

# ECHOES<sup>®</sup>

## ADULT STUDENT GUIDE

FALL 2025



JUDAH, FROM  
ISAIAH TO EXILE

DAVID  COOK<sup>®</sup>

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## ADULT STUDENT GUIDE

### FALL 2025

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Lessons for Fall 2025:

### Judah, From Isaiah to Exile

#### Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lesson 1	Sept 7	Isaiah's Call and Ministry Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:1–5	3
Lesson 2	Sept 14	Hezekiah's Passover 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27	10
Lesson 3	Sept 21	Hilkiah's Discovery 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27	17
Lesson 4	Sept 28	The Servant's Suffering Isaiah 53:1–7	24

#### Unit 2: Jeremiah and the Promise of Renewal

Lesson 5	Oct 5	Jeremiah's Call and Arrest Jeremiah 1:6–10; 26:8–9, 12–15	31
Lesson 6	Oct 12	Jeremiah's Message Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23	38
Lesson 7	Oct 19	A Family's Example Jeremiah 35:5–11	45
Lesson 8	Oct 26	Changes Promised Jeremiah 31:29–34; John 1:17	52
Lesson 9	Nov 2	Jeremiah's Rescue Jeremiah 38:7–13	59

#### Unit 3: Ezekiel and the Exile of Judah

Lesson 10	Nov 9	Jerusalem's Fall 2 Kings 24:18–25:9	66
Lesson 11	Nov 16	Ezekiel's Sign Ezekiel 3:10–11; 24:15–24, 27	73
Lesson 12	Nov 23	Ezekiel's Responsibility Ezekiel 33:7–16a	80
Lesson 13	Nov 30	Ezekiel's Vision Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12	87

Ella Baker: A Model of Servant Leadership 94

ISSL Bible Study Plan 2023–2026 95

Coming Next Quarter 96

# WHAT'S AHEAD

## QUARTERLY PREVIEW

God guided the people of Judah, and the same God helps and guides us today. The time of the prophets reminds us of our own context: people distracted, chasing after idols, and forgetting what God had done. Over the next few months, we will read about God's way of reminding His people of His love and purpose, often through the sending of prophets. As we approach these stories, we find that they teach us about ourselves and our relationship with God.

In this quarter, here are some of the biblical principles that we will study and apply to situations in our lives:

**God makes people His messengers. (Lesson 1)**

**God invites us to return to Him. (Lesson 2)**

**God uses Scripture to reform us. (Lesson 3)**

**God's servant will face rejection and hostility. (Lesson 4)**

**God's messengers might seem young and inexperienced. (Lesson 5)**

**God wants mercy even more than religious devotion. (Lesson 6)**

**Be faithful to God's ways, even more than human traditions. (Lesson 7)**

**We need God to make us faithful. (Lesson 8)**

**God can rescue those who do the right thing. (Lesson 9)**

**Expect human leaders to disappoint you. (Lesson 10)**

**In our grief we need God. (Lesson 11)**

**God warns that wickedness leads to ruin. (Lesson 12)**

**God's redemptive plan is firm and unshakable. (Lesson 13)**



# ISAIAH'S CALL AND MINISTRY

Monette was quiet as she knelt on a pillow. She had a difficult decision to make. *Lord, help me know the right thing to do*, she prayed silently.

Her close friend, Phyllis, was about to make a huge decision. Phyllis had found a partner to open a day spa. But this potential partner had ideas that seemed shady. She knew all sorts of contractors supposedly eager to help, but she didn't have details about their experience. Monette couldn't believe that her friend was preparing to take out a loan with a person she barely knew.

So far, she had kept her critical thoughts to herself. She wanted to see her friend succeed, and she seemed happy—so happy that she might not be thinking clearly. That was Monette's fear.

A few days later, her eyes fell upon James 4:17: "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." Monette knew that inaction was not an option.

Later that day, she was on the phone telling Phyllis the things she had noticed, urging Phyllis to slow down and ask more questions before partnering with someone.

"I'm glad you told me," said her friend. "You've given me a lot to think about."

Phyllis didn't say she agreed. But, as if a weight was off her chest, Monette felt relief for having shared hard news.

"Lord, I probably wasn't a perfect messenger, but thank you for helping me to share what my friend needed to hear."

**1 When have you been a messenger for someone else? What was that like?**

**2 What does it feel like to deliver either good or bad news?**

**3 Have you ever felt that God was inviting you to join a "messenger service"? What might that entail?**

<sup>1</sup> In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. <sup>3</sup> And one cried unto another, and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: The whole earth is full of his glory.

<sup>4</sup> And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

<sup>6</sup> Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: <sup>7</sup> And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

<sup>8</sup> Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

Then said I, Here am I; send me.

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

<sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

## A Holy Calling

The text begins with a date, the death of Uzziah, whose reign as king of Judah ends in tragedy and illness (see 2 Chron. 26:16–21).

During his fifty-two years as ruler, Uzziah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Kings 15:3), and his passing means uncertainty for the nation facing threats abroad.

But the heavenly temple of God opens to reveal a vision to Isaiah: God is in control. He is “high and exalted,” and nothing escapes His attention (Isa. 6:1). Isaiah beholds the almighty God sitting enthroned in the heavenly temple, with all kinds of sights and sounds around Him. Isaiah sees the Lord’s flowing robe filling the sacred space (v. 1); he sees servants of God with unusual shapes (v. 2); and he hears these angelic creatures extolling God’s holiness and glory (v. 3). Just the sound of their voices causes an earthquake, while smoke—representing God’s glory—fills the temple (v. 4).

Isaiah is overwhelmed by this majestic scene, and he becomes acutely aware of his own weakness and frailty. In ancient cultures, standing before the throne of an earthly king would be terrifying, and Isaiah is even more terrified to face the Lord of heaven. “Woe is me!” he cries, for he knows himself to be “a man of unclean lips” (v. 5). We don’t know whether or not Isaiah has a particular sin in mind. But he is an imperfect person facing a holy and powerful God.

In response to his recognition, God’s servant—one of these winged seraphim—flies to him carrying a burning coal (v. 6). The purifying heat touches Isaiah’s lips, and his sin is covered. The word *atone* can mean “to cover,” showing that Isaiah’s sins are removed in order to make him free to respond to God’s call. When God asks for a messenger, Isaiah accepts the role: “Here I am. Send me!” (v. 8). The very same unclean lips that felt unworthy in God’s presence would be used to carry God’s messages.

**1 What kind of message is sent to Isaiah through this vision of God in heaven?**

**2 Why does Isaiah say “Woe is me!” in God’s presence?**

**3 Why might Isaiah feel unprepared to act as God’s messenger?**

<sup>1</sup> In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

<sup>2</sup> Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

<sup>3</sup> And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

<sup>4</sup> Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, <sup>5</sup> Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

<sup>1</sup> In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”

<sup>2</sup> Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, <sup>3</sup> “Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: <sup>5</sup> “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.’”

## From Sickness to Victory

Since Isaiah is willing to carry messages for God, he can be asked to share either good or ill tidings. In this case, the context several decades later is the middle of a war. The powerful nation of Assyria is trying to capture all the territory of Judah. At this crucial juncture, the king, Hezekiah, has become deathly ill (v. 1). According to the parallel text of 2 Chronicles 32:25, it is the sin of pride that brought trouble upon him.

Isaiah comes to the king with a message from God: *do not expect recovery*. Hezekiah does not question whether this is from God, and the king responds with a tearful prayer that asks God, “Remember” (v. 3). It might seem like an odd request to God, but this word often refers to God’s covenant faithfulness (see Gen. 8:1; Deut. 9:27; Lev. 26:45).

Hezekiah’s prayer is asking God to look with favor upon his rule, since Hezekiah has “walked faithfully and with wholehearted

devotion” (Isa. 38:3). He had broken down the places of idolatrous worship and followed God’s commands, unlike many kings before him (2 Kings 18:4–5). By facing the wall in prayer, Hezekiah shows that his request can only be answered by God.

God relents from the initial plan and message and adds fifteen years to the life of Hezekiah (Isa. 38:5). At the same time that God extends the life of Hezekiah, God also orchestrates a miraculous rescue for Judah and city of Jerusalem (see Isa. 38:6). The Assyrians would soon be forced to withdraw, thanks in part to the prayers and courageous leadership of Hezekiah.

**1 How does Hezekiah respond to news that his sickness would lead to death?**

**2 Why might Hezekiah choose to pray with his face to the wall?**

**3 Why would God give Isaiah the first message, only to relent and give Hezekiah fifteen more years of life?**



The brutality of the Assyrian king and his attacking army is shown by their own relief sculptures. In this part of an image depicting the capture of Lachish (a town of Judah), an Assyrian soldier is about to kill one of the captives.

Osama Shukir Muhammed/British Museum



## A True Calling

As Christians, we're drawn toward a *calling* from God. We desire for our responsibilities at home, church, and even our jobs to hold heavenly weight. But sometimes the places we serve don't feel fulfilling—so we think, *Perhaps this is not my calling*. Or, a job is dull and monotonous, so *It can't be my calling*. Isaiah's example shows that God has something different to say about the roles we play. Turning our attention to God and surrendering our lives can point us toward a calling, no matter the context.

In the first example, Isaiah sees heaven opened, and all his earthly concerns put into perspective by the awesome vision of God's throne. Isaiah's sinfulness is a problem, but God heals him and empowers him to speak. In the second example, King Hezekiah is powerless to save himself. He needs God's intervention to preserve his life and save the nation. Both men—Isaiah, then Hezekiah—fulfill their vocation or “calling” by first demonstrating a willingness to turn to God.

Repentance, which means turning or changing our thinking, is central to finding our spiritual callings. It is the process of submitting to God's transformation. We must relinquish control of the narrative (whether finding the perfect job, marriage partner, or context to serve) and submit to God's leading. Ironically, it is often when we feel unprepared and powerless—when we lay our lives before God and confess our bent and broken ways—that we discover a new sense of mission. God always shapes our hopes and dreams into something more glorious than we would imagine for ourselves.

**1 What are the sorts of responsibilities in our lives that we might surrender to God?**

**2 Do you think turning to God is a one-time act or a repeated practice in Christian faith? Why?**

**3 Does repentance make a larger impact on us or on others?**

## Surrendering to God's Transformation

As you consider the lesson for today, when each of the two characters submitted themselves to God's plan and purposes, ask God to show you any way that you might surrender to the calling He has for you.

**What is one predicament or crisis that you need God's help to solve? What kind of transformation might God accomplish, if you were to surrender to His purposes for your life?**

### Key Text

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.  
—Isaiah 6:8 KJV

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"  
—Isaiah 6:8 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of September 8 through September 13

- Mon.** Psalm 145:13–21—An Everlasting Kingdom.
- Tue.** Matthew 3:4–12—A Call to Bear Good Fruit.
- Wed.** Acts 3:12–20—A Summons to Repent.
- Thu.** James 5:12–18—A Ministry of Care and Comfort.
- Fri.** Exodus 12:3–14—A Feast of Remembrance.
- Sat.** Deuteronomy 12:5–12—A Dwelling for God's Name.

**Next Week:** 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27

*Next we will cover one of the bright spots in Hezekiah's rule as king. Come prepared to discuss the value of gathering in-person.*



# HEZEKIAH'S PASSOVER

“Beverly, we have to decide what to do about dinner!” my mom said to me. I knew immediately that she didn’t mean just any dinner. She meant the October dinner our family had shared in the past, always a month before Thanksgiving. Some family members, my brother and his wife especially, found it all but impossible to get time off for the holiday. Several years ago, it had been Dad’s idea: “Our family celebrates Thanksgiving a month early!”

Only this year, there was no Dad to make the calls and plan the gathering. He had passed away eight months earlier, and this was the first October in his absence.

“Don’t you remember how important it was to him? How important it was for us all to be together?” Mom continued, “Your father loved frying the turkey and baking all those cakes. We missed it last year when he got so sick.”

“I remember,” I said as I gave Mom a hug. I knew the time together was about the most important gesture my siblings and I could make.

“Well, nobody can cook like Dad, but I can order the cakes. Mom, if you would call my brother, he can see about frying the turkey.”

“Oh Sam will do it alright. He’ll be doing it for his mamma,” she said as both of us chuckled.

“I’m happy to prepare the menu. Let me see what others would be willing to bring.”

Mom looked at me as she held back different emotions. “Your Dad would be proud. He would want us to keep our tradition!”

**1 What makes traditions of gathering so important?**

**2 What happens to families who never see one another?**

<sup>1</sup> And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel. <sup>2</sup> For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. <sup>3</sup> For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. <sup>5</sup> So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.

<sup>1</sup> Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>2</sup> The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month. <sup>3</sup> They had not been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly. <sup>5</sup> They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written.

## Hezekiah's Invitation

Hezekiah was a king of Judah who walked faithfully with God (2 Chron. 29:2). In contrast to his father—who worshiped foreign gods and shut the doors of the temple (2 Chron. 28:24)—Hezekiah reopens the temple and ends idolatrous practices (2 Chron. 29:3). With a thorough cleansing and consecration, King Hezekiah reestablishes proper sacrificial worship (2 Chron. 29:35–36).

But Hezekiah does not stop there. Since he is inspired by the joyous restoration, Hezekiah's next move is to rekindle a bond between Judah and the remnant of northern Israel (who had been at war). So Hezekiah sends an invitation to “all Israel and Judah” to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:1).

Passover commemorates the rescue of God's people from bondage

in Egypt. It is a festival that should be celebrated by all the tribes of Israel, even those alienated by generations of conflict. Hezekiah asks the divided people to come together as one. The text specifically mentions two important northern tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 1), and the words “from Beersheba to Dan” include the entire land of Israel’s inheritance (v. 5). All people—the collective descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—can remember and celebrate the salvation of the Lord, “God of Israel” (vv. 1, 5).

But there is a problem. The temple and its priesthood have fallen into such a miserable state that observing Passover at the proper time is impossible (vv. 2–4). While Israel and Judah have been divided, alternative shrines and places for worship drew focus from God’s legitimate dwelling in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 12:26–33). Now generations later, Hezekiah is reversing the split and using the temple to unify a divided people. His desire is for worship to draw estranged Israelites back to the fold.

Unsurprisingly, not enough priests can be consecrated in time. Nor will all the pilgrims be able to arrive, without special accommodations. Even when the pilgrims show up, they will not have completed acts of purification. Hezekiah and his officials first delay Passover by a month, allowing everyone to join; and then they allow pilgrims to eat, even without purification (2 Chron. 30:18). The text sets in tension two values: worshiping *properly* and worshiping *sincerely*. Hezekiah resolves the tension through prayer and a petition that God “pardon everyone . . . even if they are not clean”—a petition that God honors (2 Chron. 30:18–20).

**1 What makes Passover a fitting occasion to bring God’s people together as one?**

**2 Why do you think that Hezekiah decides to delay Passover and to include people who have not been purified?**

**3 Where might you find parallels to these difficult decisions today?**

<sup>6</sup> So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. <sup>7</sup> And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. <sup>8</sup> Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. <sup>9</sup> For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

<sup>26</sup> So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.

<sup>6</sup> At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read:

"People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. <sup>7</sup> Do not be like your parents and your fellow Israelites, who were unfaithful to the LORD, the God of their ancestors, so that he made them an object of horror, as you see. <sup>8</sup> Do not be stiff-necked, as your ancestors were; submit to the LORD. Come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. <sup>9</sup> If you return to the LORD, then your fellow Israelites and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will return to this land, for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him."

