

**BE  
GOD'S**

*Light*



**VOLUME 5**  
**READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS**

*Fishers United Methodist Church*



# Introduction

This year-long study of the Old Testament is a follow-up to the previous studies on the four Gospels (“Be with Jesus”) and the rest of the New Testament (“Be on Mission”).

The Old Testament can be intimidating for many Christians. It is much longer (929 chapters) than the New Testament (260 chapters). Additionally, the Old Testament covers a much longer time period (2000 years plus) than the New Testament (less than 100 years). Also, it contains several kinds of literature including history, poetry and prophecy. Some of these are difficult to understand, further confounded by the fact that the prophetic books are not in the kind of sequential order that the modern reader is accustomed to.

To address these challenges, this study contains just 235 daily readings, only about one-fourth of the Old Testament. We will cover the grand sweep of the entire Old Testament, but many chapters will be left to the reader for further study. Still, we will explore the history of the people of God from creation to the time period only a few hundred years before Jesus. As we do so, we will explore what the prophets had to say to challenge and encourage the people to turn their lives toward God. While the wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) are not a part of the daily readings, they will be referenced throughout the devotions to give insight to the themes covered.

Together, the Old Testament and New Testament are part of God’s continuous story. That is why they are both in the Bible! Along the way, we will examine how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and how the two testaments fit together.

**There are several components to this year-long exploration:**

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by me and correlate with the daily readings to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Daily Poems** – These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine the Old Testament through poetry.
4. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
5. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, [visit fishersumc.org/begodslight](http://fishersumc.org/begodslight) for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
6. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week’s readings, visit [fishersumc.org/begodslight](http://fishersumc.org/begodslight) for easy access.

As with the previous studies, throughout my devotions for the “Be God’s Light” study, I use capital letters when referring to Jesus: Son, King, Messiah, His, He, Him, etc. This sets Jesus apart from other mere humans. An exception is when talking about his relationships (e.g. “Mary’s son”). I do the same for references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to explore the Old Testament like you never have before, then pursue God and minister for Him to a waiting world. It is my hope that you will “Be God’s Light!”

Enjoy the journey!

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9/30/2024  
WEEK 39 DAY 1

# Four Living Creatures and the Wheels



## Scripture EZEKIEL 1

### Devotional

Recall that the Babylonian empire attacked Judah and took exiles from there back to Babylon in three waves over more than twenty years. The first period of deportation took place in 605 BC under King Jehoiakim. During this wave, Daniel was taken captive. The second round of Jews deported to Babylon happened in 597 BC under King Jehoiachin. Ezekiel was exiled during this wave. The third period of deportation ended Judah's monarchy in 586 BC under King Zedekiah, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem.

For the next four weeks we will look at Ezekiel and Daniel's prophetic ministries to Jews under captivity in Babylonia. Then, in the final five weeks of this Old Testament study, we will explore how God used people like Zerubbabel, Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah to save the Jewish people and restore a remnant back to Jerusalem and the Promised Land.

In today's reading we see that Ezekiel was a priest. No doubt he had dedicated his life to serving God in the temple of Jerusalem. But now he found himself to be a street prophet, proclaiming the ways of the Lord as an exile in a foreign land.

Ezekiel's vision of the four living creatures is much like Revelation 4:4-9. The lion is the king of the wild beasts, the ox is the most powerful of the domesticated animals, the eagle is the most majestic of the birds of the air, and the human being is the one created in God's image. All of creation gives glory to God!

In the image of the wheels with eyes, God is able to move anywhere, anytime, seeing everything as He does so. Oh the majesty of God! The power of God would bring judgment, but also grace. The rainbow recalled God's covenant promise with His people all the way back to Genesis 9:8-17.

When Ezekiel encountered the likeness of the Lord's glory so powerfully, he fell facedown, humbly listening to the voice of God as He spoke. The chapters that follow are the Word of the Lord spoken to Ezekiel the prophet. How do you prepare yourself to hear and respond to God when you are in prayer, worship, reading Scripture, listening to a sermon, discussing faith with another believer, or going about your regular day?

### Poem

#### For The Image Of God

*For the Image of God, God envisioned a garden  
An Eden of bounty and grace  
To an Image of God, the LORD shared his full vision  
Destruction of most of the race*

*For the Image of God, God envisioned a people  
As numerous as stars in the sky  
To an Image of God, the LORD gave a dream vision  
A bridge ramp ascending on high*

*For the Image of God, God envisioned great freedom  
To worship; cloud, fire lead the way  
To an Image of God, the LORD met on a mountain  
Eyes covered, cleft hiding place stayed*

*For the Image of God, God envisioned twelve clan  
tribes  
To inherit a land filled with promise  
To an Image of God, God gave great revelation  
Interpreting dreams, famine's commerce*

*For the Image of God, God sent great prophet  
see-ers  
Who dreamt of a Hope yet to come  
To an Image of God, God sent visions of rescue  
Despite chains on exiled sod*

*For the Image of God, God envisioned great visions  
Prophetic announcements 'gainst sin  
To an Image of God, the LORD shared great  
depictions  
Of potter, a plumb line, holy hymns*

*For the Image of God, God envisioned redemption  
Amidst persecution of sin  
To an Image of God, God revealed His great char'ot  
With Spirit led men, wheels a-spin*

*For the Image of God, God so loved the whole world  
Showed many His throne-reign on high  
To an Image of God, God announced strange  
conception  
A Savior from sin, by and by*

*For the Image of God, God gave up one and only  
Proclaiming the great plan of Love  
To an Image of God, came a great revelation  
"Truly, this is the great Son of God!"*

*For the Image of God, God envisioned a people  
Of Jews and of Gentiles alike  
To an Image of God, God met one on the road  
A persecutor, full blindness did strike*

*For the Image of God, God sent forth many nations  
His vision to share with the world  
To an Image of God, the LORD showed full  
completion  
Lamb of God, full enthroned, with the scroll*



## Scripture EZEKIEL 2

### Devotional

Raised to be a priest at the temple in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was now one of 10,000 exiles living in Babylonia. These deported Israelites were far from their homeland and family. But they were farther from God. Back in Jerusalem they had been part of a society that abandoned the Lord and embraced idolatry. Their deportation to another land didn't change their hearts toward God.

The Lord told Ezekiel that he was being sent to the Israelites who were rebellious, obstinate and stubborn, in revolt against the Lord. They would be like briars, thorns and scorpions to Ezekiel's message. The scroll about them contained words of lament, mourning and woe. What sad descriptions of the people of God.

Whether they listened or not, God told Ezekiel three things:

- I am sending you to them.
- Do not be afraid of them.
- Listen to what I say to you.

When Jesus sent his disciples out to do ministry, he warned them that not everyone would receive them warmly. He said, "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet" (Matthew 10:14). He didn't tell them to give up. He told them to move on and keep trying. Ministry is not for the thin-skinned.

How would the promises of God have been an encouragement to Ezekiel in his times to come? What about the words of Jesus to His disciples? What keeps you going?

### Poem

#### Stand Up And Stand Up

*Stand up and stand up  
Do not grovel before me  
A call to speak words I will give  
Stand up and stand up  
In my presence I charge thee  
Speak words that My people might  
live*

*Stand up and stand up  
For the widow and orphan  
Speak justice for all on the streets  
Stand up and stand up  
In full righteousness live thee  
My words against evil's defeat*

*Stand up and stand up  
Despite great persecution  
'Fore fire and lions be strong  
Stand up and stand up  
Before councils of power  
Exhort them of all that is wrong*

*Stand up and stand up  
On the Day of Redemption  
Your full crown of glory receive  
Stand up and stand up  
With the great cloud of martyrs  
And with all who in My Son believe*

10/2/2024  
WEEK 39 DAY 3

# Ezekiel Eats the Scroll as a Watchman



## Scripture EZEKIEL 3

### Devotional

In the previous chapter, God called Ezekiel to go to the Israelites living in Babylonian exile. The Lord told him, “You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you” (Ezekiel 2:7-8).

Ezekiel then reported, “Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe” (Ezekiel 2:9-10). Here in chapter 3, God told Ezekiel to eat that scroll. It was as sweet as honey.

This is similar to Revelation 10:9-11 when an angel told John to eat a scroll that would be sweet in the mouth, but sour in the stomach. He was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (Revelation 10:11). They wouldn’t love it. The word of God is tasty; conveying its truth to people can be nasty.

In fact, Ezekiel was told that if he failed to warn the people about their evil ways, their sins would be on him. If he succeeded in warning the people, they would tie him with ropes in his own house. This had to sound like a lose-lose proposition for Ezekiel, just like for John in the book of Revelation.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

What is the word of God? How is it good news? How is it hard news? What is the Lord saying to you about His holy Scripture?

### Poem

#### Eating God’s Word

*A scroll in my mouth  
God’s word on my lips  
The Bread upon which I do live  
Honey sweet I ingest  
Daily manna receive  
Love broad, high, deep and  
boundless in width*



10/3/2024  
WEEK 39 DAY 4

# Ezekiel Lies on His Side Symbolizing Siege



## Scripture **EZEKIEL 4**

### Devotional

When my brother Dave and I were kids, we had hundreds of gray and green plastic army men. We would reenact WWII, setting up the troops on the opposite side of the family room, constructing walls and barriers from Legos and Lincoln Logs. Then with the excess Legos, we would launch missiles at the enemy. The room was a snowstorm of flying plastic.

Ezekiel's dramatic demonstration was much more than boyhood games. Recall that the Babylonian empire attacked Judah and took exiles from there back to Babylon in three waves over more than twenty years. This enduring illustration took place before the final siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

The people of Jerusalem were being dramatically warned. The coming siege would be inevitable. The long decades of exile would be inescapable. The food and water rations would be intolerable. The final sentence says it all: "They will be appalled at the sight of each other and will waste away because of their sin."

Søren Kierkegaard said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." It's easy to look at the people of Jerusalem and ask why they didn't listen to all these warnings from God and His prophets. But we are looking at their situation through the backwards lens of history.

We ourselves live in the present, with a history that has brought us to today. But we must live our lives forwards, one step at a time, one day at a time. If God were to send a prophet to do a dramatic presentation of your future, what might that look like? What warnings would the Lord give you? What would the person sent to demonstrate it do or say?

More importantly, how would you respond? Would you change? Will you?

### Poem

#### O, The Strange Way Of Prophets

*You see him there, playing with mud and with clay  
A stick imprinting pictures on brick?  
Now laying on ground for great number of days?  
And this is the one God has picked?*

*Now he's tied up in knots lying on his right side  
With tears crying for our great city?  
O, the strange way of prophets who live in our land  
Are they not the ones whom we should pity?*

*And now he's concocting a very strange flour?  
And now he is baking some bread?  
He's eating while lying there down on the ground  
And speaking strong words of great dread!*

*O, the strange way of prophets God sends to our land  
God's foolishness full on display!  
Until all of the truth which they speak comes to pass—  
When God's wrath is released in our day*

10/4/2024  
WEEK 39 DAY 5

# Ezekiel Shaves Head & Beard Symbolizing Fall



## Scripture EZEKIEL 5

### Devotional

Some of God's prophets used words to convey God's truth to His people. Ezekiel went beyond words, using vivid illustrations to capture attention.

Throughout the Bible, shaving the head is an act of contrition and repentance. In Acts 21:24 Paul and some others shaved their heads as purification rites to show that they were "living in obedience to the law." In today's reading, Ezekiel does the same, symbolizing the need for the people of God to humble themselves in repentance for their sins.

