



OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Wonderful Day in the Lord

"Route 66"

Old Testament

Introduction: U.S. Route 66, also known as the "Mother Road" was one of the original highways in the U.S. Highway system. Established in 1926, it became the most famous road in America, running from Chicago to Los Angeles, covering 2,448 miles. Many stretches of the highway remain today and people come from all over the world to travel part or all of it. Since it runs straight through Springfield, it is part of our history and a few establishments such as Cozy Dog still exist. Others have banked on its fame recently. The largest Route 66 sign in the world was erected in Springfield.

But if you decided to travel the entire Route 66, or what remains of it, you easily get lost. The only way to succeed is to follow the signs posted along the way.

Similarly, many Christians decided to take a trip through the Bible, but soon lose their way. As they try to navigate the many twists and turns they find it a difficult task, and in frustration often give up. We may love the words of the song "*Ancient Words*" and yet when it comes to knowing those words and living them, we are still stuck in Joliet. What is needed are some helpful signs, pointing the way.

Isaiah 30:21 – promises Israel that the true Word comes when He, as their Teacher, would whisper in their ears, "This is the way, walk in it." And so the Lord has provided for us 66 books contained in Scripture to serve as sign posts to show us the way through life; a life lived for the glory of God. We will be identifying these 66 signs one at a time on our "Wonderful Day in the Lord" broadcast.

Our format:

1. A brief overview of each book of the Bible.
2. A key word (or phrase).
3. A key verse(s).

Our challenge:

1. Memorize the key word and verse, or at least know what the verse is and where it may be found.
2. Write these down in a notebook or on the first page of each biblical book.
3. If you have children watch broadcasts together, do point #1-#2 together, use these as an aid to fulfill the instruction found in Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Eph 6:4. We often encourage parents to guide their children in spiritual things, but many feel ill-equipped. This Route 66 will give you tools to accomplish this wonderful assignment from the Lord.

Genesis

Key word: Beginnings

We begin our journey in the biblical Route 66 with Genesis. The word Genesis means origin or beginning, and so the book is perfectly named for its details. Without the information given in Genesis, especially the first twelve chapters we would be in the dark concerning massive issues. Genesis tells us of the beginning of almost everything:

- Creation Chapter 1
- Humanity Chapter 2 (1:27)
- Marriage Chapter 2
- Sin Chapter 3 +
- Sacrifice Chapter 3:21; 4
- Government Chapter 9
- Nations Chapter 11
- Israel Chapter 12

Key verse: Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.”

Exodus

Key word: Deliverance

As Genesis concludes, we find the descendants of Abraham living in Egypt, having abandoned the land promised to them for the conveniences of a more civilized and developed country. In time, the Jewish people were no longer considered honored guests but hated slaves (1:8). They had entered Egypt as free people, they were now in bondage. They had entered Egypt as worshippers of Jehovah, by the time of Moses, they hardly recalled the Lord and were idolaters. What they needed was to be set free from bondage, both physical and spiritual. The Lord would call and prepare Moses to bring deliverance to His people. The Exodus is the story of that physical deliverance (chapters 1-18). The giving of the Law (chapters 19-24). So that they might find spiritual deliverance, and the building of the Tabernacle (chapters 25-40), that they might worship the Lord. Unfortunately, even as the Law was being given and the tabernacle being designed the people rebelled and briefly returned to idolatry (Chapter 32) but the Lord forgives them and the journey continues which bridges the physical and spiritual deliverance.

Key verse: Exodus 20:2 – “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

Leviticus

Key word: Holiness

While far too many people pull off the biblical Route 66 at the Leviticus exit, properly understood this is an essential and even exciting book. Its title references the Jewish tribe of Levi, the tribe chosen by the Lord to lead Israel in worship. The sacrificial system was at the heart of that worship because it was the means by which their sins would be covered until the ultimate forgiveness found in Christ's sacrifice. Five major offerings are explained in the first seven chapters, and 17:11 implies, and Hebrews 9:22 states, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin."

But even more fundamental to Leviticus is the holiness of God. Leviticus 19:2-4 informs us that He is a holy God and therefore His followers are to be holy people. Holy means separate, and in this context speaks of being separate from all impurities, pollutants and sin. And while only God is pure holiness, His people should desire and strive for the same because He is holy.

Key verse: Leviticus 19:2b – "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

Numbers

Key word: Wanderings

Numbers records the sad consequences of Israel's consistent rebellion against the Lord. It is called Numbers because of the census taken of the Exodus generation (1:46), and one taken of the Conquest generation 38 years later (26:51). The numbers are essentially the same because virtually everyone who left Egypt died in the wilderness even though it would have taken only a few weeks to travel from Egypt to Canaan, it took 40 years because of their sin. By 14:22, Moses records that the people grumbled and rebelled so often (10 times already) that the Lord doomed them to perish in the wilderness (14:29). Only Joshua and Caleb of those over 20, were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

1 Corinthians 10:11 said all these failures were written down for our instruction. Yet in the midst of all this defiance the Lord desired to bless His people as reflected in Aaron's great prayer of benediction for them (6:24-26).

Key verse: Numbers 6:24 – "The Lord bless you, and keep you."

Deuteronomy

Key word: Reminders

Deuteronomy means a second Law but it is really a repetition and explanation of the Law already given. It reviews many things found in the previous four books, and was written by Moses just before his death just prior to Israel finally entering the land promised to them by God. 69 times in the book God promises Israel they will inherit the land.

One of the prominent sections is chapters 27-28 which lists curses for rebellious sin (27:15-16; 28:15-20), and blessings for obedience (28:1-8). It is interesting that when Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus repelled the Devil by quoting from Deuteronomy three times.

Ultimately to love the Lord is the most important thing in life and Jesus confirms it is the greatest of the commandments (Matthew 22:37).

Key verse: Deuteronomy 6:5 – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Joshua

Key word: Success

Finally, after 40 years of messing up, the people are ready to follow the Lord in conquest of the land. It should be noted that removal of the Canaanites by Israel was God's judgment on them for the iniquity and idolatry and was prophesied all the way back to Abraham (Genesis 15:16) over 500 years earlier. Their removal was necessary to avoid Jewish compromise, pollution and idolatry.

The book will cover about 30 years, from the time of Moses's death, to the death of Joshua. It covers the conquest of much, but not all the land and its division among the tribes. Bookend in: these details are two powerful sections/statements. The first one is by God as He promises success if Joshua and the people will trust and obey the Lord and His word (1:5-9). The second statement is by Joshua and reflects his life of service to Jehovah (24:14-15).

Key verse: Joshua 1:8 – "This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

Judges

Key word: Failure

There is not a sadder book in all the Bible than Judges. After the great successes under Joshua, we find the next generation not only giving back all Israel had gained, but deteriorating to a new depth of depravity (2:10-11). One tragic account after another is compiled, although there were glimmers of victory and hope. As a matter of fact, there is a reoccurring cycle found throughout the book and its 350 years of history: the people rebelled, God judges their sin, they cry out for mercy, the Lord sends judges or leaders to deliver them, they repent, God restores and they sin and the cycle starts all over again.

While some of the most memorable stories in Scripture are found in Judges, such as Gideon and Samson, who gets Chapters 13-16 devoted to his life, most of the stories, even these two, are stories of failure for one simple reason: instead of meditation on the word of God and following it (Joshua 1:8), everyone did what was right in their own eyes (21:25, 17:6).

Key verse: Judges 21:25b – “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

RUTH

Key word: Redemption

Ruth is one of the most beautiful stories in all the Scripture. It takes place during the time of the Judges, demonstrating that not everyone was living godless lives, and that the Lord had not forsaken His people even if most had rejected Him. It is instructive that in the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament books that Ruth is placed after Proverbs, and specifically immediately after Proverbs 31 and the virtuous woman. Ruth epitomizes the Proverbs 31 woman.

The story line follows a Jewish family which fled from Israel to Moab during the terrible famine. While staying in Moab for 10 years, Naomi's husband and sons died and she returns home with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth. Ruth is determined to take care of Naomi and does. Along the way, she meets and marries the godly Boaz and has a son who will be the grandfather of David , the king of Israel and ancestor of Jesus.

But this simple story has deeper significance, as found in the Hebrew word "Gaal", meaning kinsman-redeemer, used 13 times in Ruth. The kinsman-redeemer was a near relative who would just back a relative's property if they had to sell due to financial problems. They would also marry a widow and raise up children in the name of the dead husband thus keeping his line alive and his property in the family. Boaz would be Ruth's kinsman-redeemer. This picture points straight to Christ who would become our Redeemer – buying us back from sin and giving us a new life in Him.

Key verse: Ruth 4:14 – "Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today."

