

VOLUME 8 - Connecting The Dots -2nd Edition
October 5th - December 28th, 2020

The period of biblical history we will now be studying is the time of the Babylonian captivity. This will include the ministries of Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Ezra and Haggai. Some of these men were ministering inside of Babylon during the captivity and some were serving and leading on the return to Jerusalem after being released. This devotional guide will conclude our chronological journey through the Old Testament and lead the way into the New Testament. This is a very exciting and colorful time in Israel's history. So, enjoy and anticipate the coming of Jesus in history past and anticipate His return in history future.

WEEK 92 THE FALL OF JERUSALEM--Dennis Watson

One of the many things I am learning in our journey through the Old Testament is that God is always at work (see John 5:17) and people in the Bible responded to His activity in one of three ways: ignore, rebel, or surrender. This week, we look at the fall of Jerusalem. What a sad streak of rebellion and disobedience. The people and the kings heard the Lord's prophets and their warnings, but chose to continue to ignore and rebel. The result was the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people. The good news was the captivity would not last forever and the people were promised a time to return to the land and the promise of a new King!

Day 1

Read 2 Kings 23:31-24:20

How do you respond to the warnings of God? The law of sowing and reaping is a reality of life and especially the Word of God: *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."* **Galatians 6:7-8 (NKJV)**

Again, how do you respond to the warnings of God? As a believer, nothing can separate us from the love of God. The same was true of the people of God in the Old Testament. They would not cease to be the people of God, however, they did experience curses when they disobeyed and blessings when they obeyed. The Kings of Judah were off and on in their following of God. The words, *"Did evil in the sight of the Lord"* were used to describe the life of the last four Kings of Judah because they continued the practice of idolatry in Judah where Jerusalem was the capital. It was their disobedience or rebellion that ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem. There was a bright spot in the line of kings after King Manasseh. King Josiah led with some positive changes and it was the reign of King Josiah that held off the destruction. However, with the reign of King Jehoahaz, there was a return to idolatry. King Jehoahaz reigned only a few months before being captured by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Then came King Jehoiakim,

who ruled eleven years. After King Jehoiakim came King Jehoiakin, who ruled only a few months before being captured by King Nebuchadnezzar. Tomorrow, we will look at the last king, King Zedekiah.

The sin and failure of these kings would not go without the chastisement of the Lord. Chuck Missler says the following about chastisement:

Chastening is evidence of God's hatred for sin and His love for His people. We can't conceive of a holy God wanting anything less than His very best for His children, and the very best He can give us is a holy character like that of Jesus Christ. God is not a "permissive parent" who allows His children to do as they please (Cf. Rom 8:29; Mt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). Obedience builds character; sin destroys character; and God cannot sit by and watch His children destroy themselves (Cf. Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11).

Are you concerned about the warnings of God? Ask Him for the grace to live a life of surrender.

Day 2

Read Jeremiah 25:1-11 and 2 Chronicles 36:1-21

When I was a child, my mother made it clear to me that I was to come home when the street lights came on. I would often push it and stay a little bit longer until she had to call me. If she called me twice, I knew I was in real trouble. That meant I could not go out of our yard for a week. I had been warned!

A warning is an act of mercy and kindness. A warning provides an opportunity to turn and get it right. For a period of 23 years, the Lord had given a warning to the people of Judah to turn away from worshipping idols and to return to the Lord. God was being kind and patient. The prophet Jeremiah delivered the message, but the message was ignored. The people, as well as the kings, refused to hear Jeremiah's message and repent. He told the people that if they did not turn to the Lord, He would send the King of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar, to take the people into captivity. The Lord referred to King Nebuchadnezzar as "My servant." He was God's servant in that the Lord used him to destroy Jerusalem and inflict the Lord's judgment.

"The period of captivity would be seventy years. Why did God predict that the Babylonian Exile would last 70 years? (605-536 BC) The answer seems to be that this was the number of years the people had failed to observe God's Law of a "Sabbath rest" for the land. God had decreed that every seventh year the land was to lie fallow (Lev. 25:3-5). The people were not to sow their fields or prune their vineyards. If the people would fail to follow this command, God would remove them from the land to enforce this "Sabbath rest" (Lev. 26:33-35). The writer of 2 Chronicles indicated that the 70-year Babylonian Captivity promised by Jeremiah, allowed the land to enjoy its "Sabbath rest" (2 Chron. 36:20-21). Therefore, the captivity lasted 70 years probably because this was the number of Sabbath rests that had not been observed for the land."¹

Have you heard any warnings lately? Ask the Lord to enable you not to ignore or rebel, but to surrender.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Jeremiah 23:1-8

God sent the prophet Jeremiah to the kings and the citizens to warn them. However, they did not listen to the warnings.

2 Chronicles 36:16 tells us about their response, *“But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.”* For that reason, God raised up the King of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar, to attack Judah and take the people into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

In today’s passage, the shepherds are the leaders, and in particular, the kings. They would be removed and the people carried away into captivity for seventy years. The message in Jeremiah 23 is also a message of prophetic hope. There will come One who will shepherd the people. The Lord speaks through Jeremiah and tells them He will bring them back and provide for them blessings and benefits. He also promises to *“Raise to David a Branch of righteousness.”* We have already seen a few times in our devotions that the term “branch” was used to speak of the family line of David. It points to Jesus. This is a prophecy that God gives Jeremiah, and a time will come when the Lord will gather the people again in the land with Jesus as their King. In His first coming, Jesus came as the Messiah. However, in the fulfillment of His second coming, He will come as King immediately before His millennial reign!

Give thanks to the Lord for the coming reign of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will reign forever in righteousness!

Day 4

Read 2 Kings 25:1-15 and Lamentations 1:1-3

Jerusalem was surrounded by a high, reinforced wall. Many of the cities of ancient times were called walled cities because they were protected by a wall built to keep its residents safe. When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to attack Jerusalem, he could not break through the wall. The only thing he could do was encamp against or lay siege to the city. This means the army camped outside the walls and waited out the people. The result of such a siege was starvation and thirst. Nothing could be brought in or out of the city. After about seven months, the king's army was able to make a hole in the wall.

When the break in the wall occurred, the army of Judah and King Zedekiah tried to escape through a back gate. However, the army of Babylon captured them. The army returned to Jerusalem, burned the temple, broke down the walls and took the people captive to Babylon. The Babylonian captivity of the people of God had begun.

It is believed that the prophet Jeremiah was also the author of the book of Lamentations. Lamentations is made up of five poems which describe the sorrow of the people over the captivity of the great city of Jerusalem. It is a sad thing to experience the consequences of generations of sin. The opening words of Lamentations are just that, they are expressive of the great sorrow of the people.

The battles of our lives that are brought on by our own disobedience and rebellion can bring some very sad and heartbreaking times.

Ask the Lord to enable you to trust and obey Him.

Day 5

Read Jeremiah 32:37-41

Can you imagine being taken to a strange country and living there for an entire lifetime? It must have been very hard on the people to be captured and taken away. The very thought is terrifying. The Lord spoke again through Jeremiah to encourage the captives that this would not be the end of His covenant people. He gave them hope in the time of their despair. He said He would once again gather His people from all the lands where they had been exiled and He would bring them back to the land of Israel where they would live in safety. He expressed He would be their God and they would be His people. He would not only gather them and return them safely to the land, but He promised to give them a new heart! He would give them an everlasting covenant. This everlasting covenant is another term for the “New Covenant.” The covenant spoken of by Jeremiah was spoken of by Jesus when He was with His disciples at the Last Supper. In **1 Corinthians 11:25** Jesus says, *“This is the new covenant in my blood.”* God was making it clear to the exiles that He would take care of them. He is letting them know He would provide for them in ways beyond their comprehension.

Once again, we get this great perspective. We read about the historic event, we read about God’s promise, and we read in history how God did exactly what He promised. God is faithful! Give thanks to Him for His faithfulness. Live with anticipation of what He has in store for us. Cherish the new covenant which is written on your heart.

Week 93 THE WEeping PROPHEt----- Chris Watson

“The Hebrew title of the book is the first word of the text—'ekah—which is translated "how?" (see 2:1 and 4:1). The title in the English Bible comes from the Latin Vulgate *lamentia*, "funeral dirges." The book consists of five laments that Jeremiah wrote after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587-86. Tradition assigns the book to the prophet Jeremiah, "the weeping prophet." During his forty years of ministry, he sought to persuade the leaders of Judah to turn back to God and avoid national judgment, but they persisted in breaking God's covenant. When Babylon invaded Judah, Jeremiah begged the leaders to surrender and thus spare the people, the city and the temple, and they arrested him as a traitor. But the prophet's words proved true and the Babylonian army took the city, and destroyed it and the temple. One evidence that Jeremiah wrote the book is the presence of similar phrases in both Lamentations and the prophecy of Jeremiah. Some of them are: "my eyes flow with tears" (1:16; 2:18; 3:48; Jer. 9:1,18; 13:17; 14:17); "laughingstock" (3:14; Jer. 20:7); "terrors on every side" (2:22; Jer. 6:25; 20:4,10; 46:5; 49:5,29); and "destruction" and "wound" (2:11,13; 3:47-48; Jer. 4:6,20; 6:1,14; 8:11,21). Lamentations reads as though it were written by an eyewitness, and Jeremiah certainly qualified.

The basic theme of these five laments is the tragedy of the destruction of Jerusalem, a judgment God sent because His people had rebelled against Him and rejected His warnings (2 Chron. 36:11-21). So critical is this historic event that it's recorded four times in the Old Testament: 2 Kings 25, 2 Chron. 36:11-21, and Jeremiah 39 and 52. Each year on this date, the Jews remember the event and read Lamentation aloud in their synagogues.

In writing this book, Jeremiah expressed his own sorrow at the destruction of the Holy City and the beautiful temple of the Lord. It looked to him as though forty years of faithful ministry were wasted, for the people didn't heed his messages. Using numerous similes and metaphors, Jeremiah described the terrible plight of the people, and he prayed to the Lord for assistance and deliverance. At the same time, he wrestled with the Lord over what He had allowed to happen, knowing fully that the sins of the people were to blame (1:5, 8; 5:7, 16). They had violated the terms of

the covenant, knowing full well what the consequences would be (Lev. 26; Deut. 28-30; see 2 Kings 17:13-15; 2 Chron. 36:15-16). Jeremiah had warned that if Judah persisted in rebelling, God would send the Babylonians (Jer. 1:13-16; 4:5-9; 5:15; 6:22-26; 10:22; 50:41-43), and Isaiah had preached the same message (Isa. 13-14; 43:14ff; 47:1ff).²

² Be Series, Lamentations

Day 1

Read Lamentations 1

The first chapter of Lamentations can be broken up like this:

Desolation of Jerusalem (Verses 1-7)

The Cause of Jerusalem's Desolation (Verses 8-11)

The Contrition of Jerusalem (Verses 12-18)

The Confession of Jerusalem (Verses 20-22)

Matthew Henry, a well-known minister and author of biblical commentaries, notes that there were many positive things about Jerusalem prior to its destruction. It was a city of dominion, a city once full of mirth, it conquered others in wars, it was a distinguished and dignified people and it was a fruitful land. In other words, Jerusalem was a power house, The people had it all, but they had forgotten the Lord. Jerusalem was conquered due to their own fault and in Verses 8-11, Jeremiah makes that clear. Then in Verses 12-19, Jerusalem felt the pain and they recognized just what kind of a situation they were in. As the chapter closes, we see the confession of Jerusalem that they were at fault.

It has been said "You don't realize what you have until it's gone." Why is it our last resort is to call on God after we recognize our fault? If we are honest, we try everything else and then we call on God. Jeremiah and others had tried to warn the people of their turning away from God and the consequences if they continued, but they didn't listen. The people had stumbled (disobeyed), but instead of getting back up and repenting, they stayed in their disobedience. It is God's desire that we not stumble at all, however, we are fallen creatures. This is not a license to sin, as Paul makes this clear in the book of Romans. What God desires is that when we sin, we acknowledge it, confess it, repent and follow Him. In our reading this week, we see His people who stumbled and continued in their stumble. They didn't continue in it for minutes, hours or days, but for years. They wallowed in their sin and it cost them GREATLY. It cost them their own destruction and captivity and it was then they cried out.

Obviously, God doesn't want us to sin, much less to remain in it. Are there sins in your life you are struggling with? Have you been walking in sin for some time? Ask God for the help you need to experience victory. You and I can not overcome on our own. Acknowledge before Him that if you continue in your sin, it will only lead you away from Him and in many ungodly places. Repent and ask Him to search your heart while thanking Him for His forgiveness.

Day 2

Read Lamentations 2

We know anger in and of itself is not a sin. Although, unlike Jesus, we have a hard time getting angry and not sinning. Our anger often turns into rage, hate, manipulation or revenge, but God has a righteous anger. It would be foolish to ignore the passages in scripture which talk about God's anger. God does get angry; there are many examples of this in the Bible. *"God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day."* **Psalm 7:11**

"However, we must not equate God's anger with our own human experiences of that emotion. We must look again to the Bible. Ephesians 4:26–27 tells us it is possible to experience anger but not sin. As God cannot sin, we know that His anger is righteous, unlike the common experience of anger in ourselves. As James 1:20 says, "Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

The context of the verses of God getting angry reveals why He gets angry. God gets angry when there is a violation of His character. God is righteous, just, and holy, and none of these attributes can be compromised (Exodus 20:4–6; Isaiah 42:8). God was angry with the nation of Israel and with Israel's kings every time they turned away from obeying Him (e.g., 1 Kings 11:9–10; 2 Kings 17:18). The wicked practices of the nations in Canaan, such as child sacrifice and sexual perversion, aroused God's anger to the point He commanded Israel to completely destroy them—every man, woman, child, and animal—to remove wickedness from the land (Deuteronomy 7:1–6). Just as a parent becomes angry at anything that would hurt his children, so God's anger is directed at that which would harm His people and their relationship with Him. "'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'" (Ezekiel 33:11).

