

LIVING THE WORD—Week 7 (Sun., March 8 – Sat., March 14)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God’s Relentless Love

The Kingdom—God Chooses a Shepherd as King

1 Samuel 13:13-14; 2 Samuel 7:8-29; 1 Kings 8:14-9:9; Psalm 23; 89

Key Verse: “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1)

The story of Israel is filled with continual unfaithfulness—from the golden calf at Mt. Sinai, to the murmuring in the wilderness, to the recurring rebellion during the time of the judges, to the constant idolatry that led to the exile. Another episode is found in 1 Samuel 8 when Israel rejects God as their king and wants a human king like the nations around them. But even though God chooses a king for them, God still reigns. God frequently refers to the king as a “prince” or “leader” (1 Samuel 9:16), because God is still the true king. Similarly, God calls these leaders “shepherds” of his people, though the flock belongs to God and he is the true shepherd.

The model king is David. He is the shepherd chosen as king, God’s “anointed” (“messiah” in Hebrew), the man after God’s own heart. Subsequent kings are measured by the standard of whether or not they walked in the ways of David. He shaped the worship of Israel through the many psalms he wrote. And he prepared to build God’s temple, a project completed by his son, the wise King Solomon. Just as David’s influence is seen in the Psalms, Solomon’s is seen in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Their reigns were the golden era of Israel...until Solomon began building pagan temples (that’s part of next week’s lesson).

The language of the kingdom would have a great impact on the teaching of Jesus and the church. Jesus is the Messiah (“Christ” in Greek), the anointed king in the line of David. He brings the kingdom, the reign of God in the world, and teaches what it means to live under God’s rule. Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” who lays down his life for the sheep. Leaders in the church are called to be shepherds who lovingly care for God’s flock, rather than authority figures like the rulers of the world around them.

Like the Psalms, our songs of worship are full of declarations that God is our king and shepherd. This week we will spend some time considering whether we actually live as though that is true.

Next Week: The Exile (Leviticus 26; Nehemiah 9; Ezekiel 20:30-44; Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 6-8): Deuteronomy 6:4-5

On the Mountain (“Love God”—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Find a time when you can sit alone and uninterrupted. Spend a few moments preparing your heart to meditate on your relationship with God.
2. Read Psalm 95:1-7 a few times. Let yourself be drawn to one phrase.
3. Meditate for a few minutes just on that phrase.
4. What do you feel God is saying to you in that phrase about your relationship to him?
5. Pray that phrase to God, putting it in your own words.
6. Kneel before God in prayer, acknowledging him as King over your life. Praise him as Maker of the heavens and earth. Thank him for being your loving shepherd.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. What is different about the way people in a kingdom act toward their king and the way citizens of a democracy act toward their president?
2. Why do you think the people of Israel demanded to have a king? What did that say about their relationship with God? (See 1 Samuel 8.)
3. Look at God’s promise to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16); and then look at what God says to Solomon when he built God’s temple (1 Kings 9:3-9) and later after he builds temples to other gods (11:1-13). The first promise appears to be unconditional, but was it? What changed in what God said and why?
4. How could King David still be held up as an example of a righteous king after his serious sins in the Bathsheba incident?
5. What is different about seeing God as “king” and “shepherd”? Why is each important?
6. If there is time, discuss the “In the World” section below.
7. Do you have anything to share from your time with God, your family, or in the world?
8. Pray together that we would love and serve God with all our heart and soul and strength.

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. Read Psalm 23. Notice the way God loves and cares for his sheep. Compare that to the way you love your family’s pet (if you don’t have one, maybe you have relatives or friends who do, and you can talk about the way they love their pet).
2. Talk about a favorite teacher. Why did you love them? How did they lead and care for their students? How is that like the way God cares for his sheep?
3. Try to write your own 23rd Psalm using the image of a teacher caring for her students.

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. Solomon’s heart was drawn away from God because of his love for worshipers of other gods. What do you love in this world that might pull you away from God?
2. How can we have relationships with unbelievers that can influence them for God without pulling us away from God?
3. In Luke 15, Jesus says he is like a shepherd who leaves his flock to search for a lost sheep. Do you think most churches are more concerned about the flock or the lost sheep? What could we do to be more like Jesus?