

WEEK 38 — GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE HOMELAND AND FAR AWAY

Date: maybe late 500s BC to 445 BC

The Story: God continues to help his people after the return from exile. Many Jews have returned to Israel, but others remain in faraway lands. Joel and Zechariah prophesy to both encourage and warn God's people. A Jewish woman, Esther, becomes queen of Persia; will she risk her life to save her people? Later, Ezra and Nehemiah relocate to Jerusalem to help their people obey God and rebuild Jerusalem's defensive walls.

* Kids' readings may not align with the daily full readings. Parents, see the content ratings on the back page.

SEPTEMBER 18 JOEL

Today's reading presents the prophecy of Joel. We don't know when he prophesied; the late 500s is a good guess. He calls God's people to repent in light of a locust plague so terrible that it's like an invading army that leaves famine and fire in its wake. Yet if the people turn back to God, he will provide for his people. Then, one day, he will pour out his Spirit on all people, rescue them, and punish their enemies.

Date: maybe late 500s BC

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Joel 1 • Joel 2:28 to 3:21

Kids' Reading*: Esther 1

SEPTEMBER 19 ZECHARIAH 9-12

Today's reading resumes our reading of Zechariah. Issues he addresses here are God's judgment of peoples around Israel (9:1-8), the coming of Israel's king and God's salvation of his people (9:9 to 11:3), God's frustration with his people and their leaders (11:4-17), God's protection of his people and destruction of their enemies (12:1-9), and his turning of his people to mourning over "the one they have pierced" (12:10-13)—a prophecy about Jesus. In fact, this text features three prophecies of Jesus: 9:9, 11:12-13, and 12:10.

Date: probably late 500s or early 400s BC

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Zechariah 9-12

Kids' Reading*: Esther 2

SEPTEMBER 20 ZECHARIAH 13-14 • 1 CHRONICLES 8-9

Today's reading wraps up our journey through Zechariah with a prophecy of a climactic battle in which God devastates the enemies of his people—and as a result, the survivors among the nations turn to the Lord, and Jerusalem and Judah are secure and holy. This could be a prophecy of a conflict between God and the enemies of his people in the end times (compare Revelation 19:17-21). Or it could be a symbolic prophecy of the great spiritual conflict that continues between God and his enemies, with God supporting the faithful until he triumphs at the end. We finish the genealogies of 1 Chronicles with the record of King Saul's family line and lists of the first Jews to return to Israel after the Babylonian exile, especially the priests and Levites.

Date: probably late 500s or early 400s BC

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Zechariah 13-14 • 1 Chronicles 9:1-34

Kids' Reading*: Esther 3-4

SEPTEMBER 21 ESTHER 1-4

Today's reading introduces the beloved story of Esther, a Jew born in Persia who becomes queen, and of Mordecai, her cousin who raised her. Haman, a high official of the king, is out to have all the Jews killed. Mordecai learns of Haman's plot and pleads with Esther to help—but to do so, she must risk her life. God is never mentioned in the book of Esther, but he is very involved; watch for his work behind the scenes.

Date: about 483-474 BC

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Esther 2-4

Kids' Reading*: Esther 5-6

DAILY BIBLE READINGS — Summit View Church of Christ

SEPTEMBER 22 ESTHER 5-10

Today's reading completes Esther's story. She risks her life to appeal to the king for the lives of her people.

Meanwhile, Haman focuses his hatred of the Jews on Mordecai personally, and prepares to have him executed—until suddenly the tables are turned. This story explains the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim. Jews celebrate it every spring with festivities and a reading of the book of Esther.

Date: about 474-464 BC

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Esther 5:1 to 9:19

Kids' Reading*: Esther 7-8

SEPTEMBER 23 EZRA 4:6-23 • EZRA 7-8

Today's reading returns us to the book of Ezra, where we begin with what (in chapter 4) was a flash-forward to the time of Xerxes (Esther's husband) and his successor, Artaxerxes, who blocks an effort to rebuild and strengthen Jerusalem. This rebuilding effort will be important in the book of Nehemiah. Meanwhile, with Artaxerxes' blessing, Ezra the priest relocates from Babylon to Jerusalem to instruct the Jews in God's law.

Date: about 485-445 BC

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Ezra 7-8

Kids' Reading*: Esther 9-10

SEPTEMBER 24 EZRA 9-10 • NEHEMIAH 1-2

Today's reading describes Ezra's reform effort in Jerusalem as he calls the Jews there to repent of intermarriage with non-Jewish peoples. Notice his prayer in 9:6-15 and its deep roots in Jewish history, going all the way back to the time of Moses. Then Ezra's story proceeds into the story of Nehemiah. He requests permission to rebuild Jerusalem, the city of his forefathers—and King Artaxerxes, who had earlier halted the rebuilding, grants his request. Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem and begins that work.

Date: about 457-445 BC (November/December of about 446 BC, Nehemiah 1; March/April of about 445 BC, Nehemiah 2:1-10; June/July of about 445 BC, Nehemiah 2:11-20)

In a hurry? 10-minute reading: Ezra 9:1 to 10:17 • Nehemiah 1-2

Kids' Reading*: Nehemiah 1-2

Parents' Guide

PG preview for young children

1Chr 8:8 (T)
Ezra 9:3-15 (T), 3 (V)
Ezra 10:3-6 (T), 11 (T), 19 (T)
Est 1:7-10 (T), 15 (S), 19 (T)
Est 2:2-3 (S), 7 (T), 8-19 (S), 21-23 (V)
Est 3:5-15 (T, V)
Est 4:1-3 (T), 4-5 (S, T), 7-8 (T), 11-17 (T)
Est 5:9 (T), 14 (T, V)
Est 6:2 (T), 14 (S)

Est 9:1-16 (T, V), 24-25 (T, V)
Joel 1:4-20 (T), 8 (S)
Joel 2:1-11 (T), 16 (S), 20 (T), 30-31 (T)
Joel 3:3 (S, T), 6-8 (T), 9-14 (V), 15-16 (T), 19-21 (T, V)
Zech 9:4-8 (T), 13-15 (T, V)
Zech 10:5 (V)
Zech 11:1-3 (T), 4-7 (T, V), 16-17 (V)
Zech 12:2-9 (T, V), 11-12 (T)
Zech 13:6-8 (V)
Zech 14:3 (V), 18-19 (T)

PG-13 preview for under age 13

Est 7:8 (S, V)
Zech 11:9 (V)
Zech 12:10 (T)
Zech 13:3 (V)
Zech 14:12-15 (T)

R shocking, graphic, or disturbing

Zech 14:1 (S, V)

C = Circumcision
N = Nudity
S = Sexuality
T = Dark/Sensitive Themes
V = Violence