

RETURN & REBUILD

An illustration of a walled city in a desert landscape. The city features grey stone walls with towers and a central gate. The background shows rolling orange-brown hills under a blue sky with light clouds. A large grey structure is visible on the right side of the frame.

KNOW THE BIBLE, FEAR THE LORD

2017 SEPTEMBER DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

(PUBLISHED BY CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHINESE CHURCH)

Introduction To Quiet Time/Personal Devotion

What Is Quiet Time/Personal Devotion: Quiet Time or Personal Devotion is more than just reading the Bible, it is a time of fellowship and dating with God. It is a time to get to know God and His will more as well as to enjoy His presence. Since personal devotion is a process of communication, it involves both “listening” (Reading His Word, Meditating, and Reflecting) and “talking” (Praying, Responding, and Devoting) to Him.

Time and Place: Choose a quiet place and a set time. If possible, morning is most ideal. If you must choose another time, choose a time when you can be most serene and alert. Also, make sure that you do your devotion before you spend time on the computer, TV, internet, or games so that your mind will not be filled with distractions that prevent you from meditating on God’s words.

Focus: Ask God to quiet your heart and to open your eyes so that you can understand God’s words. You can also praise God or sing a short hymn to Him.

Read & Reread: Read the Scripture carefully and meditate on what God is telling you. Usually, you may not be able to understand the meaning and essence of a passage when you first read it; only through repetition and meditation can one gain meaningful insights.

Using the Devotional Booklet: ①Please follow the steps in this booklet to first calm your heart with a short prayer and praise, then read and reread the given passage, and answer the questions accordingly. Then read the contributor’s insights and see how you could apply what you have learned in your life. Finally, end your Quiet Time with prayer and ask God to help you live out His words. ②Besides the reflection questions, notes, and applications, this booklet also asks the reader to fill in the date and time of each daily devotion so that the reader can evaluate his/her devotional life more precisely. ③The Scriptures quoted in this booklet are from NIV (1984). We would encourage you not to use the Bible Apps in your cell phone to read the Scriptures lest you will be distracted by the notifications or incoming calls. ④This Devotion booklet is contributed by various staff of the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church and is first written in either Chinese or English, and translated by other brothers and sisters. The contribution of the staff as well as of the translators is deeply appreciated. At times, some devotions are written in both languages by the contributor. ⑤Memory verses may be quoted for meditation and memorization depending on the context and as needed; thus, it may not be provided daily.

3. In rebuilding your spiritual life, have you had similar experiences? What benefits would these milestones bring to your spiritual life?

4. Please set some goals for rebuilding your spiritual life. Create a special way for celebration as a mark (milestone) of growth in your life. How would you do it?

Prayer: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

3. There are many “stops” in life. Can you reflect upon some of the “stops” in your life? What new insights could you gain from them?

4. If you are currently facing “stops,” what can you pray for?

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Who Is My True LORD?

Passage: Ezra 5:1-5

September 4

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 5:1-5 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 5:1-5 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. King Artaxerxes's order to stop the rebuilding was still in effect, yet God spoke through the prophets to tell the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. If you were one of the Jews, what would you do? What would be some of your struggles?

Power Of Repentance And Renewal

Passage: Ezra 5:11-17

September 5

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 5:11-17 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 5:11-17 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. In verse 12, the Israelites confessed their past wrongdoing: "But because our fathers angered the God of heaven, he handed 'us' over to Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon." Their perspective totally coincided with God's perspective. What do you think might have caused the change in them?

Repent And Remorse

Passage: Ezra 9:1-15

September 6

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 9:1-15 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 9:1-15 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Verse 2 says: "and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them." This is the gist of the problem. Ever since before the Israelites entered Canaan, God had already commanded them not to do so. However, according to the historical records, they repeatedly committed the same offense. Have you repeatedly done something that displeases God? Please ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate you as you meditate and write down your reflection.

Weeping

Passage: Ezra 10:1-11

September 7

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 10:1-11 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ezra 10:1-11 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Under what circumstances do people weep?

2. Have you ever wept for your life? Yes No

3. Have you wept for your life recently? Yes No

4. If you have wept for your life (whether recently or not), please write down one of those situations, the reason, and your feeling at that moment. If you have not, write down the reasons why you have not wept for your life.

5. Verse 3: “send away all these women and their children” showed a definitive and determined decision. In order to handle things in such manner, what kind of vision and determination does one need to have?

6. Are you willing to deal with sin with such determination? Please pray and write down how you will deal with the sins in your life.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Inspection

Passage: Nehemiah 2:9-16

September 10

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 2:9-16 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 2:9-16 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Serving God can be lonely at times; it is not easy to share with others and the right person might not be available. To cultivate the heart of solely relying on God takes practice for it to become mature. Have you ever had such experience?