1 Samuel

Key word: Kingdom

Originally the books of 1 & 2 Samuel were one book and were eventually broken into two books because it was difficult to fit all the material on one scroll due to the large amount of material. The Samuels trace the history of Israel from the latter day of the Judges through the early life of David. First Samuel starts with the birth of Samuel, the last of the Judges, and the first of the great prophets, and concludes with the death of Saul, Israel's first king. Thus the book shows the origin of the Kingdom, or monarchy of Israel, which is established around 1050 BC.

As Samuel grows up and leads Israel, he guides them in a return to following the Lord (7:3-4). But sadly his sons did not walk in the ways of the Lord (8:5) and people cry for a king so they could be like the other nations. But in doing so they rejected the Lordship of God (8:7). Nevertheless, the Lord has Samuel appoint Saul as their first king. Saul starts well but proves to be a grave disappointment. The Lord has Samuel anoint David as the next king which sets up massive conflict with Saul who did not want to lose his power. The rest of the book chronicles that conflict. What poor Saul did not get, but David did, is found in our key verse. Saul thought all was well if he followed religious ritual (at least to a degree), but David was a man who followed the Lord with his heart (13:14).

Key verse: 1 Samuel 15:22b – "To obey is better than sacrifice."

2 Samuel

Key word: David

This historical book begins with David ascending the throne of Israel and ends as he is old and approaching death. So, it is the account of God at work in Israel during the dynasty of King David, which extends about 40 years. David's reign does not begin peacefully. Judah makes him king first and David reigns over them for 7 ½ years, but there was civil war with the rest of Israel and the house of Saul (3:1). Finally, Israel is united under David and would follow him for the next 33 years (5:5). David increases in greatness for the Lord was with him (5:10).

The Lord was with David because his heart was right before God as seen in his bringing the Ark back to Jerusalem (chapter 6), and desiring to build a house for the Lord (chapter 7). The Lord would not allow David to build a house for Him, but the Lord promises to build a house for David (7:11, 16). This is known as the Davidic Covenant and its ultimate fulfillment will be when Christ Himself sits on David's throne when He returns (Luke 1:32-33).

Chapter 7 constitutes the high mark of the book; the rest describes the highs and lows of David's life. The best-known low is his sin with Bathsheba. Even a man after God's own heart can commit terrible sin if they are not on guard. David let down his guard and does a horrifying thing, and the consequences of that sin, although forgiven, are recorded in the remainder of the book.

This little key verse epitomizes David's life, and should ours as well. David was not a great man, except as he trusted a great God.

Key verse: 2 Samuel 22:2 – "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer." (also found in Psalm 18)

1 Kings

Key word: Compromise

Like 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings were originally one book split into two for convenience. As the book opens, David is on His death bed and is handing the kingdom over to Solomon. The history found in the book will take us forward 126 years through the division of the kingdom and the reigns of Jehoshaphat in Judah and Ahab in Israel.

As we begin the Kings, it is on a high note. Israel is in the land; the kingdom has been established by David and handed off in good shape economically and spiritually to Solomon, the wisest of men. Israel appears to be on the edge of being the blessing to the nations as it was designed by God to be. But something goes terribly wrong as Solomon compromises with false deities and leads Israel astray with him (11:1-2, 6). Israel was at its high-water mark by 4:20, built the temple in chapter 6, and the Lord's presence filled it in 8:10. Solomon dedicates the temple in 8:12-66.

After Solomon's death, Rehoboam, his son ascended to the throne, but soon civil war broke out and Jeroboam took the northern tribes of Israel, while Rehoboam was king over the Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, known only as Judah going forward. The division was never mended and the rest of the kings tell the narrative of 20 kings in Judah and 20 kings in Israel. There would be constant war between the two nations (14:30). Israel fully abandons the Lord and none of the 20 kings ever follow Him. Judah, ruled by Davidic descendants will be ruled by a mixture of Jehovah worshipers and apostates.

The most outstanding character during this time was not a king, but a prophet – Elijah (see chapter 17-19). Here was a man who stood against all odds, against kings and queens, against a multitude of idol worshipping prophets and priests, against virtually a whole nation and proclaimed that the Lord alone is God.

There are a few bright lights in 2 Kings, especially Elijah, but the story line is basically one of failure due to initial compromise. 1 Kings begins with Israel worshipping God and ends with a divided nation worshipping false gods. We are always only one generation away from spiritual failure and 1 Kings models this sad truth all too well.

Key verse: 1 Kings 18:21 – “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow Him.”

2 Kings

Key word: Rebellion

Since 1 & 2 Kings were originally one book, 2 Kings picks up where 1 Kings leaves off. It covers about 270 years from the deaths of Ahab (Israel) and Jehoshaphat (Judah) to the fall of both nations. Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C. (1 Kings 17), and Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C.

The narrative concerning Israel is that of progressive spiritual disintegration until finally the Lord turns them over to the consequences of their sin. In one of the most insightful and frightening sections found in Scriptures, the Lord ticks off the multitude of ways Israel defiled themselves and rebelled against God (17:7-23), until finally God had, had enough (17:18). But the most insightful part is found in verse 15, "They followed vanity and became vain" (several translations substitute the word "worthless" for vanity/vain). Ultimately, we become what we worship. Because they followed and lived for worthless things, they became worthless themselves.

As for Judah, their spiritual journey was up and down. Two kings in particular, stand out as exemplary in their devotion to God and spiritual leadership of Judah: Hezekiah (chapters 18-20), and Josiah (chapters 22-23). After the death of Josiah, Judah is on a rapid spiritual downhill slide until Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar destroys the nation, taking the people into exile in three stages from 605-586 B.C.

As Elijah did in 1 Kings, so Elisha stands out in 2 Kings as a bright spot in the history of the kings. He is Elijah's prophetic successor and his faithfulness, and efforts to turn the people to the Lord, dominates the first eight chapters.

While a very unpleasant verse, 17:15 has to be our key verse because it describes so perfectly not only Israel's sin, but also the consequences and it is a powerful reminder to us today.

Key verse: 2 Kings 17:15 – "And they followed vanity and became vain,"

1 Chronicles

Key word: Covenant

Like the books of Samuel and Kings, the Chronicles were originally one book, which begins with the death of Saul and continues through the captivity in Babylon. As such, much of the material overlaps with the book of 2 Samuel and Kings. So a legitimate question might be what is the purpose for the Chronicles? The answer is that the target audience are the returning exiles who were in need of a brief history of Judah since they had been out of the land for decades.

1 & 2 Chronicles deal almost exclusively with the house of David and Judah. The first book concerns the reign of David, much as 2 Samuel does. The returning exiles needed to be reminded of God's faithfulness in the setting up of the dynasty with David, in connection with His promises to Abraham. 1 Chronicles, unlike 2 Samuel, focuses almost exclusively on God's promises to David and his faithful obedience. Virtually nothing concerning David's faults are mentioned. Even the civil war between Israel and Judah is skipped over. Instead much attention is given to the Davidic covenant, which will be kept by God, regardless of the faithfulness of future kings (1 Chronicles 17). And 1 Chronicles not only describes the preparation David made for the construction of the temple, but also how the expenses for the construction were funded (something not found in 2 Samuel) (chapter 29). As the exiles were commissioned to rebuild the temple, the example is important.

Our key word then is covenant, for despite all the rebellion and sin of God's people, He has kept His covenant with them – both His promises to the Jews in general, and to David specifically.

Key verse: 1 Chronicles 17:16 – "Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house that You have brought me this far?"

2 Chronicles

Key word: Seek (God)

This book begins with the reign of Solomon and continued to the decree of Cyrus for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (960-536 B.C). It deals exclusively with Judah, virtually ignoring Israel. It would be Solomon who would build, furnish and dedicate the temple for the Lord. The high point of 2 Chronicles is Solomon's prayer of dedication (6:12-42), see 6:14. Israel under Solomon possesses more of the land than at any other time; they are at peace, have a booming economy, and for a time, follow God. But Solomon's sins and compromises plant the seeds for deterioration in the future, and under his son Rehoboam the kingdom splits into two parts. From this point on, the author turns to Judah. Some of Judah's kings were godless. Others were a mixed bag, but there are two outstanding lights. Hezekiah restores the temple and temple worship. He restores the Jewish feasts, especially the Passover and unleavened bread (chapters 29-30). More importantly, he led the people to a place of true repentance (30:26-27, 31:1). Josiah would be the last Godly king of Judah. He too was faithful and sought to restore Judah spiritually. But his revival could be described best as reform, for the revival was only superficial. As soon as he dies, the people returned to their sin (chapters 34-35).

