



THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL FROM GENESIS TO JESUS



ANDREW HALL

THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES READINGS



- December 1** *Genesis 1:1-2:3; John 1:1-18*
- December 2** *Genesis 3; Revelation 12:1-12*
- December 3** *Genesis 6:5-7:24; Romans 6:1-4*
- December 4** *Genesis 11:1-9; 12:1-8; Matthew 2:1-12*
- December 5** *Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:8-19; Romans 8:31-32*
- December 6** *Genesis 49:8-12; Romans 1:1-16*
- December 7** *Exodus 1:1-2:20; 2:23-25; Matthew 2:1-18*
- December 8** *Exodus 3; Matthew 11:28-29*
- December 9** *Exodus 12:1-32, 14:1-31; Luke 2:8-20*
- December 10** *Exodus 20; Psalm 19; Romans 8:1-4*
- December 11** *Exodus 40; John 1:14*
- December 12** *Numbers 13-14; Luke 3:21-4:13*
- December 13** *Numbers 20:2-13; Psalm 95; Hebrews 3:1-4:11*
- December 14** *Joshua 6; Hebrews 4:1-11*
- December 15** *Judges 1:27-36; 2:1-23; Luke 1:46-55*
- December 16** *1 Samuel 2:12-3:21; 1 John 1:1-4*
- December 17** *1 Samuel 10; 16:1-13; Luke 4:1-21*
- December 18** *2 Samuel 7; Luke 1:26-33; 2:8-14*
- December 19** *1 Kings 12; Colossians 1:15-20*
- December 20** *2 Kings 17; Jonah 1 and 4; Romans 11:11-12*
- December 21** *Zephaniah 1; 2 Kings 24-25; Matthew 1:12-16*
- December 22** *Jeremiah 31:31-32:44; Hebrews 8; 11:10,16*
- December 23** *Ezra 1; Nehemiah 1; John 14:1-4*
- December 24** *Matthew 1:1-17*

During December 2020, the constant refrain I heard from people was one of tiredness. It had already been 9 months of social distancing, mask wearing, cautiousness, and the "two weeks to flatten the curve" now felt endless. If people weren't exasperated by the pandemic, economic uncertainty and mental health challenges were growing.

In September, I had begun the most ambitious preaching series I had ever undertaken – to trace the main themes of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. One thing that struck me was the theme of rest. From the opening moments of creation to the consummation of all things, the Bible was filled with references and promises of something so soul satisfying that it would give peace to body and soul. Mapping out the chapters and writing a short devotional for each day, I was thrilled by the reminders of Scripture – there is something lasting and eternal that sustains us during the best and worst of times.

To make the most of these Advent devotionals, plan to take 10 minutes from December 1-24. Pick a time and spot so that in the hustle and bustle of the season you can slow down and take time to be with the Lord in his Word. Pray that the Lord will give your soul rest. Each devotional takes a chapter or two from the Bible and then gives a daily reflection. Some days the Bible passages are longer; other days they are shorter. If you can only read one thing, read the Old Testament passage. Every devotional makes the connection to the coming Christ that was longed for from the beginning and how the coming of Christ brings rest to our souls. Each day ends with a Christmas carol or poem to help you worship the Lord.

I'm always grateful for Amy Nelham, the administrative assistant at CBC Ilderton, who brings her creative talents to this project. She endured my picky requests and sharpened this devotional so that what you have would be a blessing to you. She worked long and hard with me and the end result is better because of her.

But most of all, I'm grateful to the Lord, the one who bears our burdens and gives us rest for our weary souls. May his word of grace give you strength and hope this Advent season! And may you be able to say with David, "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken" (Ps. 62:1).

Andrew Hall

November 2021

December 1st

READ GENESIS 1:1-2:3; JOHN 1:1-18



Every great book begins with a great line. The Bible is no different: “In the beginning...” These words take us all the way back to the very beginning, before time began. In the beginning, when there was emptiness, void, nothing, God spoke. “Let there be light!”

Throughout Genesis 1, we hear this refrain repeated: “And God said....” God speaks, and there is. Life flourishes and explodes onto the scene.

But what is the point of Genesis 1? So often, people approach Genesis 1 ready to try and figure out the science behind the creation of the world. But Genesis 1 is doing something more profound than answering science questions. At the very beginning, God is speaking and saying, “Let there be light!” But there is something odd about the light of Genesis 1:3 – there is no sun or stars shining light. Those will be created on day four (Gen. 1:14–19). So where must this light come from?

All things that are created come from the very mouth of God. He speaks, and there is. So it would be logical to assume that the light at the beginning of creation is the light of God himself. It is as though God is saying, “Let there be a revelation of me!”

When John begins his gospel, he also starts with the very beginning: “In the beginning was the Word.” The voice of God speaking, that Word that is light itself, the light that reveals who God is to humanity (John 1:4). God is making himself known!

The Bible is not primarily a book about rules so you can live a good life, nor is it a collection of stories to inspire you. The Bible is God’s revelation of himself. But we are so weak to comprehend God that God made himself flesh and blood so that we might know him.

Before we think that God is narcissistic, we get a clear indication as to why God makes himself known. At the end of his creative work, God rests. He ceases from his work. And his rest is an invitation to humanity to know him, to walk with him, and to enjoy him forever.

In a weary world, in the busyness of this time of year, isn’t it good to know that God’s goal of creation is for you to know him and rest in his presence? His call is to you: “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). God’s creative work is an invitation to rest. So come to

him this season with your burdens and find the rest he gives to your weary soul.



Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending He
Of the things that are, that have been,
And the future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!

~ Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, "Of the Father's Love Begotten"

December 2nd

READ GENESIS 3; REVELATION 12:1-12



There's a weariness in the world. Ask someone how they are doing and you'll probably hear someone say, "Oh, I'm so busy!" Rushing from work to activities, there seems to be no end to the restlessness. And yet, for all the busyness, people still are longing for rest for the soul. The promise of rest is just out of our grasp.

When God created humanity, he had given them the promise of entering his rest (see Hebrews 4). Creating for six days and resting on the seventh, the invitation for humanity to enter the Sabbath rest was on offer. But the temptation to find rest apart from God only took moments to slither into God's garden dwelling. The serpent appealed to the desires of the first humans – that they could find satisfaction not in God's Word spoken to them, but in their striving and grasping for it apart from God himself.

When God came to walk with his people, he did not find them ready to enjoy his creative work, but discovered they were hiding from him. Ashamed, disgraced, and full of guilt, humanity had sought for the rest of God without God himself. The result was disastrous – God pronounced a curse. Humanity would be exiled from the resting place of God.

Thankfully, God promised a way to find rest again. From Adam's line would come a serpent crusher – someone who would strike the head of the deceptive serpent who had led the first humans astray (Gen. 3:15); and this serpent crusher would restore the rest humanity was looking for.

When we arrive at the end of the Bible, John has a vision of a woman giving birth to a child. And at the moment of delivery, the dragon is ready to devour the baby. But at the last minute, the child is snatched up to God (Rev. 12:7) and war breaks out. John tells us that the dragon is "that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:8). And while the dragon wages war against the woman (who represents the people of God), we know that the child born in Bethlehem was taken to the Hill of the Skull. There, on a cross, the child of Bethlehem was crucified. But this was only the bruising of his heel. For the promised child of Adam had come to crush the skull of the serpent by rising again and giving power to all those who would follow him.

The weariness of a broken world exists, and we feel it now. But the promise is that rest has been won for us by the child who defeated the serpent. And he gives you the power to carry on each day, for "the God of peace will soon crush

Satan underneath your feet" (Rom. 16:20)!



Come, Desire of nations, come!
Fix in us Thy humble home:
Rise, the woman's conqu'ring seed,
Bruise in us the serpent's head;
Adam's likeness now efface,
Stamp Thine image in its place:
Final Adam from above,
Reinstate us in Thy love.*

~ Charles Wesley, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!"

December 3rd

READ GENESIS 6:5-7:24; ROMANS 6:1-4



One of the most terrifying experiences any camper can face is a ferocious storm rolling across the skyline, thunder rattling across a large body of water. The closer the storm, the more the thunder rumbling in your bones.

In the days of Noah, the whole world was overtaken by a dark, churning flood of judgment. With evil overflowing from the hearts of humanity, God would not tolerate the multiplication of wickedness. Forty days of torrential rain. The sweeping waters of judgment. Only Noah and his family were spared the punishment of sin, passing through the turbulent waters through the ark and then entering into the new creation God had prepared for Noah and his family.

