

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 53 OF 104

Tested and Proved

Week 53 of 104 • 51% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	2 Chronicles 21–29
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 53–55
Gospels	Luke 3
General New Testament	2 Corinthians 12–13

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Nobody coasts through this week's reading. A boy king stays faithful for exactly as long as the old priest who raised him is alive. A strong king grows strong and forgets who made him. A man discovers that the one who turned on him was the friend he used to walk with to the house of God. John the Baptist stands in the Jordan and tells religious people that having the right ancestors proves nothing, then asks them for fruit instead. And Paul, who had seen things he was not allowed to repeat, tells a church to stop putting him on trial and examine themselves. Every one of these passages asks the same question, and it is not whether you know the right answers. It is whether your week would prove it.

How to use this guide: Read all four passages during the week. Your teacher will take up two of them in class, one in each session. For the other two, work through the "Extended Class Discussion or Self-Study" questions on your own and write your answers in the space provided.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT 2 Chronicles 21–29

Kings Under Examination

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

These chapters run through the worst stretch of Judah's history. Jehoram murders his brothers and dies of a disease nobody mourns. Athaliah kills the royal family, and one infant is hidden in the temple for six years. Joash repairs the house of God and then, after his protector dies, has that man's son stoned in the temple court. Amaziah obeys halfway. Uzziah prospers until he walks into the holy place with a censer. Ahaz shuts the doors. Hezekiah opens them in his first month.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest, and then turned as soon as Jehoiada was buried (24:2, 17–22). Whose faith are you currently leaning on, and what would be left of yours if that person were gone next year?

2. Second Chronicles 26:16 says that when Uzziah was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. How does success actually endanger a person spiritually, and what safeguards can you put in place before you need them?
3. Ahaz shut the doors of the house of the Lord, and Hezekiah opened them in the first month of his first year (28:24; 29:3). What has been shut in your life that needs opening again, and what is your equivalent of the first month of the first year?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read the letter from Elijah in 21:12–15 and note what Jehoram had done and what was announced against him. Why is it significant that even a king in the line of David could be told, in writing, that he had walked in the ways of the kings of Israel?
2. Trace the phrase used of Amaziah in 25:2, that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord but not with a loyal heart, through his story in chapter 25. Where do you see the half heartedness show up in what he actually did?
3. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada is stoned in the court of the temple (24:20–22). Read Luke 11:50–51 and note how Jesus uses that murder. What does it say about how God keeps accounts?
4. In 26:16–21 Uzziah takes a censer into the holy place. Read Numbers 16:39–40 and Hebrews 7:13–14, and explain why the priesthood was not his to take and why that principle still matters for worship today.
5. Hezekiah did not wait. In the first month of his first year he opened the doors and told the Levites to sanctify themselves and get to work (29:3–5). Name the one thing you have been meaning to put right for more than a year, and take the first concrete step on it this week.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 53–55

When the Friend Turns

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Psalm 53 opens with the fool saying in his heart that there is no God, and pictures God looking down to see if anyone understands. Psalm 54 is short and urgent, written when the men of Ziph offered to hand David over to