The most well-known verse in the book is 7:14, and so although it offers promises specifically to Judah, it does convey a principle that is always true: The Lord desires that we humble ourselves, seek Him and turn from wickedness.

Key verse: 2 Chronicles 7:14 – "My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear them from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Ezra

Key word: The hand of the Lord

Ezra picks up Judah's story exactly where 2 Chronicles leaves off. In fact, the last two verses of 2 Chronicles are almost identical to the first three verses of Ezra. (The book tells the story of the returning exiles.) Cyrus releases exiles to return and specifically to rebuild the temple. In Ezra, there are two distinct returns recorded. The first under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (chapters 1-6), and the second under Ezra 78 years later (chapters 7-10).

The attempt to rebuild the temple was stopped due to opposition and not resumed for 15 years, following the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah.

Ezra brings more exiles back in 515 B.C. Under the first return, 42,360 returned, this time there is 1,754 for total of only 44,114 out of millions who could have come back. But of those who did, by the close of the book of Ezra they were dedicated to and obedient to the Lord.

Our key phrase is, "the hand of the Lord," which was on Ezra as he followed the Lord. (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Why God's hand was on Ezra is made clear in our key verse.

Key verse: Ezra 7:10 – For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice *it* and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Nehemiah

Key word: Restoration

Originally Nehemiah and Ezra were one book covering the return of the Jewish exiles from the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. to 420 B.C. when Nehemiah was governor of Judah. There is a 12-year gap between the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. Then 12 years of Nehemiah's leadership is detailed, followed by a 12-year gap when Nehemiah returned to Persia, and then finally he returns.

As the book begins almost 100 years have now lapsed since the first return under Zerubbabel. The temple has been completed but the people had been unable to rebuild the city walls. Nehemiah is deplored by this situation and returns to rectify this problem. Not only does he restore the walls and the city, he also restores the people spiritually. Nehemiah has to overcome external enemies and internal lethargy to accomplish these two tasks.

His partner in spiritual restoration was the faithful scribe and priest Ezra. One of the greatest revivals in Scripture takes place under his preaching (8:1-8, 12-9:3). As the word was preached, the people responded with worship and obedience (8:6, 8; 9:3). The key verse is 8:8, which shows the importance of the word of God being taught and understood for spiritual restoration.

Key verse: Nehemiah 8:8 – "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."

Esther

Key word: Jew

Esther is one of the most interesting and unique books in the Bible for a number of reasons:

1. It is one of only two books in the Bible named after women. Ruth is about a Gentile woman who marries a Jew, and Esther is a Jewish woman who married a Gentile.
2. While Ezra and Nehemiah describe events happening in and around Jerusalem as about 50,000 Jews return from exile Esther tells us what is happening to Jews who did not return but remained in Persia. The story fits between chapters six and seven of Ezra, after the Temple had been rebuilt under Zerubbabel and before Ezra returned.
3. While the book is saturated with the sovereignty of God – which is its main theme, the name of the Lord is not used even once.
4. It is in Esther that the title “Jews” becomes prominent. Before this time “Jew” was found only 2 times in all the Bible. But in Esther it is used 47 times. It is derived from the word Judah since most of the Babylonian/Persian exiles were from Judah.

The story line tells of King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes) of Persia who is in need of a new queen. An empire-wide beauty contest is held and Esther, a beautiful Jewish young lady wins. As the story unfolds, two men come into conflict. Haman, the villain of the story rises to second in command of Persia and demands virtually to be worshipped. Mordecai, Esther’s cousin, and a godly Jew refuses to honor Haman. Haman becomes so furious that he seeks to not only kill Mordecai but all of the Jews. When the king, not realizing Esther is a Jew, allows Haman to carry out his plot, only Esther can save the Jews. God has placed her in the perfect position to rescue her people. Mordecai and Esther turn the tables on Haman and he is hanged and the Jews are allowed by the king to defend themselves, and have a great victory over their enemies. To celebrate this victory, the Feast of Purim was initiated (9:19, 25-26).

Esther is the story of how a sovereign God guides and protects His people even in the midst of evil.

Key verse: Esther 4:14b – “And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

Job

Key word: Suffering

The key word is suffering especially suffering of the righteous. Everyone thinks of suffering and trials when they think of Job, but the actual theme is the sovereign work of God in our lives. The Lord is always at work shaping and forming us into the people He wants us to be.

When the story begins, we learn immediately that Job is the greatest man alive. He has it all: wealth, honor, respect, a loving family, and a deep viable relationship with God (see vv. 3-4, 8). Satan challenges God to strip Job of all his pleasures and the Lord would discover that Job was a "paid lover" as J.V. McGee frames it. Over the first two chapters, Satan is allowed to remove all of Job's props, including his health and the support of his wife. In all of this, Job trusted the Lord had the right to do what He wants with His own (2:10), and he continued to worship Him (1:21).

The rest of the book is taken up with dialogue between Job and four friends who come to comfort him (2:11-37:24). Each of the "comforters" bring with them a faulty view of life and God, and Job's own distorted theology is revealed in the process. Finally, God Himself speaks, revealing truth about Himself and humanity previously unknown to Job and his friends (38:1-41:34). Chapter 42 tells us that Job ultimately has new understanding of God and repents of his former attitude (42:1-3, 6). God then chooses to restore to Job all that he had lost and more (42:7-17).

There are many excellent verses in Job, which could be used for our key verse, but 1:21b captures the essence of the book and the attitude God desires from us.

Key verse: Job 1:21b – "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

Psalms

Key word: Praise

As we travel across America in our automobile, especially on the older highway systems such as Route 66, there often is only short distances between towns and cities. But if you are driving across states like Kansas, Nebraska, Montana or the Dakotas, you can travel great distances with no towns, or even gas stations, Psalms is kind of like that. It is by far, the largest book in the Bible with 150 chapters varying from two verses to 176. It is a collection of songs and prayers, gathered from the time of Moses to Solomon and beyond – covering several centuries. David wrote approximately half the Psalms but there are numerous other contributors. Unlike driving across desolate places in America, the Psalms, while extremely long, is a virtual oasis of heart-felt prayers, cries to God for help, thanksgiving and songs of praise. The Psalms, somewhere, touches on every circumstance and emotion we experience, so, no wonder it is so loved by God's people. In the end, it is a book about praising and worshipping God, thus our key word is praise.

Because of its length, Psalms is divided into five books, each ending in a doxology of praise. And so, unlike our previous stops along the biblical Route 66, we will spend five days observing these five books within the book.

Book 1 – Psalms 1-41 is largely the prayers of David, and the first Psalms to capture the main theme of the Psalter.

Psalm one lays the foundation for the blessed life – the life looked on with favor or delight by the Lord. Such a person shuns false people and counsel, and embraces, even delights in the word of God (v. 2).

Psalm two instructs us, however, that what mankind ultimately needs is Christ. In the best known of the Messianic Psalms, we find humanity ranging against the Lord (vv. 1-3), and the Lord's reaction to such defiance (v. 4) and the sending of His son for our redemption (v. 7).

Book 2 – Psalms 42-72 while the book of Psalms is one book in the Old Testament scriptures, it breaks itself into five sub-books each end with a doxology of praise. Book one ends in 41:13: blessings. Book two is largely concerned with the suffering of the Godly: deliverance. The first Psalm, 42,

in this collection, is representative of much of this sub book. It opens with the Psalmist longing for God (vv. 1-2). It is a beautiful example of the child of God and their longing for the "living God." But sometimes we stop at verse two and fail to catch the context. The Psalmist is hurting (vv. 3-4). As a matter of fact, he is in despair (v. 5), which is repeated in verse 11, and in different words in verse 6. One reason for his despair is his concern that the Lord has abandoned him at his hour of greatest need (vv. 9-10). Where is hope to be found? Even in the midst of his despair, he knows that hope is found only in the Lord (45:5b, 11b). This is why He is panting for the Lord (v. 1). Even though at this particular moment he is discouraged and downcast, and even though He does not presently experience the comfort he longs for from the Lord, nevertheless he does not give up. He doubles-down on his seeking the Lord, for he knows that is where his hope lies and that in God's timing, He will deliver him.

Book 3 – Psalms 73-89 constitutes book three of the Psalms and emphasizes God's dealings with Israel from the beginning of the nation to the final blessing. Two Psalms are good representations of this collection:

- Psalm 73 – verse one immediately shows that the subject of book three is God and Israel. But Asaph, the author of this Psalm, is not so certain of God's goodness (v. 2) and is near stumbling because his observations reveal that the wicked often do better in life than the godly (v. 3). It was not until the Psalmist entered the presence of God that he received insight and his attitude changed (v. 17). The wicked just appeared to be living a charmed life; in the end they will face justice (v. 18). The Psalm ends with the author focusing clearly on God who has now become his greatest desire and delight (vv. 25-26).
- Psalm 78 reminds the reader that each generation is responsible to pass to the next generations the wonders of God (vv. 4-7). It was because Israel failed to do this that their nation fell apart. May the same not be true of us.