The threat of judgment terrifies people. Hearing how God deals with evil can cause people to dismiss God as a malevolent or tyrannical God. That God would wash the earth clean in the days of Noah can leave us wondering how we could ever stand the fierce wrath of a holy and perfect God. Thankfully, there is away.

When Noah came out of the ark, God had placed his bow in the sky. It was as though the warrior God was setting down his weapon of war and saying, "No longer will I inflict judgment; rather, if you hide yourself in the refuge of my ark, I'll take the blow of wrath."

When Mark opens his gospel account, he doesn't begin with Jesus' birth. He fast forwards the scene to the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan river. Jesus is baptized with the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 1:4). Yet Jesus had never sinned (see Heb. 4:15b). Instead, he was identifying with sinners, going into the waters of judgment and rising again to show that the mercy of God is truly victorious. For this reason, Peter would say, "God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pe. 3:20-21).

Noah, whose name means 'rest', went into the ark, passed through the waters of judgment, and entered into a new creation. And all who find their refuge in Christ find that he is the ark that delivers us through the waters of judgment and brings us to the land of rest, the new creation.

So when you're feeling weary, when you feel like this world is full of evil, don't

lose heart! Sin, sickness, sadness are all evidences that this world stands under the curse. But all who look to the child in the manger, the true ark of refuge, remember their baptism. In entering those waters, you died, rising again in the newness of life with a cleansed conscience by faith (Rom. 6:1-4; 1Pe. 3:20-21). And trust Christ's promise that there is a new day coming without sin and sorrow and sadness, but true rest for the weary soul.



Softly from His lowly manger
Jesus calls
One and all,
"You are safe from danger.
Children, from the sins that grieve you
You are freed;
All you need
I will surely give you."

December 4th

READ GENESIS 11:1-9; 12:1-8; MATTHEW 2:1-12



Christmas is an international day. Santa Claus is a Dutch version of St. Nicholas, who was a 4th century bishop from Turkey. Decorated Christmas trees are a German tradition. December 25th may have been chosen to remember Christ's birth during Roman times when the empire's mid-winter festivities were celebrated. The Christmas card was popularized by the British. Christmas brings people together!

In 2020, however, Christmas felt like we were being pulled apart. A global pandemic resulted in strong language from health officials and politicians: stay home, avoid unnecessary gatherings. Christmas of 2020 felt like we're being pulled apart and isolated, tired and alone.

When reopen Genesis 11, humans are still moving away from God, east of Eden (Gen. 11:1). While God had commanded humanity to fill the earth, they had chosen to gather together on the plains of Shinar, refusing to scatter, seeking a name for themselves (v. 4). While humans were desiring to come together in defiance of God (v. 4), God was coming down to judge human pride (v. 7). Scattering and confusing their tongues, the place was called Babel, sounding just like the babble that was coming from their mouths.

Out of these scattered people, God called a man, Abram, to be the one who would bring about the blessing to the nations. While the nations had opposed God at Babel, Abram would submit to God from Ur of the Chaldeans and go to the land God would show him. While the nations had sought to make a name for themselves, God would make Abram's name great and make him a blessing to the whole world (Gen.12:1-3).

At the first Christmas, God came down again. But instead of coming in judgment, he came down in the person of Jesus to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found, to save humanity and to bring scattered people back together. This is what happens with the Magi. Matthew tells us that these foreigners come from the east (Matt. 2:1)! While humanity had moved away from God at Babel by moving east of Eden, the Magi come from the east, returning to God who is with us ("Immanuel" Matt. 1:23). And when the Magi arrive, they do not come to make a name for themselves, but to bring gifts and bow down and worship the newborn King.

Where humanity had been divided by their pursuits of self-glory, Jesus brings people together. Jesus reverses the curse of Babel, bringing the blessing of

Abraham to the nations. And they come to his manger. And God continues to bring people together by sending his people out to be a blessing to the world by being God with us forever (Matt. 28:18-20).

Christmas is the season designed to overcome the barriers that separate us, that make us feel isolated and alone and tired. While 2020 might have distanced us to protect one another from the spread of Covid-19, Christmastime is the promise that all who come and kneel before the manger will know that we need not be weary and alone, for God is with us – Immanuel.



O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

~ "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

December 5th

READ GENESIS 22:1-19; HEBREWS 11:8-19; ROMANS 8:31-32



When 2020 came to a close, it felt as though we had been asked to give up so much. Social gatherings. Family Christmases. All for the sake of the well-being and health of others.

We aren't the first generation who has had to make sacrifices. During the war efforts of the 1940s, people experienced rations, sent beloved sons off to war, and blacked out their windows.

These sacrifices can cause us to grow weary. More is asked of us and we wonder how much more we can give.

In Genesis 22, God calls Abraham to give up his one and only son on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:1-2). After years of infertility, God had finally given Abraham a son of promise – a child who would bring God's blessings to the world and reverse the curse (see. Heb. 11:18). And now, God was asking for Abraham to give up his promised child, his beloved one and only son. So taking a three day journey, Abraham and his son Isaac arrive and head up the mountain with wood and fire but no sacrifice.

And there, on the mountain, Abraham bound his son, ready to surrender his dreams and hopes to God, believing that God could raise his son from the dead (see Heb. 11:19). But at the last moment, with knife raised, ready to sacrifice his dreams, an angel called out to Abraham to stop and turn and look to see that there was a substitute sacrifice – a ram (Gen. 22:12-13). There, in the moment of surrender and sacrifice, the Lord provided for both Abraham and Isaac.

Years later, on the same mountain range as Moriah, God would send his one and only Son whom he loved as the substitute sacrifice for rebels and sinners. He would not spare his one and only Son, but would offer him up as the perfect sacrifice. And taking a three day journey, the Son of God would take the blow of the curse to bring blessings to the world, rising again to show that the Lord truly does provide (see John 3:16; Rom. 8:32).

Does it feel wearying to you to make one more sacrifice? To surrender one more plan, hope, and dream? The God of the universe gave up his one and only Son to remind you that he will give you all you need to persevere so that you endure the present trials. And he raised his Son from death to life as a demonstration that his plans are for our eternal good – our God provides!

Grieve the sacrifices of today. Mourn that sin still brings a sting. And remember

that the ultimate sacrifice has been made for you. Your present trials are tough. But they don't compare to what the Lord has provided for you through his Son – the resurrected hope of an incomparable glory where any sacrifice required is only the sacrifice of praise forevermore (Heb. 13:15)!



Come behold the wondrous mystery
In the dawning of the King
He the theme of heaven's praises
Robed in frail humanity
In our longing, in our darkness
Now the light of life has come
Look to Christ, who condescended
Took on flesh to ransom us

Come behold the wondrous mystery
Slain by death the God of life
But no grave could e'er restrain Him
Praise the Lord; He is alive!
What a foretaste of deliverance
How unwavering our hope
Christ in power resurrected
As we will be when he comes

~ Matt Boswell and Matt Papa, "Come, Behold the Wonderous Mystery"

December 6th

READ GENESIS 49:8-12; ROMANS 1:1-6



We want to live peaceful and quiet lives. Freedom from tyranny, from bad governmental policies, and oppression is a good desire. Yet governments often overreach in their responsibilities, bringing tyranny, oppression, and restrictions. Yet we continue to look for a better government, hoping that the next election will bring a better option. While governments promise utopia, they never deliver on all their promises. But God has promised that there will come a day when there will be the perfect, just government.

After Abraham had received the promise that his descendants would bless the world, his son Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob was the father of twelve sons. Slowly, the family of Abraham was multiplying and filling the earth.

As Jacob came to the end of his days, he pronounced a blessing on each of his sons. Reflecting on their past, Jacob tells how his sons will prosper in the future. In particular, his son Judah receives a long and glowing blessing. Judah will be a leader, and he will be held in such high esteem by his brothers that they will bow to him (Gen. 49:8). Like a strong lion (Gen. 49:9), Judah's descendants will have an enduring rule that will bring about the obedience of the peoples of the world (Gen. 49:10). His rule will be fruitful and prosperous (Gen. 49:11-12), resulting in the blessing of Abraham going to the nations (see Gen. 12:3). God had promised Abraham that kings would come from his family (see Gen. 17:6), and now Jacob tells Judah that those kings will come from his line.

This was the longing: the serpent crusher promised to Eve would come and destroy evil, bring about Abraham's blessing to the nations, and rule with justice and bring prosperity.

