

# LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers



WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

PART 2



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# INTRODUCTION

In 2002 Philip Yancey wrote an extremely useful book about the Old Testament with the title: *The Bible Jesus Read*. In it he gives the following insight about the prophets: “Why read the prophets? There is one compelling reason: to get to know God. The prophets are the Bible’s most forceful revelation of God’s personality.... One who reads the prophets encounters not an impassable, distant deity but an actual Person, a God as passionate as any person you have met. God feels delight, and frustration, and anger. He weeps and moans with pain... The prophets proclaim loud and clear how God feels: He loves us.”

During this term we will spend ample time learning from the prophets. They were ordinary men, but they had the very extraordinary function of speaking on behalf of God. They got their messages from God. This message became such a burden to them, that it only eased when they have passed the message on. The prophetic gifting had two sides to it: the ability to speak for God depended on the ability to hear from God. The message had to be received before it could be delivered.

We differentiate between the Major and Minor prophets. GotQuestions.com explains how the terms *Major*

*Prophets* and *Minor Prophets* are simply a way to divide the Old Testament prophetic books. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Minor Prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The Minor Prophets are also sometimes called The Twelve.

The Major Prophets are described as “major” because their books are longer, and the content has broad, even global implications. The Minor Prophets are described as “minor” because their books are shorter, and the content is more narrowly focused. That does not mean the Minor Prophets are any less inspired than the Major Prophets. It is simply a matter of God choosing to reveal more to the Major Prophets than He did to the Minor Prophets.

Both the Major and Minor Prophets are usually among the least popular books of the Bible for Christians to read. This is understandable with the often unusual, prophetic language and the constant warnings and condemnations recorded in the prophecies.

Still, there is much valuable content to be studied in the Major and Minor Prophets. We read of Christ’s birth in Isaiah and Micah. We learn of Christ’s atoning sacrifice in

Isaiah. We read of Christ's return in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. We learn of God's holiness, wrath, grace, and mercy in all of the Major and Minor Prophets. For that, they are most worthy of our attention and study.

As we finish our overview study of the Ancient Believers as found in the Old Testament, we trust that this study will help you to understand God's story for your live.

***Soli Deo Gloria***

2022





**Week 1**

# LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

## King Solomon

**Memory Verse:**

*Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong.*

1 Kings 3:9(a)

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD



## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

Solomon was the king who built the first Jewish Temple around 957 B.C. He was the third and last king of the united kingdom of Israel, following King Saul and King David. He was the son of David and Bathsheba, the former wife of Uriah the Hittite whom David had killed to hide his adultery with Bathsheba while her husband was on the battle front. Solomon reigned for 40 years

When he ascended to the throne, he sought after God. Solomon humbly acknowledged his inability to rule well and asked God for the wisdom he would need to rule God's people justly. God gave him wisdom and wealth besides. God also gave Solomon peace on all sides during most of his reign.

Solomon was not only wise in his rule but had great general wisdom as well. His wisdom was renowned in his day. The Queen of Sheba travelled 1,900 km to verify the rumours of his wisdom and grandeur. Solomon wrote many proverbs and songs and completed many building projects.

Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, many of them foreigners who led him into public idolatry in his old age, greatly angering God because his heart had turned away from the LORD.

## PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### Read 1 Kings 2:1-46 David's final instructions to Solomon

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read 1 Kings 3:1-15    Solomon asks for wisdom**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read 1 Kings 3:16-28 Solomon judges wisely**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read 1 Kings 11:1-43 Solomon's decline**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## **Prayer**

Open the session in prayer.

## **Memory verse:**

*Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong.*

*1 Kings 3:9(a)*

## **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

There are many lessons we can learn from the life of Solomon.

- First, when we seek God with all of our heart, He will be found (1 Kings 3:3–7).
- Second, those who honour God will be honoured by Him (1 Kings 3:11–13; 1 Samuel 2:30).
- Third, God will equip us to accomplish the tasks He calls us to if we will rely on Him (1 Kings 3; Romans 12:3–8; 2 Peter 1:3).
- Fourth, the spiritual life is a marathon, not a sprint. A good start is not always enough to finish well (1 Kings 3; 11).
- Fifth, we can sincerely ask God to incline our hearts toward Him (1 Kings 8:57–58), but we will wander off the path of righteousness if we choose to violate His revealed Word.
- Sixth, those closest to us will affect our spiritual lives (Exodus 34:16; 1 Kings 11:1–8; Daniel 1; 3; 1 Corinthians 15:33), and we must therefore be careful of the company we keep.
- Seventh, life lived apart from God will be meaningless, regardless of education, fulfilled goals, the greatest of pleasures, and the greatest abundance of wealth.

## Discussion questions

Read 1 Kings 2:1-4. As King David neared the end of his life, he handed the reigns to his son, Solomon. What were the final instructions he gave Solomon? How did this reflect the lessons that David had learned in life? Discuss.

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Read 1 Kings 3:5-14. God appeared to Solomon in a dream. What did Solomon ask for and what did he refrain from asking? What can we learn about prayer from this account in Solomon's life? Discuss.