Book 4 – Psalms 90-106 theme is the sufferings and afflictions of God's people to end with the reign of Christ. In the meanwhile, God is our strength and protector in the times of trouble. This is clearly depicted in the opening two Psalms in the section, Psalm 90-91 – the only two attributed to Moses. This interplays between trouble in this world and divine rescue have a design. It

is to “teach us to number our days” and examine life through eyes of wisdom (90:12). As we do so, our focus turns from our struggles to the satisfaction found in the Lord, resulting in our praise of Him (90:14). Such a person can proclaim that their only shelter from life’s bombardment is the Most High (90:1-4). Psalm 94:19 provides a summary take way and 95:1-2 guides us into worship.

The collection ends with man struggling with life and is stressing out (102:2a). He feels totally out of place like a pelican in the wilderness (102:6). But in Psalm 103, we find a man soaring as an eagle (v. 5b) rather than moping like the pelican. What makes the difference? The Psalm 103 man focuses on the Lord’s redemption and lovingkindness and compassion (vv. 1-4). David is especially thankful that the Lord understands our frailty, does not deal with us as we deserve but loves to pour out compassion and lovingkindness on those who fear Him (vv. 10-14).

Book 5 – Psalm 107-150 emphasizes the word of God. The Messiah is pictured both in his sufferings and in his glorious return.

Psalm 110 has the distinction of being the most frequently cited Psalm, more, the most frequently cited Old Testament passage in the New Testament. Psalm 110 verses are quoted or alluded to a full 17 times in New Testament Scriptures, and verse 4 which contains the only Old Testament reference to Melchizedek outside of Genesis 14, is quoted 3 times in Hebrews and serves as the basis of the whole argument given in Hebrews 7 – that Christ is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron. Therefore, Christ’s role as both King and Priest is declared in this one short, amazing Psalm.

This book contains some impressive content. Psalms 113-118 are known as the Hallel Psalms, or hymns of praise, and were sung at feasts and Psalms 120-134 are called the Pilgrim Psalms and were sung by Jewish people as they traveled to Jerusalem for the three most important feasts. Then the book ends with God’s hallelujah chorus (Psalms 146-150), each Psalm beginning and ending with “praise the Lord,” with Psalm 150 sounding the high note.

With cruise-control on, as we drove through Book 5 of Psalms, we sped right past the incomparable Psalm 119. Recognizing our error, we now

return, get out of our car and take a close look. D. A. Carson believes Psalm 119 is devoted to unpacking Psalm 1:1, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law, he meditates day and night." Every verse, of the 176 verses, except for 4 mentions the word of God through the use of one of 11 terms. If Psalm one sets the agenda for the book of Psalms, Psalm 119 unpacks its meaning.

So, we are not surprised to find that if we want to stay pure, we do so by guarding ourselves through the word (v. 9). If we want to keep from sinning, we must treasure the word in our hearts (v. 11). If we treasure the word, we delight in it (v. 16, and mentioned 8 more times). It is the word that revives or gives us true life (v. 37). It is the word that guides us through life (v. 105). And it holds a special place during times of affliction. It is in the crucible of suffering and pain that we are most likely to learn the importance of obedience (v. 67), the value of the word (v. 71), that God is faithful (v. 75), and the protective power of the word (v. 92). In short, we learn that the Lord is good and does good (v. 68).

Key verse: Psalm 1:1-2 – Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.

Proverbs

Key word: Wisdom

Have you ever been traveling down the secondary highway systems, such as Route 66, and seen signs along the way indicating that a historical marker lies ahead? As you speed by, you glance over to the markers and see a bronze sign off the road a piece, with considerable writing on it. The signs will detail an important event that took place nearby, or an important person who lived in the area. But if you are like me you seldom, if ever, pull off the road and read these markers – and so while they reference important people or events, we have no idea what they are, and we are the poorer for it.

Proverbs draws a biblical parallel. Here are numerous valuable markers just begging to be explored. To zip by with a casual glance would be a crime. We are going to stop, get out of our car and read the markers. We will be richer for the experience.

We will start with wisdom, since it is the overarching theme of the book. It is wisdom for living – practical wisdom to aid us in the navigation of life that Solomon has in mind. As a matter of fact, Solomon opens the book, addressed to his son, to teach him wisdom and instruction (1:1-2). By definition, wisdom is applied knowledge and the mastery of the art of living. Solomon will apply wisdom to dozens of subjects from anger to morals to our work-ethic. But he distinguishes wisdom available to everyone from wisdom available to the believer. In 1:7, he informs us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” In 9:10, he substitutes “wisdom” for knowledge, and thus we will use 9:10 as our key verse.

It is possible to be wise with one’s money and yet live like a fool. Foundational to true wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Ryrie defines this as a reverence for God expressed in submission to His will.” No one can truly live wisely who lacks this reverential fear of the Lord. Unless we bow before His sovereign will and majesty we cannot even enter the highway of wisdom.

Morality: One of the first applications of wisdom addressed in Proverbs has to do with moral purity. Unlike the structure of the rest of the book, Solomon concentrates on this subject, primarily in Chapters 5-7. And he approaches this subject almost entirely from the negative, only once speaking of the joy of physical love within the bounds of marriage (5:15-19). Solomon illustrates the power of moral temptation with three word-pictures: 1) A seductive lady (7:6-21). Resulting in destruction (7:21-23), 2) Misleading lips (5:3-4), 3) Unstable feet (5:6).

So, how can one avoid such destruction? We start with your heart (your thought life and desires 7:25a). The sins of the mind almost always proceed the sins of the flesh. Continue with your feet (7:25b). We need to literally flee from the place of temptation. If married, turn your physical attention toward your spouse (5:15); finally treasure the wisdom found only in the Lord (7:1-2).

Fools/Foolishness: If the theme of Proverbs is wisdom then the converse is foolishness. Much of Proverbs is written in this form – stating a wise way of living followed by its opposite. Often understanding what something is, can be enhanced by stating what it is not. Proverbs has about as much to say about fools and foolish living, as it does about wise people and wise living.

What does God's word mean by the words fool and foolish? Proverbs identifies a fool as one who lives according to his own understanding rather than God's (12:15; 14:12). Proverbs is constantly trying to convince us to abandon our own understanding and adopt God's (3:5-7). It is the very essence of foolishness to think that our views and our way of living is superior to God's.

If you identify with this description of foolishness, what can you do about it? First, repent (9:6). Second, learn the way of wisdom (9:9-10), recalling that it is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom (9:10). With this as a foundation, study Proverbs diligently for the wisdom found there for walking in God's way and don't forget the rest of scripture, which imparts wisdom found in Christ.

Advice: If wisdom is the mastery of the art of living according to the ways of God, then receiving good, godly advice and instruction plays a key role in such living. Unfortunately, we often get our backs up when people try to

advise us. Too often, we think we know what is best and we do not want insight from others. If we take such an attitude, we are the poorer for it. Proverbs calls us to seek out and listen carefully to good, biblical informed counsel (15:22). Having said this, the wise person considers the source of the advice given (12:5). Some advice is destructive – look to the righteous, those who know scripture well, for insight.

Be willing to receive constructive criticism without becoming defensive (27:5-6). If this is not true of us then we will either lose true friends, or they will stop talking to us of anything important.

A.W. Tozer wrote, "Listen to no man who fails to listen to God." If we stay in the lane what can we expect?

- Success (15:22) – not always but good counsel helps in most areas of life.
- Gaining understanding (15:32).
- Gaining wisdom (19:20).

Those rejecting good counsel should pay attention to the warning found in 29:1 – "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy."

Anger: Anger has always been a universal sinful response to life's irritations and problems. While there exists a godly anger, most anger is sinful, and as James informs us, "The anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God" (1:20). Proverbs has much to say about anger for the most part we get angry because something is not going our way. And while we often see ourselves as clever when we express anger, 29:11 says it is actually a mark of a fool, who imagines himself as clever when anger rules, we are out of control (19:19). How can we uproot anger? First, we need to recognize it for what it is. If we want to weed our flower garden, we need to know a flower from a weed. Secondly, we need to realize that we are not at the mercy of our emotions and we can control them – including anger (16:32). Self-control is actually a fruit of the Spirit. Third, take God seriously when He tells us that He is in charge of righting wrongs – even those which have you all frustrated (20:22). Finally, one very practical action – hang out with peaceable people (22:24-25). Anger can

be learned by spending time with angry people. Find people who do not react quickly with anger and learn their ways.

