh and Amon). Then the boy king Josiah was enthroned, and he became instrumental in restoring his people to the Lord. Solomon's temple was repaired yet again; the book of the law was recovered; the covenant with the Lord was renewed. We've also concluded our reading of Isaiah (about the coming restoration) and read Nahum's prophecy of Assyria's downfall and Zephaniah's announcement of Judah's fall to Babylon on "the day of the Lord."

Prayer/Meditation

Lord God, in the march of history it's so evident that we humans have continued in paths of evil. Not only have nations been violent, even your own people have struggled to be loyal to what you value. Thank you for visiting your people from time to time with revival, as in Josiah's days. Will you not send renewal in my days, O Lord? I tremble for the time Isaiah foresaw, the time of the new heaven and the new earth, when your people will dwell in righteousness forever. Amen.
