
A Holy Nation: Bible Study

The Fifth Episcopal District of the
African Methodist Episcopal Church



The Year of Epiphany

Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq. and Rev. Jennifer S. Leath, Ph.D., Editors

1st Edition

Introduction to A Holy Nation: Bible Study6
Contributors.....7

The Burdens and Blessings of Diversity8
Rev. Dr. Clyde W. Oden, Jr.
Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Oxnard, CA)

Just Stay in Your Lane: Growing Up the Head .10
Rev. Dr. Clyde W. Oden, Jr.
Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Oxnard, CA)

The God of Second Chances.....13
Rev. T. C. Johnson
Pastor, Murph Chapel/St. Paul (MCSP) AME Church
(Valinda, CA)

Can You Handle His Return?15
Rev. T. C. Johnson
Pastor, Murph Chapel/St. Paul (MCSP) AME Church
(Valinda, CA)

What Does God Want From Us?.....17
Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq.
Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Fontana, CA)

Walking By Faith.....19
Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq.
Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Fontana, CA)

Pass It On21
Rev. Karen Anderson

Pastor, Ward Chapel AME Church (Florissant, MO)
Choose Wisely.....23
Rev. Karen Anderson
Pastor, Ward Chapel AME Church (Florissant, MO)
A Burst of Mercy!.....25
Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq.
Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Fontana, CA)
The Benefits of Seeking The Lord27
Rev. Carolyn Baskin-Bell
Pastor, Second AME Church (Los Angeles, CA)
Fifth District Women In Ministry, President
Set Apart to Be With God29
Rev. Jamal Gallow
Associate Minister, Ward AME Church (Los Angeles, CA)
Am I Really Committed?.....31
Rev. Barry Settle, D.Min.
Pastor, Allen Chapel AME Church (Riverside, CA)
Righteousness and Justice33
Rev. Barry Settle, D.Min.
Pastor, Allen Chapel AME Church (Riverside, CA)
Feed Them Justice35
Rev. Quanta M. Crews
Associate Minister, The Historic Tanner Chapel AME Church (Phoenix, AZ)

A God of Action.....	37
<i>Rev. Dr. Betty Hanna Witherspoon</i>	
<i>Pastor, Primm Tabernacle AME Church (Pomona, CA)</i>	
Seeking God’s Face	39
<i>Rev. Damon Powell, Ph.D.</i>	
<i>Associate Pastor, Brookins AME Church (Oakland, CA)</i>	
Dwelling With God.....	41
<i>Rev. Damon Powell, Ph.D.</i>	
<i>Associate Pastor, Brookins AME Church (Oakland, CA)</i>	
Door Duty	43
<i>Rev. Jennifer S. Leath, Ph.D.</i>	
<i>Pastor, Campbell Chapel AME Church (Denver, CO)</i>	
Heads Up!	45
<i>Rev. Jennifer S. Leath, Ph.D.</i>	
<i>Pastor, Campbell Chapel AME Church (Denver, CO)</i>	
Day In The Barrel	46
<i>Rev. Renita Marie Green</i>	
<i>Pastor, St. James AME Church (Cape Girardeau, MO)</i>	
Humanity on Trial.....	48
<i>Rev. Renita Marie Green</i>	
<i>Pastor, St. James AME Church (Cape Girardeau, MO)</i>	
The Art of Worship.....	50
<i>Rev. Jonathan Rhone</i>	
<i>Presiding Elder, Rocky Mountain District (Denver, CO)</i>	

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Spending Private Time With God52

Rev. Jonathan Rhone

Presiding Elder, Rocky Mountain District (Denver, CO)

Trust God to Identify God’s People and Balance the Scales54

Rev. Rachel Williams-Glenn

Pastor, St. Paul (Independence, MO)

An Invitation to Hope in a Soul-Soothing God When Disrespect Reigns.....56

Rev. Rachel Williams-Glenn

Pastor, St. Paul (Independence, MO)

Can We Trust The Process?.....58

Rev. Bridget L. Mitchell

Pastor, St. Matthew’s Chapel AME Church (Boonville, MO) and Campbell AME Church (Glasgow, MO)

Can We Trust The Process?60

Rev. Bridget L. Mitchell

Pastor, St. Matthew’s Chapel AME Church (Boonville, MO) and Campbell AME Church (Glasgow, MO)

Introduction to A Holy Nation: Bible Study

Greetings to each of you in the holy name of Jesus!

We have developed this Bible Study curriculum to undergird Bishop Clement W. Fugh's vision for the work of the Fifth Episcopal District for this first year of the quadrennial. Most of our local churches have some sort of weekly Bible Study gathering. It is our hope that the lessons provided here will be used by each local church.

For this second quadrennial year, we have been asked to focus on The Season of Epiphany - Restoring the Temple Order. This is a season of training and reordering ministry. In accordance with this focus, we have been asked to give our attention to the roles of priests, prophets, and pastors; the roles of deacons and lay (lagos); regard for the holy — house and things. While the central scripture of the call to be a “Holy Nation” issued at the watergate continues to be our primary scriptural focus (Nehemiah 8:1-10; I Peter 2:1-10) for the quadrennial, the scriptural focus for the 2017-2018 Annual Conference Year, in particular, is Acts 6:2-8:

2 And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, **4** while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." **5** What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. **8** Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

and Ephesians 4:11-14:

11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. **14** We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

However, given the focus on Epiphany, this Bible Study Guide engages each of the lectionary texts assigned in the Revised Common Lectionary for Epiphany for Years A, B, and C. Thus, the studies will support the life of the Church this year and for years to come especially in the season of Epiphany.

Each contributor was asked to observe the following format for the Bible Studies, consistent with the framework used in the Commission for World Mission. It is as follows:

- 1. Title**
- 2. Date**

3. Opening Prayer

4. Scripture

5. Contemporary Context: A descriptive engagement of the context which will serve as the interpretative lens through which you will read the text. The following questions provide a guide:

- a. How do you connect with the text?
- b. Where are you coming from?
- c. What about your context connects with the text and why?