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As Solomon's wisdom grew, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to collect and write wise sayings, as we find them in Proverbs.

Read Proverbs 1:1-7. What is the purpose and the value of the proverbs? Do you think they are still needed today? Why? Discuss.

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Read 1 Kings 11:1-13. King Solomon did some very foolish things at the end of his life. What did he do, and what were some of the consequences? Discuss.

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How can we avoid finishing poorly?

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Share with the small group some area of your life you would like them to pray for you to continue living wisely and finish strong.

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**Close in prayer**



**Week 2**

# LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

## Elijah

**Memory Verse:**

*...The Lord – he is God! Yes, the Lord is God.*

*1 Kings 18:39(b)*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD



## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

The prophet Elijah, is best known for his confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He is one of the most interesting characters in the Bible. God used him during a really crucial time in Israel's history to oppose a wicked king and to bring revival to those people. However, Elijah's life was not without its challenges. There were times when he was decisive and valiant, but there were also times when he was fearful and uncertain. He also demonstrated victory and defeat, trailed by recovery. He recognized the power of God, but he also knew the pits of depression. His life was devoted to the work of restoring true worship In Israel. Ultimately, Elijah urged the people of ancient Israel to turn from sin and to return to the true God and his message is just as important for us today. Elijah's admonition that God's people faithfully serve Him with their whole heart is just as relevant now as it was during his time on earth.

Elijah did not seek to be one of God's messengers. Instead, God chose him directly for the position. When he was called, Elijah didn't hesitate to take on his mission, even though it appeared his life would be threatened by the wicked king. Elijah was chosen to confront the followers of Baal simply because he had a relationship with God. In addition to confronting the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he also performed many miracles:

providing an endless supply of flour for a widow and raising a young boy from the dead.

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### **Read 1 Kings 17:1-24 God takes care of Elijah**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read 1 Kings 18:1-46 Elijah and the Baal prophets**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read 1 Kings 19:1-21 Elijah flees to Sinai and the Lord spoke to him**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## Prayer

Open the session in prayer.

## Memory verse:

*...The Lord – he is God! Yes, the Lord is God.*

*1 Kings 18:39(b)*

## Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

There are many great prophets in the Old Testament, but Elijah is considered one of the greatest. He stood up for God despite huge obstacles and performed dramatic miracles. Elijah's name in Hebrew means "My God is Yahweh" and may be a title applied to him because of his challenge to worship of Baal.

Elijah's challenge is bold and direct. Baal was the Canaanite god responsible for rain, thunder, lightning, and dew. Elijah thus, when he initially announces the drought, not only challenges Baal on behalf of God himself, but he also challenges Jezebel, her priests, Ahab and the people of Israel.

Despite the many powerful moments in Elijah's life, he also had times of doubt and struggle, making him one of the more complex Old Testament figures.

## **Discussion questions**

Read 1 Kings 17:1 Describe Elijah's first confrontation with King Ahab. How was it that Elijah could claim such power from God? Discuss.

Read 1 Kings 17:2-7. Why did Elijah disappear for more than two years after his first confrontation with Ahab? Where was he? How did God use both supernatural and natural means? Discuss.

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Read 1 Kings 18:1-3. What did Obadiah do that showed his fear of the Lord? Discuss.

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Read 1 Kings 18:16-40. What did Elijah tell Ahab to do when he met him? What was Elijah's purpose? What was the agreement between Elijah and the false prophets on Mount Carmel?

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What did Elijah do to prove that God was the true and living God? Does public prayer have to be long to be effective?

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How had God shown His power over the pagan gods at Mount Carmel?

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Read 1 Kings 18: 41-46. There is a saying: "Faith sees God's hand behind man's hand." What does this mean? What did this mean to Elijah? What does this mean to us today? Discuss.

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Read 1 Kings 19:1-9. Right after this amazing victory, Elijah faced one of his hardest spiritual and emotional times. What did Elijah go through and how did God seek to lovingly restore him?

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As a group, discuss a time you hit a low spot in your faith life after a real victory or strength. How can we be on our guard and prepared for spiritual attacks in instances like these?

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**Close in prayer**

**Week 3**

# LEARNING FROM

the ancient believers

## Isaiah

**Memory Verse:**

*...Unless your faith is firm, I cannot make you stand firm.*

*Isaiah 7:9(b)*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD





## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

The Major Prophet Isaiah lived in the eight century before Christ. His name means “Yahweh is salvation.” His writings are especially significant for the prophecies he made about the coming Messiah, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Did you know that the New Testament Gospels quote more from Isaiah’s writings than from any other of the Old Testament prophets? Many commentators describe Isaiah as Judah’s evangelist because he worked tirelessly to turn the people back to God.

Little is written about Isaiah the man. We know that he was the son of Amoz and that he married and had sons of his own (Isaiah 1:1; 7:3; 8:3). Though Isaiah’s recognition as a great prophet is indicated in the books of the Kings and Chronicles, it is also probable that he was a priest, as his calling from God took place in the temple (Isaiah 6:4), an area reserved only for priests. The anointing he receives at his calling is similar to that of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 6:7).