<sup>26</sup> There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place.

## God's Invitation

Hezekiah's invitation to all Israel is distributed by couriers as a letter, to be read throughout the land (v. 6a). The words of this letter are in verses 6b–9. A keyword throughout is *return*, which occurs six times in the short letter. Part of the message is reciprocation: if Israel returns to God in repentance, then God will turn to them, with mercy (v. 8). For Hezekiah, the invitation to attend Jerusalem amounts to God's invitation: *Return to me*.

Israel needs to react differently than their “stiff-necked” ancestors (vv. 7–8). Many years earlier, when King Solomon dedicated the temple, God said to him, “If my people . . . will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). This verse encapsulates how God desires to relate to His people, and this text is affirmed in Hezekiah's day.

Although the northern remnant's response to Hezekiah's invitation is meager (30:10–11), God is pleased with their Passover and humility. As verses 26–27 summarize, this Passover festival hearkens back to the days of Solomon, when the entire nation was united as one. In response to Hezekiah's prayer, “the LORD [hears] Hezekiah and [heals] the people” (30:18–20), and to the priests' and Levites' prayer, “God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven” (v. 27).

This national unity could not have come at a more crucial time. In the years ahead, Hezekiah would need the collective efforts of God's people to withstand the threat of Assyrian invasion, but central to their success was their return to faithful worship.

**1 How do Israel and God each “return” to one another in this text?**

**2 Why is it important that this Passover festival is like the celebrations in the days of Solomon?**



## **Return to Sender**

This story of today's study is a reminder that life with God is complex. Even when we are seeking to please God with our worship and praise, what we have to offer can seem small and meaningless. How can we possibly measure up to the faithfulness that God requires?

Consider for a moment how radical it is that God's new covenant people are called "holy ones," or as the KJV says, "saints" (see Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 6:1–2; Eph. 1:1). What precisely does that holy status mean? Perhaps you have noticed people who say, "God knows my heart," precisely when acting in a way contrary to good behavior. That doesn't seem holy or saintlike! The apostle Paul warns against continuing in sin just because God is forgiving (Rom. 6:1–2). But that doesn't change the fact that, no matter how arrogant or hard-hearted we may be, God is ready and willing to take us back—like a partner who won't let go of loyal love for a spouse who has disappointed, betrayed, and walked away, time and again.

When Hezekiah designed a grand festival to reconcile the people, he could have set strict parameters (for instance, "only the cleansed can come"). Instead, the guest list reflected God's open invitation. God desires to bring unity to a world that would sooner be closed off than find kinship and reconciliation. When we attend a party, we might try to cleanse our outward appearance, but God wants our inward parts to be humble, our hardness set aside.

Hezekiah chose the path of return, a path that put everyone at the mercy of God's compassionate forgiveness. His choice exposed what was already true: without God to cleanse us, no one is holy.

**1 Have you ever felt like you needed to be better or "perfect" before you could approach God?**

**2 Do you believe that there is anything that we could do to ruin our chances of being reconciled to God? Why or why not?**

**3 Are there certain persons or groups that should feel more welcome to be a part of God's kingdom than others?**

## A Radical Invitation

*God invites us to return to Him.* Those words could easily serve as shorthand for the good news of Jesus. Unlike the people in Hezekiah's day, who wondered how God would receive their humble repentance, we do not have to wonder. We have seen the God of heaven in the face of Jesus, who is able to cleanse each of us.

**Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one way that God might be asking you to set aside hard-heartedness or an arrogant attitude. When God invites you to return, don't ignore Him.**

## Key Text

So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem.

—2 Chronicles 30:26 KJV

There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.

—2 Chronicles 30:26 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of September 15 through September 20

**Mon.** Matthew 22:36–40—The Command to Love.

**Tue.** Romans 2:9–16—Keep God's Laws and Do Good.

**Wed.** Deuteronomy 30:1–10—Promised Restoration.

**Thu.** Deuteronomy 30:11–21—Choose Life.

**Fri.** Hebrews 1:13–2:4—A Greater Message.

**Sat.** Matthew 13:44–52—Hidden Treasure.

**Next Week:** 2 Chronicles 34:15–22, 26–27

*We will be talking about one important way that God reforms us: Scripture. See whether you can't think of any part of Scripture that has surprised or caught you off guard in the past.*



# HILKIAH'S DISCOVERY

Tawanda hummed a song as she climbed into the driver's seat of her car. Something about her coffee dates with Gina always put a spring in her step. Gina happened to be the pastor's wife, and Tawanda affectionately called her the church's "first lady," even though Gina was the humblest soul Tawanda could imagine.

"We shouldn't allow people to abuse or harm us," Gina had said, "but there is nothing wrong with a meek spirit."

All her life, Tawanda had felt ashamed of being a "pushover" and someone that didn't find it easy to stand up for herself. She remembered it was her older sister who used to accuse her of being *weak*. Ironically, the same sister had been one to manipulate or force her way most of the time.

As Tawanda shared some of this backstory, Gina just said with a smile, "Did you ever hear what Jesus said about those who are meek? In God's kingdom, it's the meek and humble who get a place of honor. God can ask us to be gentle and patient because that's what Jesus is like. Let me show you what He says in the Beatitudes."

A few minutes later, Tawanda admitted, "I had no idea all that was in the Bible."

"Maybe it's one of the ways that God has been shaping you to be more like Jesus," said Gina. "Surprise!"

**1 What is something you've learned in Scripture or about God that has surprised you?**

**2 What words of Scripture have been transformative in your life?**

**3 If you could clear up one erroneous belief that people have about the Bible, what would it be?**

<sup>15</sup> And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.

<sup>16</sup> And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it. <sup>17</sup> And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen.

<sup>18</sup> Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

<sup>15</sup> Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD.” He gave it to Shaphan.

<sup>16</sup> Then Shaphan took the book to the king and reported to him: “Your officials are doing everything that has been committed to them. <sup>17</sup> They have paid out the money that was in the temple of the LORD and have entrusted it to the supervisors and workers.” <sup>18</sup> Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king.

## God’s Word Discovered

Generations after Hezekiah, a new king is on a righteous campaign to restore Judah’s worship of the one, true God. Josiah does what is right in God’s eyes (2 Chron. 34:2–3). Josiah becomes king at only eight years old, and when he is sixteen, he begins to seek God. At twenty, he begins ridding Judah of the influence of foreign gods. This is all the more impressive because Josiah’s grandfather, Manasseh, did extraordinary evil in the sight of God, to the point that God says that Judah shall be delivered into exile (2 Kings 21:10–15). King Amon, Josiah’s father, continued this heinous evil and refused to humble himself before the Lord. Then, Josiah becomes king at a young age because Amon’s officials conspire to assassinate him. On the heels of these terrible tragedies, Josiah heeds the messages of the prophets and turns his heart toward the Lord God of Israel.

Josiah has the idols, alters, and Asherah poles taken down and the bones of false priests burned (2 Chron. 34:4–7). He seeks to repair God’s temple in Jerusalem, which has been neglected and filled with false worship once more. With money collected from Judah and the

remnant of Israel, workers are paid to repair and restore the temple (2 Chron. 34:9–11).

It is during this restoration that Hilkiah the priest finds a scroll, the “Book of the Law,” neglected somewhere in the temple. It is possible that the book had been stored near the walls or foundation of the temple, which is how it had become lost. Most historians agree that the “book” here contains part or all of Deuteronomy, since Josiah’s later reforms match what is written in Deuteronomy (which is Moses’ final sermon to God’s people entering Canaan).

Shaphan, the temple secretary, takes the scroll to King Josiah and reports that work is proceeding as expected (v. 16). The money for the temple is being used for its restoration (v. 17). Apparently in the mind of Shaphan, the discovery of a scroll is trivial, almost an afterthought. He reports about it last and calls it simply “a book” (v. 18). Until Shaphan reads the text before the king, no one recognizes the significance of this discovery.

**Why do you think Josiah serves the Lord, when his father and grandfather had not?**

**What prompts the rediscovery of an important message from God?**

**Do you see any ways that we repeat the pattern of treating God’s Word as trivial?**



One consequence of rampant idol worship in Israel is that Israelites begin to treat God as one among many deities to appease. This image discovered on a painted piece of pottery (eighth century BC) depicts God with a partner deity, like a spouse. The inscription says, “Yahweh and his Asherah.”

Public Domain

<sup>19</sup> And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. <sup>20</sup> And the king commanded Hilki'ah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, <sup>21</sup> Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

<sup>22</sup> And Hilki'ah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college:) and they spake to her to that effect.

<sup>26</sup> And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard; <sup>27</sup> Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. <sup>20</sup> He gave these orders to Hilki'ah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: <sup>21</sup> "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."

<sup>22</sup> Hilki'ah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

<sup>26</sup> Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: <sup>27</sup> Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD."

## Josiah's Repentance

Josiah hears the message of this scroll for the first time and responds with repentance. Tearing of robes signifies *grief*: he is cut to the core by the recognition that he and the people of Judah have not kept their side of the covenant.

The book of Deuteronomy lays out God's requirements for Israel, stipulations that a nation devoted to God must observe. They are to worship Him alone, reminding each generation that God is unlike any other (Deut. 6:4–9). They shall care for the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan (Deut. 10:18–19). They shall behave with justice in all their dealings, remembering that God was their merciful rescuer (Deut. 16:18–20). Imagine hearing some of these ideas from Moses' sermon for the first time!

The same document outlines blessings and curses, a way of success and a path to abject failure. Moses says, "I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction" (Deut. 30:15). But Josiah hears these words as a king whose nation has failed at nearly every turn. He attributes the division of the people and the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel to this failure: "Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:21).

Josiah sends his staff to inquire with a prophet, to see what God has to say about their disobedience. They go to Huldah, a woman living in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 34:21). What they hear in response is extraordinary (v. 27). God is indeed angry with Judah, among other things, for the sins of Josiah's father and grandfather. But because Josiah humbles himself before God's Word and repents with sincere grief at Judah's sin, God listens. God doesn't remove the consequences or paper over the breach in the covenant relationship, but the Lord hears Josiah's appeal, and that is enough.

**What does Josiah's response to hearing God's Word demonstrate?**

**Why was God angry with the people of Judah?**

**What does it mean, "I have heard you, declares the LORD" (v. 27)?**



## **Giving Order to Chaos**

When my daughter was young, she loved the idea of playing with LEGO bricks. For her birthday, she asked for an elaborate set, complete with a house, pets, and minifigures whose skin tone and curly hair looked just like hers. But when it came to actual assembly, her exuberance turned to frustration. She would ignore the instructions and get right to work, stacking bricks in hopes the house would look exactly like it did on the box.

Her younger brother took a different approach. After digging through the box for the instruction manual, he laid it open to the first page. Step by step, brick by brick, he followed the manual with precision. Before long, the pile of bricks became a charming cottage.

When Hilkiah discovered the scroll and brought it to the king, the people of Judah had been living without this Scripture to guide them. Their lives looked more like my daughter's disorganized pile of bricks, rather than the darling house the designers intended. But under Josiah's leadership, they opened Scripture and let it guide their reformation.

Sometimes I can be more like my daughter—and the people of Judah—than I'd like to admit. I look first to the world around me—whether social media posts, viral videos, or even good books—when deciding how to assemble the pieces of my life. But as difficulties come and stresses mount, the structure collapses, and I don't look or sound like Jesus.

What if I took the better approach? What if I started looking to Scripture first when making decisions? What if I allowed God's Word to direct the pieces of my life: my schedule, attitudes, and words? I think the result would be what the designer had in mind.

**1 Where do you go for ideas and wisdom when making decisions? Has any source ever led you in the wrong direction?**

**2 When have you seen God's mercy come into a difficult situation, perhaps a circumstance where forgiveness seemed impossible?**

## A Practice of Scriptural Study

As you may already know, a plan of Scriptural study is printed at the bottom of this page of each lesson. These readings are designed to prepare your heart to receive from God. And like the people of Josiah's day, you might find that you "discover" a message that was long forgotten or a truth of Scripture that you had previously neglected. God speaks to us through the study of Scripture!

**This week, you are invited to hone your practice of reading and studying the Word of God. You can use this space to note one verse or phrase that stands out in the week ahead.**

### Key Text

And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.  
—2 Chronicles 34:15 KJV

Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan.  
—2 Chronicles 34:15 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

**Week of September 22 through September 27**

**Mon.** Philippians 2:5–10—The Humble Servant Exalted by God.

**Tue.** Isaiah 42:1–7—The Faithful Servant.

**Wed.** Acts 2:25–31—The Resurrected and Glorified Servant.

**Thu.** Acts 13:44–49—A Light for the World.

**Fri.** Psalm 84—A Doorkeeper in God's House.

**Sat.** Isaiah 50:4–9—God's Servant Obeys.

**Next Week:** Isaiah 53:1–7

*Next week we turn to a famous text that presents a puzzle and mystery for readers of Isaiah. Who is the suffering servant who can take away sin?*



# THE SERVANT'S SUFFERING

“Hi! I hope you are having a nice day.” The two employees of the convenience store did not acknowledge Juanita’s words. They just stared at her. Juanita thought they may not understand English well.

*I have to hurry or I’ll miss my bus*, she said to herself.

“Can you point me to the cold drinks?” The gray-haired attendant waved at the back corner.

Juanita quickly went to find something to quench her thirst. All she saw at first was soda. *I can’t have all that sugar like I used to*, she thought to herself. Then she spotted two bottles of something healthier and grabbed one.

Juanita remembered she had no cash and went straight to the ATM. She noticed one of the employees was walking around and had the distinct impression he was watching her closely. It wasn’t the first time something like this had happened in a store.

Juanita slid her bottled drink to the cashier. “I just want this. It sure is hot today.” She handed him a twenty.

“Your money is counterfeit and I don’t want it!” he said as he tossed the bill back at her.

“I just got this money out of your ATM! It can’t be counterfeit!” Juanita was furious.

“I don’t take fake money!” The cashier waved his hand dismissively for her to leave.

“Fine! I will tell all my friends about this store!” As Juanita left, she felt her face flush with anger about what happened. She understood the real issue.

**1 When have you faced rejection and hostility?**

**2 The Bible is full of stories of devoted people who suffer. How does that influence our view of God?**

**3 How can we remain faithful when we suffer unjustly?**

<sup>1</sup> Who hath believed our report?  
and to whom is the arm of the  
LORD revealed?

<sup>2</sup> For he shall grow up before him  
as a tender plant, and as a root out  
of a dry ground: he hath no form  
nor comeliness; and when we  
shall see him, there is no beauty  
that we should desire him.

<sup>3</sup> He is despised and rejected of  
men; a man of sorrows, and ac-  
quainted with grief: and we hid  
as it were our faces from him; he  
was despised, and we esteemed  
him not.

<sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message  
and to whom has the arm of the LORD  
been revealed?

<sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us  
to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should  
desire him.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with  
pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low  
esteem.

## Rejected and Despised

Verse 1 of this poetic text poses a question that challenges the faith of those who hear the words of the prophet: “Who has believed our message?” (Isa. 53:1). God’s servant, who has been endorsed by God in the previous verses (Isa. 52:13–15), is revealed as God’s way of salvation for Israel. But not *only* for Israel.

