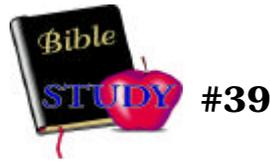


Journey Into God's Word



Job 31-42

Zechariah 10-14

Malachi 1-4

Revelation 15-22

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In the midst of chaos and confusion, fear and frustration how do we know things are going to work out. Often as we try to do good we encounter unfaithfulness, untruthfulness, broken vows and deep personal wounds that are not easily healed. Such is often the scenario in a world that has broken relationships with God, who is love. His love is a love of giving, guiding and guarding. This reality is shared in Job, Zechariah, Malachi and Revelation. “He said to me; ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the Spring of the Water of Life’ ” (Rev.21:6).

Job, who went through tremendous suffering came face to face with the Living God in Job 38-42. God challenges Job with questions like, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” As you read these four chapters please explain how God causes Job to come to the realization that if he could not explain the common events in nature, how could he possibly explain or question God. In response to our multitude of questions in the midst of unexplainable suffering and loss God would say, “Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water? Do you send the lightening bolts on their way? Do they report to you, ‘Here we are’? Who endowed the heart with wisdom or gave understanding to the mind?” (Job 38:34-36) As Job came face to face with these questions and others he declares in Job 40:3-5, “I am unworthy--how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more.” In Job 42:5,6, Job declares, “My ears had heard of You and now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Not only did Job repent, in Job 42:10, we read, “After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.” Job repented and prayed for others and as a result God blessed him in a mighty way. According to verses 11-16 of Job 42 how did God

bless Job? What hope do you find in the book of Job for your life when you encounter suffering for which there is no explanation?

What about the troubles we bring upon ourselves by ignoring God's Word and the directives it presents? In the book of Malachi we see this issue addressed. " 'If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?' says the Lord Almighty; 'It is you, O priests, who show contempt for My name' "(Malachi 1:6). How do verses 7 to 14 say that this contempt is being shown? " ' If you do not set your heart to honor My name,' says the Lord Almighty, 'I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessing.'"(Malachi 2:2) As you read Malachi 2 notice how it emphasizes that we must pattern our lives according to God's Word. What does it say about preserving the sanctity of marriage? In an age of easy divorce Malachi 2:16 declares, " 'I hate divorce,' says the Lord God." God does not want his people to be covered with violence and goes on to declare, " 'I hate a man's covering himself with violence as with his garment,' says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. 'You have wearied the Lord with your works. How have we wearied him?' you ask. By saying, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and He is pleased with them,' or 'Where is the God of justice?'"(Mal.2:16,17)

In the midst of the trials, tribulations, and the refiner's fire we must remember God's in control. The time has come for us to humble ourselves before Him confessing our sins and let Him cleanse us of all that is unclean within us. "But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap" (Mal.3:2). The day of cleansing is upon us. As you study verses 5-14 of Malachi 3 what is God showing you that needs to be cleaned up in your personal life?

For those who turn from their sins and turn to the Lord He declares, " 'They will be Mine,' says the Lord Almighty, 'in the day when I make up My treasured possession I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and these who do not'"(Mal.3:17-18). God goes on and promises those who remain faithful to Him, "you who revere My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall"(Mal.4:2). Yes, the Lord is going to return and we now need to prepare our hearts and minds to receive Him. We may experience trials and tribulations but we must remain faithful to Him. Those we love and trust may leave us but Jesus has promised He will never leave

us nor forsake us. We must hang on to these wonderful promises in the Scriptures as we look forward to the future grace revealed through the return of our victorious Lord. Remember what the Word of the Lord has promised. “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. ‘Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you, who revere My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,’ says the Lord Almighty”(Mal.4:1-3). As we live a life of faith revering the name of the Lord we can be assured of victory in spite of the circumstances. “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith”(I John 5:4).

Faith in the midst of uncertainty and suffering is absolutely essential. The alternative to faith is fear and fear destroys. Faith is based on the promises of God revealed through the on going grace of God which gives us strength in the midst of what appears to us as hopelessness. In Zechariah 10:4,5 the people of Israel returning from captivity were given the promise of a coming Messiah. Please read this promise and state how it came true through Jesus Christ. “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the one they have pierced and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child”(Zech.12:10). Jesus was nailed to a cross and died for our sins. He rose from the dead and fulfilled Zech.13:1, not only for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but for everyone who comes to Him. What was that promise in Zech.13:1? In 1 Peter 1:3-7 we read, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” What does Zech.13:9 say about such refining? As you study Zechariah 14 what does it say will happen when the Lord Jesus returns? What happen when the Lord stands on the Mount of Olives? “On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes there will be light”(Zech.14:6,7). Please describe the plague that will strike all the nations that fight against Jerusalem on that day (Zech.14:12-15).