6. Exegesis: An exegetical engagement of the selected text, locating it in its original context. These are as precise as possible with respect to addressing the text/s we assigned because many of the texts are closely connected. The following questions provide a guide:

- a. What is important or helpful to know about the original context of the text (i.e., What was the world like when the text was written? What were people like when the text was written? What other things did people believe when the text was written)?
- b. What strikes you about the words used in the text? Do these words have other meanings in their original languages or contexts?

7. Conversation: Putting the text (as you understand it) in conversation with the contemporary context and exegesis provided. Here, we consider: what does this mean for our lives, and our life as a community?

8. Questions: A set of discussion questions relevant to our community consciousness. These should enable study participants to engage their contexts, dig deeper into the text, and extrapolate from the text such meanings as may emerge for their specific contexts.

9. Media: Engagement with art or other forms of symbolic representation in a manner which could lead to deeper engagement or study.

Contributors

We are grateful for each of the contributors who prepared Bible Studies for this collection. Please review the Table of Contents that reflects the scope of this project and the breadth of participation throughout the District. We are especially grateful to our new and returning contributors.

Rev. Francine A. Brookins, J.D., M.Div.

Rev. Jennifer S. Leath, Ph.D.

The Burdens and Blessings of Diversity

Rev. Dr. Clyde W. Oden, Jr.

Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Oxnard, CA)

5 November 2017

Prayer

Dear Loving God: In our eagerness to please you in our reaching out to serve “all nations and all people,” give us the sensitivity to see our own biases, exhibit humility to feel the hurts and slights of others, and the courage to love everyone equally. Amen.

Scripture

Acts 6: 1-8

Contemporary Context

Our churches are located in multicultural, multiethnic, and extraordinarily mixed communities. In being obedient to the “Great Commission” - we are expected to bring into our congregations persons from various backgrounds, socio-economic backgrounds, life experiences, generational perspectives, cultures and sensitivities. As we are about the business of “doing good,” we must always monitor the impact of our ministries on those who are *different* than our traditional or historic membership base. This text reminds us, that there we must monitor the impact of our ministries to see if everyone is receiving the blessings of our ministries as we had intended. Biases can be unintentional and inadvertent yet still hurtful. Promoting and living with the challenges of cultural diversity is hard work.

Exegesis

The early church was living out its mission as expressed in Acts 2: 44-45, “*they gave to anyone as they had need.*” Such graciousness attracted a lot of people, because there were needy people in every community of believers. For the early church, being benevolent had an unintended downside. It was perceived that its benevolence had not benefited all believers equally. This was particularly true for the widows in the early church. The Greek speaking widows, believed that they were being discriminated against in favor of the Hebrew speaking widows, And apparently there was some truth to that accusation. This issue exasperated the Apostles because they wanted to focus more of their energy on preaching and teaching. The important work of benevolence was a distraction from their other major ministries. Something had to change.

To address the accusations related to unequal treatment and the Apostle’s need to focus more on their preaching and teaching ministries, they called a “Church Conference” to address those issues. In what was an inspired solution, the Apostles asked the assembled disciples to select seven (7) from within their ranks who were not only well respected, but who were also “full of the Spirit and wisdom.” These disciples would be given the responsibility of directing the benevolent work. More importantly, and it is only

suggested in the ultimate selections, all or nearly all of the disciples who were chosen for this sacred assignment came from the community from which the complaint had been launched: Greek believers.

Conversation

There is something very important for us to discover in examining this early controversy in the early Church. First of all, the Apostles and the disciples did not run from the issue. They did not deny the accusation, but rather addressed it head on. Secondly, the leadership of the Church recognized some important management deficiencies because there had been a lack of delegation for some of the tasks in the Church. The Apostles could not fully use their gifts of preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus because they were also occupied with addressing some of the temporal needs of the congregation. Something had to give. They decided to delegate and grant authority to those who were gifted in serving the temporal needs of their congregation. The genius of the actions taken by the early church was not just the empowering of non-apostles, but reaching into the “community of the slighted” for leadership and resolution of the problem of perceived bias.

These are important lessons for the church as we seek to address the issues of diversity in our local congregations and communities. It is not enough that we desire to reach those communities not currently represented in our local church. We must have the courage to recruit, train, and then empower those from the “underrepresented populations” to participate fully in our church and ministries. In 1 Corinthians 12, Apostle Paul lists gifts of healing, helps, administration, speaking in different kinds of tongues to edify the church. This text gives us a blueprint for addressing some of the challenges of diversity the Church. We are to locate and find persons who are well respected in their communities, “full of the Spirit and wisdom,” and then empower them to participate in the work and growth of the Church. In doing so we avoid the problem of perceived or actual biases, because we will have expanded our capacity for empathy and cultural sensitivities.

Finally, one of the unintended consequences of delegation of authority and diversity in the ranks of leadership was the unanticipated but welcomed growth of the Church. The number of disciples dramatically increased, including an unexpected growth of *former* Jewish priests. Perhaps the public display of diversity of leadership in the church and the church’s openness to problem-solving, signaled that there is *room for everyone* in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Is your church able to recognize the concerns, criticisms or hurts of its members? How are you addressing them?
2. What cultural and socio-economic biases are we overlooking in our local churches? How are you addressing them?
3. As you survey your membership, what groups in your community are missing? What are your plans to reach out to those “under represented” groups?
4. How diverse is your church leadership? Who is missing on your leadership team? Women, millennials, Latino or Hispanic, parents, youth, recovering addicts, ex-felons, newer members and LGBT?
5. The Apostle’s criteria for leadership was that of *believers* who are **respected, full of Spirit and wise**. Have we in our local churches, created other criteria for leadership and as a result not been able to fully included “slighted communities?”

Just Stay in Your Lane: Growing Up the Head

Rev. Dr. Clyde W. Oden, Jr.

Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Oxnard, CA)

12 November 2017

Prayer

Dear God: Your people need to hear a word from you in a nurturing, loving, and growing environment, absence of the confusion of the world. Please give us a discerning spirit and give us the courage to become spiritually mature in a manner that you have prescribed. We acknowledge that Jesus is the perfect Head of the Church, grant us gift of growing up the Head. Amen.