But the descendants that would come from Jacob's line were far from perfect. A lineage of good and bad rulers would follow, until one day a child would be born, a king who would bring Abraham's blessing to the world. His rule would begin with restoration – the blind would see, the deaf would hear, the lame would walk, and the dead would live. And he would rule with the justice of God, not with the rules of men. And as he would come, his restorative rule would be announced by his followers, bringing about the obedience that comes by faith among the nations (Rom. 1:6).

We long for good rulers. Wicked rulers bring about restlessness. They create instability and insecurity. They leave us with a sense of uncertainty about our future. But when the child born in the manger came, the Lion of Judah caused

every unjust ruler to tremble. He comes in weakness and humility, yet he brings justice to the world. And when he comes, the government that he brings will only increase peace forever (see Isa. 9:6-7; Rev. 5:5).



Though an infant now we view Him,
He will share His Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to Him;
Every knee shall then bow down.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!

~ James Montgomery, "Angels From the Realms of Glory"

December 7th

READ EXODUS 1:1-2:10; 2:23-25; MATTHEW 2:1-18



How often do you wonder what God is doing? We can look at the circumstances of our lives and question God – has he forgotten us (cf. Isa. 40:27)? Does he care about us? Yet God loves to work through impossible situations to prove to us that he alone is worthy of glory and honour and praise.

When Abraham received the promise from God that he would become a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3), it took generations for this promise to come to pass. Abraham and Sarah struggled with infertility, and only late in life had a son, Isaac. Isaac had twin boys who had a bitter sibling rivalry, and the younger, Jacob, would swindle his brother's birthright and blessing from his older brother, Esau. And Jacob would have 12 sons.

By the time we open the book of Exodus, God's command to Adam that he should be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28) and his promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5) has come to pass. Israel was "fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong" (Exod. 1:7). Living in Egypt, the Israelites had become a security threat to Pharaoh, who commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all the boys born to the Hebrew women.

But a faithful man and woman hid their son away in a little basket – a miniature ark – and placed him in the waters of the Nile. And like Noah, passing through the waters of judgment, little Moses was rescued and raised by the daughter of Pharaoh.

As the oppression of the Hebrews increased, the people grew weary and cried out to the Lord for help. Their groans and cries were heard by the God who remembered his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 2:23-25). And God would take the child who passed through the waters of judgment and prepare him to be the deliverer of Israel.

Some 1300 years later, another ruler would be threatened by the birth of a little child, demanding that all little boys under two be put to death. But his faithful father and mother would hide the child away, fleeing to Egypt. There God would prepare him to be the deliverer of his people (see Matt. 2:1-18).

We may groan, feeling weary and forgotten by the Lord. But God never forgets his promise to his people. He hears the cries of those who call upon him. And though we may not see how God will deliver us, God always keeps his word to keep his people and deliver them from all of their distress.



Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

~ Charles Wesley, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

December 8th

READ EXODUS 3; MATTHEW 11:28-29



Being enslaved is something that is sadly all too common to the human experience. There are certain forms of slavery that are more obvious and evil. But there are different ways to be enslaved. The Bible talks about two ways of being enslaved. One way is being oppressed – the powerful person take advantage of the powerless. Another way to describe slavery is to submit yourself to passions and desires that take control over you. Either way, being enslaved causes the heart to lose hope and to grow weary.

God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be numerous and that his descendants would be afflicted for 400 years (Gen. 15:13). And sure enough, a ruler of Egypt arose who oppressed the Hebrews. But God raised up a new Adam. A little boy named Moses was hid from the infanticide. Placed in a little ark on the Nile, Moses was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, raised in prominence, and finds himself exiled when he defends a Hebrew slave who was being mistreated by an Egyptian. And in a moment of rage, Moses killed this Egyptian oppressor.

As Moses was on Mount Horeb, the mountain of God, he saw a bush on fire. But the bush was not being consumed (3:2). So Moses went to check it out. As he approached, the voice of the Lord spoke, "Don't come near, take your sandals off you're your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Then the Lord revealed himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had heard the cries of the oppressed Hebrews. His promise is that he will deliver them and bring them to the land promised to Abraham.

But how can this God deliver? As God called Moses to go back to Pharaoh and declare the message of God's freedom, Moses learned that God remembers his promises. God says that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6) and that he will keep his promise to give them land that he had swore to Abraham (3:8-9).

God can keep his promises because he is a self-sufficient, self-existing God. The fire does not consume the bush. God is self-sufficient and self-existing – he doesn't need fuel for his fire to exist. And so his power is great, but his power is never exhausted.

And God reveals himself as the great I AM. God is who he is. He doesn't change based on people's responses, emotions, or sins. He is the same God who has always been.

If you need to be delivered, you need a God who remembers his promise to rescue. You need a God who doesn't get burned out because of your neediness. And you need a God who is consistent. You can cry out to him (Exod. 2:23-25) and trust that he will meet you where you are – in your bondage, sin, and weariness, and he will come to deliver you.

Jesus is the same self-sufficient God. He doesn't grow tired or weak of us coming to him with our burdens, our distress, our sorrows. In fact, he invites us to him: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:28-29).



Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

~ Edmund Sears, "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

December 3th

READ EXODUS 12:1-32; 14:1-31; LUKE 2:8-20



The traditional Christmas carol, Santa Claus is Coming to Town, reminds us that our behaviour better be spot on if we want presents:

You better watch out, you better not cry,
You better not pout, I'm telling you why:
Santa Claus is coming to town.
He sees you when you're sleeping,
He knows if you're awake;
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake!

The pressure of Christmas is on – be good, or you'll end up with a lump of coal in your stocking! It's an exhausting message – do good, be good, try harder, do more! And the more we try, the more we can feel like we just don't measure up.

The Christmas message and the story of redemption is not that you better perform or else, but that you can only change if the power of God comes to rescue you and you depend upon the gift of his substitute that reveals his glory to all who are weak and weary.

When Moses returned from exile to Pharaoh's court, Moses went with the promise of God. The Lord will show Pharaoh who has true power. And in a sequence of 10 plagues, the Lord demonstrates that he is the Destroyer of gods of Egypt. While Egypt took great pride in her many gods, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is even greater. Ra may be the sun god, but the Lord can make the skies dark. Heqet may be the goddess who brings life through the Nile and symbolized by a frog, but the Lord can turn the Nile to a lifeless river and overwhelm the land with frogs. And Osiris may be the god of the afterlife who has power to raise the dead, but the Lord can strike down the firstborn of Egypt.

But the power of the Lord is not seen in his great judgment of Egypt and her powerless gods, but in his mercy. God's judgment will come to the whole land of Egypt. But the Lord had told the Hebrews how they could be saved. They were to take a spotless one year old male lamb without spot or blemish, sacrifice it for a meal of remembrance, and put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel. By marking the doorway with blood, those who were within the home were saying that they were hiding from God's wrath behind the blood of the lamb.

And that night, the Lord passed through the entire land of Egypt. Wherever there was blood on the doorposts, the angel of death would pass over that

house, showing mercy, and sparing the life of the firstborn of that home.

This became the celebration for Israel called Passover. It was the remembrance of the night that God began his saving work for all who trusted in the blood of the Lamb, delivering them out of Egypt.

As Israel fled into the wilderness from Egypt's power, they found themselves situated at the edge of the Red Sea. With nowhere to go, Pharaoh's hard heart pursued the Israelites and was looking to deal with the Israelites with his mighty power. But as God opened a path for Israel through the Red Sea, his glorious cloud and pillar of fire blocked Pharaoh from the Hebrew people. Israel fled to the other side; Pharaoh and his army was consumed by the waters of judgment.

On the night that Jesus born, the darkness of the night gave way to the glory of the Lord. Weary shepherds in the fields saw the same glory light up the sky just as the Israelites saw as they stood at the edge of the Red Sea (see Luke 2:9; Exodus 14:19-20). The God who had required a lamb as a substitute for the firstborn now sent his firstborn Son as the substitute. God's announcement – that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world had come (Jn 1:29) – was announced to shepherds. And when they saw the child, they rejoiced.

When we see that Christ is our substitute, our Saviour, the One who identifies with us, and we flee to him as our Passover Lamb, we can rejoice like Moses (see Exod. 15) and the shepherds (see Luke 2:20). The baby in the manger is the power of God to deliver us and make weary hearts rejoice!



God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas Day
To save poor souls from Satan's power
When we were gone astray,
O tidings of comfort and joy!

