

Sept 10-16

Week 37

This week we are still in Act 2, scene 8. As we complete the book of Ezekiel in the first two days, we will continue focusing on restoration. The messages here—the building of the temple and the division of the land—are theological in nature. They are true but are not to be taken literally. These images communicated a message of perfect restoration, which would be fulfilled in a new kind of kingdom inaugurated by the Messiah.

The book of Daniel, which we will begin in day 3, is divided into two main movements.

1. The first six chapters are court stories from the land of Babylon that involve Daniel and his friends. These stories, such as the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den, are among the most loved in the Bible.
2. Chapters 7–12 are a series of apocalyptic visions given directly to Daniel. Apocalyptic means “revelation” or “unveiling.” The cosmic curtain is pulled back, revealing God’s purpose in the world.

Apocalyptic literature, often written in times of persecution, involves visions; symbolic language; and a focus on the real, heavenly perspective behind earthly events. Daniel’s visions revealed stages of world history from his day down to the end of time and the establishing of the eternal Kingdom of the Messiah. Because of the symbolic nature of this section of the Bible, this week’s reading can be difficult to understand at times. Try to keep your focus on the greater themes emphasizing God’s ultimate plan and control even in the midst of disturbing world events.

Day 1

Read Ezekiel 41-44

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 24

Today we continue to focus on the perfect temple, which God showed to Ezekiel. God gave Ezekiel the vision so that the Israelites would be “ashamed of their iniquities” (43:10). What God gave Ezekiel was perfect, and it communicated a very special, perfectly organized place of worship, set apart for God’s people to approach God. All of the measurements communicated the precision with which God had conceived the way he is to be approached. No haphazard, cavalier approach to God will suffice.

The climax of the section is found in Ezekiel 43, when the glory of the Lord, representing his presence, filled the temple. God’s presence among his people is perhaps the key theme of the Bible. Thus, worship stands at the center of our lives as his people.

The priests in Ezekiel 44 anticipated Jesus, the ultimate High Priest (see Hebrews 10:19-22) who would complete and thus bring to an end the sacrificial system by his one sacrifice.

Ask God to show you from this vision what areas of “iniquity” he wants to deal with in your life.

Day 2

Read Ezekiel 45-48

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 25

We wrap up Ezekiel by continuing to read about God's restoration of his people. This is a theological message; the measurements of the temple and the law and the division of the land are not to be taken literally. The pictures here speak of God's full restoration of his people, and the words about the prince anticipate Christ.

Take time to linger over the words about the life-giving river in Ezekiel 47. This speaks of the effects of God's presence and work. Everything in this vision of restoration speaks of God's perfectly reordering reality. Revelation 22:1-5 echoes Ezekiel's vision, speaking of the river of life. The book of Ezekiel appropriately ends with the city's being renamed "The Lord Is There" (48:35; also see Hebrews 12:22).

Offer praise to God for his plan to restore the heavens and earth and to provide eternal life for his people.

Day 3**Read Daniel 1-3****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 26**

Today's reading presents wonderful stories of faithfulness to God.

In Daniel 1 notice the value placed on faithfulness. Daniel and friends were in a foreign land with alien demands made on them, and yet they continued to live by God's laws.

Chapter 2 presents the crisis surrounding Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dreams. Watch how the crisis was resolved. Daniel explained that God would raise up a kingdom that would never be destroyed; this would eventually be fulfilled in Christ and the kingdom of heaven. Daniel's ability to interpret the dream also raised his status and the status of his friends.

The third story is one of the most loved in the Bible: the fiery furnace. The message is that God delivers those who are resolutely faithful to him.

How might you remain faithful today though being pressured to abandon God's ways?

Day 4

Read Daniel 4-6

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 27

Daniel 4–6 continues the series of court stories, which emphasize God’s rule over even the most powerful of earthly kings.

Watch especially for the emphasis on the need for humility in an earthly ruler and for an emphasis on God’s sovereignty. For instance, Daniel 4:17 gives the reason for Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

We get our saying “The writing is on the wall” from the story of Belshazzar in Daniel 5, which functions also to show the transition from the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire (see 5:30). The Persians defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC.

The story of Daniel’s being thrown into the lions’ den is one of the most loved in the Bible. It depicts God’s rescuing a faithful person who stands firm in the face of persecution.

Each of these stories presents a crisis. Notice that God was the real hero of today’s stories, the One who brought about his desired end.

How might God use you in the world, among those who do not know the one true God, as you stand firm in your commitment to him?

Day 5

Read Daniel 7-9

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 28

The literature in the latter half of Daniel is called apocalyptic, as explained in this week's introduction.

Daniel 7–9 presents two visions and an interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy about the seventy years of exile. The first vision (see Daniel 7:1-28) involves four beasts, which represent four stages of political history. These echo the four empires of Daniel 2: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

These earthly kingdoms are put in perspective in Daniel 7:13-14 (along with verses 26-27) by the eternal kingdom of the Messiah. When Jesus was challenged by the High Priest as to if he was truly the Messiah, Jesus quoted Daniel 7:13 in his response (see Matthew 26:64).

Notice in chapter 8 the use of language connected with the Hebrew sanctuary and its services. The focus seems to turn from historical political progression of kingdoms to deep spiritual issues that will arise during that historical progression.

In chapter 9, while Daniel is seeking to understand the fulfillment of the "seventy year" prophecies of Jeremiah 25:12 and 29:10, Daniel is given so much more than he was asking for. The angel introduces "seventy weeks" (literally: seventy sevens) that provide the first hint of the actual timing for the coming of Messiah.

These passages combine a rich historical background with apocalyptic imagery.

Reread Daniel 7:13-14 and 26-27, and turn these verses into a prayer of praise to the Son of Man, whose kingdom will never be destroyed.

Day 6**Read Daniel 10-12****Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 29**

In Daniel 10:1–12:4 an angel gave Daniel a detailed explanation of the previous visions, which extends into the future down to the end of time.

Chapter 10 describes Daniel's encounter with the angel.

Chapter 11 depicts historical events during the time of Greece and Rome. First come the struggle between the two political forces of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, the heirs of Alexander the Great's conquests, over the land of Israel. This happened some three centuries after the time of Daniel. Then comes the transition to Rome and the issues relating to the Little Horn down through the middle ages.

Daniel 12:1-4 puts these conflicts into the eternal perspective.

The book of Daniel concludes with the question of when these things will take place and what will be the outcome. The words at the end of the book are meant to encourage those caught up in world conflict to endure in trusting God until the end.

What present conflicts in the world disturb you? Thank God that he is Lord over the world and will bring these conflicts to an end one day.

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 37

Ezekiel's last chapters offered us the vision of a future temple. Whether this temple will one day become a literal reality on earth or whether there is instead some spiritual or heavenly fulfillment is debatable. Whatever the case, "The Lord Is There" (Ezekiel 48:35).

Daniel, another exile from Judah, flourished in the Babylonian royal court, and even served the next regime (Medo-Persia). His prophecies stretched ahead to foresee the arrival of "One like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13). This will be fulfilled by Jesus at his second coming!

Prayer/Meditation

Lord, thank you for the example of Daniel, who served the government of his day and yet stayed true to your name. You used him to show kings that you are the one true God. You showed him what would come to pass shortly as well as the rise of one godless empire after another. I praise you for the word revealed to him: "The God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). This is the kingdom of my Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.