Discipline: Many people view discipline in a negative light – but not God. Proverbs commends two kinds of discipline: God’s and parent’s.

1. God (3:11-12). Scripture sees God’s disciplines in our life as one of the ways He demonstrates love for His children. In essence, the Lord loves us too much to allow us to go down the wrong path in life without correction. The issue is how we respond to that correction. Proverbs warns us not to reject or hate it, but rather to recall the motive: The Lord loves us, and delights in us. Nothing He brings into our lives is for the purpose of harming us – it is always for our good.
2. Parental: our parenting should mirror God’s. So, parent’s discipline their children because they love them (13:24). The goal is to train a child in the way they should live (22:15). And much of that is to drive foolishness from their heart (22:15), and gives wisdom (29:15).

Fear of the Lord: Since the central passage, and our theme verse, is 9:10, which declares, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. It is important to examine this phrase as found in Proverbs. The phrase itself is found numerous times in the Old Testament but only twice in the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men.” The idea there is that the unbeliever faces eternal judgment from the Lord, and for that reason we are to be motivated to turn them from sin and to Christ by proclaiming the gospel to them. The believer, on the other hand, does not fear judgment, so in what sense does this relate to us? Jonathan Edwards summed it up well, “If men fear God as they fear the devil, they flee from Him, but if they fear Him as the being who He really is, they flee to Him.” At the same time, holy fear causes us to dread displeasing God, not just because of the immediate consequences, but because of the love for our magnificent Lord who has saved us.

In 9:10, Proverbs continues by saying, “And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”. We cannot properly respond to a God we do not

know. Proverbs depicts God as holy, sovereign, compassionate, and wise. Who, in their right mind, would want to be resistant of such a one?

How do you know that you are living with a biblical fear of the Lord?:

1. You will stop trusting in your own wisdom and turn to His (3:7).
2. You will hate evil (3:7b; 8:13b).
3. You will desire to walk in the Lord's way, not your own (3:6; 14:2).

Proper fear of the Lord will impact every area of one's life.

Friends: Friendship is a natural desire for most people. To share at least a part of your life with some people who love and care about you is an incredible blessing. Virtually, everything said about friendship in the Bible is found in Proverbs.

Today, things like Facebook and its superficial understanding of friends skews what true friendship is. How does God's word describe it? Friends have four qualities:

1. Loyalty (15:24). A true friend is there with and for you through every type of circumstance. They rejoice with you when you experience happiness and success. They help you when you need a hand. They come along side when you are hurting. They rejoice with you when you rejoice and weep with you when you weep (Romans 12:15).
2. Love (17:17). A true friend loves you under all circumstances. They are not a fair-weather friend, but are actually at their best when times are tough.
3. Is willing to lovingly confront if necessary (27:5-6). A true friend is willing to hurt us a bit in order to help us. Don't despise the wounds of a friend – they are evidence of true love.

4. Improve us (27:9, 17). We all need people (friends) in our lives who sharpen us – who help us to be better people. Look for this quality in a friend. Stay away from those who pull us from the Lord, who corrupt us, whose sinful habits we are absorbing. We will never find a perfect friend but we should look for those who improve us, and who in turn we can improve as well.

Money: Since the Bible is concerned with God, Christ, eternity and Godly living, some might think that the subject of money would be beneath the Bible's attention. But the opposite is true. Money is part of life in this world, and no matter how "spiritual" you are, or how much you love Jesus, money is part of your life and you need to learn to handle it God's way. Proverbs has much to say on the subject, quickly, a few biblical lessons concerning money:

1. It cannot be trusted (11:28). It will let you down, but righteous living will be faithful.
2. It should not be obtained sinfully (10:2), but righteous living delivers from death.
3. Avoid debt (22:7).
4. Work for financial success (12:11).
5. Saving is commended (13:11).
6. Generosity (11:25) is honorable.

Work: Our Lord places a premium on hard work. On the cautionary side, we who might be called "driven" people must be careful not to make an idol out of work. There is more to life than work. And we must not give work more credit than it deserves. Hard work does not give us all good things to enjoy – God does. Nevertheless, work is not part of the curse, as the Lord put people to work immediately after creating them. In Proverbs the "sluggard" and the "slothful" person is spoken of negatively at least 17 times. And the Lord has woven the necessity for work into the

very fabric of life (16:26). God intends for our necessities to be met by us going to work, therefore those who refuse to work are going against the grain of the universe as God designed it. Some might lament working as a waste of time when we could spend more time directly serving the Lord if we do not work. Yet God has chosen that most people are to glorify Him through working at a “secular” job. But Proverbs identifies certain marks of a worker approved by God.

1. They do their best (22:29).
2. They take their work seriously (21:5).
3. They are known for their integrity (13:11).
4. They are generous (11:25) Our goal should not be riches but to be the kind of people the Lord can trust with riches – because we use it unselfishly.

It is noteworthy that the Prodigal’s first request was, “Father, give me!” But when he returned home his request was, “Make me one of your servants” (Luke 15:12, 19). His lifestyle change had to begin with an attitude adjustment.

Speech: The last marker we will take time to check out on our drive through Proverbs is one pertaining to the use of our tongue. James 3:1-11 warns of the uncontrollable nature of the tongue. Nothing can get us in trouble more quickly, or cause more damage than careless words. Yet with our words, we encourage and instruct people and praise God. So, as we might expect Proverbs, this book of practical wisdom, has a great deal to say about our tongues and their use.

Our tongues have the power to destroy or to bless. We destroy by deceitful speech (4:24), by betraying confidences (11:13a), by spreading slander (10:18), which can even separate close friends (16:28), and by stirring up anger (15:1b). So, stay away from such people (20:19). Our tongues also have the power to bless and encourage because it is trustworthy (11:13b), turns away anger (15:1a), and brings delight (15:23). And one of the most beautiful description of a fit world found in all

literature is found in 25:11, "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances (cf v. 12).

Key verse: Proverbs 9:10 - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Ecclesiastes

Key word: Vanity

This wisdom literature book, written we believe by Solomon in his old age, comes out firing: "Vanity of Vanities! All is vanity" (1:26). This is not exactly a happy or positive message, and many see Ecclesiastes as a depressing book. But it has a vital message for us that can be identified in its repeated words and phrases.

"Vanity" is found 39 times and basically means a mist or vapor. It refers to things that are fleeting and ultimately of little consequence. As Solomon looked around him, he saw most of humanity living empty lives and in essence striving after the wind, a phrase repeated 9 times (1:14). He goes on to mention ten fleeting things that people chase looking for happiness and satisfaction, but always coming up empty. They include pursuing wisdom, pleasure, achievements, possession/money, sex and fame.

Taken at face value, one might despair of life. But we miss Solomon's point if we skip over a phrase he uses 29 times: "Under the sun", first found in 1:3. Solomon is describing life as if there is no connection with God. That is, Ecclesiastes tells us of the futility and meaninglessness of life lived as if God did not exist.

What solution does Solomon work out? When one recognizes and lives for God (mentioned 40 times), we receive the simple pleasures He affords as His gift to enjoy (2:24-25). This is the key to solving the puzzle of life and is repeated 7 times (3:12-13; 3:22; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-9 and 12:13).

The thing that changes life from drab, empty and meaningless, to that of enjoyment and meaning, is the recognition of God.

Key verse: Ecclesiastes 12:1a – "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth."

Song of Solomon

Key word: Love

If there is any book in the Bible that people do not know what to do with, it is this one. Historically, both the Jews and Christians have dismissed its message and offered allegorical interpretation. But if read literally it reveals a love story – the joys of romantic love within the bounds of marriage.

There are three principle actors within this drama. First, there is King Solomon, who has fallen in love with a beautiful shepherdess. He speaks often of his love and attraction for this young lady who he eventually marries. Knowing Solomon's less than exemplary relationship with women, many believe this story tells of the one wholesome love in his life. He is very complimentary of this young lady, often telling her how lovely she is (e.g. 1:15, 2:2).

We don't know the name of the second character, but she is from a place called Shulam and is called the Shulamite (6:13). She is young, a shepherdess, from the working class, but she has caught Solomon's eye. She is equally complimentary (e.g. 2:3-5). Their great delight is being together, and so makes time to get away and enjoy one another (7:10-12).

There is a third set of players in this story. Some call them the choir, which periodically show up and cheer the lovers on (six times) (e.g. 5:1b). They approve of the love expressed by this couple. As a matter of fact, God approved too. They also warn three times not to allow the physical side of love to be uncontrolled (2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

Overall this is a book about God's approval of romantic love in marriage. Our key verse is 2:4b – speaking of the bond of love in marriage.

Key verse: Song of Solomon 2:4b – "His banner over me is love."

Isaiah

Key word: "The Holy One of Israel" (28x)

Isaiah is the most quoted Old Testament book by the New Testament authors. It covers everything from warnings, to judgment, to God's grace, to the coming of the Messiah, to His death, to His return to set up His kingdom on earth.

There are so many wonderful portions and verses in Isaiah that it is almost impossible to pick out just a few. But here are some highlights:

- 1) 9:6-7 – a prophecy of both the first and second coming of Christ. Ultimately, He comes to set up His kingdom and rule over all the earth from the throne of David.
- 2) All of chapters 40-48 camp out on the greatness of our God. An often-repeated refrain, "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (45:5), describes this section well. There is no one like God (46:9).
- 3) 52:13-53:12 is unparalleled in its prophecy and description of Christ's death for our sins. In many ways, this is a fuller picture of the passion of Christ than much of what is given in the New Testament. vv. 2-3 tell of his appearance and rejection. v. 5 tell of His sacrifice v. 6 tells of our need. v. 10 tell of His accomplishments on our behalf.

We will choose 53:6 as our key verse because it summarizes well not only this section of Isaiah, but also the heart of the Gospel.

Key verse: Isaiah 53:6 – "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

Jeremiah

Key word: Return (47x)

Whereas Isaiah ministered to Judah as the fall of Israel approached, and beyond, Jeremiah ministered to Judah as Judah's fall approached and beyond. About 70 years separated the prophecies of the two men. Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet because of his deep sorrows over Judah's rejection of God and the resulting judgment (9:1). Jeremiah spends his whole ministry calling the people to repent and return to the Lord. For over 60 years, this was his message, and it was ignored by almost everyone. You could count Jeremiah's converts on one hand, with a couple fingers left over.

Jeremiah was often a reluctant prophet. He didn't want to become a prophet (1:6), often wanted to run away (9:2), felt sorry for himself (12:1-6), was nicknamed, "terror on every side" (6:25), because of his message of doom, was persecuted (20:2-3), was not allowed to marry (16:2), lived under constant death threats (26:8-24), is accused of treason (37:13-15), and is ultimately drug off to Egypt against his will (43:6-7). And yet, Jeremiah remained faithful to the Lord and to his ministry for over six decades.

Yet Jeremiah had the privilege of revealing the new covenant (31:31-34) which prophesied of a better day ahead: a day of joy, worship, obedience and forgiveness. His prophecy would become one of the most important themes found in the New Testament book of Hebrews.

But for our key verse we will go with 17:9, which reminds us of why people rebel against the word and in need of redemption.

Key verse: Jeremiah 17:9 – "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

Lamentations

Key word: Lament

Lamentations is the short follow-up book written by Jeremiah at the time of the fall of Jerusalem around 586 B.C. It is exactly what the title claims it to be – a lament, an expression of great sorrow over the awful judgment and destruction of Judah and Jerusalem due to the unrepentant defiance by the Jews in Jerusalem. The prophet is crushed, heart broken over the desolation of the land and people he loved.

Right in the middle of Jeremiah's cries we find an oasis of hope. By 3:17, Jeremiah could find no peace or happiness. By v. 18, his strength and hope are gone. He is finding himself becoming bitter toward the Lord (vv. 8, 12-16, esp v. 14). As he reflected on his growing despair and bitterness (v. 19), the tide turns as he begins to meditate on God rather than his sorrows (v. 20). As he does, hope returns (v. 21), especially as he recalls the true nature of God. The Lord is filled with endless lovingkindnesses (v. 22). His compassions never cease, even when we have lost sight of them (v. 22) His faithfulness is beyond measure (v. 23).

As he reflects further on all this, he is conscious that it is the Lord who is his portion – that which he really needs (v. 24), and therefore, hope has returned for the Lord is good to those who wait on Him and seek Him (v. 25).

Our key verse is 3:22-23. So, while our key word is lament, the great take away from the book is the faithfulness of God.

Key verse: Lamentations 3:22-23 – "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Ezekiel

Key word: Son of Man (found 91x)

Unlike Isaiah and Jeremiah, the other two major prophets who prophesied prior to exile, Ezekiel is already in exile and writing back to those still in the Holy Land and to those who were already in exile. Babylon invaded Judah and Jerusalem in three waves, carrying off exiles each time. Ezekiel was taken during the second wave around 598 B.C. While Jeremiah is pleading with the Jews to repent from his home base in Judah, Ezekiel did the same from exile also prophesied of the future restoration of Israel. Daniel, by the way is taken in the first wave of deportation and ministered in Babylon itself.

The book is filled with visions and object lessons, both used to communicate God's message of repentance and hope. But the overarching message is so "they will know that I am the Lord" (6:7) found about 70 times (see 6:10, 13-14). Somehow the Jews had lost that message and Ezekiel's task was to teach it again.

Ezekiel also contains some of the most encouraging, if hard to interpret prophecies describing future restoration for Israel. In particular is the vision of the valley of dry bones in Chapter 37, the end times battle of Gog and Magog. The book ends with chapters 40-48 and a description of a future temple that will be erected and used during the Kingdom Age.

While Ezekiel, much like the other prophetic books, offers much in the way of judgment on a godless people, it also holds out a great future hope. Our key verse expresses it well, Ezekiel 36:26 and he goes on to promise, "And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

Key verse: Ezekiel 36:26 – "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you."

Daniel

Key word: Sovereignty

The book of Daniel is a fascinating Old Testament book, and one of the best-known books in the Bible. It is known on the one hand because its marvelous stories of God's protection and providence, which has thrilled children and adults alike for generations. Who hasn't heard of Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego's rescue from the fiery furnace (3:1-18), Daniel's rescue from the Lion's Den (6:1-28) and the hand writing on the wall informing Belshazzar that, well, the hand writing was on the wall for him, and doom was approaching. In all of these accounts, and some lesser known ones, we witness the sovereign work of God.

But Daniel is also known for its prophecies: Nebuchadnezzar's fate (4:1-37), the coming of four great kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (2:1-43), and ultimately God's kingdom (2:44-45) (see also chapters 7-8). Then there are the great end-time prophecies of chapter 9-12. The most celebrated and studied of these prophecies is Daniel's 70 weeks (9:24-27), which provides the accurate time-table for the coming and death of Christ, as well as the outline of the Tribulation period and the reign of the Antichrist. Even the clearest teaching in all of the Old Testament on the resurrection from the dead is here (12:1-12). This is an incredible book.

But in all of its diversity one thread runs through it all – the sovereign hand of God. Whether the Lord is rescuing His people, humbling monarchs, or prophesying the future, we find Him totally in control of all things. Nothing happens apart from His providence and will.

Key verse: Daniel 4:17b – "The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind."

Hosea

Key word: Faithfulness

We begin our travel today through the most neglected portion of Scripture – the minor prophets. This collection of 12 Old Testament books (known as the twelve by the Jews) are minor only in the sense that they are shorter, not that they lack significance. Each book has a unique perspective to offer the reader, and Hosea starts us on our journey.

Hosea is the last prophet to address the nation of Israel before Israel fell in 721 B.C. to the Assyrians. The first three chapters illustrates the Lord's relationship with Israel through the tragic marriage of the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer. The Lord commands Hosea to marry a prostitute and have children by her (1:2). The hope at this point is that Gomer would recognize that she had been rescued from a life of sin and degradation and become a faithful and loving wife to her husband. But it was not to be. She was drawn to her former life of immorality and returned to it (2:5b). But Hosea does not give up on her. By Chapter 3, Gomer has apparently sold herself as a slave prostitute, but he goes to the slave market and purchases her, takes her home, and demands faithfulness (3:2-3). But it was ultimately not to be, and she returns to her sinfulness.

The story serves as an accurate picture of what Israel has done to the Lord. Despite the Lord's deliverance of Israel from slavery, and the many blessings bestowed on her, Israel proved incurably unfaithful. The rest of the book fleshes out both Israel's sins and rebellion, and God's undying love for her. As bad as she was, the Lord could not let her go. She was unfaithful but the Lord remained faithful.

Which is harder – to demonstrate faithful love to a loving spouse, or to an unfaithful one? The Lord shows us what true loving faithfulness looks like. Therefore 6:6a is our key verse (cp 1 Samuel 15:22).

Key Verse: Hosea 6:6a – "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice."