2. How did the inspection help Nehemiah as he planned to rebuild Jerusalem's walls? How does Nehemiah serve as an example for you when God convicts you to do something?

3. There is a time for "action" and there is a time for "words." In the ministry that you are serving today, how do you discern when it is the right time for "action" or when it is the right time for "words"?

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Testimony Of Experiencing God

Passage: Nehemiah 2:17-20

September 11

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 2:17-20 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 2:17-20 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Verse 17 describes how "Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire" was something that everyone saw everyday, yet no one responded and did anything. God moved Nehemiah to gather everyone to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. This showed the importance of a leader being willing to bear burdens. Are you willing to come forth to be used as God's servant?

Victory Over Challenges

Passage: Nehemiah 4:1-6

September 12

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 4:1-6 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 4:1-6 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. The Jerusalem walls were deliberately demolished and burned during the fall of Judah. It symbolized total destruction. Since this brought the Israelites tremendous pain and sorrow, the attack from Sanballat seemed fierce to them. Have you ever encountered attacks of this kind? How did you live through it?

Balancing The Tensions

Passage: Nehemiah 4:15-23

September 13

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 4:15-23 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Nehemiah 4:15-23 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. There are many things in life that we need to handle and each has its own importance. We need to learn how to cover all the bases. In comparison with the world, Christians has another realm to consider — the spiritual realm. How are you at handling and planning for different matters? How do you consider the spiritual realm while balancing all the needs?

3. How unique was his way of handling the complaint? What effect did it bring? Is there anything you can learn from it?

4. If you apply what you learned on the complaints that you listed, how would the outcome be different?

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

3. Is your tithing before tax or after tax? What principle does the passage offer you?

4. Our offerings are for God. Will you change your attitude after you receive the message from today's passage? How will you actually change the way you tithe?

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

3. What would be the reason to purify ourselves? What is the importance of purifying? What can you do to purify yourself?

4. "Guard the gates" is to keep things out. What are the things in your life that needs guarding? What are the things that need to be kept out in order for you to "keep the Sabbath holy"?

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Queen Dethroned and Enthroned

Passage: Esther 1:1-2:7

September 17

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 1:1-2:7 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The Book of Esther is a very intriguing book. Although the words "God" or "the Lord" did not appear throughout all nine chapters of Esther, we have an overwhelming sense of confidence that His prominence, providence and passion are throughout the book. Today's passage tells us about how God deposed Queen Vashti and enthroned Esther to become the queen who would save the Jews from complete annihilation in the future.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 1:1-2:7 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Although God remains hidden in the Book of Esther, the plot clearly reveals His hand at work. Where do you see God's hand in the twists and turns of your life's story?

Outer And Inner Beauty

Passage: Esther 2:8-23

September 18

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 2:8-23 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Esther in Persian means "Star". Esther also has a Hebrew name "Hadassah" means "Myrtle". Myrtle is a small shrub, evergreen and beautiful. It has a pleasant fragrance. Esther as her name, not only had a beautiful appearance (v7), but also had an attractive character and solid spirituality. She not only won the eunuch's favor (v9), she also won the favor of everyone who saw her in the palace (v15), and above all, she won King Xerxes' favor (v17) thus becoming the Queen. Having outer beauty is not enough, more important is inner beauty. Outer beauty will fade, but inner beauty can always grow.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read the above passages again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Our image-obsessed world can make us feel like we're competing in a kind of beauty contest every day. But really, we should be spending our time making ourselves beautiful, not for a king, but for the King of Kings. What sort of "beauty" treatments are you giving yourself every day to prepare for the moment you come into His presence?

Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right

Passage: Esther 3:1-15

September 19

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 3:1-15 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Haman was a man of arrogance and he abused his power. When he became second in command in the empire, he demanded everyone bow down to him. Everyone did, except Mordecai. Haman was so enraged that he that he succeeded in getting the king to issue an edict to destroy all the Jews for revenge. Most scholars believe that Mordecai did not bow down to Haman because Haman was a descendant of King Agag of the Amalekites and Mordecai a Jew. The people of the Amalek had been enemies with the Israelites for centuries, especially the Agagites and the Benjaminites.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 3:1-15 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Mordecai and Haman are biased against each other, and prejudice brings gap in relationships. Do you have a tendency to discriminate against a certain class of people (race, color, or class)? Why? Think about what way you can eliminate your prejudice against them?

