

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 85 OF 104

The Weight of a Word

Week 85 of 104 • 82% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Ezekiel 1-5
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 119:1-56
Gospels	John 4:46-5:17
General New Testament	James 3-5

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

A priest in a refugee camp is handed a scroll and told to eat it, and it tastes like honey. A poet builds the longest chapter in the Bible around one idea, that God's word is worth hiding in your heart. A desperate father asks Jesus to come home with him and gets a single sentence instead, and walks seven hours down a mountain road on nothing but that sentence. And James, who never softens anything, says the small muscle in your mouth can set a forest on fire, that a man who thinks he is religious and cannot control it is fooling himself, and that a sick Christian should send for the elders. Words carry freight in this week's reading. God's words, and yours.

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 Ezekiel 1-5

The Watchman and the Scroll

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Among the exiles beside an irrigation canal in Babylon, the sky opens. A storm out of the north, four living creatures, wheels within wheels rimmed with eyes, a crystal expanse, and above it a throne with the figure of a man. Ezekiel falls on his face. He is stood on his feet, sent to a stubborn people, handed a scroll to eat, and made a watchman. Then God tells him to act it out: a brick, a long immobility, siege rations, and hair cut with a sword.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Ezekiel 1 is famous for the wheels, but 1:28 tells you what he actually saw: "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Notice how carefully he stacks those words. Why does he describe it so indirectly, and what did that vision mean to a man living in a camp of deportees?
2. Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll before he opens his mouth (2:8-3:3). Why does the message have to go all the way into a man before it goes out of him, and what happens to teaching that skips that step?

3. Ezekiel 3:16–21 makes him a watchman and says the blood of the unwarned will be required at his hand. What responsibility does that lay on a Christian who knows the truth, and where does that responsibility stop?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read Ezekiel 1 and list what moves and what does not. Where is the throne located in the vision, and who is seated on it?
2. Count how often God addresses Ezekiel as “son of man” in these five chapters. What is that title emphasizing, especially coming right after chapter 1?
3. Trace the four sign acts of Ezekiel 4 and 5: the brick, the lying on his side, the rationed food, the shaved hair. Write down what each one was acting out.
4. Compare Ezekiel 2:5 with Ezekiel 33:33. God tells the prophet in advance that the people will not listen, and sends him anyway. How does that reframe the way we measure faithful service?
5. Ezekiel’s obedience cost him comfort, dignity, and years of his life. Name one thing obeying God has actually cost you in the last twelve months, and if you cannot name anything, sit with that for a while.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 119:1–56

Hidden in the Heart

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

The longest chapter in the Bible is built like a cathedral: twenty-two sections of eight verses, each section beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This reading covers the first seven. A young man asks how to keep his way clean. A student prays for his eyes to be opened. A man in the dust asks to be revived by the word. Someone promises to speak of God’s testimonies before kings without shame, and to sing His statutes like traveling songs in a strange country.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 119:9 asks how a young man can keep his way pure, and verse 11 answers it. Why does the psalmist speak of hiding the word in his heart rather than simply reading it, and what is the practical difference between the two?

2. Count the different words used for Scripture in these verses: law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, word. What is the psalmist communicating by circling the same subject with so many different terms?
3. Verse 45 says, "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts." Most people assume commandments and freedom pull in opposite directions. Where in your own life has obedience actually produced freedom?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read verses 1 through 8 and list every term used there for God's word. Then keep a running tally as you read on through verse 56.
2. Verse 18 prays, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law." Describe what that prayer assumes about Bible reading, and say when you last prayed something like it before you opened the book.
3. Trace the verbs this psalmist attaches to the word: hide, meditate, delight, cling, run, love, remember, sing. List them with their verse numbers.
4. Verse 25 says, "My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word." Set it beside verse 50. Where does this man go when he is at his lowest, and what does he expect to happen there?
5. Verse 11 is an argument for memorizing. Choose one verse from this reading, write it on a card, carry it with you, and know it by heart before Sunday.

GOSPELS John 4:46–5:17

Your Son Lives

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

A court official from Capernaum walks twenty miles uphill to beg Jesus to heal his dying boy. Jesus will not go. He gives him a sentence, and the man believes it and starts home, and meets his servants with the news that the fever broke at the exact hour. Then in Jerusalem, at a pool with five porches, Jesus finds a man who has been an invalid for thirty-eight years and asks him a question that sounds almost cruel. The healing happens on a Sabbath, and the trouble begins.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The father asked Jesus to come down to Capernaum, and Jesus refused to go, handing him one sentence instead (4:49–50). What did the man have to do with only that sentence, and when have you had to act on God's word without any confirmation that it was working?
2. Jesus asks a man sick for thirty-eight years, "Do you want to be made well?" It sounds like a strange thing to ask. Why would He ask it, and what can that question expose in a person?
3. Jesus later found the healed man and said, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (5:14). How do you take that seriously without concluding that every illness is punishment for personal sin (see John 9:1–3)?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Compare the father's two moments of belief in 4:50 and 4:53. What is different about the second, and what had happened in between?
2. Read John 4:48, where Jesus says people will not believe unless they see signs and wonders. Set it beside John 20:29–31 and describe the relationship between signs and faith in this gospel.
3. List everything the man at the pool says in John 5:1–15. Then compare him with the Samaritan woman of chapter 4. What does he never do that she did?
4. John 5:16–17 gives the reason the leaders began to persecute Jesus. Write out His answer to them, then read verse 18 and note exactly what they understood Him to be claiming.
5. Jesus met the man's physical need first and then went looking for him to deal with his soul (5:14). Name someone whose material need you have met, and take the next step toward his soul this week.

GENERAL NEW TESTAMENT James 3–5

Tongue, Wisdom, and Prayer

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

James warns that teachers face a stricter judgment, then spends a chapter on the tongue: a bit, a rudder, a spark, a world of iniquity, and a fountain that should not run both sweet and bitter. He sets earthly wisdom beside the wisdom from above. He traces quarrels to cravings, calls friendship with the world enmity with God,

and mocks the man who plans a year he has not been given. He warns rich oppressors, commands patience, forbids careless oaths, and tells the sick to send for the elders.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. James 3:2–12 says no man can tame the tongue and then insists that blessing and cursing must not come out of the same mouth. If it cannot be tamed, what is he actually asking of us, and where does the help come from?
2. James 4:4 says that friendship with the world is enmity with God. What does worldliness look like in a respectable, church-attending life, and how would you recognize it in yourself rather than in someone else?
3. James 5:14–16 tells a sick Christian to call for the elders of the church and promises that the prayer of faith will save the sick. How should a congregation obey that today, and what is the passage not promising?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the images James uses for the tongue in chapter 3: bit, rudder, fire, beast, fountain, tree. Note what each one contributes that the others do not.
2. Set the two wisdoms of James 3:13–18 in two columns. Which marks of the wisdom from above are hardest for you, and which have you mistaken for conviction?
3. James 4:13–17 addresses a man laying out next year's business. Rewrite your own plans for the coming year in the form James gives in verse 15.
4. Read James 5:7–11 on patience. List the examples he gives, and note what he says about the end the Lord finally brought about for Job.
5. James 5:16 says to confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another. Name one trusted Christian you could be honest with, and make the call this week.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Ezekiel 6–11 · Psalm 119:57–96 · John 5:18–47 · 1 Peter 1:1–2:12

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