

TODAY^{IN THE} **WORD**[®]

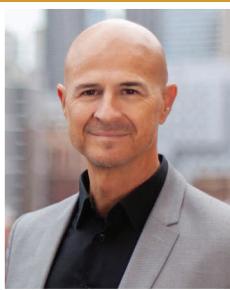
A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

JOURNEY THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT



todayintheword.org

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Keystone Habits

Bold Steps with Dr. Mark Jobe

For the Christian, it's critical to develop godly habits that will help us grow, because spiritual growth doesn't happen automatically.

It's January, which means many of us are desperately trying to stick to an ambitious New Year's resolution. We make grand plans to lose weight, exercise more, or get on a budget, but we often find that these goals are hard to turn into daily actions. In fact, one survey I found said that 80 percent of resolutions don't even stick until February!

I believe that resolutions succeed only if they're attached to a habit. Habits are formed through conditioning, when a behavior is learned through reinforcement. And once habits are created, it's harder to let them fall to the wayside. For the Christian, it's critical to develop godly habits that will help us grow, because spiritual growth doesn't happen automatically. The apostle Paul, writing to the younger Timothy, said, "Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:7–8).

In Romans 12:2, Paul says that cultivating godly habits keeps us on the right path: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." We renew our minds through "keystone habits,"

such as reading your Bible, having daily devotions, or engaging God through prayer. Those things take effort. But building your life around these key habits, rather than fitting them in when we can, lays the path for joy as we grow in knowledge and holiness and become more like Jesus.

This year, I'd love for you to join me in developing two keystone habits of the Christian life: Bible reading and prayer. Acts 2:42 describes the early believers who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Reading the Bible and using a devotional, such as *Today in the Word*, can help transform an occasional practice into a daily habit. Spending regular time in God's Word teaches us Who God is and what He expects from us. We deepen our relationship with Him and strengthen our spiritual muscles.

We are also called to be men and women of prayer. Prayer is the bridge between God and His people. It is an intimate and personal communication between us and God where we express our daily need for Him. Ask God to help you pursue these two keystone habits in 2026! ■



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on Moody Radio**

BOLD STEPS®
with Dr. Mark Jobe

TODAY IN THE WORD®

Journey Through the Old Testament

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

—Genesis 12:3

Each fall, students file into Dryer Auditorium on the campus of Moody Bible Institute to begin a yearlong survey of the Bible. Over the course of nine months, they will read every book of the Old and New Testaments and consider how God's masterful plan of salvation history plays across its pages.

As this year begins, I invite you to challenge yourself by engaging with a devotion from almost every book of the Old Testament. For the next two months, we will join the students at Moody as we learn to see God's hand at work in the history and delight in His aim to draw all nations to Himself!

Your devotional author,



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Genesis: Beginning of the Story

Read Genesis 1:1–31

God created mankind in his own image . . . male and female he created them.—Genesis 1:27

The beginning of a story sets the stage for what is to come. It is where we are introduced to the characters and where seeds of conflict are sown. For the first two months of this year, we will do a fast, fly-over study of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. While we cannot cover every moment or book of the Bible at such a fast pace, we hope you gain a broad understanding of the complete story from start to finish.

Let's start in the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (v. 1). God spoke and the universe came to be. He filled the space with living things, the best of which were humans, male and female, more like Him than the animals. These individuals were "made in the image of God (v. 27), that is to say, they represented Him on earth. They were given authority to rule and enabled to make decisions that would reflect their Creator. To be made in God's image is a fact that has awesome consequences for the story

of the Bible. This passage explains why human beings have such value in God's eyes. Every person is an image bearer!

As the story continues, these image bearers will disobey and suffer devastating consequences (2:11–19). But God will forgive and cover them (2:21) and institute plan to undo the effects of their disobedience. He promised that a future Image Bearer would defeat evil (Col. 1:15). The hope of this promise, made at the very beginning of the Bible, is the thread that binds the entire story of Scripture together. As the scope of humankind's disobedience is made plain, the scope of God's plan to restore His relationship with His image bearers becomes even more grand. What a wonderful God we love!

Go Deeper

What do you appreciate about God in the first three chapters of Genesis? Start your year of reading the Bible with delight in the God of promise!

Pray with Us

From the very first words of the Bible, we face the beautiful image of You, Lord, as Creator, and of humanity as Your image bearers. What a privilege! May we walk worthy of Your image You've imprinted on us!

Genesis: Promise to Abraham

Read Genesis 15:1–20

*On that day the LORD made
a covenant with Abram.—Genesis 15:18*

Have you ever used the “pinch and open” method to zoom in on a picture on your cell phone? Today, we will zoom in on one man, Abram, and his relationship with the God of creation.

In Genesis 12, God made Abram a promise. He told this man, older and childless, that he would have many descendants who would inherit the land of Canaan. More importantly, God promised that Abram would be a source of blessing to the whole world. And Abram believed Him!

Often students of the Bible use the word *covenant* to describe a promise made by God to a specific person or people. While the idea of such a promise, or agreement, is not unique to God (people make covenants with each other too), God’s covenant is special because His character is perfect. He will never change His mind, change the deal, or go back on His word. The covenant God made with Abraham involved promises that would have long reaching implications.

To Abram, a man without children into his 90s, and his wife Sarai, the promise of many children sounded preposterous. Yet their descendants, the Jewish people, would become the focus of God’s plan of redemption. Inheriting the land of Canaan was also difficult to imagine as they had spent their entire lives in tents without a land of their own. Yet in due time their descendants would move into Canaan and settle there. Finally, the idea that the whole world would be blessed by one of his descendants was incredible. When the time was right, God brought Jesus into the world, a son of Abraham, to save the world (Matt. 1:1). The Abrahamic covenant is a foundation of our faith!

Go Deeper

What promise did God give to Abram? Do you trust that the God of the Bible will fulfill the promises He has made to you in His Word? If you trust in Jesus, you are a beneficiary of the promise to Abram.

Pray with Us

Dear God, thank You for Your promises to Abraham, and thank You that we are the beneficiaries of these promises in Christ. Teach us how to follow You with courage and conviction. Give us the faith of Abraham!

Exodus: God Makes a Promise

Read Exodus 6:1–8

I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.—Exodus 6:5

If you've ever told a child, "I know I promised, but . . ." you probably remember their look of suspicious disappointment. The next time you said, "I promise," you knew they might not believe you. As we turn to the book of Exodus, we come to an important event that shows us why we can always trust God's promises. Seeing this clearly displayed in the Old Testament increases our ability to trust God today.

Approximately 400 years after God made a covenant with Abram, He fulfilled that promise by bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Exodus describes this as God remembering His covenant (v. 5). Now let's be clear, God doesn't "remember" because He forgot. While He may take His time, He always "remembers." But from Israel's perspective, it must have felt like God had forgotten them! Imagine waiting for 400 years to see if God would do what He promised. This feeling would have become more pronounced as the Egyptians began to enslave the Israelites. Forced to

do hard labor, they suffered greatly. Then, as their population increased, they faced genocidal threats (Ex. 1:22). But in His time, God decided to take action. He had witnessed the oppression of His people at the hand of the Egyptians (6:6). He would free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt with powerful demonstrations of His might (v. 6). He did this because he made a covenant with Abraham and reaffirmed it to his descendants (v. 8).

The exodus proved that God's promises can always be trusted. This is important because God has made promises to everyone who trusts in Him. He promises that He will deliver us from bondage to sin (Acts 26:18). It may take a lifetime, but He will do it as He promised!

Go Deeper

Have you grown weary of waiting for God to deliver you? Have you struggled to remain confident that He has not forgotten you? How does this passage in Exodus increase your confidence in God's promises?