Along with his contemporary, the prophet Micah, Isaiah served the Southern kingdom of Judah under the reigns of four kings. At the time of Isaiah’s ministry, Judah was a sinful and unjust nation. Nevertheless, Isaiah believed that

Judah was God's chosen nation, and they would be vindicated by God. With support from Micah and the godly King Hezekiah, their enemies were held at bay and a revival swept through the nation of Judah (2 Kings 19:32-36; 2 Chronicles 32:20-23).

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### **Read Isaiah 1: A message for rebellious Judah and unfaithful Jerusalem**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Isaiah 2: A warning of judgement**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges,

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Isaiah 3: The judgement

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Isaiah 4: A promise of restoration

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Isaiah 6: The calling of Isaiah

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Additional Reading:**

It is not Christmas yet, but to conclude this week – Read Isaiah 7: 10-14 and Glorify His Name!

# GROUP DISCUSSION

## **Prayer**

Open the session in prayer.

## **Memory verse:**

*...Unless your faith is firm, I cannot make you stand firm.*

*Isaiah 7:9(b)*

## **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

The earliest recorded event in Isaiah's life is his call to prophesy as we find it in Isaiah 6. Isaiah saw God and was overwhelmed by the divine glory and holiness of God. Isaiah became aware that God needed a messenger to the people of Israel, and despite his feelings of inadequacy, he offered himself for God's service.

It was not a light undertaking, as he was to condemn his own people and watch the nation perish. He was aware of the fact that he would experience bitter opposition, disbelief and ridicule. He also knew that Israel's rebellion brought on a judgement that cannot be averted.

Isaiah's ministry was characterized by closeness with other godly men, like Micah and King Hezekiah. Doing it alone can often leave us vulnerable, but when we are united by God's Holy Spirit to other members of the body of Christ through fellowship and prayer, our ministry is more effective by virtue of the protection others provide.

## **Discussion questions**

Read Isaiah 1: 1. What is this book about?

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In Chapter 1 we find three outstanding sections, each addressing a very serious matter.

Read Isaiah 1: 2-9. It begins with the call to listen to what the Lord has said. How does the Lord describe His people's spiritual decline in these verses?

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Read Isaiah 1: 10-15. It begins with a similar call to listen to what the Lord has said. What does the Lord say to His people here about how He reacts to religious practices by people who does not live according to His will? Discuss.

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Read Isaiah 1: 16-20. The Lord gives a three-fold directive for the desired way of living, with the end results of such actions (verses 19-20). Describe and discuss them.

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Read Isaiah 4:2-6. What are God's promises for those in Israel who stay true to Him:

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Read Isaiah chapter 6. Here Isaiah records how the Lord has called and commissioned him and how he answered to and accepted Gods calling.

What is the most outstanding aspect for you from this testimony? Discuss in the group and share how everyone was inspired.

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Isaiah carefully describes the REVELATION of God's Glory, the realisation of his sin and how God CLEANSED him from his sins, and what his REACTION was.

Read Isaiah 6: 1-4 and Revelation 4. Have you ever had a wonderful revelation/realisation of the Lord's glory and power? How would you express the glory, honour, and power of the Lord in your words? Share with the group.

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What effect does the realisation of Who the Almighty God is and the envisioning of His Glory, Power and Love have on you?

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Read Isaiah 6: 5-7 and describe what the Bible says about the realisation and acknowledgement of sin and of God's grace and forgiveness.

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Read Isaiah 6: 8-13: What do you learn about God's calling and the believer's response? Discuss.

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**Close in prayer**



# Week 4

## LEARNING FROM the ancient believers

### Amos

#### Memory Verse:

*Now this is what the Lord says to the family of Israel:  
“Come back to me and live!”*

*Amos 5:4*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

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PART 2



## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

David Guzik wrote: *The name Amos means burden or burden bearer. Since most of the prophecies of Amos concern coming judgment on either the nations surrounding Israel or judgment on Israel itself, he was a man with a burden.*

Amos had no “formal” theological or prophetic training. He was a farmer from Tekoa, 12 km from Jerusalem. He was the poorest kind of farmer, as he was a herdsman and also looked after the sycamore trees. This was regarded as the lowest job and therefore he was not a likely candidate to be preaching to the people.

Amos is one of a few prophets who did not focus very much on the coming salvation in Christ (along with Joel), but mainly spoke to the corruption and injustice of his context. He was a quite simple man, speaking God’s truth to the most powerful people in the land, and pulled no punches in delivering a jarring message of judgement and calling Israel back to the covenant that God had established with them.

Although most prophets proclaimed their message to their own nation. Amos was called from the southern kingdom

of Judah to proclaim God's word in the northern kingdom of Israel. His message was about the justice of God and tough to hear.

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### **Read Amos 1:1-15 God's judgement on Israel's neighbours**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Amos 2:1-16 God's judgement on Judah and Israel**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Amos 3:1-15 Witnesses against guilty Israel**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Amos 5:1-27 A call to Repentance**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Amos 7:1-9 & 8:1-14 Five visions**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Amos 9:11-15 A promise of Restoration**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## **Prayer**

Open the session in prayer.