The unnamed servant is also a way of salvation for the nations. Isaiah 52:15 says, “He will sprinkle many nations,” and Isaiah 49 calls this one “a light for the Gentiles,” with the result that “salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). But despite being chosen by God and “highly exalted,” the servant has a marred appearance that doesn’t attract people to follow or credit him (Isa. 52:13–14; 53:2).

The servant even suffers, and this challenges any expectations that he could be a deliverer or savior. His suffering makes it look as if God is not supporting him at all. Yet, “the arm of the LORD” is with him (Isa. 53:1). This phrase typically denotes God’s great power to save or deliver. Can a suffering servant really be accomplishing anything? Is that believable?

In verse 2, the language of “a tender shoot” and “a root” recalls

Isaiah 11:1: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” Because Jesse was the father of an unexpected king, David, this language pertains to the promised Messiah, an everlasting king from David’s family line. It pertains to the one who will reign on David’s throne forever (see 2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 9:7). Here, the language is applied to the suffering servant, making him a suffering servant who is also a king. Again, this challenges every expectation of what a king would look like.

Verse 2 exposes the gap between what God esteems and what people find desirable. The servant is ordinary, perhaps even unattractive. No beauty. No majesty. Nothing about his mere appearance gives his identity away. Whoever the servant is, he does not meet with the approval of human standards of beauty. Why should he meet with God’s approval either?

Verse 3 paints a bleaker picture, again exposing the gap between what God esteems and what people find impressive. Now the servant is despised and rejected. He is “a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (Isa. 53:3). Suffering and pain are not impressive to sinful humanity, not like power, influence, and charm. Suffering and pain are the kinds of things most people would rather avoid! We might assume that suffering is the result of poor decisions or mistakes. Observers think that the servant suffers because God is punishing him for his sin, but Isaiah 53:4–6 makes it clear that is not the case. At any rate, Isaiah reveals that the servant is despised for his suffering, “like one from whom people hide their faces” (Isa. 53:3). How can this possibly be someone who meets with God’s approval?

**1 Why is the servant despised and rejected by people?**

**2 What do these verses tell us about the servant’s identity?**

**3 What qualities does God value in a person?**

<sup>4</sup> Surely he hath borne our griefs,  
And carried our sorrows: Yet we  
did esteem him stricken, Smitten  
of God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our  
transgressions, He was bruised for  
our iniquities: The chastisement of  
our peace was upon him; And with  
his stripes we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone  
astray; We have turned every one  
to his own way; And the LORD hath  
laid on him the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was  
afflicted, Yet he opened not his  
mouth: He is brought as a lamb to  
the slaughter, And as a sheep be-  
fore her shearers is dumb, So he  
openeth not his mouth.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was  
on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is  
silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

## The Great Exchange

Beginning in verse 4, Isaiah begins to answer why the servant suffers: he suffers on behalf of the people. The verse of poetry says, “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering” (v. 4). The first-person plural pronoun “our” in verses 4–5 stresses that the servant is participating in an exchange. He is taking up the suffering that rightly belongs to a group of others. Despite what anyone may think, the servant does not suffer because God is punishing or afflicting him. It is instead “our” pain that he bears. Yet those who in the previous verses rejected and despised the servant still refuse to accept the truth and regard the servant as stricken by God.

But verse 5 reiterates that the servant suffers on behalf of others, in their place. The servant is taking on a punishment to provide peace. He is wounded so that others might be healed. He suffers to redeem and cleanse the people from their sin, for “he was pierced

for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities” (v. 5). The words “pierced” and “crushed” denote great suffering—suffering which leads to death. Can anyone survive being crushed? Again it challenges preconceived notions of a messiah. Could a king suffer and die, and still be the chosen one?

Verse 6 suggests that none of the people of Israel are without sin, including the writer himself. The verse says “we all” have sinned, and the servant bears iniquity belonging to “us all.” The people are like sheep who wander astray, turning this way or that, desperately in need of a shepherd to guide them.

Israel, who is also referred to as God’s servant in the book of Isaiah, has acted blindly and deafly, stubbornly refusing to listen, obey, or keep God’s covenant (Isa. 42:18–25). This stubborn “servant” (Israel) needs a more faithful servant—a truer Israel—to bear the iniquity and restore Israel to fellowship with God. And so, in His mercy, God lays the iniquity of His people on the shoulders of a faithful servant. But who is the servant? Who else could stand in place of God’s people to redeem their iniquities?

In verse 7, the faithful servant’s suffering becomes more remarkable: it is *voluntary*. Though he is “oppressed and afflicted” and “led like a lamb to the slaughter,” he accepts his unjust treatment. He willingly bears the violence inflicted on him by wicked and oppressive powers. He is like a sheep—not one who wanders astray—but one who is silent before its shearers. He does not even protest. Instead, he quietly bears the pain and suffering, the iniquity of “us all.” He is the sacrificial lamb who cleanses people of their sins. But who is the servant who can serve this unprecedented role?

**1 Why does the servant suffer?**

**2 How does the servant suffer?**

**3 What does verse 6 tell us about the condition of Israel and humanity as a whole? What is God’s response?**



## The “Suffering-With” Servant

What does the word compassion mean? Perhaps we imagine it as feeling sorry for someone, pitying them or relating empathetically in some way. While these are related to compassion, they don’t completely explain the word. Each instance mentioned above imagines remaining separate and detached from the other person: *I’m over here, and I have sympathy for the suffering person over there.*

Compassion comes from a Latin compound word, *compassio*, which means to “suffer with.” To have compassion leaves no room for staying at a safe distance. It requires drawing close, taking the burden of someone else’s pain as your own, literally sharing in the experience of distress so that the other person doesn’t carry it alone.

Sometimes our deepest experiences of suffering are when we feel alone in our difficulties, where no one can reach us. And yet Christ, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, shows what it truly means to have compassion. Jesus made our suffering *His suffering*, our iniquity *His problem*, and our despair *His burden*.

Paul says, “We share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom. 8:17). In other words, the pathway to our sanctification is forged by taking up the cross of Jesus in our everyday lives. As Isaiah 53:5 tells us, the suffering servant died for the sake of others, “pierced for our transgressions,” and “crushed for our iniquities.”

If we wish to be like Jesus, we too must become suffering servants, not simply having sympathy at a distance, but entering into others’ struggles and making them our own. This is the only pathway to transformation, allowing Jesus to make us His hands and feet, willingly bearing the wounds of others to leave no one alone in suffering. They can be embraced and redeemed in the love of Christ.

**1 What are examples where someone showed compassion to you?**

**2 Are there limits to how far our compassion might go?**

**3 If someone doesn’t seem likely to respond to compassion, is the effort still worth it?**

## Give Thanks to the Servant, Who Suffered for Us

Not all suffering is for the sake of others. Becoming like Jesus does not mean that we invite unnecessary hardship. But whenever we stand up for others, give from our excess, and shoulder the burdens of one another, we are following His example.

**Circle one characteristic of the servant as described in Isaiah 53, and write a brief thanks to Jesus that mentions this word.**

**Unattractive Rejected Submissive Misunderstood Redemptive**

### Key Text

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.  
—Isaiah 53:6 KJV

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.  
—Isaiah 53:6 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of September 29 through October 4

- Mon.** 2 Chronicles 34:1–7—Passion for God's Law.
- Tue.** Hebrews 4:12–16—The Piercing Word of God.
- Wed.** Jeremiah 3:12–19—Return to the Father.
- Thu.** Jeremiah 4:5–14—Cleanse Yourselves and Be Saved.
- Fri.** Hebrews 12:3–17—God's Discipline Proves God's Love.
- Sat.** Hebrews 12:18–29—God Is a Consuming Fire.

**Next Week:** Jeremiah 1:6–10; 26:8–9, 12–15

*We will examine God's call of the prophet Jeremiah. Has anyone very young ever shown you an important truth about God?*



# JEREMIAH'S CALL AND ARREST

Sasha spread her kente cloth over the swing arm table while her friend began organizing an array of nail polish and manicure utensils. The nursing home resident they had come to see focused on it all with sincere interest.

She and her friend were just two of the students who had been coming regularly. The previous quarter, their Sunday school teacher taught a series about servanthood. But it was one of the young students who had come up with the idea of visiting a local nursing home and putting the lessons into action.

“So many of the people never get visitors,” the student shared.

In the end, ten committed to making regular trips. Their teacher arranged the first date and collected permission slips, and she was delighted with the level of interest. Every other Saturday, two parents accompanied the young people to Serenity Manor Nursing Home.

They brought colorful index cards and notes with Scripture and encouragement: “You are Beautiful” (Psalm 45:11); “You are Loved” (Jeremiah 31:3); and “You are Important” (1 Peter 2:9).

The gesture made such an impact that one of the nursing assistants came to visit church one Sunday.

“My name is Jasmin, and I am a certified nursing assistant,” she told the pastor. “I just had to visit the church that keeps sending beautiful young people to spend time with our seniors! I haven’t been to church in quite some time.”

**1 When have you been surprised by a young person’s message?**

**2 Have you ever felt too inexperienced to say “yes” to a job?**

**3 Where do you see leadership emerging from those around you?**

<sup>6</sup> Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. <sup>8</sup> Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. <sup>10</sup> See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

<sup>6</sup> “Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. <sup>8</sup> Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth.

<sup>10</sup> See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

## God Appoints Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah begins with some dates. It is the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign over Judah (Jer. 1:2). Jeremiah is the son of a priest, leaders who are supposed to be guiding God's people to seek holiness and to protect the purity of the temple. Later we read that the priests have utterly failed in this role.

Verse 5 contains the words of God's call to Jeremiah: “Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” But God's selection of Jeremiah comes as a surprise. Instead of welcoming this message, he gives two reasons that he cannot do what is being asked (v. 6).

First, Jeremiah says he does not know how to speak. This does not mean he has a physical impairment or anything that hinders. What he means is that he lacks the eloquence and skill for such a public role of communication. Second, he calls himself a mere “child” before the Lord (v. 6 KJV). In Hebrew, the term “child” is broad enough to include various stages of youth. It is used for infants (1 Sam. 4:21), young boys (1 Sam. 2:11), even teenagers and young men (Gen. 21:1;

2 Sam 18:5). Jeremiah's concern is that he is too young and inexperienced to speak on the Lord's behalf.

But God does not accept these excuses (v. 7). Jeremiah only needs to focus on going to whomever the Lord sends him, saying whatever the Lord tells him. God will choose Jeremiah's message and audience, not Jeremiah. What matters are not the qualifications of Jeremiah but his God-appointed task. When God chooses Jeremiah, He asks Jeremiah to trust that he shall be provided with what he needs.

In verse 8, the Lord commands Jeremiah not to "be afraid" of the people to whom he will be sent. God will be with him and protect him. During Jeremiah's ministry, many will fiercely oppose and persecute him. His enemies will attack him, but God will be on his side. Jeremiah receives further reassurance of God's presence in verse 9. The Lord touches Jeremiah's mouth to show that He has placed the correct words for Jeremiah to say. These will not be human ideas; they will be from God. Jeremiah becomes a mouthpiece of God, like Isaiah before him (compare Isa. 6:6–7).

Verse 10 reveals the prophetic assignment: God gives Jeremiah authority to announce messages of judgment and deliverance. He will proclaim judgment against kings and nations, as a consequence of their disobedience. And he will announce God's plans for future restoration, instilling hope in God's redemption.

God describes Jeremiah's ministry using two types of metaphors: agricultural (uproot, plant) and architectural (tear down, destroy, overthrow, build). Of the six verbs, four highlight the destructive aspects of judgment, while only two focus on future reconstruction. These reflect Jeremiah's difficult ministry context: in the face of great disobedience, he will have a harsh message for his generation. Nevertheless, he also points to the hope of future blessing, for those who serve God with faithfulness.

**1 For what reasons does Jeremiah object to God's appointment?**

**2 What is God's response?**

**3 What will be the ministry task for Jeremiah? What must he do?**

<sup>8</sup> Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. <sup>9</sup> Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

<sup>12</sup> Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. <sup>13</sup> Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. <sup>14</sup> As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. <sup>15</sup> But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

<sup>8</sup> But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, “You must die! <sup>9</sup> Why do you prophesy in the LORD’s name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

<sup>12</sup> Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. <sup>13</sup> Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. <sup>14</sup> As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. <sup>15</sup> Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”

## Jeremiah on Trial

We transition many chapters ahead, and in obedience to the Lord, Jeremiah warns the people to turn from their evil ways, or else the Lord will bring destruction upon the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 26:1–7). He is delivering the message exactly as God has commanded, but when he finishes, the temple priests, other

prophets, and everyone else feels outraged. They seize him, shouting that he must die. They react with hostility because they believe Jeremiah is falsely claiming the Lord's authority. Their question in verse 9 is rhetorical, meant to accuse, rather than understand. They are scandalized, thinking *Why would God predict or threaten the destruction of His own temple?*

The people are under the false impression that God's presence and supernatural defense of the temple will ensure their safety (see Jer. 7:4, 10–14). They cannot accept that God would threaten to destroy the temple, so they believe Jeremiah deserves death as a false prophet (see Deut. 18:20).

The people set up a trial at one of the temple gates to bring their charges against Jeremiah (Jer. 26:10–11). In verse 12, Jeremiah gives his defense before all the people. He states that God Himself sent Jeremiah to prophesy against the temple and the city. Because God is the source of this message, not Jeremiah, the people's contention is with God, and Jeremiah is not a false prophet. Thus, even when threatened with death, Jeremiah does not change his message. Instead, he calls the people to repentance (v. 13). He urges them to change their way of life and do what is right. If they obey the Lord, He will relent and not bring judgment upon them. There is still an opportunity for them to repent.

Jeremiah puts himself at the mercy of the people (vv. 14–15). Courageously, he does not plead for his life. He is more concerned with faithfully delivering God's message than ensuring his personal safety. He warns the people that, if they execute him, they will be executing an innocent man. Such a murder would bring added guilt upon themselves and their city. He ends by emphasizing that this message is from the Lord, and it is the truth.

**1 What are the people's accusations against Jeremiah?**

**2 How does Jeremiah respond in defense?**



## **Finding the Right Words**

I have always identified with Moses and Jeremiah, both of whom seem to fear public speaking. I am not confident. I tell people (sometimes, God) that I am not good enough, not eloquent enough. Give me a computer keyboard and I can communicate. But a microphone? Not so much.

Today's Scripture reminds me of when I was asked to give my testimony to a church youth group when I was about fifteen. My peers were in that group! I was very nervous, but I also felt that God had given me an opportunity to encourage others to go public with their faith. I read Mark 13:11, which was near my thoughts: "Do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit." I repeated and memorized that verse to cover my anxiety as the date approached, and God was faithful. He gave me words to say, and I was shocked by the response.

Thus, I can understand Jeremiah's reluctance to be a spokesperson for God. Not only was he hesitant about the message (which gets him into hot water), but he tries to remind God of his youth and inexperience. He fears that no one will listen. But when God corrects him, "Do not say, 'I am too young,'" Jeremiah wisely drops the excuses (Jer. 1:7).

Jeremiah was thinking about Jeremiah. But God was thinking about His plan to use Jeremiah to be His prophet. Jeremiah would be the messenger, and God would take care of the rest.

If God is nudging you toward doing something you're avoiding out of fear, perhaps you should reconsider. Maybe God has recruited you as a spokesperson to share the gospel, or just to encourage someone. He is faithful and can supply your needs. Do you trust that truth?

