

Emmaus Encounter with Jesus

by Brenda Vail

During the season of Advent, we celebrate the coming of Jesus. While it's good to be reminded of the story of his birth, the "why" of this story should be our main focus. Why did Jesus come? To fulfill God's promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his offspring, specifically the anointed King from the line of David God promised Israel. A primary goal of this devotional is to strengthen our understanding of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah who will come again to establish God's kingdom on the earth, fulfilling all of God's promises to Israel. Jesus is the fulfillment of the old covenant, but God is not finished fulfilling his promises to Israel. When we understand how Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, we gain a better understanding of who he is, why he came, what he came to accomplish on the earth, and what he will do when he returns. To understand the new covenant, we must understand how Jesus fulfills God's covenant with Israel.

Rather than come out and say, "I am the Messiah," Jesus often chose to reveal clues that he was the Messiah by declaring truths about himself that are connected to the Messiah of the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament). While the gospel of Matthew specifically records prophecies Jesus fulfilled, John records the "I am" statements of Jesus, pointing in a subtler way to the nature of the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. When Jesus says he is the fountain of living water, he is saying he is the fulfillment of Isaiah 12, the fountain or source of salvation. When he says he is the light of the world, he's referencing Zechariah 14, a passage about the Messiah who will literally replace the sun as our source of light. When he says he is the Good Shepherd, he's referencing Ezekiel 34, where God promises that he himself will shepherd his sheep and set over them David, pointing to the son of David who will be King forever. His disciples wanted to know if Jesus was the Messiah, so he answered them by declaring in himself the fulfillment of every Old Testament description of Messiah.

At one point, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" There are many versions of Jesus being presented today. There is the Jesus who wants us to be nice little boys and girls who don't offend anyone, and the Jesus who promotes tolerance of sin in the name of love and does away with holiness in the name of grace. But are these the real Jesus? We need to know who the real Jesus is, the Jesus of the Bible (whose Jewish name is actually Yeshua). As we focus on Jesus as God's promised Messiah to the Jews, we will delve into passages that pointed to him to glean greater understanding of who Jesus is to us. My hope is that by connecting these dots, you will worship Jesus in a deeper way as the fulfillment of every good promise from God, strengthening your faith in God's ability to fulfill his promises to you.

I encourage you to read the scriptures before each devotional, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal who Jesus is as Messiah to you. I will help you make the connections in each devotional, but it's more fun to be led by the Spirit to make the connections yourself. My goal is not only to reveal Jesus as Messiah to you, but also to lead you into a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit who wants to reveal Jesus to you. Most of the following connections I've made in scripture have come directly from reading the Bible with the Holy Spirit as my Teacher. What Jesus did for the men on the road to Emmaus, explaining how the scriptures pointed to him, is what the Holy Spirit wants to do for you. If the Spirit of Truth can give me understanding of the scriptures, he can give it to you, too!

It's easy to get distracted by all the festivities of the holidays, so my hope is that these devotionals will recalibrate us each day and lead us to worship Jesus in spirit and in truth. Joy to the world! The Lord has come. Let earth receive her King!

Day 1 – The Living Word

Scriptures: John 1:1-18, John 5:19-40, John 17:1-8, 20-26

John 1:12 tells us that to all who receive Jesus and believe in his name, he gave the right to become sons of God. Who is Jesus? What exactly is it about him that we need to receive to become sons of God? Just as God revealed himself through many names in the Old Testament, Jesus has many names that were first revealed in the Old Testament. Names in the Bible are linked to a person's identity, so believing in Jesus' name means receiving his full identity as revealed through his many names in scripture. In this study we will explore how the Old Testament scriptures point to Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. Today we begin by examining the most ancient name and attribute of Jesus: the Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3, NIV).

The Creator of Genesis 1 is revealed through Jesus, the Word. Just as the Spirit hovered over the water at creation, Jesus walks over the water and the wind and waves obey his commands. Just as God created the seed-bearing plants and fish to feed us and blessed them to multiply, Jesus blessed the fish and bread and made them multiply to feed over 5000 people. Just as God breathed into Adam and gave him life, Jesus breathed on the disciples to fill them with his Spirit. Just as God gave Adam and Eve authority over the earth, Jesus gave his disciples authority over the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19). Every word God spoke in the Old Testament is fulfilled and demonstrated through the living Word, Jesus.

The Word is the revelation of God. We were created for relationship with God, so the Word is God's relational nature present at creation. When I speak, I reveal who I am to others because words build relationships. Jesus was present in the Old Testament as the Word of God because God first created the world and made himself known through speaking. While the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, God's first act of creation was to speak the Word, *"Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3)*. Before the sun was created, God spoke the Word who is the light of all mankind, the one who would reveal the Father. John 1:4 says, *"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."* God's Word is life-giving.

We often refer to the Bible as "the Word," which is also accurate because the One who is the Word spoke those words to its recipients. *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*. The scriptures Paul speaks of are the Old Testament scriptures which were first spoken by Jesus, the Word. This is why Jesus said, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18)*.

Some of what has been written in the Law and Prophets has been fulfilled by Jesus, and some of it will be fulfilled when he comes again, but all of it points to Jesus. When Jesus was talking to the religious leaders he said, *"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39)*. We don't study the Bible for intellectual ascent or to check off a religious check box. The scriptures are meant to lead us into an encounter with the person of Jesus, the Word. When we read the Bible expecting an encounter, Jesus meets us there and breathes life into us through his Word.

Jesus is the Word who was made visible so we could not only hear God's words but see and experience God in a relatable way. To make us his sons and daughters, God had to reveal himself to us as a Father through the Word who became human as God's only Son. God who is Spirit occasionally appeared in human form in the Old Testament, just like angelic spirits can appear in human form (see Genesis 18). But after thousands of years of mostly hearing God speak through a few select prophets and leaders, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14)*. God chose to reveal himself through the Word, Jesus, as the One who makes his dwelling among man. The Word came to abide with us. God always makes the first move toward relationship with us. We simply respond.

Jesus revealed the Father to us in human form, obediently doing whatever the Father told him to do as a demonstration of what it also looks like to be a child of God. In his love for us, the Word was born as a human who would have to learn obedience as a Son, just like the rest of us. Speaking of God's appointed King over Zion (Israel), Psalm 2:7 says, *"I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your father.'"* God announced who this son is at Jesus' baptism, when a voice from heaven said, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17)*.

The spoken word of God is powerful and has authority to reveal our true identity. When you come to the Father through belief in Jesus as the revelation of God's love for you, the very same words God spoke over Jesus are spoken over you. You are God's beloved child, and by simply believing in Jesus, God is pleased with you! How do I know this? When Jesus prayed for all who would believe in him, he said, *"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them"* (John 17:26).

Jesus revealed the Father so you could be his child, assured that you are loved by the Father the same way Jesus is loved by him. That's the power of the Word. What God speaks is truth. His Word has all authority. *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:10-11). Jesus, the Word, was sent from the mouth of the Father to accomplish God's purpose of revealing himself to the world as the God who loves everyone and wants no one to perish in sin but have eternal life with him (John 3:16). He came down to dwell with us so he could one day take us to dwell with him forever.

Jesus, the Word, has all authority. What Jesus says about you breaks the power of every harmful word ever spoken over you. When Jesus says you're chosen, insecurity is broken. When Jesus says you're beloved, rejection is silenced. When Jesus says you're healed, sickness vanishes. He is the Word, and his Word is truth. When we encounter the Word in scripture and believe his authority over whatever our circumstances may tell us, faith becomes the fertile soil of miracles. God's Word is light and life. His Word is unfailing, self-giving love. You don't have to earn God's love and favor, simply believe his Word and receive him. O come, let us worship Jesus, the living Word who was and is and is to come!

Response:

Jesus, thank you for revealing the love of the Father and making a way for us to enjoy relationship with you forever. I praise you because you faithfully spoke every word the Father gave you to speak and demonstrated God's holy love through your sacrifice on the cross. Your Word endures forever. Let every word you speak over my life take authority and supplant every lie of the devil, for your Word is truth. I believe you are God's Son and receive you as my Savior and King. Abide in me today by your Spirit in me.

Day 2 – The Branch

Scriptures: Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 33:14-18, Zechariah 3:8-9, 6:9-13, Hebrews 7

Isaiah 11 describes the righteous ruler who will be anointed with the Holy Spirit to rule Israel and bring peace to the earth as the Branch. *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (Isaiah 11:1)*. The Branch comes from the stump of Jesse, King David’s father. Not only is Jesus descended from King David, as we see in Matthew 1, but he is an entirely new branch that precedes David because he comes from the stump of David’s father, Jesse. What does that mean? In scripture, cutting down a tree is a sign of judgment.

In Daniel 4, Daniel interprets the king’s dream in which the king is a tree cut down to a stump because of his pride and belief that he had accomplished what God had actually done for him. Daniel told the king, *“The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules” (Daniel 4:26)*. The Messiah of the Jews comes from the stump of Jesse, indicating that God cut down the tree of Israel all the way back to Jesse, keeping the root system that began with Abraham and starting a new tree with a new Branch, a new David.

When our neighbor’s tree was injured, she cut it back to a stump. Miraculously, a branch grew from the stump and became a beautiful tree. Just like Daniel told the king that his kingdom would be restored when he acknowledged that Heaven rules, Jesus, the Branch, told the Jews they would see him again – their promised King – when they say, *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:39)*. Jesus was quoting the passage in Psalms 118 that follows the declaration that the stone the builders rejected (Jesus) has become the cornerstone. When the Jews acknowledge Jesus as the Branch sent from heaven, they will receive their King and the kingdom ruled by God will be restored to them, as was promised to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah.

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.’ For this is what the LORD says: ‘David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel, nor will the Levitical priests ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices’” (Jeremiah 33:14-18).

The name of the Branch is *“The Lord Our Righteous Savior.”* We certainly see in the life of Jesus that he did *“what is just and right in the land.”* But after disclosing the name of the Branch, God links the Branch to both a coming king from the line of David and the eternal priesthood. Why? This mystery is explained to the prophet Zechariah who lived during the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian exile. In Zechariah 3:8-9, God reveals that the High Priest, Joshua, represents God’s servant who is to come, called the Branch, through whom God would remove the sin of the land in a single day. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest offers the appointed sacrifice to cleanse the whole nation of sin. As High Priest, the Branch – The Lord Our Righteous Savior – offered a sacrifice to accomplish forgiveness of sin for all on one day. The sacrifice Jesus offered was his own body as payment for our sin.

Hebrews 7 confirms that the priests still have a man standing before God continually to intercede for us, although Jesus is of the type of priesthood of Melchizedek. In Psalm 110:4, King David prophesies the coming king who is *“a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”* Melchizedek was a High Priest of God

and King of Salem (now called Jerusalem) who blessed Abraham and to whom Abraham tithed (Genesis 14:18-20). The Branch is older than the Davidic kingdom, as his kingdom comes from the stump of David's father, and he is older than the Levitical priesthood, as he comes from the order of Melchizedek.

Zechariah 6 describes how the Branch will rule as both High Priest and King, symbolized by the High Priest, Joshua, being given a crown. Through this imagery we see that the Messiah, the Branch, is first a High Priest and then is crowned King. This order is crucial in understanding Jesus' first mission which had to be fulfilled before he could be given a crown. Jesus came first as Israel's High Priest to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin and mediate a new covenant between God and man. Hebrews 7 tells us that Jesus is our great High Priest who continually intercedes for us. Zechariah 6 tells us that the Branch who is King will also be the one to rebuild the temple.

"Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jozadak. ¹²Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. ¹³It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'" (Zechariah 6:11-13).

God tells Zechariah, here is what the Branch will look like: a High Priest who is crowned King with harmony between the two offices that had formerly been strictly kept separate. The temple built by this future High Priest/King would be a future temple because Zechariah also gives specific instructions to Zerubbabel who built the second temple. Even as the second temple was being built, God began hinting that there would be another temple built by the Branch that would *"branch out from this place."*

How would the temple branch out? By spreading across the globe through Spirit-filled believers. As we'll explore further in the lessons to come, Jesus' body is now the Temple where God's Spirit dwells, and all who remain in Christ carry his Spirit wherever they go. We are now the temple which has branched out from Jerusalem, where it began on the day of Pentecost (Festival of Weeks), to fill the earth. Just as Jesus is the Branch, all who are united to Christ have now become branches who spread the good news. But to be a branch, we must remain connected to Jesus through a daily personal relationship.

Jesus said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples"* (John 15:5-8). By remaining in the Branch, we become a branch who bears fruit. We see this principle over and over in scripture. We who remain in Jesus become like him. Jesus is our High Priest and King who makes us a royal priesthood. He is a Son who makes us sons. His identity becomes our identity.

Response:

Jesus, I honor you as my High Priest and King. May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Thank you for living to intercede for me as my High Priest. You are the Branch, "the Lord my Righteous Savior." May your temple branch out to fill the whole earth with your goodness. I ask you to fill me with your Spirit and equip me to do your kingdom building work so I may also be a branch like you who brings the Father glory.

Day 3 – The Anointed One

Scriptures: Isaiah 11, 61, Zechariah 4, Acts 10:38, 2 Corinthians 5:20

Christ is not the last name of Jesus Christ, it is the Greek word for “Anointed One,” which in Hebrew is Messiah. So when we say Jesus Christ, we’re talking about Jesus, the Anointed One, the Messiah of the Jews. To be anointed is to have olive oil poured out or smeared on your head. In the Old Testament, the priests and temple objects were anointed with oil, as were kings. Being anointed with oil symbolized being chosen by God and set apart for a specific assignment. Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit who is needed to accomplish the task for which a person has been anointed.

“So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David” (1 Samuel 16:13). Jesus was not anointed with oil by a prophet, like David was. Oil is symbolic of the anointing of the Holy Spirit who descended upon Jesus as a dove when he was baptized (Matthew 3:16). Jesus then began his earthly ministry as the Anointed One by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Peter describes Jesus’ anointing in Acts 10:38. *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”* The anointing of the Holy Spirit gave Jesus the power to do miracles and overcome the devil. It equips us with God’s presence and power to be witnesses to Jesus and do the same works he did. What was Jesus anointed to do?

In his hometown of Nazareth Jesus opened the scroll to Isaiah 61 and announced that he was the fulfillment of this prophecy: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).* Jesus freed the demonically oppressed, proclaimed the good news of his coming kingdom to the poor in spirit, declared freedom from the prison of death, and opened spiritually blind eyes through his teaching.

When Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah, he stopped in the middle of a sentence. Isaiah 61:19 says the Anointed One will, *“proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God.”* Jesus’ ministry is divided, as we saw in the revelation of the Branch. He first comes as High Priest to mediate the new covenant of peace between God and mankind. This is why the angelic host who appeared at Jesus’ birth said, *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”* During this time of favor inaugurated by the Anointed One, God wants all humanity to hear the good news of salvation so they can enter into his kingdom when Jesus comes. When Jesus returns, it will be as King over the earth who removes all wickedness and those who oppose him.