## **Memory verse:**

*Now this is what the Lord says to the family of Israel: "Come back to me and live!"*

*Amos 5:4*

## **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

Chapter 7 gives us an amazing insight into Amos' personal life and the things he encountered. It shows us that his prayers affected God. This does not mean that our prayers can influence God's character, but it can change his plans. God is not an impersonal God, with His plans set in stone, but a God who listens to us.

Furthermore, it shows us that his preaching angered the people hearing it. Prophets are never popular with priests or pastors, and Amos angered the religious leaders.

In his book, *The Message of Amos*, JA Motyer, writes: *Affluence, exploitation and the profit motive were the most notable features of the society which Amos observed and in which he worked.... On the other hand, the poor were really poor and were shamelessly exploited... When Amos turned his gaze upon the [faith community of Israel] he found a religion which was very religious, which adored what was traditional, but which had shaken free from divine revelation. The religious centres were apparently thronged, sacrifices were punctiliously offered, the musical side of worship was keenly studied. But it had no basis outside the mind of man... Looking at these things, Amos saw a society and a [faith community] on its last legs, but nobody else did.*

## Discussion questions

Read Amos 1:1-2. Why do you think God often chose men like Amos to deliver His messages to Israel, and especially in the case of Amos, to the rich and powerful people of the nation? Discuss in the group.

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From reading Amos 3,4 & 5, what would you say is the main message for the people back then (Israel)?

Relationship with God	Relationship with others (the world, church family, wider community etc)

What is Amos saying to us today about how we should live in respect to these two focus-areas? Discuss.

Relationship with God	Relationship with others (the world, church family, wider community etc)

One of the main problems that Amos noticed about the Israelites was that they would call God 'holy' and worship Him in His special separate space (the temple) but when they left, they would just continue to live in the way they wanted to and not be changed by their interaction with God. How should we think differently about God's nature, or think more deeply about His nature? How do we interact with God's holiness in a way that does not separate us from Him, but actually engages us with Him more in order to

make us more holy ourselves (Also refer to Leviticus 11:45 & 1 Peter 1:13-16)?

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Read Amos 5:18-27. God is clearly more concerned with people's hearts and the way they live out their faith than how they worship or participate in superficial rituals. How should we continue to participate in traditions, rituals and structures that encourage good lives, while also not let those things take us away from the heart of faith: a genuine relationship with God? In other words, how do we make sure that we are spending time with God and not just the 'things' of God?

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Amos observed that some of the customs that the Israelites practised, and more so the way they practised them, were more informed by the false religions around Israel rather than the Mosaic laws. What are ways that 'modern day church' can and has copied the trends and

thinking of the world and its 'customs' instead of the staying true to the heart of faith in God?

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**Close in prayer**

# Week **5**

## LEARNING FROM the ancient believers

### Jeremiah

#### **Memory Verse:**

*Does a maiden forget her jewellery, a bride her wedding ornaments?*

*Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.*

*Jeremiah 2: 32*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD





## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

The Major Prophet Jeremiah lived in the seventh century before Christ. He was a wealthy man for his time: he could afford to buy property near Anathoth (32: 6-15), he had his own seal ring to authorise documents (32: 10), he had a personal secretary (Jer 45: 1), and he could afford his own clothes (13: 1) and writing material (36: 2, 28-32). Jeremiah was set to lead a comfortable quiet life, but God called him into ministry, which totally changed his life.

Jeremiah was 17 years old when he was called by God, and he spoke to the people of God at a traumatic time for them. The 10 tribes in the North have been taken into exile by the Assyrians and only the two tribes living in and around Jerusalem was left. Jeremiah is the last prophet to speak to the people of Israel and warn them that it was almost too late to stop the disaster that was coming.

Jeremiah's life as a prophet was exceedingly tough. When he started, he had to move to Jerusalem, as his own family wanted to kill him. During his 40 years as prophet, he was in the midst of all the political upheaval. He had to advise the people to surrender to the Babylonians, and they hated him for that. His life ended with him being in Egypt after some Jews kidnapped him and took him away. He ended up at Elephantine Island, where he died alone.

## PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### Read Jeremiah 1: The **CALLING** of Jeremiah

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, visions, warnings, complaints,

charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## **Read Jeremiah 2: 1-13, 32 To remember not to forget God**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## **Read Jeremiah 3: 1-14, 19-22, 4: 1-4 The Message of God's Unconditional Love and Mercy**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Jeremiah 29 The Letter from Jeremiah to the Exiles in Babylon

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, visions, warnings, complaints, charges, judgment or promises being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## **Prayer**

Open the session in prayer.

## **Memory verse:**

*Does a maiden forget her jewellery, a bride her wedding ornaments?*

*Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.*

*Jeremiah 2: 32*

## **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

Jeremiah was very young when the Lord called him. His family also had a history that made them unpopular in Jewish society. So, Jeremiah's first reaction was to decline. But God already had a plan with him before his birth – and would not take no. He literally put His Words in Jeremiah's mouth and said: Off you go!