~ "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen"

December 10th

READ EXODUS 20; PSALM 19; ROMANS 8:1-4



When you were a child, did you ever wish you didn't have any rules? Go to bed at whatever time you'd like. Eat whatever you want. It sounds incredibly freeing to have no rules. But quickly things fall apart. Tiredness sets in. Sugar snacks don't satisfy your hunger.

Rules are for our good. Every household and society needs rules. Without some agreed social code, homes and societies will fall apart. Healthy rules are intended to set boundaries, keep order, and encourage well-being.

God had brought Israel out of the land of slavery, bringing them across the Red Sea and destroying the Egyptians who were chasing them. Now, as they headed into the wilderness, Moses brought them back to Mount Sinai, the mountain where he first encountered the Lord in the burning bush. Upon Moses's return, God's presence thundered and smoked from the mountain. God called Moses up to receive the covenant for Israel. While many have called this the Mosaic Covenant, this covenant was not made with Moses as an individual but with Israel as a nation. A people coming up out of slavery and being led to a new land, a new Eden, needed to know that God's promises to Abraham would stand. So God gave Israel a covenant – 10 laws to help them be committed to the Lord.

The land that Israel was entering was filled with foreign gods with their images. The peoples of the land could be ruthless, not giving regard to one another. So God had given his commands for Israel's safe-keeping. He wanted his people to be marked off as his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:5-6).

But the problem with the human heart is how we turn rules for our safe-keeping into rules to prove ourselves worthy. Instead of seeing that the law is good if we use it lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8), we make the law a ladder for us to climb and prove our worth to God.

Over and over we find that we cannot climb the ladder very far before we fall back down. We try to prove how good we are only to discover that we are proud of how good we are. We can barely take one step up the ladder before we fall back down again.

To rescue us from our law-breaking hearts, God did not call us to keep climbing up the ladder. Instead, God came down to us. And in the incarnation, Jesus came as God's perfect law keeper, freeing us from the tyranny of law-keeping

for approval, and instead finding that he has given us a new law – the law of love
– that we keep by the power of the Spirit whom he has given us (Rom. 8:1-4)!



O come, o come thou Lord of might,
who to the tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times didst give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel!
Shall come to thee, O Israel!
~ "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

December 11th

READ EXODUS 40; JOHN 1:14



There is something about moving in to a house that is exciting: setting up the furniture, decorating the house, and enjoying how each space can serve everyone who lives there.

Homes are not only a place to live but also a place to enjoy company. We set up our homes for living and spaces for meeting and visiting. We design the spaces of our homes so we can have rest and enjoy time together.

When God told Moses to set up his house, God had designed every room with furniture placed in the appropriate spots. But God was not setting up his house as a Home and Garden TV designer, but as a God who is revealing and restoring.

God had given specifications about his dwelling place beginning in Exodus 25 and continued to provide the people with more details in Exodus 35. When the work was finished, everything was brought together and the tabernacle was set up.

The tabernacle was a reminder of God's saving work at Sinai. Just as the people could not touch the mountain (Exod. 19:12), so the people could not go into the tent. And just as the priests could go part way up the mountain with Moses (Exod. 24:1-2, 9-11), so the priests could go into the court. But only the one who was interceding for the people could go up to the top of the mountain to hear the voice of God from the smoke and lightning (Exod. 24:12ff), just as one priest could go into the Most Holy Place where God spoke as he filled the room with a censer of incense.

Exodus ends with Moses not able to go into the tabernacle because of God's glory. The word "tabernacle" is the word that means "dwelling place." God has moved into his house. But people who have unclean lives cannot come in to his presence.

But what does God do at the beginning of Leviticus? "The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting" (Lev. 1:1). Yes, God has taken up his dwelling. But here God speaks to Moses not from his 'dwelling place' but invites his people into relationship in 'the tent of meeting.' God not only comes to dwell among his people, but he comes to meet with them. And what follows are details about how they can come and meet with him.

Hebrews 8:5 tells us that the tabernacle, all of its specifications and construction,

was a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things. They were the blueprint of what was heavenly, and what is in heaven is better.

And what was in heaven? At the beginning of John's account of the good news, he tells us that the Voice of God that thundered at Sinai, the voice that gave the Word of God, is the voice became flesh and tabernacled among us (Jn. 1:14). God dwelt with humanity by becoming human. And John says that he was able to do something that Moses could not do – he saw the glory of God, and that glory is the glory that Moses heard about – grace and truth (John 1:14). Those words – grace and truth – correspond to what Moses heard about God: that the Lord is steadfast in love and faithful (Exod. 34:6).

One day we will move into our new home – a home that will never fade, spoil, or wear out. And we will not only live there, but we will have the best time anyone could ever imagine – not with a visitor in the living room, but with the God who invites us to live in his house. Forever.



Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night;
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant light!
Come and worship,
Come and worship,
Worship Christ the newborn King!

– James Montgomery, “Angels from the Realms of Glory”

December 12th

READ NUMBERS 13-14; LUKE 3:21-4:13



In the Garden of Eden, the first human was faced with a test: would he trust in the promise of God, or would he rely upon his eyes and the desires of his heart. Adam chose to doubt God's promise and follow the lie of Satan. Now, all of humanity has this inward bent, relying upon our own instincts rather than the word of promise, and this path ends in destruction (see Rom. 5:12).

So God chose a new people to be his light to the world, the people who would bring God's blessing to the ends of the earth. He rescued them out of Egypt, bringing them to his holy mountain, making a covenant with them, and calling them his firstborn son (Exod. 4:22-23).

Then, like Adam, they faced a test. As they journeyed through the wilderness, they came to the edge of the land of promise – a new Eden. They sent twelve spies to investigate the land that God had promised them. Upon their return, ten of the spies told of the menacing giants, of people too strong to defeat. The other two came back reporting the same stories, but with the confidence that God would give them the land with the help of God.

And now, in a moment of decision, the Israelites could trust the promise of God to give them this new land or rely upon their instincts. Once again, this firstborn son failed the test. As a result, an entire generation would spend forty years wandering in the wilderness, outside of God's promise.

But one day, another firstborn son came along, coming from the line of Adam (see Luke 3: 23-38). Passing through the waters of the Jordan to receive his promised inheritance, he was baptized (Luke 3:21-22) and taken into the wilderness for forty days (Luke 4:1-2). And just like Adam and Israel before him, Jesus was tested, tempted by the devil (Luke 4:2). The devil would offer him all of the short-cuts to greatness and glory. But unlike Adam and Israel, Jesus was faithful. He responded to the three temptations with three promises of God in Deuteronomy, the record of Moses' words to Israel at the end of their forty years in the wilderness.

What made Jesus' response so remarkable is that he stands as our representative. Just as Adam and Israel before had stood the test and failed, Jesus stood as our representative and succeeded. His obedience makes the way possible for us to face the tests of this life and to find victory. But this victory does not come through our trying harder to succeed, but by trusting in the word of promise.

What should you do when you face temptation? Hear the word of promise. Don't depend upon your instincts, but look to the firstborn Son who succeeded on your behalf. Whatever sin offers, it cannot compare to the glory to be revealed to you.

And when you fail and fall into temptation, don't despair. Go back to the word of promise: If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just and will forgive us of our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9).



Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
For with blessing in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

~ "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"

December 13th

READ NUMBERS 20:2-13; PSALM 95; HEBREWS 3:1-4:11



“Do we have to go out?” “Why can’t you just do what I’ve asked you to do?” “I don’t want to play this game.” Christmas and grumbling often go together.

Grumbling is what weary souls do. Grumbling looks at the world, makes an observation, and it is followed with judgment.

Israel had a grumbling problem. God had dramatically rescued his people. They sang heartily in worship (Exod. 15). But within three days, they were complaining about Moses when they couldn’t find water (Exod. 15:24).

Grumbling hearts would become the pattern of Israel’s existence in the wilderness. They would complain about Moses’ leadership. They would complain about a lack of water. They would complain about eating manna and quail again. If they had not learned their lesson about God’s gracious provision earlier (in Exod. 15), Israel would repeat the same grumbings again when they lacked water in Numbers 20:1-2. They had been wandering for 40 years. And yet they complained and quarreled with Moses, wishing they could return to Egypt, telling Moses that this was an evil land (Numb. 20:3-5).

How did God respond to their grumbling and complaining? You’d expect a lightning bolt from heaven and his anger to burn hot. Instead, God commanded Moses to speak to the rock and water would gush forth. But instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it twice, and water flowed (Numb. 20:11).

Moses, however, was not to strike the rock. He was to speak to it. Yes, God provided water. But Moses would not be permitted to lead the people into the land of promise because he had not believed in the Lord and had not upheld the Lord as holy before the people (Numb. 20:12).

