

WORLD MISSIONS

The king is dead! The news must have hit with the kind of shock we felt at the 9/11 bombing of the World Trade Center. King Uzziah gave Judah fifty-two years of peace and prosperity. An agriculturalist, an engineer, a defense strategist, and a master of regional affairs, Uzziah was one of Judah's most powerful rulers—that is, until the day he broke God's law and entered the temple to take the office of a priest! God then smote the king with leprosy (II Chron. 26:16-21).

The Bible simply relates that the king died. We can imagine how Isaiah felt. He had served this king and appreciated what he had done for Judah.

But God showed Isaiah something stupendous. He saw the Lord sitting on a throne right there in the temple. John 12:41 tells us that this was the Lord Jesus! Yes, this was a day to remember!

On the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the media was filled with "Where were you on 9/11?" and "What went through your mind at the news?" Anne Graham Lotz, evangelist Billy Graham's daughter, wrote, "God was trying to get the attention of his people, including me. Like the prophet Isaiah in the year that King Uzziah died, I looked up with the eyes of faith" ("The CT Forum," *Christianity Today*, September 2011).

Richard Stearns, president of World Vision U.S., said, "The world became smaller that day (9/11)." People, especially Christians, were touched in many ways. Stearns went on to say that donations to international causes more than tripled in the decade following. Wess Stafford, of Compassion International, reported that their income for social ministries abroad tripled in ten years ("The CT Forum").

The world did indeed get smaller. Missions leaders had spoken of globalization for years. Now it really meant something. A quiet revolution had taken

place on 9/11, somewhat like what happened when the microscope and the telescope opened up new worlds. Suddenly we were conscious of Muslims.

Global Prayer Digest informs us that 73,000 people around the world are praying for a specific unreached people group. "You may join them!" (*Mission Frontiers*, U.S. Center for World Mission, September/October 2011).

The best 9/11 news is that there has been a dramatic increase in the desire to reach Muslims for Christ. J. Dudley Woodbury, a professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, reported, "The most significant missions development since 9/11 has been the increased number of students who want to be missionaries to the Muslims." One hundred more students than normal enrolled in classes taught after 9/11 by Dr. Woodbury. In the same article, Todd Johnson, editor of the book *Atlas of Global Christianity*, reported a 26 percent increase in the number of missionaries working among Muslims between 2005 and 2010 ("Flames of Love," *Christianity Today*, September 2011).

A Wheaton, Illinois, church sent eight students to a northern Italian city that had received a flood of refugees from North Africa during the 2011 "Arab Spring." The church team gave out one thousand New Testaments and led one Muslim to faith in Christ (Moring, Mark, "Believers on the Move," *Christianity Today*, September 2011).

Will the Lord use you?

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M.—Setting Yourself to Seek God. II Chron. 26:1-5.

T.—From Success to Pride to Destruction. II Chron. 26:16-21.

W.—Following a Father's Example. II Kings 15:32-38.

T.—People Dullied to God's Presence. Isa. 6:9-13.

F.—Choosing to Serve a Holy God. Josh. 24:14-24.

S.—Seeking the Face of God. Ps. 24:1-10.

S.—Encountering the Holy God. Isa. 6:1-8.

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The twelfth chapter of Isaiah, our study this week, has a thrilling revival theme. Some Bible scholars hold that, along with chapter 11, it speaks of life in the glorious future reign of the Messiah Jesus in a rebuilt Jerusalem.

This future time will be a time of joy (Isa. 12:3). The Lord's name will be exalted (vs. 4). We are even now to sing unto the Lord, crying out and shouting of His greatness (vs. 6).

There is much work to be done before we see the future great day. Fully one-third of the world's population does not even know about the Jehovah and the Jesus of Isaiah 12. Those who exult in that passage must rise up and reach out. We must help the least, the loveless, and the lost.

It is refreshing to speak to those with Christian youth and vitality about the great challenge. Older Christians have not always left good examples of missionary commitment. Walter Martin, whose ministry involved reaching out to cult members, met a woman who said she had figured out what to do with them. "When I see them coming, I shut the blinds and lock my doors, and when they knock, I pretend I'm not home!" (Galli, "Multi-Faith Matters," *Christianity Today*, April 2011).

Many Christians have closed the blinds and locked the doors to the world. Mission societies report that 200,000 Americans inquire about missionary service each year but that only 1 percent actually reach candidacy status.

It is good to know, however, that there are missionaries who continue to reach lost people in many hard places. One of the most hopeful movements for Christ has been the work among the Jewish people at home and abroad. One such conference bears the name of the Swiss city of Lausanne. The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evan-

gelism (LCJE), brings together believers from as far away as Japan to talk about reaching Jews dispersed throughout the world.