Scripture

Ephesians 4:11-16

Contemporary Context

The universal church is seen by much of the world, a religious organizations in crisis. Millions of people are leaving the church because of confusion and/or personal vendettas and agendas. The church also seems to be a place for religious bigotry, social and political exclusions and hate speech. Denominations are breaking up over issues regarding who can be acceptable believers, and how a loving family is defined. Finally there are physical fights breaking out at national and international church gatherings, due to differences in opinion about who can be a legitimate follower of Jesus Christ. Where is the love of Christ?

Regardless of denomination, just under the surface, there exist levels of personal and professional animus due to persons not willing to accept nor understand the concept of “staying in their lane.” In professional football, the mantra for being a champion is: JUST DO YOUR JOB! The idea being, if everyone carried out their assigned task (or in the case of the Church) doing that for which one is gifted and qualified to do -- the Church would become more successful numerically and spiritually. The writer of Ephesians is saying that if everyone “did their job” the church would grow in a healthy manner and the church would be full of love.

Exegesis

Once the early church began to grow beyond its base in Jerusalem, and as more persons joined the church it was inevitable that there would opportunities for misunderstandings with regard to roles and responsibilities. Rightly or wrongly people staked out positions of authority and scopes of duty that did not edify the church, but rather boosted their own self-worth. Individuals would assert their roles based on the strength of their personalities or some mystical demonstration of gifts and graces. Often, they would attack the credibility of others, in order to elevate themselves.

Eventually there develop three groups of church leaders in the 1st Century of the Church:

- a) Apostles - who by common understanding were those who walked with Jesus, and were witnesses of his resurrection;
- b) prophets and evangelists - persons who roamed from community to community either starting new churches and recruiting members for local congregations and/or asserting that they had a message from God - and claimed to have a prophetic voice; and
- c) Pastors and/or teachers - they would focused their gifts nearly exclusively with a local congregation for personal care, spiritual growth and development.

Each role would be crucial to the growth and success of the Church. The Apostles, long before there were any written records to the contrary, would testify to what they saw and heard and witnessed with respect to Jesus, the risen Lord. Apostles were the elder statesmen for the Church. They had the most exalted position. But over time, both through persecution and natural aging -- their numbers were diminishing and the roles of the other disciples and leaders became more dominant. That led to competition for leadership and importance. The Ephesian author was seeking to bring some order to situations that was getting explosive. Internal competition and jealousy was hurting the growth of the church.

The writer was asking all those in the household of faith to just “do their job” with their roles ultimately having one objective: to “equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ”

Conversation

In our communities today there is a lot of confusion as to who really speaks for God. Amazingly there are those who insist on calling themselves “apostles” - a title that would certainly confuse those who walked with Jesus 2000 years ago. Yet some today claim some an ‘apostolic’ standing and expect others, to acknowledge their title. Additionally, there are others who claim some “prophetic gift.” Some do have a gift of religious entertainment and can fill auditoriums and stadia putting on display their claim for demonstrating their ‘prophetic gift.’ And yet there are others who, on a less grand scale, demonstrate their forth-telling the will of God. They can, to some extent, fore-tell the future for individuals, and announced the consequences which would follow, if that believer accepts the word spoken into their spirit.

There is no way to credential one’s giftedness, and thus both ‘prophets and false prophets’ are seen in the public square with similar standing. Additionally there are many persons claim to be evangelists. Some having some denominational affiliation, and others are just self-appointed. Finally there are pastors and pastor/teachers and pastor/teacher/bishops -- and other combination of titles that suggest some gravitas with their ecclesiastical designations. There is confusion in the general community as to who really speaks for God.

With this explosion of titles and roles -- there is not a corresponding explosion in the number of followers and believers in Jesus Christ. In fact the number of regular attenders to churches in America continues to decrease. It seems that the church, is not doing its job, and those of us in positions of responsibility in the church are not as effective as we should be. We must be more self-critical. Somehow we are missing the mark, and perhaps we are adding to the confusion in the Body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11 says: “Now these are the gifts Christ *gave to the church*: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers” (*italics mine*). Rather than our claiming our various offices, we should let Christ speak to this generation and allow the Church to receive His gifts rather than our putting wrapping paper around ourselves and claiming that we *are* gift of Christ.

This rush of self-importance, this lack of humility, and this inflation of titles and positions, may be self-satisfying, but it is not helping the Church to “grow up the Head,” which is Jesus Christ. Perhaps the problem of the Church not growing isn’t “*those heathens*” not wanting to be part of the Church, but rather it is us. We fail to see how those outside the Church are *nonplus* to what call ourselves, and are waiting to see if we can live up to whatever title we claim. Furthermore we may be failing to recognize, that our goal is to grow up to the Head - and help the church to grow in knowledge and love of Jesus, so that we can be more like Christ.

Questions

1. How can we, in our teaching ministries, do a better job in clarifying the confusion in the Church community about “title inflation?”
2. Are we being too ‘politically correct’ in not pointing out the epidemic of self-promotions: “archbishops,” “cardinals,” “bishops,” “doctors,” “prophets,” “evangelists,” “preacher/teachers,” etc.?
3. The text points out that all of these offices or positions are to equip God’s people to do His work and to build up the Church. In what ways can we do a better job in doing the work of Christ and building up the church?

Another role of these ecclesiastical offices is to help our members mature in a knowledge of Christ and not be influenced by “every wind of new teaching.” In what ways can we help our members discern the difference between fresh revelations and irresponsible “god talk”?