In the New Testament, Jesus got angry with the religious teachers and leaders of that day for using religion for their own gain and keeping people in bondage (John 2:13–16; Mark 3:4–5).

Romans 1:18 tells us God's anger, or wrath, comes against "the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness." So God gets angry at the wickedness in people, and He opposes that wickedness in an effort to turn them from evil, that they may find true life and freedom in Him. Even in His anger, God's motivation is love for people; to restore the relationship that sin destroyed.

While God must bring justice and retribution for sin, those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior are no longer under God's wrath for sin. Why? Because Jesus experienced the full measure of the wrath of God on the cross so that we wouldn't have to. This is what is meant by Jesus' death being a "propitiation," or satisfaction. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4)."³

God's wrath (plan and purpose) is what put Jesus on the cross. God wasn't mad or angry at Jesus, but sin had to be dealt with and there had to be payment. There was a righteous anger towards sin and because God loved us so much, He put our sin on Jesus. Some have said if God was such a loving God, He should have done something. He did, He sent Jesus. Instead of taking out His anger and wrath on us, He took it out on Jesus so we could know Him and walk with Him. Take some time today to thank Him for His grace and love.

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/does-God-get-angry.html>

Day 3

Read Lamentations 3

Jeremiah had a hard job. As a prophet, he was giving the Lord's words to the Lord's people and it was rarely popular. In Lamentations and in the book of Jeremiah, you read the agony in his writing. He knew the people hadn't and wouldn't listen, but he was God's man. While he, like us, became discouraged at times, he continued on.

Here is what we see in today's chapter. "I. A sad complaint of God's displeasure and the fruits of it (v. 1-20). II. Words of comfort to God's people when they are in trouble and distress (v. 21-36). III. Duty prescribed in this afflicted state (v. 37-41). IV. The complaint renewed (v. 42-54). V. Encouragement taken to hope in God, and continue waiting for his salvation, with an appeal to his justice against the persecutors of the church (v. 55-66). Some make all this to be spoken by the prophet himself when he was imprisoned and persecuted; but it seems rather to be spoken in the person of the church now in captivity and in a manner desolate, and in the desolations of which the prophet did in a particular manner interest himself. But the complaints here are somewhat more general than those in the foregoing chapter, being accommodated to the case as well of particular persons as of the public, and intended for the use of the closet rather than of the solemn assembly. Some think Jeremiah makes these complaints, not only as an intercessor for Israel, but as a type of Christ, who was thought by some to be Jeremiah the weeping prophet, because he was much in tears (Matthew 16:14) and to him many of the passages here may be applied."⁴

As stated above, while Jeremiah wrote these words, he was not simply speaking of his condition, but more so of the condition of Jerusalem. However, I am sure Jeremiah very much felt these words. In fact, I am confident no one would have signed up for

⁴Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible

Jeremiah's job. This chapter can be broken up like this:

- *Jeremiah's cry of despair (Verses 1-18)
- *Jeremiah's confession of faith (Verses 19-39)
- *Jeremiah's confession of need (Verses 40-54)
- *Jeremiah's confidence in God (Verses 55-66)

Look at the progression. Jerimiah cries out for the people, he confesses the truth, he confesses the need for him and his people and ends by putting his confidence in God. Look again at Verses 22 - 23. In the midst of a hard chapter, we have a great reminder of, *"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not."* Let's break it down.

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed"

This speaks to the goodness of God. No matter what we face or will go through, be it our own sin, something going on in our family or in our world, God's mercies are always there. As we face each new day, hour and second, we don't have to be consumed by our sin, situation, or what's going on around us. Rather, we can lean on the Lord and His mercies. Praise Jesus.

"Because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning"

If you study the word compassion, you find out in Latin it actually means to "suffer with." It's more than just empathizing, but getting in our shoes and being there with us. Jesus didn't leave Jeremiah alone in his struggles and He won't leave us alone. He walks with us as we face each new day. It doesn't necessarily mean our heartaches, struggles, or difficulties will go away, it means the Lord will be with us and walk with us as we face them.

"Great is thy faithfulness"

There is no one who is faithful except the Lord. We may have moments of faithfulness but we are not faithful without the Lord. It's great to see God's faithfulness both in the Old and New Testament, but I am also encouraged by His faithfulness that I can see in my own life. I can look back and see many times He was

faithful, even when I was unaware. Maybe when I get to heaven I will recognize the many times I was not aware of His faithfulness.

Take some time today to thank the Lord for His goodness and grace. Spend some time reflecting on His goodness.

Day 4

Read Lamentations 4

In Chapter 4, we read it was a rough time for Jerusalem, as there was a great famine in the land. Verse 9 tells us that those who were slain by the sword were better off than those who were dying of hunger. A people of incredible stature were reduced to extreme poverty. We see the people were not following God and because of this the consequences were great.

“The sins they were charged with, for which God brought this destruction upon them, and which served to justify God in it (v. 13,14): It is for the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests. Not that the people were innocent; no, they loved to have it so (Jeremiah 5:31), and it was to please them that the prophets and priests did as they did; but the fault is chiefly laid upon them, who should have taught them better, should have reproved and admonished them, and told them what would be in the end hereof; of the hands of those watchmen who did not give them warning will their blood be required. Note, nothing ripens a people more for ruin, nor fills the measure faster, than the sins of their priests and prophets. The particular sin charged upon them is persecution; the false prophets and corrupt priests joined their power and interest to shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, the blood of God's prophets and of those that adhered to them. They not only shed the blood of their innocent children, whom they sacrificed to Moloch, but the blood of the righteous men that were among them, whom they sacrificed to that more cruel idol of enmity to the truth and true religion. This was that sin which the Lord would not pardon (2 Kings 24:4) and which brought the last destruction upon Jerusalem (James 5:6): You have condemned and killed the just. And the priests and prophets were the ringleaders in persecution, as in Christ's time the chief priests and scribes were the men that incensed the people against him, who otherwise would have persisted in their hosannas. Now these are those that wandered as blind men in the streets, V 14. They strayed from the paths of justice, were blind to everything that is good, but to do evil they were quick-sighted. God says of corrupt judges, They know not, neither do they understand; they walk in darkness (Psa. 82:5);

and Christ says of the corrupt teachers, They are blind leaders of the blind, Matthew 15:14. They have so polluted themselves with innocent blood, the blood of the saints, that men could not touch their garments; they made themselves odious to all about them, so that good men were as shy of touching them as of touching a dead body, which contracted a ceremonial pollution, or of touching the bloody clothes of one slain, which tender spirits care not to do. There is nothing that will make prophets and priests to be abhorred so much as a spirit of persecution.”⁵

It's been said that everything rises and falls on leadership. At this time the godly leadership wasn't so godly. They were leading the people astray and encouraging them to walk away from God. The very people who were supposed to lead were not leading. There are a few reminders in this for us today. As spiritual leaders we must be walking with the Lord daily. The moment we get off the path we must jump right back on as we are to be leading in a godly way. It's also a reminder for us as a family. Whether you are a mom, dad, or grandparent, we are to lead our family in the right direction. This is especially important for our men. When we fail to lead, we lead our families in the wrong direction.

Pray for those in spiritual leadership over you. Pray that God would give them the direction to lead and follow the Lord. We must not look solely to other people for leadership, we must first and foremost keep our eyes on Jesus.

⁵ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible.

Day 5

Read Lamentations 5

Lamentations is a tough book of the Bible. It is a great reminder of the cost of sin and its consequences. Scripture reminds us that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. No one will escape the consequences of their sin, not one. Let us be reminded that the reason Jerusalem was here in the first place was because of sin and the sin of their leaders. They rejected God and God allowed it, but it came with great consequences.

In **Psalms 51:12**, David said, “*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*” This was written after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and after David was confronted by Nathan. I imagine those words could have been said by Jerusalem as well. They had not only sinned greatly, but they had lost their hope and joy which is found in God alone. In fact, this was one of the consequences of their sin. Sin is a great tempter, but a very poor deliverer. Sin is what tempted Jerusalem, tempted David and it tempts us to give into that which we think we want or desire. However, as believers, if we do give in to those temptations, we soon find out it’s not only that we truly didn’t want it, but it caused heartache, pain and damage as well.

We need to remember God is not a cosmic kill joy. It’s not that He doesn’t want us to enjoy life, it’s quite the opposite. He simply knows that sin is, in fact, the kill joy. He knows it will destroy us and cause heartache and pain in our life and in the lives of those around us. God knows best, He always has and He always will. As you wrap up your week, ask the Lord to help you die to yourself and live for Him, moment by moment, hour by hour, and day by day.

Week 94 NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM----- -----Chris Watson

We read in the first chapter of Daniel that King Nebuchadnessar had issued orders for his men to select strong and healthy young men from Judah to be brought to the palace. The king had ordered these men to be given food and wine from his own kitchen and they were to be trained for three years after which they would enter into the king's service. Daniel and his friends continued to follow God during their captivity and they refused to eat the king's food or drink his wine. Instead, they ate vegetables and drank only water. At the end of 10 days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the men who had eaten the royal foods. Today we begin reading Chapter 2 of Daniel.

Day 1

Read Daniel 2:1-16

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him. He asked his magicians, sorcerers, and astrologers not only to interpret the dream, he wanted them to tell him what he had dreamed. They couldn't do it because they were human. The king decreed to kill all the wise men including Daniel and his friends. Once Daniel heard the news, he went to the king and asked for more time so he could interpret the dream.

Daniel, unlike the king's men, knew the one true God. He knew God was on his side. He needed God to do what only He could do and he trusted that God would do just that. Even if God would not do what Daniel asked, he trusted and would have kept worshipping Him, not bowing down to the other gods.

King Nebuchadnezzar was a bad king and desired to kill anyone in his way. God put Daniel and the other men at this particular place, for this particular time. Daniel had trusted God completely and put everything that he had on God.

Do you ever find yourself in difficult, awkward, or hard circumstances? God may have us in these circumstances to work in and through us. It may be hard, it may be trying, and like Daniel, our very lives may be threatened.

We have the choice to trust in God or trust in ourselves. Regardless of the outcome, we can know that God is in control! Is your trust in yourself, other people, or God? Have you been let down time and time again? May your prayer today be that you put your trust in God.

Day 2

Read Daniel 2:17-30

Oh, what a great God we serve! As we read today we find that God revealed the mystery of the dream to Daniel. Daniel then went to the king and told him no man could do what he was asking, but there was a God in heaven who reveals mysteries (Verse 28). This is the God we still serve today.

Notice Verses 20-23. These verses bring such comfort and peace in times of uncertainty and chaos. In fact, in dealing with various situations over the last few months and then reading this passage, I was reminded that God is in control and my mind was put to rest. Daniel recognized he was not the one doing this. It was all God. From these verses, look below at what our God does:

- 1) He changes times and seasons. God gives us spring, summer, winter, and fall. He directs the sun, moon, and stars.
- 2) He sets up kings and disposes them. God is in control of all that is going on around us. Even with all the evil and corruption in our current politics, God sees, knows, and is in control. We have also been reminded that God directed the king's hearts.
- 3) He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. God leads, directs, and guides those who fear and follow Him.
- 4) He reveals deep and hidden things. This is exactly what He did with Daniel. He was the only one that could have given Daniel the information that he needed. God speaks to our hearts as we grow deeper and deeper with Him and He shows us things that may be hidden.
- 5) I thank You and praise You- Most importantly we are to praise and worship God. Whether He gives us what we ask for or not, He is in control.

Thank God today that He is in control. If He controls the seasons, the kings, gives all wisdom and reveals deep and hidden things, He is certainly in control of what we may be walking through right now. Trust Him with it. As one author wrote, "When you can't see His hands, trust His heart."

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Daniel 2:31-45

Only Daniel could interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream and that is just what he did! He told the king that after him other kingdoms would rise. "Many scholars believe that the head (gold) of the statue represents King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the arms and chest of silver represent the Medo-Persian Empire, the belly and thighs of bronze represent the Greek Empire, and the legs of iron represent the Roman Empire. ⁶ The rock that we see in Verse 35 represents Jesus and the mountain is a picture of God's kingdom. We see in Verse 44, the Kingdom God sets up will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all other kingdoms and His kingdom will never end.

We know this kingdom comes from God and it speaks of Jesus' kingdom. We see the word "rock" in other places in the New Testament, including 1 Corinthians 10:4, as representative of Christ. We read in Matthew 7:24 that a strong and sturdy house is built on the rock, which is Jesus. In Romans 9:33, Paul says that the rock of God's truth is Jesus.

All other kingdoms and royalty will pass away. We see this in history with kings in the Bible, kings of years ago, and even kings and leaders of today. Their kingdoms have or will pass away, but the ultimate kingdom, the Kingdom of God, will stand forever. Nothing will take it down.

God chose to bring His kingdom to earth through His Son Jesus. People in New Testament days experienced Jesus in a one-on-one physical relationship. Today, we may not physically see Jesus, but the relationship we have with Him is just as real. It is wonderful to know this kingdom and world we live in today will one day pass away, but God and His Word will not pass away. It is the kingdom which has stood the test of time and will continue to do so. This, again, reminds us that God, not kings, rulers, or presidents, are in control. Don't put your trust in people, things, or power, put your trust in God!

⁶ Long Story Short, Marty Machowski, 365

Day 4

Read Daniel 2:46-49

Once Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the king began to worship Daniel and pay honor to him rather than worshipping and honoring God. King Nebuchadnezzar went on to say that Daniel's God was the God of gods, but, his focus was not on God, it was on Daniel. God caused all this to work for His own glory, even though the king was confused and continued to focus on Daniel.

When we see God at work in our lives, in someone else's life, or we see God do something incredible, in and through someone, we should celebrate with them. However, we shouldn't worship them or talk about how great and awesome they are. While God may do incredible things through people, we must remember it is God who does them. We, as His children, are simply instruments used by Him. We have heard it said that a flute without a flute player can't really do much, but when a person picks up that flute and plays it, after years of practice, beautiful sounds emerge. We don't praise the flute because it is just the instrument, rather, we thank and honor the flute player because of his skill.