**1 Why might God choose young people to accomplish His will?**

**2 When have you received encouragement to step forward to do a hard thing?**

**3 What are ways we can overcome fear?**



## Overcoming Fear

Jeremiah is accused of speaking falsely, even after God designates him a prophet. But God would be able to protect him and to give him the words to speak, even if he is not confident of his own abilities. By looking to God instead of his own abilities, Jeremiah acts in obedience to his mission.

**Can you identify one specific context where you could be taking a more active role in ministry? Write a prayer that asks God for strength to face this challenge.**

### Key Text

But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.  
—Jeremiah 1:7 KJV

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.”  
—Jeremiah 1:7 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

**Week of October 6 through October 11**

**Mon.** Mark 13:1–13—Endure to the End.

**Tue.** Mark 13:14–27—God Will Protect God’s People.

**Wed.** 1 Samuel 15:20–26—To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice.

**Thu.** John 14:12–17—Keep Christ’s Commandment.

**Fri.** John 2:12–22—An Indestructible Temple.

**Sat.** Psalm 51:15–19—The Sacrifice that Pleases God.

**Next Week:** Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23

*We will talk more about Jeremiah’s message and the compassion God shows for vulnerable people. Is your attention drawn to any group of vulnerable people this week?*

# JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE

Verna sat with her sister on the porch, sipping hot tea and watching autumn leaves drift from the trees. Her sister, Emma, had surprised her with freshly baked cookies.

Across the street, a man waved. "Hi, Mrs. Gibson," he yelled.

"Hello, Pastor Hillard!" Verna waved back. She tried to mask her discomfort with a smile.

As he got into his car and drove out of sight, Verna leaned toward her sister. "He's the Pastor of the Alpha Church over on Burnside Road. He's visited the widow across the street every week since her husband died three months ago. I think it's strange for him to be over there so often."

"Maybe he's helping her with some legal issues. He used to be a lawyer a long time ago." Verna's sister took a sip of her hot tea.

"I just got a feeling," Verna softly touched her sister's hand.

"I don't know," her sister said. "Maybe you've just been listening to your true crime podcasts too much."

Eight months later, Verna walked outside to get her newspaper. She unfolded it and saw a picture of Pastor Hillard with the headline: "Widow Scammed Out of Life Savings by Community Leader."

Verna texted her sister: "I was right. Take a look at the newspaper!"

Emma took a few moments to respond: "I cannot believe it! That poor woman trusted him. Now he is in trouble with the Lord and the law!"

**1 What are some examples of religious hypocrisy that you have seen or experienced?**

**2 Which is better, having the right words or having the right attitude behind our actions?**

**3 Where have you felt stretched to take a risk to help others?**

<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, <sup>2</sup> Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. <sup>4</sup> Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. <sup>5</sup> For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; <sup>6</sup> If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: <sup>7</sup> Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

<sup>1</sup> This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> “Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message:

“ ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. <sup>4</sup> Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” <sup>5</sup> If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, <sup>6</sup> if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, <sup>7</sup> then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

## Misplaced Trust in the Temple

Boldly standing at one of the temple gates, Jeremiah announces the Lord's message (7:1). When first called by God to be His prophet, Jeremiah was reluctant, but here, he faithfully says exactly what God commands (compare Jer. 1:6 from last week). In the ancient world, people typically made proclamations at gates as visible public places. Anyone doing business in the temple would have to pass through a temple gate, so Jeremiah's position gives him access to a wide array of worshipers.

Jeremiah's message is this: if the residents of Judah do not repent, God will not permit them to remain in the land (v. 3). He urges his

contemporaries to change their way of living. As part of God's covenant with Israel, God promised blessing and protection for those who obey Him (see Deut. 7:12–15). But an unfaithful, disobedient people is not entitled to receive these promises.

In verse 4, he commands everyone to stop trusting in deceptive words—lies. The people think they are safe with the Lord's temple in their land. The phrase “the temple of the Lord” repeats three times, emphasizing that they are trusting the temple rather than God Himself.

Verses 5–7 specify what the people must do to remain in the land. They must change their ways and act fairly. They must stop oppressing foreigners, fatherless children, and widows. In the Mosaic law, God shows a particular concern for these three groups, who were especially vulnerable and unable to protect themselves (see Ex. 22:22–24). There can be no shedding of innocent blood or worshiping of other gods. If (and only if) they do these things, God will allow them to continue in the land. At the end of verse 7, Jeremiah recalls that God gave the land to their ancestors “for ever and ever.” God desires that they stay in the land, but their actions jeopardize the covenant relationship.

**1 What is the desired outcome of Jeremiah's message?**

**2 What do the people trust instead of God?**



This stele from the eighth century BC depicts Ishtar standing on the back of a lion. In Jeremiah 7:18, the prophet accuses the people of Judah of making their offerings in the temple, then going out to make separate offerings to the “Queen of Heaven,” who is probably this Mesopotamian goddess of power and sensuality.

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<sup>9</sup> Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; <sup>10</sup> And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? <sup>11</sup> Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.'

<sup>21</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. <sup>22</sup> For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: <sup>23</sup> But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

<sup>9</sup> “ ‘Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, <sup>10</sup> and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things? <sup>11</sup> Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.’

<sup>21</sup> “ ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! <sup>22</sup> For when I brought your ancestors out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, <sup>23</sup> but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.

## God Desires Obedience

Jeremiah diagnoses his audience the way that a doctor diagnoses a patient. Based upon the symptoms, he knows the people of Judah have a spiritual problem. He accuses them of breaking God's commands (vv. 9–10), listing six specific violations of the Ten Commandments: stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, offering sacrifices to other gods, and following other gods (see Ex. 20:1–7). But the most shocking symptom of all is that, even after committing these obvious wrongs, the people enter the temple believing themselves “safe” (Jer. 7:10). Naively, they believe their temple sacrifices are enough to keep faith with God. But the actions



reveal that they completely misunderstand what God desires in the first place.

Verse 11 emphasizes that the temple is the Lord's house—it bears His name. But it has become a “den of robbers.” In the ancient world, robbers would use caves for protection and shelter when being pursued. Once the danger had passed, they would leave the caves to commit more crimes. Similarly, God's people are viewing the temple as a refuge that protects them from the consequences of wrongdoing.

Through Jeremiah, God sarcastically tells the people of Judah to add the burnt offerings to other sacrifices and to eat the meat (v. 21). According to the Mosaic law, burnt offerings were completely consumed on the altar and reserved for God alone (Lev. 1:6–9). But because the people are offering sacrifices while disobeying the law, their burnt offerings are unacceptable. They might as well just eat them; they do not matter to God (compare Jer. 6:20).

Finally, verses 22–23 conclude with a rhetorical contrast between the commands of sacrifice and the commands for obedience. The people could legitimately say, “God told us to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices when He brought us out of Egypt, didn't He?” Sacrifices and offerings certainly are important to the covenant relationship (see Lev. 1–4). Sacrifices treat the presence of God with care and allow for fellowship with a holy God. But if sacrifices are meant to demonstrate gratitude and communion, they are obviously not enough on their own. God wants obedience and devotion from the heart.

**1 If the people of Judah are like a sick patient, what are the symptoms of their spiritual condition?**

**2 What has turned God's temple into this “den of robbers” as Jeremiah describes (v. 11)?**

**3 What has made burnt offerings meaningless in God's sight?**



## **God Seeks Justice for the Vulnerable**

God designed people to live in community. Humans were not made to be alone, nor do they often desire to be. At the time of Jeremiah's speech, foreigners were encroaching upon the land God had promised Israel, and parents and husbands were passing away, leaving their children as orphans, their wives as widows. The culture of ancient Israel was family-based; family members provided for one another, looked out for one another, sought justice for one another. But foreigners, orphans, and widows would have had no one to look out for them.

From this passage, we know that God was looking out for them. He rebukes His people for preying on the innocent and the vulnerable and commands them to change their ways. God becomes angry on behalf of the oppressed, righteously indignant that His people would sully His name by stealing, murdering, lying, or committing adultery. He reminds Judah that He is watching their behavior outside the temple walls. If they would not protect the vulnerable and seek justice, God would jealously defend His own reputation.

What is especially striking about this passage is that, in the midst of indicting the people for lacking mercy, God shows mercy. He repeats His commands with a promise that, if they reform their ways, He will let them remain in the promised land. If God were without mercy, He could have simply swept them away without warning. Instead, He pleads with them so that they might be saved.

We are familiar with the pattern. God loved us, so that we may love others. God showed us mercy, so that we may show mercy. God wants people to walk in obedience. He desires devotion to His purposes, a real relationship instead of a false view of religion. God is still looking out for the vulnerable and requires believers to do the same.

**1 Why is the defense of the vulnerable so important to God?**

**2 What is an area of your life where God has been merciful to you?**

**3 Who do you know who could use protection, comfort, or provision?**

## No Substitute for Relationship

While we do not offer animal sacrifices or burnt offerings today, we can still be tempted to treat our relationship with God as instrumental. We can look at our church attendance, ministry success, or record of giving as if these are what God wants, more than the relationship we should be pursuing.

**Can you think of something *good* (like church attendance, service, or giving) that you have treated as a stand-in for a genuine relationship with God? Ask God to change your perspective.**

### Key Text

But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

—Jeremiah 7:23 KJV

I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.

—Jeremiah 7:23 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of October 13 through October 18

- Mon.** Proverbs 23:29–35—The Dangers of Strong Drink.
- Tue.** Ecclesiastes 9:4–10—Keep Earthly Pleasures in Perspective.
- Wed.** Ephesians 5:11–19—Be Filled with the Spirit.
- Thu.** Numbers 6:1–8—The Nazirite Vow.
- Fri.** 1 Thessalonians 4:1–7—Called to Holiness.
- Sat.** 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10—Keep Awake!

**Next Week:** Jeremiah 35:5–11

*Next week we will talk about the good that comes from following family traditions. Use this week to think about one family tradition that you will want to share with the group.*

## A FAMILY'S EXAMPLE

"It's going to be big fun, mate. We do it every year," explained Ambrose. "We get hammered and make a whole night of it."

"Don't you chaps do the same thing in America?" chimed Robert.

They were in Antonne's dorm at the University of West London. It was his second year at the university. It had been difficult to settle into a new country and new school, while making a new group of friends. But Antonne found his English classmates to be friendly toward Americans, possibly more so to Black students.

Ambrose and Robert had promised him a "rip-roaring, good time" for Halloween. The plan was to hook up with a larger group and to get "totally sloshed."

"I'm telling you, mate, you're not going to want to miss this. And Felicity will be there," added Robert.

Antonne kept thinking of what his extended family was doing back home: celebrating at a local farm with pumpkins, a corn maze, and all the trappings. Later they would build a campfire, drink cider, and huddle under blankets to sing or to listen to stories from his grandfather. It wasn't the typical way to spend Halloween, but it had more meaning than what other folks did.

"You know," Antonne said, sitting down and reaching for his phone, "I think tonight I might hang back and connect with my family. I haven't called my grandfather in ages."

**1 What is one of your favorite family traditions?**

**2 What value did that tradition teach you?**

**3 What kind of good tradition do you want to start with your friends and family?**

<sup>5</sup> And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.

<sup>6</sup> But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: <sup>7</sup> Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers.

<sup>5</sup> Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the Rekabites and said to them, “Drink some wine.”

<sup>6</sup> But they replied, “We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab gave us this command: ‘Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.’ <sup>7</sup> Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.’

## The Rekabite Vows

The setting is the middle of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry. At least some of the worst outcomes have already begun. But there is yet time to save lives and to make the people understand that turning to God’s mercy is their only hope. The faithless king of Judah, Jehoiakim, has not led the people into sincere repentance. Judah has been forced to submit to the invading powers of Babylon (1 Kings 24:1). Amidst all the coming and going from the city of Jerusalem, God sends Jeremiah to one family: the Rekabites, descendants of their ancestor, Rekab. God has a planned demonstration in mind.

Jeremiah brings the clan into the temple and arranges a test. He sets bowls of wine before the family and tells them to drink (Jer. 35:5). But there is something to know about the Rekabites: unlike most other families of this time, they have certain unique traditions. They do not drink wine, do not farm, and they live in tents (vv. 6–7).

Through his actions, Jeremiah is tempting this group to violate long-held family traditions. Before them is a prophet of God who has invited them to enter the temple and has made an offer of wine (presumably, before observers). But Jeremiah anticipates their response. Jeremiah (more importantly, God) already knows what the Rekabites will do.

The family comes at Jeremiah's invitation, but they flatly decline to drink any wine set before them. They explain their traditions, perhaps thinking this might be a simple misunderstanding: "Our forefather Jehonadab, son of Rekab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine'" (v. 6). The family members have probably kept this vow for more than two centuries, and they are not about to violate it now.

We may wonder why the Rekabites have this tradition in the first place. Unfortunately, the rest of Scripture is mostly silent about them; Jeremiah 35 is the only chapter that describes their history. More than likely, the reason their ancestor had forbidden the drinking of wine or the cultivation of crops was to free his descendants from being settled in one territory. The Rekabites are probably a clan of permanent nomads, expected to live like nomads, and a love for wine would make that lifestyle impossible.

Jehonadab—the ancestor who came up with these traditions—promised his family that, if they keep these traditions, they will "live a long time in the land where [they] are nomads" (v. 7). This promise closely resembles the wording of Israel's covenant: "Observe therefore all the commands I [God] am giving you . . . so that you may live long in the land" (Deut. 11:8–9). And here is the crux of Jeremiah's demonstration. Before the observers, Jeremiah highlights a family who upholds their traditions to ensure a righteous outcome.

**1 What does Jeremiah the prophet ask the Rekabites to do? Why?**

**2 How do the Rekabites respond? Why?**

**3 What makes the Rekabites want to keep their traditions?**

<sup>8</sup> Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; <sup>9</sup> Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: <sup>10</sup> But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. <sup>11</sup> But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem.

<sup>8</sup> We have obeyed everything our forefather Jehonadab son of Rekab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine <sup>9</sup> or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops. <sup>10</sup> We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jehonadab commanded us. <sup>11</sup> But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this land, we said, ‘Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies.’ So we have remained in Jerusalem.”

## Radical Obedience

The Rekabites and their leader, Jaazaniah, continue to explain these vows and their refusal to drink wine. After their forefather forbid them to drink wine, build houses, or farm, they “obeyed everything [he] commanded” (v. 8). Because they all followed these commands to live as nomads, they “have lived in tents and have fully obeyed” (v. 10). Their long-standing zeal toward keeping ancestral traditions overcame any temptation to seek the comfort of permanent homes, much less a temptation to drink the wine Jeremiah has set before them.

The only reason the Rekabites have come to Jerusalem is to find safety from invading armies (v. 11). As a result of their nomadic lifestyle, they were able to flee to the city in a time of crisis. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had begun invading the lands of Judah and the eastern Mediterranean. Because of these wars to the north, the Rekabites arrived as refugees to Judah and found safety in the city of Jerusalem (v. 11). Even now, they are not in violation of their vows and traditions. Even now they are still living in tents.

Following the printed text, God tells Jeremiah to speak to the



gathered people. Jeremiah recaps the test of the Rekabites and their faithful response (vv. 12–16). Then he brings the demonstration to a theological point: the Rekabites have done everything their ancestors had asked, have remained faithful, generation after generation. Conversely, during the same time, the people of Judah have proved utterly faithless to the covenant with God. God has sent many prophets (Jeremiah included) to urge Judah to turn from sin and idolatry. “But,” God concludes, “you have not paid attention or listened to me” (v. 15). Thus, the Rekabites are an illustration of the kind of faithfulness that Judah has struggled to display.