The actions he takes with his hair symbolize what is awaiting the people of Jerusalem: "A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword" (v. 12). The small amount tucked in his garment symbolized the small remnant who would return from exile in the future to rebuild the fallen city.

One of the grievances the Lord had against the people of Judah was the way they treated the temple in Jerusalem. Verse 11 says, "Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will shave you; I will not look on you with pity or spare you." The people had defiled the temple and turned to false religions with temple prostitutes and other ungodly practices. How we treat God's temple matters.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." How we treat God's temple matters.

How does today's reading apply to your life?  
What is God calling you to do?

### Poem

#### Killing The Cancer

*A cancer invaded the people of God  
Sin's spread, great metastasis bleak  
Prognosis is heinous  
How will we survive  
The treatment for cure, only worse*

*The strong chemotherapy courses in  
veins  
Stripping cells, causing baldness, all sick  
The stem cells of Jesus  
Jump-start back to life  
The treatment for cure—God's full purse*

*The fire radiation burns flesh, cleansing  
soul  
But scars and nerve limping will come  
God joins in our wrestling  
Through long night we strive  
The great cost, redemption from curse*

10/7/2024  
WEEK 40 DAY 1

# Mark on the Foreheads & Idolaters Killed



## Scripture EZEKIEL 9

### Devotional

We have already seen some parallels between the Old Testament book of Ezekiel and the final New Testament book of Revelation. In today's reading a mark was to be placed on the foreheads of Jerusalem's faithful. They would not be killed in the coming invasion. Similarly, Revelation 7:3 says this about the faithful in the end times: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

All of this harkens back to the time when the people of God were fleeing four hundred years of forced slavery in Egypt. The people marked the homes of the faithful with the blood of a lamb, and the angel of death passed over those inside (see Exodus 12:13-28). God takes note of those who are faithful to him.

Sadly, the discipline began with those entrusted to spiritually lead the people. Ezekiel 9:6 says, "'Begin at my sanctuary.' So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple." Those who should have known best failed the worst. James 3:1 says that "we who teach will be judged more strictly." The priests and prophets of Ezekiel's day knew better. So do the pastors and seminary professors of our day.

But this didn't take the followers off the hook. The few faithful folks were marked, then spared. The unfaithful people faced discipline, exile, and death. It is not enough to claim that your leaders taught you wrong. Ignorance is no excuse. God expects faithfulness.

What does this reading teach you about the people in Ezekiel's day. What about our day? What about in the end times? How is the Lord calling you to live?

### Poem

#### There Are Times In Our Days

*There are times in our days  
When the world seems so bleak  
When false promises, speech  
When all good is impeached  
That response is oft' hard  
Words seem helpless to form  
But with sighing and groaning  
We live*

*In these times of our grief  
When the world seems so bleak  
When false promises, speech  
When all good is impeached  
That we must oft' remember  
Our watermarked brow  
With the sign of the cross  
God's firm baptismal vow  
We live*



10/8/2024  
WEEK 40 DAY 2

# The Glory of the Lord Departs from the Temple



## Scripture EZEKIEL 10

### Devotional

When Ezekiel was called by God, he saw a stunning vision that he knew to be “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (Ezek. 1:28). Then, in yesterday’s reading, the prophet stated, “Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple” (Ezekiel 9:3). In today’s reading this is repeated, concluding with this glorious summary: “The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord” (Ezekiel 10:4).

The presence of the glory of the Lord was deeply important for the Israelites. Nearly a thousand years earlier, Moses cried out to God, “Now show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18). God gave him the Ten Commandments, and his face was radiant.

Later in the story, Moses would meet with God in the tabernacle, the portable tent that would be used until the permanent temple could be constructed. The Bible says, “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34-35).

It is most disturbing that in today’s reading Ezekiel sees a vision when the glory of the Lord departed the temple. The four living creatures from chapter 1 were now understood by the prophet to be the angelic beings whose purpose was to give glory to God. They rose from their place in the temple and departed toward the gate of the city that faced Babylon. The people had abandoned God; now he was departing from them.

What can we learn about God and ourselves from today’s reading? Do you long for the glory of the Lord? How will you live under the shadow of His wings?

### Poem

Let Not Your Glory Leave Me, Lord

*Let not your glory leave me, LORD  
Your temple fires keep burning  
Your lampstands lit  
Your bread to feed  
Your linen clothed one serving*

*Let not your glory leave me, LORD  
Allow my sight to see you  
Consume all dross  
Rescue what’s lost  
Your linen clothed one honor*

*Let not your glory leave me, LORD  
My feet be quick to serve you  
With joyous praise  
With head now raised  
Your linen clothed one joining*

10/9/2024  
WEEK 40 DAY 3

# A Pot of Meat or a Heart of Flesh



## Scripture EZEKIEL 11

### Devotional

God had used Ezekiel to warn the elders in Jerusalem that they would be the first to face punishment in the coming invasion from Babylon. They rejected those ideas, smugly saying that they were the choice meat that would remain in the pot of Jerusalem. They even pointed to the fact that they had rebuilt their houses destroyed in the previous invasions. They felt secure in their disobedience to the Lord. Only the inedible scraps are thrown out of a pot.

The Lord warned them that they are those scraps, while those they have killed or exiled to Babylonia are the true meat. He bluntly told the leaders of Jerusalem, "This city will not be a pot for you, nor will you be the meat in it; I will execute judgment on you at the borders of Israel" (v. 11). Those borders are where the coming Babylonian invaders would attack from.

But all would not be forever lost. While many would be exiled to Babylon, far away from the temple in Jerusalem, the Lord promised, "Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone" (v. 16). God would be their temple in exile. Hallelujah!

Then, in the future, the Lord would bring a remnant of His people back to Jerusalem, back to the Promised Land. They will rebuild the destroyed walls and temple of Jerusalem. They will remove all signs of idol worship. And God made this guarantee: "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (v. 19).

Think about it. The corrupt elders claimed to be the pot of choice meat that would never be removed from Jerusalem. But God said only a future remnant would have a heart of flesh to be devoted to Him alone. One thought they were indispensable to the world. The other would be indispensable to the Lord.

Which are you?

### Poem

None Left!

*None left! None left!  
All the pieces scattered!  
None left! None left!  
What was once is shattered!*

*None left! None left!  
Remnant pieces finished!  
None left! None left!  
God's people diminished!*



10/10/2024  
WEEK 40 DAY 4

# Pack and Prepare for the Exile



## Scripture EZEKIEL 12

### Devotional

There is a famous Japanese depiction of three monkeys covering eyes (see no evil), ears (hear no evil), and mouth (speak no evil). Ezekiel put it like this when talking about the rebellious Israelites: “They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people” (v. 2). At the end of the chapter, he showed how they were denying with their mouths by saying, “every vision comes to nothing” and this “vision is for many years from now” (v. 22, 27). Denial is the diet of disobedience.

To make his point, Ezekiel put on a two-act, one-actor play. During the day, he packed as if he were going into exile. During the evening, he dug through the wall and left. This had their attention. When they asked what he was up to, he said the little stage drama represented what was going to happen to them. They didn't ask for an encore or wait for a curtain call. They just took another bite of denial.

In Matthew 13:13 Jesus told his disciples why he spoke to the people in parables: “This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand’” Then He went on in the Matthew 13:14-15 referencing Isaiah 6:9-10, saying:

“In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

Jesus concluded in Matthew 13:16-17, saying to His disciples, “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

What are you seeing, hearing, and saying about God?

### Poem

#### The Day Is Coming

*The day is coming, says the LORD  
The day of isolation  
The day of sorrow, day of want  
The day of degradation*

*How shall the righteous be  
prepared?  
What in their pack shall be?  
The Word of God packed in their  
bag  
When they the exile see*

*This sweet supply will hold them  
fast  
Despite great famine landing  
Its oil and flour, be their bread  
When others fall, be standing*

10/11/2024  
WEEK 40 DAY 5

# The Baby who Becomes Wife then Prostitute



## Scripture EZEKIEL 16

### Devotional

Throughout the Bible, God is often depicted as the husband of his people. Consider this passage from Isaiah 54:5-6 which says,

“For your Maker is your husband—  
the Lord Almighty is his name—  
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;  
he is called the God of all the earth.  
The Lord will call you back  
as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in  
spirit—  
a wife who married young,  
only to be rejected,” says your God.

And throughout the Bible, the people of God are often depicted as a prostitute, who has abandoned her husband in search of love from false gods and idols. Today’s reading from Ezekiel 16:15-16 paints the picture:

“But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. You went to him, and he possessed your beauty.”

Finally, throughout the Bible, we continually see how God pursues his wayward wife to bring her back to Himself. Hosea 2:16-17 conveys this truth, stating,

“In that day,” declares the Lord,  
“you will call me ‘my husband’;  
you will no longer call me ‘my [Baal].’  
I will remove the names of the Baals from her  
lips;  
no longer will their names be invoked.”

What does this teach you about God?

What does this say about people?

How does this apply to you?

### Poem

#### A Life

*A life began with wretched start  
Unwanted and forsaken  
No one to care for basic needs  
No future, left unsharpened*

*A call to grow, a call to thrive  
An arm extended, taken  
A future hope, a covenant  
Twisted beginning, straightened*

*But early ways of emptiness  
Attachment hard to handle  
Ran from great love, ran to abyss  
Ran back to vomit, scandal*



10/14/2024  
WEEK 41 DAY 1

# Israel Has Become Dross Left in the Furnace



## Scripture EZEKIEL 22

### Devotional

The Bible is filled with references comparing God to silver and gold. For example, Psalm 119:72 says, "The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold." And Psalm 12:6 reminds us, "And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times."

Indeed, precious metals are refined in intense heat to remove the impurities, called the dross. When the heat is raised, the metals melt. The dross rises to the top and is skimmed off, leaving only the pure metals.

But in Jerusalem, the impurities had not been removed. They had remained, polluting the whole lot. In fact, they had risen to the top of Judah's political, social, and religious culture. I've always said that cream rises to the top, but so does scum. Just because it is visible on the surface doesn't mean it is good.

So, God said he would turn up the heat with His fiery wrath, stoking the furnace until all the pure metals and impure dross melted together. Jerusalem would be set ablaze, making it a crucible of God's judgment and wrath.

In Isaiah 1:25 the Lord had warned, "I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities." Now, well over a hundred years later, Ezekiel repeats the message.

Psalm 119:118-120 should give us pause. It says:  
You reject all who stray from your decrees,  
for their delusions come to nothing.  
All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross;  
therefore I love your statutes.  
My flesh trembles in fear of you;  
I stand in awe of your laws.

What is the dross in your culture? What is the dross in your life? How is God calling you to skim off and discard the impurities?

