

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 55 OF 104

Who Belongs to God

Week 55 of 104 • 53% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Ezra 1-10
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 58-59
Gospels	Luke 4:31-5:26
General New Testament	Galatians 3:1-4:20

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

A caravan of exiles walks back to a ruined city, and the first thing they build is an altar, not a wall. Old men who remember the first temple weep while young men shout, and from a distance you cannot tell the two sounds apart. A hunted man watches soldiers surround his house at nightfall and decides that in the morning he will sing. Four friends tear a hole in somebody's roof to get one paralyzed man in front of Jesus. And Paul asks a church full of Gentiles a question with an obvious answer: how did you become sons of God in the first place? Every reading this week circles the same question. Who belongs to God, and how did they come to belong?

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 Ezra 1-10

The Long Way Home

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Cyrus issues a decree, the temple vessels come out of storage, and a list of families goes home to a burned city. They build the altar in the seventh month, before a single stone of the foundation is laid, and when the foundation goes down the shouting and the weeping blend together. Opposition stops the work for years until two prophets stir the people up again. Sixty years later Ezra arrives with the Law in his hands and finds the people entangled in foreign marriages.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The returned exiles set up the altar and began the daily offerings before the foundation of the temple was laid (3:1-6), and they did it while they were afraid of the people around them. What does that order of priorities say to a congregation or a family deciding what to build first?
2. When the foundation was laid, the young men shouted and the old men who had seen the first house wept aloud, so that no one could tell the noise apart (3:11-13). How should a church handle the people who remember better days, and how should those people handle themselves?

3. Ezra 9 and 10 record men putting away foreign wives, and it is one of the hardest passages in the Old Testament. What was God protecting, and what does the New Testament actually bind on a Christian who is married to an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12–14; 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14)?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace every tactic the opposition uses in chapters 4 and 5: an offer to help, discouragement, hired counselors, letters to the king, and force. Which of those would be hardest for you to recognize if it came at your congregation today?
2. Ezra 6:14 says they built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah. Read Haggai 1:2–8 and describe what the people had been saying and what the prophet said back.
3. Ezra 7:10 says Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, to do it, and to teach it in Israel. List those three verbs in order, and explain why the order cannot be rearranged.
4. In 8:21–23 Ezra proclaims a fast because he was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers after telling him God protects those who seek Him. When has your own testimony put you in a position where you had to depend on God in front of people who were watching?
5. The people in Ezra 10 made a hard decision publicly, in the rain, with a list of names written down. Name one thing in your life that you have kept private because deciding it out loud would cost you something, and take the first public step this week.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 58–59

When the Powerful Are Wrong

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Two psalms about being on the wrong end of power. Psalm 58 confronts judges who were supposed to defend the innocent and instead weighed out violence with their hands, and it asks God, in some of the strongest language in the Psalter, to break their teeth. Psalm 59 comes from the night Saul posted men around David's house to kill him in the morning. David hears them prowling like dogs, and decides that in the morning he will sing of God's mercy.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 58 is aimed at judges who speak righteousness with their mouths and weigh out violence with their hands. When the people who are supposed to enforce justice are themselves the problem, what does the Bible tell a believer to do with that anger?
2. Psalm 58:6–9 asks God to break their teeth and let them melt away like a snail. How should a Christian read prayers like that, and what makes them different from a desire for personal revenge?
3. Psalm 59:16 says, I will sing of Your power, yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning. David wrote that with armed men outside his door. What would it take for singing to be your first response to a frightening night rather than your last?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read 1 Samuel 19:11–17 for the setting of Psalm 59. Who warned David, how did he escape, and what does the psalm add that the narrative does not tell you?
2. List the images Psalm 58 uses for the wicked: poison, a deaf serpent, a lion's teeth, water, a snail, a stillborn child. What does the accumulation of images accomplish that a plain statement would not?
3. Psalm 58:11 ends with the conclusion that surely there is a God who judges in the earth. Compare Romans 12:19 and 2 Thessalonians 1:6–8. How does confidence in God's judgment actually free a believer from having to settle the score?
4. Psalm 59 has two pairs of repeated lines, in verses 6 and 14 and in verses 9 and 17. Write out both pairs and note what changes in the second version of each. What has shifted in David between them?
5. David calls God his defense and his refuge in the day of trouble (59:16). Identify the situation where you have been trying to be your own defense, and this week take one specific step to stop defending yourself and let God handle it.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