Therefore, because of this faithless behavior, God shall bring about “every disaster [God] pronounced against [Judah and Jerusalem]” (v. 17). God has provided ample opportunity to return to covenant obedience, but the door is quickly shutting.

On the other hand, the faithfulness of the Rekabites has not gone unnoticed before God. This opens a path for God to reward them. The point is not that the traditions of the Rekabites should be adopted by the other residents of Judah. But in recognition for their having kept ancestral traditions, God says, “Jehonadab son of Rekab will never fail to have a descendant to serve me” (v. 19). In the midst of a faithless generation, God finds cause to reward a family who chooses a different path.

**1 How have the Rekabites demonstrated obedience to their ancestors after relocating to Jerusalem?**

**2 Why does God want to highlight an example of extravagant faithfulness?**

**3 How does God reward the Rekabites?**

## The Art of Finishing Well

“We have to finish this game!”

When those words came from my son’s mouth, I knew he was right. I had always been a lover of boardgames, but this was the moment I knew he loved them too. We were seated on the carpet of our living room, cards and pieces scattered in every direction. The game had gone on so long that I was willing to pack it away. But one look at his face made me certain I didn’t want to disappoint him.

“You’re right. We finish things, don’t we?”

With perfect comedic timing, my wife leaned into the room while holding a laundry basket. She said, “You finish the things you want to finish!”

It became a family joke that turned into a larger conversation. Each of us was able to think of projects and tasks that went unfinished: clothes tossed to the floor, a recycling bin that overflowed, school-work marked “Incomplete.” Thus, a new family motto was born: *In this family, we finish things.*

In the days of Jeremiah, God was seeking faithfulness, or what we might call the skill of *finishing well*. But the people of Judah were rebellious and uncommitted. Soon their lack of fortitude would reach its natural conclusion: God would send them into exile.

We can be grateful that God notices and rewards individual faithfulness. More than that, God is devoted to His plans and promises. If faithfulness is the art of finishing well, God is the master. He always brings His plans to fruition. In the person of Jesus, God has been faithful beyond the wildest imagination of human beings. We should be faithful because God is faithful.

**1 What is an example of something you always want to finish?**

**2 How can our faithfulness in other areas of life be an example of faithfulness before God?**

**3 What does it look like to obey God and to finish well?**

## Reminding the World of God's Faithfulness

As we have studied the traditions of one ancient family, perhaps you have noticed ways that your own family traditions could point others to God. Since we serve a God who is faithful, we can look for ways to exemplify faithfulness ourselves.

**With a partner, discuss a family tradition that this lesson has encouraged you to start or continue. How do you hope that your family traditions can point others to God?**

### Key Text

For unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: —Jeremiah 35:14b KJV

To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather's command. —Jeremiah 35:14b NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of October 20 through October 25

**Mon.** Joel 2:28–32—A New Salvation.

**Tue.** Ezekiel 36:25–35—A New Heart.

**Wed.** Deuteronomy 10:12–21—The Law's Essence.

**Thu.** 2 Corinthians 3:1–6—A New Covenant.

**Fri.** 2 Corinthians 3:7–11—A New Spirit.

**Sat.** Jeremiah 31:27–34—A New Relationship with God.

**Next Week:** Jeremiah 31:29–34; John 1:17

*Next week we will be looking at God's promise to make His people faithful and to give a new covenant. What is an item in your life that you've updated recently?*

# CHANGES PROMISED

Kellan set the last few grocery bags on the kitchen counter as his wife hobbled around the corner. She looked confused.

“Did you go shopping?” asked Laila.

“Yes,” said Kellan. “Can’t you sit down while I put the groceries away?”

Looking even more baffled, Laila pulled out a kitchen chair and sat down with her leg extended. She had been wearing a boot for the past three weeks after a bunion surgery. Even though she had time off to recover, Laila had continued to do housework and errands.

“Why isn’t Kellan doing more to help?” her sister had questioned her, right after the surgery.

Laila just brushed over her sister’s remarks. She didn’t like speaking ill of her husband in front of others, especially family. But she continued to pray for him. She prayed for his spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being.

“Baby, I need to apologize,” Kellan said. “I haven’t been taking as good care of you as I should. The Lord has been dealing with me for some time. He’s been faithful to me, but I’ve been ignoring my responsibilities as your husband.”

After Kellan finished putting up the groceries, he turned and said, “I forgot my suit in the car.” He came back in the house with his nice gray suit from the cleaners.

“Going somewhere special?” Laila asked.

“It’s been a while. But you don’t remember? This is my usher’s suit.”

**1 When is a time you missed the mark at home, with friends, or at work?**

**2 What is a prayer that you find yourself repeating?**

**3 What kind of renewal is something that only God can provide?**

<sup>29</sup> In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, And the children's teeth are set on edge.

<sup>30</sup> But every one shall die for his own iniquity: Every man that eateth the sour grape, His teeth shall be set on edge.

<sup>31</sup> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, That I will make a new covenant With the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: <sup>32</sup> Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day that I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; Which my covenant they brake, Although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

<sup>29</sup> “In those days people will no longer say, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’

<sup>30</sup> Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge.

<sup>31</sup> “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,

“when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

<sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

## A New Promise

During Jeremiah’s day, individuals complain that God is unjustly punishing them for sins of their ancestors (see Lam. 5:7). Their attitude is captured by a proverb that states, “The parents have eaten sour grapes”—meaning have done what is wrong—“and the children’s teeth are set on edge”—the children face the consequences (Jer. 31:29). “Set on edge” translates a rare word in the Old Testament, appearing only three times (Eccl. 10:10; Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2). In this context, “set on edge” refers to the “bluntness” or “numbness” of their teeth, a response to unpleasant taste. The people are blaming God for the consequences of their own sin by saying that it is their parents’ fault.

Jeremiah looks forward to a day when this proverb will not be repeated. He offers his own revised proverb, where each person dies for their own sins: “whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge” (Jer. 31:30). He is correcting the idea that God

punishes individuals for the sins of others. God is just, and He punishes each person according to their own behavior. While the people's ancestors were guilty of disobedience, the present generation is equally culpable. Jeremiah warned them about their guilt, but they stubbornly refused to repent and turn back to God. Now, God can no longer hold back His judgment (see Jer. 7:24–26; 11:1–8; 16:10–13).

But God promises to make a new covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31). The Lord is the one who will initiate and establish this new covenant with Israel and Judah. The two names refer to the division of the nation into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Under the new covenant, both are included. This promise requires nothing less than restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel, some which have been gone for centuries.

The new covenant shall differ from the former Mosaic covenant, which God made with Israel at Mount Sinai and renewed on the plains of Moab. The Mosaic covenant established a relationship with Israel and specified obligations for God's nation of priests and holy people (Ex. 19:5–6). But it was conditional: *If you do this . . . I will do this*. If Israel was obedient, then God would bless them; if Israel was rebellious, then God would punish them (see Deut. 28). The problem is that the people are not faithful. They violate the covenant with their disobedience, almost immediately (see Ex. 32). In contrast, God is faithful. God is so faithful that He shall make a new covenant to overcome their weakness.

**1 What is the meaning of the proverb about sour grapes in Jeremiah 31:29?**

**2 According to Jeremiah, who bears the responsibility for sin?**

**3 For whom would God make a new covenant, and why is this significant?**



<sup>33</sup> But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, And write it in their hearts; And will be their God, And they shall be my people.

<sup>34</sup> And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: For they shall all know me, From the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: For I will forgive their iniquity, And I will remember their sin no more.

<sup>17</sup> For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

<sup>34</sup> No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD.

“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

<sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

## A New Covenant

Beginning in verse 33, God describes the differences that set this new covenant apart. By referring to Israel here, He is not excluding Judah. He is speaking of the whole of Israel, which had divided into two (Israel and Judah). This new covenant would take place “after those days,” looking forward to the return of the exiles to the land. Previously, in verses 27–28, Jeremiah describes the building and planting of the people in the land. Now Jeremiah adds that the people shall experience restoration of their relationship with the Lord (see also Deut. 30:1–6; Ezek. 11:17–20).

God promises to put His “law” within them (v. 33). This law (which means “instruction”) would be written on their hearts and minds, not on stone—which refers to the old covenant on stone tablets (Ex. 32:19; Deut. 30:6). The old covenant failed because of people’s disobedience and wayward hearts, but in the new covenant, God says He shall give a new path forward. He offers inward

transformation. His people's attitudes, affections, and wills shall be changed, enabling them to actually obey the Lord. The result is that the Lord will be their God, and they will be His people (see also Jer. 24:7; 30:22; 31:1). The new covenant allows all to know the Lord (v. 34). There will be no need to exhort others to know the Lord, for they will already know Him. Whereas under the Mosaic covenant, people relied on human mediators to hear from God, the new covenant provides them with direct access (compare Heb. 4:14–16). All people, regardless of background, will know Him.

God's final statement in verse 34 provides the rationale. The foundation of this new covenant is forgiveness of sins. With the removal of sins, the people will be able to experience a restored relationship with their Creator. They will not have to rely on the law, the temple, the sacrificial system, or the priesthood.

As John 1:17 acknowledges, for the followers of Christ, something new arrives through Jesus Christ. The law of Moses was a gift to God's people, but it did not provide a path of forgiveness and inward transformation. Through Jesus, people are offered God's abundant gifts: grace and truth. Jesus is God in the flesh, who has made God known and granted eternal life for those in Him (John 3:15).

**1 How is the new covenant different from the old?**

**2 How can God's law benefit His people when written on their hearts?**

**3 What makes Jesus the bringer of grace and truth?**



Cultivation of grapes played an important role in the daily life of people in Jeremiah's day. While it is technically possible to pick and eat unripe fruit, a much better crop can come from waiting for the harvest, especially in the months of September or October.

Danny Shenar/Israeli Pikiwiki project

## What Hope Can Do

My daughter suffers with depression, as do many who are reading these words, I'd guess. There are more people who have depression than statistics report, and it's not something people like to talk about. But do you know what helps? *Hope*.

When life gets overwhelming for my daughter, and perhaps for you, hope is a wonderful antidote. It lifts the spirit and suggests that there may be better days ahead. I've seen her go from "can't-get-out-of-bed" melancholy to actually looking forward to an anticipated event, all because she has grasped that elusive spirit of hope. When she's looking forward to change, she's hoping that better days are ahead, and the anticipated future makes all the difference.

In today's lesson, Jeremiah shared a message of hope with God's people. They had the Mosaic law, but were unable to keep it. God announces He will be making a new covenant, where people won't complain for being held responsible for their parents' mistakes. They won't feel indebted to rules that feel impossible to keep, but God's instruction will be written on their hearts. No doubt, Jeremiah's audience doesn't know what all that means, but it is a *hopeful* message. They could look forward to a future that was better than their present. What encouragement that must have provided! Hope does that.

God provided hope then, and He continues to give hope today. He is called the "God of hope" in Romans 15:13. As we continue to live in a world that is filled by disheartening realities, when many choose their own way rather than God's, let's take encouragement that better days are ahead for us too. No person knows the day or the hour, but Jesus is coming, in all His glory. We have blessed hope.

**1 Where have you encountered unexpected hope?**

**2 When have you felt responsible for the actions of someone else?**

**3 What promise or truth about God fills you with hope for the future?**

## A God of Renewal

Jeremiah teaches the people that a solution to the sin problem is not something they can manage alone. There are situations and patterns that only God can fix. Like the people of Judah, we can trust in a God who is capable of performing great miracles.

**Reflect on a circumstance in your life that you feel helpless to fix on your own. Have you been taking this to God in prayer? Write a prayer to request renewal that only God can give.**

### Key Text

I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

—Jeremiah 31:33b KJV

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” —Jeremiah 31:33b NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of October 27 through November 1

**Mon.** Matthew 10:16–27—Speak as the Spirit Leads.

**Tue.** Matthew 10:28–42—Do Not Fear Mortal Powers.

**Wed.** Psalm 37:1–13—Wait Patiently for the Lord.

**Thu.** Psalm 37:25–28, 35–40—God Never Forsakes the Righteous.

**Fri.** Romans 12:12–21—Overcome Evil with Good.

**Sat.** Jeremiah 38:1–6—Speak Even when the Message Stings.

**Next Week:** Jeremiah 38:7–13

*Next week we will talk about a specific time that Jeremiah needed rescue. Can you find any hopeful stories of rescue in the news this week?*

## JEREMIAH'S RESCUE

Cynthia was just about to start her morning walk when she heard someone behind her. “Give me your purse.” She turned around, and saw the gun. The young man repeated the demand. Cynthia nervously told him that her purse was in the house. “Go get it.” He motioned toward my door.

As Cynthia walked toward the house, she prayed. Her two children were sleeping upstairs. What was she doing? What if they got hurt?

The man followed her into the house. She showed him her purse, which was on the kitchen table, and pulled out some cash. “That’s not enough,” he said.

Cynthia emptied her purse, letting everything inside fall to the floor. Surely he’d see that she didn’t have any more money. His eyes lit up. *Her debit card.* Cynthia grabbed it. “I’ll take you to the bank.”

He nodded in agreement. He went out first, and as soon as he was outside the door, Cynthia slammed it behind him, locked it, and ran upstairs to call the police.

After the police left, Cynthia fell to her knees and wept. She praised God, who had rescued her. God figured out a way. He made sure that the man walked out of her door first, and she never had to get in a car with him.

**1 Consider a time when you needed rescue. What happened? Who came to your aid?**

**2 When was the last time that you felt powerless?**

**3 When have you helped someone in desperate need? What led you to help?**



<sup>7</sup> Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; <sup>8</sup> Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, <sup>9</sup> My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for there is no more bread in the city.

<sup>10</sup> Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.

<sup>7</sup> But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, <sup>8</sup> Ebed-Melek went out of the palace and said to him, <sup>9</sup> “My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city.”

<sup>10</sup> Then the king commanded Ebed-Melek the Cushite, “Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.”

## An Unlikely Savior

Imprisoned in a dark and empty cistern, with no food and no way out, and locked within the walls of a city that will soon be under siege, the prophet Jeremiah is in a desperate situation. Jeremiah has found himself lowered into a cistern because he has been preaching an unpopular message. He has been sharing that the city of Jerusalem will fall, and he has been urging everyone to surrender to the Babylonians to save their lives (Jer. 38:2–3). But Jerusalem's officials fear this will only discourage the soldiers and undermine all efforts at defense (Jer. 38:4). The officials get their king's permission to “take care” of this troublesome prophet by killing him (Jer. 38:5). Their method is cruel and cowardly. They put Jeremiah into an empty cistern, leaving him to die of hunger and exposure (Jer. 38:6). In this way, they leave no body and no apparent evidence of a crime.

A cistern, which normally holds water, is a terrible muddy hole when it has been emptied of water (as in a city under siege). Jeremiah probably cannot sit or lie down. By the time that someone

discovers Jeremiah's confinement months later, he will have become a lifeless corpse.

Fortunately, God provides an unlikely agent of rescue, Ebed-Melek. Ebed-Melek means "servant of the king," so this might be a job title rather than his name. The text says that he is part of the king's court, but it does not say whether or not he knows that the king himself had privately agreed to Jeremiah's murder. Apparently, Ebed-Melek believes Jeremiah and his message.