In a conference in Saint Louis recently, the North American branch of LCJE featured Bible/doctrinal studies of matters involved in reaching Jews for Christ. The important news of the conference was the movement into Brooklyn, New York, by two missions societies. Their headquarters will be in the heart of the most Orthodox Jewish community in the country. The new mission station will host a full seminary program and reach out through literature, street evangelism, and small-group Bible studies. There will be a full range of worship opportunities with a distinctive Jewish theme.

Jeremiah, a young Hispanic Christian, believes the gospel must be taken directly to the lost. He has a team of young believers who meet in his home each Thursday, eat his food, and then listen to a message on reaching the lost. The next evening, they are out on the street in a section of their city that caters to late diners and others seeking recreational venues. They preach in the open and witness to passersby with the gospel. The police have welcomed them as a genuine help to keeping the peace. Many have been reached for Christ.

Is there a place for you in these movements for God? Ask your pastor's advice; then pray fervently, and seek the face of the Lord today.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—Giving Thanks Is Good. Ps. 92:1-8.
- T.—Into God's Presence with Thanksgiving. Ps. 95:1-7.
- W.—Remembering God's Wonderful Works. I Chron. 16:8-13.
- T.—Giving Thanks and Praise to God. I Chron. 29:10-18.
- F.—Thanksgiving for God's Goodness. I Tim. 4:1-5.
- S.—Unthankful Recipients. Luke 17:11-19.
- S.—Giving Thanks to the Lord. Isa. 12:1-6.

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Our theme this week is “Meaningless Worship Condemned.” Since the end of the Civil War, the history of the United States has been a story of the great cities that have mushroomed across the land.

Churches were called upon to aid the wretched victims of alcoholism, crime, violence, and immorality. Some mainline churches were unwilling to take on the high cost of alleviating human suffering. Others took it as a part-time responsibility. Committed Christians rose to the challenge and opened what were termed “rescue missions.” To this day, there may be one in your town or a city near you.

Rescue mission work involved day and night outreach to lives wrecked by sin. Clients of the missions needed food, basic medical care, and just a few kind words in a world that had nothing for the least, the lost, and the loveless.

Open day and night, missions attracted street people with warm food, coffee, music, and a strong, inviting message from the Word of God. The routine was for those who wished to eat to receive a gospel message first. After a meal provided without cost, there would be rousing gospel music and Bible reading that accented God’s fatherly arms open to every prodigal son or daughter.

You will find the name “Fanny Crosby” in most church hymnals. Blind from childhood, Fanny loved Jesus Christ and made Him known to millions through her poems and songs. The first woman to address the United States Congress, she entered into rescue mission work with her whole heart. In her sixties, blind and walking hunched over, she found her way to the smelliest, most besotted soul in the mission and sat down with him in what she called “conversational evangelism.” She hailed it as “the most wonderful work in the world” (Burger, *Women Who Changed the Heart of the City*, Kregel).

Rescuing lost people from the rav-

ages of a sinful life is often the burden of a mother or a wife’s prayer for a wayward loved one. Emily Trotter had a son, Mel, whom she encouraged to get a good education. But Mel was more interested in drinking and carousing. Emily was a godly woman. She turned to her only resource—a God who is all-powerful. She cried out for her son and waited patiently for God to answer.

One night in Chicago, Mel was thrown out of a bar. He found, as many have, that the liquor establishments are interested in you until you are out of money and become a nuisance. He decided to end it all, but then heard the music of the famous Pacific Garden Mission. A converted alcoholic all but shoved Mel into the rescue mission, where he fell asleep in a chair. When he woke he listened; then he went forward at the end of the service to trust in Christ as his Saviour (Burger).

Emily Trotter’s prayers had been answered! Mel kept on living for Christ and founded sixty-seven rescue missions in such cities as Grand Rapids, Detroit, Saginaw, Fort Wayne, and others.

We have a rescue mission in our city. It never closes, for the work never ends. In times of prosperity and times of want, there are always those whom God draws into these havens of rest to find the Lord Jesus and thus a genuine rescue from sin and self. The families of alcoholics need support; frequently they need food, clothing, and medical care. And they need Jesus Christ.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—Fruitless Worship. Isa. 1:10-17.
- T.—Worshipping Our Own Achievements. Isa. 2:5-17.
- W.—Lives Unmoved by Ceremonies. Isa. 58:1-7.
- T.—Refusing to Listen. Jer. 13:1-11.
- F.—Tuning Out God. Zech. 7:8-14.
- S.—Receiving the Word. Luke 8:9-15.
- S.—Hearts Far from God. Isa. 29:9-16.

