

Monday, September 30, 2019—Esther 1-3

King Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus) was the king of the Medo-Persian empire which stretched from modern-day India to Ethiopia. He had so much in the ways of possession and power that he hosted a party for all his subordinates which lasted 180 days (1:4). He was the most powerful man on earth, so when Queen Vashti refused to come to his concluding banquet and be paraded around, he was furious (1:12). He and his officials decided to banish Vashti, and the king went about choosing a new queen.

A Jew named Mordecai had been brought to Persia by Nebuchadnezzar, many years earlier. He had a young family member named Esther who was chosen through an empire-wide search to become part of the royal harem. Esther found favor with her caretaker (2:9) but told no one of her nationality (2:10). When her time came to be with the king, she wore only what Hegai suggested and was admired by all (2:15). She delighted the king more than any other, and the king made her queen.

Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate King Xerxes and reported it, saving the king's life. He would not, however, obey the king's orders to bow before Haman, one of the king's officials (3:2). Haman burned with anger, and he devised a plot to kill all the Jews in the empire. Despite remaining faithful to God, Mordecai (and his people) were in trouble.

In a world of prejudice and selfishness, God's people find their identity and courage in Jesus. Pray for faithfulness to honor Him.

Sunday, September 29, 2019—Daniel 10-12

God was faithful to show Daniel the truth repeatedly, and Daniel was faithful to obey God over more than 65 years of exile in Babylon. The revelation God gave has similar themes and truths, so some might wonder why God would keep saying the same thing. They need only remember how quickly the frustrations and distractions of life can make faithful people unfaithful and steady people unsteady. The Sabbath comes around once each week so people can rest, reset, and remember. One can only imagine how Daniel needed reminders over more than 60 years.

Daniel had seen a vision and was so troubled by it he prayed and fasted. For three weeks he gained no relief or insight and was deeply disturbed. A man in a vision told Daniel there had been intense spiritual warfare for those 21 days (10:13) until Michael, the archangel, came to help and free the messenger to come to Daniel.

He told Daniel he was deeply loved by God (10:18) and then revealed the truth about the vision of the near future and the distant future. Leaders were going to rise and fall throughout history. In similar ways before Christ's first coming and second coming, an arrogant leader would persecute God's people (11:28) before God intervened.

In the end, God will judge everyone and send them to everlasting judgment or everlasting life (12:2). The process will purify, cleanse, and refine the faithful and condemn the wicked (12:10). Thank God for His love, faithfulness, and promise to make all things right and new.

Saturday, September 28, 2019—Daniel 7-9

The first half of Daniel includes some of the most beloved stories in the Old

Testament. The second half includes some of the most bizarre scenes in the Old Testament. During his time in captivity and influence, God showed Daniel some remarkable truths about the future. God always gives these insights to affect the behavior of the faithful in the present.

The chaos of the sea represented the chaos of the future (7:2). Each beast that Daniel saw had characteristics of kingdoms and their kings. Babylon would fall to the Medes and Persian. The Medo-Persian empire would fall to the Greeks (8:1-27), and the Greeks would succumb to the Romans—all over the next 500 years. Daniel had interpreted a vision of a glorious statue for Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2. Here Daniel sees similar truth but displayed as terrifying, chaotic manifestations.

Over all these rulers was the Ancient of Days (7:9), who sat in judgment, and one like a man who was given authority over them all (7:12). God was aware of all that would come, and He was sovereign over it all. Some of what Daniel saw would take place even further in the future (7:23-25). In His first and second coming, Jesus would make it all right.

Some years later, Daniel prayed to the Lord after reading Scripture, confessing the faithfulness of God and his own sin and that of his people (9:1-19). God assured Daniel he was heard and loved by God (9:23). Thank God for listening to His people and speaking truth for their lives.

Friday, September 27, 2019—Daniel 4-6

“Before it’s too late . . .” Registering for an event has a deadline. Coupons expire. Offers don’t last forever. God’s ways are not the ways of man, yet He makes Himself clear enough to be known, loved, and obeyed. His hand in the life of Israel illustrates that the call to repentance is not open-ended. At some point, it becomes too late to turn around.

Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar both had this lesson offered to them. Both suffered. One learned from it. One did not.

Nebuchadnezzar lauded God for His revealing the truth to Him (4:1-3) and then had another dream. Daniel interpreted it (4:19-27) to mean that Nebuchadnezzar would find himself in poor mental health, driven from his palace, and eating grass like a cow. Daniel called him to repent, but he did not. He spent years in insanity before God restored him.

Belshazzar did not learn the lesson. He, too, saw something frightening—writing on the wall. He, too, called Daniel to interpret, and Daniel told him God had seen him and evaluated him, and he had been found lacking. His pride prevented him from repenting under God’s judgment, and he died that very night (5:30).

Under Darius, Daniel was challenged to “repent” of his contrary ways. Instead, he continued praying to God alone, and he was thrown into the lions’ den. Daniel knew his allegiance and obedience needed only be directed toward Yahweh, and He protected him from harm (6:21).

Praise God for His call to righteousness and power over all life.

Thursday, September 26, 2019—Daniel 1-3

Some have said reputation is what people think about a person while character

is who that person truly is. What people see is not always the true self. What goes on when no one is looking or no one knows?

Daniel and his friends were young and privileged and were taken from their homes to Babylon. There they would face temptations on every front as King Nebuchadnezzar trained them, provided for them, and urged them to assimilate to the Chaldean culture. How would they respond?

When they had the choice to eat the king's food, they asked for their own diet. Rather than defiling themselves to fit in, they came to their supervisor with a reasonable plan. Instead of reacting arrogantly against the king's menu or instead of compromising and doing what they knew would not be pleasing to God, they acted with the wisdom and patience of God, and their supervisor agreed. In turn, God blessed them for their obedience and honoring Him and raised them above all the others (1:19-20).

Daniel's ability not to panic or overreact later saved the lives of many when King Nebuchadnezzar wanted a dream interpreted. He first gathered his friends and urged them to pray (2:18). Then, he went before the king and glorified God in interpreting the dream. He was useful to the king because he was surrendered to the King of kings. Likewise, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked through fire with the King of kings because they would not bow to this earthly king (3:1-30).

Pray for character of complete surrender to God and His ways.

Wednesday, September 25, 2019—Ezekiel 46-48

God has made His people to worship. This is not something relegated to a building on Sunday mornings. Worship is orienting one's entire life around His supremacy. Worship is not something relegated to this life. The vision Ezekiel saw was of worship in the distant future.

Because God is a God of order, His people worship Him in an orderly way. The people were to have specific ways of entering and exiting the Temple complex, and they had a prescription for their sacrifices. "The lamb, the grain offering, and the olive oil must be given as a daily sacrifice every morning without fail" (46:15). God made His expectations clear.

This time together would allow for fellowship and enjoying good food. God is serious about holiness, but He is also intent on bringing His people joy. He wants them to find pleasure in Him and one another.

In Ezekiel 47, Ezekiel saw a healing river flowing from under the Temple. The waters would bring an abundance to the Dead Sea and the land like never before, giving fruit for food and leaves for healing (47:12). The power of His presence would cause the world to recognize it and to name the city "Yahweh is there" (48:35). He transforms those who follow Him so powerfully that the world can't help but take notice.

The end promises us we will spend time worshiping and working—giving God the praise He deserves and working in the design with which He made us. We can prepare for that time by doing the same here.

Tuesday, September 24, 2019—Ezekiel 43-45

Parents wait for months or years to hear from their soldier far away. Children impatiently anticipate the arrival of their parents after a night out on a date. The waiting

makes time seem to crawl, yet, in a moment, all that vanishes when the loved one is in sight.

God's people were in bondage once again. Jeremiah had written to them about the lengthy stay they would have in Babylon. Ezekiel had shared with them about the reasons behind their captivity. He had also seen the vision of the glory of God leaving the Temple (Ezekiel 10), one of the saddest moments in all of Scripture. The judgment was heavy.

"Suddenly, the glory of the God of Israel appeared from the east. The sound of his coming was like the roar of rushing waters, and the whole landscape shone with his glory" (43:2). Ezekiel fell down in humility, and the glory returned to the Temple. The Loved One was back home!

God would one day restore His glory and His people, but they would need to return to Him in devotion and action. The beauty of this vision would make them ashamed of their sin and the counterfeit gods they had worshiped (43:10). Sacrifice would make their place of worship holy before Him (43:13-27), and the faithful would be his ministers (44:1-31).

The restored people in their restored home would orient their lives around worshiping and serving the one true God (45:1-25). Thank God for putting His glorious Spirit in those who believe. Live in faithful obedience.