The day of vengeance is coming as announced by the Old Testament prophets and the apostles, but before that day, it is God’s will for all to be saved. While the Jews expected Messiah to show up and wipe out their enemies, avenging them for all the persecution they’ve endured, God chose to first send the Messiah leading a peace delegation rather than an army. When Jesus returns it will be the most dramatic takeover ever. Until that day, we are Christ’s ambassadors, inviting God’s enemies to willingly surrender and invite Jesus to be their King (2 Corinthians 5:20). God wants us to choose Jesus as our King rather than impose his rule on us. Jesus was anointed to reveal the goodness of the Father so we will invite his rule. That is why Jesus taught us to pray for God’s kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Because God gave mankind dominion over the earth, God is waiting for people from all nations to agree to give Jesus dominion over the earth so heaven can come down.

While Isaiah 61 tells us what Jesus is anointed to do, Isaiah 11:2 describes how Jesus, the Branch, will do it: *"The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD."* There were many leaders who were anointed by the Spirit in the Old Testament, but they did not possess the "Spirit without limit" like Jesus did (John 3:34). For instance, Samson was anointed with the Spirit of might, but he definitely did not have wisdom! The religious leaders marveled at Jesus' wisdom and understanding because he taught as one with authority. Jesus declared that he only did what the Father did because he was counseled by the Holy Spirit who empowered him with might to do the same works the Father does. Jesus had knowledge of peoples' past, which he demonstrated to the Samaritan woman at the well, and also had knowledge of what will happen in the future when he returns. Jesus taught us the fear of the Lord because that keeps us from being ruled by the fear of man (Luke 12:4-5).

Jesus is both the Anointed One and the one who anoints us with the oil of the Holy Spirit so that we can be his witnesses, advancing the gospel of peace to the ends of the earth. In Zechariah 4, those who are anointed to carry the good news and expand God's temple are pictured as olive trees. Olive oil was used in the Old Testament for both anointing and to fuel lamps. Zechariah sees a lampstand or menorah with seven lamps, symbolizing the sevenfold Spirit of God mentioned above in Isaiah 11. There are two olive trees on either side of the menorah in Zechariah's vision. Verse 14 says the two trees are *"the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."* Revelation 11:4 mentions these two olive trees and calls them God's two witnesses. Who are they?

Speaking to the nation of Israel God says, *"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God"* (Isaiah 43:12). God's first witness is the nation of Israel, which is symbolized in scripture as an olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16). The second witness is the new covenant church which includes Gentile Christians who have received the Holy Spirit. Before ascending to heaven Jesus said, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8) The two trees represent all of God's witnesses, both Jew and Gentile, who have been grafted into Jesus, the Branch. The Hebrew number translated as two in Zechariah 4 can also be translated as 12, indicating the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles sent out to build God's temple.

Zechariah 4 describes a vision of a bowl at the top that is feeding oil to the lampstand between the olive trees. The word translated as top also means "at the head of," like a chief or leader. Jesus is the head of the church, the one keeping the 7-branched menorah lit. We see this in Revelation 1 as Jesus tending the seven churches, filling their lamps with the oil of the Holy Spirit. For as the angel tells Zechariah, God's temple will be built *"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty"* (v. 6).

Both Jew and Gentile were needed to build the second temple in Jerusalem because the Jews were assisted by the Persian kings (Ezra 6). Both Jew and Gentile, the two olive trees, will expand the temple to cover the earth by bearing witness to the world who God is under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That's what it means to be a Christian. To be in Christ, the Anointed One, is to be an anointed one. Our lamps must continually be filled with the oil of the Spirit by Jesus, our High Priest. He was anointed to bring the good news and sent his Spirit so we could carry on his work of declaring the time of God's favor to receive Jesus as King. May his kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

Response:

Thank you, Jesus, for bringing the good news of God's favor. Anoint us with your Holy Spirit so we can know you and represent you to a lost world. May the world receive her King, Jesus the Anointed One.

Day 4 – Son of David

Scriptures: Jeremiah 30:9, Acts 2:25-35, Psalm 16:10, 34:19, 41:9, Matthew 1

God promised King David that he would always have a descendent upon the throne over God's covenant people. Matthew 1 gives us the genealogy of Jesus, confirming he's a descendant of King David. We established in a previous lesson that this forever king comes from the stump of Jesse, King David's father, implying that the Anointed One (Messiah) would be not only a descendant of David but a new David. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah of the final restoration of Israel at the end of the age, saying, *"They will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them"* (Jeremiah 30:9). Jesus is not only a physical descendent of David but the new David who brings a new kind of kingdom.

Jesus hinted at the Messiah being more than merely an earthly descendent of David when he provoked his disciples to look deeper by asking, *"Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? ⁴² David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand ⁴³ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."⁴⁴ David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"* (Luke 20:41-44). Jesus often quoted David and his life was interconnected with David's Psalms. These clues in scripture are given to help those who have eyes to see to connect the dots that when the prophetic scriptures talk about the coming David they are talking about Jesus.

In Acts 2, Peter cites Psalm 16 in reference to Jesus' death and resurrection: *"You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay"* (Psalm 16:10). Clearly David died, so he was not speaking of himself but the Anointed One to come. In the Psalms it is often unclear when David is speaking about himself or prophesying of the coming "David," but Peter refers to David as a prophet, so we not only read the Psalms as poetry of David's life but prophesy of the Anointed One's life. After his resurrection, Jesus explained, *"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms"* (Luke 24:44).

John's gospel highlights prophetic psalms like Psalm 34:19, which speaks of God protecting the bones of the righteous so that they're not broken. Normally, during a crucifixion a person's bones are broken to speed up the process of dying, but when they came to Jesus to break his bones, they found him already dead (John 19:33-36). Psalm 41:9 says, *"Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me."* In John 13:18-26 Jesus explicitly explains that he is sharing bread with Judas, his betrayer, *"to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me'"* (John 13:18). By highlighting the fulfillment of these psalms, John is declaring that Jesus is not just the son of David, but the David who is to come.

Jesus intentionally fulfilled passages in the Psalms and aligned his life to David's. When Jesus and his disciples took heads of grain to eat, violating the Sabbath laws about working, he justified his actions using an illustration from David's life when David ate the bread that was only intended for the priests. In so doing, he claimed the authority and anointing of David. Jesus not only fulfilled prophetic passages from the Psalms, but his trials on the way to becoming King mirror David's experiences.

- David was first a shepherd, then emerged later as a warrior and king. Jesus came first as a Shepherd to lead the lost sheep of Israel back to God, but when he returns, he will be revealed as the Lord of Heaven's Armies who wins God's battles and is crowned King.

- David was anointed, then pursued by jealous King Saul who tried to kill him. King Herod tried to kill Jesus soon after he was born because he didn't want his throne threatened.
- While being hunted by Saul, David moved from place to place with his "mighty men." 2 Samuel 2:22 tells us, "All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander." Jesus moved from place to place with his disciples, evading several attempts to kill him. He was a friend of sinners and was followed by the discontented.
- David's reign as king came in stages. He was first ruler over only the tribe of Judah before he became ruler over all Israel 7 years later. Presently, Jesus rules over a spiritual kingdom made up of believers who follow him. When Jesus returns, at the end of the final set of seven years prophesied in Daniel 9, he will regather the lost tribes of Israel that were scattered among the Gentiles and rule over the whole nation of Israel as well as the whole world.
- David was a warrior who defended Israel against her enemies. Jesus will return as the Lord of Heaven's Armies to defend Israel from her enemies. While David killed the giant Goliath with a single stone, Jesus will destroy his enemies with the breath of his mouth (2 Thessalonians 2:8).
- David brought the ark of the covenant back to Israel and established the Levitical worship of the Lord in the tabernacle. Jesus brought a new covenant through his shed blood and the gift of the Holy Spirit who enables us to worship God in spirit and in truth as a kingdom of priests.
- David was not allowed to build the temple because it was to be built by his son, but he paid for the site of the temple. The first temple was built by David's son, Solomon, and the final temple will be built by the Son of David, Jesus. Jesus paid the price for God to make his dwelling in the hearts of believers who are in covenant with him through Jesus.

Why does all this matter? Why would Jesus go to such great lengths to prove that he is the David to come? God qualified Jesus to rule the earth by allowing him to go through the same trials as David. Samuel declares that David is a man after God's own heart. He was beloved by the poor and outcasts of society. David wasn't perfect, but he foreshadowed the Anointed One to come who would shepherd God's people, fight and win God's battles, lead God's people in humility, bring God's presence back to his people, lead them in worship, and establish God's permanent dwelling place with his people. Jesus is not only a man after God's own heart, but the perfect representation of God's heart. He is every good thing David was and more! He is the perfect leader who will establish God's kingdom on the earth forever. Most importantly, however, Jesus is proof that God keeps his promises. If God raised up one of David's descendants, he will keep his promise to raise us up with him when he returns.

"The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath he will not revoke: 'One of your own descendants I will place on your throne. ¹² If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever.' ¹³ For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling, saying, ¹⁴ 'This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it'" (Psalm 132:11-14).

Response:

Jesus, I exalt you as the perfect leader over Israel and the perfect leader of my life. Just as David shepherded the sheep and protected them, you lead me and protect me. You are loving toward those who are discouraged and give us courage as we follow you. You choose to remember David's heart and honor him, in spite of his failings, and I thank you for your grace and mercy toward me. Thank you for keeping your covenant with David to put a righteous ruler on his throne forever. You, Jesus, are that ruler. May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Day 5 – The Suffering Servant

Scriptures: Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Hebrews 10:1-14, Ephesians 2:4-6

As the Son of David, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of David, including that of the suffering servant in Psalm 22. This psalm begins with the very words Jesus cried out on the cross at his crucifixion, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Psalm 22:1). Was Jesus forsaken by God or was he quoting this psalm to indicate that he was prophetically fulfilling it? Verse 24 answers the question of verse 1, declaring that God *“has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”* So how did Jesus prophetically fulfill Psalm 22?

- As Jesus was nailed to the cross, he fulfilled v. 16-17, *“They pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.”*
- John 19:23-24 describes how the guards divided his clothes among them and cast lots to see who would get Jesus’ tunic in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, *“They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”*
- Matthew 27:39 says, *“Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads,”* in fulfillment of Psalm 22:7-8. *“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ‘He trusts in the LORD,’ they say, ‘let the LORD rescue him.’”* Those who passed by Jesus said, *“Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God”* (Matthew 27:40).

Jesus is clearly the suffering servant prophesied in Psalm 22, but why did he have to suffer? Isaiah 53 explains the purpose of Jesus’ suffering on the cross: *“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:5). God revealed his nature to Moses as the Lord who is a *“compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished”* (Exodus 34:6-7). God is both merciful and just. His justice demands that the guilty be punished, yet in compassion and love God provides the sacrifice so he can pay the penalty himself.

As a parent, I would rather pay the penalty so that my children don’t have to suffer. Jesus came from the Father for this express purpose, as revealed in Hebrews 10 which quotes Psalm 40:6-8. *“Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, ‘I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God’”* (Hebrews 10:5-7). Jesus was given a body so he could pay the penalty for man’s sin in a body. He shed his blood because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). The life of God, which God first breathed into Adam, giving us a spirit, is in our blood. Jesus was able to offer his perfect life back to God through his perfect blood, in payment of our debt because God honors sacrifice. This was explained in Isaiah 53.

“Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. ¹¹ After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:10-12). When we read passages like this, we must remember that Jesus and the Father are One. God isn’t picking on a selected human. God became that human so he could suffer.

Still, you may be wondering why God insists on Jesus' suffering. Our transgressions against God and each other brought suffering into the world. When Adam and Eve resisted God's rule, the consequence was that the earth we were given dominion over would resist our rule. God doesn't delight in suffering, but it is the consequence of our fallen world. For Jesus to redeem us from the fall, mediating a new covenant to restore us to right relationship with God now and with creation when he returns, he had to become a perfect High Priest who understands suffering. Isaiah 53:12 tells us that Jesus bore the sins of many – all who would receive salvation through his blood – and made intercession for the transgressors. Jesus is in heaven where his blood continually makes intercession for us. Whenever the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we simply apply the blood of Jesus, then ask for forgiveness and help to overcome.

We can have confidence in Jesus as our perfect High Priest because he suffered in every way we suffer. He has experienced the loss of his earthly father, rejection by the religious community where he should have been admired, betrayal by his friends, mocking by his brothers, homelessness, false accusation, and temptation to walk away from God's purpose for his life. In Jesus, we find a compassionate High Priest who understands what it is like to suffer, and yet can help us triumph over the enemy in the midst of suffering. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."* (Hebrews 4:15).

While Jesus came as the suffering servant, suffering is not the end! The end of Psalm 22 describes the glory of the resurrected servant who suffered. *"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations"* (Psalm 22:27-28). Jesus suffered, died, was buried in the grave, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven so he could be glorified. The end of his journey of suffering on earth was glory so that the end of your journey and my journey will be glory. Jesus ascended so that we could spiritually ascend. *"God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:6-7).

When Jesus invites us to die to self in repentance, be buried with him through baptism, be born again by his Spirit and ascend by his Spirit in us so we are spiritually seated with him in heavenly places it is so we can share in his glory. Suffering ends in glory for all who remain in Christ. That's what Jesus, the suffering servant, came to accomplish. Jesus' suffering has mirrored ours so that his glory assures us of our future glory at the resurrection. Because Jesus gave his life for us, he is our Redeemer who turns every pain and sorrow into something beautiful and glorious. The more time we spend in prayer, remaining in his Word and love through obedience to him, the more we live in the "ascended" place of glory where we begin to see our lives from heaven's redemptive perspective. When Moses asked to see God's glory, God told him he would cause his goodness to pass by. God's glory is his goodness. The more time we spend in his presence, the more his goodness – his glory – manifests in and through us on the earth.

Response:

Jesus, I worship you as the one who took all my sin and suffering upon yourself, redeeming every painful experience I've ever had. You identified with me in my lowest, loneliest moments. You understand my pain and continually intercede for me as a perfect High Priest. May your name be lifted high and glorified forever because you chose to give your life as a ransom for mine. You did not leave me sitting in shame and failure but have put to death my sinful nature and lifted me up so that I am spiritually seated with you, receiving your mind and perspective of my life by your Spirit in me. I praise you for the goodness and mercy that has followed me all the days of my life. Thank you for your sacrifice and perfect love for me.

Day 6 – I AM the Door

Scriptures: John 10, Hebrews 9

In the same way that Jesus hinted his identity as the Son of David by quoting David and doing what David did, Jesus hinted at his ancient identity through the “I am” statements recorded by the Apostle John. When the religious leaders and guards came to arrest Jesus, and asked which one of them was Jesus the Nazarene, Jesus responded by using the name God told Moses to say to the Israelites when explaining God’s identity: I AM. John 18:6 tells us that when Jesus said this, they drew back and fell to the ground. When Jesus, the Word of God speaks the name of God, every knee will bow! Not only is Jesus one with I AM, he came to reveal I AM to us. The book of John contains Jesus’ “I am” statements which point us to the Old Testament scriptures revealing the Messiah.

In John 10:7 Jesus declares, *“I am the door of the sheep” (ESV)*. He’s talking about a sheep pen where he takes care of God’s flock. *“If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9)*. At first glance, it looks like Jesus is simply saying we get to go to heaven by receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior, which is true. But Jesus said we would go in and out of the Door. If the Door is salvation only, why would we ever go out? The Door is not merely salvation from death and the final judgment, he is the doorway through which we access God’s presence so we can enjoy a relationship with the Father while we are here on earth.

Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6)*. The “way” to the Father is through the shed blood of Jesus’ sacrifice. The way the priests were consecrated to God, which enabled them to enter God’s presence in the tabernacle, was by being sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice. In the Old Testament, God’s presence dwelled above the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle God instructed Moses to build. Hebrews tells us this tabernacle was patterned after God’s dwelling place in heaven. The way to the Father is the same in heaven as on earth. Every item in the tabernacle points to Jesus and is fulfilled in him because Jesus is the way to the Father.

In the outer court was the altar of sacrifice and wash basin for the priests. Only the priests could go through the door to the next room, the Holy Place. In the Holy Place was the seven-branched lampstand, a table with twelve loaves of bread – one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel – called the Bread of the Presence, and an altar of incense. There was a veil separating that room from the Most Holy Place where God’s presence dwelt above the ark. Only the high priest could go in there and only on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Not only did the veil tear the moment Jesus was crucified, indicating that there was no longer going to be a separation between God and man, Jewish sages record that around that same time the door to the Holy Place began mysteriously opening by itself. God was welcoming all who would receive Jesus to become a royal priesthood.

Jesus came to give us access to personal communion with God like Moses enjoyed, so we can go into his presence through the Door to the Holy Place to ask the Father for what we need, then go back out into the world with God’s provision. The Holy Place on earth is now inside believers in Jesus, where God’s Spirit dwells, because we are now God’s temple. To go in, we have to first receive Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins at the altar and be sprinkled by his blood. Everything in the tabernacle was sprinkled with the blood of animals because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:21-22). By receiving Jesus’ shed blood on our behalf, we receive the Father’s forgiveness and are welcomed into his presence without guilt or shame.

Next, we go to the wash basin where the priests would get clean before going into the Holy Place, representing the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, *“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5)*. Jesus is the fountain of living water. Just as we were physically born by coming out of the waters of our mother’s womb, we are reborn through water baptism. We die to self when we go down into the water so we can come up out of the water reborn as a new creation. Jesus makes us holy and cleanses us *“by the washing with water through the word” (Ephesians 5:26)*. The word is revelation. Jesus, the Word, gave us the revelation of the Father who receives us with joy when we repent, so we need not fear entering his presence. Repentance isn’t just turning away from sin but turning toward God, which is something we do daily.

On the night Jesus was arrested, he washed his disciples’ feet and instructed them to do likewise. Even though we are clean through baptism, our feet still connect us to this broken world, so we need to continually wash off of each other the dirt that accumulates in daily living. We wash off offense, bitterness, pride, fear of man, unforgiveness, unbelief – anything that would hinder us from entering God’s presence to worship and receive from the Lord as his beloved child. When we find ourselves struggling to connect with God, it doesn’t mean we’re no longer saved. We just need to meet Jesus at the altar and thank him for his sacrifice, then ask him to wash us with his word by revealing anything that’s hindering our belief so we can go into the Holy Place of communion with the Father who loves us.

Another way to translate the word door in John 10 is gate. Jesus is the Gate who allows his sheep into the Father’s flock and keeps the unruly goats out. The Word is the gate to our heart, deciding which thoughts and emotions get in. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:5 to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. When the world or the enemy presents a thought that is contrary to what the Bible says, we stop at the Gate, Jesus, and ask him to examine it before bringing it into our heart. If Jesus says it doesn’t line up with truth, it stops at the Gate and is not allowed to enter. Philippians 4 tells us to bring anxious thoughts before the Lord in prayer with thanksgiving. *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7)*. Jesus is the guardian of our heart and mind who will keep us in peace when we take our troubles to him. He washes us with his word and ushers us into God’s presence where we find grace and mercy.

When we receive salvation through the blood and are reborn by the Spirit, we can enter into God’s presence through Jesus, the Door. We don’t wait to access his presence when we die; it is for right now! Just as Moses spoke with God in the tabernacle, Hebrews 10:19-25 tells us, *“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”*

Jesus came to make a way for us to worship God in spirit and in truth, enjoying his presence daily. We enter God’s presence through Jesus so we can draw near to God and receive what we need from him. Then we go out to encourage others, washing their feet and inviting them to join us in worship.

Response:

Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus to make a way for me to have a daily relationship with you. Thank you, Jesus, for your blood and for the living water of your Spirit that you have poured into me to wash me continually with your word. I come through the Door now to worship, listen, and receive from you.

Day 7 – I AM The Light

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:1-7, 42:1-7, John 9, Exodus 25:31-40

Rather than come out and declare that he is the Messiah, Jesus often described himself and his kingdom in parables which are word pictures that describe a particular truth. God speaks through the language of symbols in dreams and visions because symbols can have many layers of meaning. The more we want to know, the deeper the Lord will take us in our understanding. That's why Jesus told his disciples, *"Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given – and you will receive even more"* (Mark 4:24, NLT). The I AM statements of Jesus are often his way of pointing us to the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah so we will get more understanding of who Jesus is.

In John 8:12 Jesus declares, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Several Old Testament passages speak of the Messiah as light. Isaiah 9:2 says, *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* Isaiah 9:1 identifies this land where the light dawns as the region where Jesus was raised, in Nazareth, and Galilee *"by the Way of the Sea,"* where Jesus did much of his preaching. Isaiah 9:6-7 reveals how the light will dawn. *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."* By revealing that he is the light, he reveals he is the King.

Isaiah 42:1-7 describes the Messiah who will not only be a light to the Jews but to the Gentiles also. *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. ⁶I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness"* (Isaiah 42:1, 6-7). The sign that the light has appeared is the opening of eyes that are blind. For this reason, Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man and declared that he is the light of the world.

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' ³'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' ⁶After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means 'Sent'). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing" (John 9:1-7). Jesus healed him in this manner for a reason.

The Pool of Siloam is fed by the Gihon spring, a fountain of living water. Jesus told the blind man to wash his eyes in the living water and he would see, a prophetic picture of baptism. In John 3:3 Jesus says, *"No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."* When we are baptized and born again, our eyes are washed clean and opened to see God's invisible kingdom. John 9 tells us that after the blind man's eyes were opened, Jesus revealed himself to him as the Son of Man – the Messiah – and the man worshipped Jesus. Then Jesus said, *"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind"* (John 9:39). Jesus came as a light to the Jews, but those who rejected him became blind while those who couldn't see before – the Gentiles – were shown light.

Jesus explains this concept in John 3:19-20 when he says, *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”* Unless we come to Jesus, the Light, and invite him to examine our lives and lead us into truth, we choose darkness and blindness, living in fear of exposure. All of us have sinned. No one is “good enough” to earn salvation. If we think we don’t need the Light, we’re blind and lost like the religious leaders of Jesus’ day whom Jesus said were guilty of sin because they claimed they could see (John 9:41). When we step into the light, inviting Jesus to wash us and make us clean, we see the difference between good and evil and are led into truth.

Jesus brings light to those in darkness by teaching us God’s ways and demonstrating them in love. He makes a way for us to fellowship with God in the light of truth and God’s love. In this way he fulfills another object in the Holy Place of God’s tabernacle as the way to the Father. He is the light which was provided by the seven-branched menorah or lampstand. He is filled with the sevenfold Spirit of God as described in Isaiah 11. John sees the heavenly lampstand as the sevenfold Spirit of God before God’s throne in Revelation 4:5. The Spirit gives light to the world by revealing Jesus, the Light of the world. God wants us to come and abide with him in the Holy Place so we, too, can be filled with light.

When we fix our eyes on Jesus in the Holy Place through prayer and meditation on the scriptures, we encounter God’s light and are transformed, just like Moses’ face shone with light after he spent time in God’s presence. His face shone so bright he had to put a veil over it. The more we look at Jesus and behold him, the more we are filled with light and become like him. Paul reveals that this time spent beholding the light is what brings transformation. *“We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).* Jesus said, *“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).* We fix our eyes on the Light so we can be filled with his light and shine in the darkness, drawing others to the Light.

The festival of Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of the oil that was only enough for one day yet kept the lampstand in the temple lit for eight days while they made new oil for the temple at a time of cleansing and rededication. Hellenization by the Greeks had brought in outside, pagan influences, which were removed as a result of the Maccabean revolt. We can celebrate the miracle of light that will not go out even when we’ve messed up and allowed outside influences to defile our sanctuary. We step into the light by confessing our sins, asking Jesus to cleanse us with his blood and living water. He will fill us with light that never goes out. Hanukkah points to Jesus, the Light that never goes out (John 1:5).

When Jesus returns at the end of the age, when the Light has spread across the whole world, he will replace the sun as our source of light. This is hinted at in Zechariah 14:6-7, which speaks of there being no sunlight yet continual light, even in the evening. Describing the heavenly Jerusalem when God creates a new heaven and new earth, Revelation 21:23 says, *“The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.”* Light of the world come!

Response:

Thank you, Jesus, for washing me with your word so I can see the truth of your kingdom. Thank you for teaching and demonstrating God’s truth in love. Every word you speak is light and life. Fill me with your light as I behold you so that I may shine and bring glory to the Father by pointing others to you.

Day 8 – I AM the Bread from Heaven

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 8:3,18:8, John 6, Leviticus 24:8-9

In Deuteronomy 18:18 Moses tells the people God's promise to him: *"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him."* While God sent many prophets to Israel, none did miracles like Moses. Moses parted the water with his staff, but Jesus calmed the waves with his voice. Moses turned the water in Egypt to blood while Jesus turned water to wine. So when Jesus multiplied bread to feed over 5000 people they saw his miracle as a sign that God had raised up the prophet like Moses, under whose leadership God miraculously supplied bread from heaven. *"They began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (John 6:14).*

The next day, the people began asking Jesus for a sign that he was the prophet spoken of by Moses. *"What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"*³¹ *Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'*³² *Jesus said to them, 'Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.'*³³ *For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'*³⁴ *'Sir,' they said, 'always give us this bread.'*³⁵ *Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'" (John 6:30-35).*

The people rightly asked Jesus to always give them the bread from heaven and Jesus responded that whoever comes to him and believes in him will have that bread every day. The people wanted physical bread, but Jesus was talking about more than bread. In Deuteronomy 8:3 Moses tells the people that God *"humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."* The manna that came down from heaven in the wilderness to feed the hunger God had induced was a symbol of the Word of God, Jesus, who would satisfy our souls with truth and revelation from God.

We don't like to think of God causing us to go hungry, but in Matthew 5:6 Jesus promises, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."* One of the ways the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus is by producing within us a dissatisfaction with the brokenness of this world. When we begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness, he leads us to the Bread from heaven through whom every need is met. Jesus promised that if we seek first his kingdom and righteousness, our physical needs like bread will be met, as well (Matthew 6:33). Jesus is the Bread from heaven who came to give us eternal access to God's presence and provision. He is the fulfillment of the bread in the Holy Place in the tabernacle, called the Bread of the Presence, because by his Spirit he is always with us.

God instructed the priests to set out twelve loaves of bread, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. *"This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant."*⁹ *It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in the sanctuary area, because it is a most holy part of their perpetual share of the food offerings presented to the LORD"* (Leviticus 24:8-9). The bread was a sign of God's continual presence with them. The priests offered the bread to God each Sabbath, but then God gave it back to them to eat as a fellowship meal with him in the sanctuary. Jesus came to fulfill this covenant promise as the Bread from heaven who brings all who believe in him

into eternal fellowship with the Father who abides in us. Those who eat the Bread from heaven will never die but remain in fellowship with God forever. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* Jesus explained to Nicodemus the mystery of how he would give us eternal life as the Bread from heaven. *"No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him"* (John 3:13-15).

Jesus is speaking of Numbers 21 which tells us that the children of Israel grumbled against the Lord, so he sent venomous snakes to bite them, causing many to die. It pointed to the curse pronounced on the serpent in Genesis 3:15, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* The father of the twelve tribes of Israel was originally named Jacob, which comes from the Hebrew word for "heel." By tempting the children of Jacob (later renamed Israel) to sin and invite God's punishment, the serpent struck at the "heel" of the woman. What happened next, however, foreshadowed how Jesus would crush the serpent's head.

When the people confessed their sin, Moses interceded and the Lord said to Moses, *"Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live"* (Numbers 21:8). Just as the people looked on the serpent on the pole and lived, all who see Jesus on the cross as the sacrifice for their sins will be saved from death. By his sacrifice, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. Moses interceded for the people in the wilderness, but Jesus "is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25). The Bread of life is always available.

Just like the priests ate the Bread of the Presence in the tabernacle, we must eat the Bread to have life. Jesus said, *"Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them"* (John 6:53-56). On the night Jesus was betrayed, he broke the bread of the Passover meal and explained that it now represented his body, his flesh that he was offering for us. We eat the bread in remembrance of his body that was broken for us. Eating the bread symbolizes receiving both the salvation he offers us and his teachings. Jesus said whoever eats his flesh, the bread, and drinks the cup of wine that represents his blood *"remains in me, and I in them"* (v. 56).

The mystery of eating Jesus' flesh as bread is explained in God's instructions to the priests who were allowed to eat the sacrificial bread and meat. The sacrificial meat was *"to be eaten in the sanctuary area, in the courtyard of the tent of meeting. ²⁷ Whatever touches any of the flesh will become holy"* (Leviticus 6:26-27). We are made holy not by our own effort, but by partaking of the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus' words and Spirit continually make us holy. In the same way that the bread we eat becomes a part of us, sustaining our lives, Jesus' holy presence remains in us as we consume his words in the Bible, eat the communion bread in remembrance of his sacrifice, and worship him as the Bread of the Presence.

Response:

Jesus, I worship you as the Bread of life. Fill me with life by your Holy Spirit in me. I love your presence. I am hungry for your righteousness. Fill me with the daily bread I need and draw me nearer to you.

Day 9 – The Temple

Scriptures: John 2:17, John 4:23-24, Ephesians 2:14-18

Not only do the objects in the temple point to Jesus, in John 2 Jesus reveals that his body is the temple. When the religious leaders demanded a sign of Jesus' authority he answered them, *"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*²⁰ They replied, *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"*²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body" (John 2:19-21). Jesus was pointing the religious leaders to Zechariah 6, which we studied on Day 2, declaring that his authority comes from his identity as the Branch who rebuilds the temple. The temple built by the Branch would not be a physical building confined to Jerusalem, but one that branches out to fill the whole earth. How? Through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection on the third day, the foundation was laid for the third temple, the corporate Body of Christ where God's presence dwells by his Spirit in us. For it is *"not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,"* that God's temple is built (Zechariah 4:6).

Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman at the well, *"A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."*²⁴ *God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth"* (John 4:23-24). Jesus' whole purpose in coming was to make a way for us come to the Father and worship him in the Spirit and in truth forever. The Samaritans were miffed at the Jews because they insisted that God had to be worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem, which was true, while they worshipped on a mountain in Samaria. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, *"a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem"* (John 4:21). By allowing the physical temple to be removed and replaced with Jesus' body, God put an end to that hostility and made a way for all to enter his presence anywhere on earth. In his body, Jesus not only put an end to the hostility between the Jews and Samaritans over the location of the temple, but also ends the hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

Ephesians 2:14-18 tells us Jesus *"has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,"*¹⁵ *by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,"*¹⁶ *and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."*¹⁷ *He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."*¹⁸ *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."* Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirements of the law and temple-based purity laws by shedding his blood to cleanse us from sin so we could have access to God's presence by his Spirit within us, thus doing away with the need for the laws that formerly separated Jews from Gentiles. God had declared certain people and objects unclean in the law of Moses but revealed to Peter in Acts 10 that he has now made them clean by Jesus. It's inner purity God wants.

In Amos 9:11, God promises to restore the fallen tabernacle of David. Up until the time the first temple was built by David's son, Solomon, the people worshiped in the tabernacle of Moses. However, God calls it the tabernacle of David he will restore because David established Levitical worship and wrote many of the Psalms used in worship. 1 Chronicles 16:4 tells us *"He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to extol, thank, and praise the LORD, the God of Israel."* David's highest priority was to minister to the Lord, to worship him in the Spirit and in truth. The tabernacle was a movable tent structure that centered around worship. The church is not a building, like a temple, but is made of movable tabernacles who carry God's presence and worship both individually and corporately.

Psalm 69:9 points to the Son of David, Jesus, as one who declares, *“zeal for your house consumes me.”* Jesus passionately taught us to pursue inner purity, do secret acts of devotion to God, hunger for God’s righteousness, pray with perseverance, and draw near in our hearts in worship. What does it mean to worship in truth? Jesus revealed the Father to us. When we worship Jesus, we worship the Father in truth. When we read what the Word says and respond in obedience, we worship God in truth. When we praise and give thanks to God for who he is in Scripture and who he is to us, we worship in truth.

How then do we worship in the Spirit? By yielding our lives to the Spirit and responding to each revelation he gives us with worship and obedience. When we wait on the Lord in worship and listen for his leading, then follow him, we worship in Spirit. We ask, “Lord, how can I honor you today?” If the Spirit tells us to lift our hands, we lift our hands. He may tell us to kneel, so we kneel. He may tell us to sing or to be quiet and listen to his voice. He may prompt us to give an offering or to be still and receive. He leads us to praise God, to intercede, to fulfill the priestly functions as we abide in Jesus, the temple.

Revelation 1:6 declares that God has made us to be a kingdom of priests. This echoes God’s call to Israel in Exodus 19:6, *“You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* God expands this call of priesthood to all believers because God’s temple is Jesus, and we are in him. Just as the priests had to tend to the fire on the altar so that it would never go out, we keep the fire of our love for God hot by spending time in prayer, meditation on scripture, and worship in the Holy Place of our hearts. 1 Peter 2:9 says, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

Just as the priests offered intercession for the people, we go before the Lord to intercede for others. The altar of incense was in front of the ark of the covenant above which God’s presence dwelled in the tabernacle of Moses and later the temple in Jerusalem. We see this altar in Revelation as a representation of intercession. *“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne” (Revelation 8:3).* The altar of incense had to be fueled by coals from the altar of sacrifice. When Aaron’s sons tried to use different coals, God struck them dead. This temple object points to and is fulfilled by Jesus because it is the sacrifice of Jesus that empowers our prayers and intercession.

In John 16:23-24 Jesus tells his disciples, *“Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”* We come before God to intercede for others and ask for what we need to carry out God’s will in Jesus’ name, on the authority of Jesus’ sacrifice. Our intercession is authorized by the intercession of Jesus who is in heaven, interceding for us. *“My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous” (1 John 2:1).* Jesus is our High Priest who intercedes for us. When we abide in his Body, God’s temple, we also become priests who intercede. As a kingdom of priests, we minister to God through worship in the Spirit and in truth.

Response:

Visualize yourself progressing through the temple in worship. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, praise God for who he is and for Jesus’ sacrifice, be washed in the Living Water of any dirt that’s gotten on you, invite the Light to illuminate you, enjoy the Bread of his Presence as you feast on his Word, bring your needs to Jesus who intercedes at the incense altar, then offer worship as a fragrant offering to God.

Day 10 – The Ark of God’s Covenant

Scriptures: Genesis 15:4-21, Ezekiel 16:59-63, Exodus 34:1, Matthew 26:26-28, Isaiah 59:20-21

As we continue mining the Old Testament for buried treasure, I’m reminded of Jesus’ words in Matthew 13:52, *“Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”* When we look at the Old and New Testaments as one continuous revelation of God, the Holy Spirit reveals connections that are buried in scripture for us to find like a treasure hunt. God doesn’t speak in parables and the language of symbols to frustrate us, but as an invitation to draw near to him in the mystery for the joy of discovery! One of the most important discoveries of Scripture is the revelation that we worship a covenant God.

God’s covenant with Israel was written on tablets of stone and housed in a gold-covered box called the ark of the covenant. Moses inscribed God’s covenant laws on the tablets, but then broke the tablets as a sign of broken covenant when the people sinned by worshipping a golden calf while Moses was up on the mountain with God. So the Lord said to Moses, *“Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke” (Exodus 34:1).* God renewed his broken covenant with the Jews by writing his covenant commandments in stone. When we say that something is “written in stone” it is a sign of permanence.

Jesus is the Word of God, so the stone tablets represent Jesus as God’s permanent Word that endures forever. Israel repeatedly broke God’s covenant and endured his punishments as a disobedient child. Yet God would not forsake them. In Leviticus 26 God declares that even though Israel will break God’s covenant in the future, God will remember his covenant promise to Abraham that his descendants will be a vast nation dwelling in the land of Canaan. He promises in verse 44 to never break his covenant and destroy them completely. As the people are in exile from the land for breaking God’s covenant he says, *“I will give you what you deserve, for you have taken your solemn vows lightly by breaking your covenant. ⁶⁰Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were young, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you” (Ezekiel 16:59-60).* God’s covenants are everlasting.

Jesus is the Bread God supplied from heaven as God in the flesh. When he broke the Passover bread as a symbol of his flesh, the broken bread represented Israel’s broken covenant with God. Just as Moses broke the stone tablets, a symbol of God’s everlasting Word, Jesus – the Word made flesh – was broken on behalf of all who have sinned and broken God’s laws. He came in a body like ours to be broken for our failure to keep God’s covenant. He did so because when God made his covenant with Abraham, Abraham cut animals in half, as was customary when “cutting” a covenant. Both people would walk through the halves, symbolizing what would happen to them if they ever broke the covenant. However, God was the only one who walked through. Genesis 15:17 tells us that *“a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.”* God agreed to pay the penalty for Abraham’s descendants when they broke the covenant by taking their punishment upon himself. He did so in Jesus.

Just as the stone tablets were housed in the ark of the covenant, above which God’s presence dwelled in the tabernacle, Jesus’ body houses the covenant promises of God and his Spirit rests on the Body of Christ. The word ark simply means a box. When God told Noah to build an ark, there probably was no word for boat at the time because the meaning of the Hebrew word is “box-shaped thing.” An ark is simply a container; it’s what’s inside that matters. All who entered Noah’s ark were saved from judgment. All who are in Christ are now saved from judgment. God sealed Noah’s ark and God seals us

who are in Christ with his Holy Spirit who will raise us from the dead. Though he was broken on behalf of those who broke covenant with God, Jesus has been glorified to establish an everlasting covenant.

After the flood God promised to never again destroy the earth with a flood. *“This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:12-13).* Is there a similar promise to Israel of God’s everlasting covenant with them? Yes! In Psalm 2:6-8 God says, *“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (ESV).* Just as God set his rainbow in the clouds as a sign of his covenant with the earth, he sets his promised King on Zion, his holy hill in Israel, as a sign of his everlasting covenant with them. This King is his only begotten Son who will inherit the whole earth, ruling from Jerusalem. Though Israel broke their covenant with God, he will remain faithful to send his Anointed One to fulfill all his covenant promises at Jesus’ second coming.

Why does it matter that God fulfills his covenant promises to Israel? Because if God keeps his everlasting covenant with Israel, we can be sure he will keep his promise to spare us from his wrath and raise us on the last day to everlasting reward. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s everlasting covenant with Israel and his Spirit is the sign. *“The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,’ declares the LORD. ²¹ ‘As for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the LORD. ‘My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever,’ says the LORD” (Isaiah 59:20-21).* Though Israel failed to keep God’s covenant, God would send his Spirit with the Word.

How do we remain in the ark of God’s covenant? By remaining in the Word. Jesus said, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15:7-10).* We who are part of the Body of Christ have become arks who carry his words written on our hearts. We obey his commands out of love by the power of the Spirit who pours God’s love into us. All of God’s commands direct us to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. When we obey Jesus’ commands we are remaining in his love because everything God commands stems from his love.

Can we break our covenant? Jesus warned, *“Whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:33).* Yet we see that when Peter disowns Jesus, Jesus later finds him and restores him. If there’s one thing we can be assured of through the story of Israel, it’s that God will not give up on anyone who is in covenant with him. Israel messed up time and time again, yet after thousands of years of persecution and exile from the land, the Jews have remained a cohesive people, preserving their ancient language. Do you see any Romans speaking Latin? Yet God’s people have remained and were finally restored to the land in 1948. God’s covenant with Israel is an everlasting covenant promising them land and a divine King who will rule over them from Jerusalem. His covenant promise in Christ is that we can enjoy the spiritual benefits of this kingdom both now and forever!

Response:

Thank you, Jesus, for being broken on behalf of all of us who have broken your covenant. Thank you for your Spirit who renews my mind, fills me with love, and empowers me to remain in covenant with you.

Day 11 – Passover Lamb Who Redeems With an Outstretched Arm

Scriptures: Micah 5:1-4, Exodus 12, John 6:51-58

When John the Baptist saw Jesus he declared, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Isaiah 53:7 describes the suffering servant as a sacrificial lamb. “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” King David was a shepherd boy from Bethlehem, and so the Son of David would come from Bethlehem, not only as a shepherd but as a lamb. Micah prophesied, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. ³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son” (Micah 5:2-3). Micah goes on to describe this ruler as Israel’s shepherd.

Israel felt abandoned because there were no prophets for 400 years between the Old Testament and John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for Jesus. Not only would Messiah come from Bethlehem, but his origins would be from ancient times because he is One with the Ancient of Days. Luke 2 tells us the virgin Mary gave birth to a son in Bethlehem, in a stable where animals were kept. This was intentional because God wanted us to identify Jesus as the Lamb of God. Bethlehem is only 5 miles from Jerusalem where the sacrifices were offered in the Temple, so the flocks raised in Bethlehem were likely sacrificial lambs. But Jesus is not just any lamb, he is the Passover Lamb.

Jesus fulfills both the Old Testament prophecies and the festivals God ordained because everything in the old covenant points to Jesus. The Passover festival recalls the story of God’s deliverance of the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. This festival is so central to Jewish identity that God declared the beginning of the Jewish year would coincide with the timing of the exodus. When God delivers us, it is a new beginning. On the fourteenth day of the first month, God commanded his people to celebrate the Passover. On the tenth day of the month, each family had to bring a Passover lamb into their home.

The Passover lamb was unique from all of the sacrifices because it was personal. Each man had to offer a lamb for his household. Bringing a lamb into your home is essentially making it your family pet for four days. Pets become part of our family and we grieve when they die. This is the purpose of this part of the festival. God was training the people to see that the Passover Lamb he would provide for his household, Jesus, would be part of their family. Jesus was not going to be an impersonal sacrifice, but one people cared about, with whom they had formed a bond. On the tenth day of the month, as people were bringing lambs into their homes, Jesus entered Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday. The people joyfully received the Lamb, Jesus, who spent the next four days teaching parables and speaking of his second coming – the second exodus when Jesus returns to gather his flock.

On the fourteenth day, the lambs were slaughtered and eaten as part of a special Passover meal, called the seder, in which each part of the meal symbolizes a part of the Exodus story. The bitter herbs eaten during the meal represent the bitterness of slavery. The unleavened bread represents the speed with which they had to leave Egypt because they could not wait for the bread to rise. When God delivers us from slavery to sin, we don’t linger in the old life, but immediately leave it behind. The lamb is eaten in remembrance of the lamb that was slaughtered so they could be saved from the angel of death. The last of the 10 plagues God sent against Egypt was the plague of death of the firstborn males. By slaughtering a lamb and putting its blood on the top and sides of the doorposts, the Israelites were safe from the angel of death. Being under the blood of the Lamb saves us from death.

When Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples, the evening before the day of Passover (because according to God's calendar in Genesis 1, a day begins in the evening), Jesus identified himself as the Passover Lamb. He took the bread and declared it was his flesh which he would sacrifice for us when he was crucified on Passover. He took the cup of wine symbolizing God's redemption of the Jews which came by the blood of the lamb and declared it was the cup of his blood shed for us, securing our redemption and forgiveness of sin. This cup would now be the cup of the new covenant between God and man which Jesus mediates as our High Priest. By eating the bread and drinking the cup during the sacrament of communion, which came from the Passover meal, we are accepting Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf as our Passover Lamb, which is what brings us into the Father's house.

Just as a father was responsible to provide the Passover lamb for his children, God, the Father, provided our Passover Lamb. It is our acceptance of Jesus as our Passover Lamb that brings us into the Father's house, under his protection from the final judgment, the second death. All will face a final judgment one day, but those who receive Jesus as their Savior and remain under his blood have already passed from death to life and will remain with God in his house forever. Hallelujah! After the Passover meal, Jesus assured his disciples that while he is away from us he is preparing a place for us in his Father's house. *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"* (John 14:1). Jesus offered the sacrifice that brings us into God's household forever, which was God's plan from the beginning, before creation (Revelation 13:8).

In Exodus 6:6-8 God told the Israelites, *"I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. ⁸ And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD."* As our Passover Lamb, Jesus redeemed us "with an outstretched arm" on the cross, saving us from the penalty of sin which is eternal separation from God, eternal death. We are now God's people, and he is our God. Colossians 1:13 tells us that God has, *"rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* Receiving Jesus as our Passover Lamb marks the new beginning of our journey with God during which we learn what it means to be his child in his house.

However, we must remain under the blood. If the Israelites left the house on the night the angel of death passed over Egypt, they would be subject to judgment, which is why Paul says we must remain in God's house. *"He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel"* (Colossians 1:22-23). We are free from accusation because by the blood of Jesus we are forgiven for our sins. The lamb's blood was not applied to the floor because we are never to walk on the blood shed for us. Hebrews 10:29 says that deliberately sinning after you've been saved tramples on the blood of Jesus. Let us rejoice that we have been brought into God's household and remain under the blood of Jesus which was shed for our salvation.

Response:

Jesus, I thank you for redeeming me from slavery to sin with your outstretched arms of love. Thank you, Father, for providing the sacrifice so I can be with you in your house forever as your beloved child.