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It is thrilling to read in this week's Bible selection of that great future day of the Lord's kingdom reign when He makes all things new. The theme, "The Glorious New Creation," reminds us of the thrilling news from the mission fields of earth, where great numbers of people are coming to Christ. This exciting harvest of souls is especially evident in the burgeoning house church movement.

For several years, the world has watched anxiously the news about the enrichment of uranium for nuclear weapons in Iran. At the same time, Iran has become a fertile field for the gospel! A Christian observer wrote about "how nervous the Islamic republic is about the prodigious success of house churches" (Persaud, "Public Enemy," *Christianity Today*, June 2011).

Iranian believers in this country report that 202 Christians in twenty-four cities were arrested in Iran between June 2010 and January 2011. Believers there who were not originally Muslims usually enjoy freedom of worship, but those who turn to Christ from the Islamic faith are under threat.

The writer went on to say, "The house church movement is booming" (Persaud). Believers, said to number in the hundreds of thousands, are distributing large stocks of New Testaments and literature. Christian programming on satellite TV is beamed into the country.

A distinguished scientist from a high-caste Hindu family in India received graduate education in this country. Christians here witnessed to him and developed his curiosity about the New Testament. Forced to return to India due to a family problem, he turned to the Lord in prayer for an answer to a shattering family crisis. It worked!

The young scientist read John 1:12 and gave his heart to Jesus! He was able to win his sister to Christ. He meets reg-

ularly with other believers, which is typical of house church Christians. India can be a very difficult place for Hindus who defect from that religion (Ventash, "Living and Discipling in the Hindu World," *Mission Frontiers*, May/June 2011).

Mohammad, a young Muslim, was raised in the madrassa, a school for boys to learn the Koran and a place to learn jihad—holy war. On a picnic outing, Mohammad jumped into the water without knowing how to swim. He began to sink. He called for divine help, but none came. He then cried, "Jesus, save me!"

He awakened in a boat. A Christian had rescued him. He studied with the man and trusted in Christ. In time, Mohammad rose to be the chieftain of his tribe. He teaches the Word of God and renders justice based on its teachings.

Mohammad reported "thousands of home groups of those who have given their lives to Jesus. Each group is serving about ten families" (Mir-Ibn-Mohammad, "A Muslim Tribal Chief Is Bringing Jesus to His People," *Mission Frontiers*, May/June 2011).

Church planting is a consuming occupation of mission leaders today. Early in 2011, 160 leaders from twenty-four nations met in Bangalore, India, to consider this matter. Their first agreement was on the primacy of prayer.

They adopted a program of "prayer-walking," praying as they walk around an area where a church is needed and claiming the land for Christ!

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M.—The Handiwork of God. Ps. 19:1-6.
T.—The Guidance of God. Ps. 19:7-14.
W.—No One Is Righteous. Rom. 3:9-20.
T.—Sin, Death, Sacrifice, Salvation. Rom. 5:6-14.
F.—The Servant's New Work. Isa. 42:1-9.
S.—God Makes All Things New. Rev. 21:1-7.
S.—New Heavens and a New Earth. Isa. 65:17-21, 23-25.

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This week's Scripture text mentions that the Jews celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles after the temple altar was rebuilt. It was a sign of a healthy spirit within them that they observed this biblical feast. The Bible prescription for the occasion orders that the faithful dwell in booths for seven days (Lev. 23:39-42).

It took courage to be numbered among the repatriated Jews of the Captivity: "Fear was upon them because of the people of those countries" (Ezra 3:3).

The Lord calls on some Christians to take the Word of God to very dangerous places. One such believer was a young Englishwoman, Gladys Aylward.

Gladys was in domestic service to wealthy English families. Interested in missions, she began to read and learn all she could about China. She gave up her occupation and attended a college that prepared missionaries for service in the East. She did well academically, but the director reluctantly said that she could not go out as their missionary to China. They were sure she could not master the language after age thirty—a birthday fast approaching for Gladys. She reluctantly returned to domestic service.

The Lord had certainly placed China on Gladys Aylward's heart, for she decided at last to go there without a mission sponsorship. Gladys worked in a full-time job and also extra jobs to raise the fare for ocean travel as well as a long train ride across Germany, Russia, and Siberia. The prospects of such a trip were staggering, for Russia was in the throes of revolution! Strong men would not dare make the trip.

Gladys was arrested in Russia and suspected of spying. Her indomitable spirit focused on the call of the Lord on her life. The Lord got Gladys to China unscathed. She was soon in the service of an elderly, somewhat brusque

missionary lady, Jeannie Lawson, to whom she was to be apprenticed. Gladys was still in domestic service, but she was in the land of her choice (Wellman, *Gladys Aylward: Missionary to China*, Barbour).

