

# 06

# AND PROPHETS PROVISION

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

  
the **GOSPEL** PROJECT.

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ADULTS



WINTER | 2025-26



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# GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

## HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

God's plan to redeem humanity centered on Him forming a people through whom He would bring blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). Through the descendants of Abraham would come the One to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15) and put an end to sin and death. Not only would God's blessing come through the Israelites, it would be extended to them. God had promised to care for His people, to protect them, and to be their God and their Father.

Just as God promised to take care of Israel many times, He also warned them of the consequences of disobedience. But they failed to listen. Time and time again, they played the harlot with pagan gods, wanting the faithful blessings of the one true God without being faithful to Him.

God's response through the prophets can be summarized by one word: Repent. God called His people to turn from their sin and turn back to Him. If they did, He would receive them back, but if they did not, He would bring destruction upon them—not punitive destruction but restorative destruction. His discipline is always corrective.

And still, the people would not repent; so judgment came. First, the Assyrian army conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and hauled off its people into captivity. But even witnessing this did not draw His people to repentance. And so the Babylonian army destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah and exiled its people.

God's people were prisoners in foreign lands, and the blessings of God seemed more distant than ever. But God was drawing His master plan together. At the close of the Old Testament, God restored His people to the land and the temple and Jerusalem were rebuilt. But then God went silent. For four hundred years, the people looked, listened, and waited—the stage was set for Jesus to come and crush the serpent's head.

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## THE EDITOR

Though exiled, God's people are never without His presence. God will discipline us, but He will never be far. And even in the discipline, He is longing to be restored into relationship and fellowship with His people.

We see this in the exile through the lives of Daniel and his friends. We see God's constant provision of protection when His people live out lives of faith, even under persecution and struggle. We see God's providential hand at work to show the world that He is Almighty God.

We see this in God orchestrating the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem, rebuilding their temple and their walls. God made a way for right worship to return because He longs for the hearts of His people to be made right with Him. And through the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people repented and confessed and returned to a yearning for God's Word and true worship of Him.

But the cycle of sin would probably continue. What hope was there of permanence in God's family, of complete restoration to the Father? The prophets foretold of a day when a true King will come, when complete rule and restoration will cause God's people to celebrate. Jesus Christ fulfilled that role of a King who would lead and be victorious, but not just over earthly battles, but over spiritual ones. He has already done that through His death and resurrection, conquering sin and death. And we await the day when He will return to judge all completely, getting rid of evil and bringing perfect purity and peace to His people.

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**The Gospel Project®**  
Adult Personal Study Guide  
Winter 2025–26  
Volume 2, Number 2

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Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project®: Adult Personal Study Guide (ISSN 3065-3363; Item 005849182) is published quarterly by Lifeway Christian Resources, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707, Ben Mandrell, President. © 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources.

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## SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The Gospel Project for Adults aspires to point people to the gospel of Jesus Christ through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources that show how God's plan of redemption unfolds throughout all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. This curriculum provides theological yet practical studies that immerse your group in the **STORY** of the gospel, helping to develop a gospel **CULTURE** that leads to gospel **MISSION**.

### GOSPEL STORY

Our aim is to help people understand the storyline of Scripture and to see the thread from the beginning to the end that weaves through it all—God's plan to rescue and redeem His creation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### GOSPEL CULTURE

Our hope is that the message of the gospel saturates our understanding of Christ, increasing our joy in Him and helping doubters become believers who become declarers of the gospel.

### GOSPEL MISSION

Our desire is to encourage believers to live on mission, declaring the good news of the gospel in word and deed for God's glory and the growth of His kingdom.



## 3 YEAR PLAN

---

### **VOL 01: CREATION AND COVENANT**

(Genesis; Job)  
Fall 2024

### **VOL 02: LAW AND LIFE**

(Exodus–Deuteronomy)  
Winter 2024–25

### **VOL 03: LAND AND LOSS**

(Joshua–1 Samuel)  
Spring 2025

### **VOL 04: FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM**

(1 Samuel–1 Kings; Wisdom Literature)  
Summer 2025

### **VOL 05: DIVISION AND DEFIANCE**

(1 Kings–2 Chronicles; The Prophets)  
Fall 2025

### **VOL 06: PROPHETS AND PROVISION**

(The Prophets; Ezra–Esther)  
Winter 2025–26

### **VOL 07: THE SON HAS COME**

(The Gospels)  
Spring 2026

### **VOL 08: THE SON HAS AUTHORITY**

(The Gospels)  
Summer 2026

### **VOL 09: THE SON HAS TRUTH**

(The Gospels)  
Fall 2026

### **VOL 10: THE SON HAS RISEN**

(The Gospels; Acts)  
Winter 2026–27

### **VOL 11: THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION**

(Acts; The Epistles)  
Spring 2027

### **VOL 12: THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE**

(The Epistles; Revelation)  
Summer 2027

# HOW TO USE THE PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

The Personal Study Guide is a vital tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here's how to make the most of your time with it:

## 1) READ THE WORD DAILY

Begin each week by reading the Scriptures according to the Daily Readings. These Bible readings will help you mentally and spiritually prepare for the group experience each week while also building healthy Bible study habits for personal growth. The daily readings will help you understand the context of the Bible story for each week's session and fill in the gaps between sessions. The weekly psalm reading will help you think worshipfully and prayerfully about the story's place in the greater redemptive narrative of the Bible. And the timeline will give you a visual perspective so you can place the Bible story in the larger context of the Bible's storyline.

- Daily Readings
- Chronological Timeline





## 2) STUDY THE PERSONAL PREPARATION

The Personal Preparation section contains the Scripture passages you will examine and discuss with your Bible study group. As you read each Scripture passage, a Bible study prompt will help you highlight, underline, or jot notes to help you engage with the Scripture and to provoke discussion with your group on the following Sunday. A brief commentary with thought-provoking questions will help you dig deeper into the text and reflect on what the text teaches you about God and yourself. You have the full week to work on your personal preparation, so whether you prefer to break it up into parts or do it all in one day, the flexibility is there for your schedule.

- Scripture
- Commentary
- Questions

**PERSONAL PREPARATION**

DANIEL 3:14-18

**GOD IS ALWAYS ABLE TO SAVE.**

*Circle all the conjunctions, the connecting words, in the passage below, but, if there, when, etc.*

**14** Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up?" **15** Now if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, string, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?" **16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "Nebochadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. **17** If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. **18** But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."

**THEOLOGY CONNECTION**

**MIRACLES:** A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of the world, raised from the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or delivering His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture, signs and wonders were often times evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

King Nebuchadnezzar set up a gold statue to be the center of worship for his subjects. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (previously called Hananish, Mishael, and Azariel) determined not to bow to it—they worshipped the Lord alone, even while facing a gruesome death. Some Chaldeans, likely jealous these Jews were set over Babylon's affairs, told the king these three men would not serve his gods nor worship his statue, which enraged the king (vv. 1-13).

Daniel's friends determined to obey God's commandments: "Do not have other gods besides me. Do not make an idol for yourself" (Deuteronomy 5:3-4). As Nebuchadnezzar, himself jealous for the worship and total submission of his subjects, did what all people do who set themselves against the one true God—he persecuted God's faithful people, threatening them with death by fire.

**What are some ways believers today experience difficulties and persecution for their faith?**

The persecution coming for these three courageous Jews was a very real threat, yet they saw this as an opportunity for them to give glory to God. Nebuchadnezzar mocked their God, claiming to have supreme power in this matter (Daniel 3:15). Still, Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego remained firm in their faith. They would worship God alone, no matter the outcome. The Lord could rescue them with a miracle, but He might not. Both were acceptable outcomes because the Lord alone is the true God who is worthy of worship.

These friends embodied Paul's words from Philippians 1:8: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." For the Christian, there is no losing situation. As Jesus said, "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). The greatest fear of God is the end of all other earthly fears.

**How can we become people who exhibit faith and courage even in the face of death?**

**VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY**

"Let faith be yours, and God will be with you in your trouble."  
—Augustine of Hippo (c. 354–430)

26    Book 10 | Session 8 | Chapter

27

### 3) PARTICIPATE IN THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Group Experience for each session includes an activity and interactive questions designed to make the most of your group experience. Depending on your leader, he or she may have you do the activity on your own before doing it together as a group, or your leader may want you to wait until group time. Either way, the personal prep you've put into the days leading up to your group time will provide a richer discussion and more thoughtful theological applications to mutually encourage each other during group time.



- Group Activity
- Interactive Questions
- Theological Applications



## 4) TAKE THE NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of your group time, consider how to apply the day's Scripture lesson by walking through the Head, Heart, and Hands application questions. Share and discuss answers to the questions for the mutual benefit of everyone in the group. Then take time in your group, and during the week after, to read and pray through the designated psalm, focusing your thoughts and words once more upon God's Word. And finally, record prayer requests and praises as you wrap up your group time. Space is provided to jot those down in your guide for prayer during the following week.

**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

**HEAD**  
Why is it important that we believe the miracles in the Bible?

**PLAYING SCRIPTURE**  
Read Psalm 14. Confess and pray for forgiveness for the things you acted as if God did not exist (vs. 5-6). Thank the Lord and rejoice for his faithful actions and promises to be a refuge for His people who trust in him. (vs. 6-7).

**HEART**  
What in your life keeps you from trusting God and obeying with courage?

**HANDS**  
How will you act with faith and courage this week, trusting the Lord for direction, words, and boldness?

**PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES**

31



- Application Questions
- Scripture-Based Prayer
- Prayer Requests

# PROPHETS AND PROVISION

By David McLemore

When my wife and I began dating, we quickly realized we had different vibes. I was a laid-back, go-with-the-flow kind of person, while she was a planner. When I asked her out on a date, she wanted to know where we were going, when we were going, how long we would be there, and what would happen after that. My “we’ll play it by ear” answer wasn’t good enough. She needed to know what her future held.

I learned later that such knowledge calmed her. She could relax and enjoy herself if she knew what was coming next. Aren’t we all that way to some degree? While I didn’t need to know what was next, I have always longed to know if I would be okay while waiting for an uncertain future. No one likes to be in the dark.

The Bible opens with God saying, “‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). That verse isn’t only a comment on creation; it is a comment on revelation. God doesn’t keep us in the dark. God doesn’t make us go without. Through His prophets, the Lord tells His people what’s ahead, and through His provision, He cares for them while they wait.

## PROPHETS

The Bible’s first great prophet, Moses, was sent to the Israelites with a message of God’s concern for their oppression and His promise to deliver them (Exodus 3:7-10). But Moses originally pleaded for God to send someone else, claiming he had a sluggish tongue (4:10). But a sluggish tongue is no problem for God. As the Lord told the apostle Paul thousands of years later, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Since Moses was God’s prophet, he didn’t need any of his own power. He had the power of the Almighty with him, as did every Old Testament prophet.

From Moses to Elijah to Jeremiah to Malachi, God’s prophets proclaimed God’s desire to dwell with His covenant people and for them to keep covenant with God by obeying His commands. They failed to listen to the prophets, and His warnings of judgment came to pass (2 Chronicles 36:16). But God’s heart was always for His people, and His prophets were His voices in the exile calling them to return to Him and be restored (Jeremiah 29:10; Ezekiel 39:25; Daniel 9:25; Zechariah 10:6; Malachi 3:7). If only they would return to Him, their weeping and sadness would only last the night; joy would come in the morning (Psalm 30:5).



Through the prophets, God's people could know what was coming, the good and the bad. But God did more than inform—He assured His people that His provision would accompany His prophecy. They could trust His heart.

## PROVISION

When the news wasn't good and the days ahead looked grim, God's provision was racing alongside His prophecy. The hard truths were wrapped in sweet truths of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. God would not abandon His people, for He had bound Himself to them through His covenant of grace. He would remain faithful, and when they needed Him, He would be there. When they passed through the waters, He would be with them. The rivers would not overwhelm them. And when they walked through the fire, they would not be scorched, and the flame would not burn them (Isaiah 43:2).

That was true for Israel as they walked on dry land through the Red Sea (Exodus 14). It was true for Daniel's three friends, whom Nebuchadnezzar threw into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). It was true for Daniel, who was thrown to lions (Daniel 6). God provided for His people. And it was true for Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, who experienced God's provision and favor to protect their people.

Biblical prophecy works on several levels. It can be fulfilled in multiple ways and at various times. Often there is an immediate fulfillment and an ultimate fulfillment. We are not Israel hemmed in by the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, but we face sin and

death daily. We are not Daniel's friends facing brazen idolatry or the fire, but we face the trials and tribulations of life as a Christian in this broken world.

What is our hope in such times? We find the answer in the prophets. The greatest provision promised from their mouths was not relief from the waters or flames of this world but from the waters and flames of death and hell. The greatest provision was not in earthly and temporal redemption but in eternal salvation in Christ: "He was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds" (Isaiah 53:5).

The greatest Prophet is also the greatest Provision: "Long ago God spoke to the ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus is the ultimate prophet who speaks a better word than all the rest, and He is the ultimate provision that secures our future forever.

In Jesus we have a prophet who lets us know what's ahead and a provision to sustain us as we wait. No one likes to be in the dark. Praise God that the light has come in Christ!

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David McLemore serves as an elder at Refuge Church in Franklin, Tennessee. He is a regular contributor to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's For the Church website and writes on his own website, Things of the Sort.

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 16

## GOD IN THE EXILE



DANIEL



#### MEMORY VERSES

“I continued watching in the night visions,  
and suddenly one like a son of man was coming  
with the clouds of heaven. He approached the  
Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. He  
was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so  
that those of every people, nation, and language  
should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting  
dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom  
is one that will not be destroyed.”

—Daniel 7:13-14





# OBEDIENCE

CORE PASSAGE: DANIEL 1:8-21

## CONTEXT

In 605 BC, a few short years into King Jehoiakim's reign over Judah, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar took control of Jerusalem, made Judah's king his vassal, and carried off some high-profile young men as exiles to Babylon. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were brought to the palace to be educated in Babylonian ways so they could serve their new king. For three years they were trained in all things Babylonian—language, customs, and religion—and faced the temptation of losing their identity as God's people.

## KEY CONCEPT

**Obedience to God leads to greater wisdom from God.**

As you examine Daniel 1:8-21:

- Recognize that Daniel determined to remain faithful to God and His law with its dietary restrictions.
- Consider how our obedience to the Lord helps us grow in wisdom and knowledge of the Lord.



## TIMELINE

Nebuchadnezzar Takes the First  
Exiles to Babylon, Including Daniel  
and His Three Friends (2 Kings 24)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's  
First Dream (Daniel 2)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's  
Second Dream (Daniel 4)

**SESSION STUDY: Daniel and His Friends Remain  
Faithful to God's Dietary Laws (Daniel 1)**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Refuse to  
Worship Nebuchadnezzar's Statue (Daniel 3)

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Daniel 1:1-7

☐ **Day 2:** Daniel 1:8-21

☐ **Day 3:** Daniel 2:1-13

☐ **Day 4:** Daniel 2:14-24

☐ **Day 5:** Daniel 2:25-49

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 112



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 1:8-14

### PURSUING OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS ALWAYS RIGHT DESPITE THE OBSTACLES.

*Underline the steps Daniel took in order to obey the Lord.*

**8** Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief eunuch not to defile himself. **9** God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, **10** yet he said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and drink. What if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men your age? You would endanger my life with the king." **11** So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief eunuch had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13** Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see." **14** He agreed with them about this and tested them for ten days.

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

Our obedience to God comes from faith in His character and works. He has always been faithful, even in suffering. Christ obeyed the Father through suffering. And from His example, our obedience to Christ demonstrates our faith in Him.





Obedying God is not always easy, but imagine being in Daniel's shoes: far from home, a captive of Babylon, and forced to assimilate to their culture and serve their king. Most people in such a situation would try their best to stay on their captor's good side, not wanting to draw any additional attention to avoid further suffering. Daniel's conscience, however, wouldn't allow such a route. He determined not to defile himself with the king's food and wine. His obedience to God meant more to him than any suffering that may come as a result.

How Daniel was being obedient in rejecting the king's food is somewhat unclear. Some scholars say the king's food was offered to idols, but might vegetables have been offered as well? The most reasonable option may be that Daniel wanted to obey God in keeping his Jewish identity and rejecting full assimilation into Babylonian ways. He couldn't control what others called him. He couldn't control what they taught him. But he could control what he put in his body, and that act of obedience would help him remain close to God. Beyond any specific dietary law, faithfulness was Daniel's goal. This was a risk, as obedience often is, but it was a risk worth taking for Daniel.

**How have you felt the riskiness of obedience to God in this world?**

Verse 9 tells us that God granted kindness and compassion to Daniel from the chief eunuch. When we follow God's call on our lives, He will prepare the way and give us wisdom for the road ahead (James 1:5). It was with wisdom that Daniel intended to obey the Lord. He began by asking permission. He didn't throw a fit; he was respectful. Yet he was also clear. He had reasons beyond personal preference and the need to prove a point—he didn't want to defile himself. This was a matter of faithfulness to him, and God blessed that act of faith.