Pray with Us

Father, what a joy it is to know that Your promises are faithful and true! You delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and You deliver us from slavery to sin. We praise you today. Hallelujah!

Exodus: Fellowship Requires Change

Read Exodus 19:1–25

*The people responded together,
“We will do everything the LORD has said.”—Exodus 19:8*

When someone moves to a new location, they often need instructions on how to fit in. There are customs, expectations, and ways of thinking that might need to be adjusted for the newcomer to enjoy fellowship with this new community. In the same way, Israel needed to learn how to live God's way.

God brought Israel out of Egypt so they could be free to worship Him and enjoy His fellowship. But to be in that kind of relationship, they would need to become the kind of people who could enjoy a holy God (v. 6). So, He took the initiative to prepare them. Step one: teach Israel what holiness looks like.

After the Exodus, God met the nation at Mt. Sinai (v. 1) and gave instructions on how they should live. We first encounter these teachings in the book of Exodus. The purpose of these “rules” was to prepare Israel to be the kind of people who would enjoy fellowship with God. These instructions reflect His character. If

the people want to be with Him, they must understand what He is like and change appropriately. They needed to become more like Him.

How could a mass of human beings who had lived without God's revelation for 400 years attain that standard? God didn't leave them to guess or figure it out on their own. Instead, He clearly told them how to behave. In the Ten Commandments and the many other instructions we find in Exodus, He taught Israel to value what He valued. He expected them to change the way they thought and acted (23:13). It is important to realize He was not imposing rules for His sake. Rather, He was showing them His character for their sake, so they could have fellowship with Him. Not surprisingly, they agreed to do it (19:8).

Go Deeper

How have your values changed to be like the values of the Lord with whom you fellowship? Do you take delight in the things that delight Him?

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, teach us how to know You better and to long for fellowship with You every day. Teach us to love what You love, to value what You value, and to delight in Your holy presence.

Leviticus: God Forgives

Read Leviticus 5:14–19

In this way the priest will make atonement for them for any of these sins they have committed, and they will be forgiven.—Leviticus 5:13

At most places of employment there are rewards for success: public recognition, a raise, maybe a promotion. And when a job is done poorly, the penalties are equally clear. But what happens when someone repents, apologizes, and commits to do better? Will their employer forgive them or write them off as a liability? How many times can they be forgiven before their prospects for advancement are diminished?

At Mt. Sinai, God reminded Israel that He knew they would disobey. They had already done so several times, and He knew they would do so again. So, He created a system that would allow them to confess their sin, receive forgiveness, and find their way back to fellowship with Him. Leviticus describes a series of sacrifices that Israelites could offer, which would help them express their desire to be close to God.

The Guilt Offering was about covering sin (v. 15). This sacrifice was an act of worship, a way for an Israelite to humbly declare his love for God by acknowledging he had done wrong.

The act of confession was not about informing God; He already knew the Israelite had sinned. Rather, confession required sacrifice, in this case a ram without defect (v. 15). This was a physical act that provided the Israelites an opportunity to acknowledge that sins needed to be covered and to receive the comfort of knowing God had forgiven them. It cost something.

Sin is not without cost; it mars relationships. And because God loved Israel, He offered forgiveness so they could enjoy Him. Centuries later the Psalmist would express his delight when he said, “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” (Ps. 32:1). Later still, God would offer the final sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, and make a way for our sins to be covered!

Go Deeper

Have you experienced God’s forgiveness? Describe a time when you experienced His love and restoration. What was the cost of your sin?

Pray with Us

The book of Leviticus shows us from ages past what a merciful God You are. From the system of sacrifices to the ultimate sacrifice of Your Son, You are the God who forgives. We rejoice in Your salvation!

Numbers: God Punishes

Read Numbers 11:1–35

The anger of the LORD burned against the people.—Numbers 11:33

Each year I get the privilege of welcoming freshman students to the Moody Bible Institute. In those first weeks they want to know what they are required to do for class. They also want to know the consequences if they fail to do what they are supposed to do. As we turn to the book of Numbers, we learn that disobedience to God carries consequences. While we have just learned that God provided a way for forgiveness, we also know that God is willing to hold the line even if it means punishing His people. This is a significant theme in the Bible.

After meeting God at Mt. Sinai, the nation made its way to the land God had promised. Along the way He tested them to see if they would obey Him. Often their living circumstances were difficult. They were in a desert without the food and comforts Egypt had provided. Often, they complained bitterly (v. 4). Ironically, they forgot they were slaves in Egypt!

On their desert journey, God had provided miraculous food in the form

of manna (v. 9). Still, they complained. We see that, more than just a sign of displeasure, their complaining signified a deep spiritual problem. They refused to trust that God would bring them to the promised land. They doubted He would care for them. They even suspected He meant ill for them. All of these were deeply displeasing to God. He made promises to them based on His character. Their behavior implied He was unreliable. They were committing the sin of unbelief (Heb. 3:19).

As tragic as these narratives are, they taught Israel and teach Bible readers today an important lesson: God judges unbelief. We learn that unbelief, like other sins, has consequences. God has made promises to you. Trust Him!

Go Deeper

Why did the Israelites complain? How did their complaints signify unbelief? Have you struggled to believe God's promises? Recommit yourself to believing His promises today.

Pray with Us

As we move to the book of Numbers, we receive a somber warning about the sin of unbelief. Almighty God, may we never forget that Your mercy and forgiveness go together with judgment. Teach us to trust You completely.

Deuteronomy: God Reaffirms His Love

Read Deuteronomy 8:1–20

Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him.—Deuteronomy 8:6

When a child heads off to college it is easy for parents to get anxious. They wonder, is my child ready? Will they succeed? Will the trauma of the teenage years wear off so our relationship can be normal again? Wise parents take time to prepare their child for the big change. As the Book of Deuteronomy opens, Israel is poised to enter the land God had promised them. But the journey had not been easy. What should have been a brief journey took 40 years because of Israel's disobedience at Kadesh Barnea (see Num. 14:33). Despite this, God had brought them through. As they awaited the command to cross over, God took time to prepare them by reaffirming His covenant with them.

These people were the offspring of the men and women who had met with God at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:22). They were too young to understand the special relationship God had with the nation. As they prepared to inherit this land, they needed to be reminded of who they were, who God is, and what He expected of them.

First and foremost, they needed to do carefully what God commanded (8:1). Doing so would enable them to enjoy the land He had promised. To help them obey, God instructed them to remember how He loved them by caring for them in the wilderness (v. 2). Those days were indeed difficult, but God used those trials to train them for their own good (v. 3). He had also provided for them miraculously (v. 4). Even the times of discipline were for their development (v. 5). He concludes by describing the benefits of obedience. They would enjoy a land filled with abundance (v. 9). But they would need to be on guard, for abundance could breed a different kind of unbelief (v. 10)!

Go Deeper

Has abundance or good times ever decreased your dependence on God? Why do you think that happens? How can we remember God during bad times and good?

Pray with Us

We praise You, Lord, for Your love for us, in good times and in times of trials and hardships. Your faithful love endures forever! It accompanied the Israelites in Deuteronomy, and it guides our steps today.

Joshua: Mission Accomplished

Read Joshua 23:1–16

Not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.—Joshua 21:45

Think about the last time you completed a significant project. Do you remember the feeling? Do you remember the moments when you almost quit? Do you remember the little victories along the way that kept you going? Finally, you arrived at the finish line!

When Israel crossed the Jordan River into the land God had promised them, they were at the finish line of a journey that had taken 40 years and two generations. But because the land was inhabited, Israel would have to drive out the people who lived there. God was punishing the Canaanites and using Israel to do it. He was making sure the land would be a safe place where His people could thrive.