Day 12 – Teacher

Scripture: Exodus 13, Isaiah 30:20, 42:1-4, Micah 4:2, Matthew 5-7

The Passover coincided with the Festival of Unleavened Bread, during which the Israelites were to eat only unleavened bread for 7 days. In Exodus 13, God tells us what this festival represents. *“This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that this law of the LORD is to be on your lips” (Exodus 13:9)*. Revelation 13 tells us that in the last days the wicked ruler to come will insist on being worshipped, and the sign of his worship will be a mark on the hand or forehead. In Exodus 13, God tells us that keeping his law on our lips is our spiritual mark on our forehead (representing our mind) and hand (representing our works). What you believe, speak, and do identifies which kingdom you live in, either the Kingdom of Heaven or the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of Heaven which will come down to earth with him when he returns. Through his teaching ministry, Jesus fulfilled God’s promise in Isaiah 30:20, *“You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him” (NLT)*. Jesus described God’s kingdom value system in his sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). Crowds followed him because his teachings provide a solid foundation for those who follow them. Micah 4:2 declares that when God’s kingdom comes the nations will stream to God’s temple and say, *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”* Just as the crowds followed Jesus, hanging on every word, the nations will stream to him to be taught. His ways are good and lead us to love.

God’s laws are both foundational principles for kingdom living and the boundaries of his kingdom when Jesus returns. *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Revelation 22:14-15)*. This is why Jesus’ teaching ministry preceded his sacrifice and why John the Baptist preached repentance to prepare the way for Jesus. Before the Passover sacrifice comes the removal of every trace of yeast for the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

“On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel” (Exodus 12:15). The Apostle Paul identified yeast as representing wickedness, so sweeping your house clean of yeast is a symbol of repentance. *“Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)*. Paul instructs us to keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread by removing the yeast of malice and wickedness. Jesus warned his disciples of three specific yeasts to be on their guard against.

The Yeast of the Pharisees: *“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:10)*. The word hypocrite is the Greek word for actor. The Pharisees acted righteous in public to receive praise from people but did not love God or people. In Matthew 15:9 Jesus tells the Pharisees, *“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”*

This yeast substitutes religious traditions and rules for the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 3:5 Paul warns us to stay away from those who act religious but reject the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us godly.

The Yeast of the Sadducees: The Pharisees and Sadducees were dueling sects in Judaism who were both vying for power. *“Watch out!” Jesus warned them. “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6).* Jesus issued this warning after the Pharisees and Sadducees had come demanding a miraculous sign to prove Jesus’ authority. The Sadducees did not believe in miracles, the resurrection of the dead, angelic spirits, prophecy, or anything beyond the material world. In Acts 4, The Sadducees put Peter and John in jail for preaching that Jesus was resurrected from the dead because it didn’t fit their narrative. This yeast of unbelief in the spiritual realm results in persecution of those who do miracles, preach the resurrection of the dead, or operate in the gifts of the Spirit.

The Yeast of Herod: In Mark 8:15 Jesus warns his disciples to watch out for the yeast of Herod. Herodians supported collaboration with Rome, even if it meant compromising their religious convictions, in order to gain power. It is the yeast of people-pleasing, which we see when Herod makes a foolish vow that results in him having John the Baptist beheaded, just to save face. We also see this when Jesus was arrested and brought before Herod. *“When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. ⁹He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him” (Luke 23:8-11).* When the teachers of the law started accusing Jesus, Herod went from delight in seeing Jesus to mocking him. The yeast of Herod causes people to deny Jesus, to go along with the crowd to hold onto power.

All three of these groups persecuted Jesus and the yeast of their teaching leads to persecution of Spirit-filled believers, which is why Jesus fulfills the Festival of Unleavened Bread by teaching us how to get rid of every trace of yeast. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus told us how to avoid being like the hypocritical religious leaders by doing good works in secret, praying to God in secret, and fasting in secret. Rather than outward piety to gain attention, he called for inner purity. Jesus not only did miracles, but promised his disciples he would send the Holy Spirit to empower us to continue his work of preaching, healing, and casting out demons, saying, *“Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).* Jesus’ teaching combats the yeast of Herod, instructing us to give rather than store up treasures, view serving as the sign of true greatness, honor the dishonored of society, and take up our cross daily.

God gives us grace in this process of purging, which the Holy Spirit leads us through. If we follow Jesus’ teachings, we automatically avoid these yeasts and instead are filled with the yeast of the Kingdom, which Jesus describes in Matthew 13:33. *“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”* Little by little, the Holy Spirit works the yeast of holiness into our lives as we follow Jesus’ teachings. He turns us into yeast that works its way into the world bringing transformation. Yeast causes bread to rise and the yeast of the Kingdom lifts up the downcast and fills the earth with the Bread from Heaven.

Response:

Thank you, Jesus, for teaching us the ways of your kingdom and demonstrating both humility and godly power. Fill me with the yeast of your kingdom, transforming me until I think, speak, and act like you.

Day 13 – I AM the Resurrection

Scriptures: Ezekiel 37:11-14, John 11, Hosea 6:1-2, Leviticus 23:10-11, Daniel 12:1-3

The most important “I am” statement of Jesus is found in John 11:25, *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* Jesus is both the source of the life we live in this world and the resurrection to the new life to come. In him is life. Martha and Mary, good friends of Jesus, were grieving over the death of their brother, Lazarus. They had sent word to Jesus when he was sick, but Jesus purposely delayed going to see him, saying, *“This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it”* (John 11:4). What we experience as trials are often opportunities for God to reveal our next breakthrough of revelation of who he is to us. Why did Jesus need to be glorified by raising Lazarus from the dead? To fulfill prophecy and reveal that he is both the Son of Man and God.

In Ezekiel 37, God shows the prophet Ezekiel a valley of dry bones representing the nation of Israel and instructs Ezekiel, *“Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live’”* (Ezekiel 37:9). God specifically calls Ezekiel “son of man” because he is prophetically doing what the coming Son of Man, Jesus, would someday do. God showed Ezekiel that he would restore the nation of Israel after their captivity, but there is more to this mystery.

“Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them’” (Ezekiel 37:12-13). Raising the dead was part of Jesus’ ministry as the embodiment of the resurrection and the life, but opening a grave after 4 days was a sign that he is the God of Ezekiel 37 who opens graves and brings us up from them. For God had said, *“Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them”* (v. 13). When Jesus calls Lazarus out of the grave, he is revealing, “I am the LORD,” the God of Ezekiel 37.

The prophet Hosea was given another piece to this puzzle. *“Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence”* (Hosea 6:1-2). Jesus was sent to fulfill this prophecy as the Lord who heals and binds up wounds. After two days in the grave Jesus was revived and on the third day he was restored to life, but his restoration would be our restoration, *“that we may live in his presence.”* Matthew 27:52-53 reveals that not only was Jesus resurrected on the third day, but he resurrected the bodies of many who had died. *“The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”*

Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruits of those who rise from the dead, in fulfillment of the Festival of First Fruits which took place on the day after the Sabbath of Passover, the first day of the week (Sunday) when Jesus was resurrected. This festival is explained in Leviticus 23:10-11. *“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. ¹¹ He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.’”* As the first grain to be harvested was being waved before the Lord during the First Fruits offering on Sunday, the first fruits of the resurrection ascended to the Father as Jesus led a triumphal procession of resurrected saints.

Why does the resurrection of Jesus matter? Before Jesus died, he told his disciples that he would be killed and raised to life on the third day (Matthew 17:23). If Jesus was not resurrected, then nothing he promised can be fulfilled because he promised that all who believe in him would have eternal life. How can a dead man give life? However, because he conquered death and was resurrected, we have life on the other side of death with God forever. As we read in Hosea, Jesus revives us *“that we may live in his presence.”* We know that when we die our spirit goes to be with Jesus because he told the thief on the cross next to him, *“Today you will be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43).

If our spirit goes to be with the Lord, why then do we need the resurrection of the body? This is why we’ve been studying the old covenant. God promised Israel the resurrection of the dead because it is during the time of the resurrection when Jesus reigns over the earth for a thousand years and fulfills every promise to Israel and to us. The resurrection is part of God’s plan to redeem fallen creation. God wants to see his original, perfect plan for Israel and creation be redeemed and restored. God promised the Jewish people a Messiah who would rule over the earth from a regathered Israel. In the parable of the talents and bags of silver, Jesus promised us that those who obey him and steward well what they’ve been given in this life will reign with him when he returns to set up his kingdom.

The Apostle John saw the resurrection of the dead in Revelation 20:4-6. *“I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”* We need a physical body to live on the earth, so our physical bodies will be resurrected in a glorious form like that of Jesus’ resurrected body.

As the first fruits of the resurrection, we see from Jesus’ new body that he could eat, but he could also walk through walls and ascend to heaven! His glorious body was often unrecognizable, yet Jesus’ hands still bore the scars of his crucifixion. Daniel 12 reveals that our resurrected bodies will be filled with light. *“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever”* (Daniel 12:3). At the resurrection, we will shine like Jesus!

Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week, the first day of creation, because his resurrection marks a new beginning for humanity. All who believe in Christ live in the present reality of the resurrection. The old life has gone and the new has come. We’re not saved to escape to heaven when we die. We’re saved so God can bring his kingdom down both in the future and now, through those who live in his spiritual kingdom. God’s plan is to redeem all of creation, beginning with the salvation of souls and extending to the redemption of bodies. God breathes his Spirit in us so he can bring redemption to the world through us as we advance his kingdom. Through us, God continues to heal the sick, cast out demons, cleanse the lepers, and raise the dead. Those who are filled with resurrection life are commissioned by Jesus to freely give what we have freely received. In so doing, the kingdom of heaven breaks through the veil into this world, resurrecting all that is dead and releasing the life of Jesus.

Response:

Jesus, you are the source of my life and resurrect everything that belongs to you. Fill me with life and make me shine like you. May your kingdom come and will be done in my life as it is in heaven.

Day 14 – Bridegroom Who Proposes a New Covenant

Scriptures: Isaiah 62:5, Hosea 2:14-23, John 14:1-3, Matthew 26:29, Revelation 19:7-8

When God first drew Israel to himself out of Egypt, he proposed a covenant at Mount Sinai, inviting Israel to be his people as a bridegroom proposes to a bride (Jeremiah 31:32). The 10 Commandments were the marriage vows Israel agreed to, and God vowed to be their God and bless them in the land he'd promised to their ancestor, Abraham. After the giving of the law, 70 of Israel's elders climbed the mountain to enjoy a covenant meal with God, just like a banquet follows a wedding. This giving of the law is celebrated in the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost, which is 7 weeks after the Festival of First Fruits. Like a renewal of wedding vows, every spring the festivals called Israel back to faithfulness and remembrance of God's faithfulness to them. However, the Bible tells us that for centuries, Israel committed adultery by worshipping foreign gods.

In the book of Hosea, God tells how Israel had prostituted herself with foreign gods and used the gifts given to her by her Husband to worship Baal, giving Baal credit for the things God gave her. God would abandon Israel for her unfaithfulness, but in the future, God promised to woo her back. *"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her"* (Hosea 2:14). In Isaiah 62:5 God promises that the land and people of Jerusalem would be married to God. *"As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."* God expands this proposal in Hosea, saying, *"I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'"* (Hosea 2:23). Both abandoned Israel and the Gentile nations to which they had been scattered would be shown love and invited to the marriage covenant.

"In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'¹⁹ I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.²⁰ I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD" (Hosea 2:16, 19-20). Jesus came as the Bridegroom who would betroth us to God forever in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. In ancient Judaism, a betrothal or engagement was considered a marriage, even though the couple did not yet live together, and required a divorce to break the contract. On Passover, Jesus proposed a new covenant to betroth us to the Lord forever.

In ancient times, the betrothal process had its own ceremony. The match was arranged by the bride's father, which is why Jesus tells us in John 6 that no one can come to him unless the Father brings them. Jesus proposed the new covenant during the Passover meal, then offered a covenant cup of wine representing his shed blood for our forgiveness, just as a bride and bridegroom would share a covenant cup of wine to seal the betrothal. We symbolically drink this cup in the sacrament of communion, which was originally the third cup of the Passover celebration, the cup of redemption. Jesus purchased our redemption with his blood. We legally belong to him as a bride belonged to her husband.

The bridegroom then promises the bride that he will not drink wine until he returns to marry her. After sharing the cup of the new covenant with his disciples, Jesus says, *"I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"* (Matthew 26:29). The fourth cup of the Passover celebration is the cup of the kingdom. When Jesus returns, we will drink this cup under the chuppah or canopy of God's glory and sit down at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Jesus demonstrated at the Cana wedding that he saves the best wine for last!

After sharing the betrothal cup, the bridegroom then leaves to prepare a room for his bride to join him in his father's house. On the night Jesus proposes the new covenant, he says, *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"* (John 14:2-3). Jesus promises that when the engagement period is over, and he's finished preparing a place for us in his Father's house, he will return to take us to be with him.

While the bridegroom is away preparing a home for his bride, the bride prepares her wedding clothes, which Jesus says we must have to enter the wedding celebration. In Matthew 22 Jesus tells a parable about a wedding in which everyone is invited but only those who have the proper wedding clothes are allowed in. What are our wedding clothes? Revelation 7:14 tells us that God's people who come out of the great tribulation have *"washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* Revelation 19:7-8 tells us that the wedding clothes of the bride are the good deeds we do in Christ. *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. ⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)"* How can we get these clothes? Jesus provides the way.

The final act of the bridegroom at the betrothal is to give a gift to the bride. On the night Jesus proposes the new covenant, he promises to send us a gift, the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who is the deposit of our future inheritance, the seal or wedding ring of the new covenant. Jesus promised the Spirit would be our Counselor, guide us into truth, tell us the future, and remind us of Jesus' words (John 14-16). It is the Holy Spirit who helps us make our wedding clothes by clothing us in power to continue the good works of Jesus. For as Jesus promised his disciples, *"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49).

This clothing of power came at Pentecost, the Festival of Weeks. While the Jews were celebrating the giving of God's first covenant on fiery Mount Sinai through the giving of the law, the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers as tongues of fire. For God had promised in the new covenant he would make with Israel, *"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people"* (Jeremiah 31:33). The Holy Spirit writes God's law in our minds and hearts, keeping us holy and set apart for Jesus. The good works or fruit of the Holy Spirit in us is the outward sign of our betrothal to Jesus, just like a wedding ring tells people I belong to my husband.

On Pentecost, two loaves of bread are waved before the Lord made with new yeast that has formed in the unleavened bread from the Festival of Unleavened Bread. They represent the two groups that came from the new batch of dough, the Bread from Heaven: Jew and Gentile believers. One sign of the new covenant was Jewish believers speaking in Gentile languages at Pentecost. Just as fire fell from heaven on the first sacrifice in the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, tongues of fire came down from heaven on God's new temple, his bride. Our betrothal to Jesus was sealed with the giving of the Spirit who readies us for the return of our Bridegroom, Jesus. *"For your Maker is your husband – the LORD Almighty is his name – the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth"* (Isaiah 54:5).

Response:

Thank you, Jesus, for betrothing me to you forever. Thank you for making a place for me to be with you forever. Thank you for the gift of the Spirit who helps me remain loyal to you and dresses me as a bride.

Day 15 – The Cornerstone and Rock

Scriptures: Daniel 2, Psalm 118, Isaiah 28:16-17, 33:5-6, Matthew 7

In Daniel 2, Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream and tells him that the rock he saw is a kingdom that God will set up when he sends the rock that was not cut by human hands to destroy and replace all the nations represented in the statue. These are nations that have ruled the earth since the time God sent Israel into captivity until now. *"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever"* (Daniel 2:44). This vision has not been fulfilled because the nations have not yet been crushed by Jesus. Both the Old and New Testaments point to Jesus, the Rock, destroying the nations that have set themselves up against God. For those who oppose God, the Rock brings destruction, but for those who seek to obey him, the Rock is our salvation and foundation.