Jeremiah's task was not easy, and his message was not easy – but he obeyed. He warned and blessed the people of Israel according to each of the different tasks that the Lord gave him. He exposed their forgetfulness and their idolatry and how they exchanged Him for man-made idols that could not help them (Jer 2). In Jeremiah 3 God compares Israel's idolatry with the infidelity of a married person. But he also revealed God's grace, mercy and unwavering love and how far God would go to forgive and how much he longs for our repentance.

The Jews believed that the Lord dwelled in the temple in Jerusalem, and that Jerusalem therefor was indestructible (ref Ps 48:8). Suddenly the whole of Jerusalem now finds themselves in a foreign country without a temple (Jer 29) – and they could easily fall into despair: if God dwelled in the temple and the temple has been destroyed, God must have abandoned them. Against this background Jeremiah

warns his exile listeners in their strange environment not to concede to the temptation to withdraw from public life. No, they should strive to make the place where they are a better place.

## **Discussion questions**

Read Jeremiah 1: 4-6. When God called Jeremiah to serve Him, He assured him that His plan had been in place since Jeremiah was in his mother's womb. The Bible teaches us that God has a plan for each of us who follow Him. How has God gifted and called you to serve Him and how are you following His call?

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As with many of the people God calls, Jeremiah had his list of excuses. What excuses do we try to get out of following God?

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How can your group members pray for you and encourage you to stop making excuses, and to seek to follow God with greater faithfulness and passion and boldly follow His leading? Discuss.

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In Jeremiah 2 we see how the people forgot all God's deeds and exchanged Him for man-made idols that could not help them. Do you agree that our individualistic consumers culture could cause us to forget God and rather share other stories than God's story, to have other heroes than God and to follow other values? Discuss.

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In Jeremiah 3 God compares Israel's idolatry with the infidelity of a married person. But he also portraits how far God would go to forgive and how much he longs for our repentance. What does this mean to you in respect of your salvation? Discuss.

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In Jeremiah 29 the prophet warns against the two main enemies of true hope: false hope and despair. Discuss the things that causes people to despair in our day, as well as things that causes people to hope in a wrong way.

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Read Jeremiah 29: 4-7. The Jews believed that the temple and Jerusalem was indestructible. Now they are exiles in a foreign country without a temple. Did God perhaps abandon them?

What is the unexpected message that Jeremiah has for the exiles?

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Jeremiah warns his exile listeners not to withdraw from public life but rather to strive to make the place where they are a better place. What do you think is the public responsibility of the church today? (Remember: We are the church). Think of concrete examples. Discuss in the group.

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**Close in prayer**

# Week **6**

## LEARNING FROM the ancient believers

### Esther

#### Memory Verse:

*... And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*

*Esther 4:14(b)*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD





## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In his book, *Unlocking the Bible*, David Pawson wrote the following: *“the book of Esther is unusual for two reasons: along with Ruth, it is one of only two books in the Bible named after women; and along with the Song of Solomon, it is one of only two books in the Bible that never mention God’s name directly.”*

The book, *Esther*, along with the books *Ezekiel* and *Daniel*, were written during the Jewish exile. It tells us how the Jews behaved while they were living in a Gentile society. Therefore, it can give us a good indication of how we should live in a non-Christian society.

*Esther* was an orphan from the tribe of Benjamin. Her father and mother were not alive, and *Mordecai*, her cousin, became her guardian. This was 50-60 years after many of the Jews had returned to Judah under *Zerubbabel* in 538 BC. But it was before the second return under *Ezra* in 457 B.C.

*Esther* and her people face a horrific threat in a foreign land. The story is filled with intrigue, persecution, conflict, and vindication. Although God’s name is never mentioned, He is everywhere. It is the Holy Spirit that

worked in both Esther and Mordecai the deep level of humility, leading to their mutual love and loyalty.

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### **Read Esther 2:1-20 Esther becomes queen**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Esther 2:21-23 Mordecai's loyalty to the king**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Esther 3:1-15 Haman’s plot against the Jews**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Esther 4:1-17 Mordecai asks Esther's help**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Esther 5:1-6:14 Esther’s request to the king and Haman’s plan to kill Mordecai**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Esther 8:1-17 A decree to help the Jews**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## Prayer

Open the session in prayer.

## Memory verse:

*... And who knows but that you have come to your royal position  
for such a time as this?*

*Esther 4:14(b)*

## Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

Through her actions, Esther straightened things out in her time, making sure that a hopeless situation changed and that her people were saved from destruction. She was willing to take risks and risked her position as queen to change the fate of her people. She made herself available and left it to the Lord to use her as He wanted.

Esther, with her beauty and character, stole King Ahasuerus' heart. When Haman endangered her people, she risked her life to go to the king uninvited. Thus, Esther came to the rescue of her people. Her willingness and her courage made her a tool in God's hands.

## **Discussion questions**

Read Esther 2:5-9. How did Esther become part of the pageant to find the king a new wife?