2. The heart of hatred and revenge is the enemy of our spiritual life. How do you treat those who have hurt you? Forgive, or wait for the opportunity to fight back? Are you prepared to make things right with this person? What do you need to say or do?

MEMORY VERSE: ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:17-18

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Privilege and Responsibility

Passage: Esther 4:1-17

September 20

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 4:1-17 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 4:1-17 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

Esther had been queen for a little while, and she had become accustomed to her royal life of comfort. But one day Esther suddenly received a message from Mordecai imploring her to see the king to save the Jews or they would all be killed. She was initially reluctant to help, because if anyone who came before the king without being called, even the queen, they would be subject to death. Also, she had not seen the king for 30 days, which meant she was not in his favor.

Mordecai warned Esther that she should not presume that because of her position, she would be insulated from this crisis. If she did not involve herself, the Jews would be rescued by the hand of another. However, she and her family would not escape death, if she thought she could preserve her life by doing nothing. More importantly, she had the honor of being the queen for that moment of time. God through her position could save His people. Upon hearing Mordecai's, Esther was willing to risk her life by going to the king to save her people. She asked Mordecai to have her people fast for her success.

APPLICATION:

1. This saying, "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" is a stress, a responsibility, a calling, or an honor to you?

Waiting

Passage: Esther 5:1-8

September 21

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 5:1-8 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 5:1-8 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

After fasting for three days, Esther went before the king. The king was pleased with her, and told her she could have whatever she desired, even half of his kingdom. Esther's request was to invite the king and Haman for a private feast. At the end of the feast, the king once again told her that he would grant anything she asked of him. But Esther only requested that the king and Haman join her for a second feast on the following day, and she would then tell the king of her desire.

Some people might be surprised that Esther did not ask for the head of Haman. Some might think that she missed her opportunity, or was a fool not to strike while the iron was hot or ask did she chicken out?

No, Esther, was careful and meticulous in preparation. She sensed that in order to achieve her purpose, waiting for the right timing was very important. She has not seen the king for more than 30 days, and it wouldn't have been appropriate the first time to talk is about Haman's evil plan. She waited because she wanted to see if she was really still in the king's favor; she wanted to see if the king was serious about his promise: if the offer was good for another day or if the he was being impulsive. Esther's wonderful plan did not come out of thin air. It was her three days and three nights of fasting prayer that let her know God's will of doing the right thing at the right time.

Planned Coincidence

Passage: Esther 6:1-14

September 22

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 6:1-14 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 6:1-14 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

Esther Chapter 6 seems to have a lot of "coincidences" happen, but it is all God's invisible hands deliberately arranging everything which turned out to be a turning point of the Jew's crisis.

At night after Esther's first feast, King Xerxes was unable to sleep. In fact, when the King cannot sleep, he could ask people to sing or dance to entertain him. But this night the king chose to ask people to read the records of his reign to him, probably hoping the boring document can induce sleep! However, out of so many King's records, the story of how five years ago Mordecai uncovered the plot against the king (from Esther 2:19-23) was read to him. Xerxes realized that he had never rewarded Mordecai for that heroic deed. Just as the king was deciding how to best reward Mordecai, Harman just so happened to be in the court. Harman came to the King's house in the middle of the night because he was probably unable to sleep too. He was anxious to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai the next day. Since Harman was here, the king asked Harman's opinion how to reward a man whom the king wanted to honor. In his pride, Harman thought the king was talking about him. But to his surprise, the reward was not for him but to his enemy. Haman was mortified and furious as he led Mordecai through the streets. His wife and friends warned him he would fail and chapter 6 came to the last 24 hours of Haman's life.

What Goes Around Comes Around

Passage: Esther 7:1-10

September 23

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 7:1-10 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Esther 7:1-10 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

In Chapter 6 Haman was very down, he hoped that by going to the banquet, which was the second feast Queen Esther prepared for him, she and the king would cheer him up. He went, not knowing that this meal was his last one on earth.

At the feast, the king once again asked Queen Esther what she wanted from him. Esther very delicate and skillful exposed the evil plot of Haman. Not only did she confess that she was one of the Jews going to be annihilated, but also reasoned that killing so many Jewish laborers without any legitimate reason would be a great loss to the Persian. Overcome by anger after hearing this, the king went out to the palace garden. He probably needed time to calm himself down and think how to handle his beloved Haman.

Haman knew he was in big trouble. Fearing for his life, Haman approached the queen on the couch to beg for her mercy. (It was typical for Persians to recline on couches when eating.) When the king returned, he not only saw Haman violating the strict codes of protocol in the palace, but also believed Haman was trying to assault the Queen. The king was so angry that Haman's face was covered, which means the king ordered Haman to be hanged. Ironically, all of this started because Haman was angry because a Jew would not bow down before him. Now he found himself bowing before a Jewish woman begging for his life. Even more ironically, Haman planned to hang and kill Mordecai on the pole and now he was impaled the very pole that he had constructed to kill Mordecai on. What goes around comes around.