### Poem

#### Convicted

*Just this past week  
I viewed a flick  
Recounting Nazi horrors  
Of forcing Jews  
To dig their graves  
Before mass execution  
I pondered what  
Gets in one's mind  
Allowing trigger pulling  
Against unarmed  
And innocent  
With brutal mock delighting  
A numbness ill?  
An angry hate?  
How does one come to such space?  
O, Lord, have mercy!  
How do you bear  
All of sin's vast boggy quicksand?*

*Just this past year  
I heard them talk  
About our rights entitled  
To kill a child  
Though yet unborn  
Not comprehending brutal  
The knife, the vacuum  
The piercing stab  
Which lingers after damage  
Upon the heart  
And mind of one  
Whose choice was granted license  
What capabilities  
Were lost?  
What gifts to world full silenced?  
The sacrifice  
Of children now  
The seat of human violence*

*Just now today  
I heard the voice  
Of prophet ageless speaking  
Declaring God's  
Full judgment on  
A nation in blood drowning  
With waves of violence  
Undertow  
A current long aged pulling  
Which slowly drags  
Us underneath  
A chaos, subtle sliding  
I call to God  
"O, save us, Lord!  
I fear we all are sinking!  
We'll surely die  
Amidst this storm  
In violence, hate, we're choking!"*

10/15/2024  
WEEK 41 DAY 2

# Shepherds Who Care Only for Themselves



## Scripture EZEKIEL 34

### Devotional

In Ezekiel 24, the prophet's wife died one evening. But God told him that he was not to observe the customary Jewish Shiva, the seven-day period of grieving and rituals to mourn the dead. This was a sign for the people of Jerusalem, that they were not to mourn when the temple of God was destroyed by the invading Babylonians (Ezekiel 24:15-24).

In today's reading, ten chapters later, Ezekiel turns his attention to the leaders of the people of Judah. He called out these shepherds for only taking care of themselves, not their flock. Even though the people were being scattered to foreign nations in exile, God promised, "As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep" (Ezekiel 34:12).

In a similar way, Jesus said these things about Himself:

"Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them." (John 10:7-8)

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:9-10)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." (John 10:11-13)

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life— only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (John 10:14-18)

What does it mean to you that "the Lord is my Shepherd?"

### Poem

#### Shepherds Beware

*The news declares  
"Attendance Down  
In Mainline Denominations"  
The pulpits bare  
The pews despair  
The Sunday Schools now store rooms  
The buildings crumble  
Halls unlit  
The smell of mold, paint peeling  
The gasping breath  
Of once vibrance  
With rales, death rattle seizing*

*What happened shepherds  
To your flocks  
You given charge to manage?  
No faith passed on  
No hearts afire  
From lazy preaching damage  
When did your prayers  
Become extinct  
Your pastoring pathetic  
The truth was compromised  
For what?  
Your academic rhetoric?*

*Beware, O Shepherds  
Time will come  
When you will stand in judgment  
Before the judge  
Before the Spirit  
Quenched by disobedience  
Rebellious hearts and  
Prideful thoughts  
No lame excuse will carry  
Woe to you  
Scribes and Pharisees!  
Your millstone now is granted*



10/16/2024  
WEEK 41 DAY 3

# The Valley of Dry Bones



## Scripture EZEKIEL 37

### Devotional

After the death of King Solomon, the nation of Israel split in two. The northern kingdom became known as Israel. It endured a few hundred years of corrupt kings until it was conquered by Assyria. The people were exiled to foreign lands.

The southern kingdom of Judah lasted over 130 years longer, until they were conquered by Babylon. As with their cousins to the north, the people of Judah were exiled to foreign lands.

In many ways, both were considered dead to the Jews who remained in the homeland, cast away to a valley of dry, dead bones. In this stirring vision, God promised to put flesh on the bones and breath into the lungs of the dead nation. A remnant would return to the Promised Land.

Not only that, but the divided nation would be reunited. Each was represented by a separate stick. The Lord told Ezekiel, "Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand" (v. 17). What had been separated for over half a millennium would become one again. Nothing is impossible for God.

But the Lord had even more in mind. In Romans 9:8 Paul said, "it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring." It is one thing to be God's children by blood. It is a better thing to be God's children through Christ's blood.

Ezekiel envisioned a time when Jerusalem would be rebuilt from the ground up, beginning with the temple. In the New Testament, John envisioned a time when a New Jerusalem would descend from the top down. He wrote, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

In this pure, heavenly Jerusalem, John said in Revelation 21:22-27, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Hallelujah! The dry bones will live forever!

### Poem

#### Dry Bones, Dry Bones

*Dry bones, dry bones  
Rattle, broken, whitewashed  
Lifeless, lifeless  
Buried in the sand*

*Once lived, once lived  
Fighting hard in battle  
Now dead, now dead  
By false winds now barren*

*Bone doc, bone doc  
Put them back together  
Still yet, still yet  
Skeletal dead model*

*God hand, God hand  
Molding clay together  
Blow wind, blow wind  
From the lungs of heaven*

*New life, new life  
Rising up an army  
Chanting, chanting  
Hymns of glory praising*

10/17/2024  
WEEK 41 DAY 4

# The Glory of God Returns to the Temple



Scripture **EZEKIEL 43:1-12**

## Devotional

In Ezekiel 10-11, the glory of the Lord departed from the temple in Jerusalem. It was the low point in Judah's spiritual history. Soon the city would be conquered by Babylon and many of the people exiled to live in foreign lands.

In the previous few readings, we saw how Ezekiel began to give messages of hope to the exiled people. In Ezekiel 34, God promised to be their Shepherd, even as their own leaders had failed them. And in Ezekiel 37, the Lord gave the prophet visions of resurrected bones and united sticks, symbolizing the reestablishment and reunification of Israel.

And in today's reading, the glory of the Lord comes back from the eastern border of Israel (which is the direction of Babylon) and enters the temple again. The end of verse 5 is an expression of praise: "the glory of the Lord filled the temple."

Then, God laid out His hope for the people, that they would honor His holy name and turn their backs on their sinful ways. His call was for His people to be spiritually perfect, for this is an expression of who God is.

1 Peter 1:15-16 says, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" Jesus put it like this: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

This call to spiritual holiness and perfection is a lofty one. The Bible is clear that all people have sinned. Only Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. That is why His death on the cross did for us what we could never accomplish. Yet He gave us His Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, His temple. The glory of the Lord fills us!

The Bible says, "In this world we are like Jesus" (1 John 4:17). His love overwhelms us. His glory fills us. We are to become more and more like him in holiness every day. To God be the glory.

How is the Holy Spirit speaking to you today?

## Poem

### Return To Me

*Return to me, my True Love,  
How desolate my temple  
How aches my heart  
No word from you  
I stand by window  
Lamp lit view  
Longing for that first glimpse  
Of you  
Returning to me, my True Love*

*Fling wide my door, my True Love,  
Fill every space with presence  
Fill these wet eyes  
With sight of you  
I fall upon your  
Warm embrace  
Dwelling in that lasting glory  
Of you  
Flinging wide my door, my True  
Love*

10/18/2024  
WEEK 41 DAY 5

# The River from the Temple



## Scripture EZEKIEL 47:1-12

### Devotional

A Shepherd who cares for His exiled people. God is always with us.

A valley of skeletons with new flesh on their bones and new breath in their lungs. The remnant would live.

Two old sticks which grow together and form one new stick. The nation would be established once again.

A rebuilt temple in the Holy City that is filled with the glory of the Lord.

What could top all this? In today's reading, Ezekiel gives a beautiful picture of the river of life flowing out of the rebuilt temple in rebuilt Jerusalem. Keep in mind that the land to the east of the city toward the Dead Sea is nothing but desert. The Dead Sea itself is a lifeless body of water, filled with six times more salt than the ocean. The Dead Sea scrolls were preserved for two thousand years because of the hot, dry desert climate of the region.

Ezekiel sees that there is so much vibrant life coming forth from Jerusalem's rebuilt temple that the desert produces fruit trees and the Dead Sea is the home for schools of fish. Wildlife is everywhere in a once desolate landscape. The glory of the Lord is so abundant that life is everywhere!

Once when Jesus was talking to a Samaritan woman, he told her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10). Jesus is the source of living water!

But that's not all. He also said that His followers produce that same kind of life-giving water. In John 7:38 Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." How is this possible?

The answer is given in John 7:39, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." The Holy Spirit, dwelling in us, gives us life-giving potential for others!

How has Jesus poured his living water into your life? How are you pouring it into others?

### Poem

#### The Reign

*The blazing Son  
The somber heat  
Left branches bent  
Left leaves curled, brittle  
Left fruit dried up  
All worthless*

*Though dead stalks pruned  
Though weak limbs shored  
The heart was bent  
The will exhausted, spent  
The gifts unused  
All barren*

*Then came the Reign  
Then Living Water  
Streaming droplets  
Streaming pour, down walls  
Streaming river swelling  
All renewing*

*Now blazing Son  
Now warming heart  
Brought branches girth  
Brought green life, vibrant  
Brought fruit to swell  
All fervent*



10/21/2024  
WEEK 42 DAY 1

# Daniel and Others Enter the King's Service



## Scripture DANIEL 1

### Devotional

Recall that the Babylonian empire attacked Judah and took exiles from there back to Babylon in three waves over more than twenty years. Daniel was taken captive in the first wave, Ezekiel was deported during the second wave, and Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took more exiles in the third wave.

Ezekiel's ministry was to the Jews in Jerusalem and the Jews in Babylonia. Daniel, however, was taken into the capital city of Babylon to serve their king. He was chosen because of his physical looks and intellectual acumen. He was then given the best food and education to prepare him for his task. This was like my three-year seminary degree, except Lisa and I ate whatever food we could afford.

Daniel must have felt our pain, because he refused to eat the Babylonian cuisine, probably because it included forbidden food for Jews. The official in charge agreed to the ten-day test, giving Daniel and his three friends a vegetarian diet. They passed, then spent the next three years studying all kinds of literature and languages.

This chapter gives me too many seminary flashbacks. But it is not really about the kind of diet or education you undertake. The key phrase comes at the beginning of verse 8, where Daniel "resolved not to defile himself."

Every day we make decisions, from tiny to titanic. Should I say this? Should I do that? Is it okay to believe one way and live another?

Jesus once said, "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them" (Matthew 15:11). The disciples didn't get it, and basically said the Hebrew version of "Huh?"

Jesus responded with clarity in Matthew 15:16-20, saying, "Are you still so dull? ...Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

For Daniel, eating forbidden food would defile his heart and lead him down the path of compromising his faith in God. For the Christian, food restrictions are a thing of the past. But there are plenty of other ways to sidestep Jesus and do our own thing.

Are there any ways in which you are compromising your faith? What is the Lord saying to you? What is your next step?

### Poem

#### Best And Brightest

*I'll steal your best and brightest  
The conquering King declared  
I'll use them to advance my name  
I'll use them to shore up my reign  
Enslave them for my bounty  
Their brilliance will surround me*

*Give me your best and brightest  
God's heavenly kingdom call  
I'll gift you to advance my name  
I'll gift you to spread forth my reign  
Release them for salvation  
For each and every nation*

10/22/2024  
WEEK 42 DAY 2

# The Fiery Furnace



## Scripture DANIEL 3

### Devotional

Some of the most famous, well-paid people in the world are folks who don't really contribute that much. Face it. Sports heroes, movie stars, and music idols (especially country music) don't really make or break a society. It's the school teachers, construction workers, and first responders that are the backbone of a nation. But it's been a long time since I've been to a middle school with a statue of the seventh-grade science teacher in front of the building.

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that bothered him so much he couldn't sleep. His magic men and soothsayers were useless, so finally the king sent for Daniel. The Jewish exile not only told the king the interpretation, but he told him what his private dream itself was. The dream was of a huge statue representing the king's current Babylonian empire (a head of gold), and three future empires (chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs and feet of iron and clay.)