Lawson was kind of a loose cannon in her mission society. She traveled widely all over the mountains of Shansi Province. Gladys stayed in what was called "The Inn of the Eight Happinesses." Since it was operated as a business motel for muleteers and other travelers, Gladys quickly learned a very difficult dialect of Mandarin Chinese. She preached and taught the gospel to all who took shelter in the inn.

In time, Gladys became a part-time servant of the local government, inspecting the feet of Chinese women to enforce the ban on the centuries-old practice of foot-binding babies and women. The job grew into an appeal to stop the killing of female babies, another longtime Chinese scandal.

Gladys was working hard in the Lord's harvest field when the Japanese invaded China. She collected orphans from all over northern China and led them hundreds of miles through mountains and raging rivers, all the while hunted by Japanese troops. The woman who supposedly was unable to learn Chinese lived to see hundreds of those she led to Christ following the Lord.

God transforms the heart, looking upon it and calling whom He will to His service.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem. Matt. 23:29-39.
- T.—The Coming Judgment. Jer. 7:30—8:3.
- W.—Conquest by the Babylonians. II Kings 24:1-12.
- T.—The Destruction of Jerusalem. II Chron. 36:15-21.
- F.—Command to Rebuild the Temple. Ezra 1:1-8.
- S.—The Response of the People. Ezra 2:64-70.
- S.—Restoring the Worship of God. Ezra 3:1-7.

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There are more than forty thousand Christian denominations in the world. Those that are attempting to grow using certain age-old models in other parts of the world often find they do not work very well.

Modern missions are studying two exciting movements in reaching the world for Christ. One model is teaming missionaries with Christian businessmen. A small manufacturer that turns out widgets relocates on a mission field. It employs a local workforce that starts the day with a Bible devotional. The boss is friendly and cordial, modeling a Christian lifestyle. Conversational witness proceeds slowly over a period of time, and souls are saved. Now we have the beginnings of an indigenous church, that is, one composed exclusively of local inhabitants.

The second exciting movement is the house church outreach. One Asian country where gospel ministry is officially forbidden has witnessed an incredible explosion of souls saved and churches planted. A young believer named Ying Chang began ministering in 2000. In ten years, 1.7 million decisions and baptisms have been recorded! These believers worship in 150,000 house churches. Churches are made up of from just over eleven believers to an average high of thirty-five.

As you can imagine, these numbers were immediately suspected by some as inflated; but missions experts in the study of house churches have verified the numbers. In fact, Ying Chang is known to have underreported the successes for fear no one would believe what the Lord was doing!

Six hundred house churches were planted among Hindus in one Indian state in a four-year period from 2003 to 2007. In 2004, missionaries training national leaders in India decided to mod-

el the house church movement for the workers. One of these churches was called the "Garage Church." In this church, a Hindu watchman came to faith in Christ, and soon he was a house church leader. New believers attending the Garage Church began to minister to their families, and soon dozens of house churches were planted.

In the period 2002 to 2005, three thousand new churches were planted in a part of India that was very resistant to the gospel. The inhabitants are animists; they believe spirits are in everything. Their particular brand of animism is also mixed with Hindu elements. For those who were saved, the church planters insisted on careful discipling. Soul-winning and church-planting went hand in hand, and the harvest has been bountiful.

In another situation, missionaries reached out to the Lingayat people of India. Christians had avoided reaching out to this group in the past. Led of the Lord, these missionaries began planting churches among entire families. In thirty villages, two hundred families have come to Christ and are worshipping together. (These astounding statistics are reported by B. D. B. Moses in *Mission Frontiers*, March/April 2011).

Some who had seen Solomon's temple cried when the new temple was dedicated (Ezra 3:12). Some might cry over growing a church in the United States today, but often you can see on difficult fields that God is on the move. May we pray, give, and go to work!

—*Lyle P. Murphy*

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—A Great and Wonderful House. II Chron. 2:1-9.
- T.—Building a House for God's Name. I Kings 8:14-21.
- W.—My Name Shall Be There. I Kings 8:22-30.
- T.—A House of Prayer. Matt. 21:10-16.
- F.—Make a Joyful Noise to God. Ps. 66:1-12.
- S.—Lead Me in Your Righteousness. Ps. 5:1-12.
- S.—Tears of Joy. Ezra 3:8-13.

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Living for God has always involved challenges and trials. And, as our theme this week suggests, we are “Celebrating with Joy.”

Hwa Yung, a pastor from Malaysia, tells the story of Ida Scudder, the daughter of medical missionaries in India. A lady of great conviction, Ida was sure she did not want to be a missionary.