He is also prudent in his way of advocating for the prophet's life. Instead of approaching the king privately, he waits until the king is holding court at the gate of the city (v. 7). The king will not be able to sweep the issue under the rug or make the problem go away.

As the king's own servant, Ebed-Melek has no problem receiving an immediate audience. He quickly summarizes the actions of men who have "done evil" against the prophet (v. 9 KJV). Ironically, one of the major concerns of Jeremiah's ministry is the shedding of innocent blood (Jer. 22:3, 17). The kings of Judah did not pursue justice for the oppressed and innocent, and the pattern has now been demonstrated in Jeremiah's own attempted murder.

Ebed-Melek's compassion and boldness outshine any concern for his own safety at the hands of the palace officials. At great personal risk, Ebed-Melek confronts Zedekiah, whose secret ambivalence has allowed the prophet of God to come to harm. And Ebed-Melek's boldness pays off, for the king does not wish to be publicly perceived as opposing the prophet of God. He quickly issues the command for Ebed-Melek to lead a rescue party of thirty men, so that Jeremiah can be lifted from the pit (v. 10).

**1 Why has Jeremiah been lowered into a pit or cistern?**

**2 What makes Ebed-Melek an unlikely advocate for his safety?**

**3 Why does the king respond as he does?**

<sup>11</sup> So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. <sup>12</sup> And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. <sup>13</sup> So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

<sup>11</sup> So Ebed-Melek took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. <sup>12</sup> Ebed-Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, “Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes.” Jeremiah did so, <sup>13</sup> and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

## God Rescues

Once he has the permission of the king, Ebed-Melek immediately implements the plan of rescue. He starts by collecting old rags from a room under the palace (v. 11). This attention to detail demonstrates empathy and compassion, for he wants to pad the ropes and prevent the prophet from injury and infection (vv. 11–12). The cistern is deep, and Jeremiah needs many men to haul him out of the mud. Thus, without padding on his body, the ropes would abrade his skin.

The imagery calls to mind Psalm 40:2, where the psalmist exclaims, “He [God] drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog.” While the words of the psalm express a metaphor, the pit for Jeremiah is all too real. And Jeremiah’s rescuer has a human face.

After being pulled out, he does not run away or flee the scene in fear (v. 13). After his confinement, he probably could not move quickly, and he remains under the safe custody of the men who have hauled him up from the darkness. An additional conclusion to this story happens beyond the printed text. Jeremiah tells Ebed-Melek that he shall escape unharmed from Jerusalem’s impending destruction. Because of his trust in the Lord and service to God’s prophet, on that day the Lord shall save him (Jer. 39:15–18).

Even as the book of Jeremiah recounts the stunning failure of God's people to collectively repent, this story paints a powerful image of deliverance. A desperate man is unable to free himself. Then comes an unexpected savior, acting with justice and compassion. Jeremiah and Ebed-Melek each show concern for the safety of others and share the heart of a God who "will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they" (Jer. 3:11). The heroic tale is a picture of hope for those living under oppression. God is able to rescue His people.

This story also demonstrates God's faithfulness to righteous individuals. While neither man is spared from all hardship—they are living in a city under siege, after all—the Lord rescues each from destruction. God's rescue displays His great love and concern to spare the lives of people who are suffering for doing what is right.

**1 What do we learn about Ebed-Melek from his actions?**

**2 How does God prove to be faithful, both to Jeremiah and to Ebed-Melek?**



This example of a water cistern is cut into the rock of an area outside the city of Jerusalem. Cisterns would fill with rainwater seasonally, and they would often be covered with a large stone. No one would easily be able to hear Jeremiah's cries for help.

Davidbena

## **Leaving the Rest to God**

Doing the right thing is not always easy, because there is often a difference between what is right and what is pleasing to others. As a preacher, I've sometimes wrestled with this disparity. Like most people, I want to be liked. I want others to think well of me—to shake my hand and congratulate me on “another fine message.” My sense of pride feeds off that kind of stuff. But what happens when faithfulness means speaking an unpopular message, confronting sin, or addressing something harmful that is masquerading as good? Sometimes faithfulness to God means stepping on toes and getting kicked.

I knew a denominational leader who got kicked, hard. He was attempting to address troubling patterns of leadership, which others were determined to sweep under the rug. He spoke an unpopular message and suffered for it. In fact, he was driven out of the denomination he loved. It was a hard road, but God met him and was faithful to him, just as God was faithful to Jeremiah in today's lesson. God rescued my friend in a different way, by surrounding him with steadfast support and by giving him a new ministry.

Choosing what is right does not exempt a person from suffering. Sometimes following God means walking a hard road. In rare cases, it even means facing death. But the Bible consistently points to a God who vindicates those who seek Him, who sees their suffering and moves to deliver them. Sometimes that looks like rescuing a prophet from the bottom of a cistern. Sometimes it looks like renewing a trampled leader's heart and granting him or her a fresh purpose. But ultimately it looks like the Son of God dying on the cross to defeat death, so that He can raise His people up on the last day. As for today, my task is to follow Christ and choose what is right, leaving the rest to God. God can rescue those who do the right thing.

**1 When in your life have you had to choose between what is right and what is pleasing to others?**

**2 How have you witnessed God's rescue or provision for someone who suffered for doing the right thing?**

**3 When and why can it be difficult to trust in God to rescue us?**



## Prepare for Spiritual Survival

As natural disasters make the news more and more, retailers have begun selling “survival kits” to prepare people for rescue in times of crisis. A survival kit contains items that a person would need in an emergency: water and food, something to signal for help, and supplies to deal with physical injuries.

**Imagine that you have been asked to supplement a survival kit with items that will provide spiritual support for a person in crisis. What would you include, and why? You might even feel motivated to pack a spare bag this week as if you were preparing it for a friend in need.**

### Key Text

Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. —Jeremiah 38:10 KJV

Then the king commanded Ebed-Melek the Cushite, “Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.” —Jeremiah 38:10 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of November 3 through November 8

**Mon.** Luke 12:42–48—The Master Is Coming Soon.

**Tue.** Luke 12:49–53—The Purifying Fire of Change.

**Wed.** Lamentations 2:17–22—The Lord’s Purifying Purpose.

**Thu.** Lamentations 3:21–36—Hope in the Lord.

**Fri.** 1 Peter 1:1–12—Faith Tested by Fire.

**Sat.** 1 Peter 1:13–25—Prepare for Action.

#### Next Week: 2 Kings 24:18–25:9

*We will discuss the utter failure of Judah’s leaders and the fall of Jerusalem. If you spend any time reading the news, you’ll probably spot several examples of failed leadership.*



# JERUSALEM'S FALL

Kyla looked at her husband and saw tears gathering at the corners of his eyes. They were at the kitchen table, telling their son and daughter that they would no longer be attending True Vine Assembly.

The family had been at True Vine, led by Pastor Evans since their daughter was two years old. Kyla and Aaron had been a faithful couple, and two years ago, Aaron had become a deacon. The pastor had put Aaron in charge of recording the tithes, offerings, and “gifts” to the pastor.

Aaron discovered that the minister hadn’t worked in more than ten years, supposedly so that he could “rightly pastor” the church of seventy-five people. The members, many of whom had high paying jobs, paid the pastor’s mortgage on a large house, two cars, tailored clothes, and many other high-end amenities. Aaron had grown even more concerned when he learned several members were going without necessities to give more toward “the kingdom of God.”

Both he and Kyla prayed and fasted about the matter. They had come to an agreement. Aaron would speak to Pastor Evans.

The pastor accused the couple of rejecting God’s instructions, even though they had not stopped giving to the church. He relieved Aaron of his duties, and told him to not bother returning.

“I expected so much more from him,” Aaron had said.

“He’s just a man who seems to have gotten carried away with silver and gold,” said Kyla. “Let God work on him. We’re going to keep our trust and faith in the Lord.”

**1 Why do human leaders often disappoint us?**

**2 Why do the moral failures of leaders result in harm to those they lead?**

**3 How is Jesus different from other leaders?**

<sup>18</sup> Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. <sup>19</sup> And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. <sup>20</sup> For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about. <sup>2</sup> And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

<sup>18</sup> Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah. <sup>19</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. <sup>20</sup> It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence.

Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

<sup>1</sup> So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. <sup>2</sup> The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

## No Escape

Zedekiah became king in place of his nephew, who had ruled only three months. Zedekiah's mother, Hamutal, was also the mother of the former king of Judah who was taken captive by Pharaoh Necho. Hamutal herself was the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kings 24:18), not to be confused with Jeremiah the prophet.

Zedekiah did evil in the sight of God “just as Jehoiakim had done” (2 Kings 24:19). Jehoiakim went as far as burning a scroll from Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 36:22–26). He unwisely rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1).

Zedekiah—the same king who permitted Jeremiah's attempted murder in last week's lesson—paid no attention to the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah (Jer. 37:2). Zedekiah learned nothing

from his brother's failed rebellion, and he rebels against the king of Babylon again (2 Kings 24:20). Instead of seeking God's protection, he forms an anti-Babylonian alliance with Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (Jer. 27:3).

But God warns Zedekiah against such rebellion: "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live" (Jer. 27:12). The Lord warns of famine, plague, banishment, and peril for not submitting to this rule; going as far as to refer to Nebuchadnezzar as "my servant" (Jer. 27:6, 13–15). Thus, Zedekiah's rebellion amounts to additional disobedience to God and disregard for His message. What happens next is a result of God's anger: God shall look at Jerusalem and Judah and shall "thrust them from his presence" (2 Kings 24:20). As king, Zedekiah has done evil in the sight of God and rejected all hope of restoration. The people of Judah have become habitually unfaithful, following the behaviors of other nations and defiling the temple (see 2 Chron. 36:14).

As expected, the king of Babylon does not take kindly to another rebellion from Judah and from a king sworn to him. Nebuchadnezzar marches back to Jerusalem and lays siege to the city in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:1). Nebuchadnezzar brings his "whole army" with him this time, showing how desperate the situation has become. The Babylonians surround Jerusalem and build siege works to attack the city. These would include ramps and wall-like structures, so that soldiers could eventually climb over the walls and breach the defenses. At this time, some residents apparently go over to the Babylonians, meaning that people are able to leave but not to reenter (Jer. 38:19; 39:9). The siege lasts until the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:2), because the Babylonians are patient and intent to finish the job.

**1 How does Zedekiah do evil in the eyes of God?**

**2 Why was disaster coming to Jerusalem and Judah?**

**3 How would the situation have been different, had leaders obeyed God?**

<sup>3</sup> And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. <sup>4</sup> And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees were against the city round about:) and the king went the way toward the plain. <sup>5</sup> And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him. <sup>6</sup> So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. <sup>7</sup> And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

<sup>8</sup> And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: <sup>9</sup> And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

<sup>3</sup> By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. <sup>4</sup> Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, <sup>5</sup> but the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, <sup>6</sup> and he was captured.

He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. <sup>7</sup> They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

<sup>8</sup> On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down.

## The Fall of Jerusalem

The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem lasted for approximately eighteen months. 2 Kings 25:3 reveals the devastating result: “There was no food for the people to eat.” They were cut off from help.

The city wall is broken in approximately 586 BC, prompting Judah's army to flee (2 Kings 25:4). Probably the northern wall was breached, since Judah's army flees through a gate by the king's garden. This indicates a southeastern escape, perhaps by way of the Fountain Gate described in Nehemiah 3:15. Those who flee head toward "the Arabah," traveling along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The Babylonians who surround Jerusalem prepare a pursuit.

The dishonored King Zedekiah is overtaken by the Babylonians near the city of Jericho (2 Kings 25:5–6). Zedekiah and his family are captured, Judah's army scattered. Zedekiah is taken to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah, some three hundred miles from Jerusalem in modern-day Syria (2 Kings 25:6). This is the Babylonian military headquarters in the region. Zedekiah receives a brutal sentence for his rebellion. Babylon wants to make an example, in case others might would contemplate treachery. His sons are slain before his eyes. It becomes the last thing he sees, for immediately he is blinded, bound, and taken as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). This puts an end to Zedekiah's rule and extinguishes the possibility of any heir. Zedekiah eventually dies alone in prison (Jer. 52:11).

In 2 Kings 25:8, dates start being counted by the years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, instead of Zedekiah's (compare 2 Kings 25:1, 3). There is no longer a king in Judah. About a month after the siege, Nebuzaradan, a high ranking Babylonian official and commander of Babylon's army, lays waste to the city. He burns the temple, the palace, the houses, and every important building (2 Kings 25:9). The temple, which symbolizes God's presence with His people, is gone. With the temple utterly destroyed, what can that mean for the people of God now sent into exile?

**1 What did the brutal sentence carried out against Zedekiah mean for the kingdom of Judah?**

**2 Why is destruction of the temple especially jarring?**



## **The Right and Wrong Kind of Leaders**

It seems like everyone is looking for a savior—something or someone to make the world right. To lift up a neighborhood. To rescue the country. To drive back the darkness that fills the news. Longing for a better world is part of the human experience. But how do we get there?

One of the ways people try is by attaching their hopes to human leaders: business executives, public figures, politicians. They all get put on a pedestal from time to time, assigned savior status by their most ardent supporters. But human leaders often disappoint. The business executive commits fraud. The public figure cheats on his wife. The politician breaks her campaign promises. And the headlines are still full of darkness.

To make matters worse, people tend to reflect the character of whoever they're following. After all, leaders lead, even if they're heading in the wrong direction. The people of Judah followed kings like Zedekiah into detestable idolatry, which led to ruin. Today, businesspeople adopt the shady practices of their bosses, if it means advancement. Fans take up the values of their favorite cultural icon, if it means fitting in. And constituents follow the example of politicians who demean their dissenters. Sometimes, Christians stop loving their enemies. Surely that command can't apply during an election season, can it?

When all that clamoring doesn't result in a better world, what then? When Jerusalem lies in ruins, what follows?

What we need is a better king—a leader who is always trustworthy, always faithful, and always keeps His promises. A leader like that isn't found on a ballot or list of influencers, but in the pages of Scripture. Jesus is that leader. He's the rightful king who can make the world new. He's the one whose message and example is worth following, because it leads us to the kingdom of God. Will we follow Jesus, or attach hope to someone else? Who will you choose today?

**1 What are examples of would-be saviors to whom people attach their hopes?**

**2 What happens when people follow the wrong kind of leader?**

**3 What happens to those who follow Jesus above all else?**



## Following King Jesus

For every weakness that we spot in human leaders, there is an example of someone who has exhibited perfect leadership. When we face unavoidable situations and see the harms of human leaders, we can pray for God's kingdom to come soon.

**In your own words, what would you say are three clear and timely reasons to follow Jesus as your king?**

### Key Text

For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. —2 Kings 24:20 KJV

It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence. Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. —2 Kings 24:20 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of November 10 through November 15

- Mon.** 1 Peter 3:8–17—With Righteousness Comes Suffering.
- Tue.** 1 Peter 3:18–22—Christ Exalted through Suffering.
- Wed.** Psalm 34:6–19—God Rescues Us from Our Afflictions.
- Thu.** Matthew 5:3–12—Comfort for the Brokenhearted.
- Fri.** Ezekiel 3:4–11—Speak If People Listen or Not.
- Sat.** 2 Thessalonians 1:1–4—Steadfastness and Faith amid Persecution.

