

# The Prophets & Kings

## From Rehoboam To Zedekiah

### Book 1

#### A Daily Devotional Study Guide

Week 64

## “One or The Other”

**Study:** Ezekiel 20:30-39

**Reading:** Matthew 6:19-24, Joshua 24:14-28

**Memory:** Psalm 100

Several years ago, the hockey team I was on was playing a game on a Sunday morning. I had debated on whether I wanted to take the Sunday away from church and play or if I should just skip the game. There are many areas in life where I often try to work things out so I don't have to decide between two different things, and I try to work it out so I can have them both. In this case, I tried to have both by attending a church on Sunday morning before the hockey game. Though I was able to do this, for me, something just didn't feel right. I knew that God wanted me to skip the hockey game and preach at church that morning, but I chose the opposite. The whole time during the hockey game, I didn't enjoy myself. When I returned home that afternoon, I told my wife that I was never going to do that again. There is nothing wrong with missing a Sunday here or there at times, but in this situation, I knew what God wanted me to do and I chose the opposite.

Today, we are going to see how the Israelites had to choose to follow God or choose to continue in their idol worship. They could not have the blessing of God on their lives and choose to live their selfish and worldly lifestyles.

### What Does the Bible Say?

After taking a great deal of time to describe how the children of Israel had continually defiled themselves since their time in Egypt, God asked the elders if they were going to continue in the same lifestyle that their fathers had been involved in. The reason they were in captivity was because they had offered sacrifices to false idols and had even sacrificed their children as part of these rituals. Basically, God was asking them what right they had to pray to Him and appeal to Him for help and direction when they had been unwilling to follow Him and the ways that He had set before them. The Israelites wanted to have all the earthly pleasures of the nations around them and at the same time have God on their side. This was never going to happen (vs 30-32).

God wanted to be king over His people. He wanted to rule them with His mighty power. In their current situation, His power had been on display to them through His judgement. He had poured out His wrath on them, scattering them to different parts of the world. Yet, He had great plans to use this power to bring the people back from all parts of the earth. Just as God brought their fathers out of Egypt and subjected them to a time in the wilderness before they entered the promise land, they were experiencing this time in the wilderness before they would experience time in the kingdom. This was meant to be a time to purge out the sin of the people. He wanted them to see the error of their way and turn back to Him. Though there would be a temporary rebuilding of Judah, the full fulfillment of this is still to come (vs 33-38).

The elders of Judah were told to go and worship their idols that they had been worshiping. If they were not going to listen to God, He did not want them claiming His name. They were not to be half in with God and half in with the world. It was to be either His way or their way (vs 39).

## **How Does this Apply to Me?**

When you are faced with a choice of obeying God or doing what your flesh desires, what do you choose? Every person has certain areas of their life where they are highly tempted to follow their flesh and give into selfish pleasures that are not good for their spiritual lives. When you face these times, you would do well to look beyond your temptation and desires and realize the great blessings you will experience when you choose to do things God's way.

## **Suggestions for Prayer**

- \* *Thank God for the promises that He gives you in His Word.*
- \* *Ask God to help you choose to do things His way.*
- \* *Praise God because He knows what is best for you.*

## **Thought for the day**

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What question did God ask the leaders of Judah (vs 30)?

Why was this such a challenging question (vs 30)?

What did God say the Israelites were still involved in (vs 31)?

Why do you think they wanted God's favor even though they were still practicing sinful ways?

How have you done this in your life or how have you seen others around you do this?

What did God say He didn't want the people to do (vs 31)?

What did God say would never happen (vs 32)?

What do you think He meant by this?

What did God say His future plan was for Israel (vs 33)?

Why do you think He pictured Himself "with a mighty hand and outstretched arm" (vs 33)?

What does God plan to do some day in the future (vs 34)?

What was God going to do in the wilderness (vs 35)?

Why was this going to be in the wilderness (vs 36)?

What were they going to pass under (vs 37)? Why?

*\*\*\*Shepherds would make the sheep pass under their rods one by one so they could check the condition of each sheep in their care.*

What is God going to do with the rebels (vs 38)?

What does God emphasize about those who choose not to follow Him, but follow their own path (vs 39)?