One night two Hindu men and a Muslim knocked on the door. All three told of wives struggling in childbirth. “Will you come?” they asked. Ida said she knew nothing about delivering babies. She promised to send the doctor, her father. All three said that in their religions, no man could enter the women’s quarters. The next morning, Miss Scudder learned that all three ladies had died. Deeply moved, Ida Scudder returned to the U.S. and became a doctor.

Her Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, is one of the finest hospitals in southern Asia. The college has trained thousands of medical workers (Yung, “A Fresh Call for U.S. Missionaries,” *Christianity Today*, November 2011).

Dr. Yung’s story of Ida Scudder was a lead-in to his thesis that Americans need to recapture the leadership they once held in world evangelization. Yung wrote, “There is little doubt that in sheer numbers and overall impact, the American church was the dominant force in foreign missions in the 20th century.”

Continuing his historical review, Yung points to a kind of moratorium on American mission work that existed in many places in the 1960s and 1970s. The U.S. was branded as imperialist and colonialist, and Yung says that many seemed to believe it.

Despite this period of inner reflection, the American foreign mission force is still the largest in the world and the largest funding source for missions.

Yung believes that many Christian nationals in the world look to American believers as the foundation for building their own societies. Marxism has failed. Much of the world looks to the U.S. as a model for prosperity and freedom. Yung also says that where the Bible has been brought, it has actually helped preserve native culture and language.

Dr. Yung wrote, “I am not aware of a society that has self-critically developed a guilt complex as deep and extensive over past mistakes as today’s West.” This has apparently sapped our vigor in world evangelism.

An English parliamentarian who grew up as a missionary kid in Africa despairs of the current desire of some to leave Africa without a Christian presence. A professed atheist, the English writer holds that giving Africa resources and knowledge will not do the job. “Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of . . . malign” forces (Yung).

Dr. Yung has two suggestions for American believers. “First, the American church must recover a renewed confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Second, . . . when Americans go overseas, they need to go with a spirit of humility and servanthood. This means being willing to partner with believers from other cultures.”

Dear reader, you have inherited a great Christian history. Your generation is in a position to write a new and even more glorious chapter.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—Resistance to Rebuilding the Temple. Ezra 4:1-5.
- T.—Accusations of Seditious. Ezra 4:11-16.
- W.—Temple Construction Halted. Ezra 4:17-24.
- T.—The Eye of God upon Them. Ezra 5:1-5.
- F.—Who Gave You a Decree? Ezra 5:6-17.
- S.—An Official Endorsement. Ezra 6:1-12.
- S.—The Temple’s Dedication. Ezra 6:13-22.

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Ezra was concerned about the myriad enemies of Israel that the Jews would face on the long trip back to Mount Zion. At the same time, he was ashamed to ask for a military escort (Ezra 8:22). By faith, they endured the hazards of the journey. God faithfully guided them home (vs. 31).

Christian missionaries are regularly cast upon the Lord for His strong hand of protection upon them. Nevertheless, from the start of their ministry, missionaries must be prepared to face peril and death if God so wills.

John Stam of Paterson, New Jersey, was born to Christian parents. He was slower than his siblings to trust Christ as his personal Saviour, but eventually he did. While in his teens, he worked at the Star of Hope Mission, which his father had founded. Many were saved there. John's father hoped that John would succeed him in the directorate.

Excited about missions, John planned to enter the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He had barely enough to pay for the first year of studies, but he determined to let no one know of his financial needs. The Lord blessed his faith.

Betty Scott was born to Presbyterian missionaries in China. At age seventeen, Betty came home to attend Wilson College in Pennsylvania. She graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree. Certain she was headed for missions but unsure where, Betty enrolled at Moody Bible Institute. She was a sophomore when John Stam enrolled for his freshman year.

China Inland Mission's regional director sponsored a Monday evening prayer meeting. John and Betty got acquainted at the meetings. Betty was the first to feel a definite call to China; it took the reserved, thoughtful young man some time to see the China field as Betty did. Writing to his brother

about the number of home missionaries in America, John said, "It does look frightfully disproportionate to see so many here in comparison with the few over yonder" (Christie, *John and Betty Stam: Missionary Martyrs*, Barbour).

China has always been an ominous place to serve. In 1927, several missionaries were killed.

Betty returned to China and quickly recovered her grasp of the language. John followed in 1932. The Lord had been moving in both of their hearts to be joined in marriage. By God's design, they were reunited in Shanghai on 12 October 1932. John asked Betty to marry him.

Betty's missionary parents paid for the October 1933 wedding. The radiant lovers trekked around Anwhei Province, where they were to be assigned. The marriage was blessed with the birth of Helen Priscilla Stam on 11 September 1934. Everyone said she looked like John (Christie).