Here in Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar doesn't mess around with all these future empires made of various materials. Rather, he made a ninety-foot-tall statue of his own empire, made completely of gold. The fiery furnace awaited anyone who refused to worship the king's image. The newly appointed administrators of Babylon were three such people refusing to comply. Their Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They famously survived the blazes without a hint of smoke on their clothes. They were protected by a fourth person who was perhaps an angel or maybe even Jesus Himself. Sometimes we have to do the right thing, no matter how it turns out. For these three guys, they ended up getting promoted.

They are referred to in the New Testament book of Hebrews, where the author is listing great people of faith, including those who "quenched the fury of the flames" (Hebrews 11:34). But things don't always go so well for the faithful followers of God. This same section of Scripture also refers to believers who met their gruesome death by being stoned, sawed in two, or killed by the sword (Hebrews 11:37).

Have you ever had a time when you had to stand up for your faith, regardless of the consequences? Imagine a future in which you are pressured to comply with something that would compromise your faith. How would you respond? How far would you go?

### Poem

#### In This World

*In this world, we'll face giants  
Of mocking and disgrace  
In this world, we'll receive bad news  
Which throws us on our face  
In this world, we'll have trials  
Which tempt or try us sore  
In this world, we will grieve and  
mourn  
We'll be rocked to the core  
In this world, we'll be tossed about  
By storms and brutal weather  
In this world, we will be betrayed  
By once beloved brother  
In this world, fiery furnace blasts  
Will threaten our resolve  
But even so, in this world, know  
God's sovereign reign will vow  
To hold you steadfast in your faith  
To keep you from denial  
To strengthen you with courage  
strong  
To stand with you in trial*

10/23/2024  
WEEK 42 DAY 3

# The Crazy Dream



## Scripture DANIEL 4

### Devotional

Would you like to know the future? How the stock market is going to perform in the coming year? Which player your team should draft with their #1 pick? If the person you have been dating is the one you should marry? The exact date and time you are going to face tragedy?

Daniel, here known by his Babylonian name Belteshazzar, is given the task of telling King Nebuchadnezzar his depressing future. Then he told the king how to escape that impending doom: "Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed." God gave him twelve months to humble himself and get right with God. Instead, he used that year to admire his own greatness. As a result, this "divine" king became a raving madman.

Ultimately, we do know the future. In the end, everyone will spend eternity in either heaven or hell. The Bible says that all people have sinned, and that makes us unfit for the glorious perfection of heaven. Jesus' death on the cross provides the means by which our sins can be forgiven and we can spend eternity in heaven. Look at these verses:

"Repent, then, and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus, the Christ, who has been appointed for you." (Acts 3:19-20)

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise belongs to you and your children and to all who are far off—to all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9)

These and other verses show us that only Jesus can save us. A step to receiving that eternal salvation is to confess and repent of our sins. There's the offer. You have between now and the end of your life to accept it. Using that time to admire your own greatness would be insane. But humbling yourself before the great and glorious God would be genius. What will you do?

### Poem

#### God Alone

*The grace of God is often shined  
In tests and trials which chop us down  
Our flesh made weak  
Our comfort challenged  
Integrity sawed  
Our lives, unmanaged  
For in times like these we realize  
From standing proud, we fall to ground  
Acknowledging dependence  
Upon  
God alone*

*The grace of God has come to those  
Both rich and poor, both high and low  
To weaken us  
To strip the bark  
Of comfort's shield  
To prune our pride  
For only then our rebellion staid  
Our reaching for forbidden fruit  
Our reaching hand pulled  
Back by  
God alone*

*The grace of God is best displayed  
By one who gave up heaven's throne  
To empty out  
To be stripped bare  
Humility grasped  
To relinquish equality with God  
For only then could full obedience  
Be seen as true love stretched wide  
Upon a cross, the will of God made  
Perfect by  
God alone*



10/24/2024  
WEEK 42 DAY 4

# The Handwriting on the Wall



## Scripture DANIEL 5

### Devotional

The events in this story took place about a dozen years after the death of King Nebuchadnezzar. By then Babylonia was co-reigned by King Belshazzar and his father King Nabonidus. Belshazzar spent most of his time in the capital city of Babylon, while his dad was away trying to improve relations with Persia's King Cyrus. Holding an empire together has always been a tenuous effort.

Indeed, Daniel's interpretation of the handwriting on the wall was nothing but bad news for Belshazzar. Maybe it was the king's arrogance in using items stolen from the temple in Jerusalem for his drunken, idolatrous party. Perhaps it was the fact that he continued to consult ungodly soothsayers for his spiritual questions. Or possibly it was the way he praised the handmade false gods of his culture. Most likely, it was all three.

To "see the handwriting on the wall" is a phrase that has endured for over 2,500 years. It means that we are aware of something bad that is going to happen. Often it implies that there is nothing we can do about the inevitable danger or doom. We just need to pack up the desk and turn in the key. Welcome to the gloomy world of Winnie-the-Pooh's friend Eeyore, whose current depression is only exceeded by his future pessimism.

Whether you have an inflated view of yourself (like Belshazzar) or a dark view of life (like Eeyore), we need to understand that our lives are in God's hands.

On the metal file cabinet in my office, I have a magnetic verse that says, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3). This promise is about yielding to God. The king of the greatest empire is not in control of the future. Just ask Belshazzar whose mighty Babylonian Empire was taken over by Darius the Mede in one night. Nor is the best approach to be Eeyore, the donkey of doom, who could only see the clouds and never the rainbow during a gentle rain.

Rather than being puffed with pride or weighted with worry, Jesus said we should, "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). How are you doing with trusting, yielding, and committing yourself to God? What needs to change?

### Poem

#### Numbered, Weighed, Divided

*Teach us, O LORD, that our days are  
numbered  
They fly, forgotten, upon the wind  
Like dandelion pappus  
They scatter and no more  
Blown away  
Blown away*

*Remind us, O LORD, that our lives will  
be weighed  
Upon your righteous scales of justice  
Chaff and weeds  
Tossed and discarded  
Little left  
Little left*

*Warn us, O LORD, that our treasures  
will be divided  
Once stored, polished, cherished  
Will rust and mold  
Be seen as worthless  
Thrown away  
Thrown away*

10/25/2024  
WEEK 42 DAY 5

# Daniel Survives the Lion's Den



## Scripture DANIEL 6

### Devotional

By this chapter, Daniel had been living as an exile away from Jerusalem for many decades. The Babylonian Empire had been overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire, ruled by Cyrus the Great. The identity of Darius in this chapter is uncertain. It could have been a royal title for the appointed governor of Babylon.

Daniel, now over 80 years old, had proven himself so well that he was one of the top administrators in the Medo-Persian regime. Jealousy ensued, and his underlings set a trap for their Jewish boss. Soon, the octogenarian found himself at the bottom of a lion pit. Everyone knew that the old man couldn't fend off the ferocious felines, so the king simply told him, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

Quite often that is the best advice. When there is no logical way out, trust in God. When you don't know which way to turn, trust in God. When faced with insurmountable odds, may God rescue you!

Five hundred years earlier, David was on the run from King Saul, who wanted to eliminate his competition. David wrote Psalm 18 as a response to God's rescue. Here is part of what he said in verses 16-19 about how God took care of him:

He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
He drew me out of deep waters.  
He rescued me from my powerful enemy,  
from foes too mighty for me.  
They confronted me in my day of calamity,  
but the LORD was my support.  
He brought me out into the open;  
He rescued me because He delighted in me.

God is so good. He loves His people and promises to be there at all times. When you are facing something that is beyond your ability to rescue yourself, put yourself in God's care. The hands of the Lord are mightier than the jaws of a lion!

### Poem

#### The Lion

*When we love the LORD  
And worship God alone  
Expect the lions to gather  
Growling insults  
Gruff on neck  
Panting for blood  
Ready to pounce*

*When we love the LORD  
And worship God alone  
Expect the Lion of Judah  
King of the jungle  
Thorn crown on brow  
Shedding blood  
Ready to defend*

10/28/2024  
WEEK 43 DAY 1

# Jews Can Return from Exile to Build Temple



## Scripture EZRA 1

### Devotional

It had been nearly fifty years since the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple of God. Now, half a century later, the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire, headed by King Cyrus. For the next hundred years after that, Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

The book of Ezra records the return of the first remnant to rebuild the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Later Ezra himself would return with the second remnant to rebuild their spiritual lives. The book of Nehemiah records the return of the third remnant to rebuild the walls around the city.

Daniel 6 was written about the same time as the events of Ezra 1. At about the same time that the new Medo-Persian authorities were throwing Jews into lion's dens, they were also allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the destroyed temple. Solomon had built the temple when Israel was a powerful nation, only to be destroyed by the Babylonians four hundred years later. Now, the temple would be rebuilt again.

Ezra 2 tells us that some 50,000 people were released by King Cyrus to relocate from Babylon to Jerusalem and surrounding towns to rebuild the temple under the direction of Zerubbabel. They brought with them thousands of work animals and tons of silver and gold to complete the project. Even those who did not return contributed to the success of the project.

The temple again became the center of worship for the Jewish people. In all, a Jewish temple stood on Mt. Zion for most of the one thousand years from the death of David to the death of Jesus. Rome would destroy that temple just forty years after Jesus' death. Today the Islamic Dome of the Rock stands on the site of the ancient Temple of God.

When Jesus was beginning his ministry, He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it in three days" (John 2:19). The Jewish religious leaders thought he was being ridiculous. Then John, one of his disciples, explains: "But the temple He had spoken of was his body. After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:21-22).

Writing the book of Revelation six decades after Rome crucified Jesus and two decades after Rome destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, this same author John wrote this about his vision of heaven: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb [Jesus] are its temple" (Revelation 21:22).

What do you think? Why was the temple so important to the Jews of Old Testament times? As a Christian, how is Jesus our true temple?

### Poem

#### The Lord Can Move The Heart

*The LORD can move the heart  
Of the most unlikely one  
To execute His plans  
To see His will be done*

*The LORD can freeze the  
heart  
Of those set high above  
To render full redemption  
For those He fully loves*

*The LORD can stiffen necks  
Of ones set to destroy  
As weak ones yield  
submission  
His glory to employ*

*The LORD can bring  
transforming  
So great, it gives all pause  
For His, the great intention  
To save those named "lost  
cause"*



10/29/2024  
WEEK 43 DAY 2

# Zerubbabel Rebuilds Altar & Temple Foundation



## Scripture **EZRA 3**

### Devotional

It is interesting to note that the first thing the returned exiles rebuilt was the altar. Before a single foundation stone was laid, they were making a statement that they would prioritize the worship of God above everything else.

Just like Solomon had done five hundred years earlier, they purchased imported cedar logs from Sidon and Tyre (see 1 Kings 5). While they were awaiting the arrival of the lumber, the people undertook the difficult task of laying the foundation. Keep in mind that the temple had been destroyed, with the walls, roof and other materials falling in place. All this had to be removed manually before the first foundation stone could be put in place. It's no wonder that they played music and gave shouts of joy when they were done with the foundation.

In 586 BC the Babylonians had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. Now, fifty years later, in 536 BC, the foundation was back in place. The older priests remembered the splendor of Solomon's temple, surrounded by a city of wealth and prestige. The new foundation was surrounded by burned out houses and a city wall that was merely a pile of rubble. No wonder they wept.

Ponder the priorities of this chapter. They built the altar, then stopped to worship. They built the foundation, then stopped to praise. They remembered the past, then stopped to weep.