Psalm 118:21-24 says, *"I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. ²²The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ²³the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad."* Jesus is the stone the builders rejected who has become the cornerstone on which God's kingdom is being built. This psalm is the last psalm in the Hallel, a selection of psalms of praise that were sung at the end of the Passover meal. Matthew 26:30 tells us that after the Passover meal, *"Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives,"* where Jesus was betrayed. Just hours before Jesus would be rejected his disciples sang about him becoming the cornerstone *"this very day."* Jesus was no doubt comforted as he sang, *"I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done"* (Psalm 118:17).

Isaiah 28 describes the characteristics of the cornerstone. *"So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic. ¹⁷I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place'"* (Isaiah 28:16-17). Jesus, the cornerstone, has been tested in every way that we have been tested. He is a sure foundation, for all who believe in his name will be saved. The one who relies on him will never be stricken with panic because he promised to never leave or forsake us. His Spirit is always with us to guide and comfort us.

The kingdom of God is being built with Jesus as the cornerstone, ensuring that God's justice is the measuring line and his righteousness the plumb line. What does that mean? In the sermon on the mount, Jesus taught us how God measures justice. *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"* (Matthew 7:1-2). *"If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:14-15). *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"* (Luke 6:38). *God's measures are just in his kingdom. We receive what we're willing to give.*

God's measuring line and plumb line ensure that nothing is crooked, and everything is straight. A plumb line is a vertical line with a weight at the bottom that is held up next to a wall to make sure it's straight. Jesus' teachings came from above, carried weight, and established the plumb line of his kingdom.

Isaiah 33:5-6 says, *“The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with his justice and righteousness. ⁶ He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.”* Jesus is the sure foundation for our lives, our salvation. His teachings provide wisdom and knowledge...to those who practice them. The fear of the Lord is key to this treasure. If we fear the Lord, we will obey him, which is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Jesus said, *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash”* (Matthew 7:24-27).

Jesus is the cornerstone of the house of God and the foundation upon which God’s kingdom is built. He was a stumbling block for those who did not understand how the scriptures pointed to him, causing many to reject him. But to those who believed, he became the foundation of God’s kingdom which is being spread by those who follow his teachings, who are being made into the image of the Rock. Jesus renames Simon Peter, which means Rock, telling him he is the Rock on which Jesus will build his kingdom. Peter declares that not only is he a rock, but we also are. *“You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. ⁵ And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple”* (1 Peter 2:4-5).

You and I are not isolated buildings, but living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. Paul describes this temple in Ephesians 2. *“You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”* (Ephesians 2:19-22).

We build God’s kingdom with the tools he provides – the gifts of the Spirit – on the foundation he has supplied which is salvation through Jesus, using the plumb line of righteousness taught by Jesus. If we build on any other foundation than salvation through the blood of Jesus, it is not the right foundation. If we preach a gospel that does not encourage obedience to Jesus’ teachings, the walls will be crooked and fall down. Jesus was a carpenter or builder before he began his teaching ministry. He knows how to build lasting structures. In Christ, we too are kingdom builders being built together in community.

When I visited Jerusalem, our guide said that most of the stones from the destroyed temple had been taken by people to build their houses all over the city. What a beautiful illustration of God’s temple being spread out through people! Just as the temple stones were used to make homes, God now makes his home in us, his living stones. We are scattered around the world to prepare the world for the Rock who is coming. For as God revealed to Daniel, *“The rock that knocked the statue down became a great mountain that covered the whole earth”* (Daniel 2:35).

Response:

Jesus, you are my Rock and Redeemer. You are a sure foundation. Your words are a lamp to my feet and light to my path so that I will not stumble or be shaken. I bless your name. Abide in me and make me a rock like you, a stone that is being built up into your temple that will fill the earth.

Day 16 – I AM the Good Shepherd

Scriptures: Ezekiel 34, Zechariah 9:14-16, 10:2-3, 13:7-9, Micah 5, Psalm 23, John 10

When Jesus says in John 10:11, *“I am the good shepherd,”* it is perhaps the clearest statement declaring his identity as the Messiah. The Old Testament is filled with God’s complaints against the “bad shepherds” – the religious leaders who were abusing the people – and promises that God will send a good shepherd. In Ezekiel 34 God says, *“I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd”* (Ezekiel 34:22-23). This passage reveals the Messiah as one who saves his flock, tends to their needs, delivers them from their enemies, and judges between them, separating the sheep from the goats. Jesus declares in John 10 that he is this shepherd.

God describes his chosen shepherd as David. We’ve already looked at how the life of Jesus lines up with David in fulfillment of God’s plan to have a shepherd like David over Israel. We know from David’s life that he was a warrior who trained for battle by killing lions and bears to protect his sheep. Because Jesus demonstrated God’s gentleness and restraint, we don’t always consider the fierceness of his protective love, but Jesus is a protective shepherd like David. When we read the end-time passages that prophesy God’s judgment and destruction, we must always read them through the lens of a shepherd who has found wolves among his sheep that are trying to kill his flock. The shepherd shows up with God’s arm of vengeance to rid the flock of the wolves and protect the sheep out of his love for them.

“Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south, ¹⁵ and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones. They will drink and roar as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar. ¹⁶ The LORD their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock” (Zechariah 9:14-16). Just like David killed Goliath with slingstones, when Jesus returns Israel’s enemies will be destroyed “with slingstones” as the Good Shepherd rescues his flock.

Isaiah 40 describes the Messiah as he who *“tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young* (Isaiah 40:11). In Matthew 11:28, when Jesus says, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,”* the offer of soul rest points to Jesus’ nature as the gentle shepherd of Isaiah 40 and Psalm 23 who makes us lie down in green pastures, leads us beside still waters, and refreshes our souls. God reveals his plan to be Israel’s Shepherd in Ezekiel 34:15-16. *“I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.”* In contrast to the bad shepherds of Israel who neglected the sheep, Jesus is the gentle shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to go after the one who has wandered off (Matthew 18:12).

In John 10:11-13 Jesus says, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”* In Zechariah 10:3 God rebukes the hired hands, Israel’s religious leaders, saying *“My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock.”*

In Matthew 23 Jesus repeatedly says, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!”* unleashing a tirade of accusations against them in fulfillment of God’s command to the Son of Man to prophesy against them. *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?’³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals”* (Ezekiel 34:2-5).

The ultimate scattering of the sheep came when Jesus, God’s chosen Shepherd, was struck down by Israel’s religious leaders. *“Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me! declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones”* (Zechariah 13:7). It was God’s will for his shepherd to be struck down so he could expand his flock. As Jesus declared in John 10:15-18, *“I lay down my life for the sheep.¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”* God had declared through Zechariah that his shepherd would be struck down, but Jesus completes the picture by revealing God’s purpose to bring more sheep into the flock – the Gentiles – and raise Jesus back up.

In Zechariah 13:8-9, God reveals the purpose in scattering the sheep. *“In the whole land,’ declares the LORD, ‘two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.⁹ This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”* Jewish sources estimate that about a third of the Jewish population perished during the Roman siege that destroyed the temple in 70 AD, and another third were taken into slavery, leaving one-third that God would “put into the fire.” For the past nearly 2000 years, the scattered Jews have endured the fire of persecution. However, God promised to regather his sheep from the ends of the earth. The Jews have been refined and tested in the fire so that they will call on his name and say, “The Lord is our God.” At the end of the age of the Gentiles, when their time of refining and testing is complete, they will receive their Shepherd.

Meanwhile, Jesus’ death and resurrection opened the sheep pen for Gentiles to come into God’s flock. The church has also faced persecution through the centuries, but we are not like sheep without a shepherd. God still allows us to go through the fire of persecution to refine us like silver and test us like gold, but Jesus is with us in the fire and will never leave us. Jesus promises that his sheep hear his voice (John 10:27). If we listen and follow, he will guide us through the darkest valley and safely lead us home.

Response:

Personalize Psalm 23, today, by praying this to Jesus, your Good Shepherd: The LORD Jesus is my shepherd, I lack nothing. You make me lie down in green pastures, you lead me beside quiet waters, you refresh my soul. You guide me along the right paths for your name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Day 17 – The Son of Man Coming in the Clouds

Scriptures: Daniel 7:13-14, Acts 1:9-11, Matthew 16:27, 26:24, 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

The title that Jesus used most to refer to himself was Son of Man. In Matthew 26:24 Jesus says, *“The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him.”* Jesus came to fulfill all prophecy written about the Son of Man which is what we’ve been studying. Jesus said, *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Luke 9:22).* Why did Jesus, the Son of Man, have to do all those things? Today we’ll take a closer look at what this title tells us about Jesus.

When God calls Ezekiel Son of man, the word translated as man is the Hebrew word “adam.” When God named the first man Adam, that name literally meant human, mankind. To be a Son of Adam is to be a representative of the human race. God instructed Ezekiel to do certain things as his representative but also as a representative of mankind. Likewise, Jesus was commissioned to do certain things as God’s representative, but also as a representative of mankind. As a Son of Adam, the first man to sin, Jesus perfectly obeyed God, becoming the new Adam who never sinned so that all who are born of the Spirit through Jesus are the offspring of the new Adam.

“For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). We all inherited a sinful nature that leads to death from Adam and Eve, the first to sin. But now we have inherited eternal life from the new Adam. *“The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).*

Jesus fulfilled his mission as the Son of Adam to reverse the curse of sin that leads to death for all who believe in him. However, we not only inherit eternal life through the Son of Adam, Paul says in verse 49 that “we bear the image of the heavenly man.” What was impossible when we were trapped in our sinful nature becomes possible by God’s Spirit in us. We can now be bearers of the image of Jesus as we follow the Spirit’s leading and obey Jesus’ commands. The Spirit will show us a different way of reacting to the world that comes from heaven, not our flesh, and when we obey his voice, we experience transformation. This transformation becomes our testimony of Jesus as others witness the change in us.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to open the way for us to be reborn as spiritual beings “who are of heaven”? Paul says, *“I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:50).* Jesus came preaching the kingdom of heaven. To inherit a spiritual kingdom, we must be spiritual beings because the earth and everything in it will pass away so that only what is eternal remains. Jesus tells us to store up treasures in heaven because those things with eternal value – the souls we bring with us – are all that will last forever from this world. However, Jesus didn’t come to destroy the world but redeem it as the new Adam. All who are in Christ are now equipped to build with imperishable materials.

As the Son of Man, Jesus also identifies with our pain, having experienced all the things we go through in life. We’ve explored how Jesus’ sufferings qualified him to be the new David and assures us we have a sympathetic High Priest interceding for us. However, Jesus’ experiences also mirror the nation of Israel:

- Matthew 2:15 tells us Jesus' parents fled with him to Egypt because it was written in Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called my son." Like Israel, Jesus came out of Egypt.
- After 40 days of waiting for the scouts to return, the children of Israel abandoned God's plan to go into the promised land when they heard about the giants in the land. Jesus was led into the wilderness – perhaps that very same wilderness – for 40 days where he was tempted by Satan to abandon God's plan yet overcame the devil. Where Israel failed to obey, Jesus triumphed.
- When the Jews rejected God in favor of false gods, their first temple was destroyed, and they went into exile. Daniel 9:26 prophecies that *"the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary."* Jesus – God's temple – was rejected by the religious leaders, put to death, and cut off from the land. Jesus appears to have nothing – no throne or physical kingdom on earth – just as the Jews were cut off from the land in exile. He has experienced everything the Jews have as a nation.

While the title Son of Man seems to speak of his humanity, Jesus also uses it to point to his divinity. *"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done"* (Matthew 16:27). To understand how Jesus could make such a claim, we turn to the prophecy of the Son of Man in Daniel 7. *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed"* (Daniel 7:13-14).

In Daniel's vision, the Son of Man comes with the clouds of heaven. In Acts 1:9-11, Jesus *"was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!'"* For Jesus be taken up into a cloud and later emerge from a cloud points to the God of Israel who descended on Mount Sinai and spoke from a cloud. When the Son of Man returns in a cloud, he will be the visible Word who comes to Israel from the cloud.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:30-31 that all the people of the earth *"will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world – from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven."* When we see Jesus coming in the clouds, the angels will gather us to him with the blast of the trumpet. In Revelation 14:14-16, after the last trumpet has sounded, the Son of Man appears in the clouds and sends his angels to harvest the earth. *"Then I saw a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was someone like the Son of Man. He had a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ Then another angel came from the Temple and shouted to the one sitting on the cloud, 'Swing the sickle, for the time of harvest has come; the crop on earth is ripe.' ¹⁶ So the one sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the whole earth was harvested."* Paul tells us that at the last trumpet, the dead are raised, we who are alive meet Jesus in the air, and we are given new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:52). What a glorious day when the Son of Man comes!

Response:

Jesus, you are beautiful and glorious. You have overcome sin and death so that all who are in Christ are overcomers. I worship you as I wait for you to come with power and glory. Your kingdom is forever!

Day 18 – The King of Kings

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 5:1-3, Hosea 3:4-5, Romans 11, Isaiah 59, Zechariah 9

We have already established that Jesus is a King like David whose ascension to the throne follows the pattern of David, so let's take a look at how David assumed the throne. David was anointed king by the prophet Samuel while King Saul was still ruling, and he lived in exile most of that time. David was crowned king at Hebron after Saul's death, then seven years later became king all Israel. Saul's son Ish-Bosheth ruled Israel after Saul died for two years before he was murdered. David would not take the life of Saul when he had the opportunity, and he killed the men who murdered innocent Ish-Bosheth. He refused to take the kingdom by force. 2 Samuel 2:10-11 tells us that Ish-Bosheth reigned for two years over Israel and David reigned for seven years over Judah before becoming king over all Israel. So what happened during the missing five years? The Bible doesn't tell us, but it appears that Israel had no king while David patiently waited for them to crown him king, which is what finally happened.

"All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'We are your own flesh and blood.'² In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"³ When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Samuel 5:1-3).