With wisdom, Daniel also offered a test to the guard: vegetables and water for ten days followed by an evaluation. This reasonable option gave the guard, and the eunuch, an opportunity to honor Daniel's request and not put himself in jeopardy. If it didn't work, the supervisors had an out. If it did work, Daniel and his friends wouldn't have to defile themselves. Through it all, God was at work, and no matter the outcome, He would get the glory through Daniel's actions.

**How can God get the glory from our obedience, whether the outcome is positive or negative?**

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 1:15-21

### WHEN WE OBEY GOD, KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM INCREASE.

*Highlight the result of Daniel and his friends' faithful obedience.*

**15** At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food. **16** So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. **17** God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. **18** At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. **19** The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to attend the king. **20** In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom. **21** Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS:** Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Ephesians 2:10). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

Daniel's "risk" paid off. After ten days, Daniel and his friends looked better than all the rest. Yet this was but the first "better than" for God's people in the king's court because their obedience gave rise to more wisdom from the Lord.

Verse 17 shows how obedience is a wise step we take on the path toward wisdom. In fact, wisdom cannot be gained any other way—it is a gift from God that grows as we cultivate it and our relationship with the God of all wisdom. A young doctor who wants to make it big in his field cannot skip the obedient study and preparation required. An athlete who wants to play at the top of his game for a long time cannot forsake the obedience required to eat the right foods, do the right exercises, and care for the body. Obedience is the path to grow toward what we ultimately want, but it is born from what God does for us.

**How does obedience help cultivate wisdom in the Christian life?**



Daniel and his friends' obedience was used by God to grant them knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. In fact, no one was found to be their equal (v. 19). This is even more remarkable when we realize that what they excelled in was not the things of God but the things of Babylon. They became Babylonian literary experts, and Daniel understood visions and dreams. They surpassed all the king's advisers in providing him helpful counsel. Even in captivity, Daniel and his friends pursued the well-being of the city that it and they might thrive and be a testimony to the greatness of the one true God (Jeremiah 29:7). Still, Daniel and his friends would face a fiery furnace and a lions' den in the days ahead. Faithful obedience will result in increased godly wisdom but may also come with a worldly cost.

What can we learn from this? Not just that God will always grant wisdom, but that He will always be with us in whatever He sends us to do. We can trust His plan even when we can't see the path. Our call is to obey Him and let Him prove His goodness to us.

**How can our obedience shine a light on God's glory for others to see?**

## WHOM SHALL WE FEAR?

*Read Daniel 1:8-21. Compare and contrast the reasons Daniel and his friends had for fearing the king of Babylon versus fearing and obeying the Lord.*

FEAR THE KING

FEAR THE LORD

What reasons do we have to fear the Lord and obey His commands?



**Key Concept:** Obedience to God leads to greater wisdom from God.



## HEAD

How does the fear of the Lord relate to our obedience to the Lord?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 112. The best way to read the psalms is to hear them as the songs of Jesus. Praise the Lord that Jesus perfectly obeyed His Father so that He could save us from our sin and that we would be blessed through our faith in Him.



## HEART

Under what circumstances do you find it most difficult to obey the Lord, and how can you prepare yourself for those times?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

How will you determine to obey the Lord so He gets the glory through your actions?



# COURAGE

CORE PASSAGE: DANIEL 3:14-18,24-29

## CONTEXT

After three years of Babylonian training, Daniel and his friends served the king as advisers. One night, the king had a disturbing dream, and only Daniel, blessed with God's gift to interpret dreams, was able to answer the king about its meaning. That dream included a multi-layered statue and foretold the rise and fall of nations, beginning with Babylon, whose king was represented by the statue's golden head. Nebuchadnezzar later decided to build an enormous statue made entirely of gold and to have all of his subjects bow in worship to it. Daniel's friends, however, chose to remain faithful and to worship the Lord alone.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.**

As you examine Daniel 3:14-18,24-29:

- Recognize that the three friends' courage stemmed from their belief that God could be trusted in life or death.
- Notice how Nebuchadnezzar recognized God's power and gave Him the praise He deserved because of the three friends' faithful testimony.



## TIMELINE

Daniel and His Friends  
Remain Faithful to God's  
Dietary Laws (Daniel 1)

**SESSION STUDY:**  
**Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship  
Nebuchadnezzar's Statue (Daniel 3)**

Daniel Interprets the Writing on  
the Wall for Belshazzar (Daniel 5)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's  
First Dream (Daniel 2)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's  
Second Dream (Daniel 4)

Daniel Is Thrown into the  
Lions' Den (Daniel 6)

## Daily Readings

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 1:</b> Daniel 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 4:</b> Ezekiel 40–44 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 2:</b> Daniel 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 5:</b> Ezekiel 45–48 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 3:</b> Obadiah  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 6:</b> Psalm 14      |



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 3:14-18

### GOD IS ALWAYS ABLE TO SAVE.

*Circle all the conjunctions, the connecting words, in the passage (and, but, if, then, when, etc.).*

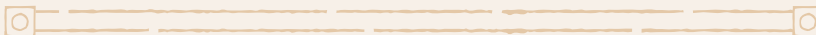
**14** Nebuchadnezzar asked them, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don’t serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? **15** Now if you’re ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don’t worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?” **16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. **17** If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. **18** But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.”

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**MIRACLES:** A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order or supersedes natural laws for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God’s message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.



**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.



King Nebuchadnezzar set up a gold statue to be the center of worship for his subjects. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (previously called Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) determined not to bow to it—they worshiped the Lord alone, even while facing a gruesome death. Some Chaldeans, likely jealous these Jews were set over Babylon’s affairs, told the king these three men would not serve his gods nor worship his statue, which enraged the king (vv. 1-13).

Daniel’s friends determined to obey God’s commandments: “Do not have other gods besides me. Do not make an idol for yourself” (Exodus 20:3-4). So Nebuchadnezzar, himself jealous for the worship and total submission of his subjects, did what all people do who set themselves against the one true God—he persecuted God’s faithful people, threatening them with death by fire.

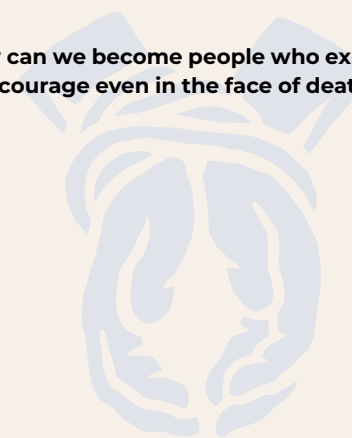
**What are some ways believers today experience difficulties and persecution for their faith?**

The persecution coming for these three courageous Jews was a very real threat, yet they saw this as an opportunity for them to give glory to God. Nebuchadnezzar mocked their God, claiming to have supreme power in this matter (Daniel 3:15). Still, Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego remained firm in their faith. They would worship God alone, no matter the outcome. The Lord could rescue them with a miracle, but He might not. Both were acceptable outcomes because the Lord alone is the true God who is worthy of worship.

These friends embodied Paul’s words from Philippians 1:21: “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” For the Christian, there is no losing situation. As Jesus said, “Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). The reverent fear of God is the end of all other earthly fears.

**How can we become people who exhibit faith and courage even in the face of death?**



#### VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

✕ ————— ✕

“Let faith be yours, and God will be with you in your trouble.”<sup>1</sup>

—Augustine of Hippo (c. 354–430)

**GOD SAVES SO THAT ALL WOULD KNOW HE IS THE MOST HIGH GOD.**

*Circle every instance of God or gods in the passage.*

**24** Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, “Didn’t we throw three men, bound, into the fire?” “Yes, of course, Your Majesty,” they replied to the king. **25** He exclaimed, “Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” **26** Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. **27** When the satraps, prefects, governors, and the king’s advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there was no smell of fire on them. **28** Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him. They violated the king’s command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. **29** Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this.”

**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.



The courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego sent Nebuchadnezzar into a rage. The furnace was heated seven times hotter than normal—so hot that his best soldiers who threw them in died from the heat (vv. 19-23). But the three did not die because the living God was among them.

Nebuchadnezzar himself was the one to notice the fourth man, an “angel” of God (v. 28), walking in the fire with the other three. The king who believed he had power over life and death was beholding a supreme power unlike any he could achieve. The flames of man cannot extinguish the glory of God!

**Why do you think God gave Nebuchadnezzar the ability to see “the fourth man” in the fire?**

God’s rescue of His servants was not for their sake only. Their preservation brought glory to God. Imagine it! The king who had ridiculed the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego now praised the very same God. What a turnaround!

The three friends risked their lives to serve God, and God came through. That’s a truth that rings through the ages. Whatever threat God’s people face, it is nothing compared to God’s power. He has all authority in heaven and on earth, and

He laughs at the schemes of the wicked (Psalm 2:1-4). Nothing can move God from His throne, and nothing can thwart His plan of salvation for His people.

**How have you seen the power of God at work in your life?**

Not every fiery trial will end like this, however. Not everyone who stands up for God and His gospel survives the punishment of worldly kings. That doesn’t make God a failure. He is always powerful and glorious. No, flames can only kill the body. God can raise up the body again. Jesus was raised from death to life, and He will raise up everyone who trusts in Him on the last day (John 6:39-40).

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

God’s power saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire, and that same power resurrected Jesus Christ. Even in dire circumstances, God makes a way to accomplish His will, as seen ultimately in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

## MODERN-DAY STATUES AND FURNACES

*Read Daniel 3:14-18,24-29. Identify some modern-day “statues” that demand worship and modern-day “furnaces” we may face for upholding the gospel.*

### MODERN-DAY GOLDEN STATUES

### MODERN-DAY FIERY FURNACES

How can we fix our eyes on Jesus instead of golden statues the world offers?

How can we encourage other believers who are facing fiery furnaces?

**Key Concept:** God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.



## HEAD

Why is it important that we believe the miracles in the Bible?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 14. Confess and pray for forgiveness for the times you acted as if God did not exist (vv. 1-3). Thank the Lord and rejoice for His faithful actions and promises to be a refuge for His people who trust in Him (vv. 4-7).



## HEART

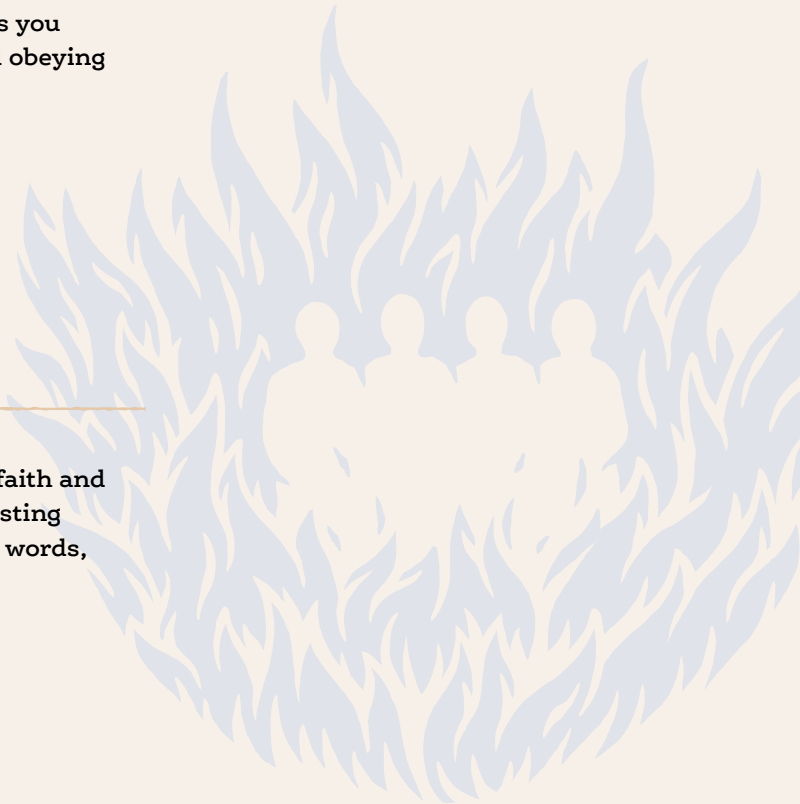
What in your life keeps you from trusting God and obeying with courage?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

How will you act with faith and courage this week, trusting the Lord for direction, words, and boldness?





# FAITHFULNESS

CORE PASSAGE: DANIEL 6:13-24

## CONTEXT

In the waning years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, the Lord humbled him for seven years and then restored him to his throne, for which the king praised the Lord as "the King of the heavens" (Daniel 4:37). But the king's descendant failed to learn this lesson. On a night of revelry, Belshazzar defiled the gold vessels taken from the Lord's temple. He then observed mysterious fingers writing on the wall, which Daniel interpreted as God's coming judgment upon the king. That very night, Belshazzar was killed, and Babylon was conquered by Darius (Cyrus) of the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel then served Darius as an administrator of the kingdom.

## KEY CONCEPT

**We honor God when we live in faith and trust God in all situations.**

As you examine Daniel 6:13-24:

- Recognize that Daniel felt honoring God with his life was more important than preserving it.
- Consider that when we are falsely accused, we can rest in God's justice.



## TIMELINE

Daniel and His Friends Serve  
Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1-4)

Babylon Is Conquered by Darius the Mede,  
Who Is Cyrus of Persia (Daniel 5)

**SESSION STUDY: Daniel Is Thrown  
into the Lions' Den (Daniel 6)**

Daniel Interprets the Writing on  
the Wall for Belshazzar (Daniel 5)

Cyrus of Persia Issues Decree Allowing  
the Jews to Return to Judah (Ezra 1)

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** 2 Kings 25:27-30

☐ **Day 2:** Jeremiah 52:31-34

☐ **Day 3:** Daniel 5:1-31

☐ **Day 4:** Daniel 6:1-18

☐ **Day 5:** Daniel 6:19-28

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 91



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 6:13-18

### FAITHFULNESS INCLUDES LIVING OUT OUR FAITH WHEN PERSECUTED.

*Circle the charge for which Daniel was being persecuted and the way the king described Daniel's actions.*

**13** Then they replied to the king, "Daniel, one of the Judean exiles, has ignored you, the king, and the edict you signed, for he prays three times a day." **14** As soon as the king heard this, he was very displeased; he set his mind on rescuing Daniel and made every effort until sundown to deliver him. **15** Then these men went together to the king and said to him, "You know, Your Majesty, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no edict or ordinance the king establishes can be changed." **16** So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you continually serve, rescue you!" **17** A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing in regard to Daniel could be changed. **18** Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and he could not sleep.

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

Following God and being a believer in Jesus Christ can come with persecution in our world. Yet we continue to live in faith because He is with us and has saved us. We don't fear death because He has resurrection power, whereas those without Christ will suffer an eternal death.

**Key Concept:** We honor God when we live in faith and trust God in all situations.

It's difficult to find a more faithful response to a political act than what Daniel displayed in Daniel 6. When he learned of the edict to pray to no one but the king for thirty days, he went to his house, faced Jerusalem, and got down on his knees to pray (vv. 1-10). Daniel's response was to do what he had always done—pray to God alone despite what the world around him demanded.

This edict was a scheme of the satraps and administrators who set themselves against Daniel. Pay attention to this fact, for it is remarkable. Daniel was so faithful to God that his enemies could find no other way to bring him down than to use his faithfulness against him (vv. 4-5). Therefore, they made a new law so they could catch Daniel in the act of civil disobedience by doing what he always did—praying (vv. 6-9).

**How are you challenged by Daniel's example of faithful prayer in this passage?**

Once Daniel's haters had the evidence, they wasted no time bringing it to the king's attention. They had thought out the plan fully. They knew Darius would try to find a way to free Daniel because he was such a good servant. So they leaned on the law that any edict passed by the king was irrevocable, even by the king who passed it. The king's hands were tied by his own signature. Duped by his own administration, the king had Daniel thrown to the lions.

Why would God allow such a thing to happen to a man who continually served Him (Daniel 6:16)? Shouldn't faithfulness prevent such suffering? The answer, according to Scripture, is no. In fact, Jesus Himself said that we would suffer for His sake (John 15:20). When we face persecution for the sake of Christ, it is the faith He grants that gives us the strength to endure. His resurrection power arises within us and reminds us that even if the lions devour us, all they can do is usher us into our Savior's hands.

**How do you think about the suffering you experience in life? How should you?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 6:19-24

### THOSE WHO DO NOT LIVE IN FAITH WILL FACE PUNISHMENT AND DEATH.

*Underline the reason Daniel was spared from death in the lions' den.*

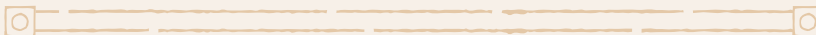
**19** At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. **20** When he reached the den, he cried out in anguish to Daniel. "Daniel, servant of the living God," the king said, "has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?" **21** Then Daniel spoke with the king: "May the king live forever. **22** My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me, for I was found innocent before him. And also before you, Your Majesty, I have not done harm." **23** The king was overjoyed and gave orders to take Daniel out of the den. When Daniel was brought up from the den, he was found to be unharmed, for he trusted in his God. **24** The king then gave the command, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the lions' den—they, their children, and their wives. They had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**GOD IS OMNIPOTENT:** God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.



**Key Concept:** We honor God when we live in faith and trust God in all situations.



Daniel's wisdom in serving the king and his faithfulness in prayer landed him in the lions' den, yet only one action was noted for his survival there—"he trusted in his God" (v. 23). As the king ran to the tomb in anguish, he hoped Daniel was spared. Logic and reason told Darius that it could not be so. Everyone knew the elderly Daniel could not have fended off the lions himself. They were kept hungry for such an occasion. If Daniel were spared, even Darius knew only one person could have done it—the living God—and He did.

God's power is immense. He is omnipotent. There is nothing God cannot do, especially as simple to Him as shutting lions' mouths. But it was God's faithfulness to His holy name that compelled His strength. Through Daniel, God was proving the kind of God He is. He is not capricious. His edicts are everlasting and just, made in righteousness, not vanity. The living God alone is worthy of worship, and Daniel's experience in the lions' den proved it.

**In what circumstances can trusting God's power bring you comfort?**

The administrators and satraps tried to paint Daniel as an unfaithful betrayer of the king because Daniel's highest allegiance was to his God. But Daniel and King Darius counted him acquitted of the charge since the living God rescued him from the lions. So Darius turned the tables on the accusers, who had manipulated the king for their own benefit and who would have deprived the king of his most effective administrator.

By the king's command, the accusers, along with their families, suffered the fate they had plotted out for their enemy. Yet ultimately, the judgment of God fell upon their houses for their faithlessness of attacking God's man, as seen in the fact that the lions that had passed over Daniel devoured them immediately.

**What does this passage teach us about God's justice?**

## DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS

*Read Daniel 6:13-24. Record the differences in the ways Daniel and his accusers related to the Lord and to the king.*

FAITHFUL SERVANT

FAITHLESS ACCUSERS

THE LORD

THE KING

How did Daniel's life of integrity impact the people around him, both positively and negatively?

What are some ways we can show faithfulness to God in our spheres of influence?

**Key Concept:** We honor God when we live in faith and trust God in all situations.



## HEAD

How has your faith in God sustained you through difficult times?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 91. Pray through the psalm, thanking the Lord that He answers His children and will be with them in times of trouble. Pray to follow in Jesus's steps of faith, not to complain or test the Lord but to trust His will and ways for your life (see Luke 4:1-11).



## HEART

What fears keep you from bold, faithful obedience to God in the world?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

How will you express your faith in Jesus outwardly this week?

# THE DOCTRINE OF THE KINGDOM

By Greg Kilgore

You may have heard it said jokingly that “Americans have no king but Elvis.” The United States often prides itself in not having a king since the Revolutionary War. In many Western nations, there are presidents or prime ministers, but these leaders are not all-powerful sovereigns. Many people today do not really understand the idea of an all-powerful king. Most of the titles surrounding kings in the West come simply from honorary titles, such as homecoming kings.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

Why is the kingdom of God important for Christians? God’s rule and reign is one of the major themes of the entire Bible. The kingdom is centered on Christ, and many prophecies in the Old Testament predict the coming King who will rule and reign perfectly over His people. Zechariah 9 presented the King as coming to Jerusalem to bring salvation to His people. Daniel 7 promised a coming kingdom that will be eternal and comprehensive—everything will be subject to the coming King’s authority and dominion.

Additionally, the importance of the kingdom is seen in how many times Jesus speaks of the kingdom in His ministry. The kingdom is mentioned 126 times in the Gospels; thus, it is one of the dominant themes of Christ’s teaching ministry.

## GOD’S GENERAL SOVEREIGNTY

What does it mean that Christians are part of the kingdom of God? Even if we have never lived under the rule of a king in our own country, we can understand the rule of Christ as King. The kingdom of God is made up of God’s general rule over all and Christ’s particular kingship over His people who trust in Him as their Lord and Savior. Most statements of faith describe God’s kingdom and His rule. The Baptist Faith and Message, for example, identifies these categories this way: “The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.”<sup>1</sup>

As we consider this statement, the question “Why is God king?” might arise. Ultimately, it is due to Him creating the universe (Genesis 1–2). Psalm 103:19 states, “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.”

God alone has the power to create and rule His universe. Thus, the first part of God's kingdom is His general rule and reign over the universe.

## CHRIST'S PARTICULAR KINGSHIP

The second element of the kingdom includes Christ's kingship over those who acknowledge Him as King: "Particularly the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> This means that the second element of the kingdom entails the saving rule and reign of Christ in our hearts and lives.

People do not enter this kingdom by any earthly means. Entrance into the kingdom of Christ does not come on the basis of earthly merit, power, or nationality. How, then, do we enter this saving kingdom of Christ? When Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, He said, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). We enter this kingdom through the spiritual birth that takes place at conversion. We enter Christ's kingdom by being born again. We enter this kingdom by knowing and loving the King. The entrance into the kingdom of Christ is cross- and resurrection-shaped. Through trusting in Jesus Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection, we enter this saving rule of Christ in His particular kingdom.

Every single person is under the rule of God as king because they are part of His universe. However, we enter the particular kingdom that is marked by salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

## OUR ROLE IN THE KINGDOM

For those who have trusted in Christ, we have a role to play in this kingdom. Even though God's rule is established, Christ's saving kingdom has not yet fully arrived here and now. When we read the New Testament, we see the emphasis on the return of Christ to establish His reign fully and finally in the new heavens and new earth. As believers, we live between the times, that is, between the beginning of the end and the "full consummation" of Christ's eternal reign.

The kingdom was inaugurated with Jesus's first advent. Through God's Word and Spirit, we are called to life under His lordship, where we are freely accepted and forgiven. This also means that we are committed to Jesus's kingdom priorities in the age to come and seek to work them out in our own lives and in the present age as well.

Until Christ returns, every local church is meant to be a gospel outpost of the kingdom of God, and every Christian is meant to be an ambassador of Jesus's kingdom in this world (2 Corinthians 5:20).

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Greg Kilgore is the associational missions strategist for the Mid-Valley Southern Baptist Association and a member of Woodward Park Baptist Church in Fresno, California. He and his wife, Megan, have three children: Owen, Camille, and Judson Titus. Greg is a PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also teaches as an adjunct professor.

# DOMINION

CORE PASSAGE: DANIEL 7:2-14

## CONTEXT

The book of Daniel is divided into two main parts. The first six chapters are narratives, such as the fiery furnace, the writing on the wall, and the lions' den. The last six chapters contain four visions of the future the Lord gave to Daniel as a prophet. Daniel 7 is the pivot point bridging the two halves, connecting the narratives to the grander events happening in the world. In this first vision, which Daniel received in the first year of King Belshazzar's rule over Babylon (7:1), sometime before the writing on the wall, Daniel describes four beasts representing four powerful kingdoms, but above them all is the kingdom of God.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God will establish His forever kingdom through Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.**

As you examine Daniel 7:2-14:

- Recognize that because of sin, human empires will try to establish dominion over this world.
- Rejoice that Christ is reigning and will reign and judge over all people at the end of time.





## TIMELINE

Daniel and His Friends  
Serve Nebuchadnezzar  
(Daniel 1–4)

**2:** A Ram and a  
Goat (Daniel 8)

Babylon Is Conquered by  
Darius/Cyrus (Daniel 5)

Cyrus Issues Decree  
Allowing the Jews to  
Return to Judah (Ezra 1)

**Daniel's Four Visions:**  
**SESSION STUDY:**  
**1: Four Beasts (Daniel 7)**

Daniel Interprets the  
Writing on the Wall for  
Belshazzar (Daniel 5)

**3:** "Seventy Weeks"  
(Daniel 9)

**4:** A Glorious Man  
and the Last Days  
(Daniel 10–12)

## Daily Readings

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 1:</b> Daniel 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 4:</b> Daniel 10–11 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 2:</b> Daniel 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 5:</b> Daniel 12    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 3:</b> Daniel 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 6:</b> Psalm 93     |



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 7:2-8

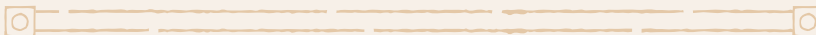
### THOUGH OPPRESSIVE POWERS SEEM UNSTOPPABLE, THEY ARE TEMPORARY.

*Highlight the descriptions of the four beasts using different colored pens.*

**2** Daniel said, “In my vision at night I was watching, and suddenly the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea. **3** Four huge beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. **4** The first was like a lion but had eagle’s wings. I continued watching until its wings were torn off. It was lifted up from the ground, set on its feet like a man, and given a human mind. **5** Suddenly, another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, with three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up! Gorge yourself on flesh.’ **6** After this, while I was watching, suddenly another beast appeared. It was like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back. It had four heads, and it was given dominion. **7** After this, while I was watching in the night visions, suddenly a fourth beast appeared, frightening and dreadful, and incredibly strong, with large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and it trampled with its feet whatever was left. It was different from all the beasts before it, and it had ten horns. **8** While I was considering the horns, suddenly another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. And suddenly in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that was speaking arrogantly.”

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**THE KINGDOM:** The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King. Particularly, the Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ.



Careful readers will notice the similarities between the four beasts in this vision and Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the layered statue in chapter 2. Daniel's vision is divided into four sections, each describing a different beast and kingdom (see Daniel 7:15-28). There has been much discussion about which kingdoms the beasts represent, but the consensus among scholars is that the beasts represent Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, respectively.

**Why do you think Daniel's vision represented kingdoms with beasts?**

The first beast was like a lion with an eagle's wings. The prophet Jeremiah used these images to describe Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jeremiah 49:19-22). The wings were torn off, and later, the beast was lifted up from the ground and restored with a human mind (Daniel 7:4). These events correspond with Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation and restoration in Daniel 4.

The second beast looked like a bear on its side, feasting on some previous prey. Someone told it to get up and eat more. This beast represented the Medo-Persian kingdom of King Cyrus, who conquered the Babylonians.

The third beast was like a leopard with four wings and four heads. This represented Greece. The kingdom and army of Alexander the Great was certainly as swift as a leopard and as vast as a bird's flight through the air. The four heads may mean this beast was looking in all directions for prey.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth and final beast, representing the kingdom of Rome, was the most terrifying of them all, so much so that it wasn't likened to any animal. With its incredible strength and large iron teeth, it devoured anything in its path, and anything that escaped the teeth was trampled by its feet. Significant among its ten horns was one little horn that came up and uprooted three others. It was personified with eyes and a mouth that communicated human arrogance and rebellion.

**How have you seen earthly kingdoms and nations devour people and display arrogance?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

DANIEL 7:9-14

### GOD ALONE REIGNS SUPREME, AND EVERY OTHER KINGDOM IS SUBJECT TO HIS WILL AND JUDGMENT.

*Circle the ways the Ancient of Days exercises His supreme authority over the kingdoms of the world.*

**9** “As I kept watching, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head like whitest wool. His throne was flaming fire; its wheels were blazing fire. **10** A river of fire was flowing, coming out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was convened, and the books were opened. **11** I watched, then, because of the sound of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued watching, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. **12** As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was removed, but an extension of life was granted to them for a certain period of time. **13** I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. **14** He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

#### CHRIST CONNECTION

God will give Jesus the authority to rule an everlasting kingdom of those who follow Him in faith. The “one like a son of man” (Daniel 7:13) is fulfilled in Jesus, who ascended into heaven in the presence of a cloud after His resurrection (Acts 1:9).



After contemplating the horror of the beastly kingdoms, we are refreshed through Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days on His supreme throne of judgment. Every human heart should long for this heavenly kingdom. No matter how bleak things look in one kingdom or the next, there is always hope with God. The Lord has not forgotten His people. His plan is not disrupted by any earthly kingdom nor any demonic spiritual influence. The Ancient of Days rules over them all.

**What differences do you notice between the kingdoms of the earth and God's kingdom?**

The beastly kingdoms of this world may think they are in control, but they are only sandcastles by the shore. God's kingdom is the ocean coming to knock them all down and wipe them all away. Their periods of dominance are in His hands, as is their very existence. And those rulers who would speak arrogantly should prepare themselves for the Lord's judgment. Nebuchadnezzar was brought low and then graciously restored (Daniel 4), but the arrogance of the little horn reaped its death and destruction by fire (7:11).

By contrast, there will be a kingdom instituted by the Ancient of Days that will far outweigh all the others. In Daniel 2, it is pictured as an untouched stone that destroyed the layered statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and then became a mountain filling the whole earth. Here in Daniel 7, we see this kingdom will be ruled by "one like a son of man . . . coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 13). The dominion of the kingdoms was taken from them, but an everlasting and all-encompassing dominion is given to this righteous figure who is able to approach the Ancient of Days.

This "one like a son of man" is none other than the God-man, Jesus Christ. Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus foretold His heavenly enthronement and His coming judgment with the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64). After His resurrection, He ascended to the Father in the presence of a cloud, fulfilling this vision, and He will return the same way (Acts 1:9,11). For all the glory every beastly kingdom thinks it has, it pales in comparison to the kingdom God is bringing to earth through Jesus.

**How can the promise of the kingdom of God help you respond faithfully to political turmoil and uncertainty today?**

## THE ANCIENT OF DAYS AND THE SON OF MAN

*Read Daniel 7:9-14. Record in the gaps descriptions of “the Ancient of Days” and “one like a son of man,” especially as they contrast with the beasts.*

THE  
ANCIENT  
OF DAYS

ONE LIKE  
A SON  
OF MAN

How do the qualities of “the Ancient of Days” and “the Son of Man” help us?



**Key Concept:** God will establish His forever kingdom through Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.



## HEAD

How does your thinking about the world's kingdoms need to change considering Daniel 7?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 93. Express your hope in the powerful and everlasting kingdom over which God rules. And praise the Lord with your trust in His Word and His promise that Jesus will reign over all forevermore.



## HEART

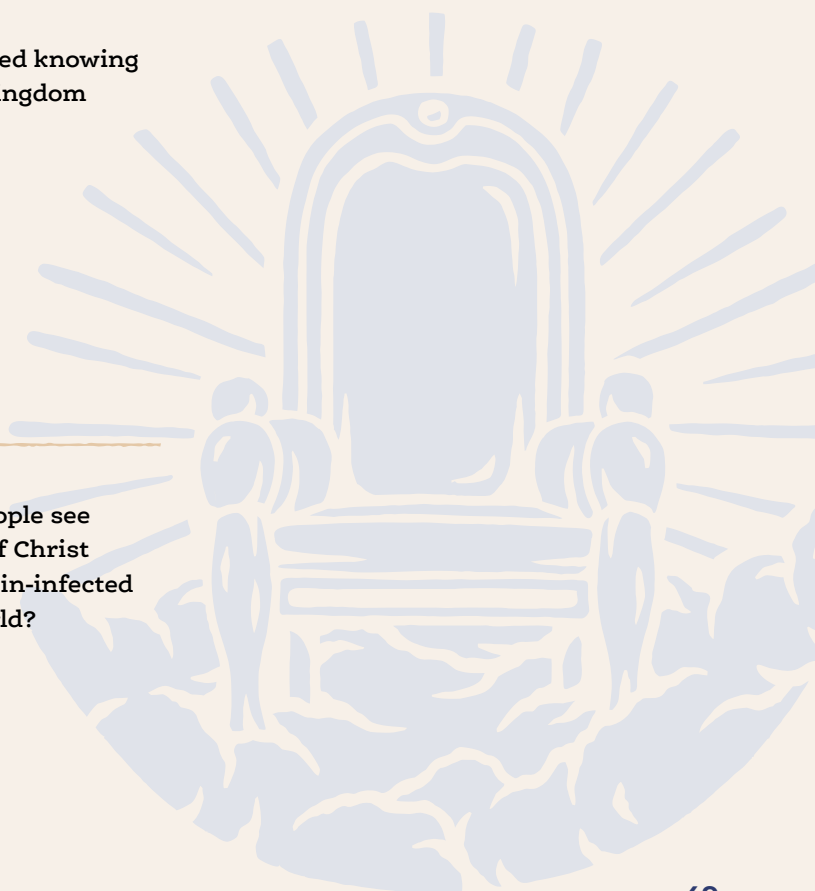
How are you comforted knowing Jesus's everlasting kingdom is coming?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

How can you help people see the better kingdom of Christ contrasted with the sin-infected kingdoms of this world?



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 17

## GOD IN THE RESTORATION



EZRA, ESTHER, ZECHARIAH



#### MEMORY VERSES

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph,  
Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to  
you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and  
riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse  
from Jerusalem. The bow of war will be removed,  
and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His  
dominion will extend from sea to sea, from the  
Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.”

—Zechariah 9:9-10



# THE PEOPLE RESTORED

CORE PASSAGE: EZRA 1:5-8; 3:1-7

## CONTEXT

After decades of disobedience and defeat, God's covenant people were a threadbare bunch. The best and brightest had been deported to Babylon, while the poor, the worn out, and the weak were left behind to work the land for the benefit of another nation. But after seventy years, a new power arrived on the scene to crush Babylon for their excesses, just as the Lord had promised. And King Cyrus of Persia then issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. God's people now held onto a thread of hope that restoration might come to their ragtag remnant.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.**

As you examine Ezra 1:5-8; 3:1-7:

- Recognize that even through discipline, God desires to restore His people.
- Highlight how King Cyrus recognized God's power and gave Him the praise He deserved.