# “*Couldn’t See It*”

**Study:** Ezekiel 20:40-21:7

**Reading:** Matthew 13:10-17, Ephesians 1:15-23

**Memory:** Psalm 100

**T**here have been times when I have been driving and pulled out right in front of someone. These individuals often let me know they weren’t happy with my driving with various noises and hand signals. Most of the times this happens, it is because I simply didn’t see them. When this happens, it makes me a little nervous as I start to wonder how I could have looked that direction and not seen a car coming directly at me. It reminds me of the importance of being extra cautious rather than just assuming I will see everything that is taking place.

Today, we are going to be reminded how important it is to take time to see things from God’s perspective. The Israelites missed out on God’s plan and chose not to see what He wanted from them.

## What Does the Bible Say?

The children of Israel did not want to serve God, but wanted to follow their own way. God told them to go ahead and follow the gods of the world and He would leave them alone to face the consequences for their actions. He knew that one day they would realize the error of their way and looked forward to the future millennial kingdom when all of Israel will choose to serve Him. In response to His love, God will expect them to give the best of what they had as an offering to Him. God will gather the Israelites that were scattered from the countries around the world and will show His power and His holiness among them. It will be clear to the Israelites and all the nations around them that He is God. He will be able to shower them with His love rather than spending much of His time pouring out His punishment on them for their evil deeds (vs 40-44).

God delivered another message to Ezekiel telling Him to face south towards the Negeb. This was a region that was the southern most part of Judah and separated Judah from Egypt. Though much of the area today is dry and arid, it appears from the reference to the “forest of Negeb” that it at one time was much more populated with trees. God described how He was going to burn up the trees of the land, scorching

the land. Perhaps this is why it is no longer a region that is full of trees today. God said He was going to do this so that everyone would know that this was a judgement from Him (vs 45-48).

Though Ezekiel had given the elders all of these instructions and warnings, it appears that they had a hard time believing him. They seemed to write off what Ezekiel was saying by declaring they couldn’t understand him because of all the parables that he was using (vs 49).

Ezekiel was then directed to set his face towards Jerusalem and to prophesy against it. God declared that He was against Jerusalem and the land of Israel. He pictured Himself as having his sword drawn from its sheath, an indication that He was ready for battle and judgment. Both those who were righteous and those who were wicked were going to face the judgement. God would use Babylon to invade and kill with no preference of one person over the others (vs 1-5).

God told Ezekiel to grieve over this with great sorrow. When the people would ask him why he was grieving, Ezekiel was to declare that his grief was over the great destruction that was to come. Judah had already faced invasions from Babylon, but the final invasion would be like nothing they had seen before. God was going to keep His Word and fulfill His promise of destruction for their sin (vs 6-7).

## How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you realize how easy it is to harden your heart to the truth? Over and over again, Ezekiel warned the people of judgement for their sin and their choice to follow foreign gods over the one true God, but the people seemed to be blinded about what they were doing. They appeared to write off what Ezekiel had to say to them by declaring that his words were too confusing and hard to understand. Their excuses would not work when it came to God’s judgment. God had tried to tell them in many different ways that He desired for them to repent and turn back to Him. He wanted them to follow Him in all things and yet they failed to listen. God had no choice but to carry out His word and enact judgement upon the people.

## Thought for the day

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What do you think the holy mountain is a reference to (vs 40)?

What is God looking forward to (vs 40)?

What is God going to do for the Israelites (vs 41)?

What is God going to show to the people (vs 41)? What do you think that means?

What will Israel fully realize (vs 42)?

What will Israel finally see (vs 43)?

What do you think verse 44 meant?

What was Ezekiel told to prophesy against (vs 45-46)?

What was God going to do to the Negeb (vs 47)?

What will everyone see when this was accomplished (vs 48)?

What did Ezekiel say about the response of the people (vs 49)?

What did God tell Israel to preach against (vs 1-2)?

What did God say about the land (vs 3)?

Who was going to experience the wrath of God (vs 4)?

Why do you think the righteous were also going to suffer?

What did God's reference to His sword infer (vs 5)?

What was Ezekiel told to do (vs 6)?

What was this mourning a symbol of (vs 7)?