Five weeks later, they were in Tsingteh, their new station. On Saturday, 8 December 1934, Chinese Communist guerrillas entered the town and held the Stams hostage. They demanded \$20,000 in ransom. Mission boards almost never pay ransom for missionaries.

On Sunday morning, the Stams were led to a mountain village. John first and then Betty were slain for the cause of Jesus Christ. Two lives were shaped for a lifetime of service—beautiful lives, offered for God's glory in Christ's name.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M.—Humbly Calling on God. II Chron. 7:12-18.

T.—Beseeching God's Answer to Prayer. Ps. 69:9-18.

W.—Humble and Contrite in Spirit. Isa. 66:1-4.

T.—Fasting Directed to God. Matt. 6:16-18.

F.—Studying and Keeping the Law. Ezra 7:1-10.

S.—Securing Servants for the Temple. Ezra 8:15-20.

S.—Praying for God's Protection. Ezra 8:21-23, 31-32.

GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

“Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers” (Ezra 8:28).

In this passage, Ezra had just appointed twelve priests to watch over the gifts for the temple. Ezra declared the priests and the vessels to be holy. To be holy is to be “devoted entirely to the deity or the work of the deity” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*).

The gifts for the temple were consecrated as an offering to the Lord. When we give an offering to God—whether in time, talent, or money—we must give with pure hearts. It would be wise for us to examine our hearts and ask why we give or even serve. The Apostle Paul stated, “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (II Cor. 9:6-7).

When we give back to God a portion of what He has given to us, we are acknowledging Him as our Provider. The goal is to worship God not just by giving a check to a ministry or doing a good deed now and again but by giving ourselves wholly to the Lord. In Romans 12:1 the Apostle Paul stated, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

May it be said of us, as it was said of the priests and the vessels, “Ye are holy unto the Lord.” May we recognize that while God appreciates our offerings and acts of service, we are the greatest gifts in the temple when we are a living sacrifice. We are just what He has been waiting for.

—Kristin Reeg.

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The hard fact is that most Christians do not witness to others about their faith in Christ. The late John R. W. Stott made the case to convince believers of our shameful performance. Stott suggested several reasons for this failure to reach out. He listed fear of ridicule or resistance as the number one reason. Second, he suggested we are slothful (Stott, *Our Guilty Silence*, Eerdmans).

The evangelist began with the words of Paul: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16). After a few minutes to reflect on those words, many had to say that yes, they were ashamed of the good news that had saved their souls! Everyone in the evangelistic enterprise at some time has had to think long and hard about the desperate state of one who dies without salvation.

The story is told that a deacon in a Dallas church was handed a visitor’s card for follow-up. The deacon put the call off for a week. It was November of 1963. President Kennedy was assassinated that week. The following Tuesday, the deacon turned over the visitor’s card and was shocked to see the name of Lee Harvey Oswald, the president’s assassin (Fay, *How Can I Share My Faith Without an Argument?* RBC Ministries).

In our lesson from Ezra 8, we learn of chosen men guarding a treasure. The witness we bear is even more precious.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M.—A Single Offering for All Time. Heb. 10:1-14.

T.—Stirred Hearts and Willing Spirits. Exod. 35:20-29.

W.—Bring Offerings Before the Lord. Num. 7:1-6.

T.—Contributing Tithes and Offerings. II Chron. 31:2-10.

F.—More Important Than Sacrifices. Mark 12:28-34.

S.—The Gift of a Poor Widow. Mark 12:38-44.

S.—The Offering for God’s House. Ezra 8:24-30.

GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

“All the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: . . . And there was very great gladness” (Nehemiah 8:17).

Have you ever gone camping and slept in a tent? Before the Israelites reached the Promised Land, they slept in tents. During the Feast of Tabernacles, many Jews even today eat and sleep in tents for seven days.

In Leviticus 23:41-43, the Lord gave this command through Moses: “And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

The Lord had commanded that the Israelites dwell in booths for seven days in the seventh month of every year. However, while the Israelites were in captivity, they were unable to keep this ordinance of the Lord. When Ezra read the book of the Law of Moses, the people learned that they should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month. Immediately, the people went about making the tents to dwell in during the feast. The knowledge that they were doing what God had commanded filled them with gladness.

Just like the people of Israel, we do not always know the commands or the wisdom that the Bible contains. Once we read it, we have the choice to obey it or not. When we obey God, we are blessed. Today offers us a new opportunity to read the Word of God. Our obedience will bring great gladness.

—Kristin Reeg.

WORLD MISSIONS

To this day, the Jewish people observe the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles in the fall. The flimsy booth of today is usually made with easily obtained materials rather than the branches called for in our Scripture text in Nehemiah 8.