## TIMELINE

King Nebuchadnezzar Takes the First Exiles to Babylon, Beginning the 70 Years of Exile (2 Kings 24; Daniel 1)

King Evil-Merodach Pardons King Jehoiachin of Judah in Babylon (2 Kings 25)

King Cyrus Issues Decree Allowing the Jews to Return to Judah (Ezra 1)

Nebuchadnezzar Destroys Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Kings 25)

Babylon Is Conquered by Medo-Persia (Daniel 5)

**SESSION STUDY: The First Group of Jews Returns and Lays the Foundation for the Temple (Ezra 1–3)**

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Joel 1:1–3:21

☐ **Day 2:** 2 Chronicles 36:22–23

☐ **Day 3:** Ezra 1:1–11

☐ **Day 4:** Ezra 2:1–70

☐ **Day 5:** Ezra 3:1–13

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 126



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

EZRA 1:5-8

### GOD WANTS TO RESTORE US BACK INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

*Underline all the people or groups mentioned in this passage.*

**5** So the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites—everyone whose spirit God had roused—prepared to go up and rebuild the LORD's house in Jerusalem. **6** All their neighbors supported them with silver articles, gold, goods, livestock, and valuables, in addition to all that was given as a freewill offering. **7** King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the LORD's house that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and had placed in the house of his gods. **8** King Cyrus of Persia had them brought out under the supervision of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though God's people had been exiled, God had a plan for restoration, to bring them back in relationship with Him and back to a place of worship. Many years later, the ultimate restorative work of God is found in Jesus's sacrifice through His crucifixion, allowing forgiveness of sin to restore our relationship with God forever and saving us from death and separation from Him.

**Key Concept:** God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.

Not long after creation, the sin of Adam changed everything and messed it all up with dire consequences for his sin. Yet God did not give up on humankind. Instead of starting all over, He initiated a plan of redemption—and God has been pursuing His people ever since. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of this redemptive work. God initiated covenants, instituted laws, provided systems, sent prophets, ordained rulers, and even moved hearts to go rebuild His house, all to pursue and provide for His people.

The author of Ezra clearly recognized God's providential hand in the Jews' return to Jerusalem (see Ezra 1:1-4). It often can be difficult to see such things in the moment, but with hindsight and, of course, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer saw it clearly that God moved massive mountains to bring His people home.

**As you look back, where can you see God's providential hand at work over your own life?**

From start to finish, the book of Ezra is a testimony of God's faithful work of restoration. God roused hearts, provided goods, returned articles, and more. God is always working, even when it seems all hope is lost.

This is a theme throughout the Old Testament. Just as the Lord worked to deliver His people from Egypt in His perfect timing, we can trust that He works in our lives in the same providential way. Just as He raised up the right ruler to send His people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, we can wait on His faithful care to lead the movements of our lives. We may not know or understand His timing. We may not like or enjoy His means. But God's work is sure and steadfast because it flows from His good and faithful character.

**How have you seen God's providential and restorative hand at work through the storyline of the Old Testament?**





EZRA 3:1-7

## SACRIFICE IS NEEDED AS PART OF OUR RESTORATION WITH GOD.

*Circle all the references to offerings to the Lord in this passage.*

**1** When the seventh month arrived, and the Israelites were in their towns, the people gathered as one in Jerusalem. **2** Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers began to build the altar of Israel's God in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. **3** They set up the altar on its foundation and offered burnt offerings for the morning and evening on it to the LORD even though they feared the surrounding peoples. **4** They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed, and offered burnt offerings each day, based on the number specified by ordinance for each festival day. **5** After that, they offered the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the beginning of each month and for all the LORD's appointed holy occasions, as well as the freewill offerings brought to the LORD. **6** On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, even though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid. **7** They gave money to the stonecutters and artisans, and gave food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so they would bring cedar wood from Lebanon to Joppa by sea, according to the authorization given them by King Cyrus of Persia.

**Key Concept:** God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.

After many months, God's people gathered to continue their process of settling in. No longer chained by the oppression of regimes, they were free to return to their homeland, resettle into ancestral rhythms, and rebuild their central place of worship. Ezra 3 records a major milestone in the history of their big move.

It is not an insignificant detail that they started with building the altar. It might have been a temptation to start building walls, ceilings, and corridors. But they started with the altar, "even though the foundation of the LORD's temple had not yet been laid" (3:6). The worship of God demanded sacrifice, and sacrifice required an altar. God's people could not resume worshiping the Lord as He had instituted long ago without an altar.

**Why might the Jews who returned to Jerusalem have been so focused on setting up the altar, offering sacrifices, and celebrating prescribed festivals?**

How easy it is to get sidetracked by what seems the most logical, practical, or economical. But we must follow in the footsteps of our spiritual forefathers and go with what is most worshipful. Through the final sacrifice of Christ, our worship as believers under the new covenant is no longer dependent on a physical altar, but we are still called to worship.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**CHRIST AS SACRIFICE:** There are several signs, symbols, and pointers in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ as being the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were unable to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), Christ's sacrifice on the cross was able to permanently, "once and for all," take away sins.

We too are in the middle of a move—a spiritual journey out of bondage into our new life with Christ. However, we do not need to build an altar to worship God. Instead, we must rely on the sufficiency of our Savior's sacrifice and respond to this grace through obedience-filled worship (Romans 12:1-2).

**What does worship and sacrifice look like today if there is no altar or physical sacrifice?**

## GOD'S PROVISION AND OUR RESPONSE

*Read Ezra 1:5-8; 3:1-7. Record what God provided for the returning exiles and how they responded.  
Then apply this pattern to yourself.*

WHAT GOD PROVIDED

HOW THE PEOPLE RESPONDED

WHAT GOD PROVIDES FOR ME

HOW I RESPOND

What do these passages reveal about God's desire for restoration?

**Key Concept:** God is faithful to reconcile and restore His people to Himself.



## HEAD

What keeps you from trusting that God is for you and not against you?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

✕ ————— ✕

Read Psalm 126. Praise the Lord for the ways He has restored your fortunes and joy, and pray for ways to honor the Lord in sharing this good news with others, especially sharing the gospel of God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.



## HEART

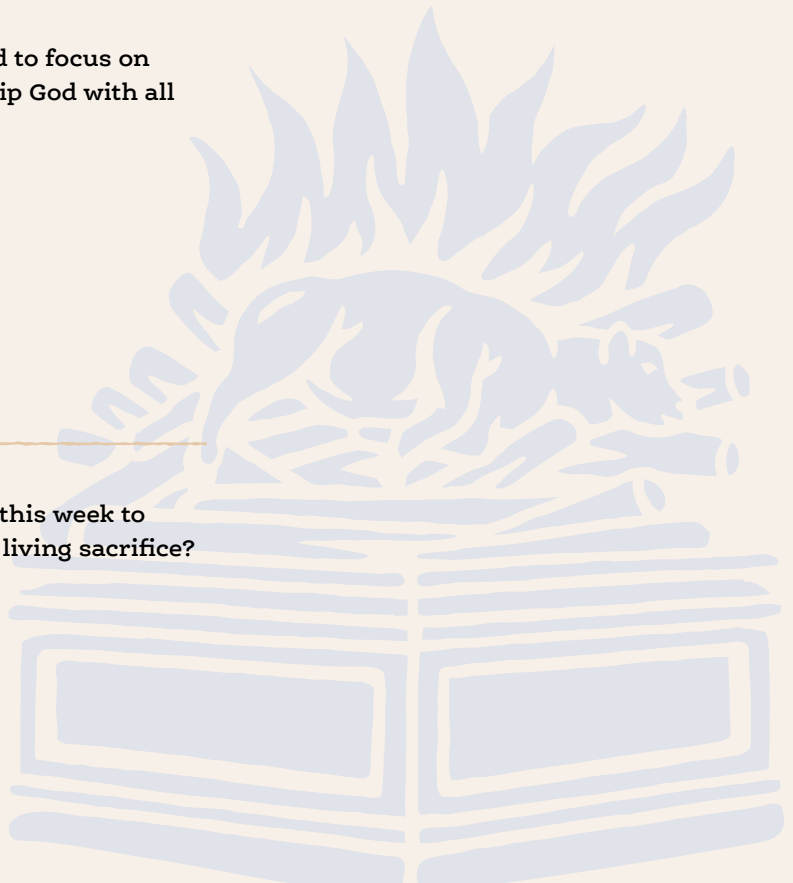
What do you need to focus on in order to worship God with all your heart?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

What can you do this week to worship God as a living sacrifice?



# THE TEMPLE REBUILT

CORE PASSAGE: EZRA 6:6-12,16-22

## CONTEXT

After the return to Jerusalem, God's remnant people prepared to rebuild the Lord's temple. The task ahead was daunting with opposition at every turn. On the surface, their work seemed insurmountable. Yet theirs was not a man-made assignment. They were commissioned by the Creator and Sustainer of all—the same God who providentially brought them back to their ancestral home and provided abundant supplies for the temple's reconstruction. This faithful Deliverer would continue to pave the way for them to complete the task, enabling them to proclaim His excellencies along the way.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God will restore worship of Him, resulting in a joyful celebration of His faithfulness.**

As you examine Ezra 6:6-12,16-22:

- Reflect on the reality that though enemies of God tried to stop the rebuilding of the temple, God had a plan in place.
- Recognize that joy comes with worship as we remember God's faithfulness in the past, present, and into the future.



## TIMELINE

King Cyrus of Persia Issues  
Decree Allowing the Jews to  
Return to Judah (Ezra 1)

The Jews Face Opposition  
and Pause Rebuilding the  
Temple (Ezra 4)

**SESSION STUDY:**  
The Temple Is Completed  
and Dedicated (Ezra 6)

The First Group of Jews Returns,  
Builds the Altar, and Lays the  
Foundation for the Temple (Ezra 1-3)

Haggai and Zechariah  
Encourage the Building  
to Resume (Ezra 5)

Ezra the Priest Returns to  
Judah and Instructs the People  
in the Law (Ezra 7-10)

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Ezra 4:1-5

☐ **Day 4:** Ezra 6:1-15

☐ **Day 2:** Ezra 4:24-5:2

☐ **Day 5:** Ezra 6:16-22

☐ **Day 3:** Ezra 5:3-17

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 20



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## GOD IS ABLE TO USE ANY MEANS TO RESTORE WORSHIP OF HIM.

*Circle the phrases in which King Darius references God as part of His decree.*

**6** Therefore, you must stay away from that place, Tattenai governor of the region west of the Euphrates River, Shethar-bozenai, and your colleagues, the officials in the region. **7** Leave the construction of the house of God alone. Let the governor and elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its original site. **8** I hereby issue a decree concerning what you are to do, so that the elders of the Jews can rebuild the house of God: The cost is to be paid in full to these men out of the royal revenues from the taxes of the region west of the Euphrates River, so that the work will not stop. **9** Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, and lambs for burnt offerings to the God of the heavens, or wheat, salt, wine, and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem—let it be given to them every day without fail, **10** so that they can offer sacrifices of pleasing aroma to the God of the heavens and pray for the life of the king and his sons. **11** I also issue a decree concerning any man who interferes with this directive: Let a beam be torn from his house and raised up; he will be impaled on it, and his house will be made into a garbage dump because of this offense. **12** May the God who caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who dares to harm or interfere with this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued the decree. Let it be carried out diligently.



**Key Concept:** God will restore worship of Him, resulting in a joyful celebration of His faithfulness.



Soon after the temple's foundation was set and dedicated, opposition to the work emerged. Enemies sought to sabotage the efforts of God's people: first by attempting to infiltrate their work and then by making them afraid to build; they also bribed officials to frustrate the work (4:1-5). Unfortunately, the enemies' crusade to crush the construction efforts succeeded.

The work on the house of God stopped "until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia" (4:24). For over a decade, the job site sat in silence. Day after day, year after year, God's people passed by the unfulfilled slab of rock dedicated for the structure central to their life and worship. Perhaps the people felt defeated, at first, but then that seemed to give way to disinterest as they turned their focus to their own houses (Haggai 1:2-4).

**When has opposition discouraged you from obeying the Lord?**

In His perfect timing, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to re-declare God's plan and stir up God's people to restart the rebuilding efforts. But this also rekindled the difficulties—a letter from the regional governor was sent to the king of Persia asking if this rebuild was allowed (Ezra 5:1-17).

The faithful God of Israel led King Darius of Persia to respond to the letter with a clear decree in the Jews' favor. First, Cyrus's original decree was found (6:1-5). Then in keeping with Medo-Persian law, in which a decree of the king is irrevocable (Daniel 6:8), and in deference to "the God of the heavens," Darius supported, protected, and provided for the construction of God's house (Ezra 6:6-12). The Lord used both Cyrus and Darius to accomplish His will.

**How does God's sovereignty relate to His faithfulness, as seen in this passage?**

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**GOD IS FAITHFUL:** God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:13; 1 Peter 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word in 1 Thessalonians 5:24. We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

EZRA 6:16-22

### WHEN WE CELEBRATE GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS, JOYFUL WORSHIP ENSUES.

*Underline the ways the Israelites celebrated the dedication of the temple “with joy.”*

**16** Then the Israelites, including the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. **17** For the dedication of God's house they offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, and four hundred lambs, as well as twelve male goats as a sin offering for all Israel—one for each Israelite tribe. **18** They also appointed the priests by their divisions and the Levites by their groups to the service of God in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the book of Moses. **19** The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. **20** All of the priests and Levites were ceremonially clean, because they had purified themselves. They killed the Passover lamb for themselves, their priestly brothers, and all the exiles. **21** The Israelites who had returned from exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the Gentiles of the land in order to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. **22** They observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, because the LORD had made them joyful, having changed the Assyrian king's attitude toward them, so that he supported them in the work on the house of the God of Israel.

## CHURCH CONNECTION

God made the rebuilding of the temple possible so the people could see His faithfulness to them, resulting in joy and celebration. God's faithfulness is revealed ultimately in His provision of His Son, Jesus Christ, which results in ultimate joy and celebration for believers today.

**Key Concept:** God will restore worship of Him, resulting in a joyful celebration of His faithfulness.

The people celebrated, offered, appointed, observed, and more “in order to worship the LORD” (Ezra 6:21). And all of this unfolded in the context of community and “with joy, because the LORD had made them joyful” (v. 22). Worship activates action, fosters fellowship, and rouses rejoicing. The context of the majority of God’s commands surrounding worship is corporate, expecting a body of believers with a common goal of God’s glory.

Though we no longer slay lambs and build temples, we can worship with the same fervor and joy, together as the church. Worship isn’t passive or solitary. While lyrics and mountaintops may stir our souls, the call to worship leads God’s people to active, corporate rejoicing in who God is and all He has done.

**What obstacles in your life might you need to address to worship God actively, corporately, and joyfully?**

Within a month of the temple’s completion and dedication, the time arrived for Passover—a long-standing celebration of God’s deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt—and then the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Both were instituted by the Lord at the beginning of the exodus “because on this very day I brought your military divisions out of the land of Egypt. You must observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent statute” (Exodus 12:17).

Recalling God’s faithfulness is vital to our faith and worship. Day by day, year by year, generation after generation, we are called to remember who God is and all He has done. He is good. He does good. He is worthy of our praise. Though the remnant Jews in Jerusalem faced an uncertain future under Persian rule, they chose to worship God for His past deeds and what He was presently doing. When the future seems cloudy, we can look to our past and present to see how God has unfailingly provided all we needed, precisely when we needed it.

**How can remembering God’s past and present faithfulness help you worship God more deeply today?**



## GOD'S CONTINUING FAITHFULNESS

*Read the following Scriptures and write down how God displayed His faithfulness.  
Then record how God has shown you His faithfulness.*

|                   |               |
|-------------------|---------------|
| EXODUS 14:13-31   | DANIEL 2:1-23 |
| ACTS 2:36-47      | ACTS 5:25-42  |
| EZRA 6:6-12,16-22 |               |
| TODAY             |               |

What part do we play in the restoration of God's worship in the world today?

**Key Concept:** God will restore worship of Him, resulting in a joyful celebration of His faithfulness.



## HEAD

What are some ways you can regularly remind yourself that you exist for God's glory?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 20. Call for the Lord's help in your "day of trouble" (v. 1) and express your faith in His deliverance and victory, however He chooses to bring that about. Praise Him for His faithfulness to His people who call on His name.