Saul. Psalm 55 is the hardest of the three. David is shaken by a threat inside the walls, and the worst of it is not the enemy at all: it is the familiar friend with whom he once walked to the house of God.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 53:1 says the fool has said in his heart, there is no God, and then immediately describes corrupt behavior. What does that connection suggest about where practical atheism actually starts, and how can a believer live as though there were no God without ever saying so?
2. In Psalm 55:12–14 David says he could have borne it if an enemy had done this, but it was his companion and friend. Why does betrayal inside the family of God wound so much more deeply, and how should a Christian respond when it happens?
3. Psalm 55:22 says to cast your burden on the Lord and He shall sustain you. In practical terms, what is the difference between casting a burden on God and simply worrying about it in religious language?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Compare Psalm 53 with Psalm 14 and list the differences. Then read Romans 3:10–12, where Paul quotes this psalm. What is Paul proving in Romans 3, and what is he not proving?
2. Read 1 Samuel 23:19–29 for the setting of Psalm 54. Note what David asks for, what he promises, and where his confidence comes from in verses 4 and 7.
3. Trace David's emotions through Psalm 55: what he feels in verses 4 through 8, what he asks for in verses 9 and 15, and where he lands in verses 16 through 23. How honest is the Bible about fear?
4. Psalm 55:15 asks that death come suddenly on his enemies. Read Romans 12:19 and Luke 23:34, and explain how a Christian should handle a prayer like that.
5. Psalm 55:17 says evening, morning, and at noon I will pray and cry aloud. Choose three fixed times this week, write them down, and actually stop and pray at each one, even if only for two minutes.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Luke anchors the story in world history, naming an emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs, and two high priests, and then says the word of God came to John in the wilderness. John preaches a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, calls the crowds a brood of vipers, and refuses to let anyone hide behind Abraham. Three groups ask what they should do, and his answers are ordinary. Then Jesus is baptized, heaven opens, and a voice speaks, and Luke closes with a genealogy running back to Adam.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Three groups ask John what they should do, and he tells them to share a coat, collect no more than they are appointed, and be content with their wages (3:10–14). Why are his answers so ordinary, and what would he say to you about your work this week?
2. John tells the crowd not to begin saying that they have Abraham as their father (3:8). What is the modern version of that sentence in a congregation like ours, and how do we know when we are leaning on it?
3. Jesus had no sin to repent of, yet He was baptized (3:21–22). Why would He do that, and how does His baptism differ from John's baptism and from the baptism commanded in Acts 2:38?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List every specific instruction John gives in 3:10–14, and note what each one costs the person who obeys it. What pattern do you see in the kind of repentance he is asking for?
 2. Read Isaiah 40:3–5 and note how Luke quotes it in 3:4–6. Luke carries the quotation further than Matthew and Mark do. What phrase does he include, and why would that matter to his readers?
 3. Compare the genealogy in Luke 3:23–38 with Matthew 1:1–17. Note where each begins and ends, which son of David each traces, and how many names differ. Then read John 1:45 and Galatians 3:16 and describe what both genealogies are establishing.
 4. Read Acts 19:1–7, where Paul meets men who had received John's baptism. What does Paul do, and what does that tell you about the difference between John's baptism and baptism into Christ?
 5. John said the axe is already laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down (3:9). Name one specific fruit that has been missing from your life, and do one concrete thing about it before next Sunday.
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Strength Made Perfect in Weakness**WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE**

Paul tells, reluctantly and in the third person, about a man caught up to the third heaven who heard words he was not permitted to repeat, and then explains that a thorn in the flesh was given to keep him from being exalted. Three times he asked God to remove it, and three times the answer was My grace is sufficient for you. He recounts the signs that marked him as an apostle, announces a third visit, and tells the church to examine itself.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Paul prayed three times for the thorn to be removed, and God said no and gave him something else instead (12:7–9). Describe a prayer of yours that God has answered that way, and what you did with the answer.
2. Second Corinthians 12:10 says that when I am weak, then I am strong. How does that actually work, and how is it different from simply telling yourself you are stronger than you feel?
3. Second Corinthians 13:5 tells the Corinthians to examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith, and to test themselves. What standard would you use for that examination, and how do you keep it from becoming either self flattery or despair?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Paul states the purpose of the thorn twice in a single verse (12:7). Write out both statements. What does the repetition tell you about the danger he was in and about who sent the affliction?
2. Trace the argument from 12:9 to 12:10. List what Paul says he takes pleasure in, and explain how he moves from a denied request to genuine contentment.
3. Second Corinthians 12:12 speaks of the signs of an apostle. Read Hebrews 2:3–4, Mark 16:20, and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. What purpose did those signs serve, and what does Scripture say about their continuance?
4. List the sins Paul fears he will find at Corinth in 12:20–21. How many are sins of the tongue or of relationship rather than of appetite? What does that emphasis say about what damages a church?
5. Paul says he would gladly spend and be spent for their souls, even if the more he loved them the less he was loved (12:15). Name one person you will keep loving this week with no expectation of return, and one specific way you will do it.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 2 Chronicles 30-36 · Psalm 56-57 · Luke 4:1-30 · Galatians 1-2

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