What are the things in your life that are not yet finished? Are there any from your past that are worthy of mourning? Any in your future that need celebrating now?

### Poem

#### Altar And Temple

*When through the deep waters of flooding  
When trials have forty days spent  
When fin'ly from exile you're carried  
To freedom out of great lament  
When enemies are now defeated  
When now upon dry land you stand  
When fasting and ashes are all washed  
away  
Deliverance witnessed first hand  
'Tis now time to build God an altar  
Great stones, Ebenezer erect  
And give God the best of your offerings  
Your life laid out, your all to subject*

*And once sacrifice burning is finished  
It's time to rebuild for the LORD  
Your temple, your life, God's great meeting  
Where spiritual waters will pour  
Where you'll find a peace sanctuary  
From all foes who hound at your feet  
Safe hidden within its strong fortress  
You'll stand before God's mercy seat  
And there you will offer the incense  
Of prayers, praise, and there bless the  
LORD  
For now, you no longer are stranger  
But covered by love, one accord*

10/30/2024  
WEEK 43 DAY 3

# Amid Opposition, Artaxerxes Halts Rebuilding Temple



## Scripture **EZRA 4**

### Devotional

After the death of King Solomon, the nation split in two. The northern kingdom was called Israel. It was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. They exiled most of the people of Israel, and repopulated the land with others from their vast empire. These people intermarried with the remaining Jews. Their mixed breed offspring became known as the Samaritans. In the New Testament, Jesus stopped at a well and had a spiritual conversation with a Samaritan woman. John lets us know how unusual this was, saying, "Jews do not associate with Samaritans" (John 4:9).

It was some of these folks who volunteered to assist with the temple reconstruction. Most likely they wanted to insert themselves in the process and disrupt the plans. Zerubbabel saw through their offer and denied their help. As a result they did everything they could to halt the reconstruction. Look at these phrases:

"set out to discourage"

"make them afraid"

"work against them"

"frustrate their plans"

"lodged an accusation"

"came to a standstill"

What would you have done if you had been one of the workers who was trying to rebuild the temple? What about if you had been Zerubbabel, who was overseeing the massive project? What do you do when people do things against you? How can you keep from being a naysayer to others who are trying to do God's work?

### Poem

#### The Reality Of The Faithful

*Have you ever felt a call from God  
To do  
To build  
To mend  
Only to face roadblocks at each turn  
Your way blocked  
Your way hindered  
Your way opposed?*

*It is at times like these that you wonder  
Did I hear incorrectly  
Did I miss the mark  
Did I lose a puzzle piece  
In in your discouragement and frustration  
Were you tempted to give up  
Were you tempted to quit  
Were you tempted to leave the call  
unfinished?*

*Dear Pilgrim, you are not alone  
For so it has been by many in the past  
For so it is for many now  
For so it is for many in the future  
As it was in the beginning is now and ever  
shall be  
The faithful will be challenged  
The faithful will be betrayed  
The faithful will be opposed*

*But know, dear Pilgrim, you are not alone  
For so they rebelled against God  
For so they rejected their Messiah  
For so they quenched the Holy Spirit  
Yet in the midst of all the chaos and sorrow  
God has placed one for such a time as this  
God has reserved 7000 as a remnant  
God has become incarnate and  
tabernacled among you*

10/31/2024  
WEEK 43 DAY 4

# Haggai & Zechariah Arrive Amid Conflict



## Scripture **EZRA 5**

### Devotional

Let's review the timeline:

586 BC - the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians.

536 BC - work begins on the reconstruction of the temple.

530 BC - reconstruction work comes to a standstill for a decade.

520 BC - work begins again under the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Verse 2 says, "Zerubbabel... set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them." Haggai and Zechariah gave both their prophetic words and the sweat of their brows to the temple reconstruction. We will look at some of their prophetic statements in the coming days.

The restart of the building project led to a restart of tension with opponents. The Medo-Persian Empire was vast, incorporating modern-day Sudan, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Israel, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and all points between. In today's passage, a governor of one of those provinces knew nothing about the plan of the previous king Cyrus to authorize and finance the rebuilding of the temple. So, he wrote a letter to the current king Darius to get clarification.

Even with God on their side and God's prophets by their side, the people of God still ran into interference when they were doing what they were supposed to do. A half millennium later, Peter wrote a letter to the Christians who were facing persecution for simply being Christians:

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:12-16).

What does today's devotional teach you about perseverance?

### Poem

Haggai And Zechariah

*A hug  
Embrace  
A festal celebration  
A Haggai  
Who enters in  
With such an irony  
In the midst of chaos  
Can only mean  
God is with us  
Emmanuel*

*Review  
Remember  
The eternal call from God  
Who enters in  
With such a key  
In the midst of chaos  
Unlocks the truth  
God is with us  
Emmanuel*



11/1/2024  
WEEK 43 DAY 5

# Haggai Calls the People to Rebuild the Temple



Scripture **HAGGAI 1:1-2:9**

## Devotional

The reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem had been put on hold for a decade. The 50,000 Jews who returned from exile halted their work because of opposition and fear. In the meantime, they spent their time rebuilding their homes and resuming their lives in and around Jerusalem. God's word through Haggai had to sting: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

But it was when Haggai's message from the Lord, "I am with you," was delivered that the spirits of Governor Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, and the whole remnant of people were stirred (1:13-14). They got to work rebuilding the temple after a ten-year respite. God followed this up by saying, "But now be strong, Zerubbabel... Be strong, Joshua... Be strong, all you people of the land... and work. For I am with you" (2:4).

Opponents may stir up trouble, but God stirs the heart. Challengers may try to weaken, but God offers strength. The ignorant may sow seeds of doubt, but the Lord makes a promise: "I am with you."

God said, "I am with you" to Abraham when he was awaiting the birth of a son.

The Lord said, "I am with you" to Moses at the burning bush, calling him to the impossible task of freeing the people of God from Egyptian slavery.

God said, "I am with you" to Joshua as he prepared to enter and take the promised land.

He said, "I am with you" through the prophet Isaiah, calling the people to return to Him.

Jesus said, "I am with you always" as He ascended into heaven.

What does it mean to you that the Lord promises to be with you?

## Poem

### Our Souls Are Restless

*Our souls are restless  
As we try to quench the needs of  
Shelter with lodgings  
Harvest with planting  
Hunger with food  
Thirst with water  
Chill with clothing  
Provision with wealth*

*Only when we rest in God  
Are all our longings satisfied  
God becomes our Home  
God gives bounty to the Lord of the  
Harvest  
God satisfies the hungry heart with the  
Bread of Heaven  
God quenches with the Living Water  
God covers us with the Robe of  
Righteousness  
God supplies our every need by way  
of the Prince of Peace*

11/4/2024  
WEEK 44 DAY 1

# The Two Olive Trees & Call to Complete Temple



## Scripture **ZECHARIAH 4**

### *Devotional*

Along with Haggai, Zechariah was another prophet used by God to encourage the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Both men were encouraging Zerubbabel to resume the decade-long pause in the reconstruction. He did so, and they finished the new temple just four years later.

God's reminder to Zerubbabel is timeless: "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty." We might like to take credit for our good works and great efforts. But only God gets the glory.

The symbolism of this chapter is a stirring reminder of that. Verse 10 tells us that the seven lamps are the "eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth." God is everywhere and over everything. The olive trees on the right and left of the lampstand are probably Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the priest. They were the political and spiritual leaders of the Jewish people but were subservient to the power and presence of God Himself.

Five centuries later, Jesus said, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:4-6). This is a humble reminder that we are not in charge; only God is.

Jesus followed this up with what happens when we fully serve and follow Him: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:7-8). There it is. All to God's glory.

The reconstruction of the destroyed temple in Jerusalem was quite an undertaking. As they were working on it again, they were reminded that every timber and stone, every doorpost and window frame, every basin and lampstand all were made possible by God's power and gave glory to God's presence.

What are some of the accomplishments of your life for which you need to give glory to God?

### *Poem*

Child

*Where are you, Child?  
Kicking against the goads?  
Imprisoned by your own choices?  
Drowning in despair?  
Relying upon yourself?  
Your strength?  
Your intellect?  
Your connections?*

*I will give you rest, Child  
Your labors are in vain  
Come unto me  
Not by your might  
Not by your power  
But by my easy yoke  
But by my light burden  
But by my Spirit, says the LORD*

11/5/2024  
WEEK 44 DAY 2

# The Passover is Celebrated as Temple is Completed



## Scripture EZRA 6

### Devotional

When we were last in the book of Ezra, a regional governor from the Trans-Euphrates province of the Medo-Persian Empire sent an urgent request to King Darius. The governor was disturbed because the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had encouraged Zerubbabel and Joshua to resume their reconstruction work on the temple in Jerusalem. He knew nothing about the previous king Cyrus, and his supposed edict authorizing and financing the temple rebuild. So, he wrote the present king Darius for clarification.

Much to the regional governor's dismay, the edict was found. Adding insult to injury, King Darius ordered him to leave the Jews alone and to finance the project from his own Trans-Euphrates revenues. That will teach him not to meddle with God. Four years later the temple rebuild was completed. The celebration was a blessing to the Lord!

Seventy years earlier the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and deported the best and brightest to a life of exile in Babylon. Back then, the prophet Jeremiah encouraged them to make the most of their new situation. He advised them to build houses, settle down, plant gardens, raise families, build the economy, and get along with their captors (see Jeremiah 29:5-7).

Then Jeremiah conveyed this promise from the Lord to the captives: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile" (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

How would these words have sustained the exiles for those seventy years? What meaning would they have taken on when the temple was completed. What does this teach us about the promises of God? What does it teach us about patience?

### Poem

#### Stay Away

*You, Tempter  
Stay away from my Image Bearers  
You, Floodgates  
Stay away from my Ark Dwellers  
You, Pharaohs  
Stay away from my Chosen People  
You, Giants  
Stay away from my Anointed Ones  
You, False Idolators  
Stay away from my Prophets  
You, Destroyers  
Stay away from my Temple  
Builders  
You, Soldiers  
Stay away from my Innocent Ones  
You, Satan  
Stay away from my Son  
You, Betrayers  
Stay away from my Faithful Ones  
You, Deniers  
Stay away from my Beloved  
You, Death  
Stay away from my Risen People  
You, Powers of Hell  
Stay away from my Conqueror*

*Begone, Satan, begone!  
Get behind me, you Evil One!*



11/6/2024  
WEEK 44 DAY 3

# The Coming of Zion's King on a Donkey

Scripture **ZECHARIAH 9:9-17**

## Devotional

Most scholars believe Zechariah 1-8 was written during the time of the temple reconstruction. Chapters 9-14 were written about forty years later. The temple was completed, and new generations of Jews were living in Israel surrounded by oppressive nations hostile to the people of God. The walls of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt, leaving the city exposed and vulnerable.

The first eight verses of this reading are a declaration against those surrounding people groups. Then, with great hope, Zechariah speaks of a future Messiah:

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Five hundred years later, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey that had never been ridden. Matthew 21:4-5 tells why:

“This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:  
“Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

On the way to his crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy of Zechariah as the Messiah, that is, the Christ for all who believe!

Zechariah knew that the mere completion of the temple was only a first step to restore the people to God. He prophesied a Messiah who would proclaim peace to the nations. Look at the Lord's promise in Zechariah 9:11, “As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.”