Why did God emphasize that what He said would be fulfilled (vs 7)?

## ***“A Sharp Sword”***

**Study:** Ezekiel 21:8-23

**Reading:** Jude 1

**Memory:** Psalm 100

**M**y daughter and son-in-law gave my wife and I a new set of knives one Christmas. These were high quality knives which we were not used to and we soon found out how sharp they were. In the first few weeks that we used these knives, my wife and I both cut our fingers on a few different occasions, because we were not extremely cautious in the way we handled them. We weren't used to having such sharp knives and we learned pretty quickly to treat these knives with care. Today, we will read about how a sharp sword was coming to the nation of Judah.

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

God sent another message for Ezekiel to declare and this one was about a sword that had been sharpened and polished. This was a picture of the swift slaughter that was going to take place among those in Judah. There is some question about the exact meaning of the end of verse 10. It appears that Israel was being rebuked for scoffing at the idea that God would bring such severe judgement. They had not heeded the warnings when God used the wooden rod of correction on them so now He was using something stronger and more severe. The sharp sword was given to those God had called to slay His people. Ezekiel was told to weep and wail for his people because they were going to face great destruction. The striking of the thigh (vs 12) was a sign of great anguish and grief. God had no choice but to bring this great slaughter to His people because they failed to listen to the rod of correction that He had tried to use to get their attention (vs 8-13).

Ezekiel was told to take a sword and use it as a prop for this prophecy. He was to clap his hands to get their attention and was to then swing the sword through the air at least three times to symbolize how the slaughter to Judah and Jerusalem would come from every direction. This destruction would be swift and terrifying. Ezekiel was to continually swing the sword in all different directions indicating how God would clap

His hands to get their attention with this judgement. It would satisfy the anger over their sin that had built up year after year (vs 14-17).

Another message was delivered to Ezekiel as he was told to map out two different directions for the king of Babylon to take while heading out for war. There would be a sign post placed at a spot in the path that would give a choice to go towards Judah and Jerusalem or Rabbah in Ammon. The king was pictured standing at the sign post and trying to decide which way he should go. The king would use divination techniques practiced in those days to help him decide which way to go. These would be apparatuses used by people to consult their higher powers for direction (vs 18-21).

This divination would reveal to Nebuchadnezzar that he should attack Jerusalem. He would use battering rams to knock down the gates and would build siege ramps to allow Him to go over the walls of the city. Those in Jerusalem would think that Nebuchadnezzar would be mistaken since they had made a treaty with him. They didn't understand that their rebellion against him would lead to him choosing to attack and completely destroy the region (vs 22-23).

## **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Over and over it is emphasized in Scripture that God will bring judgement for sin. Since this is repeated over and over again in many different places and in many different forms, you can understand that it is the natural tendency for men to think that they can live however they want to live and not face the judgement of God. Many times this type of attitude is found to exist among those who claim to be followers of God. They live with the idea that they can worship God and yet also make up their own rules for how they want to live. They exalt human reasoning over the truth that is given in God's Word. The Israelites thought they were worshipping God, but in reality they were living how they wanted to live and trying to add God to what they were doing. God wanted it the other way around. He wanted them to put Him first and follow His way above their own desires. The end result for the Israelites and others in Scripture who followed their own way was never good for those who lived that way.

## **Suggestions for Prayer**

\* *Ask God to show you any areas of your life where you are following your way instead of His.*

What was being sharpened and polished (vs 9)?

What did this indicate?

What was going to happen with this sword (vs 10)?

Who was this sword going to be given to (vs 11)?

Why was Ezekiel told to cry and wail (vs 12)?

What do you think verse 13 means?

What was Ezekiel to do with a sword (vs 14)?

What was going to happen to the hearts of the people (vs 15)?

Why do you think the sword is paired up with lightning (vs 15)?

What did swinging the sword in every direction indicate (vs 16)?

What was God going to do to get the attention of the people (vs 17)?

What was Ezekiel told to mark (vs 19)?

What two directions were the sign post going to point (vs 20)?

- 1.
- 2.

What would the king of Babylon have to decide (vs 21)?

How was he going to decide this (vs 21)?

What was the end result of his inquiry (vs 22)?

Why would the people of Judah feel that He made a mistake (vs 23)?

Why do you think the Israelites were so insistent on the idea that they would not face destruction even though it was prophesied over and over again?

# “A Great Inferno”

**Study:** Ezekiel 21:24-32

**Reading:** Psalm 103:1-22

**Memory:** Psalm 100

One of the things that I feel bad about (sometimes) is that my wife has to continually live the funny things that she has said or done in the past. These are things that she has said or done that she is embarrassed about and wants to forget, but I tend to find myself teasing her by bringing them up over and over again. I try to limit these things so it is just a fun, jovial part of our relationship, but it is in my nature to remember some of these things. I am sure she would like to forget about many of these things, but the fact is that I keep bringing them up.

Today, we are going to read how God wants to forget our sins and choose to remember them no more, but when we choose to live in those sins we don't allow Him to forget. We will be reminded that it is not God who continually brings up our past once we have been forgiven, but it is us who brings up our past when we choose to live in it.

## What Does the Bible Say?

God had been very longsuffering with the people of Judah, but they continually reminded Him about their sin by continuing to commit their sin. Things would have been way different for them if they had confessed their sin and sought forgiveness. God would have treated them in a completely different manner if they had stopped sinning. God longed to forgive His people for their sin, but since they were constantly reminding Him of their guilt, action had to be taken (vs 24).

Zedekiah was king of Judah at this time and had rebelled against Babylon. God described him as profane and wicked because He continued to lead Judah away from God and the instructions that He had given. Though he was king now, his crown would be removed and he would be brought humbled when God chose to act and allow Babylon free reign in Israel. The reign of the kings of Israel would come to an end and would not be restored again until Jesus returns to set up His throne in the millennial kingdom (vs 25-27).

In the beginning of this prophecy Ezekiel was to put up a sign post

that directed Nebuchadnezzar towards Judah and Ammon. Though the first direction led them to Judah, the Babylonians would eventually end up in Ammon. God wasn't just going to judge His people, but the nations around Israel were going to be judged for their sin and the way they treated Israel. Just as with Israel, the sword of judgement had been sharpened and prepared for battle in Ammon. The Ammonites had cheered on the Babylonians in their destruction of Israel, but now it was their turn. God was going to blow on them with breath like fire and they would be delivered into the hands of brutish, evil men. The people would be like fuel to a small fire causing it to grow into a massive inferno. Though Nebuchadnezzar would first choose to attack Israel, Ammon was not going to be spared. Their demise would be the same as the people of Judah (vs 28-32).

## How Does this Apply to Me?

Do you realize that God is ready and willing to forgive your sin? Though this passage about judgement might not seem to be about forgiveness, the fact that God only enacted this great judgment after the repeated sins of Israel points to a forgiving and gracious God. It is easy to only see the judgment of God and live in an improper fear that God is going to “get you” every time you fall short, but that is not the case. God wanted to forget their sin, but the problem was that the Israelites kept reminding Him of their sin by continually committing it. Even if with their words they asked forgiveness, their continual choices to commit sin were like a stench in the nostrils of God. Understand that God does seek to forgive sin and wants to forget about your past failures, but the way that you remind Him of your sin is by choosing to commit it again.

## Suggestions for Prayer

- \* *Thank God for the forgiveness He has to offer.*
- \* *Ask God to help you choose to stop your sinful ways.*
- \* *Praise God because He is in control of the affairs of this world.*

## Thought for the day

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What did the Israelites continually remind God of (vs 24)?

What did they make obvious about their sin (vs 24)?

What was going to happen to Israel because of their sin (vs 25)?

What did God say about the crown (vs 26)?

What was not going to remain the same (vs 26)?

What principle at the end of verse 26 is found throughout the Scripture?

Why do you think the word “ruin” is repeated three times in verse 27?

Why do you think God said that judgment belonged to them?

Who was the next prophecy about (vs 28)?

What was drawn for slaughter (vs 28)?

Why was this polished (vs 28)?

What did false prophets and false visions do (vs 29)?

What do you think the beginning of verse 30 means?

*\*\*\*The Ammonites were told that resisting Babylon and God’s plan would be useless.*

What was God going to pour out on Ammon (vs 31)?