Dorothy began working in a Jewish study group for the discipling of newly minted Messianic Jews. She began an aggressive witnessing ministry to the Jews she met in her communications job.

Dorothy began to pray about taking up a formal ministry to lost Jews, Gentiles, and Muslims. In 2011 she was appointed to that work in a “tentmaker” relationship. The tentmaker theme comes from the ministry of the Apostle Paul and Priscilla and Aquila, who actually were tentmakers. The term refers now to Christians in ministry positions who use their professional skills to meet their needs instead of depending on the support of churches.

Irving was a Jewish man who came to a Jewish Bible study Dorothy attended. One evening she helped him with some selections at a local store. She felt it was time to talk to him seriously about his need for the Saviour-Messiah. Irving was ready. He invited the Lord to save him. Irving is now with the Lord, and Dorothy has continued to reach out right where she is. Will the Lord use you in making “tents”?

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—Rhythms of Work and Worship. Exod. 23:12-17.
- T.—First Bring Your Offering. Lev. 23:9-14.
- W.—Celebrating God’s Bounty to Us. Deut. 26:1-11.
- T.—Commemorating God’s Deliverance. Lev. 23:33-44.
- F.—Gathering to Hear God’s Word. Neh. 7:73—8:6.
- S.—Responding to God’s Word. Neh. 8:8-12.
- S.—Discovering a Neglected Festival. Neh. 8:13-18.

GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

“Thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly” (Nehemiah 9:33).

God is faithful. His loving-kindness endures forever. Our God is filled with patience and is always longing for us to come to Him. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). Our God is good and just—even when we are not.

In Nehemiah 9 we read that the Israelites fasted, separated themselves from all foreigners, and confessed not only their own sins but the sins of their fathers as well. As they were praying, the Levites recounted to God the mercy He had shown the Israelites. They praised Him for His faithfulness and recognized that even in times of distress, God acted justly because of the evil that had been committed.

Sin has consequences. Unless we are willing to repent, ask forgiveness, and turn away from our sin, our behavior today could affect our children’s children. Numbers 14:18 declares, “The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.”

However, we can stop the generational effects by admitting that we, along with our ancestors, have sinned and asking the Lord to forgive us. We can stand in the gap through prayer and confession. God is merciful, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9). He is looking for His people to humble themselves and admit their need for His mercy and grace (II Chron. 7:14). Our healing begins when we acknowledge our need for God and confess our sins.

—Kristin Reeg.

WORLD MISSIONS

At what age should a Christian begin to witness for Jesus Christ? It is safe to say that planting the gospel seed can begin at any age. A young girl at Columbine High School in Colorado died in the school massacre there declaring Christ to be her Saviour.

Many young people are needed to take up the ministry of reaching the lost, for many adults are reluctant to witness. It seems likely that more believers would be active witnesses if they knew what to say to the lost person.

In witnessing, you will need to say that it is sin that keeps a man out of heaven. Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Men are sinners by nature and by choice (Eph. 2:3). If sin is never dealt with, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

The very best part of witnessing is that God has done everything for the sinner in providing the Saviour, Jesus Christ! “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Christ died for our sins (I Pet. 2:24).

Your unsaved friend must understand that he cannot perform any good deed or make payment of any kind to gain salvation (Eph. 2:8-9). Now invite him to give his life to Christ (Heb. 7:25). One day he will meet Nehemiah’s “gracious and merciful God” (Neh. 9:31). You *can* reach your friend for Christ.

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M.—Repent and Turn to God. Acts 3:17-26.

T.—A Changed Mind. Matt. 21:28-32.

W.—Repenting in Dust and Ashes. Job 42:1-6.

T.—First Be Reconciled. Matt. 5:21-26.

F.—Beseeching God’s Mercy. Luke 18:9-14.

S.—Joy in Heaven. Luke 15:1-10.

S.—Confessing Sins Together. Neh. 9:2, 6-7, 9-10, 30-36.

GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

“That day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: . . . so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off” (Nehemiah 12:43).

Joy is contagious. Have you ever noticed that when you smile, even at a stranger, he or she will generally smile back? Sometimes just being around people who are laughing will cause you to laugh too.

The Israelites were full of joy! They were celebrating the dedication of the wall that surrounded Jerusalem. The wall had been in ruins for years, leaving the city open to attack. The gates had been burned down. The city that once had been beautiful and full of glory looked tattered and torn. But God always has a plan!

The Lord had placed the city of Jerusalem on the heart of the king’s cup-bearer, Nehemiah. Through answered prayer, King Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem. When Nehemiah arrived in the city, he said to the people there, “Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach” (Neh. 2:17).