The God of Second Chances

Rev. T. C. Johnson

*Pastor, Murph Chapel/St. Paul (MCSP) AME
Church (Valinda, CA)*

19 November 2017

Prayer

God of Heaven, I pray that you will give us eyes to see beyond what we can see. We thank you for being a second chance God. Keep us in your hand that we may not stray, and help us to remain faithful to your will and your way. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Scripture

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Contemporary Context

You're feelin' pretty blue, you didn't do what God requested. Yeah, I'd be mopin' too, if I was gonna be digested. This ain't a pretty picture, no I said, it ain't a pretty sight, no. You ran from God this morning and you're whale chow tonight. But hold up, hang on. Not so fast, your life ain't over yet. See, we're here to tell you all about the forgiveness that you can get. You see God's a God of mercy. God's a God of love, and right now, He's gonna lend a helping hand from up above. Praise the Lord, He's the **God of Second Chances**. You'll be floored how His love your life enhances. You can be restored from your darkest circumstances. Our God is a **God of Second Chances!** Ain't it good to know a God who gives a second chance? Why, that's enough to get a smile from Mr. Grumpy-Pants. So, if you say you're sorry for all the stuff you do, we know that He'll be ready with a second chance for you. Praise the Lord, He's the **God of Second Chances**. You'll be floored how His love your life enhances. You can be restored from your darkest circumstances. Our God is a **God of Second Chances**. Our God is a God. If you believe, God's love is true, then you should know what you should do. If you believe, God's love is true, then you should know what you should do. God gives a second chance. Second chances, second chances, Praise the Lord, He's the **God of Second Chances**.

Those are lyrics entitled "God of Second Chances" from the April 2013 movie animation "Jonah: A Veggie Tales Movie". There are three gospel soul singers with a choir in the background clothed in cross robes singing to Jonah about the "God of Second Chances".

Jonah's disobedience to the assignment God gave to him resulted in a "time-out" in the belly of a big fish. Jonah actually benefits through the three-day revival of prayer and restoration. Often times, we need to be still through God's chastisement when we have disobeyed. It allows us to reflect on how much we must depend on God and not on ourselves. With a contrite heart, we are able to connect to God while he gradually works on us.

Exegesis

After Jonah was given the assignment, he immediately placed in his heart that it was a destination he is not willing to travel. The nature, of the Ninevite people, is termed wicked “Go to the great city of Neneveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” (Jonah 1:2 NIV) due to Nimrod (a great grandson of Noah by Ham); who begun his kingdom with Babel and its tower in rebellion against God, “went forth into Assyria, and built Neneveh” (Gen. 10:10-12). When the Ninevite army defeated the opposition, it resulted in beheading of kings or the flaying of generals alive and cutting off limbs of the body and tossing them for personal trophies. This is definitely not the assignment Jonah signed up for. After Jonah’s release from the depths of the fish, his assignment was restored “a second time” (Jonah 3:1) and he boldly proclaimed the message God had given him for some forty-three days about their destruction because of their wickedness. Clearly, the message penetrated and convicted the hearts of the Ninevites and turned to the God of Israel. All of them fasted and put on sackcloth through contrition, mourning, and repentance. When the king of Nineveh heard, he too rose from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat down in the dust to show humility (Jonah 3:5,6). God was pleased with the change and spared the city of Nineveh.

Conversation

We are chosen for a season to do what is impossible in our own comprehension but very possible in the mind of God. We too have turned away from many assignments and when we look back on our misjudgments, God gave us a **Second Chance** (figuratively). God has a right to use whom he pleases to place His plan in motion. We are pieces on the chess board allowing the fingers of God to move into battle zones and claim the victory. It might have not been clear to us before, but through the epiphany it allows us to have a deeper perspective of how God do what God does. “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. “Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:16). Our mission is to target the lost, the wicked, the down-trodden, and the misguided, to name a few. The message, if you believe, God’s love is true, then you should know what you should do. If you believe, God’s love is true, then you should know what you should do. God gives a second chance. Second chances, second chances, Praise the Lord, He’s the **God of Second Chances**.

Questions

1. We tend to blow our stack when the “wicked” are given second chances. How can Christians learn to rejoice when others not like them turn to God?
2. Sermons of this millennia seem to be watered down messages. Do you believe that sermons should be harsh, thought provoking, and brazen to get the hearers of today’s attention?
3. Our fraternity/sorority of believers have taken a stance to not reach out to anyone not like them. As a result, churches have become content, complacent, and empty. What type of action should God take?
4. What types of shipwrecks, fish bellies, and/or pits has God released you from? Have you shared your story? Were they convicted? Did they turn to God as a result of your testimony?

Can You Handle His Return?

Rev. T. C. Johnson

*Pastor, Murph Chapel/St. Paul (MCSP) AME
Church (Valinda, CA)*

26 November 2017

Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for the sacrifice you have made for us. Prepare us to receive your Son into our hearts and to ready our spirits for His return. In Jesus name, Amen.

Scripture

Malachi 3:1-4

Context

The local news, TMZ, Entertainment Tonight, to name a few, oftentimes show large crowds clamoring uncontrollably in a mob like manner when a star in entertainment becomes visible. They will press their way or shout as loud as they can to get the attention of their idol. It's amazing the lengths that people go through to throw themselves like rolled up newspapers at the celebs feet. The Justin Biebers', Beyonces', and the Leonardo DiCaprios' of the world would be trampled if they did not have the army of security to hold the crowds back.

There is something to be said about the nature of crowds; their reactions, their movements, their impulses, and their decision making. Envision the same description of crowds when confronted by the (new) presence of Jesus the Christ. What will they do, as Malachi pens, in the beginning of chapter 3, when they hear the introduction of Jesus by His messenger? The suspense is overflowing with ardent energy as the future bodily presence of the Savior strolls into the Temple. This will be a different Jesus than before. He came to bring salvation, now He comes to bring judgment.

Exegesis

At the end of Malachi 2, Israel complained that God seemed to reward the wicked and did not exercise His justice in the world. God responds, "I will set things right with My Messiah, and before Him will come my Messenger." (3:1). In an ancient royal procession the messenger went before the King to announce his arrival, to indicate the route, and to remove any obstacles in the road. John the Baptist fulfilled this exact ministry for Jesus. He will enter the Temple with thronging and boisterous crowds trying to get a healing, a blessing, a word. But this Jesus, this Messiah has come to do some cleaning and to prepare God's children for Himself.

When Christ comes this second time, it will be awesome and terrible, but with a purpose. The launderer and the refiner will work together to clean, and not destroy. Charles S. Spurgeon says,

If any of you, my hearers, are seeking the Lord at this time, I want you to understand what it means: you are seeking a fire which will test you, and consume much which has been dear to you.