Jesus, the Anointed One, was received as King by a small band of followers in Judea while Israel was ruled by Herod, a Hasmonean king appointed by Rome, not anointed by God. Jesus, the Anointed One, had every right to take the throne by force, but like David, he did not. Since 70 AD, when Rome destroyed Jerusalem, Israel has been in a parallel to the "missing years" between Ish-Bosheth's reign and David's with no king. Jesus is presently King over the Jews and Gentiles who have received him, but he is waiting for the tribes of Israel to come to him like they did to David and say, "You were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns as the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"

When Israel asks Jesus to be their King, he will come and reign from Jerusalem, just like David did. Hosea 3:4-5 prophesies, *"The Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods."⁵ Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days."* However, this waiting period is intentional, for it is during this waiting period that God is revealing King Jesus to the nations, as was prophesied in Isaiah 65:1. *"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'" This is the great commission of Jesus, to go to these nations and spread the gospel.*

Paul explains the purpose of this waiting period of the Jews in Romans 11. *"Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in,²⁶ and in this way all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26).* Paul assures us that unbelieving Jews *"are loved on account of the patriarchs,²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience,³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you" (Romans 11:28-31).* God will remove the veil that has blinded Israel to their King in the last days and his people will *"return and seek the LORD their God and David their king" (Hosea 3:5).*

What will cause Israel to seek their Lord and King? What God has always used in the past: war. Revelation 5:5 reveals Jesus as the Lion of Judah who is given all power and dominion over the earth. He is worthy, as the Lamb who was slain, to open the scroll that releases the final seven years prophesied in Daniel 9. When Jesus opens the scroll, he releases a rider who goes out to conquer. This is the beginning of the consolidation of power that the beast of Revelation 13 will gain through war. The angel tells Daniel, *“The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end”* (Daniel 9:26, NLT). There are many prophecies of end-times wars in Israel – in Zechariah 12 and 14, Jeremiah 30, Joel 3, Ezekiel 38, Daniel 11 – and while we know the wars in the last days are the wrath of Satan and beginning of birth pains, God allows it to set up the ultimate finale to end all wars.

Isaiah 59:15-19 reveals God’s purpose in allowing war in the last days, *“The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. ¹⁷ He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. ¹⁸ According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due. ¹⁹ From the west, people will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory.”* The whole world will fear the name of the Lord when he comes in might to rescue Israel.

In the time of trouble, Israel will cry out and Jesus, the King of Kings, will answer and rescue them. You may have noticed that Paul borrowed from Isaiah 59 the imagery of our spiritual armor. While God fought for Israel in the Old Testament, he fought with them as their helper. Their army was his arm in battle. Zechariah 9:13-16 reveals that in the last days wars God says, *“Judah is my bow, and Israel is my arrow. Jerusalem is my sword, and like a warrior, I will brandish it against the Greeks. ¹⁴ The LORD will appear above his people; his arrows will fly like lightning! The Sovereign LORD will sound the ram’s horn and attack like a whirlwind from the southern desert. ¹⁵ The LORD of Heaven’s Armies will protect his people, and they will defeat their enemies by hurling great stones. They will shout in battle as though drunk with wine. They will be filled with blood like a bowl, drenched with blood like the corners of the altar. ¹⁶ On that day the LORD their God will rescue his people, just as a shepherd rescues his sheep. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.”* Jesus shows up in glory to make Israel a jewel in his crown.

Jesus came as a humble servant riding on a donkey into Jerusalem to offer his life as the Passover Lamb. But he will appear in glory when he returns as the rider on a white horse in Revelation 19 who comes to save his people. *“Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt. ¹⁰ I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations. His realm will stretch from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth”* (Zechariah 9:9-10). Jesus shows up as King of Kings to destroy the dominion of wicked rulers in the heavens and on earth. He makes Israel mighty in battle then puts an end to war. He brings peace to the nations by ruling them with an iron rod.

Response:

“The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Psalm 98:2-4).

Day 19 – The Lord of Heaven’s Armies

Scriptures: Daniel 2, Isaiah 14, 24, Habakkuk 3, Revelation 12, 17-19

Throughout the writings of the prophets God promises that when he is done disciplining Israel, he will turn against the enemies of Israel and destroy them as the Lord Almighty or Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. He is described in Isaiah 24 as the one who comes to rid the heavens and the earth of evil. *“The earth staggers like a drunk. It trembles like a tent in a storm. It falls and will not rise again, for the guilt of its rebellion is very heavy. ²¹ In that day the LORD will punish the gods in the heavens and the proud rulers of the nations on earth. ²² They will be rounded up and put in prison. They will be shut up in prison and will finally be punished. ²³ Then the glory of the moon will wane, and the brightness of the sun will fade, for the LORD of Heaven’s Armies will rule on Mount Zion. He will rule in great glory in Jerusalem, in the sight of all the leaders of his people”* (Isaiah 24:20-23, NLT). To understand what Jesus does as the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, it’s important to know who his enemies are: the gods in the heavens and proud rulers of the nations. Jesus will come to rescue his bride from their persecution in the last days.

In Isaiah 14 God is prophesying against Babylon after the Lord has given Israel *“rest from sorrow and fear”* (v. 3). This has not happened yet, but will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. *“This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: ‘I, myself, have risen against Babylon! I will destroy its children and its children’s children,’ says the LORD”* (Isaiah 14:22). Isaiah isn’t just prophesying against ancient Babylon but the Mystery Babylon to come of Revelation 17-19. It is the foot of the statue of Daniel 2 that began with ancient Babylon and has carried the prideful, idolatrous spirit of Babylon down through the centuries through various empires. It is this spirit or principality that the Rock, Jesus, destroys when he comes to set up his eternal kingdom. John sees it as a beast backed by Satan who in Revelation 12 is thrown down to the earth, like the principality of Babylon described in Isaiah 14:12.

“How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. ¹³ For you said to yourself, ‘I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. ¹⁴ I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.’ ¹⁵ Instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead, down to its lowest depths. ¹⁶ Everyone there will stare at you and ask, ‘Can this be the one who shook the earth and made the kingdoms of the world tremble? ¹⁷ Is this the one who destroyed the world and made it into a wasteland? Is this the king who demolished the world’s greatest cities and had no mercy on his prisoners?’” (Isaiah 14:12-17).

The beast of Revelation 13 will try to be worshipped “like the Most High” (v. 14). He will “destroy the world,” making it “into a wasteland” (v. 17). The cosmic battle between God and the usurper, Satan, will be played out on the earth as war in the last days. As the clock ticks ever closer to this time, we must remember that *“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 6:12). Jesus, the Lord of Heavens Armies, will return to destroy these powers. However, Revelation reveals there are two principalities who wage war against God’s people that God will destroy: the beast and prostitute of Babylon. One represents the pride of man, the other all immorality and idolatry. In a brilliant twist, God will use one to destroy the other.

Revelation 17 reveals that the beast and prostitute rise to power together. John says the prostitute is called *“‘Babylon the Great, Mother of All Prostitutes and Obscenities in the World.’ ⁶ I could see that she*

was drunk—drunk with the blood of God’s holy people who were witnesses for Jesus” (Revelation 17:5-6). “The kings of the world have committed adultery with her, and the people who belong to this world have been made drunk by the wine of her immorality” (Revelation 17:2). Jesus warned that the rampant sin and immorality in the last days would lead to martyrdom (Matthew 24:9-12). At the same time, Revelation 12:13 tells us that Satan, the accuser, is behind the persecution of Jews and believers in the last days when he gets thrown out of heaven and goes after the “woman who bore the child,” the nation of Israel that brought forth Jesus. Revelation 12:12-16 shows us that God fights for Israel and thwarts his plans. “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus” (Revelation 12:12-17). He does this through the beast of Revelation 13 who gets 10 kings to agree to give him power and wage war against the saints. Revelation 13:5 says the beast is given authority for 42 months. Why?

“The waters where the prostitute is ruling represent masses of people of every nation and language. ¹⁶ The scarlet beast and his ten horns all hate the prostitute. They will strip her naked, eat her flesh, and burn her remains with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put a plan into their minds, a plan that will carry out his purposes. They will agree to give their authority to the scarlet beast, and so the words of God will be fulfilled. ¹⁸ And this woman you saw in your vision represents the great city that rules over the kings of the world” (Revelation 17:15-18). Just as God used Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem, God is going to use the beast/antichrist’s army to destroy Babylon. “All the nations have fallen because of the wine of her passionate immorality. The kings of the world have committed adultery with her. Because of her desires for extravagant luxury, the merchants of the world have grown rich” (Revelation 18:3). The devil has always had 2 strategies: wipe out God’s people through war or tempt them to sin and turn away from God. Thus, God warns his people of Babylon, “Come away from her, my people. Do not take part in her sins or you will be punished with her” (Revelation 18:4).

In Habakkuk’s vision of Jesus’ coming he says, “You marched across the land in anger and trampled the nations in your fury. ¹³ You went out to rescue your chosen people, to save your anointed ones. You crushed the heads of the wicked and stripped their bones from head to toe. ¹⁴ With his own weapons, you destroyed the chief of those who rushed out like a whirlwind, thinking Israel would be easy prey” (Habakkuk 3:12-14). When he’s done using the beast’s army to destroy the enemies of righteousness, Jesus will come and destroy the beast and his army. “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11-16).

Though Isaiah 24 says the earth will be “emptied and looted” with only a remnant remaining, that remnant is the redeemed of the Lord. “But all who are left shout and sing for joy” (Isaiah 24:14).

Response:

Let’s join with those who triumph over the beast and sing to the Lamb, “Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear you Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy” (Revelation 15:3-4).

Day 20 – The One Who Regathers the 12 Tribes

Scriptures: Ezekiel 37:23-27, Isaiah 11:11-16, Isaiah 14:1-2, Joel 2, Revelation 10:6-7; 11:15-18

One of the activities of the Shepherd of Israel is to gather them from the ends of the earth in the last days. *“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. ²⁴ My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. ²⁵ They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever”* (Ezekiel 37:21-22, 24-26).

Isaiah 11:11 says, *“In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people.”* The Jews were brought back from exile in Babylon, but this is a second return from exile. *“He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth”* (Isaiah 11:12). Isaiah 14:1-2 says, *“The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Foreigners will join them and unite with the descendants of Jacob. ² Nations will take them and bring them to their own place.”* The word “nations” is plural. While Cyrus sent the Jews back to Israel after Babylonian captivity, it took the United Nations after World War 2 to settle Israel in their own land. The regathering of the Jews has begun with the recreation of the nation of Israel, but reuniting the scattered lost tribes will be accomplished by Jesus.

Israel used the sounding of the trumpet or shofar (ram’s horn) to gather the people together for holy days and for war. The fall festivals begin with the Festival of Trumpets, during which the shofar is sounded 100 times. Since the Jewish day begins at sunset, the festival begins on one solar calendar day and concludes at sunset of the next day. The trumpet is sounded to gather the nation together for the 10 Days of Awe and repentance before the Day of Atonement. Just as there is a dual purpose in sounding the trumpet to gather for both holy convocations and for war, in Revelation we see trumpets sound in the last days to announce the coming of Jesus, the gathering of God’s children from the ends of the earth and heaven, and a final call to repent before the final judgment.

Before the return of the Son of Man in Revelation 14, Revelation 8-11 reveal that seven trumpets are sounded in heaven that release judgments on the earth. We see the sounding of the trumpet for war in Joel 2:1, *“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill.”* Joel then describes a vast, fierce army that parallels the description of the army of the sixth trumpet in Revelation 9. *“The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?”* (Joel 2:11). However, in the next verse we see why God releases this army (which I believe is the army God sends to destroy the end-times Babylon). It is a warning to turn back to the Lord in repentance.

“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ ¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and

compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. ¹⁴ *Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.* ¹⁵ *Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly” (Joel 2:12-14).* When God sounds the trumpet for war, if we respond by sounding the trumpet to call a fast and repent, the Lord’s desire is to relent from sending calamity. God is not willing that any perish, but all be saved.

God will sound six warning trumpets. Revelation 10:6 says that when the seventh angel blows his trumpet there will be *“no more delay.”* The first six trumpets are sounded to delay judgment and give people time to repent, just like the time between the Festival of Trumpets and Day of Atonement is a time of awe and repentance. The trumpets announce judgments both against Babylon and those who took the mark of the beast, which will restore the fear of the Lord and awe of him. Before the trumpets are sounded, God’s people are marked with his seal to protect them from judgment, just like Israel was protected from the last seven plagues on Egypt. All twelve tribes are marked (Revelation 7). At the end of the 6th trumpet, Revelation 9 says, *“The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.* ²¹ *Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”*

Like the seven days the Israelites marched around Jericho, sounding the trumpets as a warning of their impending invasion, God will sound seven trumpets to call the world to repentance. Just as the ground beneath Jericho shook as the Israelites marched around it, the sound of each trumpet in heaven releases a corresponding activity on earth meant to shake the earth’s inhabitants out of their complacency and begin to reckon with their eternal destiny. On the seventh day, the Israelites marched around Jericho seven times blowing seven trumpets and shouting, causing the walls of the city to collapse so they could invade. *“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever’” (Revelation 11:15).* As the angel tells John in Revelation 10:7, *“When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as he announced it to his servants the prophets.”* We have been studying that very plan.

At the last trumpet, after delaying judgment so people can repent and be saved, Jesus appears in the clouds and sends out his angels to gather his chosen ones from the ends of the earth and heaven (Matthew 24:30-31). *“It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).* The remaining remnant of Israel and Judah will be gathered along with believers everywhere into one flock. Jesus will then go out to trample his enemies in the winepress of God’s wrath, fulfilling all God’s promises to Israel to avenge them by destroying their enemies (Isaiah 63). Jesus will sit down at the wedding supper of the Lamb with his bride (Revelation 19:7). God’s people will be rewarded and reign with him a thousand years in his Kingdom (Revelation 20). Every promise Jesus made to his disciples to reward them in his kingdom will come to pass. The earth will be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb who reigns forever. Hallelujah!

Response:

Jesus, we worship you as the coming King who will gather Israel and the rest of your flock together on the last day, ushering in your kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace. Worthy are you of all praise!

Day 21 – The Scapegoat Who Makes Atonement

Scriptures: Zechariah 3, Leviticus 16, Colossians 2:12-15, Revelation 12:7-11

Zechariah 3 records a vision that gives us a window into the spiritual realm. *“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ²The LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?’ ³Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you”* (Zechariah 3:4).

The name Satan means adversary or accuser. We know from Job 1 and Revelation 12 that Satan is our adversary who accuses us before God day and night. Why? Perhaps because he led a rebellion against God in heaven and will be punished, he wants to take all of God’s children with him to hell, so he accuses us like a prosecutor in God’s courtroom. This went on for centuries until God did something unexpected. He took away our sin and dressed us in the righteousness of Jesus, silencing the accuser.

“Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. ⁹See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day” (Zechariah 3:8-9). We know that Jesus is God’s servant, the Branch. We know that he is the Rock and Cornerstone, but why does the stone have seven eyes? In Revelation 5:6 Jesus appears as the Lamb who was slain. *“The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”* Jesus is the Spirit-filled stone set in front of Joshua, who represents things to come, specifically God’s promise to remove sin in a single day.

Every year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would offer sacrifices to cleanse the people and the tabernacle of sin from the previous year. It was an annual sacrifice during which God forgave the sin of the nation. But in Zechariah 3 God says he will not just forgive but remove the sin of the land in a single day. Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for Israel and for the whole world as the *“Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). In fulfillment of Psalm 103:12, *“He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west”* (NLT). How does Jesus remove our sins? By fulfilling the scapegoat requirement of Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur, two identical goats were brought before the high priest. One goat was sacrificed to God as a sin offering and the other goat was driven into the wilderness as the scapegoat. The high priest laid his hands on the scapegoat, confessing all the sins of the people over it, transferring to it the sins of the people. In Jerusalem, the goat was driven out the eastern gate to the wilderness where it was pushed off a cliff to its death, thus carrying the peoples’ sins to the grave. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming scapegoat on whom God would transfer our sins, thus removing them from us. *“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:4-6). Just as the high priest confessed the sins of the people while laying his hands on the goat to transfer them, God laid on Jesus every sin that would ever be confessed in a spirit of repentance.