Israel’s grumbling reflected a problem with their heart. Their rebelliousness (Numb. 20:10) caused their hearts to grow hard to the promise of God (see Ps. 95).

Grumbling is a serious problem. It causes our hearts to grow cold to the promises of God. We can harden ourselves against God’s good provision. For this reason, the writer of Hebrews calls us to guard our hearts and not let sin sneak in and ensnare us (Heb. 3:7-15), but as long as we have today, we should be ready and eager to hear the promise of God to us, believe it, and obey it. Grumbling only increases our weariness. Trust in God’s promise will bring rest to our souls (Heb. 4:1-11).

Yet we are prone to grumble. So what should we do when we find ourselves murmuring and complaining again? Paul says that the rock that was struck was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). What happened in the wilderness was a reminder for us. As Christ hung from the cross, the rod that struck him was the rod that we deserved, and the water that flowed from him was the blessings we did not deserve.

The punishment for grumbling is serious. Not everything will go our way this Christmas season. But the baby in the manger came to be the Rock who bears our judgment for our grumbling hearts and gushes out blessings upon us. And when you're tempted to grumble because you didn't get what you want or aren't happy with how things are going, look to the Rock who made all of heaven's blessings flow to you. And then consider what annoys you – it might not seem quite so important!



Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

- Augustus Montague Toplady, "Rock of Ages"

December 14th

READ JOSHUA 6: HEBREWS 4:1-11



Everyone is fighting a battle. For some, it is a health challenge. Others are dealing with the shame or guilt of past sins. Still others are suffering because of trauma they experienced. Still others are suffering alongside someone whom they dearly love. Whether physical or emotional, the pain is real.

Everyone is trying to find some relief from the pain – either finding a solution to ‘fix’ the problem or learning how to cope with the ongoing nature of pain. Regardless, the battles we face are real.

In the Old Testament, God’s people faced both psychological and military battles. On the one hand, God’s people faced the battle to have a proper perspective and not grumble (as we saw yesterday). On the other hand, God’s people had been promised a land and called to go in and take it. Israel’s new leader, Joshua, had made preparations to take the land God had promised to Abraham. Sending in two spies, the way was prepared to take the land.

Joshua led the people through the flooded Jordan River in the same way Moses had led Israel out of Egypt – the waters parted, and the people passed through on dry ground.

Then in an unusual military strategy, God told the people to march around the city one time for six days, and then on the seventh day to march seven times. Led by priests rather than military warriors, the people shouted and trumpets were blown at the final lap. God was worshipped and declared to be King. The result was that the walls came tumbling down.

Reading the book of Joshua makes it seem that the conquest was relatively short. In fact, it took 7 years for the land to be at rest (Josh. 11:23). After purging the land and making it new, Joshua brings rest to the land. And after seven trips on the seventh day around Jericho, the walls fall and victory is given to God’s people.

Israel was called to be a holy people (Exod. 19:6), and when they trusted in the Lord, he fought their battles for them. It is through the worship of God that God brings the victories. But these victories were never final and complete. Hebrews 4:6-7 tells us that the problem of disobedience caused Israel to fail to experience the full rest God had in store. But there remains a rest – a Sabbath rest. While Israel marched around Jericho and saw the victory on the Sabbath (or seventh) day as they worshipped, and as Israel took seven years to win the battles in the land, the Sabbath rest does not come from Joshua. It comes

through Jesus Christ.

The name “Jesus” means “The Lord saves.” It is the Greek form of Joshua. He is the great warrior who goes into battle on our behalf, saving his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). And whoever trusts and worships him will enjoy complete rest and peace. For the land he is bringing us into has no tears or sorrows, no accusations or sufferings.

We’re all fighting battles. But there is one who fights for you. And when you trust and worship him, you only need to stand still and watch the deliverance of our Lord (see Exod. 14:14).



On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.
All o'er those wide extended plains,
Shines one eternal day;
There God the Son forever reigns,
And scatters night away.
I am bound for Promised Land.

No chilling winds nor poisonous breath
Can reach that healthful shore;
Sickness, sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more.
When shall I reach that happy place,
And be forever blessed?
When shall I see my Fathers face,
And in His bosom rest?
I am bound,
I am bound,
I am bound for promised land.

- Samuel Stennett (1787), "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand"

December 15th

READ JUDGES 1:27-36; 2:1-23; LUKE 1:46-55



Feeling stuck in a bad pattern or habit is a terrible feeling. You start off with great aspirations, but quickly find yourself returning to old ways that are just terrible and destructive. It just feels exhausting. When will this cycle end?

This is the rhythm of Israel in the book of Judges. The people of Israel took possession of the promised land under Joshua's leadership. God had commanded the people to continue the conquest, each tribe going up and taking their allotted area. Moving from south to north, we hear the reports of Israel's conquest. Judah begins well, but things get progressively worse. Each tribe fails to drive out the Canaanites (1:21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33). By the time we reach the northern tribe of Dan, they not only fail to drive out the Amorites, but they themselves are driven out into the hill country (1:34-36).

This pattern is the cycle of the book of Judges. A generation after Joshua, the people began a downward spiral. Each generation drifted further away from God. So God let the people fall to their enemies. Eventually, out of despair, the people cried to the Lord and he gave a warrior (or a 'judge') to liberate the people as well as restore peace and order.

Over and over this pattern continued. Judges 2:6-19 summarizes the entire book. As each generation drifted, we hear the sad words of Judges 2:10: "And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel." By not remembering the Lord or what he has done, Israel would fall into idolatry. If they want to worship like the Canaanites, God will give them a taste of what it is like to be a Canaanite. And it's not very nice. It is more like Egypt and being a slave (cf. 1 Sam. 12:8-9).

The reason the land did not experience rest and the reason the people did not have peace is summed up in Judges 2:1-3: "Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'"

Israel did not destroy the false worship; instead, they joined in the self-defeating worship of Canaanite gods. If Israel worships the Lord, they will win their battles

and enjoy the Lord's blessings, but if they turn to idols, their enemies will defeat and enslave them.

In the song Mary sings while carrying Jesus in her womb, she says:

"He has shown strength with his arm;
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
He has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate. (Lk. 1:51-52)

As the year comes to an end, we often take stock of our lives. We make new year's resolutions hoping to change, only to find that we repeat the same cycle of our old ways year after year.

With the coming of the true and great warrior, Jesus declares that the days of being bound in sin are numbered. He will use his strength and bring his people into victory as they trust and worship him.



My soul will magnify the Lord;
I rejoice in God my Saviour,
In the wonder of His favour.
For He has done great things for me;
He was mindful of His servant.
Every age shall call me blessed.
The Hope of Abraham come
In the giving of a Son;
For He who promised is mighty
In remembering His mercy.

My soul will magnify the Lord
For His grace to those who fear Him
Through every generation.
The proud He scatters to the wind
As the ruler's strength is broken,
And the rich are left with nothing.
The humble lifted high,
And the hungry satisfied;
Our Portion and our Treasure,
Our Hope and Help forever.

~ Keith & Kristin Getty, Stuart Townend, "My Soul Will Magnify the Lord (Magnificat)"

December 16th

READ 1 SAMUEL 2:12-3:21; 1 JOHN 1:1-4



Has it ever seemed to you that God seems far away? Talk to anyone who is older and they will lament the changes of Western society. The ethics that drove them, the hard work that was required for a better life – all of those values seem to have been altered. They wonder if God has forgotten them. The world seems to spiral out of control. Things that were once morally unacceptable are now celebrated. Things that were once seen as good behaviour are now deemed immoral. And life can become hard to bear.

After Israel's continued pattern of falling, crying out for mercy, and deliverance, the Lord visited Israel with both judgment and mercy. Raised as a priest and prophet and judge to prepare the way, Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord (1 Sam. 2:11b, 18, 21, 26; 3:1, 19). While the sons of Eli the priest were unfaithful, Samuel was adopted into the house of Eli (3:6, 16) and served faithfully. As Samuel grew, so did his influence (3:19-20).

But the problem in Israel had been the silence of God (1 Sam. 3:1). God's word had been forgotten – the teaching of God had given way to tradition, and the obedience to the word of God had been rejected. Eli the priest could barely see. Not only was his vision bad, but the vision of his sons eyed up worthless things. They did not know the Lord; they only knew their own appetite (2:12-17). But Samuel heard the voice of the Lord (3:4, 6, 8), and though he didn't recognize it, Eli did. The voice of God that had been silent for so long had spoken again. And the God whose glory had been obscured came near as God revealed himself to Samuel by his word (3:21).