While the Canaanite coalition had been defeated, many of them remained in the land and represented a significant temptation for Israel. So, with his final words Joshua encouraged the people to remember that God fulfilled everything He promised them (23:14). They should remain loyal to Him with all their hearts!

He warned them against making alliances with the Canaanites who remained (v. 12). These alliances were often sealed with marriages, which meant Israelite families would be merged with Canaanite families. Often this meant that the people of God would worship the gods of the Canaanites. The result of this behavior would be that Israel would not enjoy the land (v. 13).

As the curtain closed on the book of Joshua, the nation stood at a crossroad. Their next steps were critical. Would they follow through on the victories that had brought them control of the land by remaining faithful to God, or would they give in to the temptation and ally themselves with the Canaanites?

Go Deeper

Why was the entry into the promised land such a significant crossroads for Israel? What is the danger for us when we experience victory? How can we avoid letting our guard down at those moments?

Pray with Us

Almighty God, thank You for the encouragement from Joshua, which resonates in our hearts centuries later: "Not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed" (Joshua 23:14).

Judges: Chaos and Kindness

Read Judges 2:10–23

The LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.—Judges 2:16

Experts in financial investing understand that investor memory is not to be relied upon. Investors tend to downplay or even forget downturns in the market and remember very clearly the upswings with exciting returns. We tend not to learn from the pain. The book of Judges can feel a lot like those financial markets. The nation swung from times of obedience and victory to times of disobedience and suffering. Their situation reflected the forgetfulness of people and their need for a strong, godly leader. They didn't learn from the pain; someone would have to guide them.

When Joshua died, no national leader emerged to shepherd the nation, and they lost spiritual momentum. They failed to drive the Canaanites out and instead became like them! God disciplined Israel by empowering their enemies. The discipline had its intended effect; the people turned to God and begged for help. God raised up judges, who led them to victory and a time of righteousness (v. 16). But when the

judge died, like a forgetful investor, they forgot the bad times and turned from the Lord again and again.

Turning from the Lord meant following other gods, serving and even worshiping them (v. 19). As expected, their disobedience provoked the Lord to anger, and He declared that He would not drive out the Canaanites before them. Instead, they would remain as a test for Israel (v. 22). It was a test they would often fail. But during this difficult time, there were some Israelites who dedicated themselves to obeying the Lord and following His commands. An example is given in the book of Ruth. We are reminded that following God takes sacrificial commitment, and the blessings God showered upon the faithful are worth the sacrifice!

Go Deeper

Have you minimized the effects of sin in your life? Have you forgotten what life apart from God looks like? Take time to remind yourself of your need to remain close to Him.

Pray with Us

Merciful Father, we receive Your somber warning today about the deadly power of sin in our lives. May we stay close to You and to Your faithful love, we pray.

1 and 2 Samuel: Israel Wants a King

Read 1 Samuel 8:4–22

*Then we will be like all the other nations,
with a king to lead us.—1 Samuel 8:20*

We live in a culture characterized by self-sufficiency. We don't like to ask for help. Have a problem? Get an answer in an instant from the computer. But what if the problem is something that can't be solved with the collected wisdom of the internet? In that case we need a better source.

As the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel open, Israel is in a tough spot. Harassed by her enemies, the nation needed to make a change. God raised up one last judge, Samuel, to lead them to victory and to guide them back to righteousness (1 Sam. 7:6). But righteousness is hard work. What if there could be a way to guarantee victory while avoiding righteousness? Israel looked at how the other nations did things and said, "Give us a king to lead us" (v. 6).

On the surface, their request seemed innocent enough. God had permitted Israel to have a king in the Law (Deut. 17:14–21). The problem was *why* they wanted a king. They wanted

a king who would do the things God had promised to do for them (1 Sam. 8:20)! God had already promised to defend, lead them, and fight for them if they obeyed him. He also promised to fight against them if they disobeyed! What Israel wanted was security without righteousness. They wanted the blessings of obedience without the commitment that obedience requires. In this way they rejected God from being king over them. They turned Him into their employee, rather than submit to Him as their ruler.

So, God gave them the kind of king they asked for—Saul, and he proved to be a failure. Later, God would give them the kind of king they should have asked for, David. He proved to be a leader who, although not perfect, led Israel in righteousness.

Go Deeper

Why did Israel want a king? What does it mean to want security without righteousness? Why does that fail?

Pray with Us

Oh Lord, how often we want the security of Your protection without true commitment, and Your blessings without true obedience. By Your Spirit, keep us away from disobedience, hypocrisy, and shallow faith.

1 and 2 Kings: Leadership Fails

Read 1 Kings 14:7–16

You have done more evil than all who lived before you.—1 Kings 14:9

When experiments go wrong, it can be an opportunity for learning. Thomas Edison famously quipped, “I have not failed. I’ve found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” But when a failed experiment doesn’t provoke change, there is no progress. We must learn from our mistakes, or we will repeat them.

Israel had received the king they desired. They followed the example of the nations around them, raising up leaders that valued power, wealth, and influence. But God desired a different kind of kingship, one that valued obedience, righteousness, and humility.

Time and time again, the nation followed leaders who chose a worldly path and led the nation away from God. Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, set the standard for wickedness. He was given his throne by God, yet when he came to power he quickly gave in to ungodly fear and set up idols to worship, and the nation followed him (v. 9)!

The kings of Israel, like the judges, were supposed to lead the

nation closer to the Lord. Instead, Jeroboam led them astray. Judgment came swiftly, “You have aroused my anger and turned your back on me,” God said. He declared that the nation would go into exile for what Jeroboam did (v. 15).

One would expect the nation to learn from this disastrous experiment and turn to God in repentance and righteousness, but they did not. The rest of the books of 1 and 2 Kings detail the repeated failures of Israel leaders and the failure of the people to reject wicked leadership. What would come of the promise to Abraham to bless the nation? Could there ever be a king who could lead the nation like David did? The failures of kingship created an expectation for the one King who would light the world.

Go Deeper

Why do we often repeat the same sinful behaviors over and over? What can we learn from today’s reading that might help us learn and improve?

Pray with Us

As we read about the failed leadership of Israel’s kings in 1 and 2 Kings, we long even more for the true King, the Savior, the Light of the world. Come, Lord Jesus!

1 and 2 Chronicles: God Has a Plan

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15–23

*I will hear from heaven,
and I will forgive their sin.—2 Chronicles 7:14*

If you own stock in a company, you are keenly aware of one thing: If the company goes out of business, your dividends disappear. You can't expect to be paid when the company that is supposed to pay you no longer exists!

God made promises of forgiveness to Israel, but at the end of 1 and 2 Kings the nation was in exile. Had God gone out of business? What happened to the promises He made? The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles *retell* the story of God's people in light of their *return* from exile. More than a repetition of 1 and 2 Kings, Chronicles allows us to re-read this part of their story with the knowledge that God brought them back, just as He promised. These books show that God planned to save enough Israelites who would return and reconstitute the nation decades after they went to Babylon. In His wisdom, He coordinated the collapse of the Babylonian empire (Jer. 25:11–12), and orchestrated the rise of Cyrus, king of Persia (Isa. 44:28). It was God's plan all along, and He was faithful to complete it.

But more important than this change in their physical circumstances was a change in their spiritual condition. God used the exile to lead Israel back to Himself for forgiveness. Their restoration to the land would coincide with their restoration to faithfulness, and it started with the rebuilding of the House of the Lord (2 Chron. 36:23). The Temple was the focus of Israelite worship. It was the place where God promised to meet His people, receive their sacrifices, and forgive their sins! In raising up Cyrus to rebuild the Temple, God began with what mattered most: returning His people to Himself. Solomon's prayer (2 Chron. 7:14) anticipated that Israel would always find their God in business, ready to forgive them when they turned to Him.

Go Deeper

Are you having a difficult time accepting God's forgiveness? Turn to promises He made to His people and remind yourself that He has a plan. In Christ He has forgiven you!

Pray with Us

King Jesus, we pray that Your wonderful promises of forgiveness and restoration will spur us to seek a closer communion with You. Our hearts are full of gratitude. Thank You for Your salvation!

Ezra: Back to Basics

Read Ezra 7:1–10

*Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed,
let it be done with diligence.—Ezra 7:23*

In the classic film *The Princess Bride*, the swashbuckling Inigo Montoya tries to restart his life after the failed kidnapping of Princess Buttercup. “When the job went wrong, you went back to the beginning,” he reminded his leader. Israel went wrong and they ended up in exile. In the book of Ezra, the people could return! But after 70 years, what kind of nation would they build? Ezra, a teacher who returned with the nation, showed them the way. They needed to go back to basics.

Ezra understood that if they were going to rebuild their nation in a way that would honor God, they needed to know and obey the Law of God. For the nation of Israel, the beginning started with the Law of Moses.

Centuries before, God had made a covenant with Israel. That covenant included many things they needed to obey. Now given a second chance, Ezra made it his aim to set the nation on the right footing. He was a man who “devoted himself to the study

and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel (v. 10).

Although Israel had endured seventy years of exile, Ezra understood that God had not changed. Therefore, those who wanted to be in a right relationship with Him needed to return to His word.

Centuries have come and gone since Jesus Christ walked this earth and proclaimed the good news of salvation. If people today want to build, or rebuild, their lives in a way that pleases God, they need to return to the simple message that Jesus proclaimed from the beginning: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 3:2). There is no need to search for a new message, go back to the beginning.

Go Deeper

What basics did you understand when you first became a Christian? What might you need to return to today?

Pray with Us

Father, show us what lessons we need to learn from the book of Ezra. May we follow Ezra’s example of coming back to You and Your Word. May we learn from this godly leader how to serve You with diligence!

Nehemiah: Rebuilding the Nation

Read Nehemiah 2:1–20

The gracious hand of my God was on me. —Nehemiah 2:8

What kind of work is most valuable in the eyes of God? Some people think that the kind of work God most values is ministry. That assumption can leave many with the sense that the work they do every day has little value beyond a paycheck. Are those in ministry the only ones storing up treasure in heaven? Nehemiah suggests that is not the truth.

While Ezra returned and set his focus on restoring obedience to the Law in Israel, Nehemiah faced a different problem. A high-ranking official in the court of Persian king Artaxerxes, Nehemiah was in a key position of influence (Neh. 1:11). So, when he received a report that Jerusalem was defenseless and in a state of disrepair, he sprang into action. “I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem” (v. 12). Nehemiah did not make a distinction between spiritual and earthly work. He understood that work can be spiritual when the motive is right.

Nehemiah recognized that he had a promise from the Lord that he could claim. God promised He would send Israel into exile if they disobeyed Him, but He also promised to bring them back and restore them to their place if they repented (Neh. 1:9). Israel was back in the land, but it didn’t appear they would thrive because a city without walls is vulnerable. So, the official prayed for favor with the king to start a construction project! He then relocated to Israel to oversee the work. Some might consider this kind of work of lesser value than more spiritual work, but that’s not how God saw it. When the king granted his request, Nehemiah noted it was “because the gracious hand of my God was on me” (v. 8).

Go Deeper

Do you ever wonder about the value your work has to God? Why was Nehemiah’s work so significant? How did he honor God with his efforts?

Pray with Us

Father God, help us to discern and then follow Your plan and purpose for our lives, not our own ambitions. Teach us to always seek You in our journey on this earth.

Esther: God's Mysterious Way

Read Esther 4:9–17

*I will go to the king, even though it is against the law.
And if I perish, I perish.—Esther 4:16*

While a large contingent of Jewish people returned to their homeland, many remained in exile where the kings of Babylon and Persia had taken them. Some exiles rose to positions of authority and power and made lives for themselves in foreign lands. Most importantly, they remained committed to the God of Israel. They refused to give in to the practices and customs of the people among whom they lived, even when it meant persecution.

Esther was one individual who faced persecution. Married against her will to the king of Persia, she found herself in a position of dubious influence. Her people were under threat of annihilation, and she was the only one who could do something about it by speaking to the king about the matter in an official capacity.

Esther knew that approaching the king brought great risk; she could be killed for breach of protocol (v. 11). But she had great faith, believing that the God of Israel was not bound by borders, procedure, or protocol! Gathering the Jewish community in

Susa she invited them to fast, which often was accompanied by prayer. She would entrust herself to God as she took a risk for His people. Her declaration, “If I perish, I perish” (v. 16), should not be interpreted as a nihilistic expression of defeat. Rather, it was an expression of faith that, having done all she could, she was now entrusting herself to her God who controls all things.

Esther’s commitment was rewarded. The king looked upon her with favor and granted her requests. God delivered the Jewish community from certain death and destroyed their enemies in dramatic fashion. “For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor . . . and many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them” (8:16–17).

Go Deeper

What can we learn from Esther?
How can you apply her courage and act of faith to a difficult situation you are facing?

Pray with Us

Holy God, May Esther’s courage and faith inspire us to be brave and faithful through all the twists and turns of our destiny. Teach us to walk worthy of Your kingdom!

Job: Poise in Pain

Read Job 1:1–22

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.—Job 1:22

Have you ever questioned God? When something terrible happens to us, we may wonder if we can ask God hard questions. The short answer is, yes. But we also don't want to cross into sinfully accusing God. We must ask, *Is my question a real question or an accusation? Has God already given me an answer that I just don't like, or am I genuinely confused about what He is doing?*

The first chapter of Job is a case study in tragedy. Job had lost everything: children, wealth, property, status. Yet, Job was known to be a man of God, blameless and upright (Job 1:1). The question is one we all face, why do bad things happen to people who love and follow God?

Job was experiencing unbelievable suffering. But his first step took him to the feet of God. In an attitude of worship, Job reminded himself of two things he knew to be true: people arrived into the world without anything, and they leave without anything (v. 21). Furthermore,

God can give blessings and take them away: “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (v. 21).

Note that Job did not accuse God of maliciousness. However, he did express anger at God. He did not withdraw from God because he lost trust in Him. Instead, he took a step closer to the One who controls all things. In this, Job showed us how to suffer. There is little value in charging God with wrongdoing when we face difficulty. Like Job, we don't have all the facts (Job 42:1–3). However, we should lament to the One who holds the answers, the One who controls all things.

Go Deeper

Are you facing a difficult situation? Have you considered the relative weakness of your power when compared to God's? While you may not understand what He is doing, that doesn't change His position or love for you.

Pray with Us

Lord, how do we go through the inevitable suffering of this life? In the book of Job, You showed us how. Despite all his trials, anger, and confusion, Job didn't sin against You. Thank You for Job's honesty and faith!

Psalms: Expressing Emotion

Read Psalm 100:1–5

*Worship the **LORD** with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.—Psalm 100:2*

Have you ever wanted to express your feelings to someone but couldn't find the right words? Maybe you stood in the greeting card aisle hunting for the perfect card to express what was in your heart. When you found the right card, did you feel a sense of thankfulness for the person who wrote it? Probably not, but you should! They helped you express what you could not on your own. In many ways, the Psalms function the same way.

The speaker invites his readers to express themselves to God aloud, joyfully, and with gladness (vv. 1–2)! As C. S. Lewis noted, “The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.” The writer of this psalm cannot stop himself from rejoicing and invites others to do the same.

The speaker declares that Yahweh, their god, is God (v. 3). In a world where every nation worshiped their own god, the Psalmist wanted Israelite

worshipers to remember that they were the only ones worshiping in light of reality (John 4:23). He continued with more cause for rejoicing: God made them, and, as a result, they belonged to Him (v. 3). Like sheep who belong to a shepherd, they were protected, fed, and cared for by God. With these images in mind, the speaker invited listeners to enter the city of God with thankfulness for who He is and how He behaves towards them. He is good and He loves with a love that will never fade (v. 5)!

Sometimes we find emotions hard to express. The grind of life dulls our spiritual senses. We may approach worship with lips weighed down. The psalms can help us express what we really feel. Shout for joy! God made you and loves you. You belong to Him.

Go Deeper

Do you find it difficult to express the emotions you feel toward the Lord? How can reading or praying through the psalms help us in that regard?

Pray with Us

Jesus, as we “fly over” the psalms today, we can’t help but be drawn into joyfully praising You together with the Psalmists. Your “love endures forever,” Your “faithfulness continues through all generations” (Ps. 100:5).

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: Wisdom

Read Proverbs 1:1–7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.—Proverbs 1:7

I serve as president of a small public charity that gives scholarships to undergraduate students. Recently one recipient wrote a letter of thanks, saying: “I am grateful for your investment in my career, and it won’t go to waste.” Then he quoted Proverbs 14:23, “All hard work brings a profit.”

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are two books of the Bible considered wisdom literature. Both books offer important observations about God and humanity, living with wisdom versus living foolishly. Wisdom can be described as the knowledge it takes to live life skillfully. Having wisdom doesn’t mean you’ll always be profitable, but it does mean that you’ll be able to navigate your way through life’s various situations.

The foundation of wisdom is learning to respect the Lord. Proverbs describes this as the fear of the Lord (v. 7). The phrase does not mean being terrified of God. Rather it means having respect for Him and His ways. Ecclesiastes ties this to obeying God’s commandments (Eccl. 12:13).

Neither the Proverbs nor Ecclesiastes make promises the way promises are typically understood. Both agree that failure, difficulty, and frustration are part of the human condition. Wisdom literature does remind us that, in the end, we answer to a God who does not always tell us why He does what He does.

In life, we may work very hard at something and still fail. That does not negate the biblical principle that hard work is good. It also does not negate that in a sinful world hard work does not always produce the fruit we want. Wisdom stands as the bedrock foundation of our confidence. We are to fear the Lord above all else and trust that He alone controls the results of your labor.

Go Deeper

Do you feel like you bear the responsibility for the results of your work? Have you considered that your toiling and striving may be more about yourself than about honoring God?

Pray with Us

Lord, thank You for the important principles You revealed in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. We ask for Your wisdom and knowledge. May we trust You, even when we don’t understand Your ways.

Song of Songs: Love Celebrated

Read Song of Songs 2:3–13

*Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.—Song of Songs 8:7*

Of all emotions, love is the most celebrated in art, literature, and song. There seems to be no end to our appetite for depictions, words or melodies that extol the delights, depths, or devastations of romantic love. Song of Songs describes the love between a man and a woman. In a world that has debased, monetized, and distorted the nature of this relationship, it is a breath of fresh air.

While marriage customs of their day may seem strange to us, we understand the emotion of seeing our beloved from afar. “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men” (v. 3). Her love stands out among his peers. The passage encourages those who have not tasted love not to get ahead of themselves (v. 7). Love is powerful. In each other’s presence the old has passed away, all things are made new (vv. 11–13).

Are you wondering why this description of romantic love is in the Bible? Consider that after God

made Adam, He declared that man shouldn’t be alone (Gen. 2:18). Even the relationship between Christ and the church is described as a marriage (Ephesians 5). Instead of attempting to resolve the tension of this little book by spiritualizing the difficult bits away, we should stop and consider that God gave humans the capacity to experience an emotion as powerful as love. But, like all other emotions, sin has marred love. Our capacity to love can become disordered. Song of Songs shows that this is not what God intended. And the Bible points to the perfect love Christ has for His church, showing us how to love well.

Go Deeper

Are you in a relationship that could be described by the Song of Songs? If so, rejoice. God has given you the capacity to enjoy it. Are you waiting to be in a Song of Songs relationship? Be patient as you trust God to bring you the right one.

Pray with Us

Even though love is often marred by sin in today’s world, You showed us beautiful love in Song of Songs. Even more, Lord Jesus, You gave us Your perfect, eternal love. Teach us to love You more!

Isaiah: Judgment and Mercy

Read **Isaiah 40:1–8**

The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.—Isaiah 40:5

Job interviews can be tricky. If you're conducting the interview, you want to get a total picture of the candidate, but if you're the candidate you might be tempted to present only your best features, even if the portrait you give is a bit one-sided.

Our modern-day understanding of God can also be one-sided.

Portrayals of God that neglect His willingness and capacity to judge are misleading at best, and deceitful at worst. But as this passage reminds us, mercy is part of God's character as well! Israel sinned by turning from God to worship idols and to live in a way that violated the Mosaic Law. As promised, God judged them. But as He also promised, His judgment was paired with mercy and designed to lead them to repentance.

Israel received judgment (v. 2), but eventually that time of punishment would come to an end, and Israel would experience God's mercy. God promised they would return to the Promised Land after a time of exile.

Even then, God's mercies were not exhausted. Verses 3–5 looked forward to a time when God's final kingdom will be established on the earth and "the glory of the Lord will be revealed" (v. 5) to everyone. In that day, Jesus will rule as King over a kingdom that will not end.

This combination of judgment and mercy are best exemplified in Christ who took the judgment we deserved. His sacrifice was an act of mercy for all who trust in Him. God ordained them both. It was His plan to judge, and it was His plan to show mercy. This is glorious!

Go Deeper

Have you overemphasized the judgment of God in your life? Take a moment to reflect on the mercy He has shown you. Have you overemphasized the mercy of God in your life? Take a moment to reflect on His judgment. Both judgment and mercy are for your benefit.

Pray with Us

God, we join the prayer of the prophet Isaiah for Your kingdom on earth to come and Your glory to be revealed to everyone. What a glorious day it will be!

Jeremiah: The Bigger Picture

Read Jeremiah 25:15–32

*The LORD will roar from on high;
he will thunder from his holy dwelling.—Jeremiah 25:30*

Who is in charge? Political scientists use the term “anarchy” to describe the way our world operates because no one is in charge to enforce laws or resolve conflicts. Countries act in their own best interest. Given this state of affairs, we might wonder if the buck stops with anyone at all. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that God is in control of all things, even the movements of countries on the world stage.

In chapter 25, Jeremiah delivers sobering news to the nations (v. 15). God’s wrath is symbolized as a cup of wine which will make them staggering drunk. God lets them know that they will experience war (v. 16). While Jerusalem was due for hard discipline, the nations had worn out God’s patience and He intended to punish them as well (v. 17). This would involve startling geopolitical shifts, causing some empires to rise and others to fall.

The list of nations would have shocked Jeremiah’s audience (vv. 19–25). Israel’s neighbors Egypt,

Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, and more were put on notice! Many of these nations played a negative role in Israel’s politics for centuries. Now God was informing them, through Jeremiah, that they would all be torn down.

For little Israel, an island in a sea of enemies, this might have come as good news. But it was also a reminder that God doesn’t play favorites when it comes to disobedience. They would endure their own judgment (v. 18). It’s easy to look out at the world and declare that God will one day judge the nations, but at times we forget that our own people will fall under judgment if we do not repent. “You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword on all who live on the earth” (v. 29).

Go Deeper

Are you quick to rejoice when God judges disobedience in other nations? Have you considered that God commands “all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30)?

Pray with Us

Father, may we heed the sobering message of Your “weeping prophet” Jeremiah: You don’t play favorites, and You punish disobedience. Thank You that in Christ, You extend Your love and forgiveness to us.

Ezekiel: The Lord Pleads

Read Ezekiel 33:10–15

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.—Ezekiel 33:11

How do you react to difficult feedback? Do you accept the critique as being for your own good? Or do you write it off, suspecting the messenger of unfair motives? By the time we get to Ezekiel, a lot of hard words have been spoken against Israel. It's easy to wonder if God had their best interest in mind. The attentive ear will listen to the words of the prophet Ezekiel and hear the note of redemption.

During Ezekiel's day, the political invasions God promised were starting to become reality. Even so, Israel wasn't taking the hint. They were asking all the wrong questions. "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live (v. 10)? Facing strong punishment, they wondered how they would ever recover. Like a person facing bankruptcy due to their poor decisions, or a confiscated driver's license they wondered, *How or when will life go back to normal?*

Thankfully the Lord presented the answer right away: Turn! This one word sums up the Lord's purpose in judgment. His goal was to compel His people to turn from their godless behavior and turn to Him, the source of all joy. Today, we might use the word *repent* to describe a change of mind that leads to a change of action.

God was not judging Israel because He enjoyed it (v. 11). Rather, He was punishing them because He wanted them to live. To really live meant loving Him above all other things (Deut. 6:4). In the New Testament, God makes the same plea. Jesus says, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

Go Deeper

We too need to hear the call to repentance. It doesn't mean you are not a child of God, it means you still sin and need to change. Pray that the Lord will give you a spirit of repentance to hear, turn, and really live!

Pray with Us

Merciful God, give us a spirit of repentance! Teach us to turn away from sin and turn to You with all our worries, hardships, and trials. May we hear Your voice even in the "valley of the shadow of death."

Daniel: A Future Look

Read Daniel 2:24–45

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.—Daniel 2:44

Would you want to know the future if you could? Which details would you like to know? Some would like to know the results of the next election, or the price of the Dow Jones Industrial Average on a certain day. But the future is a mystery, inaccessible to all but the God who controls all things. Of course, that doesn't stop us from wondering, which leads to uncertainty.

God uses His knowledge of the future to make an important point: He can be trusted. God did this during the time of Daniel by giving the king of Babylon a dream he couldn't understand. Then God gave Daniel the meaning of the dream. The people of Israel had experienced the trauma of military defeat. The nation wondered, does God have a plan for us? Does He have a plan at all? Their reaction reveals typical human uncertainty. So, God took pains to show that He had things under control; He knows the future (Isa. 46:10).

In a series of visions, God revealed the rise and fall of empires in the

region. These were significant details which could not be predicted with such specificity by mortals. In doing so He made it clear that He had His hand on world events. The dream was trustworthy and so was the God who revealed it (2:25). In addition, God showed the powerful Babylonian king and the humble prophet how much they didn't know!

This prophetic dream covered more than just ancient times. It extended to the end of times as well, when God establishes a kingdom that will endure forever. This kingdom, promised to the nation during the days of King David (2 Samuel 7), represents a great victory over Israel's enemies and the enduring hope of all who trust in God today.

Go Deeper

Do you ever wonder about what's next? Does it ever cause you to doubt whether God really has things under control? How do these prophetic visions calm your fears?

Pray with Us

We are in awe of the vision of the future You revealed to us in the book of Daniel! Lord, You are in control of the rise and fall of empires and of each individual human destiny. It gives us great comfort. Hallelujah!

Hosea: Committed to Forgive

Read Hosea 6:1–3

*Come, let us return to the Lord.
He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us.—Hosea 6:1*

If you've ever received a strong rebuke, you had multiple ways to respond. You could immediately fight back, justify yourself, and even explain why the correction was unnecessary. Or you could accept the critique as being good for your development.

In the Old Testament, Israel received many rebukes from the Lord. There were times when they justified themselves. But in Hosea, God's people listened, accepted the discipline, and committed themselves to Him again. The prophet Hosea begins with a call to "return to the Lord" (6:1). Like a car making a U-turn, the writer encourages his listeners to make a 180-degree change to their sinful ways. He acknowledges that the Lord has "torn us to pieces" (v. 1). This is a graphic description of the strong discipline they have endured. Because they wandered so far from Him, God brought the judgments He described in the Law upon them (Deut. 27–28).

Notice that their ability to return to the Lord is based upon His

character. The prophet does not say: You've now become good enough to come back to Him! Instead, Hosea roots his call in the fact that God loves His people and has promised to restore them. "He will heal us . . . he will bind up our wounds" (v. 1). Why would God do this for wicked people? So that they would be restored to live righteous lives in His presence for their own good (v. 2).

With this commitment from God to forgiveness and restoration, the prophet challenges his readers to press on to return to and acknowledge the Lord (v. 3). God has made a promise and as sure as the sun rises, He will fulfill it!

Go Deeper

Are you struggling with repentance? Have you convinced yourself that it might not be worth it to turn back to God? Remember, He has made promises to you. One of them is that He will forgive when we confess (1 John 1:9). Press on to know Him!

Pray with Us

Too often we struggle with repentance and run away from God. Remind us, Holy Spirit, that You are a God of healing and forgiveness. We pray for the prodigals to run back to You and find restoration.

Joel: What Repentance Looks Like

Read Joel 2:12–27

*“Even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart.”—Joel 2:12*

It is possible to settle a lawsuit without admitting guilt. Sometimes the cost of the legal proceedings is so high that an accused person may just settle the case with a fine, while never actually admitting they are guilty. While our legal system allows this procedure, it would be hard to say the person who paid the fine actually repented.

A survey of Israel’s history could lead one to believe that the nation had been paying fines, but never really admitting they did anything wrong. They seemed to commit the same sins over and over again. Idolatry, abusing the poor, and taking advantage of foreigners all appeared on their rap sheet since the book of Exodus. Even though God had called them to repent more times than we can count, they had not done so with their whole hearts.

The prophet Joel describes what true repentance looks like. He uses an ancient image for expressing distress: tearing a garment a person is wearing. Generally tearing a garment will ruin it, so this act was reserved for

expressing the deepest of distress. But tearing a garment could also be done for show. Here the prophet invites his audience to an even greater level of commitment: rending or tearing their hearts (v. 13).

This expression signifies a genuine decision to turn from violating God’s covenant. It is an act that, while it cannot be seen externally, is transformative spiritually. Joel calls his readers to this because, unlike a torn garment, a torn heart will be accepted by God. Joel knew God’s character. Since the days of Mt. Sinai God had consistently reminded Israel that He was unlike any god they had ever encountered (Ex. 34:6). Joel invokes that self-declaration of God here, using it to entice the Israelites to repent.

Go Deeper

What is holding you back from genuine repentance? Are you hoping to escape with a fine, but never admit guilt? What would it look like to rend your heart today?

Pray with Us

“Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Joel 2:13). What a powerful message! May we learn the true repentance of the heart.

Amos: Seek and Live

Read Amos 5:4–15

*Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.—Amos 5:14*

I lived in eastern Iowa for a decade. Every Wednesday a tornado warning siren would blare over the air. My family and I quickly learned that this was only a test, and we grew to ignore them. But occasionally the siren would blare at a different time, and we would scramble to the basement in haste. The siren was calling us to take immediate action so we would live!

The prophets of Israel are often characterized as full of judgment and destruction. But we can also look at them as God's warning sirens. During the days of Amos, Israel was not living according to the covenant, so God sent the prophet with a warning. "Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel" (v. 4). By inviting the people to seek Him, God was sounding the alarm.

This alarm also warned them where not to go. Bethel was an infamous city in Israel. Generations before, a king named Jeroboam had built a temple to a false god there (1 Kings 12:29). As a result, he led

the nation into idolatrous worship and away from the Lord. Years later, Bethel continued to be a place where people went to sacrifice and pray to a pagan deity. Like a family fleeing from a tornado to the second story of their home, Israel was turning to false gods for help. They needed to be told where to go, but they also needed to be told where *not* to go! The other cities, Gilgal and Beersheba, also had associations with wickedness.

Far more than just judgment and destruction, the prophet Amos was calling Israel to change their ways while there was still time. Eventually God would lose patience, but until that moment there was a chance to escape punishment. All they needed to do was seek Him, and they would live.

Go Deeper

Are you hearing sirens going off in your spiritual life? What is God warning you to do or not to do?

Pray with Us

Father in heaven, thank You for Your prophets who spoke Your word in a mighty way. Today, we are called to seek You and live. It is a comfort to know that Your Son Jesus opened for us the way to You and gave us eternal life.

Jonah: Delivered for a Purpose

Read Jonah 3:1–10

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented.—Jonah 3:10

For a number of years, my father, a pastor in Brooklyn, New York, volunteered with a second chance program. Young men and women who had early encounters with the legal system were given a chance to have their records expunged in exchange for community service. They were given a second chance for a purpose.

God gave both Jonah and the people of Nineveh second chances as well. Most of us are familiar with Jonah's story. After God told the prophet to go to the city of Nineveh, Jonah fled in the opposite direction. The Lord disciplined the prophet with unusual means, and Jonah spent a few nights in a watery jail cell before he was released on parole (read Jonah 1–2).

In chapter 3, we see God return to Jonah a second time with a mission (3:1). God once again told Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh, calling them to repent. Again, Jonah was resistant. Why did he resist? Was it fear? Was

it bitterness? As an Israelite who had suffered at the hands of Nineveh, he preferred to avoid this calling.

Thankfully, God didn't leave the outcome in Jonah's hands. It was God's message and His heart on display, as He called a second time for Jonah to deliver this message! We learn that the "Ninevites believed God" (v. 5). Their turnaround was so complete that "a fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth" (v. 5). God had saved Jonah for a reason, and this time the prophet obeyed. "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened" (v. 10).

Go Deeper

God has redeemed you for a purpose, too. Have you resisted His call in your life? Have you noticed that His call to service will not go away? Consider what mission God has for you!

Pray with Us

Dear God, thank You for the assurance that You redeemed us for a purpose. You called us to Yourself out of our wanderings in hopelessness. Help us to discern and follow Your call on our lives.

Nahum: The End of Enemies

Read Nahum 1:1–15

*The LORD is slow to anger but great in power;
the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.—Nahum 1:3*

Revenge is a dish best served cold, or so we are told. But as people committed to the Bible, we are commanded not to take revenge. We are told to love our enemy, not plot his downfall. Yet if you have ever suffered an injustice, you know the feelings that can bubble up in your heart. If I don't take care of this, who will? If I don't take care of this, they might get away with it. Is there anyone you can turn to who will take care of things for you?

In biblical times, Assyria was a world power that excelled at cruelty. From one of their principal cities, Nineveh, this empire ran roughshod over the ancient Near East. In his providence, God used this nation to chastise His people. But the Assyrians took delight in their cruelty and took credit for their own success (Isa. 10:10–11), so God decided to defend His people. The judgments described here are severe: Their allies would abandon them, they would be childless, their precious idols and temples would be destroyed (Nah. 1:14).

This would have been a cause for rejoicing among Israelites. God promised to defend them when their enemies attacked. He had done so in the past, but with the arrival of Nineveh they might have wondered if He would do so again. The prophet declares that He would (v. 12). This was a joyous word from the Lord. Nahum calls it “good news” (v. 15). Their enemy would be totally and triumphantly defeated.

Rejoicing at the downfall of an invader is understandable, but how can it be squared with exhortations to avoid revenge? Nahum provides the answer. Because God is fully capable of judging with perfect righteous judgment, His people can leave that difficult work to Him.

Go Deeper

Have you been wounded and are struggling with a desire for revenge? What does Nahum teach us to do with those emotions?

Pray with Us

In our flesh we crave revenge on our enemies, on those who hurt us. Holy Spirit, encourage us with Nahum’s “good news” that it’s God who fights for us as our defender from any evil.

Zephaniah: A God Who Restores

Read Zephaniah 3:14–20

*At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you home.—Zephaniah 3:20*

The forest fires raging in California and Western Canada have caused an incredible amount of devastation. Homes have been destroyed, communities erased, and lives lost. Many wonder if things will ever return to normal. After returning from the exile, life in Judah was not the same as it used to be. The Jewish people returned to a land devastated by war. No longer an independent nation with their own king, they had become a province in the mighty Persian Empire.

Into such discouraging circumstances God sent the prophet Zephaniah with a message of hope. God had not abandoned His people (v. 17). While their situation might have given them the impression that they were alone, the reality was that God was with them as He always had been. God was a mighty warrior, intent on saving them (v. 17). This portrait of God was designed to encourage them to have hope for the future.

After decades in exile, followed by decades of malaise, the Jewish people needed hope that God's wrath could

be assuaged, and that they would see the other side of Him again. He declares in Zephaniah that the time for rebuke is over. Instead, He will respond to them with delight and singing (v. 17). More than that, He will undo the effects of their sin. Oppressors who had been sent to afflict them will be removed (v. 19). The lame and exiled who find themselves helpless will be rescued and brought home to a hero's welcome!

God will return things better than they were before. After enduring the punishment for their covenant violations, Israel could rest in the knowledge that their God had never abandoned them, and that He was a God who restores.

Go Deeper

Are you tempted to give up on God because you have endured a difficult season? Recall all that He has done for you in Christ to restore you to Himself. Read Zephaniah's message of hope and remember that God loves and cares for you as well.

Pray with Us

Lord, the message of Zephaniah fills us with joy: You respond to Your people with delight and singing. Thank You for the hope and assurance that we need today as much as did Your people in Zephaniah's time.

Haggai: First Things First

Read Haggai 1:1–15

*Give careful thought
to your ways.—Haggai 1:5*

Have you ever heard the phrase, “The Cobbler’s children have no shoes”? If you saw the children of a cobbler, a shoemaker, walking around with worn out shoes, or no shoes at all, you would wonder why! Wouldn’t caring for your children’s needs be a priority? In a similar way, the prophet Haggai warned God’s people that their priorities were out of alignment. They were neglecting what was most important.

Israel was back in the land after 70 years spent in exile. While they returned in excitement, the rebuilding process had been discouraging. The Temple in Jerusalem was still not completed, and the people had turned instead to building their own homes. Through Haggai, God confronted them about the situation: “Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” (v. 4). His question needs no answer. Of course, it was not time for them to be focusing on their own homes while the house of the Lord was in shambles. This was

an embarrassment, an affront to all sensibility.

God’s displeasure is evident as the prophet points out that they have been suffering economic distress (v. 5). Their crops have failed. What they do have, they find satisfying. When they save money, it disappears like money in a bag with holes (v. 6)! They were failing to prioritize the most important things and this affected everything else they did.

The solution was to put God first. They needed to expend energy, making God’s work a priority in their lives. They needed to be less busy with themselves and more busy with the things of the Lord. Specifically, that meant redoubling their efforts to gather the building material to finish the Temple and working hard to get the work done.

Go Deeper

Are your priorities rightly ordered? How do you put God first in your life? What changes do you need to make to realign your priorities?

Pray with Us

Dear Jesus, help us to look honestly at our lives to determine our priorities. Do we put You first? Help us to “give careful thought to [our] ways” (Haggai 1:5).

Malachi: God's Refinery

Read Malachi 3:1–5

*I will send my messenger,
who will prepare the way before me. —Malachi 3:1*

The last few days of a semester are more important than my students realize. The final weeks present an opportunity to tie up loose ends, clarify concepts, and summarize the big picture. And as we come to the end of our grand tour of the Old Testament, the Bible returns to a major theme: God intends to undo the damage done in the garden.

Malachi reminds Israel that the promised Messiah will arrive on the scene (v. 1). But He will not telegraph His visit. He will appear suddenly, with surprise. His appearance will signal God's commitment to the covenant He made with Israel. Long ago God bound Himself to His people by making a promise never to abandon them, but to redeem them. That redemption will require purifying them to make them fit to be with Him.

So, the coming of this messenger will be accompanied by a great refinement (v. 2). Using the image of a furnace for refining metal or a launderer with strong soap, God

declares that no one will escape the purifying process. He will start with the Levites, who facilitated Israel's sacrificial worship system (v. 3). If the worship team is sinful, the offerings they bring will be unworthy. But thankfully, God would refine them.

This refining process would involve a confrontation, a reckoning. Using judicial language, Malachi announces that evildoers would be put on trial (v. 5). It would be easy to dismiss this passage as yet another description of judgment on Israel, but there is more here. Coming as it does at the end of the Old Testament, it leaves us with the hopeful expectation that our sin problem will be finally dealt with! Even at the end, God is not done with Israel.

Go Deeper

Do you look forward to the day when your sin will be cleansed? Christ's sacrifice has taken care of it, and we await the day when we will be finally purified. Rejoice, it will come!

Pray with Us

As we reach the end of our journey through the Old Testament, we thank You, God, for the lessons we've learned along the way. Thank You for the wonderful message of Malachi about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ!

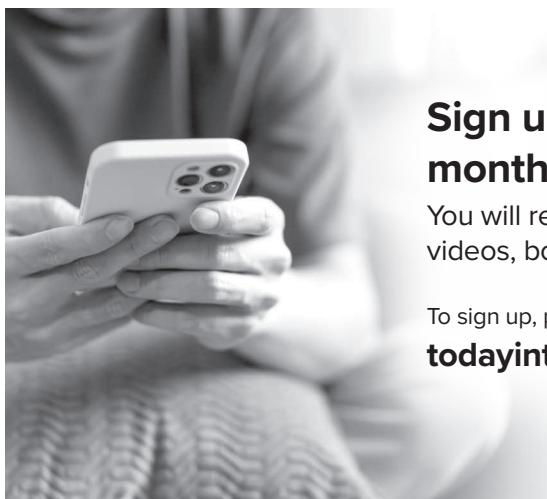
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JANUARY AND FEBRUARY | Journey Through the Old Testament, Journey Through the New Testament



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Extended Bible Reading Calendar

In the first two months of 2026, we will journey through the Old and New Testaments. Following is an optional reading calendar with extended Bible passages for those wanting a deeper understanding of each book. May God bless the reading of His Word!

The Old Testament

<input type="checkbox"/> January 1	Genesis 1–3	<input type="checkbox"/> January 17	Psalm 100
<input type="checkbox"/> January 2	Genesis 12–15	<input type="checkbox"/> January 18	Proverbs 1–2
<input type="checkbox"/> January 3	Exodus 6; 13:17–14:31	<input type="checkbox"/> January 19	Song of Songs 1–2
<input type="checkbox"/> January 4	Exodus 19–20	<input type="checkbox"/> January 20	Isaiah 40
<input type="checkbox"/> January 5	Leviticus 4–5	<input type="checkbox"/> January 21	Jeremiah 25
<input type="checkbox"/> January 6	Numbers 11	<input type="checkbox"/> January 22	Ezekiel 33
<input type="checkbox"/> January 7	Deuteronomy 8–10	<input type="checkbox"/> January 23	Daniel 1–2
<input type="checkbox"/> January 8	Joshua 21:43–23:16	<input type="checkbox"/> January 24	Hosea 5–7
<input type="checkbox"/> January 9	Judges 1–2; Ruth	<input type="checkbox"/> January 25	Joel 2
<input type="checkbox"/> January 10	1 Samuel 8–10	<input type="checkbox"/> January 26	Amos 5; Obadiah
<input type="checkbox"/> January 11	1 Kings 14	<input type="checkbox"/> January 27	Jonah 1–3
<input type="checkbox"/> January 12	2 Chronicles 36	<input type="checkbox"/> January 28	Nahum; Habakkuk 1
<input type="checkbox"/> January 13	Ezra 5–7	<input type="checkbox"/> January 29	Zephaniah 3
<input type="checkbox"/> January 14	Nehemiah 2–4	<input type="checkbox"/> January 30	Haggai; Zechariah 1
<input type="checkbox"/> January 15	Esther 4–5	<input type="checkbox"/> January 31	Malachi
<input type="checkbox"/> January 16	Job 1–2		

The New Testament

<input type="checkbox"/> February 1	Matthew 1–3	<input type="checkbox"/> February 15	1 Timothy
<input type="checkbox"/> February 2	Mark 10–12	<input type="checkbox"/> February 16	2 Timothy
<input type="checkbox"/> February 3	Luke 5–6	<input type="checkbox"/> February 17	Titus
<input type="checkbox"/> February 4	John 18–20	<input type="checkbox"/> February 18	Philemon
<input type="checkbox"/> February 5	Acts 2; 7–9	<input type="checkbox"/> February 19	Hebrews 1–3
<input type="checkbox"/> February 6	Romans 1–2	<input type="checkbox"/> February 20	James
<input type="checkbox"/> February 7	1 Corinthians 4–6	<input type="checkbox"/> February 21	1 Peter 1–2
<input type="checkbox"/> February 8	2 Corinthians 1–2	<input type="checkbox"/> February 22	2 Peter
<input type="checkbox"/> February 9	Galatians 3–6	<input type="checkbox"/> February 23	1 John 2–3
<input type="checkbox"/> February 10	Ephesians 1–2	<input type="checkbox"/> February 24	2 John
<input type="checkbox"/> February 11	Philippians 1–2	<input type="checkbox"/> February 25	3 John
<input type="checkbox"/> February 12	Colossians	<input type="checkbox"/> February 26	Jude
<input type="checkbox"/> February 13	1 Thessalonians	<input type="checkbox"/> February 27	Revelation 19–21
<input type="checkbox"/> February 14	2 Thessalonians	<input type="checkbox"/> February 28	2 Timothy 3



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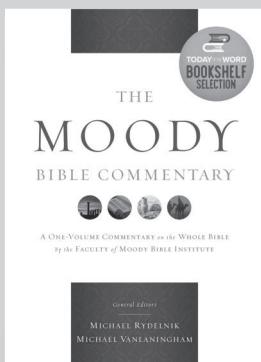
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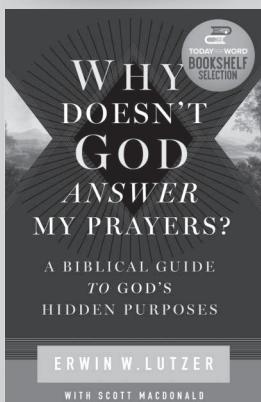
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JANUARY

The Moody Bible Commentary



FEBRUARY

Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayers?
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