We are not to expect Christ to come and save us in our sins, he will come and save us from our sins; therefore, if you are enabled by faith to take Christ as a Savior, remember that you take him as the purger and the purifier, for it is from sin that he saves us.”¹

Conversation

It is clear, God has a mission in placed...**clean up**. We are not ready to go before the Father in the state that we are in. There is too much going on within us to approach a holy and righteous God. In fact, we are not prepared for the preparer. The way our world looks at this very moment, is at best, shameful. No time to waste, the Messiah is arriving soon to wash us with the strong lye soap and to burn all of the impurities away. David says “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (Ps 51:9-12). It will take constant time and watchfulness and Jesus is prepared to do it. God’s ultimate purpose is to cleanse society, and to change the hearts of men and women. When Jesus returns in glory and rules on this earth, evil will be quickly punished.

Questions

1. Knowing the bit of information that you know now, will you still be a part of the crowd thronging for Jesus?
2. The way our nation is going, how long will the Father tolerate such blatant sin? Can you see any of His works unfolding?
3. The complaints of the people were heard and God responded. What will happen when the remnant come together now and complained about the millennia?
4. What would be your greatest fear, about yourself, if Jesus returned today?
5. There are major catastrophes all around. There are talks about war between major powers. Diseases and pestilence; hunger and suicides. Where is the church and it’s leaders that crash into your television stations? Will the Messiah refine and cleanse them (Levites)?

¹ “The Sitting of the Refiner,” *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*. Sermon, The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, 1881. <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols25-27/chs1575.pdf>.

What Does God Want From Us?

Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq.

Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Fontana, CA)

3 December 2017

Prayer

God who brought us up and out of Egypt, who calls us by name; God who lifted us from where we were and turned us into a chosen people, a royal priesthood, help us to remember where we came from. Do not let us think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

Scripture

Micah 6:1-8

Contemporary Context

We often find people in churches fighting for position and authority. There are kitchen fights, choir fights, official board fights, annual and general conference fights. Sometimes we are fighting over the menu, the song selection or the agenda, but often we are really fighting over pride, ego, insecurities or hurt feelings. We feel entitled to something and when we don't get it, we become destroyers of one another and often destroyers of the common agenda.

Exegesis

This section of the text begins with a lawsuit where God is both the plaintiff and the judge, Micah is God's counsel, and the mountains and hills serve as the jury. There are four questions for the people: 1) Have I mistreated you? (vss. 1-3); 2) Have I required too much from you? (vss. 4-8); 3) Have I approved of your exploiting one another? (vss. 9-12); 4) Have I blessed your get-rich-quick-schemes? (vss. 13-16) With those questions on the table the people are brought to trial. Today we focus on the first two questions.

Has God mistreated the people? No! God brought them out of Egypt (out of the house of bondage); God gave them spiritual leaders; God turned curses into blessings; God kept every promise made. Hearing these reminders, the people ask what God wants in return (vs. 6). They foolishly think they can offer God things or rituals or even their firstborn children. This proves they have not listened to what they have been told. (vs. 8)

God wants them to: live justly. They are to act with equity, fairness and deference to those who are in a weaker social position – the opposite of violence, oppression, fraud, lying and injustice.

God wants them to: love mercy. A spirit of generosity, loyalty, graciousness, and maintain a commitment to forgiveness for the sake of the entire body.

God wants them to: walk humbly with God. Walking is the Hebrew idiom for what we call one's 'lifestyle.' It is how we live our daily lives (as in how is your walk with the Lord?). Pride insists on taking first place, having the best seat, hearing our names called, and getting the credit. Humility is an act of faith. It is esteeming others as better than ourselves while at the same time knowing that we are extremely valuable in the eyes of God.

Conversation

The people thought they could satisfy God with offerings and sacrifices but they had been told repeatedly what satisfies God (justice, mercy and humility). Maybe it was easier for them to think of giving away their money and stuff than it was to consider doing what God really wanted. Sometimes we hear what we want to hear and refuse to hear what we don't want to hear. The Word tells us that obedience is better than sacrifice. (1 Sam. 15:22).

This year we are focusing on our roles in the church. We are also asking God to open our eyes and reveal things to us that we did not yet perceive, this scripture reminds of the Agenda God has set for our time together as a church on this side of heaven.

Questions

1. What is justice? Is it different than 'living justly'?
2. What is mercy? What do justice and mercy have in common?
3. What is humility?
4. What are the issues of injustice inside the church walls? (Local, District, Connectional)
5. When is the last time you had the opportunity to show mercy? To stand/speak for justice? To put your pride aside and let humility lead you?
6. If you were describing the agenda of your local church would you say that you spend most of your time living into the requirements of this scripture?
7. In what way can you personally implement these things in your daily activities for/with the church?

Walking By Faith

Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq.

Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Fontana, CA)

10 December 2017

Prayer

True and living God, remind us of who You really are and what You desire from us. If we have lost our focus or our faith, restore us as we study Your word together today. Remind us of Your power, Your presence and Your promises.

Scripture

Isaiah 40:21-31

Contemporary Context

We have a U.S. President who lies nearly every time he speaks. He admitted that he sexually assaulted women. He defended the Nazi and White Supremacist terrorists who killed a young woman in Virginia as ‘nice people.’ His singular agenda seems to be the undoing of ever policy passed for the people by the previous administration. No more Medicare, no more social security, no more health care, no more housing, no more public school, and no more help for poor people in general. If God were to speak to us today and say *‘it is time to start walking out of this bondage. I have prepared a place for you where no-one will oppress you. All you have to do is believe me, and start walking.’* How many of us would believe God and start walking?

Exegesis

The generation of people who remembered the homeland of Judah and the city of Jerusalem were dead. The people to whom God was speaking knew only Babylon, and the promise of God as transmitted to them by their ancestors. These people grew up in Babylon, built homes and families, started businesses, and found a way to survive in a hostile environment. Some of them had become wealthy and secure. As long as the children of Israel didn’t cause too much ‘trouble’ speaking up for themselves, they were ‘safe’ in Babylon.

In our text God calls God’s people to come out of Babylon and take a seven-hundred-mile march through rough terrain with only the possessions they could carry on their back and pull in a cart. They were to start walking out of bondage with only the promise of God in their hearts. They were gripped with fear.