The glory that had once been so near to Israel, dwelling in their midst, had departed. Sin has created a separation between humanity and God. It cannot be overcome by being good enough – it must be overcome by God showing us his glory again, revealing his beauty, and speaking his word of truth. It must come and do a disruptive work – dealing with sin and starting afresh, bringing a fresh revelation of the God who is gracious and compassionate. He will cut off sin (2:30-36) and he will raise up a faithful priest who will do according to what is in the heart and mind of the Lord (2:35).

When we come to the end of the Old Testament, God had been silent again. But when we open to Matthew 1, there is a glory that appears. Jesus Christ, God himself has appeared. He is no longer silent. He is no longer absent. He is present – so very close that he can be seen, touched, and heard.

At one point, glory had departed. But now, the glory of the Lord has appeared. The dwelling place of God is with humanity. He has overcome our reluctance, our sinfulness, and our separation, and he has made a way to draw close to us – by answering our cry of distress. So do not despair! The world might seem out of control and God might seem far away. But at the moment when the Lord had been most silent and the world had been bleak, God appeared as a man, to rescue us!



In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan;
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

~ Christina Rossetti, "In The Bleak Midwinter"

December 17th

READ 1 SAMUEL 10, 16:1-13; LUKE 4:1-21



We want good leaders. We know how much good leadership can make things better. A good leader is wise, makes timely decisions, and is not afraid to do the hard things necessary for people's good. A good leader isn't looking out for themselves; they look out for the betterment of those around them.

In Israel, the nation had fallen into a terrible spiral of decline because of wickedness and godlessness. But because the Lord is gracious and compassionate, he gave them a good leader. When Saul first appears, he is out looking for his father's donkeys (1 Sam. 9:3) and he is a dutiful son, unlike Eli's sons (1 Sam. 2-3). Not only is Saul dutiful, he is also tall and handsome (1 Sam. 9:3). He has an aura of humility about him (1 Sam. 9:21), surprised that Samuel thinks so much of a small household in the smallest of Israel's tribes. And when he is chosen to be king, Israel gathers together but Saul is hiding (1 Sam. 10:22).

But Saul falls into sin. In 1 Sam. 13-15, he does not wait for Samuel to sacrifice. He has been told to wait 7 days (10:8), but instead offers it on his own timing. When Samuel confronts Saul, he blames the people (13:11-12). Then, when Saul tells his men to not eat during the battle against the Philistines or else they will face death, his son Jonathan eats without knowing of the command. Saul is furious and ready to kill his own son (1 Sam. 14). And in 1 Sam. 15, Saul refuses to follow God's commands regarding Amalek's destruction. Again, when Samuel confronts Saul, he blames the people (1 Sam. 15:15-20-24). And this begins Saul's long downward spiral: the Spirit of God leaves him, he is tormented by an evil spirit, and the kingdom will be torn from him (15:27-28).

God will never leave nor abandon his people, even when they have terrible leaders. So he instructs Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and will show him Israel's new king. What Samuel expects is another tall, rugged, strong leader. But the Lord tells Samuel not to look on outward appearances but upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Again, the one that is anointed to be Israel's king is being a faithful son and shepherd watching over his father's flocks (1 Sam. 16:11). And when David appears, he is handsome and rugged. But even more important, the Spirit of the Lord rests upon him when he is anointed.

Israelite kings were not crowned. They were anointed with oil (1 Sam. 16:13). So the king was the anointed one – or Israel's messiah. With the power of the Spirit, David would go on to be Israel's greatest king, giving the people rest in their land. But his successors were not as faithful as David.

This was not the end of the story. Isaiah saw how poorly the leaders had been and where it would lead the nation. But he also saw beyond the problem. “A shoot will come from the stump of Jesse,” the Lord told Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1). Though Jesse’s household might be reduced to a stump, the Lord would bring from her a new King anointed not with oil but with the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might, in the knowledge and fear of the Lord (Isa. 11:1-3).

Almost 1000 years later, another Samuel would come, announcing that Israel’s new King had come. John prepared the way, and baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. As he arose from the baptismal waters, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power (Lk. 4:1, 14), enabling him to bring good news in the power of the Spirit (Lk. 4:18). Where other kings had failed in their testings, Jesus succeeded in the power of the Spirit (Lk. 4: 1-13).

The good news today is that the same Spirit who anointed David and Jesus is the one who comes upon those who follow the Messiah, Jesus (see Acts 1:8). And this anointing (1 Jn. 2:20, 27) enables us to continue to take the good news to the ends of the earth.

Good leaders begin with you and me as we are Christ’s ambassadors, declaring the King’s message to a broken and weary world: Christ has come to liberate you from the power of sin and death!



Hail to the Lord’s Anointed,
Great David’s greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
His reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
To set the captive free,
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity.

~ James Montgomery, “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed”

December 18th

READ 2 SAMUEL 7; LUKE 1:26-33; 2:8-14



Human nature wants to do something remarkable and leave a legacy. We build up a nest egg so that we can pass it on to our children; we work hard in our careers to make a lasting impact. We strive to make a difference in someone's life so their world is just a little bit better. The problem humans have is not with wanting to leave a legacy and an impact, but how we depend upon our own strength to accomplish these things. The attempts to accomplish something great in human power are exhausting.

Ever since the beginning of time, God has had the same plan for humans: to give thrones and crowns to his sons and daughters, the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. The promises to Abraham point in this direction, and the promises to David continue to build off of all of these promises.

David, like Abraham, received some wonderful promises – promises that further expanded what God had given to Abraham. David, like Abraham, will have a great name; David's son will receive this great name as well, and they will have a place where they will live in rest and security. And just as Abraham would be blessed and be a blessing, so David is told that he will have victory and peace over his enemies, and that the descendant of Abraham who would bless the nations would come from David's line.

God's promises to Abraham are not just repeated to David; they are expanded. Ever since Israel had been promised the land, they had never enjoyed a permanency. But now Israel will have an enduring kingdom, and this kingdom will be a blessing for all humanity (2 Sam. 7:19).

The kings who followed David, however, were far from the glory that was anticipated. The downward direction of the kingdom would result in pain, hardship, and end in the nation's division and fall.

But almost a thousand years later, an angel told Mary she would conceive, and give birth to the Son of the Most High. He would receive the throne of his father David and rule over Jacob's descendants forever with a kingdom that would never fade (Lk. 1:32-33).

Nine months later, shepherds in the fields would be visited by an angel, declaring good news for all people: in the city of David a Saviour had been born – the Messiah (Lk. 2:10-11).

Legacies come and go. Human effort tries to make something last. But only God

can build a lasting legacy, and that legacy is in his Son Jesus Christ. When we build our lives upon him, what we find is that our lives are established upon something that can never fade, spoil, or be corrupted. And for a good reason – when we build our lives on the eternal One, he is the One who makes all things endure forever!



Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed
Where a mother laid her baby
With a cradle for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild;
Jesus Christ, her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love;
For that Child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above,
And he leads his children on
To the place where he is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
When like stars his children crowned
All in white shall wait around.

~ Cecil Frances Alexander, "Once in Royal David's City"

December 19th

READ 1 KINGS 12; COLOSSIANS 1:15-20



One of the most wearying things to the soul is division. When you feel the pain of a relationship that has been torn apart, the soul feels the pain of the tear.

After David's great reign, his son Solomon followed him. The kingdom had been held together by good and wise leadership. But there were already cracks forming, even as early as the days of Saul, when the northern tribes and southern tribes were counted separately when preparing for war (see 1 Sam. 11: 8; 1 Sam. 15: 4). David's rebellious son, Absalom, stoked the division by claiming that his father David favoured his tribe, Judah, above the others (2 Sam. 15:1-6). But after Solomon, things really fell apart.

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, acted foolishly. After years of heavy taxation under Solomon (1 Ki. 12:3), Rehoboam was advised to lighten the burden. Instead, listening to the foolish young men, Rehoboam enacted a tax policy that was even heavier than his father's (1 Ki. 12:12-15). This decision brought the entire house crashing down.