What was God going to use to destroy Ammon (vs 31)?

How were they going to be fuel for the fire (vs 32)?

What do you think it means that they would not be remembered (vs 32)?

What do you think you can learn from this passage?

## “Harming Yourself”

**Study:** Ezekiel 22:1-16

**Reading:** 1 Samuel 25:1-42

**Memory:** Psalm 100

I am always shocked and amazed when I watch a documentary or read accounts which describe some older medical practices which doctors in the past actually thought were helpful to people. For instance, for some time, it was a common practice when people had a severe illness to drain blood out of them in order to bring healing. It was thought that this was removing the infected blood and giving the body a chance to reproduce good blood. Yet, in many cases it was this very practice that led to the death of some individuals who would have had a good chance to recover.

Today, we are going to read how the Israelites were taking advantage of others for selfish gain, not realizing that they were actually causing harm to themselves.

### What Does the Bible Say?

God once again spoke to Ezekiel and asked him if he was ready to judge the city. This appears to present the idea that Ezekiel was acting as a prosecuting attorney against the city and needed to declare the straight facts about why they should be found guilty. Jerusalem had become a city that was filled with murderers which would kill their children and sacrifice them to idols. They followed the pagan practices which did not exalt life, but exalted selfish deeds. These sins had brought guilt upon them and their sin was clearly on display to anyone who looked. Their time of judgement had come and God was going to desolate them so that they would become synonymous with death and destruction. Nations around them would refer to Jerusalem in a negative context, mocking them because of the great destruction they would experience (vs 1-5).

The leaders of Judah had used their power to shed the blood of innocent people. The people had no respect for their fathers and mothers, they treated foreigners with great disdain, and took advantage of the fatherless and the widows. They completely disregarded the instructions of God and chose not to keep the Sabbath as a sacred and special day.

People would continually lie about each other and accuse each other of wrong for selfish gain. Sexual perversion was rampant as people chose to sleep with whoever they wanted to sleep with and had no boundaries. They had become so degraded that they were committing sexual acts with their own family members. Bribes were very common and extortion had run rampant in the city. Everyone was living for their own selfish gain and had completely removed the ways of God from their lives (vs 6-12).

The striking or clapping of the hands mentioned in verse 13 seem to indicate a call for destruction. God was going to destroy the nation because of the way Judah had treated each other in their selfish living. God asked them if their courageous defiance would be able to hold up when He chose to deal with them. After God declared what He was going to do, there would be no stopping Him. He was going to carry out His Word. He was going to make it clear and evident to them that He was the Lord (vs 13-16).

### **How Does this Apply to Me?**

Though God gave a list of the sins of Israel, most of what He described could be summed up in one word - selfishness. The Israelites had become so focused on themselves and their personal pleasures that they not only neglected others around them, but they oppressed and harmed others for their own selfish gain. What they failed to realize is that all the effort they put into gaining things for themselves was the very thing that was causing them harm. They were not just hurting others around them with their actions, but they were bringing great destruction in their own lives. This is a great warning and reminder for you today. It is very easy to get so caught up in your own selfish desires and what is best for you that your actions and choices meant to help yourself actually are harming you. Trust that God knows what is best for you and that when you do things His way, you are actually helping out yourself more than you could ever realize.

### **Suggestions for Prayer**

- \* *Thank God for giving you guidelines for what is best.*
- \* *Ask God to help you live unselfishly.*

### **Thought for the day**

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What did God ask Ezekiel if he would do (vs 1-2)?

What are two of the things that Israel was guilty of (vs 3-4)?

- 1.
- 2.

What are ways that you can be guilty of these same things today?

What was God going to do as a result (vs 4)?

What were people from near and far going to do (vs 5)?

What were the leaders of Judah guilty of (vs 6)?

How did they treat their parents (vs 7)?

Why do you think this was such a problem?

How do you see this type of behavior in our society today?

What three categories of people are mentioned in verse 7?

Why do you think these three are mentioned?

What else was Judah guilty of (vs 8)?

What sins were described in verse 9?

What sins were describe in verses 10-12?

What question did God ask in verse 14? Why do you think He asked this?

What was God going to do (vs 15)?