In Capernaum they are astonished at His authority, and a demon cries out in the synagogue and is silenced with a word. Simon's mother in law is healed, and by sunset the whole town is at the door. He leaves anyway to preach in other cities. He borrows Simon's boat, fills his nets until they break, and tells him he will now catch men. A leper asks if He is willing. And four men who cannot get through the crowd take a paralyzed friend onto the roof and start digging.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. When Jesus told the paralyzed man his sins were forgiven, the scribes reasoned that only God can forgive sins, and they were right about that (5:20–21). What is Jesus claiming, and how does He answer their objection?
2. Peter's reaction to the miraculous catch was to fall down and say, depart from me, for I am a sinful man (5:8). Why does a close encounter with holiness make a person aware of his own sin rather than pleased with himself?
3. Four men tore a hole in another man's roof to get their friend to Jesus, and the text says Jesus saw their faith (5:18–20). Who is the one person you would be willing to go to that much trouble for, and what would the roof look like in your case?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List every kind of authority Jesus displays in this reading: over teaching, over demons, over disease, over nature, over sin. Which one did the scribes find intolerable, and why?
2. The demons say they know who He is, the Holy One of God (4:34, 41). Read James 2:19 and explain the difference between knowing who Jesus is and belonging to Him.
3. Luke 5:16 says He often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. Find every mention of Jesus praying in Luke's gospel that you can, starting with 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, and 9:28. What pattern emerges, and what does it say about His practice before major moments?
4. Jesus told the cleansed leper to show himself to the priest and make the offering Moses commanded (5:14). Read Leviticus 14:1–7 and Matthew 5:17. Why was that instruction appropriate before the cross, and what changed afterward (Colossians 2:14)?
5. The four friends solved the problem instead of accepting it. Name one person you have been praying for without acting for, and this week do one concrete thing: the invitation, the visit, the ride, the conversation you have been putting off.

Sons, Not Slaves

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Paul turns from history to argument with a blunt question: who has bewitched you? He reminds them how they received the Spirit, takes them back to Abraham, who believed God before the Law, and shows the promise came four hundred and thirty years before Sinai. He explains what the Law was for, calling it a tutor that brought us to Christ, and announces that we are sons of God through faith, baptized into Christ. He closes with an appeal so personal it sounds like a father in distress.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Galatians 3:26–27 says you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Trace the connection Paul makes between those two verses. How does a person become a son of God, and what does putting on Christ mean?
2. Paul says the Law was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come, and served as a tutor to bring us to Christ (3:19–25). What was the Law for, what was it never able to do, and what follows about binding its practices on Christians today?
3. Galatians 3:28 says there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. What is Paul saying is the same for everyone, and how do we keep that verse from being made to say things the same writer denies elsewhere?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List everything Paul says about the purpose and limits of the Law in 3:19–25. How many separate statements can you find, and what picture of the Law do they build together?
2. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, Habakkuk 2:4, Deuteronomy 27:26, and Deuteronomy 21:23 in 3:6–13. Look up each one in its own setting, and explain how Paul uses it.
3. In 3:16 Paul makes an argument from a single word, noting that the promise was made to Abraham's Seed, singular, not seeds. Read Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:29. Who is the Seed, and how do Gentiles come to be Abraham's offspring?
4. Galatians 4:9–11 rebukes them for observing days and months and seasons and years. Read Colossians 2:16–17 and Romans 14:5–6, and explain the difference between binding an Old Covenant observance and a personal matter of conscience.

5. Paul says he is again in labor until Christ is formed in them (4:19). Name one specific way Christ is not yet formed in you, tell one trusted person about it this week, and ask them to ask you about it next month.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Nehemiah 1-7 · Psalm 60-62 · Luke 5:27-6:19 · Galatians 4:21-6:18

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