That is a picture of Jesus freeing us from hell through His blood shed on the cross! Colossians 2:15 says, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Take a moment and thank Jesus that He is the fulfillment of everything in the Old Testament!

## Poem

### What Shall I Ride?

*Shall I ride in the womb  
Of a virgin maid  
As to Bethlehem  
I'm carried?*

*Shall I ride in the arms  
Of a mother mild  
As to Egypt  
I'm carried?*

*Shall I ride in the hidden cloak  
Of an obscure village  
As I wait for my time  
To come?*

*Shall I ride upon dusty feet  
Of an itinerant rabbi  
As I teach my disciples about the  
Kingdom  
To come?*

*Shall I ride upon the wind  
Of my baptizing Spirit  
As I am transfigured into glory yet  
To come?*

*Shall I ride upon a colt  
Of a Peace-loving king  
As I enter into the Holy City yet  
To come?*

*Shall I ride upon the tree  
Of a Roman crucifixion  
As I pay the price of salvation yet  
To come?*

*Shall I ride upon the clouds  
Of the space between earth and  
heaven  
As I ascend to the Father until  
I come?*

*Shall I ride upon the White Horse  
Of the Victor of heaven  
As I return to make all things new when  
I come?*

*Shall I ride upon the throne  
Of my Father's right hand  
As I break the seven seals of the scroll  
I'm worthy?*

9/12/2024  
WEEK 44 DAY 4

# Ezra Permitted to Return with 2nd Group of Exiles



## Scripture EZRA 7

### Devotional

Let's review once again the timeline of exile and return:

586 BC - Jerusalem is destroyed; Jews are exiled to Babylon.

538 BC - The first remnant returns under King Cyrus to begin reconstruction of the temple.

516 BC - The temple is completed during the reign of King Darius

458 BC - The second remnant returns to Jerusalem under King Artaxerxes to restore proper allegiance to the Lord.

It had been almost one hundred thirty years since the exiles were taken to Babylon, and nearly sixty years since the temple reconstruction was completed by the first remnant that returned to Jerusalem. Ezra was born and raised in Babylon but was brought up as a Jewish priest. He was well-versed and well-studied in the Law of the Lord. Plus, God gave him favor with Artaxerxes, the new Persian king.

Now it was Ezra's time to return to Jerusalem. His mission: to re-establish the Law of God among the people of God. Even though the temple had been rebuilt decades earlier, the hearts of the people were still not fully devoted to God.

When King Solomon completed the construction of the first temple, he offered a lengthy prayer to the Lord. Then he blessed the people saying, "And may your hearts be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time" (1 Kings 8:61). As we have seen throughout this study, the hearts of the kings, priests and people were anything but fully committed to the Lord. Things were no different after the construction of the second temple.

Going to a church building does not make one a fully devoted follower of God. In the New Testament, Paul poured out his hope and concern for the Christians living in Corinth, saying, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough (2 Corinthians 11:2-4).

Do you go to a church building for worship every week? Good! Is your life different on Sunday morning than it is on other days of the week? Not so good! How is God calling you to a life of "sincere and pure devotion to Christ?"

### Poem

#### Geneological Prayer

*Helper, son of  
The soldier of the LORD, son of  
God is my Helper, son of  
God is my Portion, son of  
Bestower of all that is good, son of  
The just and righteous one, son of  
My brother is goodness, son of  
God has given His promise, son of  
God is my Helper, son of  
Rebellion, son of  
The brightness of the LORD is rising,  
son of  
My strength, son of  
Emptied and tested one, son of  
My Father is rescue, son of  
An oracle from God, son of  
God has helped, son of  
Strong and exalted mountain of  
strength*

#### PRAYER

*You, O LORD, are my Helper  
The Soldier of my LORD who fights  
my battles when I find myself in exile.  
You are my Helper and my Portion,  
the Bestower of all that is good. You  
are the Just and Righteous One who  
is my only Brother who is Good, with-  
out sin. Through you, God has given  
His promise to Help all those once in  
Rebellion. You are like the Rising Sun,  
shedding your Brightness upon all the  
darkness in my life. In your strength,  
you emptied yourself and though  
tested and tempted, you remained  
faithful to God. My Father sent you to  
rescue me, to speak an oracle—the  
Word of God—which brings life and  
help. To you alone, do I run, strong  
and exalted mountain of strength, to  
find my refuge and peace.*

*Hallelujah!*

11/8/2024  
WEEK 44 DAY 5

# Ezra Opposes Intermarriage

## Scripture EZRA 9

### Devotional

Some 2000 families were part of the second remnant of Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. Eighty years earlier about 50,000 Jews were in the first wave of returning exiles. Add to these numbers the Jews who had remained in Judah when the Babylonians exiled their family and friends. There were many Jews living in the land.

Ezra's mission was to reestablish worship and obedience to the Law of God. If the nation of Israel was going to be restored, it would have to be from the inside out. But the idolatry of the surrounding nations was always looming. The very pagan practices that led Israel astray in the past were always ready to snag them again. When Ezra arrived, he saw that leaders, priests and people had intermingled with "the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices." Here we go again.

In the New Testament, the city of Corinth was a place of ungodliness. Still, Paul and others led some of the Corinthians to Christ. However, they still lived in Corinth, and intermingled themselves and their faith with those practicing pagan idolatry.

As a gut punch, Paul wrote to the Christians there, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and [Satan]? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

What does all this mean? Are we to form holy huddles and hide from the world? Paul answers that in his first letter to the same people of Corinth: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?" (1 Corinthians 5:9-12).

We are to be in relationship with people who don't believe in God or who do ungodly things. That doesn't mean we should marry them. Jesus knew that He was leaving His followers in the world. But He said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16).

How is God calling you to be in the world but not of it?

### Poem

#### Confession

*I have sinned against heaven and earth  
But more so  
I have sinned against you, O God  
I have defiled your holy temple  
Allowing your enemies to enter  
They have ravaged your holy places  
And stolen your priceless treasures  
I have joined myself to that which was  
forbidden  
I have been unfaithful to your covenant  
Running after other lovers  
I am ashamed and disgraced  
I cannot stand in your presence  
I cannot seek your face  
I am unclean and live among an unclean people  
You know our guilt  
Our stench has reached the throne room of  
your grace  
You are justified in your righteous holiness  
To abandon us to our enemies  
To send us to a far off country  
To let us die  
Feeding upon pig slop  
Dirty, torn and ragged  
Alone and outside the gates  
Skin and heart being eaten away  
By leprous necrosis  
We are no longer worthy to be called your  
people  
Your children  
Your inheritance  
By your grace and mercy  
Look upon us  
And save  
Plant us once again in a firm place  
Bring light to our eyes  
And relief to our bondage  
Rebuild us  
Repair us  
And protect us  
By the wall of your sanctuary  
For your name's sake*



11/11/2024  
WEEK 45 DAY 1

# Esther Becomes Queen; Mordecai Finds Conspiracy



## Scripture **ESTHER 2**

### Devotional

In recent weeks we have looked at exiles who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple and others who returned with Ezra to rebuild the hearts of the people back toward God. Not all the Jews returned though. The book of Esther takes place in Susa near Babylon. Historically, it takes place after the temple was rebuilt but before Ezra returned.

In Esther 1, the Persian King Xerxes became angry with his wife, Queen Vashti, because she refused to be paraded in front of him and his buddies at a royal drinking party. As a result, her crown was removed and she was forever banished from the king's presence. Fame and fortune are so fleeting.

In an ancient episode of The Bachelor, a kingdom-wide search was made for a new queen. Esther won the heart of Xerxes, and a Jew became queen of the Medo-Persian Empire. The kicker is that her cousin Mordecai convinced her to keep her family background and nationality a secret. Then Queen Esther and Mordecai worked together to expose an assassination plot, with her cousin getting the credit.

The book of Esther is famous for being one of only two books of the Bible that do not mention God. But we can see God working all throughout it. Here, the Lord is orchestrating things so that the descendant of an exiled Jew would become the First Lady of a vast empire.

How is God working in the background of your life? How do you see the Lord working in your community, school, workplace, nation and world? Thank God for all He does, whether seen and acknowledged, or not.

### Poem

O Heaven

*O Heaven,  
You came down today  
And took the hand  
Of your lowly servant  
And placed her  
In the palace of power  
Surrounded by enemies  
But guarded by the sword  
Of your Spirit  
Your word  
To execute  
Your salvation  
And deliverance  
Of your people*

*O Heaven,  
You came down today  
And opened the mind  
Of your lowly servant  
And revealed to him  
Upon the streets of exile  
Surrounded by enemies  
But guarded by the light  
Of your Spirit  
The plot  
To execute  
Your people  
And the way to  
Deliver your people*

9/17/2024  
WEEK 45 DAY 2

# Esther to Intervene in Plot Against the Jews

*Scripture* **ESTHER 3:1-6; 4:1-17**

## *Devotional*

Ego is a curious thing. Not enough and you can barely function. Too much and others wish you couldn't function. This guy Haman had enough ego for himself and a hundred other narcissists. Mordecai refused to kneel down to Haman, because faithful Jews only knelt down to the Lord. Haman decided, fine, then kill all the Jews. Another holocaust at the hands of an egomaniac.

Mordecai went into action. He sent word to his cousin, Queen Esther, asking her to intervene. He famously told her, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (v. 13-14).

For such a time as this. It's a phrase that has stood the test of time. The meaning is clear for all of us. You live where you do for a reason. There is a purpose behind why you have your job and coworkers. It's not a coincidence that your school is filled with classmates and teammates for you to influence. Your position in government, at work, in your church, or in your family are the handiwork of God.

For Esther, it was to save the Jews from genocide. For you, it could be to save someone from themselves, introducing them to Jesus. Who knows that you are in the spot you are in for such a time as this?

Pull out a sheet of paper. Write down the days of the week. Then next to each day, list all the people you typically see at work, school and church, in the neighborhood, park and gym, at the restaurant, gas station and grocery store, among your family, friends and acquaintances, and wherever else you go and whoever else you see.

Then ask yourself if God has put you into relationship with them for such a time as this. What is the Lord saying to you?

## *Poem*

### **Purposed**

*Before all time  
I was a part of your plan  
You knit me together  
In the womb of my mother  
With gifts, talents and attributes  
For such a time  
When I would be born  
Live  
And have your purpose  
Proposed to me  
To execute your will  
With courage  
And trust  
For such a time  
As this*

11/13/2024  
WEEK 45 DAY 3

# Esther's Banquet and Haman's Humiliation



## Scripture ESTHER 5-6

### Devotional

It must be understood that Esther was taking a huge risk in approaching the king. She had not been summoned. She approached him anyway. This was the same guy who dethroned and banished the previous queen because she refused to be Miss Persia. Just as easily he could have done that or worse to Esther. But she knew that she had come to her royal position for such a time as this. To that call she flatly stated, "if I perish, I perish" (Esther. 4:16).

But the king received her with an open hand, even saying, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." In the New Testament, King Herod made the same offer to his stepdaughter. She took him up on the offer by requesting that John the Baptist's head be served up on a platter (Mark 6:21-25). But Esther had a different kind of agenda. Instead of killing a troublesome Jew, her mission was to prevent the genocide of the Jewish people throughout the Medo-Persian Empire.

Haman was the man who orchestrated the plot to destroy all the Jews. How his ego balloon must have deflated when he came in to request that Mordecai be hanged, only to be ordered by the king to parade Mordecai through the streets proclaiming how honored he was. Haman lost his mind. Take the ego out of egomaniac and all you have is a maniac.