You and I are instruments of God through which He lets His glory shine. When others give us praise or accolades, we should direct it straight to Jesus. He is the flute player and we are just the flute. Without God, we are nothing. Take time today to thank God for working in you and that you get to be part of what He is doing.

Though the king worshipped and paid honor to Daniel, God worked it into His plan. The king put Daniel in charge of Babylon and all of the wise men. At the request of Daniel, his three friends became administrators of his command. We will see next week that through all of this, God is setting the stage for HIS glory!

Day 5

Read Isaiah 12:1-2

What is your salvation? When your back is against the wall and there is nowhere else to go, where do you turn? The answer to this question often helps us know who we really trust when faced with struggles and difficulties and who or what we credit when life is great.

Verse 1 of this passage speaks of God's anger. God hates and despises sin. How do we know this? We know it because of what He allowed His Son to experience on the cross. He loved you and me so much and desired a relationship with us, but our sin had to be paid for. The only One who could pay the price was the Righteous One!

Isaiah tells us that God is our salvation. When Jesus took our sins, all of God's anger and wrath was poured out on Him. Therefore, when we place our faith in Jesus and in what He has done for us on the cross, we are forgiven. Now when God looks at us, He doesn't see sin, wrath, or anger; rather, He sees the blood of His Son. It is the blood of His Son which allows us to know God in a real way and allows us to commune with Him always.

God is our salvation in many ways. God has saved us from ourselves, which most of the time is our greatest enemy. Our own attitudes, selfishness, and sin keeps us from fully experiencing Jesus. God has saved us from ourselves, from the enemy, from hell, and from sin itself. He has not only saved us from these things, but He has saved us to many things. He has saved us to Heaven. He has saved us to do good works, but we must understand we are not saved by doing good works. He saved us to be in relationships with each other so we might know we have brothers and sisters in Christ. However, most importantly, as **John 17:3** says, "*He has saved us to Himself.*" Eternal life is to know God and to know Jesus forever. I am saved from my past by Jesus, meaning God has paid for the sins of my past. I am saved presently by Jesus meaning God saves me everyday from myself and, I am saved for the future by Jesus, which means I am saved to a relationship with God in Heaven.

God through Jesus is my salvation. As **Isaiah 12 :2b** says, “*He is my strength and my song.*” Thank God for your salvation, what He has saved you to, from, and what we get to look forward to as well.

WEEK 95 FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE----- -----Dennis Watson

The power and the presence of the Lord among His people is evidenced all through the Bible. It is especially seen when bold faith is practiced. The book of Daniel is about several things, but one of the most significant is bold faith. It is seen in **Daniel 1:8** as “*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s delicacies.*” We see it again in **Daniel 2:28** where Daniel says, “*But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets.*” In **Daniel 3:18**, Daniel’s three friends were about to be thrown into the furnace when they proclaimed they knew God would take care of them, “*But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.*” This week, we see powerful evidence of faith in the Lord!

Day 1

Read Daniel 3:1-12

It is not unexpected to see a godless king filled with arrogance. After all, it has correctly been said that “power corrupts.” It requires a strong godly faith to remain in-check when power is conveyed by way of position. King Nebuchadnezzar proved that power really does corrupt the ungodly. He made a huge gold statue of himself which was about 90 feet tall. Talk about an over-inflated ego! He then, through his cabinet, sent word throughout the land that at the dedication of the statue, all people were to bow down and worship it when they heard the music begin to play. If anyone refused to bow down and worship the statue when the music played, they would be arrested and thrown into a furnace of fire.

What a position to leave the people of God in! Three of Daniel’s young Israelite friends determined not to violate the first commandment which says, “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” They took a stand and, when the music played, they did not bow down and worship. Some of the enemies of God and His people could hardly wait to tell on Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego.

It seems the ungodly are always looking for ways to test the faith of Jesus' followers. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "*There is nothing new under the sun.*" We live in a time very much like the days recorded in Daniel.

Believers in Jesus are mocked and, on occasion, set up to be tested or expose their stance. We should welcome such opportunities rather than complain about them. Light shines the brightest in the darkest of times.

Ask the Lord to enable your faith to shine in the darkness.

Day 2

Read Daniel 3:13-18

There was a confrontation between King Nebuchadnezzar and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He had issued an order that all the people were to bow down and worship his statue when the music played. They had refused and the king confronted them, *“Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?”* They stood firm! The King threatened them again with the fiery furnace. They told him they were not worried because they knew their God would take care of them and continued expressing their bold faith by saying, *“But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”*

Talk about a showdown! What would you do? We face these kinds of showdowns almost daily but we fail to recognize their significance. Belief and practice do not always line up. After all, it can be hard when your life is on the line. The determining factor is what you love the most. That is really what is at stake. What do you really determine to be most important, even to the extent of loss of friends, position, and, yes, even life? For these three young men, there was no question. They would stand clearly on the side of the Lord and Truth. In doing so, they left the outcome to Him. We often rationalize the “your faith or your life” issues. Sometimes we rationalize that it would be better to have a live believer than a dead one. Really? What about this case where there were so few faithful believers? What if there were three less? Was that their problem or the Lord’s? They concluded it was the Lord’s problem and they trusted Him to handle it best and, in so doing, He was exalted.

The bold faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego is a testimony to their God and His greatness. Ask the Lord to enable you to trust Him more so that others will see His greatness!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Daniel 3:19-27

When it was reported to King Nebuchadnezzar that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to bow down to the king's statue, the king was very angry. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times hotter than normal and the three tied up and thrown into the furnace. He was so angry he did not wait to have their clothes removed. They were thrown in the furnace tied up and clothed. The haste and heat caused the death of some of the king's guards. The three Israelites were not afraid, they stood firm and unshakable.

When anger is confronted by bold, abiding faith, we see two possible outcomes. First, we see that King Nebuchadnezzar became very angry. He was outraged and overcome by his anger. As angry as he was, his anger melted away. When he looked, probably through a low opening in the furnace which allowed ventilation, the king saw not the three who had been thrown into the furnace, but four people walking around. What he saw was Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego walking around with someone else. King Nebuchadnezzar said, "*The form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*" I want you to think about that. It was the faith of the three men that led to their being thrown into the fiery furnace. It was this event that allowed the king to see the One who looked like the Son of God! Who was this? It was obviously the Son of God! This was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Once again, we see Jesus in the Old Testament doing what He does—saving! When the three were called out of the furnace by the king, the power of the fire had no impact on them. In fact, not only were they not burned, they didn't even smell like smoke. Jesus is stronger than all things!

I find this biblical account not only encouraging, but comforting. Jesus is always present with us! No matter what you are going through—attacks by people who do not share your faith or the difficulties brought on through sickness and death—remember He is always with you.

Thank the Lord for His presence.

Day 4

Read Daniel 3:28-30

Yesterday, we shared that when anger is confronted by abiding faith, one outcome may be more anger. We saw that King Nebuchadnezzar became really angry and threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego into the fiery furnace in his rage, but we also see that when that faith became a testimony to the king, his rage melted into recognition of the presence of God. The result was that the king praised and blessed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego's God. He declared that respect and honor should be shown to their God. He issued a decree of protection for all of the Jewish people to worship the one true God. He promoted the three men to positions of authority.

When God's people stand and abide in faith, God shows Himself strong and His name is glorified. This is exactly what we see here. The three friends simply took a stand and put their faith into practice and God did the rest.

Have you been in any fiery furnaces lately? If you stand on the truth and the Word of God, you probably find yourself in some pretty hot spots. This is a time that God will make Himself known through your obedience. It can be hot and painful, but that is what it takes to stand and make a difference.

Ask the Lord for the grace to fully trust Him.

DAY 5

Read Isaiah 12:3-6

At the end of last week, we looked at Isaiah 12:1-2. We saw how Isaiah expressed that God would, through the Savior Jesus Christ, replace His anger with grace and salvation. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Today, in the remainder of Isaiah 12, we see how we should respond after God saves us.

Jesus is our salvation. The Lord sent Jesus into the world to take away the power and consequences of sin. The results in our lives, according to today's passages, should be at least three specific things. First of all, what He has done should result in thanksgiving. What a blessing the Lord has provided for us. The Lord has accomplished forgiveness and salvation for us in Jesus Christ. We are forgiven and accepted by God, not based on our behavior, but totally because of His goodness and grace. Give Him praise and thanksgiving for what He has freely given you in His Son Jesus Christ.

Secondly, as a result of what the Lord has done for us, we are to tell others about His gift for us, which is also for others. Make known His gift of salvation. In other words, tell everyone in the world what He has done for you and for them. Make it known!

Thirdly, we are to celebrate by singing and shouting in great exuberance. Great joy and rejoicing should characterize our lives on a daily basis. Are you joyful and celebrative? If not, give more thought and consideration for the Lord's salvation.

Pause for a minute and think, are you a person who lives with thanksgiving, rejoicing and an attitude of telling others what the Lord has done in your life? Ask the Lord to enable you to live a life that expresses rejoicing and thanksgiving for His gift of salvation.

Week 96 THE GLORY BELONGS TO GOD ALONE-- -----Chris Watson

There is no good in us; scripture reminds us of this. If this is true, then we cannot and should not get the glory for doing anything right or good (based on truth and God's Word). We are inclined to sin, inclined to disobey, inclined to leave God, and inclined to do whatever we want to do. However, when God works in and through us, it is not us, but God in us. The Apostle Paul calls this "*The hope of glory, Christ in us.*" When God does something great either in you or through you, make certain you are pointing the glory back to Him.

Day 1

Read Daniel 4:1-18

King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream and this time it was of a tree. It was a big, abundant tree where animals found shelter and the birds nested in it. In the dream, the branches were to be cut off and the tree cut down, but the stump remained in the ground. Then, the tree changed to a "him" as we see in Verse 15. It was said that he would have the mind of a man, but would be given the mind of an animal for 7 years. Tomorrow we will see exactly what this dream meant.

Notice Daniel's name and the name that the king gave him. In Chapter 4, we see the meaning of the name Belteshazzar. He was named after one of the king's gods and it is even said the spirit of the holy gods was in him.

After the king had seen God work in and through Daniel and even after he had seen Daniel's God work a miracle in the fiery furnace, he apparently still resisted the one true God. We know this because he called the magicians, the enchanters, the astrologers, and the diviners, once again, to come and interpret his dream. If he had truly believed in God, he would have sent for Daniel immediately.

The king was stuck in his old ways. Although he had seen God do some great things and had acknowledged Him as the one true

God, he was still not totally getting it. He was either not totally convinced, set in his ways, still giving into sin, or all of the above.

What about you? Do you fully trust God? Or, do you sometimes rely more on other people and things for direction, guidance, and wisdom? I think, at times, we all forget just what God has done and we seek to depend on our own understanding or another person's understanding because it's what comes natural. May we always trust and put our hope in God. We have seen Him work mightily in our own lives and we have seen through scripture just how He works in mysterious ways. Today, may your prayer be to fully trust God all of the time. When you wavier, jump right back on course.

Day 2

Read Daniel 4:19-26

Can you imagine why Daniel is perplexed in Verse 19? I don't think Daniel was confused, baffled, or puzzled as to what he had to do. He had to tell the king the bad news. Daniel told the king that he was the tree and the stump that remained of the tree meant his kingdom would be restored when he acknowledged Heaven rules. We can imagine the king was not very happy when he heard this interpretation.

Today's reading reminds us that God is in control. God is sovereign over kings, presidents, leaders, you, me, every country, and every person. We need to trust that God is always in control. This doesn't mean things will go the way we want them to or that we won't face struggles and trials. The scripture tells us we will.

God often does whatever it takes to get our attention. What He desires is for us to walk in step with Him. Are you waking in step with Him? Are you listening to His voice? Are you obeying Him? Are you seeking His plans? May we seek to always be walking in tune with God so that we can enjoy God and He can use us out of our obedience!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Daniel 4:27-33

Notice the words Daniel said to the king in Verse 27. He told him to renounce his sins by doing what is right and for him to be kind to the oppressed. Not only did the king not renounce his sin, but he talked about his own greatness, his own power, and his own majesty. Daniel indicated that if he turned his ear to God, maybe he would continue to be prosperous.

Again, he totally ignored Daniel and went about his own plans and ways. Soon, the dream's predictions began to come true and he was driven away from his people. He ate grass like the cattle. He had failed to acknowledge who he was, what he had done, and who God was. He had, in the past, acknowledged the God of Daniel in some ways, giving a head nod toward God, but he was still going after his ways and his gods.

God desires more than a head nod. He desires our hearts, our thoughts, and all that we are. When we place our faith in Jesus to take our sins away, we are truly forgiven and made right with God. Coming to Jesus for forgiveness is just the beginning. We spend the rest of our lives knowing, learning, walking, and growing in God more and more everyday. We need Jesus. Receiving Jesus' free gift of salvation is simply putting our trust in what He has already done. We then have the privilege to walk in that grace and love eternally.

Have you merely been giving God a head nod? Maybe you know about Him, but don't really know Him. That is, you have never placed your faith in the only One who can take away your sins and bring you into a relationship with God. Today is the day of salvation. Maybe you do know Jesus, but still just seek to give God the head nod, rather than all of you. Jesus asks us to follow Him daily and to put ourselves away. Will you follow Jesus with all you have today and the rest of your life? May we devote all that we are and all we have to Jesus.

Day 4

Read Daniel 4:34-37

James 4:6 says, “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” Notice Daniel 4:34 says that the king raised his eyes to the heavens. He was finally submitting to God and His ways. Verse 35 shows us the king is serious in his submission and thoughts. The end of the chapter says that he praised, exalted, and glorified the King of heaven!

God did what it took to get King Nebuchadnezzar’s attention and turn his heart to Him. The king had been proud and sought to do things his own way and carry out his plans. As we know, up until now, he acknowledged God, but never really submitted to His plans and ways until the time of his life portrayed in today’s passage.

God desires for us to know Him in a real and intimate way. He wants to walk and talk with us. At times, we go our own way. We become proud, angry, frustrated, or even rebellious. The last sentence in today’s passage reads, “*Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*” We know this is true because this is clearly what God did with the king!

What are you facing today? What are your struggles? What are you prideful about? Would you lay it before God? Would you honor and glorify the Most High? Even when you don’t understand, will you trust and follow God? When life doesn’t make sense, will you follow God? When a well of pride and selfishness comes forth, will you push it to the side and follow God?

Today, ask God to remove any pride that might be in your life and ask to follow Him. Will you ask Him to show you your pride and help you to lay it down? We all need to do this, myself included. There are those areas of pride that we are well aware of and there are areas that we don’t see. The Holy Spirit has to show us, but in order for Him to show us, we need to submit to Him. Submit to Him today. Ask Him to rid you of your pride. Praise and exalt His name, for He is good.

Day 5

Read Psalm 118:19-24 and Acts 4:11-12

Both passages today speak of a cornerstone or a stone which the builders rejected. A cornerstone is the first stone that is put down when constructing a building. Marty Machowski says, “The entire foundation of the building must line up to the cornerstone in order for the building to be strong and solid.”⁷ In other words, the cornerstone or the first stone is vitally important because the rest of the building depends on it.

We know from the New Testament that many people, including the Jews, rejected Jesus. These passages say many rejected Jesus. Jesus is the cornerstone upon which everything is built. Jesus is the only right and secure cornerstone! If Jesus is not the foundation, then anything built is destined for total destruction.

The first part of Acts 4:11 says they rejected the cornerstone, but the verse goes on to say He became the capstone, meaning God raised Jesus to the highest point. He is the authority and dominion over all. The house or apartment you live in was built on a foundation. If the foundation is faulty or wasn't laid correctly, you would probably know it by now. All of the walls, doors, and roof depend on a correct foundation. If it's not correct, then everything else will be faulty.

If Jesus isn't our foundation, our foundation will be faulty, at best. If our foundation is money, fame, job status, popularity, relationships, or pride, eventually, the foundation will crumble leaving us with nothing. We must not be like the people we read about in Acts and reject Jesus as the cornerstone. Rather, we must receive and place this cornerstone as the foundation of our life. If our foundation is not Jesus, then we are in trouble. Today, what is your foundation? Is your foundation things? Is your foundation people? Could it be money? If it's anything other than Jesus, confess it to Him and ask that He be your foundation.

⁷ Long Story Short, Marty Machowski, 376

WEEK 97 DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN-----

-----Dennis Watson

In Week 95 we read about faith in the fire. This week, we will read about faith in the jaws of lions. This is another occasion of people striking at the followers of the Lord. We should expect this and allow God to use it. All that happens in life is not about us. If we go through life as His followers, all occasions become about Him. None of these events should draw attention to us. As with Daniel, on the occasion that brought him into the lions' den, it was about revealing the greatness and power of the Lord.

Day 1

Read Daniel 6:1-9

King Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylon and placed a king over Babylon by the name of Darius. King Darius organized the region into 120 segments with satraps (KJV-princes) over each one. Those 120 were divided into three areas with a governor (KJV-president) over each one. Daniel was one of those governors. It was clear the wisdom and ability of Daniel was recognized, even to the point that King Darius thought about appointing him over the whole region.

The other two governors and 120 satraps were jealous of Daniel and sought for a way to discredit him, but they could find nothing of which to accuse him. Daniel was squeaky clean. In fact, we are told Daniel was faithful, of excellent spirit, and no fault was in him. Therefore, the group devised a plan to discredit Daniel regarding his God. They knew Daniel faithfully prayed to God three times a day. The whole group got together, went to King Darius, and convinced him to make and sign a decree that for thirty days no one was to pray to any person or god except to King Darius. Anyone who violated the decree would be thrown into the lions' den.

Envy and jealousy can be a real problem for people who are plagued by it and, also, by those who are the victims of the attack. When a person lives a life of faithfulness to God, others may be-

come envious or jealous and seek to discredit them or make them look bad. Are you on one side of envy or jealousy? Which side? If you are jealous of someone, seek to establish your security in the Lord alone. If you are the victim, rejoice that God has counted you worthy to join in His suffering.

Day 2

Read Daniel 6:10-18

Did Daniel know of the experience of his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego? I feel certain he did. What about the people in the king's court? Did they forget that their God delivered them from the fiery furnace? Regardless, Daniel was still going to obey God!

We are often confronted with the challenge of whether to obey God or man. Contrary to the king's decree, Daniel went home, knelt and prayed, giving thanks to God. As you would expect, they were waiting and watching to catch Daniel in the act of praying. Once again, it appears that both governors and the 120 satraps went before the king and reported that Daniel had been praying. The king had no choice but to honor his decree and throw Daniel into the lions' den.

King Darius realized he had been set up. He was displeased with himself for making such a decree and painting himself into a corner. In order to save face, he had to throw Daniel into the lions' den. He wanted to let Daniel off the hook, but he was stuck. He gave the order and Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. King Darius expressed his own trust in Daniel's God by saying to Daniel, "*Your God whom you serve continually will deliver you.*" King Darius fasted all night and could not sleep because he was very upset at what he had done.

Daniel's trust in the Lord was a witness to King Darius. It had an impact on the king who eventually trusted in the Lord. Ask the Lord to provide grace for you to trust Him like Daniel.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Daniel 6:19-23

The next morning, after an anxious night, King Darius ran to the lions' den to check on Daniel. When he got there, he called to Daniel in words that I really enjoy reading: *And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"* **Daniel 6:20 (NKJV)**

As the king spoke these words, I'm sure he was hoping to hear Daniel's voice. Much to the king's delight and surprise, Daniel responded: *Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."* **Daniel 6:21-22 (NKJV)**

Who was this angel? As in the case with Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace, there was someone there protecting Daniel. This was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ! He was there to save or deliver Daniel from the lions. The king was exuberant! He said that Daniel had been saved because he believed his God.

Those who trust Jesus and His work at the cross and His resurrection will be saved. What a look at the salvation God brings!

Thank the Lord for His provision of salvation.

Day 4

Read Daniel 6:24-28

Deception in any area of life is not a good thing. We see deception in government, business, and even in family. The motivation for deception or lying is usually to get things your own way or to make yourself look good. In the case of King Darius' leaders, it was jealousy of Daniel. They wanted to make Daniel look bad and, ultimately, they wanted him in the lions' den. After Daniel had been delivered safely from the lions' den, the king realized that the deception the leaders had come up with for the purpose of getting rid of Daniel was law based. King Darius decided to turn the table on the leaders. He had the leaders and their families thrown into the lions' den. Before they landed at the bottom of the lions' den, they had already been killed by the lions. Their gods did not protect them.

I like how King Darius was impacted by the life testimony of Daniel. Even before the situation with Daniel in the lions' den, the king was watching Daniel and knew that his God was powerful. He believed Daniel's God would deliver him from the lions' den. He gave praise and glory to Daniel's God. It is very possible King Darius became a believer because of Daniel's testimony.

People are watching you. Are they seeing an evident faith? Are they being influenced by your faith in Jesus? Ask the Lord to enable you to have a testimony that others can see so they might come to know Jesus, too.

Day 5

Read Psalm 118:26-29 and Matthew 21:6-9

We looked at Psalms 118:19-24 last week, and these verses spoke about Jesus hundreds of years before He came into the world as God in the flesh. Today, these passages continue speaking of Jesus as the One who comes in the name of the Lord. This psalm also speaks of Jesus being the light God has sent to shine in darkness. It is amazing to see Jesus all through the Bible. This is why we are calling this study, “Connecting the Dots.” In the New Testament we see these connections being made which enable us to recognize how these verses were speaking of Jesus.

In Matthew 21:6-9, it is recorded that Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Along the way, people lined the streets, placing their coats and palm branches on the road and crying out, “*Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!*” This is a direct fulfillment of what was spoken of hundreds of years earlier.

In **John 8:12**, Jesus tells the people, “*I am the light of the world.*” This correlates to Psalm 118:27 where God says that He has given us the light. Jesus is the light of God that has come into the world to provide His light in a sin darkened world.

Psalm 118:29 says, “*His mercy endures forever.*” One translation sometimes references this phrase as ‘loving kindness.’ This is expressed in John 3:16. God has, in Jesus Christ, sent His love into the world. Give thanks to the Lord for His light, loving kindness, and for sending Jesus, His gift of salvation.

Week 98 DANIEL'S VISION OF 70 WEEKS -----

----- Chris Watson

Daniel's life and ministry bridge the entire 70-year period of Babylonian captivity. Deported to Babylon at the age of sixteen and hand-picked for government service, Daniel becomes God's prophetic mouthpiece to the Gentile and Jewish world declaring God's present and eternal purpose. Daniel knew, of course, about Jeremiah's prophecy, the captivity and the promise to return after 70 years. This prophecy was fulfilled in 537 BC when the Jews were allowed by King Cyrus to return to Israel and begin rebuilding the city and temple. This brings us to Daniel 9 today.

Day 1

Read Daniel 9:1-12

We see from our reading today in Verse 2 that Daniel was clear on what had taken place up until now. We, of course, know God had Daniel set for this time and this place to accomplish His purposes. Leviticus 26:14-46 speaks directly of what Daniel's prayer is all about. God had promised Israel that if they would continue going against Him and rebelling that the Lord would "*appoint terror over them*" and "*set His face against them*" (**Leviticus 26:14-16**).

If you look at the account briefly, you might think it's sad that Israel was taken captive by Babylon and while it was, God was using it for His plan. He was setting things up so Israel would turn back to Him. In fact, we read in the last part of Leviticus 26:40 that God was still merciful to the Israelites and said if they would confess their iniquity and repent, He would remember His covenant and also their land.

Daniel's prayer we read in Daniel 9:1-19 is the beginning of the repentance and confessing if you will. He says in **Verses 10-11** "*We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God has been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.*"

We have ALL sinned against the Lord. Take some time to reread Verses 3-12. Could that be yours and my prayer? Can we acknowledge and repent? Daniel was not only interceding for himself, but for the people. We need to intercede for both as well. We need to ask God to forgive us and we need to remember His promises. Take some time today to not only confess your sin and your need for Jesus, but also intercede for others, both individuals and as a whole.

Day 2

Read Daniel 9:13-19

“What were the consequences of the nation's rebellion? They became a sinful people, a people covered with shame ("confusion of face," Dan. 9:8), and a scattered people. Their land was overrun by enemy soldiers, their great city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and their holy temple was desecrated, robbed, and burned. No wonder the Jews were ashamed! But it was their own sins that had brought these disasters, because their kings, princes, and priests had disobeyed God's laws and refused to obey God's prophets.

The leaders and the people knew the terms of God's covenant, but they deliberately violated them. The Jews were unfaithful to God's covenant, but God was faithful to keep His Word. If the nation had obeyed, God would have been faithful to bless them (Ps. 81:11-16); but because they rebelled, He was faithful to chasten them. "You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster" (Dan. 9:12, NIV). Daniel didn't make excuses for the nation nor did he say that God's covenant was too demanding. Israel had enjoyed great blessings when they had obeyed the law, so why should they complain when they experienced great suffering because they disobeyed the law?

But there was something even worse than the sins that brought divine punishment to Israel. It was the refusal of the Jews to repent and confess their sins even after being taken captive! They spent their time praying for judgment against Babylon (Ps. 137) rather than seeking God's face and asking for His forgiveness. God's will for Israel in captivity was outlined in Jeremiah 29, but the Jews didn't always follow it. Daniel's approach was biblical: "For the Lord our God is righteous in everything He does" (Dan. 9:14, NIV). Why would He bring His people out of Egypt and then allow them to waste away in Babylon? Daniel knew that God had purposes for Israel to fulfill, and so he reminded God of His past mercies (v. 15).

God in His grace gives us what we don't deserve, and God in His mercy doesn't give us what we do deserve. Daniel asked the Lord to turn away His anger from Jerusalem and the holy temple. He admits that the sins of Israel (including Daniel) were the cause of that great catastrophe, but that God had promised to forgive if His people would repent and confess their sins. "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy" (v. 18, NIV). But even more, Daniel desired the nation to be restored that God might be glorified. After all, the Jews were God's chosen people, and Jerusalem was the place of His holy temple; the longer the people and the land were under God's wrath, the less glory the Lord would receive. "Your city and your people bear your Name" (v. 19, NIV).

God answered Daniel's prayer. The next year, Cyrus issued a decree that permitted the Jews to return to their land, take the temple treasures with them, rebuild the temple, and restore the worship. What a remarkable ministry Daniel had in Babylon! He was counselor to four kings, intercessor for the people of Israel, a faithful witness to the true and living God, and the author of one of the basic books of prophecy in the Old Testament.

Daniel now knew God's immediate plans for the nation of Israel, but what about the distant future? He had already learned from the visions God gave him that difficult days lay ahead for God's people, with a kingdom to appear that would crush everything good and promote everything evil. Would God's people survive? Would the promised Messiah finally appear? Would the kingdom of God be established on the earth?"⁸

⁸ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Resolute (Daniel).

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Daniel 9:20-25

In our reading today, we come to a very important prophecy. Most all commentators agree that the word “weeks” means “sevens” so Gabriel was speaking about 70 periods of 7 years or 490 years. “During the time of the 490 years the Lord would accomplish 6 purposes. The first 3 had to do with sin and the last 3 with righteousness. Warriën Wiersbe says, “The Lord would finish the transgression,” that is, the transgression of the Jewish people, and “make an end of” Israel’s national sins. This was one of the main burdens of Daniel’s prayer. Israel was a scattered suffering nation because she was a sinful nation. How would the Lord accomplish this? By making “reconciliation for iniquity,” that is, by offering a sacrifice that would atone for their sin. Here we come to the cross of Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah.

When Jesus died on the cross, He died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2; John 1:29), and therefore we can proclaim the good news of the Gospel to sinners everywhere. But He also died for the church (Eph. 5:25) and for the people of Israel. “For the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isa. 53:8). Jesus died for sinners in every tribe and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9), but in a very special way, He died for His own people, the Jewish nation (John 11:44-52).

The last three divine purposes focus on righteousness and the future kingdom of Messiah. When Jesus returns, He will establish His righteous kingdom (Jer. 23:5-6; 31:31-34) and rule in righteousness (Isa. 4:2-6). In that day, the Old Testament prophecies of Israel’s glorious kingdom will be fulfilled, and there will be no need for visions or prophets. “To anoint the most holy” refers to the sanctifying of the future temple that is described in Ezekiel 40-48.

These six purposes declare the answers to Daniel’s prayer! Ultimately, Israel’s sins will be forgiven (Zech. 12:10-13:1), the city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and the temple and its ministry will be restored, all because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the

cross. All of these wonderful accomplishments will be fulfilled during the 490 years that Gabriel goes on to explain. He divides the seven sevens—490 years—into three significant periods: 49 years, 434 years and 7 years.”⁹

“The first 7 (49 years) spoken of in Daniel 9:25 the Jews would rebuild the city of Jerusalem in tough times. The decree of Daniel 9:25 is most likely that of King Artaxerxes in 445 authorizing Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and restore the gates. This is most likely the date of the beginning of the first 49 years. The second period or 483 years is referenced in Daniel 9:26. Wiersbe says, “Gabriel affirmed that 483 years are involved from the giving of the decree to the coming of “the Anointed One, the ruler” ($7 \times 7 = 49$; $7 \times 62 = 434$; total = 483). When you count 483 solar years from the year 445, you end up with A.D. 29/30, which brings us to the time of Christ's ministry on earth. But this Anointed One, the Christ, will not be permitted to rule;

For His people cried out, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). The Messiah will be “cut off, but not for himself (“and will have nothing,” NIV). This speaks of His rejection by the Jewish nation (John 1:11; Luke 13:33-35) and His crucifixion as a criminal, turned over to the Roman authorities by His own people and one of His own disciples. But He died for the sins of the world, including the sins of the Jewish nation. We know that Jesus arose from the dead and returned to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit to empower His people to bear witness to the whole world (Acts 1:8), beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-53). But the same nation that allowed John the Baptist to be slain and asked for Jesus to be crucified went on to persecute the church and themselves kill Stephen (Acts 7). In A.D. 70, the prophecy in Daniel 9:26 was fulfilled when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and the Jewish nation was scattered. The Romans are “the people of the prince that shall come,” and that prince is the future Antichrist that Daniel described as “the little horn” and the blasphemous king (7:8, 24-25; 8:23-27). This takes us to the third period, which we will look at tomorrow.”¹⁰

⁹ Bible Exposition Commentary - Be Resolute (Daniel)

¹⁰ Ibid

Thank God that He is in control. Thank Him in spite of what you may see going on around you or inside of you that He is faithful and will always be with you. Just like the prophecy, God knows what He is doing and always will.

Day 4

Read Daniel 9:26-27

In today's reading, we come to Period 2 (483 years, Daniel 9:26) and Period 3 (7 years, Daniel 9:27). "Gabriel affirmed that the 483 years from the giving of the decree to the coming of the "Anointed One, the ruler ($7 \times 7 = 49$; $7 \times 62 = 434$, total = 483). When you add up the 483 solar years from the year 445 you end up with AD 29/30 which brings us to the time that Christ was on the earth (ministry). The Messiah was "cut off" when He was rejected by His own, the Jewish nation and turned over to be crucified.

In AD 70 the prophecy of Daniel 9:26 was fulfilled when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, therefore the Jewish nation was scattered. The Romans are, "the people of the prince that shall come," and that prince is the future Antichrist that Daniel described as the "little horn" and the blasphemous king (7:8, 24-25, 8:23-27)." ¹⁰ This brings us to the 3rd Period.

"The pronoun "he" refers to "the prince that shall come" (v. 26), this is, the Antichrist. We are now in the final seven years of the prophetic calendar that Gabriel gave Daniel, the period that we know as "the Tribulation" or "the day of the Lord." While the world has always known wars and desolations (Matt. 24:3-24), the end of the age will introduce a time of terrible suffering that will climax with the return of Jesus Christ (Rev. 6-19; Matt. 24:15-35).

The event that triggers this last seven-year period is the signing of a covenant between the Antichrist and the Jewish nation. At this time, the Antichrist is a key political figure in Europe—one of the ten toes of the image in Daniel 2, and the "little horn" who emerges from the ten horns in 7:8, 24ff—and he has the authority and ability to end the "Middle East problem." He covenants to protect the Jews from their enemies, probably so they can build their temple and restore their sacrifices. The spiritually blind Jewish leaders, ignorant of their own Scriptures, will gladly enter into the covenant. "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me," Jesus told the Jewish leaders of His day; "if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43, NKJV).

¹⁰ Ibid

After three and a half years, the Antichrist will break the covenant, seize the temple, and put his own image there, and will force the world to worship him (2 Thes. 2; Rev. 13). This is the "abomination of desolation" (Dan. 11:31; 12:11, NKJV) that Jesus spoke about that marks the midpoint of the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). The "man of sin" and "son of perdition" (2 Thes. 2:3) who up till now has deceived the world by playing a shrewd political game will now reveal himself as a tool of Satan and a cruel world dictator. Christ will defeat him when He returns to establish His kingdom (Rev. 19:11-21).

The strange parenthesis. Whether Daniel understood all that he heard is not revealed to us, but Gabriel's message assured him that the nation of Israel would be restored to their land, the city of Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt, and God would make provision for the cleansing of the nation. But Gabriel didn't tell Daniel what would happen between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth "weeks." Between Daniel 9:26-27 there is a strange parenthesis. Why? Because this prophecy has to do with the Jews, the Jewish temple, and the city of Jerusalem (v. 24). But the period of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks has to do with the church, the body of Christ, which was a mystery God had hidden in Old Testament times and didn't reveal until the time of Christ and the apostles (Eph. 3:1-13). Daniel wasn't told that the rejection and death of the Messiah would bring about a new thing, a spiritual body that would include Jews and Gentiles and in which all natural differences would be unimportant (Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:22-29). One reason the Jewish legalists opposed Paul was because he put Jews and Gentiles on the same level in the church, and the traditionalists wanted to maintain the "superiority" of the Jews as revealed in the law and the kingdom prophecies.

Some of the prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 has already been fulfilled, and the rest will be fulfilled in the end times. We are today living in the age of the church, when Israel has been partially blinded and temporarily set aside (Rom. 9-11). Like Paul, we must have a heart concern for the Jewish people, pray for them, and seek to share the Gospel with them. Gentile believers have a debt to the people of Israel (Rom. 15:24-27) because they gave us the knowledge of the true and living God, the inspired written Scriptures, and the Savior, Jesus Christ."¹¹

¹¹Ibid.

Day 5

Read Psalm 46

The more I read and study the Bible, the more I am amazed. When you take all the details of Genesis to Revelation and see the intricate plan and how God has brought it to fruition, it is incredible. The same is true of our reading today. As I write this (June 29), we are in the middle of a crazy time. A pandemic has been declared, our political system is broken as we are entering an election year, a major dust storm from the Saharah Desert hit the east coast, and still no one knows if schools will start back in the fall. Talk about a time of uncertainty! The good news is there is not uncertainty when it comes to the Lord.

Psalm 46 tells us that the Lord is our refuge, a picture of strength and safety in a time of uncertainty. It goes on to say we have nothing to fear because our God is a help in times of trouble. This does not mean we will not face trouble, but rather He is with us as we walk through it and He will guide us. Scripture reminds us that no matter where we are, no matter what we are facing, or no matter what is in our path; the Lord is with us.

I don't know about you, but reading God's Word, in particular Psalm 46, reminds me that God is faithful and He is in control. I don't have to wring my hands, worry, fret or try to figure it all out. Rather, my responsibility is to walk with the One who already has it all figured out. He is in control. I'm reminded of **Psalms 91: 4** which says, "*He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and rampart.*"

Week 99 THE EXILES RETURN-----Chris Watson

Open your Bible and read Isaiah 44:27 to Isaiah 45:12. Approximately 150 years before God used King Cyrus to allow His people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, Isaiah wrote and prophesied it would happen. This wasn't a second option or a plan B God came up with, it was part of His original plan as we read in Isaiah. This week, we will read about rebuilding the temple.

Day 1

Read Jeremiah 29:7-14 and Ezra 1

In Week 71, we saw the fall of Jerusalem. We can read about the fall in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah. Today, in our first passage, we read part of a letter which was written by Jeremiah to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people that King Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. They were carried into exile because they refused to listen to the warnings and the words God spoken through His prophets. They were words of warning, words instructing them to turn to God and follow Him and leave all other gods behind. Verse 11 is one of the most quoted verses found in the Bible. It speaks as a promise to God's people (Israelites), stating He will prosper them and give them a hope and a future. The Lord is letting the Israelites know He still loves and cares for them. After all these years He will bring them back to the place from which He carried them into exile!

God used King Cyrus, to begin allowing the people to gather items and start going back to Jerusalem, in Judah, to rebuild the temple. The prophecy in Jeremiah 29 is coming true. God's people had chosen to go their own way, but God had promised them that after 70 years of exile in the Babylonian Empire, they would gather items and begin to rebuild the temple. We read in Ezra 1:7 that King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple which King Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem.

This is an amazing account as we see that which God spoke through His prophets, specifically Jeremiah, begin to take place.

This is not coincidence or by chance, but by God's plan. The Israelites were still His chosen people and He desired for their hearts to turn back to Him as they called out to Him.

God is always in control. He loves His children and while we may put ourselves in a bind due to foolishness or disobedience, God doesn't go anywhere. He desires to walk with us, know us, and grow with us. Isn't God's love and grace amazing? Take some time today to thank Him for who He is and what He has done.

Day 2

Read Ezra 3:1-7

God's people were back to worshipping Him through various means, including burnt and freewill offerings. As Verse 3 says, they were following exactly what was written in the Law of Moses. Notice that they didn't waiver. They continued to build the altar and make sacrifices, despite the fear of other people around them. Remember that King Nebuchadnezzar had knocked down all the walls so the people were open to attacks. However, they trusted God and knew what they were doing was right and what God wanted.

In the past, the Israelites had sought other gods, tried things on their own, disobeyed God, and selfishly did what they wanted. As we see in Ezra 3, at least they were back on the right path seeking and worshipping God.

What about you? Are you on God's path? Are you seeking and obeying Him? Or are you like the Israelites when they were doing things on their own? Have you tried things on your own in the past and now realize that God's way is the best? Or, maybe you tried things on your own, years ago, but are now walking in the ways of Jesus. If you are far from God, come back. He is waiting. He desires for you to worship Him and walk in a relationship with Him. Just like the prodigal son, come home. If you are in God's will, thank Him for your salvation; thank Him for saving you from those times of foolishness in the past. Also, take some time to pray for family members, friends, and co-workers who are following their ways rather than God's. Ask God to bring them back to Him so they will seek and follow Him. All other ways leave us empty and always wanting more!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Ezra 3:8-13

The actual rebuilding of the temple was now taking place. The foundation had been laid. When the foundation was laid, many people praised the Lord singing, “*He is good, his love endures forever.*” However, many of the older priests, Levites, and family heads, who had seen Solomon’s temple wept. It could be that they were tears of joy, but it could also have been they remembered that Solomon’s temple was large and beautiful. While this temple would be nice, it wouldn’t be as large and extravagant as the one they remembered.

However, Jesus would actually walk in this temple. He would heal the sick in this temple and He would teach the Gospel in this temple. The temple, while important, wasn’t the focus. It was the fact that God’s presence lived in the temple; it was where God came to meet with His people.

When you and I go to church, the building itself isn’t the focus, God is. God also gives us each other to encourage one another and walk this life together. It has often been said “I don’t have to go to Church to be a Christian.” The bigger statement or question is why would you be a Christian and not connect to God and His people through His Church? Church was and is God’s idea, not man’s. Church is His way of bringing us together to worship Him, be encouraged, and get ready to take His light to a dark world. 1 Corinthians 3:16 tells us we are God’s temple. God lives in us and He desires for us to walk with Him and grow with Him and with other believers. Have you gotten out of the habit of connecting to God’s Church? Have you become complacent concerning God’s Church? Remember that God’s Church is His plan to carry the Gospel to the nations. Commit yourself to God and to His Church.

Day 4

Read Ezra 4:1-5 and 17-24

The people that offered to “help” build the temple were the enemies of Israel. The enemies of Judah and Benjamin refer to the people living in Palestine since the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. They didn’t exactly want to help, but rather to confuse things and mess things up. This is confirmed in Verse 4 when they were told they couldn’t help. They set out to discourage the people of Judah and eventually to get them to stop building the temple. These people had acknowledged God, but they worshipped other gods as well and had no desire to see the temple come to fruition.

In Ezra 1, we read that the Lord moved in the heart of King Cyrus and he told the people to go and build the temple. In order to fulfill the prophesy of Jeremiah (from the Lord), they began building. However, when faced with fear and a reply from the king, they were forced to stop. Although they knew they had been given the go-ahead to build by the Lord Himself, they were given the command to stop by men.

They chose to trust man’s word over God’s word. Notice they didn’t hear from God to stop, but from men. Matthew Henry says, “Where the command of God requires one thing and the law of the land another, we must obey God rather than man, and patiently submit to the consequences.” In other word, if what we know is right and is from God, we are to follow that rather than earthly rulers. This, of course, must be what God desires and is true to His word. Those building the temple followed men’s words and not God’s. Instead of continuing to build, they stopped.

We have two choices: follow God or follow man. The world says things like abortion, homosexuality, adultery, and doing whatever you want is okay, but God and His Word say differently. Therefore, we are to stand on truth and listen to and follow the Word of God. To whom do you listen and follow, the world or God?

We need to be reminded we are to follow and obey our President and other elected officials, unless it contradicts God's Word. Then, with much prayer and seeking God, we follow Him, regardless of the consequences we may face. Who do you follow and obey?

Day 5

Read Haggai 2:6-9 and John 2:19-22

Jesus is the temple. We see this in our passage in John today and also in Haggai's prophecy. The prophecy was looking forward to Jesus as the temple.

You and I can call on Jesus' name anytime, wherever we go. We don't have to go to a temple, church, or special place to call on God's name. As believers, Jesus is always with us, meaning the temple is in us. God's people together make up God's Church and we can worship and meet with Him corporately as He has called us to do.

In our daily lives, we can call on God, the Creator of the Universe. Had a bad or good day? You can call on God's name. Things falling apart or going great? You can call on God's name. Are you at Church or sick at home in bed? You can call on God's name. Are you in the US or across the world? You can call on God's name. We see in scripture that Emmanuel means God with us. He is not just with us on Sunday or when things are going great, God is always with us. Jesus lives in us. In fact, take some time to read these words, even if you know the song, and think on them today. Sing this and be reminded of this truth today:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

Today, let us focus on Jesus being with us always. He does, in fact, walk and talk with us. He lives with us and knows us. May we know and walk with Him.

WEEK 100 THE TEMPLE IS COMPLETED----- -----Dennis Watson

It is an amazing blessing to be reminded time and time again that God is in control. The words of **Proverbs 21:1** ring forever true, especially as played out in the book of Ezra: *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*

In Ezra, as in the other books which describe the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon, it is clear the Lord God is directing the activity of pagan kings. Decrees were made by these kings providing protection and provisions for Israelites returning to Jerusalem. Of course it was the Lord who was providing the real protection and provision, but He was doing it as He gave direction to the hearts of these kings. This week, we will look at the amazing provision of the Lord for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

Day 1

Read Haggai 1:1-15 and Ezra 5:1-5

Last week, we saw that the people stopped building the temple because their enemies were harassing them. The people became discouraged and stopped building the temple and turned to building their own homes. As a result, nothing they did prospered. They became frustrated. The harder they worked and tried, the less things worked for them. The Lord did not bless their efforts because the temple was in shambles, but their own houses were extravagant.

The Lord raised up the prophet Haggai to give them a message. The message was clear and direct—stop building your houses and get to work on the Lord's temple. They had started and stopped. Although they had said, "it is not time to build the temple," Haggai told them that the Lord said it was time to return to building His house. As soon as they went back to work on the temple, a local governor by the name of Tattenai ordered them to stop. This time they refused to stop.

How important is it for you to do what the Lord wills? These people had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild, the walls of the city, their homes and most importantly, the temple. They started building the temple, but got discouraged and turned to their own houses. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever known there was something the Lord wanted you to do and after you started you were interrupted, perhaps by hurt or discouragement? This can cause people to get their priorities out of order. Has this happened to you? Is there something you have put before the Lord? If so, ask Him for the grace to get your priorities back in order.

Day 2

Read Ezra 6:1-12

It appears Governor Tattenai was really put out when the people continued building the temple. The people in charge of overseeing the construction were so focused on the Lord that they just kept building. They could not be stopped. Governor Tattenai was outraged, so he sent a letter to King Darius asking that a search be made of the royal records to see if there had really been a decree by King Cyrus of Persia permitting the people to rebuild the temple. The search was made and the record revealed that there had been such a decree. Can you imagine the aggravation of Governor Tattenai? He had to let the people continue to build.

The aggravation was only getting started. King Darius included some other things in his letter of response to Governor Tattenai. King Darius instructed Governor Tattenai to assist the construction by providing the needed funds! Can you imagine the outrage? He not only had to allow the construction to continue, but now he had to pay for it! I love it! Indeed *“The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord and He directs it like rivers of waters.”* It gets better still! Governor Tattenai was to provide all animals as well as whatever else they might need for sacrifices in their worship. There was one more thing, those who interfered with the decree were to be hung on a tree!

What an amazing account of seeing God in control! Although King Darius was not a believer, he said in **Ezra 6:12**, *“May the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.”*

Give thanks to God for His sovereignty!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Ezra 6:13-22

Finally, the work of rebuilding the temple was complete! Seventy years after it was destroyed, the rebuilding was finished. It had taken 21 years to complete! There were interruptions and times of misplaced priorities. It was completed four years after the Lord spoke to the people through Haggai telling them to get back to work. There had been decrees given by three different pagan kings regarding the rebuilding. The Lord had spoken through the prophet Haggai and now it was done.

After the completion of the temple, the people had a dedication at which time they sacrificed 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 male lambs, and 12 male goats. This may seem like a lot, but it pales in comparison with the tremendous amount sacrificed by Solomon at the dedication of the first temple - 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats.

The sacrifice of these animals was made for the sins of the people. The sacrifices were an acknowledgment of their sins and the need for atonement. About a week after the dedication, they observed the Celebration of Passover. This points to Jesus, the Lamb of God. They did not know or understand all that the sacrifices and the Passover represented. However, we have the benefit of hindsight. We know that these events were in anticipation of the glorious coming of the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world.

Give thanks that we do not have to offer bulls, goats, or rams, Jesus is our sacrifice!

Day 4

Read Ezra 7

In the opening verses of Chapter 7, we read Ezra's credentials. We see that Ezra was the man God chose to teach and lead the people and he came from the priestly line of Aaron. He was used of the Lord to direct the people to the Word of God.

Today's passage is about events which took place 57 years after the events of Chapter 6. King Artaxerxes is the fourth King of Persia/Babylon through whom God has worked to accomplish His purposes in rebuilding Jerusalem. Once again, we are reminded of the sovereignty of God. Can you imagine the South Korean dictator, Kim Jung Un giving help and aid to Christians? These kings were not necessarily friendly with the True God, but they helped His people fulfill their agenda and the Lord used that. After all, it was the Lord who set their agenda!

Many years later there was another group of exiles who are returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra. The current King Artaxerxes gave his blessings and also sent a letter with Ezra. He wanted Ezra to receive gifts from the king and others for the furnishing and sacrifices in the temple. The gifts were extravagant. Once again it is amazing to read the words of this pagan king who gave gifts and praise to Israel's God. I am amazed to see the obvious hand of the Lord in all of this, but so was Ezra. Here is his response to the letter: *"²⁷ Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, ²⁸ and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me. Ezra 7:27-28 (NKJV)*

Be encouraged, God is still in control!

Day 5

Read Zechariah 3:1-5

How vivid is your imagination? These passages describe a courtroom-like scene. Picture there are three actors in this vision the Lord showed to Zechariah. The first is the priest, Joshua, who was standing before the second actor in the vision, The Angel of the Lord. The third actor in the vision is Satan. Joshua is representative of God's people. The Angel of the Lord, who we have already seen, is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus and, of course, Satan is the one who opposes God and man.

Joshua, representative of the Lord's people, stands clothed in filthy clothing before the Angel of the Lord. The dirty clothing represents his sins and the sins of all people. Satan, observing the dirty clothing, slings accusations toward Joshua. We see this in **Revelation 12:10** where Satan is referred to as "*The accuser of our brethren.*" The Lord (Angel of the Lord) interrupts Satan and tells him that Joshua has been rescued from the fire. The Lord then gave Joshua bright, clean, white clothes to put on. This is a vision of what God does for us in Jesus Christ.

Now, back to your vivid imagination. Can you picture that same scene, but instead of Joshua, it is you? Satan is day and night accusing you. It is easy to believe his accusations because of our sins and failures. However, in Jesus Christ, the Lord God has made you clean and pure. The Lord has rebuked your accuser because He has washed you clean in the blood of His only begotten Son. Picture it, the accuser has been silenced by the work of God. You have been washed pure in the cleansing blood of Jesus!

Give thanks to the Lord for His work of cleansing through Jesus Christ!

WEEK 101 FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS----- -----Dennis Watson

Although the name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther, He is powerfully present, working in the midst of the choices of men and women. This is a powerful picture of the sovereignty of God. I know often we can see clearly that God is in control. However, this does not deny the clear and obvious fact this is a picture of the behind-the-scene providence of God. God is sovereign of all of the affairs of man!

Day 1

Read Esther 1

The people of God were carried off into captivity by the King of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. In 539 BC Babylon was defeated by King Cyrus the Great of the Medo-Persian Empire. King Cyrus allowed some of the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but many were still in exile. This sets the stage, historically, for this account. The Jews who are in Shushan are staying pretty low due to the way Jews were being treated.

The king of the region, King Ahasuerus (Xerxes), decided to have a six-month celebration. During the celebration, drunkenness ruled the day. At the end of the six-month party, there was a weeklong feast which also included heavy drinking. At the same time, King Ahasuerus' (Xerxes) queen, Queen Vashti was having a feast for the women. The king decided he wanted to show off the beauty of Queen Vashti, so he sent for her to come, in all of her adornment and crown, and to parade herself before the people and all the officials. His request was met with a refusal! The king was insulted and all of the men of the kingdom were worried that all of the women would follow her ways. Something had to be done. This kind of insolence could not be tolerated. The king directed his wise men and his lawyers to come up with a plan. The plan was to banish Queen Vashti and she would never come again into the presence of the king. This was not a marital issue it was a legal issue which had to be addressed. A royal decree was made which could not be reversed. Suddenly Queen Vashti was gone,

banished. This paved the way for what was to come in the remainder of the Book of Esther.

Something which seemed so insignificant set up an incredible account of deliverance and established a great feast, the Feast of Purim, which is still observed by Jews today. Most importantly, we see an incredible picture of the sovereignty of God. The book of Esther shows the ways of God vary, but He is still always in control and will establish His purposes and will. Find joy, peace and confidence in the sovereignty of God.

Day 2

Read Esther 2

As is often the case, King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) got over his temper tantrum. He began to miss Queen Vashti, but the decree had been made and could not be undone. The king's servants advised him to have a beauty contest for the purpose of finding a new queen. The king found this to be a good idea, so the process began. Beautiful young virgins were brought into the harem of the king and beauty treatments were given to each one of them. The one who pleased the king would become his wife, the queen.

We are now introduced to a major player in the account of Esther, Mordecai, her cousin. After the death of her father, he became like a father to Esther. It is important to note that he was a descendant of Kish, King Saul's father. Esther was very beautiful and she became a candidate for the position of queen. Hegai was the man caring for the young ladies and he took a liking to Esther and gave her additional beauty treatments. Mordecai kept a close eye on her as the time to visit the king approached. Mordecai warned Esther not to let anyone know she was a Jew.

Each young woman had a visit with the king. This was obviously not a time for small talk. The wording here indicates it was a time to sleep with the king. Of course, this kind of activity was totally unacceptable to the Jewish people, but was not so farfetched to the Gentiles.

Here is a good explanation from Tony Evans about this:

“Though this kind of behavior may have been acceptable in the Gentile world, it was considered scandalous among God's people. A man and woman were only to engage in a “one flesh” union when they had come together as husband and wife (Gen 2:24). Furthermore, the people of Israel were not to marry unbelievers (see Deut 7:3). But sometimes, God allows things to happen of which he doesn't approve in order to accomplish his greater purpose. This could also explain why God kept his name from being mentioned in the book.”¹²

¹² Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.

We read, "*Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her*" (2:15). She also was pleasing to the king and she became the new queen in place of Queen Vashti.

There was a big feast thrown, the Feast of Esther. Soon after the big wedding and feast, Mordecai, who was serving within the king's gate, heard of two men plotting to kill the king. Mordecai made it known to Queen Esther and she passed along the plot to the king and the two men were hung.

Esther was the new queen and Mordecai was in the king's records as a hero. God was at work, He always is! Always be reminded, although you sleep, God never does. He is working out His will and plan for His kingdom to come and His will to be done. There is no randomness in God's plan.

Day 3

Read Esther 3

In Chapter 3, we are introduced to another major player in the account of Esther, Haman. Haman had been promoted by the king to a position above all of the other princes. Remember there is no randomness in God's plan. There are no random people and no random events. Haman was an Agagite. This was not random either. Mordecai was a descendant of Kish who was King Saul's father. King Saul was supposed to kill all of the Amalekites including King Agag. If King Saul had done what he was supposed to have done, there would have been no Mordecai. Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman and Haman was outraged. Haman plotted to have Mordecai and all Israelites killed (Hitler was not the first or only one to attempt this). Think about the things we do or do not do in obedience or disobedience to God. They are impacting! Maybe not today, but they will have an impact.

Haman began his plot by casting the pur or the lot. He was basically throwing dice to determine when he would launch his plan to annihilate all the Jews. The lot fell to the month of Adar which was eleven months away. I am sure Haman wanted it sooner, but the time was on God's side to work out His plan. God is in control. *"The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD"* (**Proverbs 16:33**). Tony Evans says, "Even when Satan rolls the dice, God loads them."

Haman went to meet with King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) to tell him of his plan to get rid of the Jews. It was all connected to his hate for Mordecai. Haman was a prideful man who demanded to be worshipped, but Mordecai refused to bow down to him. Haman was so committed to this that he promised the king to foot the bill for the extermination project. Haman told the king lies about the Jews. Haman convinced the king and he signed the decree. The king gave the people into the hands of Haman to do as he pleased. The decree was issued throughout the region and the time was set.

How can someone be so filled with hate? It was all linked to Haman's pride. He thought he was special and other people should treat him that way. However, Mordecai refused. The table was set. God was using the foolishness of Haman, the loyalty of Mordecai and the willingness of Esther.

No random events. No random people. God is working. Obedient surrender is how to get in on the blessings of joining God. Disobedience will leave you in a place of missing God's blessings. Be sure to join Him today.

Day 4

Read Esther 4

Mordecai was mourning and grieving over the king's decree to annihilate the Jews. He put on the clothing of a person who was mourning. All over the kingdom the Jews were in great mourning, as you can well imagine. The desire to eliminate the people of God has been around from nearly the beginning of human history. The same is true today, both of the Jews and Christians.

Queen Esther was living in the palace secluded from the affairs of the outside world. Word of the plot made its way to the queen and she sent word to Mordecai to find out the details. Mordecai sent word by the messenger back to the queen about the plot along with a copy of the official decree. Mordecai also sent word instructing Queen Esther to go to the king and plea for her people. Queen Esther sent word back to Mordecai telling him she could not do what he was requesting because anyone who approached the king without an invitation could be put to death. Mordecai sent word back to Queen Esther simply saying to her that this was her time and she was in the right place for this time. His words are well-known and memorable, *"Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

Queen Esther sent word back to Mordecai to ask the people to fast and pray, telling him that she, along with her maids, would also fast and pray. I wonder how that went. It was most likely known among her maids that she, too, was a Jew. Queen Esther was all in. She would go to the king which was unlawful without an invitation. Her conclusion was, *"If I perish, I perish."*

It is significant to note here that Haman was all in, too. However, he thought he had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Oh, was he in for a surprise!

God had orchestrated this moment in time for all involved. The major players were on both sides of the story. Let me put it this way. There are no random people. There are no random events. God is sovereign and intentional. We either participate with Him or against Him (see Luke 9:50 and Mark 9:40). He will determine the outcome and His will, will be done!

Day 5

Read Esther 5-7

The time had come for Queen Esther to appeal to the king. She had made it past the first hurdle. The king received her into his presence and he asked what she wanted. She was well received because he told her to ask for anything, even up to half the kingdom. All she wanted was an audience with the king and Haman. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet she had prepared. At the banquet, Esther did not bring up her topic but instead asked for both Haman and the king to come to a banquet again the next day. It is exciting to see the significance of the timing. Haman went home that day excited because he just knew he had a special honor coming his way. His wife and friends suggested he have a gallows made to hang Mordecai. This sounded like a great idea to a prideful Haman.

The night after the first banquet, the king could not sleep so he had some of the historical records read to him. The king discovered that Mordecai had uncovered a plot to assassinate him and made it known and the king was not assassinated. The king wanted to show him honor. Just as Haman came in, the king asked him what should be done for a special person who pleased the king. He gave the king an answer, thinking the king was speaking of him. So guess who had to lead the king's horse through the city with Mordecai on it wearing one of the king's robes? Haman! Haman was humiliated!

Of course, there was more to come. It was time for Queen Esther's second banquet with only her, the king and Haman present. The queen made known a plot to annihilate her people, including herself. The king asks "*Where is the man who has dared do such a thing?*" Queen Esther tells him it is "*This wicked Haman!*" Haman was instantly terrified and pleaded for his life. That very day Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai.

Mordecai was promoted to the position that Haman once held. The plot was exposed and the king issued a decree that the Jews

could defend themselves against those who might carry out the original decree. According to Esther 9:1, the Jews began to defend themselves on the very day that Haman had determined by the dice that the extermination was to begin. The Jewish people were saved from the plot to exterminate them.

You can read the rest of the story in Chapters 9 - 10. A special feast was established to commemorate the event. It is the Feast of Purim. Purim comes from the word for lot, like the rolling of the dice.

Be reminded:

“Believers need to remind themselves, one another, and their children that the circumstances of their lives are not the result of random events. God is orchestrating the events of our lives according to his sovereign plan and for his kingdom purposes.”¹³

¹³ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda.

Week 102 NEHEMIAH-----Chris Watson

Even though the temple was complete, the walls of Jerusalem were still in piles of rubble and needed to be repaired. We have seen God raise many people up in the Old Testament for various tasks. This week in Nehemiah is no different. Nehemiah was called by God to complete the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Day 1

Read Nehemiah 1

Our historical account picks up in Nehemiah 1, as Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and he was deeply saddened. This meant that God's temple and His people were open to attack. Notice Nehemiah's response to this, he was broken before God and sought Him in prayer.

In Verses 5-7, Nehemiah recognized his sins and the sins of Israel, realizing their actions were wicked and they had not obeyed God's commands or laws. Before he offered up this part of the prayer, he acknowledged God for who He is and then asked Him to please be attentive to his prayer. Nehemiah was broken before God and sought after Him.

In Verses 8-9, Nehemiah reminded God, that He had said if the Israelites were unfaithful, they would be scattered among the nations, but if they returned to Him, He would bring all of His chosen people back to a place He had chosen as a dwelling for His name.

In Verses 10-11, he then asked and prayed for God to give him favor with the king.

Nehemiah prayed and sought God the entire time. Our daily life should consist of seeking God throughout every day. We should certainly all have a quiet time when we seek God daily. As we are at work, at school, on the ball field, or at home, we should be in a continual attitude of prayer, seeking God's direction and guidance.

Today, as you go about your day, seek God in prayer, always calling out to Him. As we will see with Nehemiah, He will answer. His answer may not come when we want it or hope it will, but God will answer.

Day 2

Read Nehemiah 2

God had raised Nehemiah up for this time. Verse 12 even says that God had put it in Nehemiah's heart to rebuild the walls. This was God's plan and Nehemiah had to be obedient. Can you imagine being in Nehemiah's shoes?

As Nehemiah entered the king's presence, the king realized that Nehemiah was sad and asked what was wrong with him. Again, Nehemiah prayed to God before asking the king to let him return to Jerusalem to build the walls. Nehemiah prayed when he was in need of courage to follow God's instructions. He prayed and God answered.

What about you? What has God raised you up for? Many of us already know some of the answers. Are you a husband? God has raised you up to love your wife as Christ loved the church; He has raised you up to be obedient. Are you a wife? God has raised you up to be loving and submissive to your husband. Are you a child or a teenager? God has raised you up to be obedient to your parents. God shows us clearly some of the things we are to do. However, as with Nehemiah, there are times that God reveals that He wants us to step out in faith. It can't be done on our own; we can't do it with our strength, and we certainly can't do it for selfish reasons. Maybe God has called you to teach, to preach, to be on mission with Him, to meet a need, or to be a friend to someone who is hurting. The list goes on and on! What has God called you to do and are you being obedient? Even when it gets hard, as it did for Nehemiah in Verse 20, trust that if this is what God sent you to do and you obey, He will lead you and grant you the success He has in mind. Again, what has God raised you up for?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Nehemiah 3

Nehemiah assigned each family to work on the part of the wall that was near their home. With families working near their home the wall would be completed. Each family contributed, doing their part. 400 years later, Jesus would walk along the walls they rebuilt and walk through the gates of Jerusalem they had repaired.

Today is our “CONNECT TO JESUS,” day. Am I showing and teaching Jesus in my home? Just as each family started rebuilding the wall closest to their home, we are to teach and show Jesus, first and foremost, to those with whom we live or those closest to us. This could be our spouse, kids, sisters, brothers, parents, friends, or neighbors.

Stop and think for a minute about this. What if every believer at Harp’s Fayetteville and Hollonville intentionally made Christ known, in every way possible, to their families and neighbors? What if you took advantage of every opportunity to make Christ known to your kids? For those that already know Jesus, do you look for opportunities to help them grow in their walk with Jesus? Several months ago, I began thinking about how weak we are on discipleship. We don’t intentionally teach our kids about the things of God. Teaching takes place with various life lessons, but intentionally sharing Jesus with our own family is what God desires. I decided to think about this in regards to my own family.

Several years ago, my son Landon, and I began a Thursday morning discipleship breakfast. We would eat at a fast food restaurant, and then take 5-10 minutes to read a scripture and talk about it. Just Landon and I. I have now begun the same with my daughter, Josie. This is a challenge for all of us. Landon and Josie often remind me on Wednesday night that the next day is our breakfast time together. This gives me the opportunity to teach, learn, and share the things of Jesus with my children.

Some of you are already doing this by using these devotions with your kids or families. If your kids are grown, who are you

discipling? Who is close enough in proximity to you that you can show the love of Jesus? Remember, it starts in our homes and then should move to our neighbors and beyond. Ask the question, “What am I doing so those closest to me learn about Jesus and connect to Him?”

Day 4

Read Nehemiah 4 and 6:15-16

God's people again faced opposition in building the wall. However, this time they didn't stop, they continued to build with people standing guard and watching for an attack from the enemy. Instead of cowering down and quitting because of adversities, they continued to do what God had told them to do.

As God's people we will face adversity. When trouble comes it may be from those outside of God's church, but we know it can come from the inside as well. No matter where it comes from, it can be difficult. God has called us to love Him and to love others while going and making disciples. As God leads you in this endeavor and shows you specific ways to make disciples, you should expect adversity. Anytime we hold God's Word in high esteem and follow Him, we may be questioned, mocked and ridiculed. When we are doing God's work, we can expect problems. We saw this in reading about Nehemiah and the rest of God's people who were building the wall. They faced adversity, but they put themselves in a position to keep going in spite of it because they were not doing the work of their own accord. They were doing the work that God had set before them.

The enemy uses adversity to get us down, discourage us, and hopefully, make us throw up our hands and quit. This is the time to cling to Jesus; trust the mission that He has you on. Remember, we don't always have to fight back or react to the opposition, we need to love and show Jesus and let God fight for us while we do our part seeking Him on our knees.

What adversity are you facing right now as you follow God? What roadblock or obstacle stands in front of you, making you want to quit? Is what you are doing God's plan and will? If so, then keep on. Don't throw in the towel and don't quit. Stand firm and remember the words of Joshua when He said, "*As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.*" Serve on. Don't give in to the enemy.

Day 5

Read Zechariah 3:8-10

We have seen Jesus throughout this Old Testament study in many ways. In Verse 8 of today's passage, we read again about Jesus being referred to as the branch. Remember, in several passages we have seen Jesus the Messiah, being referred to as the branch. We will also see this reference in the New Testament Study.

Each year, the Jews celebrate the Day of Atonement, in which they are reminded of their sins and that only God could cleanse them. Years before Jesus would come and die on the cross; Zechariah was speaking of the branch that would come, which is Jesus.

When Jesus came, He would pay for all of the sins of the world. Sins from before Jesus, sins from while Jesus walked the earth and all the sins that will ever be committed. No longer are sacrifices needed to cover sin. The blood of Jesus can take away or wash every sin once and for all. Those in the Old Testament were made right by putting their faith and hope in God and we are made right when we put our faith and hope in Jesus, the One who takes away all sins. Jesus would pay for the sins of all.

Thank God for Jesus, for what God has taught you, and for what He will continue to teach you.

WEEK 103 EZRA READS THE LAW-----Dennis Watson

The Book of Ezra picks up where 2 Chronicles leaves off and the Book of Nehemiah picks up where Ezra leaves off. Therefore, we have a nice flow of biblical history that moves from the captivity of God's people in Babylon to the defeat of Babylon by King Cyrus of Persia and his rise to power. The Lord stirred the heart of King Cyrus to begin releasing the people of God to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the temple. All through these historical events we see the hand of God.

Day 1

Read Ezra 1

Some seriously glorious dot connecting takes place in this account. Ezra opens up with what the book is all about—restoration of the worship of God in Jerusalem. The major feature in the account is the rebuilding of the temple. Right here, in the opening verses, there are some amazing prophecies being fulfilled.

It was King Cyrus of Persia who gave the order for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt. This might not seem like such a big deal, however, there are no random people and no random events written about in the Bible. There is, however, a sovereign God who is in control and is intentional about people and events. One hundred and fifty years before King Cyrus lived, God tells through the prophet Isaiah that He would use a future world leader to restore His people from captivity. He is mentioned by name. This would not be a random world leader, but a specific world leader called by name even before he was born! You can read about this in Isaiah 44:28-45:13. Now, here we are in Ezra, nearly two hundred years later, reading about that prophecy becoming a huge historical reality.

Now one more piece. Jeremiah speaks of the time that the people of Israel would be exiled in Babylon and when they would be released:

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you,

and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:10-13 (NKJV)

The event in Ezra of the rebuilding of the temple and the beginning of the return of the people to their homeland is not a random event. It was planned and purposed by God. He did not plan their exile directly. It was part of the deal. If they forsook God, then they would be taken out of the land. However, Jeremiah encouraged them early on in the exile, telling them it would end after seventy years. At the end of that time, they would return and the Lord would continue to bless them and their future.

Have you ever gone through a time which was so difficult that you wondered where God was? I am sure that was the case of the people in exile. Yet, God told them early on He was at work in all of this. Be encouraged. God will never leave you, nor will He forsake His own. He is at work even in the most difficult of times. He will finish and it will be good.

Day 2

Read Ezra 3

Chapter 1 is the decree by King Cyrus for the people to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the temple. Chapter 2 is a list of some of the people who returned. The lengthy list of names was to confirm those returning were true Israelites. We may see it as a struggle to read through, but for the returnees and those who would read it in the years to come, it was encouraging. There were a total of 42,360 Israelites who returned in this wave.

They set to work under the leadership of the Priest Jeshua, who was a descendant of Aaron. The civil leader was the Governor Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David. Keep in mind they had a great deal of work to do. They had a city to rebuild, a temple to rebuild, and a wall to build, but it looks like they got things in the right order. They had spent seventy years in captivity and had seen the temple destroyed because of their failure to serve and worship only the Lord. The first thing they did was build the altar of the God of Israel. Their first priority was to restore the true worship of God. Right off, *“The people gathered together as one man.”* The altar was built and the people made sacrifices to God and observed the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles was a time that the people built booths or tents and lived in them to commemorate the forty years their ancestors spent wandering in the wilderness.

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 6:33**, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* First because worshipping and knowing God is the top priority of all that we do. The people returning to Jerusalem were to build the city, the walls and the temple. Usually building a church would be the last thing to do, but these people had learned a lesson—God first! Their rebuilding and revival started with the altar. The altar was about worship and prioritizing God.

What is of first importance to you each day? Eighteenth century British Evangelist George Muller said, “The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord.” There it is, FIRST!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Ezra 7

Ezra was the author of Chapters 1- 6 as a historian. It is also believed he wrote the two books of Chronicles. The Book of Ezra picks up historically where 2 Chronicles ends. The first six chapters of Ezra deal with the building and dedication of the temple. In the first six chapters, Ezra is not mentioned by name. However, in the last four chapters, we read about the reforms and revival under Ezra's leadership.

When you think about reform and revival, the beginning place is the Word of God. Revival without the Word of Truth is just emotionalism and hype. True revival and transformation comes from the Word of God. James wrote about this:

“²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25 (NIV)

Think about this, Jesus is the Word of God who became flesh. He came so the Word of God could be in us. It is the Word, the living Word that enters into a person that brings ongoing revival and transformation. Paul encourages us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12). The Word of God addresses first of all the mind and then comes transformation.

This was the major work of Ezra. He was a historian but most importantly, he was a presenter of the Word of God. In **Ezra 7:10** we read about Ezra's commitment to the Word of God, *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*

The Life Application Bible says this about Ezra's ministry of the Word:

First, as a scribe, Ezra dedicated himself to carefully studying God's Word. Second, he intended to apply and obey personally the commands he discovered in God's Word. Third, he was committed to teaching others God's Word and its application to life.¹⁴

Ezra was used by God to lead a group out of captivity back into Jerusalem. They built the temple and Ezra was used by God to bring about revival and reform by way of the Word of God.

Please, let God's Word dwell in you richly every day.

¹⁴Life Application Study Bible

Day 4

Read Ezra 9

Some of the leaders brought a report to Ezra as to what had been happening since they had returned to Jerusalem. There had been intermarrying with the people who had been living in the area. God had forbidden this intermarrying because such relationships would turn the people's hearts away from God to worship false gods (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). It was bad enough the people had done this, but the report was that it was the leadership who were leading the way. The people in Ezra's day were following the same path as their ancestors. This path would result in being removed from the land if they did not repent.

Ezra was broken by the report and tore his clothes and pulled out some of his hair. This was a sign of brokenness and humility. Ezra was expressing sorrow and the desire to repent. He was sorrowful although he had not participated in their sin! The sin of a few impacts the whole. There were others who were in agreement with him about the situation.

Then, Ezra poured out his heart to the Lord in prayer. The major thrust of the prayer was corporate guilt. Ezra was not personally involved, but no nation can stand above the sin that affects the whole. Right now, in America, we are going through racial unrest as has happened so many times in our nation's history. We all need to acknowledge it is our sin. We all need to be broken and humbled and seek the Lord in repentance and obedience. It may not be your sin personally, but we must all seek the Lord for healing in our nation.

God in His grace and mercy had provided a remnant. A remnant is a small group out of a larger whole that God has used and will use to continue His plan. He did this many times with Israel after they rebelled and He judged them and He preserved for Himself a remnant to begin again.

Ezra knew the Lord and His Word. He saw where the people were in their disobedience and he cried out to the Lord. He taught the Word of God. He prayed the Word of God over the people. The Word of God brings conviction and sorrow for sin. The goal is repentance and turning to the Lord. Where are you? Are you living in belief, repentance and obedience?

Day 5

Read Ezra 10

While Ezra was crying out to the Lord and praying, the people of Israel gathered to Ezra and they, too, began weeping. The people, too, were broken over their sin. Shechaniah became the spokesman and acknowledged they had indeed sinned. They had mixed and mingled with the nations and had married them. The sin was blatant disobedience to God (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). God does not want any of His followers to be influenced toward idols or disobedience to Him. God is not opposed to interracial marriage! The warning in the New Testament is that believers are not to be yoked together with unbelievers. This is not a statement about marrying across racial or even national lines. This is about disobedience that would cause the people to turn from God. Paul also taught that a person who becomes a believer and their spouse does not, they are to continue to be married to them (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

There was an urgency for the people to confess their sin, repent and become obedient. Shechaniah confessed their sin and called for the people to enter into a covenant with God moving forward. His words in Verse 3 says there is something to do which will restore hope. They needed to deal with this sin. The call was to put away *“Pagan wives from the peoples of the land.”* He calls them to enter into a covenant with God to do just that. This was a huge and bold step! Yet, this is the case with sin. Confess your disobedience and turn in obedient repentance to the Lord. This is done much easier before you get way down the road with your sin. Keep short accounts. As soon as you realize you are out of step with God, return quickly and unwaveringly. It is easier and much more refreshing to take one step of return than to have to make a journey of miles. When the journey is the only way to return, then it must be made! Drastic times call for drastic steps. Because of years of disobedience, the return was going to be tough, but they committed to do it.

The people rallied together and the decree was made and the people agreed to, *“Make confession to the LORD God of your fathers,*

and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.” They were ready to be obedient. Judgement begins with the house of God. The names of the priests, Levites, singers and gatekeepers who led the way in the disobedience also now led the way in repentance and obedience. It was only when these leaders had dealt with their own sin that the whole people of God could move forward.

God is serious about sin! So serious that His Son Jesus became sin for us in order to make us the righteousness of God. Is there unconfessed, unrepentant sin in your life? Repent and return to the Lord in obedience.

WEEK 104 MALACHI-----Chris Watson

As was the case with most of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi was speaking on behalf of the Lord to God's people regarding their neglect of the things of God. They were not honoring marriage. They did not trust God's justice. They were robbing from God by not tithing. They neglected worship by just going through the motions. Much of what they were rebuked for troubles God's people today. Therefore, tune in. He is speaking to us.

Day 1

Read Malachi 1:1-5

Like all of the Bible, Malachi is first and foremost about God. We know nothing about Malachi except his name and its meaning. The name Malachi means "My Messenger." So, Malachi is God's messenger to deliver God's message to His people. The message was not unlike that of many of the other prophets. The people had been rescued by God, returned to the land and now had fallen into a time of cold, empty religious practices.

God's message to the people began with God telling the people of Israel that He loved them. Then the people responded pretty much with, "Oh, really, doesn't look like it." In the conversation, God brings up with the people, Israel, His relationship with the brothers Jacob and Esau. God demonstrates to them His love by saying, "*Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated.*" These brothers became two separate nations. Jacob became Israel and Esau became Edom. God is telling them that His love is seen in His selection of the people of Israel as His chosen people. To better understand this, consider this passage where Jesus is speaking to His disciples:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:26 (NKJV)

This does not mean that they were to break one of the Ten Commandments. The point is selection. When called upon to make a

a choice, choose God. God did not hate Esau or the Edomites. He rather chose Israel to be His special people through whom He would bring the promise of God and salvation to all the people of the world. God was saying that He loved them and proved it by making them His special people.

This choice had nothing to do with who they were or what they had done, but it had to do with who God was and what He had done.

The group Casting Crowns has a great song called, “Who Am I.” Here is the chorus:

Not because of who I am
But because of what you've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who you are

Listen to the song. You can find it on the internet. I love the song because it speaks of God’s incredible love for us only because of who He is and what He has done.

Moses asked that question, “who am I” in Exodus 3:11.

David asked it in 1 Samuel 18:18.

Solomon asked it in 2 Chronicles 2:6.

God chose these people to be used by Him because of His love.

That is what He was saying to them. I chose you. This is the proof of my love for you. Look at the chorus one more time. He has chosen you, not because of who you are or what you have done, but because of who He is and what He has done.

Day 2

Malachi 1:6-2:9

Do you enjoy your relationship with the Lord God? Does this sound like a strange question? Do you enjoy your relationship with your spouse, your children, other family members? It is not a joy if any of those become routine or boring. Routine worship for worship's sake is boring. If worshipping God becomes detached from the love relationship it is all downhill. It won't be too long before the fellowship is in jeopardy, but worse still, it may indicate that there was never a relationship.

God brought a charge against the people of Israel because their worship was boring and routine. They called the table of the Lord contemptible. They were bringing sacrifices to offer to the Lord which were stolen, blind, lame and sick. The sacrifices were to be the best of their animals. God asks if they would serve these kinds of animals to the governor. They lost the connection between sacrifices and worship. For them, the whole process was an inconvenient and uncomfortable mess. They had to kill the animals and spill the blood. It was just an interruption that was meaningless. The connection was God's plan to bless and liberate them from guilt. Tony Evans gives a great explanation:

“But, they had forgotten that the sacrificial system was God's gracious means of dealing with their sin so he could give them the provisions of his covenant. They were despising that which was the source of their life and blessing!”¹⁵

There was also an issue with the priests because they were not valuing the covenant God had made with the house of Levi. God made a covenant with Levi and his descendants that the priests would be blessed to perform priestly duties to care for the tabernacle and temple. This covenant had within it blessings from God and responsibilities for the priests. However, the priests were not

¹⁵ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda

honoring the Lord and they were corrupting the covenant with Levi. What God intended to be a blessing for the priests had become anything but a blessing. Because of the priests' sloppy work, their blessings would be cursed. It would be like eating your favorite meal, but there was no enjoyment. They had the blessing of God's call and covenant, but were not experiencing the blessing.

It is sad to see people who have the blessings of God on their lives, but they are not enjoying them. The blessings have been cursed because of merely going through the motions. God has more in store for His people. Don't let routine cause you to miss Him and His blessings.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Malachi 2:10-3:6

The history of the people of God in the Old Testament is filled with unfaithfulness regarding the institution of marriage. Malachi calls it “*Profaning the covenant of our fathers*” and that they had “*Profaned the Lord’s holy institution which He loves.*” This had been done by the people marrying the daughters of foreign gods. The Lord’s messenger is rebuking the people because they had violated the Lord’s instruction to not marry outside of the Jewish family because to do so would bring in the foreign false gods and idolatry. This is what Solomon did which turned his heart from God. They were doing this while they continued to bring their offerings. They were making a mockery of marriage, worship and they were crying at the altar making a show. Their offerings and tears were rejected because of their gross spiritual inconsistency. This sin is made even worse because the men were divorcing their Jewish wives to marry the foreigners, and God “hates divorce.” The people had dishonored God by dishonoring marriage.

In today’s reading, we see that they not only dishonored marriage, but they wearied the Lord (Verse 10) because they did not trust Him to be just. They believed God to be unfair. They were asking, “Where is the God of justice?” Who hasn’t asked a similar question when it appears the evil people are advancing and doing well and those who seek God’s righteousness are struggling to get by. I heard someone say recently that those who want God to get rid of evil are not considering the ramifications. Just say that the Lord was going to answer your prayer and that at midnight tonight all evil would be eradicated. Where do you think you will be a second after midnight? We are all sinners, none are righteous. These people who were asking God to be fair were themselves living double lives. They wanted God’s blessing but they were not seeking alignment with Him.

Basically, He tells them, “I will take care of this, I have a plan.” He will send His messenger, John the Baptist, who will preach a message of repentance. This must come to prepare the way for judgment which will prepare the way for God’s blessings. He will

bring judgment as a loving father disciplines his children and He will provide the blessing of the covenant. He then lets them know that He has not changed. In Him, is mercy and judgment. There is coming a time when both will be complete.

Justice and mercy were expressed at the cross when Jesus died to take our judgement and give us mercy in exchange. I do not want “fair” from God. I want what He has fully provided through Jesus who took my punishment and gave me grace and mercy. No, that’s not fair, and I am so thankful!

Day 4

Read Malachi 3:7-18

God invites the people to repent and return to Him. They ask how are they to return? This really means, “What did we do? We don’t need to return.” God then drops a bomb on them about robbing God. They did not think they were robbing from Him. He tells them they had been robbing Him by not tithing. What a surprise that must have been, but not really. They knew they had been withholding the tithe or at best skimping. Do you know if you are tithing or not? Of course you do. A tithe is ten percent of your income. It belongs to God. It is His. If you are not tithing, then you, like these people in Malachi, are robbing God. What is the remedy? TITHE! The word is a noun sometimes and sometimes it is a verb. It is something you do out of trust and obedience. Sadly, the stats indicate that about twenty percent of the people in a church support the work of the church with their tithes. The others are robbing God. This does not sound good. But here is what research says:

Christians are giving at 2.5% of income; during the Great Depression it was 3.3%. Only 3-5% of Americans who give to their local church do so through regular tithing. When surveyed, 17% of Americans state that they regularly tithe. For families making \$75k+, 1% of them gave at least 10% in tithing. (nonprofitssource.com)

God challenges us to put Him to the test. “Try me,” He says. He wants to demonstrate His ability to take care of you.

In the second part of our passage, we see a group of people who truly fear the Lord and have a real and meaningful relationship with Him. I see this group as those who enjoy the Lord and enjoy being His people. The people described in the above section, and through most of Malachi, were people who endured the Lord and found the relationship with Him as being something to be tolerated. The group who enjoyed the Lord were heard by Him and He enjoyed them. This group clearly loves and serves God and enjoys doing so because of His love for them and the relationship they have.

So which are you? Are you enduring the Lord and going through the motions, or, are you enjoying the Lord and finding great joy and fulfillment in serving Him? You are one or the other. Which one describes you? Pray that you will enjoy Him and enjoy serving Him all the time.

Day 5

Read Malachi 4 and Matthew 11:9-11

For the believer in Jesus Christ who is living expectantly, the words, “*For behold, the day is coming*” evoke great excitement and anticipation. Scripture often speaks of “*The day*” and “*The day of the Lord*” which refer to God’s intervention in history and ultimately to His bringing history to its glorious climax. God has taken steps within history to make things right and to direct history to His plan. In this, we see that God is sovereign. This means God is in control and governs all things.

Tony Evans puts it this way:

“There is absolutely nothing that happens anywhere, anytime, anyhow that God does not either cause or allow. He’s not only God of the big stuff but also of the tiny details, as well. In fact, there is not a single hair that falls from your head of which he is not intimately aware.”¹⁶

Here Malachi is speaking of end time events or eschatology. This “day” is the time that Jesus will bring history to its glorious climax.

“¹But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ²For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. ³For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.”

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 (NKJV)

When Jesus comes at the end of all things He will come and judge and will settle all accounts. Those who have not trusted Jesus Christ will experience eternal judgement. But those who have

¹⁶ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda

received Him will experience His healing and will be set free to run and frolic like calves being set free from the stall.

The Old Testament ends here anticipating the wonderful promises of God to bring healing and restoration of broken relationships. Then comes what has been called the silent years when there is no revelation from God for four hundred years. But when it comes it opens up with the work of the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel told Zachariah that his son John would *“Also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* **(Luke 1:17 (NKJV))**

This was applied to John the Baptist. Prophecy about him and his work closes out the Old Testament and opens up the New Testament. Remember, we are connecting the dots!

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