## HEART

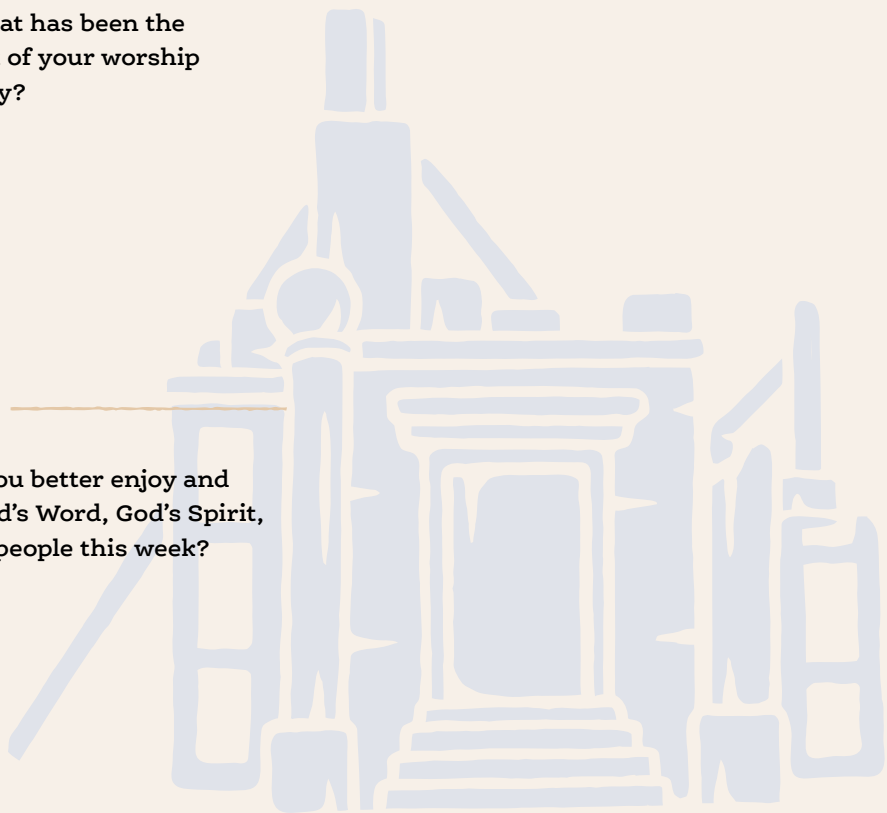
Who or what has been the true object of your worship lately? Why?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

How can you better enjoy and employ God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's people this week?



# THE KING PROMISED

CORE PASSAGE: ZECHARIAH 9:9-17

## CONTEXT

In His perfect timing, the Lord used prophets as His mouthpiece to deliver divine messages to His people. Often they warned the people of consequences for their sin while also holding out a future hope. The book of Zechariah is split into two sections. Chapters 1–8 called the Jews to reject complacency and return to God. After declaring God’s call to repentance and the restoration obedience would bring, Zechariah unveiled in chapters 9–14 a hope-filled, divine plan—a promise that stretched far beyond their immediate horizon and wildest dreams.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God will provide a messianic King who will restore and save His people.**

As you examine Zechariah 9:9-17:

- Notice how Zechariah described the coming king who would restore God’s people and kingdom.
- Take comfort in the truth that the Lord will save His people because they are precious to Him.



## TIMELINE

The First Group of Jews Returns, Builds the Altar, and Lays the Foundation for the Temple (Ezra 1–3)

Haggai and Zechariah Encourage the Building to Resume (Ezra 5)

The Temple Is Completed and Dedicated (Ezra 6)

The Jews Face Opposition and Pause Rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 4)

**SESSION STUDY: Zechariah**  
Prophesies of the Coming Messiah (Zechariah 9)

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7–10)

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Haggai 1–2

☐ **Day 4:** Zechariah 7–8

☐ **Day 2:** Zechariah 1–3

☐ **Day 5:** Zechariah 9–14

☐ **Day 3:** Zechariah 4–6

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 2



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

ZECHARIAH 9:9-13

## THE PROMISED MESSIANIC KING WILL BE RIGHTEOUS AND HUMBLE, RIDING ON A DONKEY.

*Circle everything attributed to the promised King in this passage.*

**9** Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. **10** I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The bow of war will be removed, and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will extend from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. **11** As for you, because of the blood of your covenant, I will release your prisoners from the waterless cistern. **12** Return to a stronghold, you prisoners who have hope; today I declare that I will restore double to you. **13** For I will bend Judah as my bow; I will fill that bow with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, Zion, against your sons, Greece. I will make you like a warrior's sword.



**Key Concept:** God will provide a messianic King who will restore and save His people.

Verse 9 reveals much about the promised Messiah-King. First, He emerges as “your” King. He will belong to God’s people; He won’t be a foreign king like those who had subdued them for nearly a century. This King most certainly would be of David’s line, a true and proper King of the Jews.

Second, this promised King is “coming.” There is a divine plan in place surrounding Him, which leads to the third detail to see—He is coming “to you.” God’s people could expect this promised One to come to them. Next, the text lists various traits of this Messiah: righteous, victorious, humble. Most rulers barely embody one of those characteristics, never all three.

Lastly, verse 9 tells us the King will ride on a donkey’s foal. With New Testament insight, we see this fulfilled in Matthew 21, when Jesus triumphantly rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey a week before His death and resurrection—a day we celebrate each year as Palm Sunday.

**Why is the King’s humility such a unique characteristic to highlight?**

#### CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is the coming King riding on a donkey, as prophesied by Zechariah. His peace and dominion will be an everlasting kingdom for those who believe in Him.

Zechariah also declared the King’s victory. War will cease. He will proclaim peace to the nations. He will rule from sea to sea. His kingdom will extend to the ends of the earth.

Though much of what Zechariah foretold has been accomplished, God’s restoration plan continues. From where we stand, we see more clearly than the people of Zechariah’s time, yet the Messiah’s kingdom awaits completion. So until that day when Jesus comes again, with Christ we pray: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

**What might life look like if God’s kingdom ruled in every corner of this earth?**

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

ZECHARIAH 9:14-17

### GOD WILL DEFEND AND SAVE HIS BELOVED PEOPLE THROUGH HIS MESSIAH-KING.

*Circle every action of the Lord in the text.*

**14** Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will fly like lightning. The Lord God will sound the ram's horn and advance with the southern storms. **15** The LORD of Armies will defend them. They will consume and conquer with slingstones; they will drink and be rowdy as if with wine. They will be as full as the sprinkling basin, like those at the corners of the altar. **16** The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people; for they are like jewels in a crown, sparkling over his land. **17** How lovely and beautiful! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine, the young women.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**CHRIST AS KING:** God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

**Key Concept:** God will provide a messianic King who will restore and save His people.

This passage reveals two vivid portraits of God's provision. First, God emerges as the divine, majestic commander. Arrows fly, trumpets sound, storms surge—this is frenetic battle language. Zechariah paints the sovereign Lord of Armies as defending and saving His people. This provision descends from above, as He “will appear over them” (v. 14). The fire of His glorious presence guides and guards His people—echoing His guidance and provision in the exodus (Exodus 13:21-22).

As a result, God's people will conquer, celebrate, and flourish (Zechariah 9:15,17). Yet they will not sit on the sidelines; God will lead them to action—they will “conquer with slingstones.” Just as David toppled Goliath the giant with humble stones and faith in God (1 Samuel 17:49-50), they too will claim victory and rejoice as they trust in their heavenly King.

**What victories has God provided that you can celebrate today?**

God stands not only as the strong and stately Lord of Armies but also as the Savior of His flock. As Jesus later declared, He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11). This second portrait of provision, that of Savior, pulses with deep tenderness. The Lord cherishes His sheep “like jewels in a crown,” treasuring them as His prized possession (Zechariah 9:16). He nourishes and cares for them, and they grow lovely and beautiful.

What a striking contrast of provision! The Lord's glorious salvation spans the powerful deliverance of troops in battle and the nurturing care of treasured souls. The Lord Jesus came to save His people. The Good Shepherd rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, yet within a week, He was crucified on a cross. The war His people expected never erupted. Instead, King Jesus triumphed in a greater battle, saving His people from sin and death. Though His work on the cross stands complete, the Good Shepherd still seeks and saves the lost, desiring all to come to repentance until He returns for His treasured people (Luke 19:10; 2 Peter 3:9).

**How have you experienced the tender care of the Good Shepherd lately?**



## EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY

*Read the Scriptures below. In the space provided, write how the reality of the kingdom of God far exceeds our expectations.*

### ZECHARIAH 9:9-10

**EXPECTED:**  
A Conquering King  
**REALITY:**

### JOHN 18:33-37

**EXPECTED:**  
Political Dominance  
**REALITY:**

### HEBREWS 9:11-14

**EXPECTED:**  
Temporary Deliverance  
**REALITY:**

### PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

**EXPECTED:**  
Strength Through Force  
**REALITY:**

How does recognizing Jesus as the humble, righteous King shape our understanding of His rule in our lives today?

How might we expect Jesus to fit our own desires rather than submitting to His reign?

**Key Concept:** God will provide a messianic King who will restore and save His people.



## HEAD

How can we focus on Christ as our King this week and submit to His rule?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 2. Praise the Lord, who is sovereign over all kings and kingdoms, and thank Him for the promised gift of King Jesus, His Son. Finally, pray for your non-believing friends and family to be receptive to the good news of Jesus and His kingdom.



## HEART

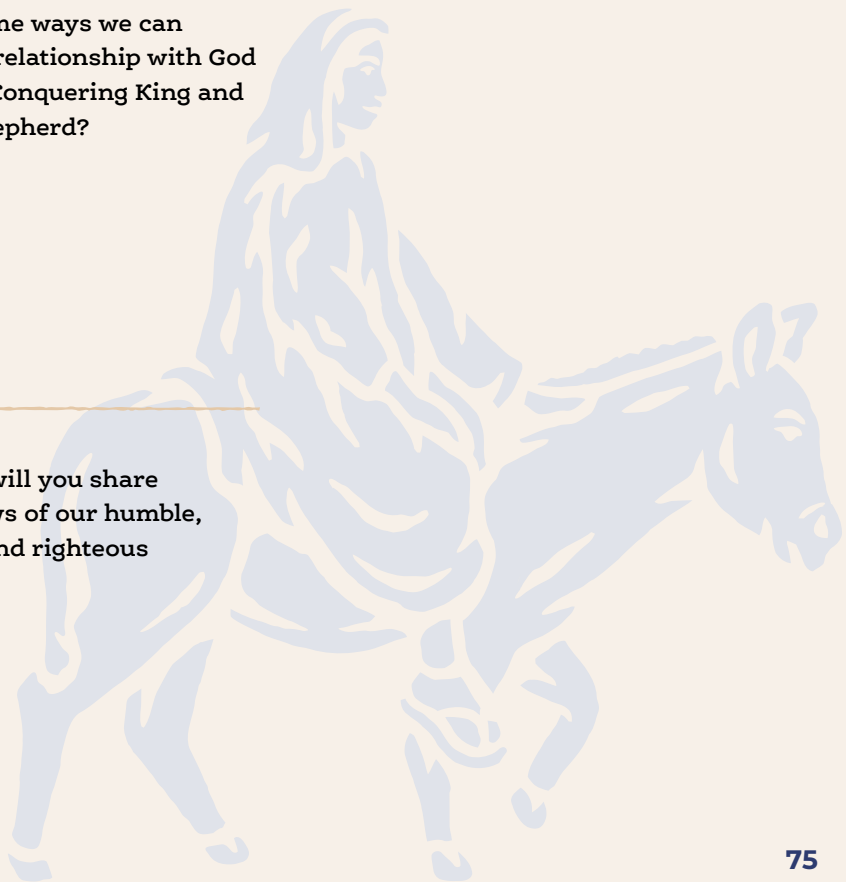
What are some ways we can nurture our relationship with God as both our Conquering King and our Good Shepherd?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

With whom will you share the good news of our humble, victorious, and righteous King Jesus?



# THE PEOPLE RESCUED

CORE PASSAGE: ESTHER 3:7-9,13; 8:5,11-13,17

## CONTEXT

Though many Jews returned to Judah to reclaim and rebuild the way of life that had been lost, many stayed put. The original exiles who had survived the deportations settled in their new home, married, and had children, just as Jeremiah had commanded them (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Over the seventy years of exile and beyond, generations were born and raised in the foreign lands of Babylon and Persia. But because of the passage of time, these lands no longer seemed so foreign; rather, they had become home. Yet even in these places distant from their homeland, God was watching over His people.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God rescues His people even in the face of imminent destruction.**

As you examine Esther 3:7-9,13;  
8:5,11-13,17:

- Recognize that though it may seem God is not present or working, He always is.
- Rejoice that God keeps His promises and covenants, preserving His people.



## TIMELINE

The First Group of Jews  
Returns and Rebuilds the  
Temple (Ezra 1–6)

**STUDY SESSION:**  
**Esther and Mordecai Rescue God's  
People from Destruction (Esther 3–10)**

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds  
the Wall Around Jerusalem  
(Nehemiah 1–6)

Esther Is Made Queen of  
Persia (Esther 1–2)

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and  
Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7–10)

## Daily Readings

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 1:</b> Esther 1–2 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 4:</b> Esther 6–7  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 2:</b> Esther 3   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 5:</b> Esther 8–10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 3:</b> Esther 4–5 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 6:</b> Psalm 71    |



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

ESTHER 3:7-9,13

### EVEN AT THE BRINK OF SEEMING DESTRUCTION, GOD IS WORKING AMONG HIS PEOPLE.

*Underline the orders given for the destruction of the Jews.*

**7** In the first month, the month of Nisan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, the pur—that is, the lot—was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar. **8** Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, “There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, keeping themselves separate. Their laws are different from everyone else’s and they do not obey the king’s laws. It is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. **9** If the king approves, let an order be drawn up authorizing their destruction, and I will pay 375 tons of silver to the officials for deposit in the royal treasury.” . . . **13** Letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces telling the officials to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jewish people— young and old, women and children—and plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**GOD’S PLAN AND HUMAN ACTION:** God’s sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings (Proverbs 19:21). In ways we cannot fully comprehend, the Lord’s plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God’s overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.



**Key Concept:** God rescues His people even in the face of imminent destruction.



Embedded in Esther's colorful story—filled with beauty treatments, harems, lavish banquets, and dangerous requests—there was a power struggle. Two men serving the king began to clash. Haman, a descendant of Agag and recently promoted official, took offense when Mordecai, Esther's guardian, refused to honor him. When he learned Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided to destroy all of Mordecai's people with him (v. 6). Haman would not rest until Mordecai—and every Jew—was put to death.

As the highest-ranking official in the nation, Haman posed an imminent threat to God's people throughout the entire kingdom of Persia. With malicious intent, Haman moved every political mountain he could to eliminate Mordecai and his people. Finally, he manipulated King Ahasuerus to decree the annihilation of the Jews (vv. 8-15).

**Why do you think God allows hatred and harm for His people?**

Though shocked and in a state of mourning over the deadly decree, Mordecai didn't give up the fight. Five years before Haman had concocted his murderous plot, a young Jewish girl named Hadassah was plucked out of obscurity to become Queen Esther of Persia (2:7,16-17). Mordecai rightly recognized this providential placement and urged Esther to use her influence with the king: "Perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this" (4:14).

The events of the book of Esther read quickly, yet they take place over a decade (483–473 BC). We see the sudden seismic shifts in the story, but we must recognize that many mundane moments passed by in the meantime and that God was working all along. The events that turn our lives upside down do not come as a surprise to God. He's been preparing us for "such a time" all along.

**How has God prepared you for particular opportunities or seasons you didn't see coming?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

ESTHER 8:5,11-13,17

### GOD CARRIES OUT HIS PURPOSES OF RESCUE AND DELIVERANCE.

*Circle the orders given for the defense and preservation of the Jews.*

**5** She said, “If it pleases the king and I have found favor with him, if the matter seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a royal edict be written. Let it revoke the documents the scheming Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces. . . . **11** The king’s edict gave the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every ethnic and provincial army hostile to them, including women and children, and to take their possessions as spoils of war. **12** This would take place on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar. **13** A copy of the text, issued as law throughout every province, was distributed to all the peoples so the Jews could be ready to avenge themselves against their enemies on that day. . . . **17** In every province and every city where the king’s command and edict reached, gladness and joy took place among the Jews. There was a celebration and a holiday. And many of the ethnic groups of the land professed themselves to be Jews because fear of the Jews had overcome them.

**Key Concept:** God rescues His people even in the face of imminent destruction.



The theme of favor runs through the story of Esther. She first found favor “in the eyes of everyone who saw her” (2:15) and then with the king, gaining “more favor and approval” than all the other women (2:17). Later when Esther risked her life before the king, “she gained favor with him” (5:2) and appealed to that favor in her petitions (5:8; 7:3; 8:5). Esther’s rise to royalty was not due to her pretty face and charismatic personality. She didn’t earn the crown. Esther had the gracious hand of God upon her life orchestrating these events for His glory and good purposes, even though He is not explicitly named in the story.

**How have you experienced the unmerited favor of God in your life?**

see that God, indeed, was working. But there is no glaring internal evidence from the book itself that Mordecai or Esther possessed the heroic faith we hold them so high for having.

Granting that Esther and Mordecai were the best versions we hope they were, although there are lessons we can learn from their example, ultimately neither of them is the hero of the story. The main takeaway of the book is not to become more like Esther or Mordecai; it is to trust in the provision and power of our all-seeing, all-powerful, all-faithful covenant-keeping God. He is the hero of the story.

**What characteristics of God stand out to you as clearly displayed in the book of Esther?**

We tend to read stories seeking a hero to emulate, distilling them down into three alliterative application points for self-improvement. Yet a careful, honest reading through Esther reveals both Mordecai and Esther as works in progress. Even in their correspondence back and forth, there is no mention of trust in God. We can read between the lines and

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

God remains true to His covenant in having a people for Himself and will provide a way to trust in Him. This was true for Esther, even in a foreign land, and it is true for believers today who trust in Jesus to rescue us from sin and death.