**Next Week:** Ezekiel 3:10–11; 24:15–24, 27

*We will continue the story by hearing that God speaks to His grieving people in exile. This week, can you name a time that God turned your grief into joy?*

## EZEKIEL'S SIGNS

Terrance didn't care if his lips were moving. He didn't care what people would think as he sat in the provost's office. He was praying, hard.

Terrence received notification from his university three days prior that he was facing academic suspension. His grade point average was now 1.6. He had been on academic warning and academic probation. After not raising his grade point to 2.0, he would probably be placed on suspension.

Terrence wasn't even a bad student, in many ways. "You have poor time management skills. You goof off, and you are always wanting someone else to bail you out!" his sister said. "God can't help you if you don't do the work, if you don't apply yourself."

But that was exactly what Terrence wanted God to do—to rescue him! *I need you, Lord. Touch the hearts of this academic committee and let them put me back on academic warning or probation.*

With a warning or more probation, Terrence could continue his second year of school uninterrupted. But with a suspension, he would have to pause for one semester, then reapply. His mother would never understand. He would lose his scholarship.

It's not like Terrence went out drinking. But he was choosing his friends and extra-curricular activities over studying and going to class.

*Lord, if you get me out of this, prayed Terrence, I promise I will change. I will apply myself. I will study hard. I will get my grades up.*

**1 When have you neglected to care for something important?**

**2 Do we always face the consequences for our choices? Why or why not?**

**3 How can love of "freedom" distract or mislead us?**

<sup>10</sup> Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. <sup>11</sup> And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.

<sup>15</sup> Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, <sup>16</sup> Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. <sup>17</sup> Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.

<sup>18</sup> So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.

<sup>10</sup> And he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you. <sup>11</sup> Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.”

<sup>15</sup> The word of the LORD came to me:

<sup>16</sup> “Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. <sup>17</sup> Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover your mustache and beard or eat the customary food of mourners.”

<sup>18</sup> So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded.

## The Word of the Lord

Ezekiel 3:10–11 concludes the account of the prophet’s call. After seeing the divine throne chariot (Ezek. 1:1–28), Ezekiel receives his commission to preach to God’s people. God tells Ezekiel to speak the truth without worrying about the response (Ezek. 2:3–7). In his vision, Ezekiel receives and eats a scroll that tastes sweet as honey, even though it contains “lamentations, and mourning, and woe” (Ezek. 2:8–3:3). God gives Ezekiel the strength to confront a hard-hearted people; he must share God’s message without fear (Ezek. 3:8–9; compare Jer. 1:17–19).

God addresses him as a “son of man,” which highlights Ezekiel’s low status before the God who is choosing him as messenger. The commands to “receive [God’s words] in thine heart, and hear with thine ears” (v. 10 KJV) emphasize that Ezekiel must embody the

divine message. Unlike Jeremiah, who prophesied while in Judah, Ezekiel is with fellow exiles who have now been resettled to regions of Babylon (see 2 Kings 24:10–17). His responsibility is to relay God’s words, regardless of whether the people will hear and obey.

Ezekiel 24:15–27 jumps forward to describe one of Ezekiel’s final “sign acts.” Sign acts are like visual parables that deliver a divine message in dramatic fashion (see also Hos. 1:2–9; Jer. 43:8–13; Ezek. 5:1–4; 12:1–16). Some of Ezekiel’s signs cost him dearly (Ezek. 4:4–6), but none more than the death of his wife. God tells Ezekiel, “I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes” (v. 16). God says that He shall use the death of Ezekiel’s wife for a particular purpose, and that evening, she passes away (v. 18). The text does not say how or whether she was previously ill, and the passage does not provide enough information to justify speculations. Ezekiel is losing the person most dear to him.

Worse yet, Ezekiel is not allowed to grieve publicly for his wife. God explicitly forbids him from weeping or shedding tears (v. 16). The Hebrew phrase translated “forebear to cry” (v. 17 KJV) or “groan quietly” (NIV) is difficult. It may mean that Ezekiel should express sorrows only to himself, or only in wordless groans, rather than cries. Moreover, Ezekiel must not dress himself like a person in mourning. Rather than throw dust on his head, he must wear his turban and his sandals as if nothing has changed (v. 17). He must leave his mouth uncovered, and he must refuse customary food of mourners. Until we hear the explanation to follow, we do not know why God is asking Ezekiel to throw off all customary ways of mourning.

**1 What are Ezekiel’s duties as a prophet?**

**2 What is a “sign act,” and what is its purpose?**

**3 What does God tell Ezekiel to do when his wife dies?**

<sup>19</sup> And the people said unto me, Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?

<sup>20</sup> Then I answered them, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

<sup>21</sup> Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword.

<sup>22</sup> And ye shall do as I have done: ye shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. <sup>23</sup> And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another. <sup>24</sup> Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God.

<sup>27</sup> In that day shall thy mouth be opened to him which is escaped, and thou shalt speak, and be no more dumb: and thou shalt be a sign unto them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> Then the people asked me, “Won’t you tell us what these things have to do with us? Why are you acting like this?”

<sup>20</sup> So I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>21</sup> Say to the people of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary—the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword.’ <sup>22</sup> And you will do as I have done. You will not cover your mustache and beard or eat the customary food of mourners. <sup>23</sup> You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves. <sup>24</sup> Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.’

<sup>27</sup> At that time your mouth will be opened; you will speak with him and will no longer be silent. So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.”

## The Message Explained

After witnessing Ezekiel’s astonishing behavior—his reserved attitude toward his wife’s death—the people say, “Tell us what these things have to do with us” (v. 19). The sign act has done its job, opening up the people to hear a message. The strangeness of Ezekiel’s past behavior and history of enacting signs make them suspect that



there is a message behind Ezekiel's composure. Ezekiel begins his answer with "the word of the LORD came to me" (v. 20), a common introduction to a revelation in the Old Testament (see Gen. 15:1, 4; 2 Sam. 7:4; 24:11; Jer. 1:4; 2:1). This speaking formula shows the divine authority behind the messenger, which enables Ezekiel to boldly declare, "Thus sayeth the Lord God" (v. 21 KJV). Ezekiel calls the exiles of Judah, and he addresses them as "the house of Israel" (v. 21 KJV), a recognition of their common heritage in Abraham's family.

Ezekiel interprets and explains his sign. Just as Ezekiel lost his wife—"the desire of [his] eyes" (v. 16)—the exiles are about to lose "the desire of [their] eyes," the temple in Jerusalem and the lives of their family in and around Jerusalem (v. 21). News will soon arrive that the Babylonians have destroyed Solomon's temple. This is the decree of God, who takes full responsibility for profaning His own sanctuary. God is not powerless to prevent this, but He is allowing it to happen.

Because of Judah's persistent idolatry, it might seem odd to call God's temple "the stronghold in which you take pride" (v. 21). But even the exiles believed that the temple's persistence guaranteed God's favor. They expected to return, or at least that their distant families would survive in Judah. Ezekiel crushes these hopes: the temple will crumble and many of their children will die.

In verses 22–24, Ezekiel explains his odd behavior. Just as he avoided public displays of his grief, so shall the exiles. They will continue in their daily lives, permitted only to groan over their iniquities, rather than to properly mourn their loss. As exiles in the heart of the Babylonian empire, they will not have the luxury of grieving what Nebuchadnezzar will declare a victory. When word of these horrors reaches them, they will know that this is God's judgment (vv. 24, 27).

**1 What is the meaning applied to the death of Ezekiel's wife?**

**2 Why does God send the exiles a message about mourning? How does this connect to what they shall do?**



## Messages to a People in Exile

If you are like me, when you read the words of today's text, you might have a strong reaction. It seems unlike what we expect when approaching God. Then again, the consequences for our actions always feel harsh.

What I notice from this text is, *God is still speaking to His people in exile*. It is a simple observation, right? But think about what it meant for them to hear news of their families' deaths and the end of Judah's kingdom! It would feel as if their world was coming apart, and the silence of God would have been deafening.

But God is not silent, even to a people in exile. God prepares them to face the realities of life in a foreign land, without the freedom to grieve. They have the opportunity to see their own need for reformation. God keeps sending prophetic messengers to share His word.

Equally today, God is not silent, to a people living in exile. First Peter 1:1 addresses an audience of Christians, "exiles," who live as out of step with the world around them. In a different sense, we are exiles too.

In the eyes of the world, we grieve for the wrong things. First, we grieve for our failures, our inadequacies, and the ways our witness falls short. Second, we grieve for others. As a people called to justice and mercy, we see injustice all around. Finally, we groan inwardly because we await God's kingdom (Rom. 8:23). We know that God is not done with this world; He is not done with us.

To everyone else around us, none of this makes sense. "Take care of yourself! Live your life! This world is all we've got." Maybe you've heard a response like this and felt out of step with the world around you. That is life in exile. But where is God when His people are in exile? He is there, speaking.

**1 What is one hopeful message that we can take from today's text, which covered the consequences for sin?**

**2 Where is God when His people are in exile?**

**3 What is one way that you have felt out of step with the world around you?**

## Grieved for What Grieves God

Unlike the people in today's lesson, we are free to grieve. We do not have to hide our dismay at things that are out of step with God's design. Has God been showing you any particular injustice or need in the world? Or has your heart been grieved by something you have done?

**Write a brief prayer of lament for something that grieves God. You might lament your own sin and weakness, or you might lament the needs you see in the world, with a particularly issue in mind.**

### Key Text

Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears.  
—Ezekiel 3:10 KJV

And he said to me, “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you.”  
—Ezekiel 3:10 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of November 17 through November 22

**Mon.** 1 Peter 4:1–11—Love Others Despite Suffering.

**Tue.** 1 Peter 4:12–19—Rejoice to Share Christ's Sufferings.

**Wed.** Ezekiel 18:1–9—Each Will Answer for His or Her Sin.

**Thu.** Psalm 38:1–2, 10–22—I Confess My Iniquity.

**Fri.** Galatians 6:1–10—Restore One Another in Gentleness.

**Sat.** Matthew 7:1–6—See to Your Own Sins First.

**Next Week:** Ezekiel 33:7–16a

*Next week we will continue to discuss Ezekiel's role as a “watchman” for God's people. What is something that you watch for?*

# EZEKIEL'S RESPONSIBILITY

"Why couldn't you just send her money for a ride?" Kiyanna asked as she was fastening her seatbelt.

"She doesn't have the right app, and she's broke" replied Yvette. "Thanks again for riding with me. I didn't want to go by myself."

Yvette's friend had called her thirty minutes prior with yet another financial emergency. But this was a big one! Her friend had lost a bunch of money at the blackjack table.

"How far is this casino?" asked Kiyanna.

"It's a twenty-minute drive," Yvette said, repositioning her cell phone on its mount.

"I don't know why you keep bailing her out," said Kiyanna. "You're enabling her. How does she maintain a living?"

"She works and lives in her mother's house, which is paid off."

Yvette's friend was an only child, and her mother died five years ago. She never knew her father and was not especially close to her extended family.

"Her mother used to warn her years ago about throwing money away on lottery tickets," said Yvette. "She started right out of high school. She'd say it was just something fun to do."

However, this "fun" had escalated to occasionally playing slot machines. Then, she was frequenting the casinos within a radius of her home. Yvette didn't know exactly when her friend graduated to the blackjack table, "where the real money is."

"This situation does not end well, Yvette," Kiyanna said. "When are you going to see that?"

**1 Why do people ignore warning signs?**

**2 Share about a time you questioned a warning sign. What happened?**

**3 What is an example of a spiritual warning sign?**

<sup>7</sup> So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

<sup>8</sup> When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. <sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? <sup>11</sup> Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

<sup>7</sup> “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. <sup>8</sup> When I say to the wicked, ‘You wicked person, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. <sup>9</sup> But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.

<sup>10</sup> “Son of man, say to the Israelites, ‘This is what you are saying: “Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?”’ <sup>11</sup> Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’”

## A Watchman for Israel

*Warn the people.* This is the call for the prophet Ezekiel. He is a prophet to a people in exile, where he receives this important mission from the Lord. He shall proclaim God’s message to those who habitually disobey God’s commands. Even in life under Babylon’s rule, God’s people need a messenger.

This humble “son of man” (which means the same as *human being*) is called a watchman in this text (also in Ezek. 3:16–17). It underscores his role as a herald of warnings from the Lord. In the ancient Near East, every major town has a watchman stationed at the city

gate, someone responsible for the safety and protection of the people. If any kind of danger is advancing upon the city, a watchman can spot the signals from far away. He can sound the alarm to bar the gates and to protect everyone from an attack to come.

But God uses the symbol of a watchman to refer to the people's need for repentance. Because sin is like an attacking army, the prophet can watch for signs that God's people are heading into catastrophe. As their watchman, Ezekiel is tasked with warning the wicked against continuing to do what is wrong. If he fails in his role—metaphorically, if he falls asleep instead of watching carefully—the lives and safety of others would be upon him (Ezek. 33:8). God would still punish the wicked, but it would be Ezekiel's failure too. Conversely, if Ezekiel warns Israel to turn away from sin, but the people refuse, they will die in their sin while Ezekiel's own life is spared (Ezek. 33:9). Ezekiel would be blameless if he has done the job of giving the warning.

The exiles in Babylon might think of themselves as blameless. They see consequences for sin everywhere, but they do not connect the dots to their own behavior. They say, "How . . . can we live?" (v. 10). Through Ezekiel, God expresses a desire for reconciliation. God does not even enjoy punishing the wicked (v. 11). Rather, God wants the people to turn and to avoid death as a consequence.

**1 What is the role of a watchman?**

**2 What would Ezekiel warn people against?**

**3 How does God feel about punishing and killing "the wicked"?**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth. <sup>13</sup> When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. <sup>14</sup> Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; <sup>15</sup> If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. <sup>16</sup> None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him:

<sup>12</sup> “Therefore, son of man, say to your people, ‘If someone who is righteous disobeys, that person’s former righteousness will count for nothing. And if someone who is wicked repents, that person’s former wickedness will not bring condemnation. The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live even though they were formerly righteous.’ <sup>13</sup> If I tell a righteous person that they will surely live, but then they trust in their righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered; they will die for the evil they have done. <sup>14</sup> And if I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ but they then turn away from their sin and do what is just and right—<sup>15</sup> if they give back what they took in pledge for a loan, return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil—that person will surely live; they will not die. <sup>16</sup> None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them.”

## Evaluating Behavior

If God does not enjoy punishing “the wicked,” how does God feel about people who flip from one way of living to another? That is the question addressed in this section. In the first case, say a person has been righteous before God for their entire life, but that same person starts a new sinful pattern. As Ezekiel communicates, their formerly righteous behavior does *not* outweigh their sin. As he says, “The righteous person who sins will not be allowed to live” (v. 12). No person is above the fray and immune to being judged harshly for



sin. Otherwise, a person could reason, “I’ve done enough.” Rather, God will deliberately “forget” any former righteousness, if a person walks into a new path of sin (v. 13).

Alternatively, say a person has been wicked in the past, but this person repents. Ezekiel uses a specific example: If someone returns ill-gotten goods (something stolen or accepted in a manipulative trade), and if that same person has truly reformed their ways so as to follow God’s decrees into the future, “that person will surely live; they will not die” (v. 15).

These statements all reveal a defense of God’s *fairness*. The exiles might try to blame God or the Babylonians for their plight. They believe God’s judgment is harsh and that they have no room to repent. However, the message to them is to be compassionate and merciful. All they need to do, regardless of past behavior, is to return to the faithful service of God.