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Read Esther 2:10. Why do you think Esther hid her Jewish identity? What does this tell us about the Persian society and the Jewish people in exile?

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Have you ever been in a situation where you had to hide your Christianity? Discuss with the group.

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Read Esther 2: 21-23. How did Mordecai and Esther save the king's life? Why is this incident important? Discuss.

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Read Esther 3: 6. Why did Haman hate the Jews? Have you ever been the target or experienced hatred based on who or what you are and believe? Discuss.

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Discuss the pathway Haman takes from pride to mass genocide? How does it warn us today? How can sin grow and gain power in our own lives?

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Read Esther 3: 13-4:3. What is Mordecai's response when He hears the edict? What is your response to seeing injustice and evil around you? What can Mordecai's response to injustice and evil teach us about our own?

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How does Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews prepare for Esther's meeting with the King?

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How does the story of Esther, Mordecai, and Haman help us understand the injustices we see in our world today? How can we respond where God has placed us today (Refer to Esther 4:14)?

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**Close in prayer**

# Week 7

## LEARNING FROM the ancient believers

### Daniel and his friends



**Memory Verse:**

*... the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power...*

*Daniel 3:17(b)*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD



## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

In the Book of Daniel, we read about Daniel and his three young Hebrew friends held captive in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Their Hebrew names are Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah. But most of us know them by the pagan names given to them by the Babylonians – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel is also given a pagan name – Belteshazzar, yet we know him by his Hebrew name.

Around 598 BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Assyrians and their Egyptian allies at Carchemish in Syria. This victory resulted in Babylonian control of Syria and all of Palestine. On his way back to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and made the king an unwilling vassal. (Nebuchadnezzar did not attempt to conquer Jerusalem until 587 BCE.) He also took the "best and the brightest" back to Babylon in order to train them in Babylonian ways and use them for political gain.

Unlike most victorious kings, who typically only allowed people of their own ethnicity to rule while enslaving all subjugated peoples, King Nebuchadnezzar determined to train for governmental service those with the best minds among the people within his kingdom, regardless of their race.

Those taken were sons of noble people or other elites. In fact, one tradition suggests the three Hebrew "boys" with Daniel were descendants of King Hezekiah. In addition to being of noble birth, these lads were also good-looking and highly intelligent. They were given good positions in the royal court and were expected to learn the language and culture of Babylon. Their training would last three years before they were put into full-time service.

As part of their training, they were fattened up, because in those times, obesity was seen as a sign of prosperity. Daniel and his three friends did not wish to violate God's dietary laws and stood out because of the food and drink they wished to consume. Although Daniel was the first to resist the king's food and drink, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are soon shown to have the same mind-set.

Although the Babylonian overseer was reluctant to grant Daniel and his three friends' request to not eat the king's daily provision for them, he granted them a 10-day trial on the food and drink they proposed. Because they appeared healthy at the end of this test period, they were allowed to eat the diet of vegetables and water that they had requested.

They stood on their principles in the small matter of their diet, and therefore they were able to stand when the real big tests came.

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### **Read Daniel 1:1-21 In Nebuchadnezzar's Court**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Daniel 2:1-23 Nebuchadnezzar's dream**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Daniel 2:24-49 Daniel interprets the Dream**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Daniel 3:1-18 Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Daniel 3:19-30 The blazing Furnace**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## **Prayer**

Open the session in prayer.

## **Memory verse:**

*... the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power...*

*Daniel 3:17(b)*

## **Reflection:**

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

Daniel chapter 3 is a well-known and well-loved chapter in the Bible. It contains things we all like in a story... 90-foot idols, furious kings, fiery furnaces hot enough to kill people who are just passing by... That sort of thing. At the end of chapter two everything was going along very nicely for Daniel and his three friends. They were exalted to a position of privilege and power in Babylon. But then everything changed when Nebuchadnezzar decided to make a golden image that was 30m high and 3 m wide! And what is worse, everyone is commanded to bow down and worship the image!

This event constitutes a change for the lives of all Jews exiled in Babylon. They had faced indoctrination before but not persecution for their religious beliefs. But this proclamation and decree is going to affect all people and men of every language. Everyone is going to be put on the spot. They all need to decide: Do you go with these new laws of the land? What about if you are Jewish and to bow down and worship this image would break the first two of the Ten Commandments? But what of the alternative? To not do so will cost you your life.

Christians in persecuted countries have faced these questions since the time of Christ. In the West however it

is a recent development where the laws of the land are coming into conflict with the laws of God. But this is increasing and changing fast. In this study we are going to see how the three friends stood strong in their faith despite the threat of death.

## Discussion questions

Read Daniel 3:1-2. What did Nebuchadnezzar make? How large was it? Where did he put it? Whom did he call together and for what purpose?

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Describe the differences between idolatry and worship of the true God. What are some ways people today are guilty of idolatry? Discuss in the group.

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Daniel 3: 3-8. What were the people who attended the dedication required to do? What was the penalty for refusing?