How do you see God working behind the scenes when...

...Esther approached the king?

...Esther was granted her request to have two banquets for the king and Haman?

...Haman had a massive gallows built for Mordecai, not knowing what would happen the next day?

...the king couldn't sleep, and ordered to be read from the chronicles of his own reign?

...Haman showed up just when the king was ready to reward Mordecai?

...Haman got home just in time for him to be summoned to the second banquet?

### Poem

#### Banquet Table

*Banquet table  
All bedecked  
Butcher knife  
Held at neck  
Plot served up  
On silver platter  
Wine is spiced  
With brutal matter  
Toast is spoken  
Power yearn  
Only now is  
Table turned*



11/14/2024  
WEEK 45 DAY 4

# Haman is Hanged as Decree Protects Jews



## Scripture **ESTHER 7-8**

### Devotional

This story began with a plot to exterminate the Jews. The last verse of today's reading says, "And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them." What a turn of events.

Take a few minutes to recall each of the following people in these first eight chapters. What kind of person were they? What did they do? What happened to them? What can you learn from them?

King Xerxes

Queen Vashti

Queen Esther

Haman

Cousin Mordecai

What traits do you share with any of these people? Are there any ways in you that are not godly? What good gifts or opportunities has God given you? What will you do?

### Poem

#### Hangman's Game

*It's a mystery  
With clues  
Choose your letters  
Wisely*

*Gallow ready  
Draw the head  
Letter missed  
The body*

*Arms drawn now  
The tension mounts  
One more leg  
Then deadly*

*Hangman's noose  
Around the neck  
Meant for other  
Killed strategy*

11/15/2024  
WEEK 45 DAY 5

# Mordecai is Exalted and Purim is Celebrated



## Scripture ESTHER 9-10

### Devotional

Apparently, there were many other people throughout the empire who were enemies of the Jews, seeking their destruction. With their newfound power in the Medo-Persian Empire, the Jewish people eliminated the threats to their existence.

Purim is a Jewish holiday that is still celebrated. It commemorates the events of the book of Esther, when the Jews were saved from genocide. During Purim, people celebrate by reading the book of Esther, enjoying food, and sharing with people in need.

The last three verses of the book are reserved for recognizing the greatness of Queen Esther's cousin Mordecai. He became second in rank to King Xerxes. This echoes the end of the book of Genesis, when the Jewish slave Joseph rose to become the second in command behind the pharaoh of Egypt (see Genesis 41:41-43). Mark Twain once said, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." So true.

In the New Testament, Jesus was surrounded by people who wanted to make a name for themselves. Peter wanted to be top dog. James and John wanted to sit at the right and left of Jesus in His kingdom. And when Jesus was eating at the house of a prominent Pharisee, guests were picking the places of honor at the table. Jesus told a little story that demoted those upwardly mobile people, then finished with this punchline: "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).

In the kingdom of God, the way up is down. How is the Holy Spirit prompting you to humble yourself? In what area of your life will this be the most difficult?

### Poem

#### Purim

*Relief from our enemies  
Sorrow to joy  
Mourning to celebrating  
Evil destroyed  
Feasting and giving  
Gifts to the poor  
These holiday practices  
Purim is for*

11/18/2024  
WEEK 46 DAY 1

# Nehemiah Weeps about Jerusalem's Walls



## Scripture **NEHEMIAH 1**

### Devotional

The exiles in Babylon returned to Jerusalem in three waves. Here's the timeline:

586 BC - Jerusalem is destroyed, including the temple and wall around the city; Jews are exiled to Babylon.

538 BC - The first remnant of 50,000 people returns to Judah led by Zerubbabel to begin reconstruction of the temple. It is completed in 516 BC.

458 BC - The second remnant of 2000 families returns to Jerusalem led by Ezra to restore proper allegiance to the Lord.

445 BC - The third remnant of a few people returns to Jerusalem led by Nehemiah to rebuild the wall around the city.

Nehemiah had an official position in the royal court as cupbearer to the king of the Medo-Persian Empire. Yet as a Jew, his heart was wrecked when he heard that the wall around the holy city of Jerusalem was still in a shambles. He knew that this meant the residents were unprotected from enemy attacks. The news caused him to weep, mourn, fast, and confess the sins of himself, his family, and the Israelites.

It had been 140 years since the walls were broken down and the gates burned. And it had been 70 years since the temple was rebuilt. Nehemiah had never seen any of it. He had just heard stories passed down through the generations. He was a Jew, but his life was in Susa, the royal capital of the Persians.

What makes your heart break? What people group or cause are you passionate about? Is God moving your mind and spirit to have compassion for something in your community or world? How is the Holy Spirit encouraging you to pray, speak, go, give, or do something about it?

### Poem

#### The Cupbearer

*The cupbearer sips the wine poured  
for a king  
Protection 'gainst poisonous schemes  
At times the wine's sweet, fragrant cup  
full of joy  
At times filled with wrath intervenes*

*The cupbearer sits and hears all that's  
presented  
The good news, the shrouded news  
meant to confuse  
With no say and no will and no power  
to exert  
Coming dangerous waves to diffuse*

*And yet, the cupbearer has voice  
before one  
The great King of Kings listens well  
As the cupbearer pours out his  
heart-cup to God  
In confession, vast danger to quell*

*The cupbearing servant well knows his  
low place  
Yet still trusts in the high place of One  
Who knows and who holds all the  
poisonous schemes  
Offering cup of wrath up to his Son*

*This Son weeps great tears as His  
blood sweat drips down  
His deep anguish pours out from His  
soul  
"Take this cup from me, Father, but  
Your will be done"  
Drinks the cup, saves His people, the  
goal*



11/19/2024  
WEEK 46 DAY 2

# Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem to Inspect Walls

## Scripture NEHEMIAH 2

### Devotional

Artaxerxes was the same king who allowed Ezra to return to Jerusalem with 2000 families to reestablish spiritual loyalty to the Lord. Here he did the same for Nehemiah thirteen years later. Though this king was far from a worshipper of God, the Lord still used him to impact the spiritual and physical well-being of His chosen people.

The Bible says that when Christ was resurrected and ascended, God “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:20-23). There is no earthly power that even touches the authority of God.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he inspected the rubble and made a plan to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. This was met with acceptance by some (“Let us start rebuilding”) and resistance by others (“What is this you are doing?”). The reality is that most things of significance get buy-in by some and push-back by others. Nehemiah didn’t wait for 100% approval ratings. He simply said to his detractors: “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”

In the passage quoted from Ephesians above, Paul boldly stated that Christ is above every person or power in this world. Let’s remember that when he was ministering in their city, he was met with massive resistance. An influential silversmith who made a fortune making statues of the false goddess Artemis stirred up the people, “You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all” (Acts 19:25-26). The result was a riot. Nonetheless, a Christian Church was established in the pagan city. God is above all.

Whether rebuilding a wall around the holy city or starting a church in a corrupt city or doing whatever God is calling you to do, expect resistance. The question is not: “Does everyone approve?” The question is always: “Is God calling?” Or as Nehemiah put it, “The God of heaven will give us success.”

What is the Lord saying to you from today’s devotion?

### Poem

#### Examine Your Walls

*The walls of your city, protection for you  
Great gates guard, decide who will pass  
Into your great city, And who is shut out  
In order for peace there to last*

*But enemies try to find areas weak  
Or try to scale over your walls  
Their goal to attack all that’s holy and pure  
Full longing your city to fall*

*So examine your walls, this a disciplined  
chore  
Make sure gates are strong, guards wield  
swords  
Pray wisdom, discernment, what comes in or  
stays out  
The foundation stones solely God’s word*

11/20/2024  
WEEK 46 DAY 3

# Facing Opposition, Some Build, Others Protect



## Scripture **NEHEMIAH 4**

### Devotional

In chapter 3 of Nehemiah, details are given for how the people went to work on the various sections and gates of the wall around Jerusalem. By chapter 4, the wall was rebuilt to half its height. It was real teamwork.

But the opponents of the project wouldn't go away. They were threatening to attack the workers while they were occupied with their tasks. So, Nehemiah turned half of his workforce into military guards. The work slowed, but it kept moving forward.

Psalm 79 was written after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Now 140 years later, the people were working to rebuild the walls while the nations around them tried to thwart their progress. As you read this Psalm, imagine that you are one of the workers. How would this have been an encouragement to you as you lifted stones or stood guard?

Psalm 79

A psalm of Asaph.

- 1 O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;  
they have defiled your holy temple,  
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
- 2 They have left the dead bodies of your servants  
as food for the birds of the sky,  
the flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild.
- 3 They have poured out blood like water  
all around Jerusalem,  
and there is no one to bury the dead.
- 4 We are objects of contempt to our neighbors,  
of scorn and derision to those around us.
- 5 How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever?  
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
- 6 Pour out your wrath on the nations  
that do not acknowledge you,  
on the kingdoms  
that do not call on your name;
- 7 for they have devoured Jacob  
and devastated his homeland.
- 8 Do not hold against us the sins of past generations;  
may your mercy come quickly to meet us,  
for we are in desperate need.
- 9 Help us, God our Savior,  
for the glory of your name;  
deliver us and forgive our sins  
for your name's sake.
- 10 Why should the nations say,  
"Where is their God?"  
Before our eyes, make known among the nations  
that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.
- 11 May the groans of the prisoners come before you;  
with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die.
- 12 Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times  
the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.
- 13 Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture,  
will praise you forever;  
from generation to generation  
we will proclaim your praise.

### Poem

#### We Work With All Our Hearts

*The labor is intensive  
Its often mocked and scorned  
Our enemies they circle  
They wish us all great harm  
We're tired and exhausted  
Work tedious and long  
Yet we will build God's holy wall  
'Gainst evil we are armed  
Defend the faith with one hand  
From labor don't depart  
We labor with God's people  
We work with all our hearts*

11/21/2024  
WEEK 46 DAY 4

# The Wall is Completed in 52 days



## Scripture **NEHEMIAH 6**

### Devotional

Let's put this project in perspective. The wall around Jerusalem was about 2.5 miles long. It was built up to forty feet high and eight feet thick. It contained ten gates and numerous towers. Yet they completed it in less than two months while under duress.

When the detractors couldn't stop the men from working, they tried a new tactic. They went after their leader, trying to lure him away from the work using deceit and fear. Throughout this Old Testament study, we have seen how God emboldens His people to overcome their fear.

He told Moses to not be afraid to confront Pharaoh, and repeated it later when the freed Israelites rebelled against him.

He told Joshua to not be afraid when he was to succeed Moses, then lead the Israelites to take the Promised Land.

He told the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel to not be afraid when He called them to prophesy to people who would hate their message.

In Matthew 10:28, Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Nehemiah understood this concept. He was called by God to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. He would not let God down, even if they killed him for it. That is determination. That is faith.

Of course, Nehemiah needed a huge team around him to complete the task. It took the courage of the leader and all the people to get the job done.

How is God challenging you to pray for, support, and help your leaders?

### Poem

#### A Position Of Faithfulness

*God set me in position  
God placed on me a call  
God sent me on a mission  
God bids me give my all  
So why would I abandon  
The course now laid ahead  
Why would I leave work stranded  
God's Spirit is my head  
So try hard to distract me  
I'll not to you succumb  
I'll work, for night is coming  
I'll labor 'til all's done*



11/22/2024  
WEEK 46 DAY 5

# Ezra Reads the Law Yielding a Celebration



## Scripture **NEHEMIAH 8**

### Devotional

Ezra the priest had come to Jerusalem thirteen years before Nehemiah. He came with a remnant of 2000 families to rebuild the spiritual lives of the people. He was well established in the holy city when the wall was being rebuilt.