Those who consider themselves righteous cannot rest on past behavior, or worse, turn to sin (Ezek. 33:13). No matter how righteous they believe themselves to be, the Lord calls them to follow His commands, to repay any debts, and to practice justice. Instead of death, in this new reality of exile, God continues to offer life.

**1 Why is it important for the exiles to take responsibility for their own actions?**

**2 How is the message of repentance a message that offers hope?**

**3 What kinds of behaviors might people be tempted to trust as evidence of past righteousness?**

## Grading on a Curve?

I remember a class that I took in high school. The teacher had designed the course to stretch his students. For quizzes and tests, the topics were so challenging that most classmates and I worried we had gotten less than half of them right. We soon learned that the same teacher graded on a generous curve. “The highest score on this test was seventy-four percent,” he would say, “so anything above sixty-four is an A.”

I fear that many of us treat God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness the same way. We might think to ourselves, *I’m doing so much, how could I possibly be facing consequences?* We forget that the righteous requirement of God is, as expressed by Jesus, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). It might not feel fair to be accountable for it all, but we are.

But in the new covenant context, God has given His Word, and more than that, God has given faithful men and women who teach and proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Like Ezekiel, who held the role of watchman, the apostle Paul says, “I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). When the heat is on, when all eyes are watching, and at great peril to themselves, godly men and women remain “on the wall” to declare the truth of the good news. They warn of the consequences of unfaithfulness, and they proclaim God’s offer of life.

**1 In your experience, where and when has God used a “watchman” (male or female) to warn against danger ahead?**

**2 How have you ever tried to grade yourself on a curve?**

**3 How has the role of messenger changed in a new covenant context, when we have the gospel of Jesus to share?**

## Bringing a Message of God's Salvation

God calls Ezekiel to serve as a watchman in a particular time and place. But God expects all people to speak the truth in love and to seek the good of others. With the Word of God and the person of Jesus before us as examples, each of us has a circle of influence where we can share the good news of God's salvation.

**My circle of influence is my \_\_\_\_\_ .**

**(Examples: church, business, home, school, community)**

*Father, help me to be a faithful witness of Your mercy and desire that all should turn to You to receive new life.*

### Key Text

So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. —Ezekiel 33:7 KJV

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.” —Ezekiel 33:7 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

**Week of November 24 through November 29**

- Mon.** Ezekiel 37:1–7—God Breathes New Life.
- Tue.** Ezekiel 37:8–14—A Resurrection of Hope.
- Wed.** Isaiah 55:1–9—The Thirsty Will Be Refreshed.
- Thu.** John 7:2–10, 37–39—Rivers of Living Water.
- Fri.** Revelation 21:1–7—Hope for God's New Creation.
- Sat.** Revelation 22:1–5—The Tree of Life.

**Next Week:** Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12

*We will turn to hopeful message of what God can do. Ezekiel uses water as an image of life. Can you think of any other verses about streams of water?*

## EZEKIEL'S VISION

Raven slid the curtain closed. The automatic light filled the dressing room. She moved slowly as she took off the hospital gown. She was tired and sore.

Raven was on her sixth week of radiation treatment, following her breast cancer diagnosis. She was grateful the doctors had caught it early—"stage zero" they called it. She didn't know there was a stage zero, but she praised God anyway.

She was struggling and thought about taking the rest of the afternoon off. Raven was grateful for the intermittent Family and Medical Leave time she had available.

Raven's mind went to her deceased mother, a twice-over breast cancer survivor herself. Her mother had advised, encouraged, and preached to her three daughters about going to college and finding a good job. "You never know when you'll need those benefits," she would say. Raven was happy, well-adjusted, and financially prepared for the unexpected.

She gave God all the glory for that! Still, she frequently looked back at how her mother had prepared her too. She had worked a job that didn't pay for sick or vacation days. There were many days when she went to work sick and tired. Now in her own career, Raven had earned three weeks of vacation and plenty of sick days each year.

"Thank you, Mom," Raven whispered. "I'm headed home and taking off the rest of the day. Because I can."

**1 How can preparation help you to enjoy or make it through an event?**

**2 How do you feel when you attend a well-prepared event?**

**3 What are you currently hoping for, by preparing well?**

<sup>1</sup> Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar. <sup>2</sup> Then brought he me out of the way of the gate northward, and led me about the way without unto the utter gate by the way that looketh eastward; and, behold, there ran out waters on the right side.

<sup>3</sup> And when the man that had the line in his hand went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. <sup>4</sup> Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were to the loins. <sup>5</sup> Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.

<sup>1</sup> The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar.

<sup>2</sup> He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side.

<sup>3</sup> As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. <sup>4</sup> He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. <sup>5</sup> He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross.

## A Deepening Stream

This chapter continues a description of a vision that is shown to Ezekiel, beginning in 40:1. Ezekiel sees a rather mysterious man—his “appearance was like bronze” (Ezek. 40:3)—who leads Ezekiel to a mountaintop to observe a restored city of Jerusalem. The spokesman (probably an angel of God) says to Ezekiel, “Tell . . . everything you see” (Ezek. 40:4). Even in the midst of exile and disappointment, God shows a hopeful message. Ezekiel sees a city set on a



hill—Mount Zion—where God has linked heaven and earth and placed His presence in a new temple. Ezekiel learns that the eastern gate to the sanctuary is locked forever, since God shall never leave (Ezek. 44:1–3).

The God of heaven will dwell in the midst of His people; and in chapter 47, the prophet sees trickling water coming from under the southern threshold of this temple's entry. The water is coming from the presence of God (Ezek. 47:12). The altar of sacrifice would stand in the outdoor court, so the waters dribble down “south of the altar,” flowing southeastward toward the Dead Sea (v. 8).

The man leads Ezekiel on a tour, all while measuring the length of the stream a thousand cubits at a time. A cubit is a measurement from the elbow to the tip of the longest fingers, about one and a half feet. Thus, four successive measurements total about six thousand feet. The stream grows deeper and deeper with each thousand cubits of its flow (vv. 2–5).

The image of miraculously deepening water, flowing from God's presence, shall be applied in many ways by later Christians (a symbol for baptism, the Holy Spirit, growth of the church). But the historical context is Judah's present situation in exile, where God's people are desperate to restore a temple to the center of Israel's spiritual life. This imagery reverses the vision of Ezekiel 8–11, where the prophet witnesses a heavenly chariot carrying away the glory of Yahweh (see 9:3; 10:4; 11:22–24). Now, in this vision of a renewed temple, God's life-giving presence is restored and secure.

**1 What would coming to the temple mean for Ezekiel?**

**2 Why does the vision describe where the water flowed?**

**3 Why might Ezekiel point out that “no one could cross” the river?**

<sup>6</sup> And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen this?

Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river. <sup>7</sup> Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other. <sup>8</sup> Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.

<sup>9</sup> And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.

<sup>12</sup> And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

<sup>6</sup> He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. <sup>7</sup> When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. <sup>8</sup> He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. <sup>9</sup> Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.

<sup>12</sup> Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

## A Healing River

Ezekiel now comes to the bank of the river and marvels at its life-giving qualities. When the waters flow into the salty Dead Sea, the sea itself becomes sweet and fresh: “swarms of living creatures” populate this freshened water and abundance prevails (vv. 8–9). This activity recalls the creation of sea creatures on the fifth day of creation (Gen. 1:20–23).

Many fruit trees grow on the river’s bank, and they have

supernatural qualities: leaves never wither, fruit never decays, and the cycle of ripening fruit is continuous (Ezek. 47:12).

Anyone who has visited the Dead Sea can attest to its briny bite. Though people love to wade and float effortlessly in its waters, nurses stand on shore to tend to those who get water in their eyes. Today, anyone who is temporarily blinded by the Dead Sea needs an extensive eye wash! Yet, according to the prophet, such waters have turned sweet and healing. The healing work of God flows unceasingly, ready to wash the whole creation in God's glory.

If the fruit of the trees "will serve for food," then the leaves of the trees will serve a medicinal purpose (v. 12). There is nourishment and healing for all. And never decay! Leaves normally fall from trees and wither on the ground, but in this new creation, the discarded leaves are purposeful and life-giving.

This vision—and those of all the biblical prophets—glimpses an earth restored, an entire creation renewed. The apostle Paul may have thought of this vision when he writes, "For the creation was subjected to frustration . . . in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20–21).

Thus, in a sense, the whole redemptive plan of God brings His people back to the garden. Eden, as it should have been, is a *restored earth*, where the memory of human weakness and doubt is overcome by God's saving work.

**1 What are the effects of the river's water?**

**2 What might this reveal about God's attitude toward the earth's environment?**

**3 What does a captive people, like Ezekiel's generation, need from a deepening, healing river?**

## **Waters of Healing, For and From God's People**

The New Testament often picks up the imagery of flowing water as a way of expressing a fundamental truth about Christian faith: *abundant life streams from the presence of God*. For instance, in John 7:38–39, Jesus connects this flowing water with the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Later in John 19:33–34, the blood of Jesus flows together with water from Jesus' side when He is pierced by a soldier's spear. When Jesus allows Himself to be poured out, the mercy and power of God's Spirit flows freely into the world.

We know from 1 Corinthians 16:9 that the bodies of God's people are “temples of the Holy Spirit.” Through His grace and forgiveness, God sanctifies those in Christ as His dwelling place. And yet, if we truly wish to be like Christ, we cannot simply rest on our laurels and keep the gift to ourselves. Like Jesus, we must allow ourselves to be given for others, so that the love of God's Spirit might flow freely into the lives of those around us. This is how the world is changed: by God's holy people offering themselves in love, for the sake of the world. It is this openness that allows us to become temples, the sources of an ever-flowing river of God's mercy.

But that can feel costly! It can require us to give up our time and energy, to let go of trying to control the situation, and to trust Him to meet us on the way. Jesus shows us that, to be a channel of His peace, means entrusting ourselves to God. When we do, we find that our lives (miraculously) remain filled to the brim, overwhelmed with the life-giving grace of the Holy Spirit. Let us become these temples of God's presence, so that the life of God can abide in us and so that others can be nourished and restored.

**1 Why is water such an important metaphor in Scripture?**

**2 What are ways that you have experienced God's restoration?**

**3 Is there anyone in your life who might benefit from your initiation of kindness toward them?**

## Water to Begin Anew

A nearly universal human need is to begin each day with a drink. In the week ahead, you are invited to begin each morning by drinking a glass of water. At the same time, you will pray for God to make you a vessel of His life-giving presence. Ask the following questions of God, and keep notes of any divine encounters prompted by God.

**God, as I begin my day aware of Your presence and sustaining life, who shall you send me to fill today? Who do you need me to encourage? Who do you need me to restore?**

### Key Text

And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.

—Ezekiel 47:12 KJV

Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.

—Ezekiel 47:12 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of December 1 through December 6

- Mon.** 2 Kings 22:1–10—God’s Word Reclaimed.
- Tue.** 2 Kings 22:11–20—God’s Word Leads to Repentance.
- Wed.** Luke 24:25–32—God’s Word Touches the Heart.
- Thu.** Nehemiah 8:1–8—God’s Word Interpreted.
- Fri.** John 5:37–47—God’s Word Testifies of Jesus.
- Sat.** John 17:14–19—God’s Word Is Truth.

**Next Week:** Psalm 19:7–13; 2 Timothy 3:14–17

*We will continue to discuss the life that God gives. Can you think of times when wise instructions saved your life or kept you from harm?*



# Ella Baker:

## A Model of Servant Leadership

*By Juliet Liu*



Among the many who played a role in the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, Ella Baker stands out as a unique representation of leadership. Ella Baker shows the meaning of Christlike leadership—not seeking to be a charismatic person in the spotlight but accepting the role of a quiet servant, one who raises others up. She demonstrates that true leadership is rooted in giving and empowering others.

### **Early Life and Education**

Born in 1903 in the state of Virginia, Ella Baker grew up in a family that valued education and community activism. Her grandmother was born into slavery, and her parents instilled in her a strong sense of justice and the importance of standing up against inequality. After college, she began a career as a teacher. Soon her passion for activism took center stage in her professional and personal life. This activism was rooted in the stories her grandmother told, about what it was like to grow up enslaved.

### **Activism and the NAACP**

Baker demonstrated her commitment to civil rights in the 1930s when she began working with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Beginning as a volunteer, her hard work and determination advanced her to several leadership roles. Throughout the 1940s, Baker acted as the organization's first field secretary. She traveled across the South, advocating for voter registration, organizing grassroots campaigns, and responding to lynchings and segregation.

*Find the text continued at this link:*



# International Sunday School Lessons

# Bible Study Plan

## For 2023–2026

	Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer
2023– 2024	<b>God’s Law is Love</b> Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians	<b>Faith that Pleases God</b> Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews	<b>Examining Our Faith</b> Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude	<b>Hope in the Lord</b> Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John
2024– 2025	<b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b> Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms, John	<b>A King Forever and Ever</b> Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke	<b>Costly Sacrifices</b> Exodus, Leviticus, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Matthew, Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation	<b>Sacred Alters and Holy Gifts</b> Genesis, Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter
2025– 2026	<b>Judah, From Isaiah to Exile</b> 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel	<b>Enduring Beliefs of the Church</b> Exodus, Psalms, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, 1 John, Revelation	<b>Social Teachings of the Church</b> Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah, Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, James	<b>The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses</b> Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, 2 Timothy, Philemon

# COMING NEXT QUARTER

December 2025 – February 2026

## Enduring Beliefs of the Christian Faith

The Christian faith insists that God is real, personal, knowable, and active in the world. We come to this realization through our encounters with the Bible and with the Holy Spirit. As we read the Bible, relying upon the Spirit's guidance, we find that Jesus is central to the biblical story.

Through Jesus's life and teaching, we see more of what God is like and what God intends for humanity. God is in the process of building a whole new world—a new creation (Rev. 21:1)—where evil is completely vanquished and life is eternal. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus liberates us from evil, forgives our sins, provokes us to love, and provides us a community of sisters and brothers, where we learn how to make the most of our lives on earth as we await the new creation.

**Texts for study include:** Exodus, Psalms, Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, James, 2 Peter, 1 John, Revelation

*Lessons of this Student Guide are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible, following the International Sunday School Lessons series (ISSL). In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both Old and New Testaments.*





**E**zekiel says, “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail. . . . Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing” (Ezek. 47:12).

To this day around the world, many kinds of trees shed leaves as they prepare for seasonal change. As days shorten, leaves lose their green color, revealing vibrant yellow, orange, and red. But what if those falling leaves didn’t decay and turn into compost? What if God were to redesign even the decaying leaves and repurpose them for healing?

That is part of Ezekiel’s vision of hope. Anyone who feels awestruck by the splendor of leaves passing away, God invites to rest in the hope that theses glories of creation shall be reshaped and remade, until all is well.

*God gives light to the darkness, new life to the lifeless.*





## *Embracing God's Longing and Our Spiritual Thirst in Prayer*

Author Strahan Coleman offers readers guidance on how to have a transformative relationship with God. In *Beholding*, Coleman redefines prayer as a way of being with God, emphasizing its role in deepening our connection and enriching our spiritual lives. *Thirsting* explores our deep yearning for God, guiding us to embrace this spiritual thirst and experience a profound, intimate communion with God.

Available from David C Cook  
and everywhere books are sold