After many years, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, and joy was restored! What is it that steals our joy? What happens when we are living among the ruins of a lost job, a broken marriage, or a life-threatening illness? If we focus on Christ, the cares of this world cannot take our joy away.

Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God. We may once have been tattered and torn—our relationships in ruins or our faith shattered. Nevertheless, like the wall of Jerusalem, we are constantly being rebuilt, with Jesus as our cornerstone!

—Kristin Reeg.

WORLD MISSIONS

The Korean Peninsula, lying between China and Japan, has a troubled history with its two stronger neighbors. Although life has been hard for the Koreans, their land has also been a place of spiritual blessing. A missionary first went there with the gospel in 1845. Hard but fruitful work led to many souls being saved. In 1906, a tremendous revival was marked by prayer for cleansing, resulting in a sweeping return of people to the cause of Christ (Monod, *The Korean Revival*, Hodder and Stoughton).

Young seminary students took the message everywhere. Villages and districts never before touched with the gospel were filled with enthusiasm for the Word of God. Deadly enemies made peace with one another.

After World War II, the Soviet Union installed a Communist government in North Korea. In 1950, they were ready to invade South Korea. The United States responded immediately, along with other U.N. allies. The Communists were beaten back.

A new prayer revival has begun. Across the country, as many as ten thousand Koreans meet daily for prayer at four or five o’clock in the morning. The result? Per capita, South Koreans form the largest missionary force in the world today. This new revival is a time of rejoicing, like that which took place in Jerusalem (Neh. 12:43).

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

- M.—Celebrating God’s Greatness. Ps. 96:1-9.
- T.—Celebrating the Lord’s Coming. Ps. 96:10-13.
- W.—Celebrating God’s Blessings. Deut. 12:2-7.
- T.—Celebrating Freedom from Oppression. Nah. 1:6-15.
- F.—Celebrating the Restored Nation. Jer. 30:18-22.
- S.—Celebrating the Restored Jerusalem. Isa. 66:10-14.
- S.—Celebrating a Completed Task. Neh. 12:27-36, 38, 43.

GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

“I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day” (Nehemiah 13:22).

Nehemiah was outraged when he returned to Jerusalem to find the people were buying and selling and doing work on the Sabbath. In Exodus 20:8-10 the Lord commanded, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”

Nehemiah found that not just the Israelites from Jerusalem but also visitors from other cities were disregarding the Sabbath. He rebuked the Israelites and commanded the Levites to purify themselves. Many Levites were priests, and they represented all the tribes of Israel. A priest is a person authorized to act as a mediator between humans and God.

The Levites were supposed to watch over the people and ensure that the laws God gave Moses were observed. This is why Nehemiah had the Levites watch the gates, making certain that no merchant could enter the city on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day set apart to worship and thank God; it is a day of rest.

Fifty years ago, it was rare to find a store open on Sunday. Oh, how our society has changed! Nowadays we rarely take a day of rest at all, let alone do so to seek the Lord. May the Lord help us set aside time to rest and worship properly. May He give us wisdom, understanding, and time management skills so that we can truly enjoy His day of rest!

—Kristin Reeg.

WORLD MISSIONS

Since 9/11 intense scrutiny has been focused on the Islamic world. Would you be surprised to learn of successful missionary work in Muslim countries?

When the International Mission Board began working in southern Asia in 1997, there were only two areas that showed promise for the planting of house churches among the Muslims. In 2010, two hundred churches were prospering. These churches had 300,000 converts from Islam. How do they account for this spectacular movement among people thought to be closed to the gospel?

One man followed six of these groups closely. Between December 1999 and May 2002, 4,500 Muslims came to Christ and opened 315 new house churches. By 2009, these six groups had baptized 2,000 people. Prior to this outbreak of soul-winning, missionaries had worked there thirty years with little visible fruit.

Strange to relate, Muslims report having dreams that drove them to Jesus! It is thrilling to think of these people who have now come to faith!

Discipleship has aided in the stunning growth. Former Muslims are leading in soul-winning. Since Islam is unforgiving toward those who leave the faith, Christians today must have boldness in standing for the truth, as did Nehemiah (Neh. 13:21) (Greeson, “Church Planting Movements Among Muslim Peoples,” *Mission Frontiers*, March/April 2011).

—Lyle P. Murphy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M.—A Sabbath to the Lord. Exod. 16:13-26.

T.—Keep the Sabbath Holy. Exod. 31:12-18.

W.—Honoring the Sabbath. Isa. 58:9-14.

T.—The Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:23-27.

F.—Doing Good on the Sabbath. Mark 3:1-6.

S.—Restoring the Sanctity of the Temple. Neh. 13:4-14.

S.—Restoring the Sanctity of the Sabbath. Neh. 13:15-22.