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Daniel 3:9-18. What accusations were made? How did the king react to these accusations? What claim did Daniel's three friends make about God? What intention did they state regardless of God's deliverance? Were the friends right to disobey the king? Explain and give Scripture for your answer.

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Have you ever been in a situation where you were forced to disobey rules or government because of your faith? List examples of dangers we may face today that require courage like that shown by Daniel's friends. Discuss in the group.

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Read Daniel 3:19-23. Discuss the evidence from the story that shows that survival would have been impossible by natural law.

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Read Daniel 3:24-27. What miracle happened when the three men were thrown into the furnace? What was observed when the friends came out from the furnace?

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Read Daniel 3:28-30? What conclusion did the king reach about the friends and their God? What decree did he make?

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Based on Daniel 3, what should we learn about the purpose of true miracles?

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**Close in prayer**

# Week 8

## LEARNING FROM the ancient believers

### Daniel

#### Memory Verse:

*For He is the living God, and He will endure forever.  
His kingdom will never be destroyed, and His rule will  
never end.*

*Daniel 6:26(b)*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD





## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

Daniel was part of the group of noble men taken from Israel's royal household to be trained in the ways of the Babylonians. There are some striking similarities between the life of Daniel and that of Jacob's son Joseph. Both of them prospered in foreign lands after interpreting dreams for their rulers, and both were elevated to high office as a result of their faithfulness to God.

God gave Daniel the ability to understand dreams and visions of all kinds. Daniel exercised great integrity and, in doing so, received the respect and affection of the powerful rulers he served. Daniel became a skilled government administrator, excelling at whatever tasks were assigned to him. His court career lasted nearly 70 years.

However, his honesty and loyalty to his masters never led him to compromise his faith in the one true God. Rather than it being an obstacle to his success, Daniel's continual devotion to God brought him the admiration of the unbelievers in his circle. When delivering his interpretations, he was quick to give God the credit for his ability to do so.

## PERSONAL STUDY

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### Read Daniel 4:1-27 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Daniel 4:28-37 The dream's fulfillment**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Daniel 5:1-12 The writing on the wall

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Daniel 5:13-31 Daniel explains the writing on the wall

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Daniel 6:1-28 Daniel in the lion’s den**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or

solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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# GROUP DISCUSSION

## Prayer

Open the session in prayer.

## Memory verse:

*For He is the living God, and He will endure forever.*

*His kingdom will never be destroyed, and His rule will never end.*

*Daniel 6:26(b)*

## Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

Daniel 6 has long been a beloved Bible story – and no wonder. There are so many dramatic features in this story – the jealousy of political subordinates, the vanity of a king, the integrity of a man, the power and preservation of God, even wild animals, and violence.

Daniel was one of three leaders directly under Darius, and he shined above the other two leaders. Daniel had a good attitude in his work and life, and this made him the object of attack.

His enemies knew he could not be trapped into evil, but they also knew that he would be faithful to his God in all circumstances. If the enemies of Daniel knew him, they also knew Darius. They knew they could appeal to Darius' pride and his desire for a unified kingdom.

It was an established principle in the Medo-Persian Empire that when a king formally signed and instituted a decree, it was so binding that not even the king himself could change it. The decrees of a Persian king were unchangeable because he was thought to speak for the gods, who could never be wrong and thus never needed to change their minds.

Daniel did not let the decree change his actions one way or another. He did not do more praying or less; he simply continued his excellent prayer life. Once again Daniel proved that he was a man of integrity and God proved His ability to keep His servant.

## Discussion questions

Read Daniel 6:1-5. What do you notice about the character traits of Daniel described in 6:2-4? Do you think his faith had an impact on his character? Discuss.

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Remember that by this time, Daniel is advanced in years (probably in his eighties). What strikes you about his intentionality and influence? (Also refer to verses 10, 22-23.)

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Read Daniel 6:10. Upon learning that this petition presented by the administrators had been signed into law,

how does Daniel react? Did Daniel change any of his habits? What does this reveal about his character? What would you do if this law were passed today? Discuss in the group.

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Read Daniel 6:11-15. What happened to Daniel as a result of his faithful commitment to the Lord?

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Read Daniel 6:16-23. When all efforts of the king fail to spare Daniel, he is led away to the lions' den. How did God save Daniel from the lions?

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Read Daniel 6:26-27. In this story, as in several others in Daniel, some of the most profound descriptions of God come through the mouth of a pagan king. What attributes,

essence and character traits of God are highlighted in this story?

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Daniel was a prayer warrior. How is your heart drawn to cultivate a prayer life with God as a result of this study? Discuss how you can help each other to cultivate a dynamic prayer life.

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**Close in prayer**



# Week 9

## LEARNING FROM the ancient believers

### Ezra

#### **Memory Verse:**

*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

*Ezra 7:10*

WALK WITH GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GOD'S WORD

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PART 2



## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

In 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar tore down the temple in Jerusalem and he took away everything that was valuable from the house of God. In 538 B.C. Cyrus took Babylon and put an end to the Chaldean Empire, of which Nebuchadnezzar was king. Thus, the Persian Empire was established. Cyrus was the first king of the Persian Empire. One of the first things he did was to allow the people who had taken the Chaldeans captive to return to the lands where they came from.

