

# The Compass

Week 27

OT Readings: 2 Kings 20:1 - 1 Chron. 6:81

NT Readings: Acts 21:18 - 26:32

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## Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

### Old Testament

- The remainder of Kings traces the decline of Judah. The book ends with Jerusalem in ruins, the temple destroyed, the people either slaughtered or exiled to Babylon.<sup>1</sup>
- Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, is one of Judah's most wicked kings. The implications of his idolatry cannot be undone despite his personal repentance.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Josiah, all the remaining kings of Judah will be wicked and incompetent.
- The prophet Jeremiah's ministry will take place in these last years of Judah.<sup>3</sup> It is against this tragic background that God's heart is so clearly revealed.

### New Testament

- Paul takes center stage in Luke's account. Paul's courage and conviction is on display as he is confronted by mobs, stands before Jewish and Roman authorities, faces a plot on his life and is dogged by Jewish opposition. What can we learn from his response to his circumstances?<sup>4</sup>
- Acts 26 gives insight into the specific commission Paul was given by Jesus.
- The better we understand the person of Paul, the better we can understand his writings in the Epistles.

## Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

**2 Chron. 36:15-16.** The last chapters of Kings tell the tragic story of Judah disintegration and collapse, all in the period of about 75 years. To read these events alone may seem just a bit of dry history. However, when one adds the heartbeat of God, His brokenness and pain, our perspective is radically transformed – and so is our picture of God. Jeremiah will reveal the depths of God's heart and agony over the tragedy, but Jeremiah is for later. While Chronicles is not our present reading, it re-tells the story of Kings and gives commentary on the events. The Chronicler summarizes the tragedy from God's perspective, "until there was no remedy." At the end the people were so resistant to God that there was no other path, no other recourse for God, but to discipline them in a last hope of change and repentance. The destruction of the city and the exile were the greatest shock that Judah had ever known. It shattered their false and distorted picture of things and caused them to rethink, to reflect, to ask "why?" Once in exile, far away from home, humiliated and broken, they were able to hear the gentle voice of the God who loved them. The events of the exile were the culmination of nearly a century of God's incredible mercy and patience as He systematically used measured discipline in an attempt to bring His people back to their senses. Finally, they would come to see it - and more importantly *Him*. Never would God's people again fall into the worship of idols and in the centuries before Christ they would be God-seekers, not perfect, but committed to a future with God and not apart from Him.

## Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

**Acts 26:12-25.** One of the greatest shortcomings of American Evangelicalism is our misunderstanding of the gospel. We have reduced it to a formula with "four spiritual laws" and a superficial prayer to "accept Jesus as your Savior." How tragic. The profundity and awesomeness of the *euangellion*, the "good news" of Jesus the King and His in-the-world transforming powerful kingdom, has been reduced to an "it's all about me" commodity for consumeristic American Christians. Paul would be shocked and perplexed.

This passage presents the gospel succinctly and from the mouth of the resurrected Jesus Himself. Notice that there is a clear progression. First, one's *eyes must be open*. A person must see the truth - about their sin, about the selfish condition of their hearts; they must see their "lostness." They must see the truth about God and His wonderful mercy. Now, with open eyes they are ready to *repent*, turning from the kingdom of darkness and

coming into the kingdom of God. This is a change of *allegiance* – no longer living for myself, but a total surrender to King Jesus and a commitment to live fully for His kingdom (Acts 26:20). **Only when there is repentance can there be forgiveness.**<sup>5</sup> Until there is surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, there can be no forgiveness. With our entrance into the kingdom, we are not only forgiven but we obtain an inheritance. All the blessings of God become ours as we live in relationship with Him and walk in His kingdom ways. Want to think about this more? Take a look at

### Difficult Question of the Week

#### **2 Kings 23:26-27. “Q. How is that after all that Josiah did, God still allowed the tragedy of Jerusalem’s destruction and the Exile?”**

Josiah “got it;” he had *already* been reforming for 6 years when he heard the words written on the lost scroll, now found, read to him.<sup>6</sup> In his shock and grief, he tore his clothing and wept aloud (2 Kings 22:8-20). The revelation of how far away God’s people were from God fueled his passion to bring change. He systematically destroyed the idolatry in the land, including the calf-god of Bethel. He led his people in repentance and a return to God. He reinstated the Passover and called for a national covenant with God. Yet in the end, it was not enough. Jeremiah 3:6-10 tells why, “...Judah has never sincerely returned to Me. She has only pretended to be sorry.” **External change alone is not true repentance.** For all of the visible reforms Josiah instituted, the hearts of the people never truly changed toward God. And when Josiah died in battle (BC 609), Judah returned to her idolatry and wickedness with a vengeance.

Over the 20 plus years following Josiah’s death, God would do all in His power to woo His people back to Himself, all to no avail. In the end, the only recourse that remained, the only hope of saving the nation, was to discipline them by uprooting them from their homeland and send them away into exile.

What of us? America has not seen a national revival in more than a century and a half. There is much religious “activity,” but little that would lead to believe that God has our hearts fully and completely. Let us be like Josiah and press in to God, “How do you see us, Lord? Where are we really with You?” When He shows us, and He will, let us “tear our hearts” and return to fully to Him, without pretense.

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<sup>1</sup> The last verses of 2 Kings tell of the release of one of Judah’s kings, Jehoiachin, from prison in Babylon (BC 560). The Babylonian exile would last roughly 70 years and would mark the Jewish people for the rest of their history. Ezra-Nehemiah picks up the story after the exile as the people return to the land.

<sup>2</sup> His repentance is recounted in 2 Chron. 33. Chronicles is a re-telling of the history from the post-exilic perspective; see “How to Read 1 & 2 Chronicles.”

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah, like all of the prophets, can only be understood when we see the historical situation into which they spoke. Keep this in mind as we read the prophets later.

<sup>4</sup> Should we consider Paul to be an illustration of the “normal” Christian life?! Perhaps more than we might think. A person may not be called to the same kind of ministry as was Paul, but it is true that his life of passion, conviction and sacrifice are closer to what is normal for believers, Biblically and historically speaking. Many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world would find Paul’s experience to parallel their own. Consider reading *The Heavenly Man* by Brother Yun. Also check out The Voice of the Martyrs website at <http://www.persecution.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Repentance makes us safe to live in God’s kingdom and function in His universe. God in His love and wisdom will not let a person committed to being their own god loose to bring devastation and pain upon others through their selfishness.

<sup>6</sup> While the Bible does not tell us what portion of the Bible was found or how it was lost, scholars believe it was probably Deuteronomy. Perhaps Manasseh’s determination to destroy YHWH worship also involved an attempt to destroy the Bible?