Some were settled with their level of success and comfort and no longer yearned for freedom. Some were afraid that if Babylon saw them organizing to leave they would violently suppress the movement. They were surrounded by powerful images they could touch and some feared trusting a God they could not see or touch. Some feared they would not be strong enough to make the journey.

In our verses today God speaks to each of their fears with questions intended to jog their memories and strengthen their faith. Take a moment now in this study to review each of the rhetorical questions God asks them in vss. 21-31.

Conversation

Many of us have become comfortable in oppressive situations. We have found a way to 'make it' in the midst of mess. This is true in our families, on our jobs, in our churches and in this Country. Some have accumulated wealth and status while the masses suffer. Those who realize they have nothing to lose may be more willing to take risks for the promise of future gain. Those who 'are comfortable' are less likely to respond to the call to leave the present comforts and walk by faith into the freedom promised for all. But they must travel together if they are going to receive the promise. They must trust God if they are going to move from where they are to where God has called them to be.

Questions

1. If you had to give up \$1.00 on God's promise that in a few days and with a little effort you would get \$50.00, would you do it? Why or why not?
2. Imagine that you are the children of Israel in our text and have a discussion about what concerns people might raise if everyone were asked to show up and walk out of Babylon together.
3. The opposite of faith is fear (**F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal). Name 2 things that fear stopped you from doing in your life?
4. What decisions would you make if you were not afraid? (in your family, on your job, in your church, in the community)
5. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things NOT seen. It is easier to trust what we can see. Name three decisions you have made by faith. Discuss how you made the decision, what challenges you faced, and how it turned out.

Pass It On

Rev. Karen Anderson

*Pastor, Ward Chapel AME Church
(Florissant, MO)*

17 December 2017

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for those you place in our lives to instruct and guide us along this journey called life and faith. Thank you for the men and women who take time to speak into us words of affirmation and correction that we might become all that you have created us to be. Mostly thank you for Jesus the greatest example what a mentor should be. Amen.

Scripture

2 Kings 2:1-12

Contemporary Context

God is constantly raising new leaders. For young adults graduating from college and preparing to enter the world one piece of advice frequently given is to find a mentor. The dictionary defines a mentor as a wise and trusted counselor and teacher. This person should be someone who preferably has experience in your chosen field of study or interest. A mentor desires for you to be successful and doesn't mind sharing both their successes and failures. Mentors serve as sounding boards for our questions and concerns. Mentors are not threatened by those who come behind rather their desire is to equip the mentee for success in order that they may excel in their endeavor.

We know transitions are never easy however, they can be made smoother when someone has been trained and prepared to assume leadership roles.

Exegesis

We first meet Elijah in 1 Kings 17 when he is sent by God to deliver a message to King Ahab there would be a drought in the land. Elijah learns to be a critic of the system is not an easy job and he finds himself being pursued by Jezebel. He flees to the desert, hides in a cave and bemoans being the only prophet of God left. It's in the cave God lets him know he is not alone, recommissions him for service and sends him back the way he came with instructions to anoint Elisha as his replacement.

Elisha like many of us was a bit hesitant to move into the role immediately but instead takes on the role of Elijah's companion and prophet in training. So, he travels with Elijah watching, learning and being introduced to the other prophets. We hear nothing else of Elisha until 2 Kings 2:1 when it is announced that YHWH is about to take Elijah away in a whirlwind as they are traveling from Gilgal. At this point Elijah says he will now return to Bethel but Elisha should remain behind. Elisha refuses to allow Elijah to make the trip without him. At each step along the way they meet members of the prophetic community who remind Elisha that the time of Elijah's departing is imminent. Elisha's response each time is don't talk about it. Maybe the thought of being on his own without his mentor created tension in Elisha as he realized the responsibility which he was about to assume.

And so, he asks Elijah for a double portion of his spirit. It would serve as the public acknowledgment of his transition. Elijah hesitates but in the end as he is taken into the whirlwind Elisha's request is fulfilled. The cloak of

Elijah falls to the ground, Elisha picks it up, returns to the banks of the Jordan strikes the water with the cloak as Elijah had done as a group of prophets from Jericho watch. The transition is complete.

Conversation

We've all had people in our lives who either directly or indirectly have influenced our growth and development both personally and professionally. Persons who have seen something in us and have been willing to assist us on our journey sometimes preparing us to assume their role or to move to a higher level. Someone who has been willing to invest time in us teaching and sharing wisdom and knowledge to assist us in the navigation of unfamiliar spaces. Often these mentors provide opportunities to gain firsthand experience through shadowing in the work environment providing an invaluable learning experience. It's also through our relationship with our mentor that we begin to build our professional networks as we are introduced to others.

The text shows us the value of training and preparing others for transition to leadership. It emphasizes the need for mentors and guides to share and pass on knowledge and wisdom to those coming behind them. The passing of the mantle is not the loss of something for the mentor but an assurance that the work can continue beyond the individual.

Questions

1. Who have been the mentors in your life?
2. What if any have been the benefits to you of that relationship?
3. Who have you been willing to mentor?
4. In what areas do you see a need for mentoring in the church to promote smooth transition of roles?
5. As Christians how are we called to 'mentor' people in the faith?
6. What would our church/communities look like if we invested additional time in our youth? Taking the time to walk with them as they move through life sharing our successes and failures rather than always pointing out their shortcomings.
7. What would 'a double portion of our spirit' look like today?

Choose Wisely

Rev. Karen Anderson

*Pastor, Ward Chapel AME Church
(Florissant, MO)*

24 December 2017

Prayer

Gracious God grant us wisdom and insight as we journey through life. Remind us when we are faced with difficult choices to be still and know that you are God, to listen for your instructions and to follow them with a grateful heart. Amen.

Scripture

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Contemporary Context

As a child growing up when it came time to circle Christmas gifts in the catalog my mom would remind us to take our time before we made our decision. She'd say, "choose wisely because you can only have two things." Which meant we had to think intentionally about what we wanted because we would have to live with our decision for the entire year. As we got older and were faced with the multiplicity of decisions which must be made daily, her words 'choose wisely' often echoed in my head. Particularly as I came to recognize the fact that accompanying every decision we make in life are consequences. The writer says, 'choose life' it's a choice which carries many consequences.

Exegesis

The book of Deuteronomy or "second law" was written to affirm the centrality of the covenant God made with Moses on Mt. Sinai not just for the present generation but all subsequent generations of Israelites. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy Moses is speaking to the people as they sit on the periphery of the promised land. It's been a long journey with many ups and downs. So, for the first 30 chapters Moses reiterates the law and reinforces that there is only one God who deserves their worship and loyalty, the God of their ancestors. He says if they remain faithful to God, God will be faithful and will bless them as they enter this new land. Moses recounts the story of their deliverance, exile and the journey as a way of reminding them of some of the untoward consequences when they chose to rebel against God. And so, he concludes this third pastoral sermon by challenging them to 'choose wisely.' Decide between doing the things which bring life and those which promote death and destruction. To choose life is to live with intentionality focused on loving God above all else, listening for God's voice and walking in God's ways.

Conversation

The way the text presents the call to 'choose' might make one think it is a one-time choice but choosing 'life' is a daily decision. I believe that for most of us we desire to please God but like the children of Israel the distractions of the world sometimes catch us off guard. The world is constantly offering us choices which may seem life giving but may result in death for self and/or others. When we choose to bow down to wealth and privilege refusing to hold those in positions of power accountable it can lead to death for the economically disadvantaged. When we choose profit over protection of the environment we are choosing death for future generations. When we choose to put personal interest above the interest of others we are choosing to leave them vulnerable to be exploited and left to destruction. When we choose to malign and ostracize persons because they don't conform to our

definitions of acceptability we are choosing death for entire communities. When we choose greed and selfishness over selflessness we die to ourselves. When we use religion to oppress rather than liberate we are choosing to sit in the place of God as judge and jury. In the world in which we live it's easy to get caught up and forget what God desires from us.

It's why Moses spent 30 chapters reminding the people of the times when they didn't 'choose wisely' the times when they turned away from God and suffered dire consequences. This call to choose is one we must hear and answer daily. It reminds us that we must be intentional in our pursuit of God and seeking after the things of God. To choose life means that we don't just choose life for ourselves but that we are committed to revealing God to those we meet. To choose life means following God's instructions to do justice, love mercy and to walk humbly. The call to choose life reminds us that our first choice every day should be to love the Lord our God with all our heart, our soul and our mind and then to love our neighbor as ourselves. Choosing wisely has eternal consequences.

Questions

1. Have there been times in your life when you haven't 'chosen wisely'? If comfortable sharing what were the consequences?
2. Name a time when you were intentional and 'choose wisely' what were the consequences of your choice?
3. What are some spiritual practices which can help us to remain focused on the things of God?
4. What role does the church play in helping persons to make the decision to 'choose life'?
5. How can the church be a place of life to persons who have been marginalized and oppressed?
6. Choosing life means we are the examples of God's love on earth, where do you feel God is calling you to be an example?
7. Name some areas where you feel 'society' has not chosen wisely? What have been the consequences?
8. What role can we play in helping our communities to once again 'choose life'?

A Burst of Mercy!

Rev. Francine A. Brookins, Esq.

Pastor, Bethel AME Church (Fontana, CA)

31 December 2017

Prayer

God whose property is always to have mercy, please remind us of the particular mercies you have shown towards us. As we study today, teach us to be merciful. Show us the places where just a little bit of grace would change everything.

Scripture

Isaiah 43:18-25

Contemporary Context

I was teaching a class in a Christian context the other day and I asked the group to share the last time that another human being had been merciful towards them. Nobody spoke. When was the last time you showed mercy to someone I asked. The examples were ALL of having given money to homeless people. Are there people in your church or family who hold grudges against others? Are you one of them? Could this be an opportunity show mercy as a means of transformation? If God's property is always to have mercy, then how can 'the people of God' be so short on mercy?

Exegesis

The American Tract Society Bible Dictionary defines the word *mercy* as:

The divine goodness exercised towards the wretched and the guilty, in harmony with truth and justice, Psalm 85:10. The plan by which God is enabled to show saving mercy to men, for Christ's sake, is the most consummate work of infinite wisdom and love. The soul that has truly experienced the mercy of God will be merciful like him, Luke 6:36, compassionate to the wretched, Psalm 41:1,2, and forgiving towards all, Matthew 5:7, 18:33.²

The people of Israel had sinned against God and had been punished by God through the hand of the Babylonians. At some point, God decides that the punishment must end. It could have gone on forever because the people of Israel did not truly repent – even after their fall. They rejected God. They did not pray, they did not tithe, they did not offer themselves in worship, they were not grateful for what God had done and was doing and had promised to do, but instead, they complained and cried out because of their punishment. Justice demanded they should die, but God! Instead of a word of condemnation, God promises to forget about their sins and to create a new thing.

Conversation

Nobody ever deserves mercy. As a partner to grace, the nature of mercy is that it is undeserved. It is an alternative to punishment for the goal of becoming whole. It requires that we forgive the unforgivable.

² "Topical Bible: Mercy." Accessed October 30, 2017. <http://biblehub.com/topical/m/mercy.htm#amt>.

It requires that we swallow our pride. It requires that we desire reconciliation more than revenge. If we want to be like Christ, then we must allow him to work to change our minds and hearts, so that we can see it like he sees it.

Take time to read 1 Corinthians 13 before moving to the questions for today's study.

Questions

1. Do you pray? Talk about your prayer life.
2. Do you tithe? Talk about how you became a tither.
3. Do you offer yourself in worship? Talk about what worship means to you. What is the heart of a true worshipper?
4. Do you spend more time thanking and praising in gratitude or complaining and speaking negatively?
5. If you were God and you were giving out grades on the basis of the 4 questions above, what grade would you give yourself?
6. When was the last time you showed mercy to another human being? To a stranger? To a loved one?
7. Are there any relationships in your church, your family, your workplace, your community where a burst of mercy could cause everyone to sing a new song?
8. What is stopping you/them from showing mercy?