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

*Read the case study below and consider Esther's and Mordecai's examples for possible ways to respond. Finally, consider what you would do.*

**CASE STUDY:** Recently, a new government law has declared that churches must submit all sermon manuscripts for approval before preaching. Failure to comply could lead to heavy fines, imprisonment, or even the closure of the church. You and your fellow church members must decide how to proceed.

### CONCEAL

Esther 2:10-11,20

### DEFY

Esther 3:1-5

### SUBMIT

Esther 7:1-4

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

How can we know the wise and godly response when facing persecution?

How does knowing that God not only rescues but also preserves His people shape our decisions?

**Key Concept:** God rescues His people even in the face of imminent destruction.



## HEAD

What verses could we memorize this week to help us remember God's power and sovereignty?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 71, and pray specifically through verses 1-8. Seek the Lord for refuge and rescue from your troubles (vv. 1-4). Express your reasons for hope in the Lord and praise Him for His faithfulness to you (vv. 5-8).

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HEART

How might a better grasp of God's favor and providence affect your peace?



## HANDS

How will you honor God with the influence He has given you "for such a time as this"?



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

# UNIT 18

## GOD IN THE RETURN



NEHEMIAH; MALACHI; LUKE



#### MEMORY VERSES

“Look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,’ says the LORD of Armies, ‘not leaving them root or branches. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.’”

—Malachi 4:1-2



# THE WALL REBUILT

CORE PASSAGE: NEHEMIAH 1:5-11; 6:2-9,15-16

## CONTEXT

The book of Nehemiah opens in late fall, early winter of 446 or 445 BC. Nehemiah was an Israelite living in exile who had been appointed to be the king's cupbearer, a highly honored role that allowed him close access to the king. Nehemiah was in Susa, a royal fortress city of the Medo-Persian Empire, located in modern-day Iran. There, Nehemiah received a troubling report from the Israelites who had returned to the land as God promised, and he prayed for the opportunity to do something about it.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God restores His people when they repent so that the world would know He is God.**

As you examine Nehemiah 1:5-11; 6:2-9,15-16:

- Highlight that the restoration of God's people began with confession and repentance.
- Receive encouragement that even God's enemies recognize His powerful work in the lives of His people.





## TIMELINE

The First Group of Jews Returns  
and Rebuilds the Temple (Ezra 1-6)

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and  
Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7-10)

Ezra Reads the Book of the Law  
in Celebration (Nehemiah 8)

Esther and Mordecai Rescue God's  
People from Destruction (Esther 1-10)

**SESSION STUDY: Nehemiah Returns  
and Rebuilds the Wall Around Jerusalem  
(Nehemiah 1-6)**

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Ezra 4:6-23

☐ **Day 2:** Ezra 7:1-8:36

☐ **Day 3:** Ezra 9:1-10:44

☐ **Day 4:** Nehemiah 1:1-3:32

☐ **Day 5:** Nehemiah 4:1-6:19

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 41



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

### NEHEMIAH 1:5-11

## WITH REPENTANCE COMES RESTORATION.

*Underline any words or phrases relating to God's covenant with His people.*

**5** I said, LORD, the God of the heavens, the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant with those who love him and keep his commands, **6** let your eyes be open and your ears be attentive to hear your servant's prayer that I now pray to you day and night for your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we have committed against you. Both I and my father's family have sinned. **7** We have acted corruptly toward you and have not kept the commands, statutes, and ordinances you gave your servant Moses. **8** Please remember what you commanded your servant Moses: "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. **9** But if you return to me and carefully observe my commands, even though your exiles were banished to the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I chose to have my name dwell." **10** They are your servants and your people. You redeemed them by your great power and strong hand. **11** Please, LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to that of your servants who delight to revere your name. Give your servant success today, and grant him compassion in the presence of this man. At the time, I was the king's cupbearer.

### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**REPENTANCE:** Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Psalm 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration, in other words, the human side of our conversion.



After hearing about the distressing condition of the returned exiles and Jerusalem itself, Nehemiah turned to prayer. He did not suppress his emotions; he wept and mourned “for a number of days” (v. 4), but he also fasted and prayed for God’s forgiveness and favor.

**What is your first reaction when you hear distressing news?**

Nehemiah’s prayer was based on the covenant God made with the Israelites, and Nehemiah’s hope was founded on God’s character. On multiple occasions during their forty-year trek through the desert, God reminded the Israelites that one of the consequences for not upholding their part of the covenant would be exile from the promised land (Leviticus 26:27-33; Deuteronomy 28:58-68). At the time of Nehemiah’s prayer, this had already happened. Nehemiah acknowledged the people’s sins (Nehemiah 1:6-7), but he also recalled the redemption promised when the people repented (v. 9). Though God had restored the people to their land, the restoration wasn’t yet complete.

While we might not ever be exiled from our physical homes, our disobedience to God will bring consequences. But He doesn’t leave us without hope! Deuteronomy 28 contains intense curses for the Israelites’ disobedience, but Deuteronomy 30:1-10 shows God’s heart behind the punishment: to bring His people back to Him and bless them. Nehemiah knew this, and his prayer reflected his trust in God’s faithfulness.

Nehemiah prayed this prayer about a thousand years after the establishment of God’s covenant with Israel, yet he spoke of God’s promises like they were personal and active. They were! Nehemiah lived under the old covenant, and believers today live under the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15), but God’s character and plan for the world remain the same. Just as Nehemiah descended from Abraham’s line, we too are spiritual descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:6-7). We can rest on God’s faithfulness just like Nehemiah did.

**When have you faced consequences for your sin, and how did the Lord lead you back to Him?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

NEHEMIAH 6:2-9,15-16

### GOD WILL RESTORE HIS PEOPLE TO REVEAL HIS GLORY AND SOVEREIGNTY.

*Underline the dialogue in this passage, noting the motivation of each person speaking.*

**2** Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message: “Come, let’s meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley.” They were planning to harm me. **3** So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing important work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” **4** Four times they sent me the same proposal, and I gave them the same reply. **5** Sanballat sent me this same message a fifth time by his aide, who had an open letter in his hand. **6** In it was written: It is reported among the nations—and Geshem agrees—that you and the Jews plan to rebel. This is the reason you are building the wall. According to these reports, you are to become their king **7** and have even set up the prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim on your behalf, “There is a king in Judah.” These rumors will be heard by the king. So come, let’s confer together. **8** Then I replied to him, “There is nothing to these rumors you are spreading; you are inventing them in your own mind.” **9** For they were all trying to intimidate us, saying, “They will drop their hands from the work, and it will never be finished.” But now, my God, strengthen my hands. . . . **15** The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. **16** When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.

**Key Concept:** God restores His people when they repent so that the world would know He is God.



Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem appear in 2:19 and chapter 4. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, Tobiah was an Ammonite and possibly the governor east of the Jordan River, and Geshem was an Arab, one of those who had settled in the Negev and trans-Jordan area.<sup>1</sup> These foreign leaders opposed Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's wall from the beginning and are mentioned together in 6:1. When Sanballat and Geshem approached Nehemiah in this passage, the wall almost entirely finished, but they still tried to thwart Nehemiah's plans.

Nehemiah easily recognized their deceit and refused to be intimidated (vv. 2,10-13). Rather than engaging in their false accusations or halting his work (vv. 6-7), Nehemiah responded firmly and truthfully (v. 8). Instead of entering into a debate or attempting to prove the men wrong, he prayed to the Lord: "But now, my God, strengthen my hands" (v. 9).

**What are some ways Christians can respond confidently and graciously to intimidation or false accusations?**

Nehemiah remained faithful to the task God set before him, unshaken by repeated obstacles and opposition. Because of this, the wall was finished, and God blessed Nehemiah's efforts and glorified His own name (vv. 15-16). Because of it, the surrounding nations recognized Jerusalem's success as the work of God.

**How can you be faithful to God's call in this season, even if someone or something opposes you?**

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

Restoring and returning the Israelites back to Jerusalem reflects God's heart in wanting to be with His people. God also is in the work of restoration in our lives today as we choose to repent and believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. And when we sin and repent, He restores our fellowship with Him.

## GOD'S DESIRE FOR RESTORATION

*Read the Scripture passages below. Fill in the chart comparing the various aspects of the Israelites' story in Nehemiah with Peter's story in John.*

|                              | <b>THE ISRAELITES</b><br>Nehemiah 1:5-11; 6:2-9,15-16 | <b>PETER</b><br>John 18:15-17,25-27; 21:15-19 |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>How They Sinned</b>       |   |   |
| <b>How They Reacted</b>      |   |   |
| <b>How God Restored Them</b> |   |   |

How does Nehemiah's prayer and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall reveal God's character and commitment to restore His people?

How might repenting from sin and turning to Jesus bring honor and glory to Him?

**Key Concept:** God restores His people when they repent so that the world would know He is God.



## HEAD

Why is it important that we turn to God before acting or reacting to troubling events?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

✕ ————— ✕

Read Psalm 41, noting how Nehemiah's experience relates to David's experience. Pray that the Lord will shape your heart in such a way to put faithfulness to Him above all earthly concerns.

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



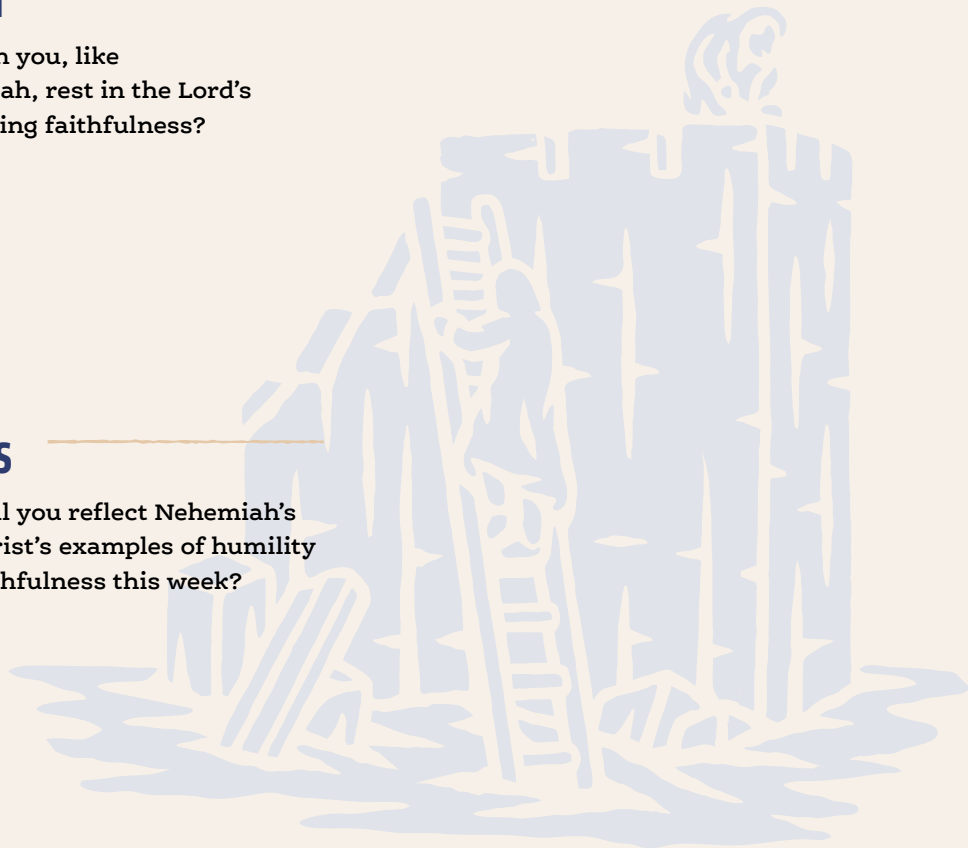
## HEART

How can you, like Nehemiah, rest in the Lord's continuing faithfulness?



## HANDS

How will you reflect Nehemiah's and Christ's examples of humility and faithfulness this week?



# EZRA THE PRIEST

By Caroline Chong

As a man with a book of the Bible bearing his name, Ezra may be one of the least well-known figures on the historical timeline of Scripture, yet he was instrumental in the spiritual health and well-being of the Jews who returned home after their exile to Babylon. Ezra was a priest descended directly from the high priest Aaron, Moses's brother (Ezra 7:1-5), and he was a scribe, "an expert in matters of the LORD's commands and statutes for Israel" (v. 11).

## RETURN FROM EXILE

In 538 BC, King Cyrus of Persia allowed Israelites to return to their homeland after several decades of living as exiles in the Babylonian Empire (1:1-4). Zerubbabel led the first major group of returnees, who rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem and reinstated the worship of the Lord (Ezra 1-6).

Ezra led the second major wave of exiles returning to Judah in 458 BC, about eighty years after Cyrus's initial decree (7:1-9). King Artaxerxes gave Ezra permission, protection, and provisions to return to Jerusalem with any Israelites who wished to go; he also gave Ezra authority over anyone "west of the Euphrates" to teach them God's law for the good of the Persian Kingdom (vv. 12-26)!

Ezra is a beautiful example of humility in leadership. He took time gathering people to return to Jerusalem with him, seeking qualified and willing Levites to serve in the temple, even though he himself was a priest (8:1-20). He knew that he couldn't and shouldn't do this task alone. Furthermore, Ezra proclaimed a fast among the returnees before their journey to humble themselves and ask for God's protection for their travels (vv. 21-23). And once they arrived safely, Ezra led them in three days of rest before beginning their work (v. 32).

## PURIFICATION OF THE PEOPLE

Soon after arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra was informed of a grave situation that had developed among the first group of returnees—many had intermarried with those from the surrounding peoples, pagans with detestable practices (9:1-2). Devastated, Ezra offered a prayer of corporate confession for this sin of the people (vv. 3-15), and then he began the messy but necessary work of sending away the foreign wives that the Israelite men and leaders had taken and their children (Ezra 10).



This purification of the community was less about racial differences and more about religious ones, seeing as intermarriage and idolatry had previously led the Israelites to imitate the pagan nations around them and thereby earn their exile in the first place. The New Testament would address this same problem by saying:

Do not be yoked together with those who do not believe. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? . . . And what agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. (2 Corinthians 6:14,16)

Ezra didn't assume a self-righteous attitude over the people in this matter but led with conviction and humility, grieving their sins. For their own good, he sought the Israelites' faithful obedience to God's law, no matter how difficult the process.

About twelve years later, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 BC, and he and Ezra served alongside one another in the leadership of the people. After Nehemiah rebuilt the city wall, an assembly was called in which Ezra read aloud the book of the Law to all the people who were gathered. Making sure the people understood what was read, he led them in renewing their joyful obedience to the Lord, who had rescued them from their exile (Nehemiah 8).

## FORESHADOW OF CHRIST

In the person of Ezra we see a type, or foreshadow, of Christ. The main purpose of Ezra's return to the land was to study God's law, obey it, and teach it to the returned exiles in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Almost five

centuries later, young Jesus astounded the teachers in the temple with His understanding and answers (Luke 2:46-47), obeyed God's law perfectly in the wilderness and throughout His life (Luke 4:1-13; Hebrews 4:15), and taught the fullness of God's meaning and intent behind His law (Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:20-49).

Ezra lamented the Israelites' unfaithfulness to God (Ezra 9:3-5); Jesus wept over Jerusalem just days before being crucified by His own people (Luke 19:41-44). Ezra assumed the people's sins and confessed them to God, despite having played no part in them (Ezra 9:6-15). The sinless Christ humbly bore our guilt and shame on the cross that we might have a relationship with Him and be pardoned from God's just judgment of our sins (1 Peter 2:22-25). Ezra the priest modeled being a selfless servant-leader and thereby foreshadowed the perfect great high priest to come—Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:14-16).

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# THE LAW TAUGHT

CORE PASSAGE: NEHEMIAH 8:2-12

## CONTEXT

After completing the wall around Jerusalem, Nehemiah established measures around the city to protect them from their opponents (Nehemiah 7:1-4). He then reiterated the initial census of returnees recorded in Ezra 2 (Nehemiah 7:5-73a) with the intention of repopulating Jerusalem (7:4-5) and renewing their covenant with God (8:1). To do this, Ezra read the Torah—the first five books of the Bible written by Moses—to the people. The Torah contained the Israelites' history, God's covenant with them, the covenant stipulations, and God's promised blessings and curses.

## KEY CONCEPT

**Scripture should lead us to worship, repent, and celebrate.**

As you examine Nehemiah 8:2-12:

- Note the connection that reading God's Word leads us to worship Him.
- Recognize that rightly understanding God's Word causes us to both mourn our sin and rejoice in our salvation found in Christ.