3. Do you thirst after “my Spirit remains among you?” Have you ever prayed that way in your prayer life? What type of person would pray that way?

4. Jesus said your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple is a place to display God’s glory; is your life a testimony of His glory? List the areas where you can be renewed and transformed.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

3. Are you involved in any of the practices that you just listed?
Does it coincide with what you meditated on in question #1?

4. Please write down your prayer, read it out aloud. Make it your prayer for the entire day.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Might? Power?

Passage: Zechariah 4:1-10

September 26

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Zechariah 4:1-10 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Zechariah 4:1-10 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Men accomplish by "might" and "power." Can you explain what "might" and "power" mean??

2. What kind of a person is one who accomplish by Spirit? How is he unique in terms of how he handles himself?

3. In today's world, God also uses people like Zerubbabel; are you moved by that fact? Please respond according to how God moves you and pray.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Faith Without Seeing

Passage: Zechariah 8:1-13

September 27

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Zechariah 8:1-13 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Zechariah 8:1-13 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. From verse 4 and 5, we read: "men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there." How did the scripture describe Jerusalem? How was the description different from how Jerusalem actually was at that time? What did God want to illustrate by showing the differences?

3. From their own words, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”, reflected their fundamental values and the type of relationship they had with God. Why would God’s chosen people be reduced to such? How can we avoid that?

4. Offer a prayer for yourself.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Grudge And Sin

Passage: Obadiah 10-16

September 29

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and open your eyes so that you can understand His Word.

ADORATION: Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Obadiah 10-16 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Obadiah 10-16 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Esau was the father of the Edomites; therefore, Edomites and Israelites (offspring of Jacob) belonged to the same clan. In these scriptures, God accused the Edomites being aloof in his brother's affliction. The Edomites not only rejoiced over his brother's misfortune but also participated in robbing and persecuting them. While God lay down His accusation against Edomites, do you think God had any hope in them??

3. Based on verses 16 and 17, what mindset and preparation should one possess in order to plead for forgiveness and mercy?

4. What areas in your life do you need God's forgiveness and mercy? Meditate on that and then offer your prayer.

PRAYER: Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Praise the Lord! We have completed the Old Testament portion of our church theme, “Know the Bible, Fear the Lord” in just 9 months (from January to September). We started from Genesis and went through the four major events (i.e. creation, fall, flood, and nations), and followed the footprints of the four patriarchs (i.e. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph). We went down to Egypt with Jacob’s family, experienced the misery of slavery, witnessed the ten plagues, crossed the Red Sea, received the Ten Commandments, built the Tabernacle, spied on the Land of Canaan, and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Finally, a glimpse of hope brought us into Canaan as we fought alongside the Israelites and occupied the Promise Land — the land flowing with milk and honey. Yet the rebellion of the Israelites ushered us into the time of the Judges, as we witnessed their downward spiral through the cycles of “sin,” “suffering,” “supplication,” “salvation,” and “silence.” The time of the judges was concluded with the remark that “everyone did as they saw fit,” which led us into the period of the kings.

During the kings’ rule, we saw Saul’s jealousy, David’s failure, and Solomon’s foolishness, resulting in the pain of God’s nation being divided. After the division, we witnessed the coming of God’s prophets, admonishing and exhorting the leaders of the two kingdoms, warning them that the consequence of sin would be the destruction of the kingdoms. The kings’ disregard of the warnings led to the Assyrian besiegement of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, in 722 B.C., and the Babylonian captivity of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in 586 B.C. Yet, throughout the rise and fall of the two kingdoms, we could experience God’s abundant grace and mercy. Though God has put Israel under His rod of discipline, He still promised the return of Judah. After 70 years of exile, the people of Judah finally returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zarubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah to rebuild the Temple, to revive the people, and to repair the city wall. The end of exile moved us from the turbulence of the patriotic time into 400 years of silence as the God’s people awaited the coming of the promised Messiah.

Dear brothers and sisters, in these past nine months of following the history of the Old Testament, what have you learned? Has your heart been encouraged, disturbed, unsettled, or excited? What response are you moved to give? What commitments are you willing to make to God? Please write down these feelings as a conclusion to your devotional practice for the past nine months.

Insights as You Journeyed through the Old Testament

Write down the overall spiritual insights that you have learned in your daily devotion this year:

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