Joel

Key word: "Day of the Lord"

Joel is a little book with a powerful impact on the prophetic understanding. That is because it is wrapped around what is called "the Day of the Lord", referenced directly five times (1:11, 15, 22, 31, 3:14) and alluded to a few other times (see 3:1). In a general sense, the day of the Lord is used to describe a time of judgment, destruction and doom, throughout the Old Testament. That is how Joel begins, describing a coming locust infestation coming on Judah for its continual rebellion against the Lord (1:1-2:17). See 1:15. Yet with all the doom and gloom of this coming judgment, there was time to alter its course. If the people would truly repent (2:12-13). Judgment would be averted.

Beginning with 2:18, Joel turns to the future and describes a glorious future that would be the Kingdom Age. This too is described as the Day of the Lord (2:28-31). This text receives a lot of attention because Peter quotes it in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But as Joel 3:1-2 indicates, these events are not fulfilled at Pentecost, or in the Church Age, but awaits the end times.

The great and awesome Day of the Lord (2:31) being described is a future event which comes in three stages:

- 1) The Tribulation – a 7-year period of time of unprecedented judgment on the earth.
- 2) The return of Christ as the rightful king over the whole earth.
- 3) The Millennial Kingdom on the earth with Jesus sitting on the throne of David ruling the whole earth.

Our key verse reminds us of this great future the Lord has determined for His people. How we look forward to this wonderful day.

Key verse: Joel 2:28 – "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind."

Amos

Key word: Prepare

One of Israel's last kings was Jeroboam II. Under his leadership, the nation reached its zenith militarily and economically. The people experienced a wide level of prosperity and peace. But as is often the case, prosperity led to disastrous spiritual consequences. Instead of humble thanksgiving to God, they congratulated themselves and sank into a life of luxury, cruelty and deceit. To such a people, God sent a shepherd/farmer with a message. Amos was not a prophet, but for a brief moment, he stepped out of his country lifestyle to warn Israel that their sins had not gone unnoticed by the Lord, despite their prosperous circumstances.

Israel compared itself with the nations around them and came off looking good (chapters 1-2). Being self-deceived, Israel needed God to tick off their sins such as harming the poor, immorality, idolatry, rejection of God's word (2:6-12). They had become so hardened by sin that they no longer knew how to do right (3:10). Through prophets such as Amos, God called the nation to repentance, "Yet you have not returned to Me", declares the Lord, repeated five times in chapter four (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). Therefore, because they refused to return to God, they must now "prepare to meet your God" (4:12). No longer would they encounter God's judgments indirectly, they will now have to face God Himself. And just in case they did not understand the severity of the situation, Amos reminds them of the greatness of God (4:13).

The remedy to their spiritual mess and its consequence is simple and direct, although often resisted. It is found in our key verse (see also 5:4, 14). Israel had deceived themselves into thinking they were pretty spiritual when all along they were seeking self-pleasure and pursuing sinful behavior to that end. Amos message is to the point: return to the Lord and seek Him if you want real life. If you do not, prepare to meet your God."

Key verse: Amos 5:6 – "Seek the Lord that you may live."

Obadiah

Key word: Arrogance

If there is any book in the Bible, which might seem inconsequential, it would be Obadiah. It is the shortest book in the Old Testament. We know nothing about the author except his name (there are 12 Obadiah's in Scripture); we do not know when he wrote his book, or the special circumstances he is talking about; it is not even addressed to the Jews, instead it is addressed to Edom, descendants of Esau, not Jacob, who lived SE of Judah. Yet, Obadiah has a message for us today.

Although cousins, Israel and Edom were not kissing cousins – they never got along. In addition, while Israel worshipped Jehovah, at least officially and at times, Edom worshipped idols. The two sons of Jacob parted ways not only geographically, but also spiritually. As the years moved on, the day came when the Jews were under attack. This could have been on one of two occasions – around 586 B.C. when Babylon was destroying Judah, or years earlier (around 845 B.C.) when the Arabs and Philistines invaded with great destruction. Either way, while Judah was being devastated, Edom stood aside and even participated in the destruction (v. 14). Edom thought it was untouchable due to their location (v. 3). This was Edom's great sin – they trusted in Mt. Esau (v. 8) instead of Mt. Zion (v. 17), which represented God. As a result, the Lord will bring them down (v. 4). The central message of the book is addressed to those who in their arrogance thought they were self-sufficient and even invincible. They ask in their hearts, "Who will bring me down" (v. 3c), and the answer is, God will (v. 4c). Arrogance deceives us into believing in ourselves. Humility directs us to trust in God.

This is a book about the consequences of pride and arrogance and therefore our key word is arrogance and our key verse v. 3a. May we learn from Edom's example.

Key verse: Obadiah 1:3a – "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you."

Jonah

Key word: Appoint

God appointed Jonah several things to do. His will: a wind, a fish, a plant, a worm, a wind (again) and a prophet. Only the prophet resisted.

Jonah is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. Because of its storyline it has become a children's classic, but has a sobering message, which is played out in five scenes:

- #1 The commission of Jonah (1:1-2). Jonah is given a unique calling: a Jewish prophet taking a message from God to a Gentile city. Nineveh was the capital of the evil Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were destroying nation after nation and had its sites on Israel. Jonah and all Jews hated Assyria, and here is the Lord sending one of His prophets with a message that could lead to repentance.
- #2 Jonah's rebellion (1:3-16) The prophet refused to go and actually books a trip to Spain – the opposite direction by all rights God should have brought judgment on Jonah, but instead He has mercy. "Mercy", is God's ministry to the miserable according to D. Pentecost. After a storm, Jonah is thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish.
- #3 Jonah's repentance (1:17-2:10) With 3 days in the fish, Jonah has time to contemplate his life, and ultimately realizes his rebellion is wrong and stupid. He now repents and confesses that salvation, both physical and spiritual is of the Lord (2:9).
- #4 Jonah obeys (3:1-10). God recommissions Jonah and this time he obeys and delivers the message God had given him.
- #5 Jonah's heart exposed (4:1-11). When the Ninevites repent Jonah is angry. In his heart, he wished that they would resist and God would destroy them. Now Jonah is

also angry with God for being merciful. He would rather die than live like this (v. 3). God rebuked His prophet but the book ends without knowing Jonah's response. It is almost like the Lord is asking us to conclude the story. But our story ends with our response to Christ.

Key verse: Jonah 2:9 – "Salvation is from the Lord."

Micah

Key word: Listen

Micah as a prophet contemporary with Isaiah who ministered to both Judah and Israel. He has three messages from God to deliver, each beginning with the word "hear". The first message is to the people of Israel (chapters 1-2) (1:2). It is a warning of coming judgment, a call to repent, and a promise of hope. As a matter of fact, at the end of each sermon is a message of hope (cf 2:12-13).

The second prophecy (chapters 3-5) is directed to the leaders of Israel (3:1). They hate good and love injustice. But even so there is hope, for a kingdom is coming in the last days (4:1-8), and a Savior, born in Bethlehem, will ultimately be its ruler (5:2). This is the best-known verse in Micah and is quoted in Matthew 2:6 and John 7:42.

The final message (chapters 6-7) is actually directed to the mountains (6:2), which will listen to the Lord's case against Israel. The Lord has two indictments against Israel:

1. They have forgotten what He had done for them (6:3-8).
2. They had forgotten His requirements (6:6-8). They thought the Lord would be pleased with abundant religious acts. But while they followed the rituals, they missed the heart of God (v. 8). This verse is posted in the reading room of the Congressional Library in Washington, and must be our key verse.

The final chapter begins in sorrow as Micah is a miserable man as he observes the defiance of Israel (7:1-2). But he has hope that the Lord will eventually right these wrongs (7:7). His hope rests, not in his circumstances but in the nature of God (7:18-20).

Key verse: Micah 6:8 – "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord requires of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

Nahum

Key word: Against

Have you ever felt that the Lord was against you? For the child of God that can never be the case. He may discipline us but He will never turn against us (Hebrews 13:5). But for the nation of Assyria – a godless, ruthless people, this was not the case. As a matter of fact, twice the Lord declares to the Assyrians that He was against them (2:13, 3:5). What an unbelievable horrifying position to be in. You will recall it was to the capital city of Nineveh that Jonah went 100 years earlier, which repented at the time. Now a century later whatever happened at that time has long been forgotten and Assyria has returned to its wickedness: three things to consider concerning God's pronouncement that He was against them.