But the fault is not Rehoboam's, but the foolishness of Solomon. In his latter days, Solomon did not worship the Lord alone but chased after other gods and led the people astray (1 Ki. 11: 5, 7, 33). One of Solomon's trusted advisors saw the spiritual adultery going on and prophesied that the kingdom would be torn into pieces (1 Ki. 11:26-40). The result of this false worship resulted in a divided nation and foolish leadership. Jeroboam seized control of the northern tribes and set up idols for the people. His aim was to keep the people within the north and not returning to Jerusalem to worship (1 Ki. 12:26). To protect his political power and to keep people from moving to Judah, Jeroboam set up golden calves at Dan (in the far north) and Bethel (at the southern edge of the Northern Kingdom). Like Aaron before him, he repeated the sin of Sinai (see Exod. 32) and claimed that these calves were the gods that brought the people out of Egypt (1 Ki. 12:28; cf. Exod. 32:4).

What makes this division so egregious is how Jeroboam claims that he was acting faithfully. By choosing calves as the idols for worship, he claimed to follow Aaron. His selection of Bethel points back to Jacob's worship of God at the same location (see Gen. 32). Jeroboam even names his sons Nadab and Abijah (1 Ki. 14:1; 15:25), just like Aaron's sons who chose to worship God their own way and died (see Lev. 10).

What makes divisions so painful is the claim that what is being done is faithful

and true. For Jeroboam, he can say that Israel worships the God of the Exodus while fashioning golden calves. Sure, he is keeping the first commandment (they still are worshipping the Lord), but he worships the true God in the wrong way (using images, as forbidden in the second commandment – see 1 Ki. 12:29–30). And what starts with legitimate complaints becomes the pattern that leads to the Northern Kingdom’s demise, for the sins of future kings of Israel will be described as “walk [ing] in the way of Jeroboam” and committing the “sin of Jeroboam” (cf. 1 Ki. 15:29–30; 15:34; 16:19; 16:26) – and it all began with the sin of golden calf worship.

The only way that we can find reconciliation and peace is by returning to the King of kings. In Jesus Christ, the only true image of God (Col. 1:15), he is the One who can reconcile to himself all things – things on earth or in heaven, by the blood of the cross (Col. 1:20) because all authority comes from him (Col. 1:16).



Creation gazed upon his face;
The ageless One in time’s embrace
Unveiled the Father’s plan
Of reconciling God and man.
Hallelujah! Let all creation stand and sing!
Hallelujah! Fill the earth with songs of worship!
Tell the wonders of creation’s King!

– Keith & Kristen Getty, Stuart Townend, “Creation Sings the Father’s Song”

December 20th

READ 2 KINGS 17; JONAH 1 AND 4; ROMANS 11:11-12.



How do you respond when the world is falling apart? What do you do when you feel like you are being oppressed? Christians today are struggling to know how to respond to increased government intervention, and restricted freedoms. We want to push back and regain our rights and freedoms.

As Israel was falling as a nation, pressured by the superpower Assyria, one prophet was sent by God to the capital of Assyria to preach a message of impending judgment. But instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah took off in the opposite direction. Why? Jonah is a prophet in the twilight years of the Northern Kingdom Israel. The evil kings have led Israel further down the path of Jeroboam I in idol worship. And within no time, the Assyrians were invading (2 Ki. 15). It was clear that the Lord would not put up with Israel's idolatry forever. Jonah might have been pleased to go and preach a message of impending judgment upon the Assyrians. If the Assyrians are destroyed, Israel would be much safer. But the more he thinks about it, the more he realizes that the Lord is gracious and compassionate (Jonah 4:2). For if the Lord was to wipe out Assyria, why send a prophet? Jonah knew that when God warns people of their sins, it is an act of mercy that gives sinners an opportunity to repent.

Never before in the history of Israel had a prophet been sent to a foreign nation in such a personal way. Now Jonah was being commissioned by God to proclaim that judgment was coming. Jonah knows the law well enough to know it can mean only one thing: if Israel turns from the Lord, the Lord would make Israel jealous by means of the other nations:

“They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.

So I will make them jealous with those who are no people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.” (see Deut. 32:15–21).

Jonah understands what is happening: the Lord is turning his attention to a new people to provoke Israel to return. After sending one prophet, the Ninevites repent (Jonah 3:6–10). But according to 2 Kings 17, the Lord has sent prophet after prophet to Israel, warning and calling them back, but they will not listen. Instead, Israel has worshiped other gods and provoked the Lord's jealousy. If Israel will not return to the Lord, the Lord will give them over to their own desires and provoke them by his work in other nations. By the time 2 Kings 17 ends, Israel has not listened and will not be delivered (2 Kings 17:40).

Like Israel, Jonah was provoked to jealousy and anger when the Lord showed his mercy upon another nation. Jonah didn't want Assyria to repent, and he didn't want to help the Lord in provoking Israel. Jonah knew he couldn't run from God; he simply did not want to be God's prophet. In spite of all of this, the Lord was kind to Jonah, delivering him from the watery grave into which he was thrown. And in the same pattern, this will happen to Israel. Israel also has turned from the Lord, refusing to be a light to the nations. And just as the Lord stirred up a storm to rescue Jonah and keep him as the prophet, so the Lord will flood Israel with the nations and call her back to himself.

Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so Jesus descended to the grave and was raised so that the message of repentance might come to all who hear and believe the good news of great joy – that the Lord can and will provoke people to consider eternal things by doing a strange work. For at the birth of the Messiah, Israel's rulers seek to kill the Lord of Glory (Matt. 2:13-15), provoked by foreign magi (Matt. 2:1-12). For in his provoking work, the Lord is showing that he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.



How suddenly a baby cries and all forever change
As shepherds leave the angel song to find this holy place,
Where in her young and trembling arms a virgin holds her Son
And in this Child of breath divine our Light has finally come.

She ponders how the Magi kneel before Emmanuel.
With gold and frankincense and myrrh Christ's sacrifice they tell.
A dream would help them flee a king whose pride would cruelly destroy.
As mothers weep God's mercy meets the hunger for His joy.

How suddenly a baby cried and all forever changed.
Through history soul by soul have come to find His healing grace.
He filled my troubled heart with peace, with hope of endless worth.
My voice will join the song of praise that tells Messiah's birth.

- Keith & Kristen Getty, "How Suddenly A Baby Cries"

December 21st

READ ZEPHANIAH 1; 2 KINGS 24-25; MATTHEW 1:12-16



There's no good way to do it. The time comes when you've got to pull the band-aid off, but you know it will be painful. You can either pull it off very slowly and feel the pain as it pulls every hair follicle attached and prolong the pain, or you can rip it off with a lightning-fast yank and be done with it. Most times, we opt for the latter and pull quickly.

The same is true for how the writer of 2 Kings describes the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. After the good king Josiah's death in 609 BC, Judah declines in a hurry. In a matter of 22 years and through the span of four kings, Jerusalem is done. The repeated refrain of the closing chapters of 2 Kings is "He did evil in the Lord's eyes" (23:32, 37; 24:9, 19). It didn't have to end this way. But Judah failed to learn the lessons of the Northern Kingdom's demise (in 722 BC). The Northern Kingdom worshiped idols and refused to listen to the prophets, and the Lord removed them (2 Ki. 17:18).

And as good as Josiah was as king (see 2 Ki. 22-23), Zephaniah warned Judah of a coming day of punishment, the day of the Lord. It will be a day of wrath, of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, of darkness and gloom (Zeph. 1:15-16). Humans and beasts will feel the wrath that comes via the Babylonians (Zeph. 1:2-3). The reason for the Lord's punishment is clear: the people bow down and swear to the god Milcom and turn from following the Lord (Zeph. 1:4-6). Josiah can bring his reforms, but the people's hearts have followed the ways of the nations. The kings of Judah who replace Josiah fall in quick succession, and most are forced to pay a tribute to Egypt or Babylon, the two superpowers fighting for control of Judah. King after king can try to resist the superpowers, but Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians crush the city, break down its walls, and destroy Solomon's temple. Just like Israel, Judah falls and is taken into exile.

The band-aid has been ripped off, and the result is great pain. Israel and Judah, once glorious and destined to be a light to the nations to show the glory of God, live in darkness and gloom. The people who once walked in light now walk in darkness and dread. Instead of learning the lessons of the Northern Kingdom, Judah repeats the same mistakes and succumbs to the same fate.

Humans are notorious for repeating the same mistakes of the past, with different nuances but the same errors. Is there any way we can be changed? 2 Kings 25 ends with a whisper of hope: the King of Judah is freed from prison, is given a

seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon, removes his prison clothes, and dines regularly at the king's table (2 Ki. 25:27-30). In the midst of a captive, failed, exiled people, hope whispers. Matthew 1:12-16 picks up the story where 2 Kings 25 ends. The promise of land given to Abraham seems lost; the kingship promised to David cast down. Judah is under foreign domination and life is hard. The earth is bleak, the skies are grey, the wind is cold. And into this moment, Matthew tells us the Messiah is born! When faith feels frail and the shadow of sin seems dark, the Sun of Righteousness appears.