The Lord did not forsake and forget his people. After He sent His people into captivity as punishment for their unfaithfulness, He did not leave them. All the initiative was with Him to bring them back. He was not done with them. They still had a task and a calling to fulfill. This is how God works with people. When you think God has forgotten you — then you discover that He has been with you all along.

God uses different people to execute His plan. Ezra and Nehemiah were two godly men that God called to lead and re-establish the Israelites in Jerusalem after their return from exile in Babylon. This is recorded in the books Ezra and Nehemiah.

There is a strong possibility that these books were once one book with two sections, written by the same author, probably Ezra. They both have the same structure and many similar traits. For this study, we will only focus on the book Ezra.

## **PERSONAL STUDY**

- Read the Scriptures with patience and pay close attention to details.
- Compare other Bible translations with your translation of choice. Use the prompts below to help you understand the passage.

### **Read Ezra 1:1-11 Cyrus allows the exiles to return.**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Observation:** (What do you observe about the characters, events, instructions and claims being made? What did you find interesting? What did you learn?)

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**Application:** (How can you apply this passage to your life? What challenges or encouragements does it have to offer?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Ezra 3:1-12 The beginning of the rebuild of the temple**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Ezra 6:1-22 Rebuilding of the temple  
resume**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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**Read Ezra 7:1-27 Ezra arrives in Jerusalem**

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## Read Ezra 8:1-36 Preparation for Ezra's journey to Jerusalem

**Scripture:** (Read the Scripture and write down the following: List the main characters in this story. What is the plot (problem) of this story? What is the result of or solution to the problem? What is the main lesson learnt in this story?)

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**Prayer** (Based on your reflections, offer a prayer to God.)

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## GROUP DISCUSSION

### Prayer

Open the session in prayer.

### Memory verse:

*For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

*Ezra 7:10*

### Reflection:

Share with the group members how God worked in your life during this week.

## **Introductory Remarks:**

Ezra was the second of three key leaders to leave Babylon for the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel (538 BC) reconstructed the temple (Ezra 3:8), Nehemiah (444 BC) rebuilt the walls (Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2), and Ezra restored the worship. Ezra was a scribe and priest sent with religious and political powers by the Persian King Artaxerxes to lead a group of Jewish exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem (458 BC).

Ezra came back from captivity in Babylon expecting to find the people serving the Lord with gladness, but upon his return to Jerusalem, he found the opposite. He was frustrated and sorrowful. His heart ached, but he still trusted the Lord. Ezra was cut out to take the lead at this time, because he devoted himself “to study the Law of the Lord, to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Till today God still provides the right man at the right time in critical times of the existence of his church. Even though Artaxerxes was not a believer, God used Him to formulate the task God had for Ezra.

Ezra’s effective ministry included teaching the Word of God, initiating reforms, restoring worship, and leading spiritual revival in Jerusalem. These reforms magnified the need for a genuine concern for reputation and for public

image. Nehemiah and Ezra were then, and are now, an encouragement to God's people to make worship their top priority, to emphasize the need for and use of God's Word as the only authoritative rule for living, and to be concerned about the image God's people show to the world.

## Discussion questions

According to Ezra 1-3, God instructed the Jews through the Emperor Cyrus to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord – AND he provided for all their needs. In what ways have you seen/experienced the rescuing powers of the Lord? Discuss.

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The first group of 50,000 Jews that returned to Jerusalem had the task to rebuild the temple, and they have done it successfully before Ezra lead the second group of 1,800 Jews back to Jerusalem about 44 years later.

Read Ezra 6:31- 7:10, 25-26. What was Ezra's role when he arrived in Jerusalem?

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Ezra has devoted Himself to studying Gods Word and following what it teaches (Ezra 7: 1-10). How did Ezra's commitment to God's Word shape his life and ministry?

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Why is it so important that we do more than just know the content of the Bible, but actually obey what the Bible teaches? (Refer to 2 Timothy 3:16)

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Read Ezra 7: 11-12, 21-28, 8: 15-36. King Artaxerxes' instructions what Ezra had to do was very clear. And his material support to make it possible was ample. This was a wonderful opportunity, but there was a big responsibility resting on Ezra's shoulders. What would you do in such a situation? Get organized and immediately get to work? Organize a committee? Discuss in the group.

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What did Ezra do according to Ezra 7: 27-28?

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What is the significance of the instructions and actions recorded in Ezra 7: 21-28, 8: 15-36?

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Read Nehemiah 9:1-8. In the book Nehemiah we find another occasion where Ezra gathered the people to listen to the Word of God – this time with the help of the Levites. What do you notice about the order of their worship service? How would this order of worship work in church today? Discuss in the group.

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A significant contribution of the Ministry of Ezra was that he changed the order of how the corporate worship of God should be organized: he began with the reading and explaining of God's Word and the worship only followed after their acknowledgement of God's holiness and repentance of their sins.

**Close in prayer**

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