As soon as the wall was finished, Ezra and the Levites read aloud the first five books of the Old Testament, called the Law, “making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.” This continued for a week, from daybreak to noon. And you thought my sermons were long.

The people didn’t just listen. They also put it into practice. Since it was the seventh month in the Jewish calendar (Nehemiah 7:73b), they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles in temporary shelters, which the Law said should be done in the seventh month (Nehemiah 8:14).

Whenever we encounter Scripture, we should answer two basic questions:

What does God want me to believe?

What does God want me to do?

From what you have been studying in the Bible lately, how would you answer these two questions? Be as specific as possible. If you don’t have an answer, go back and read Scripture some more. Slow down. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Follow the Lord.

### Poem

#### There’s A Sound In The Camp

*There’s a sound in the camp of great clapping  
A thunderous booming of praise  
As the Word springs alive from the scroll  
The people’s arms naturally raise*

*There’s a sound in the camp of great weeping  
A chest beating wailing of woe  
As the Word cuts through bone and through marrow  
Exposing the state of the soul*

*There’s a sound in the camp of great comfort  
As the herald declares the LORD’s peace  
As the Word brings an offer—forgiveness  
And God’s joy is unleashed now for each*

11/25/2024  
WEEK 47 DAY 1

# Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem for Reforms



## Scripture **NEHEMIAH 13**

### Devotional

Three times in this chapter Nehemiah said a version of, "Remember me for this, God." Let's take a look:

When he reformed how the temple was being used for personal use, Nehemiah said, "Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services" (Nehemiah 13:14).

When he ended the practice of open commercialism on the Sabbath, Nehemiah said, "Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love" (Nehemiah 13:22).

When he stopped the practice of intermarriage with people practicing idolatry, Nehemiah said, "Remember me with favor, my God" (Nehemiah 13:31).

Think about what you are doing with your life right now. What is God prompting you to do in your family, neighborhood, workplace, community or world? Are you doing it? Why or why not? In short, what do you want to be remembered for?

Here is a sobering exercise. Imagine your funeral. What do you want the preacher to say about you? When people come and pay respect, what do you hope they say? As God is ready to receive you into heaven, what do you want Him to remember you for? To make it more concise, what phrase or verse do you want etched on your tombstone?

Now, go live that life.

### Poem

#### Remember Me, Lord

*Remember me, LORD, as my soul calls  
to you  
Remember the strength of my youth  
How with vigor and passion I sang in  
your house  
How I clung to your message of truth*

*Remember me, LORD, as I prayed on my  
knees  
As with tears, I called out to your name  
How I wrestled with evil, confessed all  
my sin  
As you helped me, rebellion to tame*

*Remember me, LORD, as I labor and  
work  
In the time you positioned my life  
How you called me to courage, to be  
still or to speak  
Fully armed against evil and strife*

*Remember me, LORD, as I'm laid down  
to rest  
Bring your healing, all brokenness mend  
Welcome me in your arms and receive  
me  
When my life's work is brought to its  
end*

11/26/2024  
WEEK 47 DAY 2

# Showing Contempt through Blemished Sacrifices



## Scripture MALACHI 1

### Devotional

After eleven months of study, we have come to the last book of the Old Testament. At the outset, we set this aim:

“Together, the Old Testament and New Testament are part of God’s continuous story. That is why they are both in the Bible! Along the way, we will examine how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and how the two testaments fit together.”

I hope we have accomplished that goal.

Malachi became a prophet in 430 BC, just fifteen years after Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. In fact, Malachi began his ministry at about the same time that Ezra was establishing the reforms related to the temple, Sabbath, and intermarriage. We looked at that in yesterday’s reading.

Apparently, Ezra’s reforms didn’t solve all the spiritual deficiencies of the people of God. Here in Malachi chapter 1, the prophet confronted the people when they would “bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices.” These animals couldn’t be sold on the open market or bred with other animals. They were useless. So, why not give them to God?

It is a common temptation to want to give God our useless leftovers.

Clothes that are out of style? Give them to a resale shop.

Meat that is freezer burned? Donate it to the food pantry.

Car that is on its last miles? Offer it to someone else.

Exhaustion at the end of a busy day? Pray for a few seconds while falling asleep.

Money left over after spending the rest on self? There’s always the church.

The Lord’s response to this kind of gifting is unnerving: “Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?”

How is today’s passage inspiring you to give your best?

### Poem

#### How Do I Know?

*How do I know that you love me?  
How do I know that you care  
When the demons are loud  
When I’m lonely in crowds  
When my whole life is filled with despair?*

*How do I know that you see me?  
How do I know that you’re there  
When your voice is now stilled  
When your face, I can’t see  
When surrounded by sin everywhere?*

*How do I know that I love you?  
How do I know I have faith  
When I’m often in fear  
When I doubt you are near  
When I’ve nothing to bring to the plate?*

*Child, your eyes are dimmed, not fully seeing  
Your ears are deaf, heart stony cold  
Still I’m faithful and love you  
Beside you and for you  
My grace will keep you in my fold*



11/27/2024  
WEEK 47 DAY 3

# Rebuke of the Priests & Unfaithful Marriages



## Scripture MALACHI 2

### Devotional

In Nehemiah 13 and Malachi 1 we saw that reforms were made related to the temple, Sabbath, intermarriage, and blemished offerings. Here in chapter 2 the prophet addressed reforms for ungodly priests and unfaithful marriages. Having a rebuilt temple and wall were externals. Here at the end of the Old Testament God is addressing the internals. Their wayward hearts were creating these unholy practices.

In Numbers 25:13, God made a Levitical Covenant, saying, "He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites." Throughout the Old Testament, some of the priests lived into this, honoring God. Others did not, leading the people to the worship of idols and false gods.

By the time of Malachi, many centuries later, there were still priests who did not honor God's name. Here God reminded them, "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth" (Malachi 2:7). The New Testament echoes this, "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Being a spiritual leader comes with heavy expectations.

The last half of today's reading deals with marriage and divorce. The Lord says, "So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.... The man who hates and divorces his wife... does violence to the one he should protect" (Malachi 2:16).

When I officiate at a wedding, I allow a lot of latitude for the couple to design their ceremony as they want. But I insist on doing the traditional vows. Living out these vows is showing faithfulness to the covenant of marriage. Here they are:

I take you  
To be my wife (husband),  
To have and to hold,  
From this day forward,  
For better, for worse,  
For richer, for poorer,  
In sickness and in health,  
To love and to cherish,  
Until we are parted by death.  
This is my solemn vow.

And...

I give you this ring  
As a sign of my vow,  
And with all that I am,  
And all that I have,  
I honor you.  
In the name of the Father,  
And of the Son,  
And of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

The words are the vow. The ring is the sign of the vow. The life together is the proof of the vow. If you are married, are you displaying the proof of the vow?

### Poem

#### Faithful, Faithful

*Faithful, faithful  
Faithful to the end  
Wounded, weary  
Always, you're my friend  
Trouble, trouble  
Trouble all around  
You will not forsake me  
Even when I'm down  
Weary, weary  
Weary with this world  
Satan's darts are  
Ever at me hurled  
Justice, justice  
Justice off its stand  
No one, no one  
None to lend a hand  
Evil, evil  
Evil all around  
Thorns and weeds fill  
Every piece of ground  
Thankful, thankful  
Always, you're my friend  
Faithful, faithful  
Faithful to the end*

11/28/2024  
WEEK 47 DAY 4

# Robbing God vs. Full Tithe



## Scripture MALACHI 3

### Devotional

In Nehemiah 13, the priest Ezra brought reform to Jerusalem related to the temple usage, Sabbath practices, and intermarriage with those who practice idolatry. In the first two chapters of Malachi, that prophet addressed blemished offerings, ungodly priests, and unfaithful marriages. Here in chapter 3, he continued to call for reform, now addressing those who practice the occult, oppress those at risk, deprive others of justice, withhold tithes, and put God on the back shelf.

Remember that the people of Jerusalem had their rebuilt temple and wall, the physical representations of their spirituality and security. But their inner lives didn't match their surroundings. Their hearts were far from God.

Four hundred fifty years later, Jesus was confronting the Pharisees when He said, "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'" (Matthew 15:7-9).

Their walk didn't match their talk. This was true in the days of Isaiah, Malachi, and Jesus. It's also true in our day. It's one thing to go to church, listen to a sermon, toss some money in the offering, then go home. Uninspired. Unaffected. Unchanged. Go back to church the following week. Same song. Second verse.

It's a whole other thing to be completely in for God. Go to church. Enter His temple with reverence and expectation. Lean into what is being sung, prayed and preached. Give the full tenth of everything received. Go home to the family and the community. Inspired. Affected. Changed. Go back to church the following week. Anticipate even greater things.

What kind of spiritual life do you want to live?

### Poem

#### The Only Hope I Know

*I cannot stand before you  
My sin buckles my knees  
I cannot stand refinement  
My life, like chaff in breeze  
I cannot bear your scrubbing  
Your lye soap rips my flesh  
The only thing to save me  
Your Son's own righteousness*

*It's He who stands before you  
Forgiving all my sin  
It's He who is refining fire  
Which purifies within  
It's He who with blood scrubs me  
And makes me white as snow  
Your Gift of love now given--  
The only hope I know*

11/29/2024  
WEEK 47 DAY 5

# He Will Turn the Hearts



## Scripture MALACHI 4

### Devotional

We have come to the final day of our nearly year-long study of the Old Testament. After the ministry of Malachi there will be a four-hundred-year gap until the arrival of Jesus. These final verses of the Old Testament are a bridge to the New Testament.

They look back: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel." (Malachi 4:4)

They look ahead: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction" (Malachi 4:5-6). These words are quoted by the gospel writer to describe John the Baptist even before the baby was conceived (Luke 1:17).

In fact, speaking about John the Baptist, Jesus said, "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come" (Matthew 11:13-14). At another time Jesus said, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law" (Luke 16:16-17).

Jesus certainly didn't see the Old Testament as outdated or irrelevant. Indeed, He proclaimed, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

In the 1973 musical *Godspell*, the actor playing Jesus summarizes one of His teachings by saying "Well that is the Law and the Prophets." The entire cast then echoes Him, saying in unison:

The law and the prophets  
The law and the prophets  
The law and the prophets  
The law and the prophets  
The law and the prophets

Jesus finally interrupts by singing, "You are the light of the world!" There you go: The entire Old Testament finds its fulfillment in the Son of God, who is the Light of the World. Jesus then told His followers, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). We get the true light from Him. We then have the honor of sharing that light with the world.

This study of the Old Testament has been called, "Be God's Light." On the first page of the Bible, God's first words were, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). On the last page of the Bible, the Lord gives a glimpse of heaven, proclaiming, "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

Between creation and heaven we live our lives in His light: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7).

Praise be to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

### Poem

#### The Day Of The Lord Is Coming

*All my dreams and castles  
Like flowers  
Wither in a day  
All my stored-up treasures  
On earth are  
Wood, stubble, hay  
All the things I boast in  
Like chaff  
Will blow away  
The day of the LORD  
Is coming  
Repent, do not delay*





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