When God rips off the band-aid, we discover that the healing work of redemption is not due to our righteousness, but the Lord's everlasting compassion and mercy. And for that reason, we should always pray and not lose heart!



O come, o come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lowly exile here,
Until the Son of God appears.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

~ "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

December 22nd

READ JEREMIAH 31:31-32:44; HEBREWS 8; HEBREWS 11:10,16



Every culture has a moment that reshapes it. For North Americans, September 11, 2001 is forever etched in people's memories. The hijacking of four planes resulted in three crashing into key buildings – the Twin Towers in New York and one into the Pentagon in Washington DC. The security of the West was forever shaken. Planes were grounded. Security was added at ballparks to casinos. Life changed.

Jeremiah, a prophet from Anathoth, the son of priest Hilkiah (the one who had found the scroll in the Temple during Josiah's reign), ministered in the final days of Jerusalem. The Babylonians were surrounding the city of the Lord, cutting off all supplies going in or out. For 2 ½ years, the city was besieged until it fell in July 586 BC. And during this time Jeremiah called the people to turn to the Lord. For the Jewish people, the summer of 586 BC was their September 11th moment. All looked lost. The king God had promised to sit on David's throne was taken away. The hope of a restored Israel from Josiah's days were gone. And the people were being deported into exile.

While all looked hopeless, we would be mistaken. In chapter 32, Jeremiah is told by the Lord to go and buy a field while Babylon is besieging Jerusalem. He can't understand why – this is a bad move in terms of a real estate purchase. But the Lord tells him why he is to purchase this land (32:36-44). This is the promise of the new covenant that the Lord is making. He will restore his people to the land. As sure as the Lord will give his people a new heart (31:31-34) – they will know this will happen because they will be brought back to the land. So Jeremiah is to buy this field as a sign of hope.

When the writer of Hebrews looks at this new covenant in Hebrews 8, he can't help but see that there is a new and better Jerusalem coming. Those who examine themselves, look at their hearts, and turn from their sin will experience something wonderful: the one who said that there is a message of judgment will also be the one who will rescue his people from this judgment. "Do not fear him who can destroy body, but fear him who can cast body and soul into hell," Jesus said (Matt 10:28). There is a greater exile coming. There is one that will separate people from the joy of the Lord forever.

But the Lord has promised that there is a better Jerusalem coming, whose builder and designer is God (Heb. 11:10). And the longing for a better world is exactly right – the utopian desire that people have in their hearts is a longing for

a heavenly country (Heb. 11:16).

This city has been purchased by another weeping prophet – the one who looked at the first Jerusalem and wept over her because she killed prophets like Jeremiah. Yet this man was greater than a weeping prophet. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despised its shame (Heb. 12:2). So if we suffer for a while in this life, we should not grow weary (Heb. 12:3ff). Why? Because he has purchased for us a better kingdom – a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:18–24), a heavenly Jerusalem that will come down one day (Rev. 21). And when it comes down, there will be no more weeping or sorrow or sin. But until that day, you and I are called to spur one another on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). We are exiles here and now (1 Pe. 1:1). But exiles don't surrender in hopelessness and disobedience. Exiles live with the hope of the new covenant. He is our God. We are his people. He is purifying our hearts even now.



By faith the prophets saw a day
When the longed-for Messiah would appear
With the power to break the chains of sin and death
And rise triumphant from the grave

~ Keith & Kristin Getty, "By Faith"

December 23rd

READ EZRA 1; NEHEMIAH 1; JOHN 14:1-4



There's no place like home. When you've been away, most people find they don't sleep as well in a different environment. The pillow isn't the same. The bed feels softer or harder. The smell of the room is different. But home – it feels like a place of security, familiarity, and comfort. We love to feel at home. For the Jewish exiles, home brought feelings of longing and regret. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137:1).

God had told Israel she would not stay in the security and comfort of the land if they broke his covenant (see Deut. 28:64). They would be sent into exile. This had been Adam and Eve's experience after breaking faith with God, being driven from their home and land and barred by an angel who guarded the entrance back into the sacred place with a flaming sword (see Gen. 3:24). And ever since Adam and Eve, humanity has had the same experience – living our lives cut off from God. We want to go home.

For the Jewish exiles in Babylon, it looked as if Ezra might be the one who could bring them back home. With Babylon now defeated, the Persians gave the Jews an opportunity to return. Ezra led the first group back. But home wasn't so comforting. Their temple was in ruins. The city's walls had been torn down. Back in Persia, Nehemiah received an update from his brother. Returning back to Jerusalem, Nehemiah found things in disrepair. So, he pulled together a team to rebuild. But the surrounding nations taunt and threaten the project. Work slowed as construction workers had to take up swords to guard the others. Eventually, the wall was rebuilt. But the people of God were still far from God because they continued to break God's commands by marrying unbelievers and ignoring God's sabbath commands for rest. They might be home, but the people prayed, “We are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors” (Neh. 9:36). They may be home, but their hearts aren't.

For centuries, the Jewish people lived under oppression and foreign domination. Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans kept Israel from experiencing the rest and joy they had been anticipating. Yet the promise of God still stood: Israel's exile would come to an end, and God would bring about peace and security. And suddenly, almost five centuries after their return to the land, the exile came to an end. But it was not the ending that anyone anticipated. What most expected was the defeat of the Romans, the establishment of David's throne, and a return to the golden days of the kingdom. But when David's descendant arrives to take his throne, he doesn't do things the way most people

expected. Instead of dealing with the feeling of not being at home in the land, King Jesus comes to deal with the heart that isn't at home. It isn't foreign oppressors who keep God's people from enjoying rest, but sin and death. And King Jesus is going to lead his people home, out of exile, and into the restored Eden.

The only way that God could bring his people home is if his Son would go and rescue his people. At the cross, Jesus experienced exile. He died in darkness, under the cloud of judgment, feeling abandoned by his Father. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). In experiencing exile for us, King Jesus would bring us back home to the place he has prepared for us (Jn. 14:1-4).

Coming back home is what Christmas is all about. Christ left his home in order to bring you back. Out of exile, out of darkness, out of bondage, into freedom, light, and the place we've always longed to be - home.



He will come like last leaf's fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to the bone, and
earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

December 24th

READ MATTHEW 1:1-17



You open to the first page of this best seller. You're anticipating the good news of Jesus Christ, the rescuer of the world. And what do you find?

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1).

For 17 verses, name after name is listed. This isn't the way you start a best seller – it's not a riveting opening, something that grips you and keeps your attention. So, when you finally get to verse 18, it feels like the story really starts. And it's tempting to blow past this list of names because...well, it's wearying to read them.

Instead of reading this genealogy as a dull list of names, it may be helpful to see this account in a couple of ways. First, the list of names isn't the dusty old recounting of so and so. This genealogy is built around the hope of something new. Matthew picks out three moments and structures his genealogy around them. He tells us this fact in v. 17: "So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations." Jesus is the hope of something new. Jesus fulfills the promises to Abraham – to make his name great, giving him descendants more numerous than can be counted, and a place where all can dwell in security forever. The birth of Jesus is the birth of David's greater son, the eternal King who will reign forever and ever. And the coming of the Messiah is the end of the exile and the guarantee that we will be brought into the place of God's presence forever.

Second, when you read these names, you're not reading about people that don't matter. This is part of your family tree. It's not just that Old Testament stories are pointing to Jesus. They are culminating of all of history into the last Adam, the dragon-slayer, the hope of the world. Included in this genealogy are prostitutes, murderers, adulterers, and everything in between. Those with shameful pasts, those who were strangers and foreigners – they're included in this family tree. They remind us that this story is for everyone, no matter where they've come from or what they've done.

But the story does not end here. This genealogy ends with Jesus but begins the story of something brand new – God's presence among us, God's presence with us, God's presence sending us out. The genealogy ends with Jesus, but the story of something new is the story to bring hope in the midst of our confusion,

certainty in the face of uncertainty, and rest in the face of weariness. The question then is this: Will you make the story of your life about you and feel restless and weary, or will you acknowledge Jesus is the center of it all, the hero above all heroes, and receive his rest?



Joy to the world! The Lord is come,
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing!

~ Isaac Watts, Joy to the World



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