1 John 1:9 promises us, *"If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."* When we confess our wrongdoing, God immediately transfers our sin to Jesus who then removes it from us, cleansing us from all wickedness. How do we know we are made clean? The Jews recorded in the Mishnah a ritual of wrapping scarlet thread around the horns of the scapegoat and handles of the temple. When the goat reached the cliff, the thread was tied to a stake and the goat pushed off a cliff to its death. If the thread turned white, God had forgiven the sins of the people. For Isaiah 1:18 promises, *"Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool."* Every year the scarlet thread on the temple turned white except the last 40 years of the temple because Jesus had fulfilled this sacrifice.

How are our sins removed? The scapegoat was driven off a cliff and descended to the desert below, just as Jesus descended to hell carrying all our sins. He took our sins to the grave so that our sins could be buried in the grave with him. Through water baptism, we symbolically join him in death to sin as we go down under the water, washing away our impurity. *"For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. ¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross"* (Colossians 2:12-14, NLT).

This brings us back to the courtroom in Zechariah 3, where God clothes Joshua the High Priest and rebukes Satan for accusing him. When Jesus entered heaven with his blood that was sacrificed on our behalf, he cleansed God's courtroom in heaven just like the High Priest on Yom Kippur would sprinkle the blood on the atonement cover of the ark of the covenant, called the mercy seat. Jesus became our Advocate in heaven and gave us the Holy Spirit as our Advocate, a legal term meaning legal Counselor (John 14:26). He is our defense attorney who helps us obey God's laws. God's courtroom is also filled with his witnesses who have authority to judge (Revelation 20:4). By removing our sin, Jesus has stripped Satan of all arguments against us, for God chose us in Christ *"to be holy and blameless in his sight"* (Ephesians 1:4). God clothes us in Jesus' righteousness and tells the accuser, "Case dismissed."

"Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:14-15). This changes how we live, for *"there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). When the accuser tries to shame us with our past, we point to Jesus and declare, "I'm now clean." As our testimony of the power of the blood of Jesus to wash away our sins spreads throughout the earth, the accuser eventually gets thrown out of God's heavenly courtroom. *"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹ They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death'"* (Revelation 12:10-11). As we spread the good news of salvation, Jesus' victory over the accuser becomes ours.

Response:

Thank you, Father, for providing a sacrifice to make me clean and for forgiving me. I transfer all my sins to Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for removing my sins, rebuking my accuser, and setting me free from shame.

Day 22 – The Fountain of Living Water

Scriptures: John 7:37-39, Isaiah 12:3, Zechariah 12:9-10, 13:1, 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, Zechariah 14

Zechariah spoke of a coming day when God would redeem Jerusalem and send his chosen King who is also High Priest over Israel. *“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zechariah 13:1).* Jesus revealed at the Festival of Tabernacles (also called Festival of Shelters, Booths or Sukkot) that he is that fountain, once again pointing people to the scriptures that prophesied about him.

“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:37-39). Why is it significant that Jesus said this on the last day of the festival? The climax of the festival is the water ceremony which entails bringing spring water (called living water) from the Pool of Siloam and pouring it onto the altar as a way of imploring God to send the rain, since this also was the beginning of the rainy season in Israel.

As part of the water pouring ceremony, Isaiah 12:3 is quoted: *“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”* In Hebrew, the word for salvation is “yeshua.” Jesus’ name in Hebrew is Yeshua. Every time you see the word salvation in the Old Testament, you can insert the name Jesus. So as the water is poured out to God while they ask him to send water, Jesus announces that he, Yeshua, is the well from which living water is drawn. All who drink the living water that comes from him will be filled with a river of living water. This water is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, the Rock, is the source of the living water of the Holy Spirit just like the children of Israel drank water from the rock in the desert. The Apostle Paul tells us that this rock foreshadowed Jesus. *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).*

The fountain of living water was always with Israel. Exodus 17 tells us that when there was no water in the desert, God told Moses to strike a rock and water gushed out for the people to drink. When Jesus was crucified, *“one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (John 19:34).* When the Rock was struck, water flowed out, pointing yet again to Jesus as the fountain of living water. In Zechariah 12:10 God says, *“They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”* Though the people mourned over the death of God’s only Son, their mourning was turned to joy at his resurrection. As John 7 tells us, the living water of the Spirit could not be poured out until Jesus had been pierced, resurrected, and glorified.

Jesus is the Rock who provides the fountain of living water, the Holy Spirit. Because of his sacrifice, all who believe in him can now be filled with the living water of the Spirit. He came to not only provide a way for us to be with the Father in heaven but be filled with God’s presence now by the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises in the old covenant, the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises in the new covenant. Jesus promises to never leave us and so the Spirit is given to connect us

to Jesus at all times. Jesus promises to raise us from the dead, and so the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is given to us. Jesus promised that anyone who believes in him will do the same works he does, and so the Holy Spirit is sent in Acts 2 to equip believers with the gifts of the Spirit needed to continue Jesus' ministry on earth. Anyone who believes in Jesus will have the same living water that flowed out of him flowing out of them. What are the characteristics of the Spirit's river of living water?

Zechariah 14 tells us that when Jesus returns, he will stand on the Mount of Olives, causing it to split in two. *"On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter" (Zechariah 14:8).* Ezekiel sees this river of living water that will flow from the temple to the Dead Sea which is too salty for any fish to live there. *"This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹ Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live" (Ezekiel 37:8-9).*

The river of living water brings dead things back to life. The living water restores balance to what has been out of balance. It also causes us to bear fruit and bring healing. *"Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing" (Ezekiel 37:12).* While this will be a physical river when Jesus returns, what the river accomplishes is available now by the river of living water that is inside all who are a temple of the Holy Spirit. This water flows from us, enabling us to bear fruit and bring healing to our hurting world. That's why Jesus told his disciples it's better for him to leave so he can send the Holy Spirit. God's plan was to release the river of the Holy Spirit to flow out of all who believe in the Rock, Jesus.

During the water ceremony in the Festival of Tabernacles the people prayed for rain, another symbol of the Holy Spirit who enables the harvest. *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11).* We pray for the Holy Spirit like we pray for rain because the Spirit teaches us truth and reminds us of what Jesus, the Word, has said. It is the rain of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes God's will on the earth through us.

The Festival of Tabernacles is the final festival that takes place at the final harvest. It will be fulfilled when Jesus comes. Zechariah 14:16-17 tells us *"Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. ¹⁷ If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain."* The Festival of Tabernacles will be celebrated forever because it celebrates the final harvest and reminds us that God came to dwell with us while we were temporary wanderers in this world, just as God dwelled with the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years while they lived in temporary shelters. It also reminds us that every good gift – including rain and the Holy Spirit – comes from above. May we believe and receive the living water that cleanses and purifies.

Response:

Thank you, Jesus, for giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Fill us with this river of life so that we bring life to the world around us. Thank you for your presence in this life and the eternal life to come.

Day 23 – The Shepherd Who Will Gather and Separate the Sheep

Scriptures: Micah 5:2-5, Ezekiel 34:11-23, Matthew 25:31-46, Joel 3:2

We've already looked at how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is a protector like David yet is also a gentle shepherd who watches over his sheep. Jesus laid down his life for his sheep to bring more into his flock, but then the sheep of Israel were scattered. Micah 5 tells us that Israel's shepherd will come when the ruler from ancient times is born in Bethlehem and Israel has been regathered. *"Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth" (Micah 5:3-4).* Verse three has been divided by many centuries. The child was born, but now we wait for Jesus' brothers – the scattered Jews – to "return to join the Israelites."

Today we're going to look at the future activities of the Good Shepherd that will be fulfilled in Jesus' second coming. The first is that he will regather the scattered sheep of Israel. *"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search and find my sheep. ¹² I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. ¹³ I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live" (Ezekiel 34:11-13).* This regathering began after the Holocaust when the nations of the world agreed to put the Jews back into the land of Israel in 1948. It continues today. The persecution that once drove the people out of the land has become the persecution around the world that is now driving them back home. Antisemitism is definitely evil, but God takes what the enemy meant for evil and uses it to move his flock where he wants them to be, "back home to their own land of Israel."

Ezekiel tells us that after the gathering, which is completed in the final harvest, the Shepherd will separate the animals and judge the unruly ones. *"And as for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to his people: I will judge between one animal of the flock and another, separating the sheep from the goats. ¹⁸ Isn't it enough for you to keep the best of the pastures for yourselves? Must you also trample down the rest? Isn't it enough for you to drink clear water for yourselves? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? ¹⁹ Why must my flock eat what you have trampled down and drink water you have fouled? ²⁰ Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will surely judge between the fat sheep and the scrawny sheep. ²¹ For you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded my sick and hungry flock until you scattered them to distant lands. ²² So I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one animal of the flock and another. ²³ And I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them" (Ezekiel 34:17-23).*

God's plan is to rescue his abused flock and deal with their abusers when Jesus comes as God's Shepherd. Ezekiel tells us the Shepherd will separate the sheep from the goats. Jesus echoes this same passage in Matthew 25 and clarifies who the sheep and the goats are. If you've only heard this parable in a religious context, as an encouragement to be kind to the poor, I invite you to take off that lens and read it in the context of the time frame Jesus gave for this parable, the time of his return as the Shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats. *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32).* The people being separated are the nations who remain after the rapture of the church.

Right before telling this parable, Jesus told his disciples the events that would lead up to his return. *“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other”* (Matthew 24:30-31). When Jesus appears, he sends out his angels to gather his sheep and bring them into the new Jerusalem, the place he went ahead to prepare for us. This is the gathering of the church. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of the gathering of the nations. After the church is gathered to God’s kingdom, Jesus sits down on his throne to judge the nations that remain, to decide who gets to come into the kingdom. The determining factor will be how they treated his flock.

“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’⁴⁰ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’” (Matthew 25:32-40).

Everyone who survives the final plagues will be judged according to how they treated Jesus’ brothers and sisters, the Jews. *“I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel”* (Joel 3:2). In Mathew 12:49 Jesus points to his disciples and says, *“These are my mother and brothers,”* expanding the definition of brothers and sisters to mean those who listen to him and follow him. The deciding factor in who gets to enter the kingdom will be if people were kind to God’s flock and helped care for them.

Jesus taught this same principle to his disciples when he said, *“Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the Father who sent me.⁴¹ If you receive a prophet as one who speaks for God, you will be given the same reward as a prophet. And if you receive righteous people because of their righteousness, you will be given a reward like theirs.⁴² And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded”* (Matthew 10:40-42).

Whatever people did “for one of the least of these brothers and sisters” of Jesus, they did for him, demonstrating that they are a sheep who hears Jesus’ voice. Because the last days will be so difficult, God will prompt nonbelievers to help his flock. Those who respond to his voice, though they didn’t know who was speaking to them, will demonstrate that they are a sheep who can be led by him and allowed to enter his kingdom. Conversely, the ones who don’t listen to the Shepherd are goats. The rest of the parable goes on to judge goats who refused to help God’s sheep in need. We know that the antichrist and those who take the mark of the beast will be judged, but those who do not take the mark and are not Christians will be separated as either sheep or goats. Jesus is a Good Shepherd and just Judge!

Response:

Jesus, I thank you for not only being a Good Shepherd who takes care of my needs but one who will reward those who help you take care of me. Your grace and goodness astound me. You are a just Judge.

Day 24 – The Prince of Peace

Scriptures: Zechariah 2:10-11, Isaiah 33:22-24, Isaiah 65:17-25, Micah 4:3-4, Revelation 20, Isaiah 9:6-7

David records his vision of Jesus, the coming King who is God in Psalm 68:24-26, *“Your procession, God, has come into view, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. ²⁵In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the young women playing the timbrels. ²⁶Praise God in the great congregation; praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel. ²⁷There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah’s princes, and there the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali.”* The glory of the coming King is also the restoration of the glory of all Israel. Centuries later, Ezekiel also saw a vision of God’s glory returning to the sanctuary.

“The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. ⁵Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ⁶While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. ⁷He said: ‘Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever’” (Ezekiel 43:4-7). God’s temple is Jesus’ throne. For centuries, the temple of God has been the people of God, but the spiritual kingdom will once again be a physical kingdom when Jesus returns. *“Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the LORD. ¹¹“Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you” (Zechariah 2:10-11).*

“In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. ³Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. ⁴The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. ⁵Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over everything the glory will be a canopy. ⁶It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain” (Isaiah 4:2-6). The Son of Man will bring with him the same glory cloud and fire that led Israel in the wilderness, which is why we will celebrate the Festival of Shelters. The word “canopy” is chuppah, what a Jewish bride and groom are married under. God’s glory is the Bridegroom’s wedding chuppah.

Paul tells us that after the resurrection, *“the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. ²⁵For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).* This may not fit some people’s expectations of the return of Christ. How is it that Christ will reign until his enemies are humbled beneath his feet? Revelation 20 tells us that after the resurrection of the righteous, Jesus will reign on the earth a thousand years. *“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore” (Revelation 20:7-8).*

After this war, the devil is thrown into the lake of fire, the rest of the dead are resurrected and judged, and the new heaven and earth come down. Revelation 21:4 tells us at this time, *“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* When talking about Jesus’ return, we usually skip over the millennial reign of Christ and go right to this passage. But the millennial reign serves a purpose. It is during these thousand years that God redeems his original plan

for the earth which we saw in Genesis and redeems his original plan to reign from Jerusalem with those who faithfully followed Jesus during their lifetime, serving as a kingdom of priests who reign with him.

Jesus promises the overcoming church, *"To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations –²⁷ that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father"* (Revelation 2:26-27). As we saw previously, there will be survivors from the nations when Jesus returns. Those who were kind to Jews and Christians will remain on the earth, living out their normal lifespan, having children and continuing to live with free will during the millennial reign of Christ. The devil is bound for a thousand years so he can't deceive the nations, but those who remain will still need to learn to obey Christ. If they don't, there will be consequences, like the withholding of rain mentioned in Zechariah 14.

Micah 4:3 says that the coming King *"will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."* Jesus will reign as the Prince of Peace because he settles disputes, cleanses the earth of all wickedness, and rules with righteousness. Isaiah 33:22 describes Jerusalem under the reign of the King as a peaceful abode, *"For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us."*

"Be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.²⁰ Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed" (Isaiah 65:18-20). Isaiah 33:24 says that during the reign of the King, *"No one living in Zion will say, 'I am ill'; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven."* People will live long lives, like they did in the early chapters of Genesis, without sickness because Jesus, the Healer, reigns. After the millennial reign, the rest of the dead are resurrected to judgment and death is done away with forever (Revelation 20:11-15).

Isaiah 65:21-24 tells us that the curse that came upon the earth because of sin will be lifted so that our labor will no longer be in vain. *"They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.²³ They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."* Jesus' kingdom is not a retirement home; it's like the garden of Eden which Adam and Eve were told to cultivate. We will enjoy the work of our hands and be helped by God. Those who were faithful with little in this life will be given more to steward (Matthew 25:23). Isaiah 65:25 tells us that that all creation is redeemed, even the animals who will no longer prey on each other. *"The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain."* All will be made new.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:6-7). O Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!