What did God emphasize about the result of their actions (vs 16)?

What do you think God was attempting to teach Israel in these verses?



# “Stand In the Gap”

**Study:** Ezekiel 22:17-31

**Reading:** Isaiah 6:1-8, 59:14-21

**Memory:** Psalm 100

A few years back, there was a carnival ride at the Cherry Festival in Traverse City that started to malfunction. The ride started shaking and it looked as if it may tip over. The video clips of this showed how there were several people who saw this and ran to the ride to stand on it to add some weight and counter balance the ride to keep it from tipping. One person didn't make a difference, but once many people ran over to the ride and used their combined weight, they were able to help balance out the ride until it was able to come to a stop.

Today, we are going to be challenged to step up and fill in the spiritual gaps that exist in our society and our churches. You can have an affect for God on the life of others around you, and as you unite together with other believers, the affect will grow stronger and stronger.

## What Does the Bible Say?

In the next message of God to Ezekiel, God described how Israel had become like “dross” to him. When a metal was heated to a high temperature, the heat would separate the pure metal from the impurities which it contained. What was left over was the dross. God pictured how He was going to put Israel through the furnace and they would be removed because of their impurity. Jerusalem was going to be treated like metals and be put through extreme fire. God was going to blow on it to make it hotter and hotter. He was going to purify the land and the city by removing the impurities from among them (vs 17-22).

God delivered another message to Isaiah declaring that Israel was a land that had become extremely dirty, but had no rain to wash all of their dirt away. The spiritual and political leaders were like roaring lions who ripped apart their prey. These leaders robbed others of their treasures and caused the death of many along the way. The priests, who should have been leaders in compassion and love, would not think twice about

breaking the laws of God and profaning the things that were holy. There was no longer any distinction between things that were to be holy and set apart for God and things that were used for common everyday purposes. They had disregarded the laws of God and did not value the Sabbath day as a day of rest and worship. The prophets were corrupt. The priests were corrupt and the political leaders were corrupt. While the political leaders took advantage of others for earthly gain, the prophets whitewashed the true message from God and made things look way better than they actually were. These prophets gave false visions and false predictions that stirred the people on in their sin rather than calling them to turn from their sin. The people followed their leaders and practiced all types of selfish evil, taking advantage of anyone who was in a station lower than they were (vs 23-29).

The prophets, priests, kings and princes had all failed the people by leading them away from God rather than towards Him. God was looking for someone to stand up and repair the wall of protection from the evil that had been attacking the land, but all of the leaders had failed. As a result, He was going to pour out His wrath on them and repay them for all of their evil deeds (vs 30-31).

## How Does this Apply to Me?

Are you willing to be that one who stands in the gap? This does not mean that if you are the only one doing what is right that everyone will follow you into righteousness. Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Daniel were all alive at this time and were voices of reason and godliness, though the people failed to listen. If more people chose to stand up for godliness in the land, things would have been much different. Instead, the walls of protection had broken down and there weren't enough leaders willing to step in and repair the walls. The challenge is for you as an individual to be willing to stand up and fill in the gap. If your fellow believers do the same, you will be a powerful force for righteousness and for the kingdom of God.

## Suggestions for Prayer

\* *Thank God for those who have stood in the gap before you.*

## Thought for the day

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What did God say that Israel had become (vs 18)?

What do you think He meant by this?

Where was God going to gather the people (vs 19)?

What did God compare this gathering to (vs 20)? Why?

What was going to be the end result (vs 20)?

Why was He going to “blow” on them (vs 21)?

What did God want them to know (vs 22)?

Why do you think He often stated that He wanted them to know this?

What had not happened to the land (vs 24)?

What did God compare the actions of the prophets to (vs 25)?

Why did He say this about them (vs 25)?

Who had done violence and profaned holy things (vs 26)?

Why was this so harmful?

What did the priests not teach (vs 26)?

What were the princes compared to (vs 27)?

What did God say the prophets were doing (vs 28)?

How did the people follow their leaders (vs 29)?

What did God look for (vs 30)?

What do you think this meant?

What was God going to do (vs 31)?

Memory Verse:

*Psalms 100:1 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! 2 Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! 3 Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! 5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*