## TIMELINE

The First Group of Jews  
Returns and Rebuilds the  
Temple (Ezra 1–6)

Esther and Mordecai Rescue  
God's People from Destruction  
(Esther 1–10)

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah  
and Instructs the People in the  
Law (Ezra 7–10)

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds  
the Wall Around Jerusalem  
(Nehemiah 1–6)

**SESSION STUDY:**  
Ezra Reads the Book of the Law  
in Celebration (Nehemiah 8)

The People Confess Their Sin,  
Vow Faithfulness, and Dedicate  
the Wall (Nehemiah 9–12)

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Nehemiah 7:1–4

☐ **Day 2:** Nehemiah 7:5–7:3a

☐ **Day 3:** Nehemiah 7:73b–8:3

☐ **Day 4:** Nehemiah 8:4–12

☐ **Day 5:** Nehemiah 8:13–18

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 119



Scan this QR code  
to access this session's  
Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

NEHEMIAH 8:2-6

### GOD'S WORD SHOULD LEAD US TOWARD WORSHIP.

*Circle the actions in this passage, especially those performed by Ezra and the Israelites in response.*

**2** On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. **3** While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. **4** The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. **5** Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. **6** Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**THE SCRIPTURES:** The Holy Bible reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

**Key Concept:** Scripture should lead us to worship, repent, and celebrate.

Ezra's role as scribe and priest was to know the law intimately and guide the people in keeping it. Therefore, he led this public reading, surrounded by other teachers of the law, the Levites. Although we don't know with certainty, it seems that public readings had been neglected since the first group of Jews returned from exile. Each person didn't have a copy of the Scriptures as we do now, so they depended on public readings to know and remember God's commands. Before this reading of God's Word, some of the people may have been familiar with parts of it, but it was necessary to read the entire law to turn their hearts toward God collectively.

One of Ezra's main tasks in returning to Jerusalem was to reinstate proper worship of God and observance of the law. When Ezra read the law, the people worshiped and bowed down. Notice their initial reaction was to praise God for His Word, and then they wept over their sin. It's right to grieve our sin, but to do so without first recognizing God's character overlooks the grace that He gives. God's law speaks to us and about us, but we aren't the main characters. It's about God and His purposes.

**What is your reaction when you're convicted by God's Word?**

Kneeling, bowing, or falling to the ground is a common picture throughout Scripture. In the ancient Near East, this was a physical expression of recognizing the authority or divinity of another. In Scripture, those who bow down before anyone other than the true God are often rebuked (Matthew 4:9-10; Acts 10:25-26; Revelation 22:8-9). Kneeling facedown represented humility before the Lord, submitting to His Word and sovereignty. The Israelites recognized God's greatness through His law, and after blessing Him by standing, lifting their hands, and shouting "Amen," they lowered themselves in adoration.

**How might you respond to God's Word with your entire self—physically and emotionally—like the Israelites?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

NEHEMIAH 8:7-12

### AS WE UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURE, WE WILL BE LED TO REPENTANCE AND CELEBRATION.

*Underline the commands to the Israelites in this passage.*

**7** Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. **8** They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read. **9** Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. **10** Then he said to them, “Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our LORD. Do not grieve, because the joy of the LORD is your strength.” **11** And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, since today is holy. Don’t grieve.” **12** Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them.

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

The reading of Scripture is important, individually and corporately. Through the study of Scripture, we discover together who God is—His holiness, goodness, grace, and mercy. Scripture points to Christ and His wondrous works of salvation. Hearing and studying it together leads to the growth of God’s kingdom.

**Key Concept:** Scripture should lead us to worship, repent, and celebrate.



The Israelites worshiped upon hearing God's Word. When they realized how they and their ancestors had broken God's law, however, they mourned, recognizing they had acted corruptly toward their holy God. Just like the Israelites, we can't properly grieve our sin if we don't first grasp the character of the God against whom we sin.

**What does your attitude toward your own sin reveal about your understanding of who God is?**

Once the Levites explained the law, the people were encouraged. "Don't grieve," they were told, because "this day is holy." According to the law, that day, the first day of the seventh month (v. 2), was a day of rest and commemoration as the people prepared for the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Shelters (Leviticus 23:24-25,27,34).

They also were told not to grieve because "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Although solemn repentance was a healthy reaction, the purpose of this gathering was to renew the people's covenant with God, which was a joyous thing. Not only had God recently restored them, but reading the book of the Law reminded them that the Lord had saved their people in the past as well. God's joy in His people was their source of strength and protection.

The commands in this passage (rejoice, eat, drink, send, and be still) revolve around delighting in God's gifts, sharing those gifts with others, and resting in the mercy He gives. Life with God is not one of restriction and blind obedience but one of abundance within His loving boundaries.

**What do the Levites' commands teach you about God's heart for His people?**

We should mourn our sins, not from a place of unhealthy fear or self-hatred but from a place of reverence for God. This mourning should be followed by joy because God doesn't leave us dead in our sins. His heart is to see us return to Him, and He graciously provides the mercy and forgiveness necessary to make that happen.



## ENCOUNTERING THE BOOK

*Read Nehemiah 8:2-12. Write in the columns below how the different groups interacted with the book of the Law and the result.*

|                      | INTERACTION | RESULT |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|
| Ezra and the Levites |             |        |
| Returning Exiles     |             |        |
| Believers Today      |             |        |

How does your present situation affect your perspective of God's Word?

Why do you think most people today do not respond to Scripture the same way the returnees did?



**Key Concept:** Scripture should lead us to worship, repent, and celebrate.



## HEAD

Why is it necessary to know God's Word to truly obey and worship Him?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, contains 176 verses, but it is entirely focused on the beauty of God's law and the abundant life that it brings. Choose one section of the psalm to read, meditate on, and pray, asking the Lord to soften your heart to love and follow His Word.



## HEART

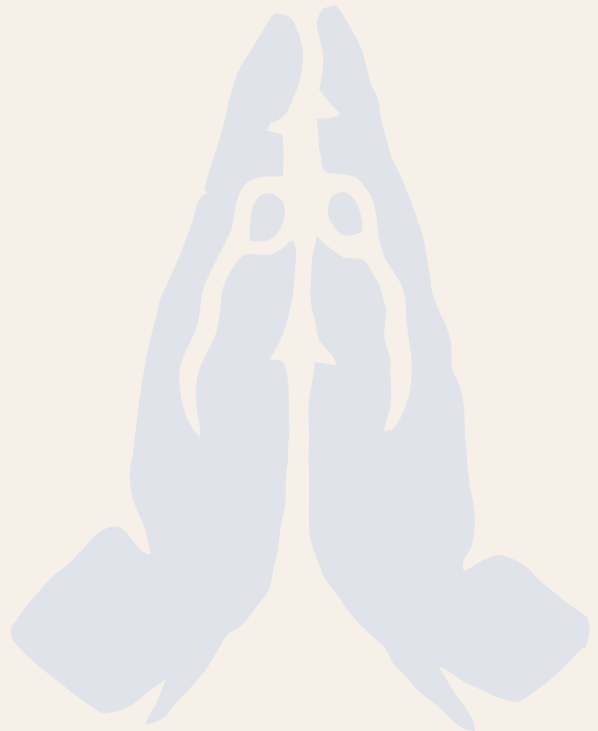
How has Nehemiah 8 convicted your heart regarding your attitude toward God's Word?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

What is one thing you can do this week to remind yourself of God's commands in a way that results in worship and celebration?



# THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED

CORE PASSAGE: NEHEMIAH 9:1-3; 12:27-30

## CONTEXT

After hearing the book of the Law read and then praising, repenting, and celebrating, the people observed the Festival of Shelters (Nehemiah 8). The law stipulated that the people observe the Festival of Shelters from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month, and it told them to observe a solemn day of assembly and rest on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the month (Nehemiah 8:18; cf. Leviticus 23:24-34). As chapter 9 opens, the observance of this festival has just ended. The Israelites then continued their covenant renewal with God.

## KEY CONCEPT

**Reconciliation with God will include confession, worship, and purification.**

As you examine Nehemiah 9:1-3; 12:27-30:

- Recognize that the people understood their need to confess their sin and recommit to the covenant.
- Reflect on the fact that holiness often requires separation from the things that lead us into sin.



## TIMELINE

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7–10)

Ezra Reads the Book of the Law in Celebration (Nehemiah 8)

Nehemiah Is Zealous for the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13)

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds the Wall Around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1–6)

**SESSION STUDY: The People Confess Their Sin, Vow Faithfulness, and Dedicate the Wall (Nehemiah 9–12)**

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Nehemiah 9:1–37

☐ **Day 4:** Nehemiah 12:27–47

☐ **Day 2:** Nehemiah 9:38–10:39

☐ **Day 5:** Nehemiah 13:1–31

☐ **Day 3:** Nehemiah 11:1–12:26

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 40



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3

### CONFESSION AND VALUING GOD'S WORD ARE PART OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

*Circle the actions of the Israelites that revealed their seriousness about their sins.*

**1** On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads. **2** Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. **3** While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day and spent another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the LORD their God.

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

Before Christ, reconciliation with God was similar but temporary, yet it did include confession, worship, and purification. Now, when we repent and trust in Christ, we are purified by His blood and eternally reconciled with the Father, resulting in our worship of Him.

Fasting, wearing sackcloth, and putting dust (sometimes translated “earth” or “dirt”) on one’s head were all acts of mourning and repentance in the ancient Near East. Fasting, or foregoing food for a time, is an act of humility and a reminder of our total dependence on the Lord. Wearing sackcloth and putting dust on one’s head weren’t commanded by God’s law, but they were cultural ways of expressing grief.

**How can you incorporate modern expressions of humility into your spiritual life?**

The text says that the Israelites separated themselves from the foreigners among them. By this time, many had returned to the land who weren’t physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob), but any resident alien who drew near to worship the Lord would be accepted (Numbers 15:13-16; cf. Isaiah 56:3-8). Both Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, and Ruth, a Moabitess, recognized the Lord as their God, and they both were accepted in the community of Israel and became Jesus’s ancestors (Matthew 1:5-6). In the time of Nehemiah, however, the resident aliens living in Jerusalem most likely weren’t worshipping the Lord.

According to Ezra 9–10, many of the Israelites had taken pagan wives for themselves, which was in direct opposition to God’s commands (Deuteronomy 7:1-5). Nehemiah reminded the people in chapter 13 that King Solomon “was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, yet foreign women drew him into sin” (Nehemiah 13:26). More than likely these pagan women worshiped their own gods and taught their children to do the same. So in Nehemiah 9, to demonstrate full repentance from their sins, the Jews likely were separating themselves from any foreigner (not just wives) who didn’t exclusively worship God.

The Israelites confessed both their own sins and those of their ancestors despite God’s undeserved goodness (9:6-38). They recognized the corporate responsibility of sin and its generational impact. This confession led them naturally to worship as a community.

**When have confession and repentance led to renewal in your life or the life of your community?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

NEHEMIAH 12:27-30

### WORSHIP AND PURIFICATION ARE ALSO PART OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

*Highlight the words related to worship and celebration.*

**27** At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sent for the Levites wherever they lived and brought them to Jerusalem to celebrate the joyous dedication with thanksgiving and singing accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres. **28** The singers gathered from the region around Jerusalem, from the settlements of the Netophathites, **29** from Beth-gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth, for they had built settlements for themselves around Jerusalem. **30** After the priests and Levites had purified themselves, they purified the people, the city gates, and the wall.

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**WORSHIP:** While many reduce worship to an event or singing of worship songs, worship first and foremost emanates from the heart and extends to all areas of life. The focus of worship is God, giving Him the praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only inwardly but also in joining with other Christians to worship and steward our gifts for God's glory. Corporate worship serves to edify and strengthen Christians, but it also serves as a witness of God's greatness to non-believers.

**Key Concept:** Reconciliation with God will include confession, worship, and purification.

Between chapters 9 and 12, the people collectively renew their covenant with God, committing to following the law given to the Israelites by Moses nearly one thousand years prior. In this passage, the now-complete wall around Jerusalem is dedicated by God's people from across Judea (12:28-29). The wall's dedication attributed the work to God because the completed wall was a picture of God's faithfulness to His promises, as it fulfilled prophecies from Isaiah 44:28 and 45:13.

The temple, the wall, the city, and God's people had been restored and reconciled, and so the people celebrated. Calling for the Levites to lead in their joy musically, the people celebrated with thanksgiving and singing. And they gathered singers from all around, a great choir concert for the Lord acknowledging His faithful goodness and work.

**How can we as individuals and as a church develop a greater attitude of celebration to the Lord?**

In verse 30, by purifying themselves and the people, the Levites kept God's purity laws (Leviticus 11–15), which allowed the Israelites to approach God in worship. We often struggle to reconcile these purity laws, which seem legalistic, with what

we know to be true about God's grace, but many scholars agree that these laws protected the health of the individual and the community.

Certain purification laws in Leviticus included washing, isolation, or waiting periods. Others required one to bring a sacrifice to be offered by a priest on their behalf. Christ's sinless life and crucifixion served as the final, permanent sacrifice to atone for our sins and make us pure before God (Hebrews 9:11–10:18). We no longer have to follow the purification laws to come before God—all that's required of us is faith in Christ.

**How are you tempted to ground your purity before God apart from faith in Christ?**

#### VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"Soul-purification is of faith, it is not of baptism: it is not by any outward rite even of God's own ordaining, nor by the will of man, nor by blood, nor by birth, but by the work of the Holy Spirit through the agency of faith and that alone."<sup>1</sup>

—Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

# RECONCILIATION FOR FELLOWSHIP

Read Nehemiah 9:1-3; 12:27-30 and the verses in James below. Fill in the verses and define each step of reconciliation with God in your own words.

| ISRAELITES<br>Nehemiah 9; 12 | BELIEVERS<br>James | DEFINITION |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| REPENTANT<br>SORROW (      ) | (4:9-10)           |            |
| PURIFICATION<br>(      )     | (1:21; 4:1,8)      |            |
| CONFESSION<br>(      )       | (5:16)             |            |
| SCRIPTURE<br>(      )        | (1:21)             |            |
| CELEBRATION<br>(      )      | (1:2-3)            |            |
| THANKSGIVING<br>(      )     | (1:17)             |            |
| SINGING<br>(      )          | (5:13)             |            |

Which of these steps are easy for you to do, and why? Which are difficult, and why?



**Key Concept:** Reconciliation with God will include confession, worship, and purification.



## HEAD

Why are we called to confess both to God and to trusted fellow believers?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Psalm 40:3 says God put a new song in David's mouth. Read Psalm 40 and list what you would mention if you sang a new song of thankfulness to the Lord. Make your list your own prayer to God this week.

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HEART

What has been your attitude toward confession and repentance? How do you respond when others confess their sins to you?



## HANDS

What steps will you take to connect with a mature believer for mutual prayer, confession, and accountability?



# THE DAY FORETOLD

CORE PASSAGE: MALACHI 3:1-6; 4:1-6

## CONTEXT

The prophet Malachi ministered to the returned people of Israel around the same time as Ezra and Nehemiah (somewhere between 460 and 425 BC). Malachi's main message, made up of six disputations (arguments) from God, was directed at the spiritual apathy of the people. He warned that although God would destroy their enemies, He would also purify His people. Though the Jews weren't guilty of blatant idolatry like their ancestors, their faith had become joyless and mechanical. Through Malachi, the Lord called them to return truly to Him.

## KEY CONCEPT

**A day is coming when God will purify  
His people and destroy evil.**

As you examine Malachi 3:1-6; 4:1-6:

- Recognize that God's unchanging qualities include His faithfulness to His promises and covenants.
- Consider how the fire of purification for God's people will also bring the destruction of the wicked.



## TIMELINE

**SESSION STUDY: Malachi**  
**Prophesies the Coming**  
**Messiah and the Day of**  
**the Lord (Malachi 3-4)**

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds  
 the Wall Around Jerusalem  
 (Nehemiah 1-6)

Nehemiah Is Zealous for the  
 Sabbath (Nehemiah 13)

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah  
 and Instructs the People in the Law  
 (Ezra 7-10)

Ezra Reads the Book of the Law  
 and the People Confess Their Sin  
 (Nehemiah 8-12)

The Intertestamental  
 Period

## Daily Readings

☐ **Day 1:** Malachi 1:1-5

☐ **Day 4:** Malachi 2:17-3:12

☐ **Day 2:** Malachi 1:6-2:9

☐ **Day 5:** Malachi 3:13-4:6

☐ **Day 3:** Malachi 2:10-16

☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 66



Scan this QR code  
 to access this session's  
 Scripture passages.

## PERSONAL PREPARATION

### MALACHI 3:1-6

## A DAY IS COMING WHEN GOD WILL PURIFY HIS PEOPLE.

*Underline all the future-tense verbs (actions beginning with “will”) and note who is performing the actions.*

**1** “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the LORD you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in—see, he is coming,” says the LORD of Armies. **2** But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will be able to stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s bleach. **3** He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. **4** And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will please the LORD as in days of old and years gone by. **5** “I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the hired worker, the widow, and the fatherless; and against those who deny justice to the resident alien. They do not fear me,” says the LORD of Armies. **6** “Because I, the LORD, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.”

## GOSPEL CONNECTION

Though those who trust in Jesus are in right standing with God the Father because of Christ and are being sanctified daily by the Holy Spirit, when Christ returns, He will purify us completely, finishing our sanctification process as He finally establishes His kingdom on earth.