The Benefits of Seeking The Lord

Rev. Carolyn Baskin-Bell

Pastor, Second AME Church (Los Angeles, CA)

Fifth District Women In Ministry, President

7 January 2018

Prayer

Lord, we praise you and thank you for your saving grace. We are grateful for your unconditional love that receives us in whatever state or circumstance. Our desire is to seek first your will and your way. In Jesus name, AMEN

Scripture

Isaiah 55:10-13

Contemporary Context

We are often excited about the benefits associated with position and privilege. Many careers and professions offer medical, financial and economic empowering opportunities that accompany base salary. Some receive advice to pursue a career with promising benefits. There are also certain associations with organizations and clubs that grant access to preferred customer sales, VIP seating and parking. The purpose of this lesson is to bring enthusiasm about the spiritual benefits of seeking God's will and way." One of the great hymns of the church, "Standing on the Promises," continues to resonate while reflecting on the great benefits in store for an individual "who seeks God while the Lord may be found."

Exegesis

The Second Book of Isaiah contrasts with the First Book where the Prophet calls Judah, Israel and surrounding Nations to repent while issuing warnings of God's judgement and punishment. Whereas, in Second Isaiah, the prophet presents a message of consolation, hope and the benefits that come through the coming of the Messiah.

The book of Isaiah contains poetry and prose and uses personification by expressing personal qualities to divine or inanimate objects. As a reader, one is moved into a mode of visual imagery through divine inspiration by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conversation

Too often benefits offer superficial satisfaction. "Silver and Gold, but I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold." The songwriter expresses preference over Jesus than the riches of the world. Isaiah 55:3-6 extends the invitation to listen, seek and call upon the name of the Lord."

Benefit #1- Seeking the Lord offers refreshment for our souls. God's salvific plan provides spiritual food for our souls. In the midst of disasters, environment changes, hatred on the rise, threats of nuclear wars and rumors of wars, our souls experience void and emptiness but the prophet promises those who dine at the spiritual table of the Lord will reap benefits. Verse 12 promises the seeker to "go out with joy and be led back in peace." When the spiritual droughts of life attempt to leave us empty and dry, as we seek the Lord, the spirit will surround us with joy and peace.

Benefit #2- Seeking the Lord gives nourishment through the Word as described in verses 10-11. The Word is actively nourishing as it waters, makes flourish, accomplishes and achieves. Nutrition is essential for our physical as well as spiritual growth. God's Word deposits within us the necessary instructions to build, develop and construct our lives for the Lord's purpose. In Genesis 24:12-16, the Lord summoned Moses upon the mountain in order to give the law and commandments for their instruction. God extends an invitation to us to seek the Lord's presence to allow the Word to saturate in our souls as the rain and snow saturate the earth.

Benefit #3-Seeking the Lord provides everlasting communion with God. This is promised through the plan of salvation and nourishment of the Word. Verses 12-13 expresses imagery of transformation by describing the actions of trees. Seeking God's presence and power opens the door for deliverance, healing, restoration and renewal. Everlasting communion with God allows the following transformative acts to occur. 1. Those dry places where disasters have shattered will discover the restoration of the Lord. 2. Humankind becomes aware of the necessary changes to engage in order to save and preserve God's creation. 3. The Love Feast is more than a local church ritual but causes love to overflow and overpowers hatred in the world. 4. Peace on Earth and goodwill to all humankind prevails over nuclear wars and rumors of wars. These occurrences express the everlasting presence and power of a transformative God who majors in redemption, restoration and renewal.

Questions

1. We discussed the Word as spiritual nourishment. Name and discuss the importance of other spiritual nourishing activities.
2. What are some other benefits of seeking God's presence?
3. How does the Word of God influence our discovery of God's purpose for our life?
4. What does "Seek God while the Lord may be found" mean?
5. How can we participate as an agent of transformation in the name of the Lord?

Set Apart to Be With God

Rev. Jamal Gallow

Associate Minister, Ward AME Church (Los Angeles, CA)

14 January 2018

Prayer

Our Lord and father we come to you because you are holy, loving, and compassionate. We have set some time aside to study your word trusting that it will be time well spent. We invite your Spirit to lead and guide us. We are grateful for this time. Amen.

Scripture

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Contemporary Context

We find ourselves in a rush. We are in a hurry to finish one thing so that we can do the next thing. Information is thrown at us a warp speed. Our to-do lists are endless. Even our 'free' time is filled with tasks. We must be disciplined and intentional about setting apart special time to be with God. Time with God is part of our tithes. It may seem like a sacrifice but it turns out to yield more fruit than we could have imagined.

Exegesis

Deuteronomy is the Fifth book of the Old Testament and last book of Moses, written around the 7th century BC. Deuteronomy means "These are the words..." In the chapter 4 Moses teaches the importance of having a covenantal relationship with God. God calls us to be holy. To be holy means to be set apart and sacred.

As Moses is giving instruction we are told of the commandment that set apart the Sabbath day from all other days of the week. This is the day that every living and breathing being in the house (including the animals) does not work. This is the day that everyone has a chance to rest. God reminds Israel that they had been slaves in Egypt, forced to labor under watchful of the taskmaster. God's mighty hand is more powerful than any tyrant, master, ruler, monarchy. Taking time to spend with God is worth it!

Conversation

I am struck by the fact that this commandment enforces equity and equality for all members of the house. How do you keep this commandment for any person and animal that you can come in contact? Many people have to work on Sundays in order to feed their families. This is really a societal problem, not a personal problem. There was a time when everything shut down so that nobody expected to be served by others on the Sabbath.

Questions

1. Why would Moses need to both give a commandment and a reminder of past conditions?

2. Do you participate in Sabbath? Why or why not? If yes, what are the important parts of Sabbath in your life? What are some of the benefits you have gained?
3. Do you have feelings about people who work or do other things on Sundays?
4. Does this commandment effect how you interact those who you come in contact with throughout the day? Do you treat people working in service oriented jobs any differently on Sunday? Have you considered that they may be knowingly working on a Sabbath so that you are well served?
5. How does self-care factor in to the Sabbath?
6. In what ways is the sacrifice of time part of tithing? What are the benefits of tithing?