1. The cause: Historically we know the Assyrians are among the cruelest empire that ever existed. Human life meant nothing to them, even so, God offers to be their refuge (1:7), but if they refuse He will be their judge (1:8).
2. The consequence: Because of their rejection of God, utter ruthlessness, and mistreatment of God's people (2:1-2), the Lord will ruin them (2:13-3:1). As a matter of fact, their situation is hopeless – for their "wound is incurable (3:19). Nineveh was so completely destroyed that it was not until 1842 that archeologists rediscovered its ruins.
3. The cure: Quite frankly, there is not much positive to be found in Nahum. Yet 1:7, our key verse reminds us. Our key word, if we are to be faithful to the text, has to be against. The Lord is against Assyria for its wickedness, and against all those who reject His love. But a "cure" is found in Christ. We can't help but think of the remedy for our spiritual enmity with God as found in Romans 8:31-32 – "If God is for us, who is against us?" He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us, how will He not freely give us all things?"

Key verse: Nahum 1:7 – “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble,
and He knows those who take refuge in Him.”

Habakkuk

Key word: Faith

Have you ever questioned God and, the way He is handling your life? Have you ever wondered why He allows so many ugly things to take place in this world, things like the death of children, war, famine, injustice, or whatever you are facing today? If so, you are ready for the message of Habakkuk.

We are introduced to the prophet at an extremely low point in His life (1:2). As a man of God, he is deeply troubled by the wickedness of the nation of Judah – God’s people. He is perplexed that the Lord is allowing this to continue and wants to know why. God informs him that He is not passive; as a matter of fact, He is preparing the Babylonians to execute judgment on Judah (1:5-11). But this does not please Habakkuk who wants to know how God could use an even more ungodly nation to discipline Judah (1:12-17) (1:13b).

Having completed his prayer, and more troubled than ever, the prophet does an amazing thing: he waits on the Lord (2:1). He has cast his concern on the Lord, now he will wait to see how He will answer. When the Lord replies, He does not give a detailed explanation, but His admonishing is profound – trust Me. He says, “The righteous will live by his faith” (2:4b). This line becomes the basis for three New Testament books: Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. In essence, the prophet is being told that while he may often be confused by what he sees in life around him, he nevertheless can live faithfully because he can have trust in a faithful God, for after all “The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him” (2:20).

When the book concludes we find the circumstances surrounding the prophet’s life unimproved, yet he stands firm because the Lord was His strength (3:19). How did he get from a man on the edge of spiritual collapse (1:2), to a man with deep confidence in God (3:19), he went through the door of faith (2:4b), everything hinges on entering through this door.

Key verse: Habakkuk 2:4b – “But the righteous will live by his faith.”

Zephaniah

Key word: Renewal

Zephaniah is a descendant of royalty, being the great-great grandson of Hezekiah. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah and comes out firing (1:2). His theme is the "Day of the Lord", which he references some 20 times. As we have seen in other books, the Day of the Lord includes two distinct periods of time – a day of doom and a day of rejoicing and renewal. In the early going doom is on, Zephaniah's menu and as we have seen before, the doom/judgment being described is sometimes contemporary and sometimes Eschatological. The coming judgment in this book is contemporary to the times. Despite the apparent, but superficial, revival during Josiah's reign, the Lord has not been fooled. The Lord will judge the other nations for their rebellion (2:4-15), that is to be expected. But Judah too will face destruction because it has followed suit (3:1-8). Zephaniah holds out one hope during this coming doom – and that it could be avoided if they would humbly seek Him (2:3).

The book, as many of the prophetic books do, suddenly shifts direction at 3:9. The prophet looks to the future and describes the second aspect of the Day of the Lord in the Kingdom Age to come. It can best be described as a day of restoration and renewal (3:14-15, 20). Thus, a book, which begins in gloom, ends with rejoicing (3:14). This is true not because of anything Judah deserved, but because the Lord delights in them, He loves them (3:17). And so, while the Lord hates sin, and will deal with sinners in judgment, His mercy is ever ready to pardon – and He has a glorious future planned for His people. The condition is found in our key verse.

Key verse: Zephaniah 2:3a – "Seek the Lord all you humble of the earth."

Haggai

Key word: Consider

The last three minor prophets' prophecy to the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem after being in Babylonian captivity for 70 years. The Jews who had returned under their governor Zerubbabel and high priest Joshua had as their immediate task to rebuild the temple. The less than 50,000 who returned laid the foundation of the temple but then got discouraged and stopped. Soon they became complacent and went about their daily lives totally forgetting about the temple for 14 years. This apathy toward the temple represented well their apathy toward God. The Lord sends two prophets to shake them up: Haggai and Zechariah. Over a period of 4 months, Haggai preached 4 messages with a central theme: consider (5x). Consider your ways (1:5, 7) and change was Haggai's message.

They were happy to live in their paneled houses while the house of God, and the worship associated with it, lay in ruins (1:4). The result of the first prophecy was action – they started to build (1:12-15). But then two discouragements arose:

- 1) They realized this new temple did not compare with the first (2:3).
- 2) Fear (2:4) perhaps of the resistance of those enemies around them, or perhaps of the critics within them – or both. The message God sent was to take courage for the Lord was with them.

Two months later the Lord sends another message – about purity. Their lives should reflect the Holiness of God (2:10-19). A final message comes later that same day – it is a proof concerning God's plans for their glorious future (2:20-23). Our key verse is applicable for all times and occasions.

Key verse: Haggai 2:4b – "Take courage, declares the Lord, and work; for I am with you."

Zechariah

Key word: Lord of Hosts (45x)

Zechariah prophesied at about the same time as Haggai, for the same purposes – to draw the Jews back to the Lord and have them finish the construction of the temple. Haggai preached two messages in the 6th and 7th month, then Zechariah gave his first message in the 8th month, followed by two more prophecies by Haggai in the 9th month. Haggai now steps into the background and Zechariah picks up in the 11th month and continues off and on for two years. In order to encourage them, the prophet has the people look in 4 directions.

- 1) Backward (1:1-6). He reminds them of their fathers and their great need to “return” to the Lord (1:3).
- 2) Upward (1:7-2:13). Three months later he gives a series of 8 visions, all on the same day, to detail what the Lord was doing for them now. The desired response is a holy silence (2:13).
- 3) Inward (3:1-4:10). We are given a beautiful vision of how the Lord removes our iniquity and replaces it with His righteousness (3:2-4). This can only be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit (4:6) – our key verse.
- 4) Forward (7-14). Two years later Zechariah returns. The temple is about half finished and again the people need encouragement. The prophet does this by giving prophecies concerning the future. The big picture is that one day their Messiah will come and they need to be prepared for Him.

In chapters 9-11, Zechariah mostly foretells more immediate events but the Triumphal Entry is prophesied in 9:9. Beginning with Chapter 12 and continuing to the end, the theme is the coming of Christ. The first readers could not grasp this, for Zechariah gives one of the most extensive

descriptions of the second coming of Christ found in the Bible. Four great events:

- 1) War against Israel (12:1-9);
- 2) Repentance (12:10); leading to forgiveness (13:1);
- 3) The return of Christ (14:4);
- 4) The coming of Christ's kingdom on earth (14:8-21).

Key verse: Zechariah 4:6 – "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi

Key word: "You Say"

The Lord had sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the returned exiles to finish building the temple. But spiritually, the people had declined and so 58 years later God sent Ezra to preach truth and the Jews responded well. 12 years after Ezra came to town, Nehemiah appears and under His leadership they rebuild the walls and their spiritual lives. But Nehemiah goes back to Persia for several years and the people once again go into spiritual decline. The Jews maintained their religious routines but their hearts were cold. It was then that the Lord sent Malachi, at Nehemiah 13:4-14, to expose their cold hearts and call them to spiritual vitality.

Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament is the Lord's final wake up call to His people who so often drifted into spiritual slumber and worse. Malachi uses a very unique approach. 12 different times he quotes the very words of the people, revealing to them how they had lost their way. He introduced these quotes with the words, "You say", we will look at a few of these that reveal their hearts:

- 1) They doubted God's law (1:2). The Lord opens the book with a declaration of His love but they question it and want to know how He has loved them.
- 2) They dishonored God by going through the motions of worship but giving their "throw-aways" to Him (1:7).
- 3) They are bored serving God (1:13).
- 4) They had sinfully divorced their wives (2:14, cp v. 16).
- 5) They did not know how to repent (3:7).
- 6) They had robbed God (3:8).

- 7) They saw no profit in serving the Lord (3:13-14). They were the types who would say that they tried to follow the Lord but it just didn't work for them.

Malachi and the Old Testament closes with a command, a promise and a curse.

- 1) The command (4:4). The Lord goes back to the basics and demands obedience.
- 2) A promise (4:5-6a). The Lord will send a messenger who will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (cp 3:1).
- 3) A curse (4:6b) A warning: The Lord's coming will nullify the curse (cp Revelations 22:20).

Key verse: Malachi 1:2a – "I have loved you," says the Lord.