**Key Concept:** A day is coming when God will purify His people and destroy evil.

In Malachi 2, God rebuked the Israelites and their priests for their skewed view of justice and their complacent behavior toward worship. Chapter 3 begins with the Lord's response to them, showing them what true justice will look like. The Lord rebuked the people for bringing inappropriate sacrifices (ch. 1), but they would be able to offer acceptable sacrifices again when the Messenger purified and reoriented their hearts to obedience.

In fulfillment of Malachi 3:1, John the Baptist would be the lowercase "messenger" who prepares the way for "the LORD," the uppercase "Messenger," Jesus Christ. Using metaphors of a refiner's fire and strong launderer's soap, the Messenger will purify the people so that they will "present offerings to the LORD in righteousness" (v. 3), not in apathy and corruption as they were doing. The "day of his coming" (v. 2) refers to the Day of the Lord, Christ's second coming. When He returns, final purification will come for God's people.

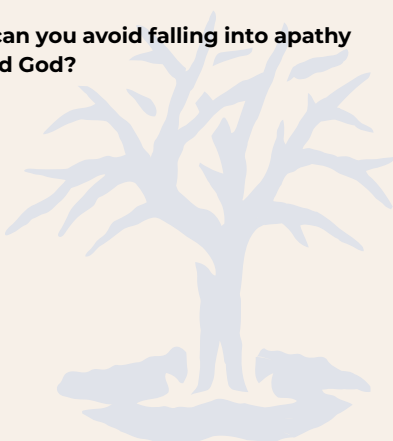
**How can you avoid falling into apathy toward God?**

God calls His people to heart change, not just passive obedience (Ezekiel 20:40; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 2:5), and by His Spirit, He enables that heart change. Our good intentions aren't enough; our lives must reflect God's character.

How often we forget the power and might of the Lord! The Israelites forgot this as well, continuing to sin even after returning from exile, recognizing the Lord's faithfulness, and renewing their covenant with Him. Sadly, this is the human condition; despite our best intentions, we still sin.

One day, Jesus will return and bring judgment to those who did not believe in His name and did not fear Him. But those who trust in the Lord will be saved. God allowed the Israelites to continue living in the land because of His character (Exodus 34:5-6). It had nothing to do with them and everything to do with His covenant promises. In the same way, God's new covenant promises assure us of salvation because God never changes. His love, grace, and mercy are always available to His people.

**Knowing that judgment is coming, how does that inspire you to share the gospel with those who don't know Christ?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

### MALACHI 4:1-6

## A DAY IS COMING LIKE FIRE THAT WILL DESTROY THE WICKED.

*Circle all the imagery words that symbolize something else.*

**1** “For look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says the LORD of Armies, “not leaving them root or branches. **2** But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall. **3** You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing,” says the LORD of Armies. **4** “Remember the instruction of Moses my servant, the statutes and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. **5** Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. **6** And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**CHRIST'S RETURN:** God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord.

**Key Concept:** A day is coming when God will purify His people and destroy evil.

Malachi concluded his book with a summary of his main points. On the Day of the Lord, the faithful will be purified and saved, while the wicked will be destroyed (4:1-3). The arrogant and wicked are those who don't trust in or fear the Lord, even among those who claim God's name (3:16)! The Lord will remain faithful to His covenant promises, both in blessing and cursing (4:4-6).

The "day" referred to here is again the day of Jesus's second coming, although the Israelites didn't realize that yet. On this coming day, two things will happen: A burning fire, like the one referenced in the previous passage (3:2-3), will (1) destroy the wicked, burning them to ashes, leaving no root or branches to regrow or produce fruit, and (2) purify and heal those who fear God's name, those who trust in Jesus as Lord.

The wicked will already be ashes when they're trampled by God's people. This is the Lord's doing, not ours (4:3). God is always the Judge, not us. By His grace, then, we will one day trample those ashes if we fear Him.

**Why do you think God is justified in destroying all the arrogant and the wicked?**

The people were then commanded to remember "the instruction of Moses" (v. 4), God's law, for that would show whether they feared His name or not. And in the future, God would send "the prophet Elijah" to call them to repentance (v. 5). Ultimately this meant God would send someone, His "messenger" (3:1), in the spirit of Elijah—John the Baptist, who would warn the people and call them to repent and believe in Jesus.

The final verse in Malachi emphasizes the restoration and revival that will take place as people turn to the Lord because of this messenger. Fathers will care for their children and children will care for their fathers, representing a lack of selfishness among humanity. But a stark warning ends the book for those who continue to live in wickedness: God will come and punish them, and curses will ensue (cf. Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

**What would a spiritual revival look like for you today?**



## THE DAY OF THE LORD

*Read Malachi 3:1-6 and 4:1-6. Write down what will happen on the Day of the Lord for the people listed.*

THE WICKED

THE RIGHTEOUS

How should believers today respond to Malachi 3:1-6 and 4:1-6?



**Key Concept:** A day is coming when God will purify His people and destroy evil.



## HEAD

Why is it important that we study the prophets, even the passages that are difficult to understand?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 66. Reflect on God's wonders and all He has done for your soul. Praise Him as you pray through these verses.

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HEART

How has loyalty to human beings clouded your worship of God and obedience to His Word?



## HANDS

What steps can you take this week to identify areas of sin in your life and move toward humble obedience in those areas?



# THE MESSENGER PREPARED

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 1:5-17

## CONTEXT

In the four hundred years between the closing of the Old Testament (Malachi) and the opening of the New Testament (the Gospels), many world powers and leaders shaped Jewish culture and religious life. When the book of Luke opens, Herod the Great ruled Judea and the surrounding regions. Though a descendant of Esau, Herod was appointed as king of the Jews by Rome and ruled ruthlessly. The priesthood largely became corrupt during the intertestamental period. But Zechariah was faithful to his role as priest, and along with his wife, Elizabeth, he continued to be faithful to Israel's covenant with God.

## KEY CONCEPT

**God will send messengers  
to prepare His way.**

As you examine Luke 1:5-17:

- Recognize how God's miracle of giving Zechariah and Elizabeth a son recalls similar miracles in the Old Testament.
- Consider how their son, John, fulfilled God's promise to send someone in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for Jesus.



## TIMELINE

Malachi Prophesies the Messenger to Prepare the Way for the Lord (Malachi 3–4)

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds the Wall Around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1–6)

The Intertestamental Period

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7–10)

Ezra Reads the Book of the Law and the People Confess Their Sin (Nehemiah 8–12)

**SESSION STUDY:** An Angel Foretells the Birth of John the Baptist, Who Prepares the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1)

## Daily Readings

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 1:</b> Luke 1:1–4   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 4:</b> Luke 1:39–56 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 2:</b> Luke 1:5–25  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 5:</b> Luke 1:57–80 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 3:</b> Luke 1:26–38 | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 6:</b> Psalm 65     |



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## PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 1:5-13

### GOD PREPARED THE WAY THROUGH THE PROVISION OF A SON.

*Highlight the description of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Underline the message the angel gave Zechariah.*

**5** In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. **7** But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years. **8** When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, **9** it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. **10** At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. **11** An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. **12** When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. **13** But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John."

#### GOSPEL CONNECTION

God is not abrupt in His ways but has planned all along to send a Savior for His people. That includes sending messengers to prepare the way to ready hearts to receive Him.

Luke starts off his Gospel telling Theophilus that he is writing “so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed” (1:4). And with that, he started with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, a priest and his wife, who also was from a priestly line. Both lived righteously before God, yet they had no children as Elizabeth was barren and they were both older. Luke was setting up the story knowing that this narrative would fulfill prophecy.

In verse 9, Zechariah was chosen by lot for a priestly responsibility. It may seem that this was all happening by luck or chance, but God’s providence was truly at work, for in that one moment of Zechariah burning incense in the sanctuary, God sent an angel to him with a message.

**What recent event initially seemed like a matter of luck, but now you can see God’s providential hand in it?**

Like anyone would be, Zechariah was “terrified and overcome with fear” (v. 12). God had been silent for over four hundred years, and here an angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel’s message, however, was one of encouragement, telling Zechariah, “Do not be afraid,” because his prayer had been heard, and his wife would bear them a son (v. 13).

But note that God didn’t give Zechariah and Elizabeth a child to reward their “good behavior”; this wasn’t a reward for their blamelessness. He chose them to participate in His plan of redemption. By withholding a child until His chosen time, God defied society’s belief that to be barren meant there was some underlying sin in a woman’s past. God looks on barrenness throughout Scripture with gentleness and care, especially in the face of societal shame. In cases like Sarah (Genesis 12; 17; 21; Hebrews 11:11), Rebekah (Genesis 25:21), Rachel (Genesis 29:31; 30:1), Hannah (1 Samuel 1), and Elizabeth, God didn’t give children to elevate these women in society’s eyes but to demonstrate His ability to accomplish His covenant promises.

**How do you view the God-given gifts in your life: as rewards or as God’s faithfulness to His Word? Why does this matter?**



## PERSONAL PREPARATION

LUKE 1:14-17

### THIS SON WOULD PREPARE THE PEOPLE FOR THE COMING MESSIAH.

*Circle each future-tense verb in the passage.*

**14** “There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. **15** For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. **16** He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

#### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**THE HOLY SPIRIT:** The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, possessing the fullness of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the triune God (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

**Key Concept:** God will send messengers to prepare His way.

John's birth, prayed and longed for by Zechariah and Elizabeth, was also joyful for the many who prayed and longed for the deliverance of God's people. Finally, here was the messenger to the Messenger, foretold four hundred years earlier by the prophet Malachi.

The Greek word for "great" in verse 15 indicates power, authority, or significance. John would be great in the Lord's sight because of the divine power on his life and the divine purpose for which he was chosen (cf. Jeremiah 1:5). Abstaining from wine and beer would be an outward sign of this purpose.

Previously, God had ordained other prophets before they were born (Isaiah 49:1,5; Jeremiah 1:5), but Zechariah's child would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before birth. Pentecost had not happened occurred, so the Holy Spirit didn't dwell in every person who trusted in the Lord. After hundreds of years without any revelation from the Lord, God would give John His Spirit so that no one could ignore the calling on John the Baptist's life.

**How do you see the Holy Spirit's working in your life?**

Luke 1:16-17 recalls Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6, which speak of the "delight" of the people and the messenger coming like "Elijah" to "turn the hearts of fathers to their children." The passage also recalls Isaiah 40:3, which foretells a voice of one crying out to prepare the way of the Lord. As a priest, Zechariah would have been familiar with the Old Testament and its prophecies, so the significance of Gabriel's words here wouldn't have been lost on him. He would know that the angel was talking about a messenger who was preparing the way for the Messenger, the Messiah.

Even recognizing this prophecy, Zechariah struggled to believe God's power to give him a son. As a result, the angel made him unable to speak until these things happened (Luke 1:18-20). Later, when Zechariah believed and named his son John, he was able to speak again, and then he prophesied by the Holy Spirit and praised God for His faithfulness (vv. 59-79).

**What do you struggle to believe about God, even knowing His Word is true?**

## PREPARE THE WAY

*Research how the New Testament describes some of God's preparations.*

| VERSES            | SUMMARY |
|-------------------|---------|
| Romans 9:22-24    |         |
| 2 Corinthians 5:5 |         |
| Ephesians 2:10    |         |
| Hebrews 11:16     |         |
| Revelation 21:1-2 |         |

Which preparation of God are you most thankful for?

How does it make you feel that God thinks you're special enough  
to prepare these things for you?



**Key Concept:** God will send messengers to prepare His way.



## HEAD

Which of God's gifts have been the most purposeful in your life?

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Psalm 65 praises God for His power and provision. As you read, consider the situations you are facing that feel overwhelming or hopeless. Let this psalm guide your prayer and remind you of God's complete control and goodness to His faithful ones.



## HEART

How can you practically acknowledge the gifts God has given you and praise Him for them this week?

### PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



## HANDS

What can you do to help prepare others to accept the message of the good news of Jesus Christ?



# THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

By Bob Bunn

On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”<sup>1</sup> In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.”

Today, many Christians recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life. Not only is it a matter of life and death for unborn children, but it also underscores the larger truth that all human life is sacred—from the womb to the grave. In the article on “The Christian and Social Order,” the SBC also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

“Sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, or “sacred.” So by definition, the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans. That’s exactly what we see in the Scriptures.

Starting with Adam and Eve, human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). While theologians have debated the precise meaning of the *imago dei* (“Image of God”), three things are certain. First, it is unique to humanity. No other aspect of the created order is said to be formed by God’s hand in God’s image. Second, the image of God is a universal trait of each human. All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s mercy and grace—bear His image. Finally, the image of God gives every human value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the *imago dei* places humans “a little lower than God” and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (8:5). The Lord has given us authority as His stewards to rule over His creation (vv. 6-8).

Plus, we are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and

security in Hebrew<sup>3</sup>) us in our mother's womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (vv. 13,15). This underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

The sanctity of human life also emphasizes the purposes God has for each individual. Again, the psalmist noted that God knows the course of our days before they even begin (139:16). In addition, the prophet Jeremiah learned that God had set him apart from ministry before his birth (Jeremiah 1:5).

God, the Creator of the universe, knows each of us and has a plan for each of us. But the greatest proof that every human life has value can be found in what is arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture. John 3:16 states that God's love for humanity drove Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin. Because Jesus died for humanity, we can affirm the sanctity of all human life.

## WHAT IT MEANS

As noted, the momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. It served as a clarion call to encourage believers to protect the most vulnerable members of society and to take a bold stand against the evils of abortion.

But if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the single issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice. Today, we don't have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

By and large, these are the people Jesus helped. While He kept the hypocritical religious elite at arm's length, He socialized with the "sinners" as the Great Physician who offered the cure for their deepest needs. He was the rabbi who reached out and touched the lepers and other outcasts with a healing hand. He broke down cultural walls built around ethnic, gender, and social constraints.

Why? All so He could fulfill His messianic call articulated by Isaiah centuries earlier:

To heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He reminds us, as C. S. Lewis stated: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."<sup>4</sup> He challenges us to value every human life just as He does.

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Bob Bunn serves on Lifeway's Adult Ongoing Bible Studies team. He and his wife, Mary, live in Nashville and serve at First Baptist Church Nashville.

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## ARTICLES

### The Doctrine of the Kingdom

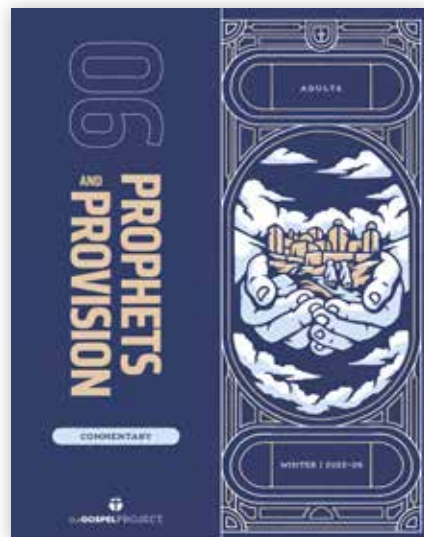
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**Context:** In 605 BC, a few short years into King Jehoiakim's reign over Judah, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar took control of Jerusalem, made Judah's king his vassal, and carried off some high-profile young men as exiles to Babylon. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were brought to the palace to be educated in Babylonian ways so they could serve their new king. For three years they were trained in all things Babylonian—language, customs, and religion—and faced the temptation of losing their identity as God's people.

**Key Concept:** Obedience to God leads to greater wisdom from God.

**DAILY READINGS**


|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 1:</b> Daniel 1:1-7</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 2:</b> Daniel 1:8-21</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 3:</b> Daniel 2:1-13</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 4:</b> Daniel 2:14-24</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 5:</b> Daniel 2:25-49</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Day 6:</b> Psalm 112</p> |
|--|---|

**Pursuing obedience to God is always right despite the obstacles (Daniel 1:8-21)**

<sup>8</sup> Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief eunuch not to defile himself. <sup>9</sup> God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, <sup>10</sup> yet he said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and drink. What if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men your age? You would endanger my life with the king." <sup>11</sup> So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief eunuch had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see." <sup>14</sup> He agreed with them about this and tested them for ten days.

**Obedient Hearts Resist Compromise**

In 605 BC, the Lord gave Jerusalem into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605–562 BC). God's judgment came because of the kingdom of Judah's persistent unfaithfulness toward God and the terms of His covenant. Nebuchadnezzar took many sacred vessels from Jerusalem's temple to Babylon with him (vv. 1-2). He also commanded the Judean court's best and brightest youths be brought to the palace at Babylon to be trained for three years in the literature and language of the Chaldeans in order to serve the king (vv. 3-5). Among these captives were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the latter three being



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## PROPHETS AND PROVISION

Throughout the exile of His people, God remained faithful in providing for those who lived in faith, even under persecution. He provided His presence, protection, and prophets to show the world that He is the almighty God. And when the time was right, He allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, to continue right worship, and to rebuild the city because He is a God of restoration. The Lord desires to restore His people to a right relationship with Him. We see this ultimately through His sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die and rise again. Through His work, people can be restored permanently and adopted into God's family. Despite our sin, which exiles, God provided a way home, and the only way is Jesus.

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