In Revelation 15, 16 we see the pouring out of the last seven plagues. Please describe these plagues. As these plagues take place please explain the worship that is taking place in heaven and the cleansing of the earth. Please go into detail on how this cleansing is described according to Revelations 17,18. In the midst of such cleansing please note the following: “They (the ten Kings) will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and Kings of kings—and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers”(Rev.17:14). As this unfolds the earth’s economic system in the form of Babylon is destroyed. Please describe this destruction and note the following warning. “Come out of her, My people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes” (Rev.18:4,5).

After the destruction of this system of greed we see the rejoicing that takes place in heaven. “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting; ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants’ ”(Rev.19:1,2). Please describe the wedding supper of the Lamb as shared in verses 3-10. Jesus Christ is returning the second time as a victorious King. Please read carefully verses 11-21 of Rev.19 and describe this return. What happens to the beast and the false prophet? In Revelations 20 we read in verses 1-6 about the thousand-year reign of Christ. What do these verses say about that? What does it say will happen to Satan in verses 2,3 and then in verses 7-10? After Satan is defeated look what happens next. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them” (Rev.20:11). What events take place at this great white throne according to Rev. 20:12-14?

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea”(Rev.21:1) What we are witnessing here is God fulfilling His purpose to fill the universe with the material manifestation of His glory. He did not create this world without purpose. It is a world created for the purpose of praising God. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands”(Ps.19:1). Christianity is not a platonic religion that considers material things simply a shadow of reality to be denied. Instead Christians believe in the resurrection of the body and the renewal of all of creation. Just as our bodies will be resurrected even so the earth will be made new for a place of dwelling for those resurrected through Jesus Christ.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new!’ ”(Rev.21:1-5). When both Rev.21:1 and 2 Peter 3:10 speak of the present earth and heavens passing away it doesn’t mean they will pass out of existence but that their present condition will be changed like II Cor.5:17 which says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come.” As you read of this change and the fact God will dwell among us in a new way, what does this mean to you personally?

Jesus declares, “ ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of life”(Rev.21:6). What a promise of hope I find this to be. When I come to Him and I am dried up, worn out and feeling hopeless Jesus will refresh me for He is that Spring of Living Water. As I cry out, Lord I need you, and as the daily battle seems to become more and more intense, He responds. “He who overcomes, will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be My son”(Rev.21:8). But the next verse also includes a warning for those who give up and give in to sin. “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murders, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death”(Rev.21:8). We will be overcomers inheriting eternal life as we put our trust in Jesus our victorious Lord. The bride described in Rev.21:9 is the Church of our Lord Jesus made up of the overcomers who put their trust in Him. Please read verses 10-27 and describe the New Jerusalem, “coming down out of heaven from God?” “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The City does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp”(Rev.21:22,23).

As I struggle with deep personal issues, feelings of rejection and sometimes even questions like, “Is all this hard work and effort really worth while?” I experience hope and peace in the future graces shared in Revelation 21 and 22. “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of Lamb”(Rev.22:1). How do the events described in Rev.21 and 22 offer you hope and encouragement in your work?

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End”(Rev.22:12,13). Did you notice the following as you studied Rev. 21:1-4? Rev.21:2 shares that a new environment will be created. Rev.21:3 speak of the new experience of God’s presence. In Rev.21:4 you learn that there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. There is much more described in these two chapters. For that reason you will want to read them again looking more carefully for the wonderful things awaiting those who are overcomers in Christ Jesus.

Now you are invited to come and draw closer to Jesus than ever before. The hour is late. He could return at anytime. “The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life”(Rev.22:17). We are invited to receive the free gift of the Water of Life. Jesus is that water. He declares, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believe in Me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from him” (John 7:37,38).

Revelation 21 and 22 demonstrate the fulfillment of Jesus promise found in John 16:33. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Next week as we restart our journey through the scriptures by reading Genesis 1-10, Psalms 1-10 and Matthew 1-7, I want to encourage you to keep in mind the hope we have for ultimate victory through Jesus Christ. As you read the book of Genesis and see Satan’s victory in the Garden of Eden do not forget how Christ as shown in Revelation 20 ultimately defeats Satan. When Genesis tells how sin entered the human race remember how Revelations shows that sin is banished through Jesus. As Adam and Eve run and hide from God after they sin in Genesis, keep in mind how because of Jesus Christ, people are invited to live with God in Rev.21:3,4. Yes, you and I must not forget that in spite of the circumstances we do not need to run but instead must be awoken to the fact that there is hope because Christ is Risen. Paradise may seem to be lost in Genesis but because of Jesus, Revelation boldly proclaims that paradise has been regained and those doomed to death can now experience life everlasting. Because of Jesus there is hope which is oxygen for our souls. This means that even at those moments when everything seems to be lost we can continue to trust in Jesus. “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused

by evil desires”(II Peter 1:3,4). Now, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe”(Eph.1:18,19).

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice