

Sunday, September 30, 2018—Esther 1-3

The Medo-Persian Empire was a vast kingdom stretching from modern-day India to Ethiopia. The king, Ahasuerus, was likely the most powerful, wealthiest man in the world. To celebrate his kingdom and accomplishments, he hosted a party that went on for weeks. At one point, he called for Queen Vashti to come dance before him, yet she refused. The most powerful man had no control over his queen.

He began a kingdom-wide search for a replacement. Women from all over came to his city in order to receive a year-long treatment in preparation for an audience with him. While the process for finding the new queen is quite mind-boggling, God shows Himself so wise and capable. The eventual queen, Esther, lived in the city, and her cousin and caretaker Mordecai checked on her regularly. In doing so, he uncovered a plot to assassinate the king and thwarted it. God was putting two of his own people in prominent places in a foreign land.

This influence would be vital because Haman, one of the king's officials, hated the Jews (who had been living in Persia for generations) and convinced the king to allow their extermination. (There have rarely been times or places throughout history when the Jews were harbored and safe away from Israel.) The people of God often become a target of governments or institutions when God is working to increase His Kingdom foothold. That threat to believers often comes though believers have done nothing at all to earn the hatred.

Thank God for His sovereignty over all the earth, its kings, and its kingdoms. Pray for faithfulness and usefulness in trials and difficulties.

Saturday, September 29, 2018—Daniel 10-12

Paul told the Ephesians that our true battles happen in the spiritual realm (see Ephesians 6). He said in 2 Corinthians 10:4 that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual. There is a realm we cannot see yet is absolutely real and has impact on our daily lives.

Daniel found himself in spiritual battle through prayer, and he grieved for three weeks because the subject of his prayer was so heavy on his spirit, and he felt as if God had not answered. A being came to Daniel and told him he was a treasure in God's eyes (10:11). God had indeed heard him when he first prayed, but the spiritual battle this messenger endured hindered him from coming for 21 days. The angel Michael helped free him so he could come to Daniel and encourage him.

Some years later, Daniel received a vision about the coming kings and kingdoms which would rule the world (11:1-45). Spiritual battles are real, but the physical world presents its own conflicts. The coming days would be ones of continued conflict and transitions of power.

The spiritual and physical battles will eventually collide with the end of times and fiercest of battles centered around Jerusalem. Daniel 12 uses some symbolic language about the timing but makes clear these conflicts will involve the daily sacrificial system at the Temple.

Praise God for being fully aware of all beings and battles in the physical and the spiritual. Pray for courage and wisdom to fight well in whatever arena God places you.

Friday, September 28, 2018—Daniel 7-9

God works on a time schedule that rarely aligns with the wishes and understanding of His people. In Daniel 9, Daniel wrote that in the first year of Darius the Mede that he, Daniel, came to understand from the prophet Jeremiah's writings that the exile would last 70 years. Daniel had come to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. He served under his successor Belshazzar. Ahasuerus was the next king, and then his son Darius became king. Daniel had been in captivity for quite some time before he came to a fuller understanding of what God had said and what He was doing.

If Daniel, who was undoubtedly righteous, wise, and useful to God, only came to that understanding after decades of seeking and serving the Lord, modern believers need not be surprised when God works slowly and reveals great truths over time. Answering the prayers for

release from Egypt took 400 years. The promise of a Messiah took thousands to fulfill. His working slowly is no indication of disobedience or unfaithfulness. He is working to complete His plan, not the wishes of others.

God revealed in Daniel 7 and 8 that His plan for the coming of the Ancient of Days required the rise and fall of several other leaders and powers. Daniel was deeply disturbed by this news (8:27). He prayed, praising God and admitting his own faults and the faults of his people. Through Gabriel, God reminded Daniel he was treasured (9:23).

Praise God for having a plan which brings Him glory and exalts His Son. Thank Him for treasuring His children and saving them.

Thursday, September 27, 2018—Daniel 4-6

God told Asa He was looking for those who were wholeheartedly devoted to Him so He might show Himself strong (2 Chronicles 16:9). Working through the weak to humble the strong brings glory to God because the power is obviously his. In Daniel, God found such a man.

When Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, Daniel told the king he needed to separate himself from his sins by doing what was right and separate himself from his injustices by showing mercy to the needy (4:27). After a mental illness caused by his pride, Nebuchadnezzar repented and said, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of the heavens, because all his works are true and his ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride (4:37).

When Belshazzar became king, he threw a party and celebrated by drinking from some of the pieces that had come from the Temple. When he saw a vision, the queen told him to call Daniel. He recalled what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar and said, “But you his successor, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this” (5:22). He failed to give God the glory He deserved. Pride cost him his life.

Daniel eventually became the target of jealous leaders, and they conspired to kill him, using his devotion to God as the trap. Daniel saw faithfulness and prayer as superior to compromise, and he ended up arrested and thrown into the lions’ den. His humility saved his life and brought glory to God (6:25-27). Pray your life will do the same.

Wednesday, September 26, 2018—Daniel 1-3

Daniel and Ezekiel both experienced the Babylonian captivity but in different settings. Ezekiel remained among the common people and shared visions from God with them. Daniel, and his three friends, found themselves in royal surroundings, training with the king’s best teachers and eating at the king’s finest tables. Despite the disparate locations, both Daniel and Ezekiel presented themselves as vessels for God’s use and glory.

King Nebuchadnezzar took pieces from the Temple in Jerusalem and put them in the house of his god, using holy pieces for unholy purposes. He tried to do the same thing with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These young men were some of the finest Jewish examples, and he wanted to train them for his personal benefit. During the training, the young men learned well, but they chose not to defile themselves by eating unclean foods. Courageously and diplomatically, they requested a different diet, and God blessed their obedience with health and success.

When the king had a dream no one could interpret, God gave Daniel the insight needed. Daniel praised God (2:19) and told the king God was the One with wisdom (2:28). Using Daniel, one made in His image, God was bringing glory to Himself in a foreign land. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship an idol, Nebuchadnezzar threw Yahweh’s “idols” in a fire. They survived without harm and brought glory to God from Nebuchadnezzar himself (3:28-29).

Pray for faithfulness that brings God the glory He deserves.

Tuesday, September 25, 2018—Ezekiel 46-48

The people of God took great pride being His people. There was no other nation who had a god who was as close as Yahweh. That pride, however, did not keep them from forgetting Him and wandering from His ways. Ezekiel and his contemporaries were in exile because God told them He would not allow their sin to continue.

No longer living in the Promised Land was a demoralizing situation for His people, but there remained a bit of pride that the city wall remained and the Temple stood proudly on Mt. Moriah. The people were not at home, but God was in His house. In a vision, God had shown Ezekiel that even His presence was going to leave the Temple, and all they had known and all that represented God would be gone.

As He concluded His revelation to Ezekiel, God showed Him this promise. One day He would restore all things, and people would look on Jerusalem once again and say, “The LORD is there” (48:35). What set Israel apart from all other nations was not their size or ability or resources. What made them different was the presence of the one true God.

This restoration is complete in Jesus’ living in the souls of those who believe. He makes them sons, not servants (46:16-18), who possess the gift forever. Nothing can take that away. This restoration brings a river of life flowing from God and possessions which enable service and flourishing. What Ezekiel saw is a promise God continues to fulfill today.

Praise God for being closer than your next breath.

Monday, September 24, 2018—Ezekiel 43-45

God gave Ezekiel a vision of the Temple to show His people what had been lost because of sin (43:1-17). Their daily access to the presence of God Himself was gone because they found idols and pagan practice more attractive. God was not taunting His people or being hateful, but He did want them to see clearly the destructive consequences of their sin.

God also gave this vision so the people would know how to rebuild and rededicate the Temple (43:18-27). His people were in captivity, but this was not the end. By His grace, His people would one day be home again.

To live well in their homeland, the people needed priests who would be faithful to the standards Yahweh gave them and who would lead the people well (44:15-27). These priests would have no land or inheritance because God Himself was their inheritance (15:28). Everything the people offered to God would be available for the priests’ needs so they could give their daily attention to God and the people. This had been the plan when Moses instructed the people, but they had strayed far from the expectations and suffered as a result. God was giving His people another chance.

God makes personal relationship with Him available through Jesus, and He has high expectations for holiness, obedience, worship, and service. Following Him brings great reward, and He uses His followers as His priests to connect others to Him and proclaim His greatness to all. Praise Him today for the new life He gives in Christ.