

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 95 OF 104

But If Not

Week 95 of 104 • 91% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Daniel 3-6
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 144-146
Gospels	John 11:28-12:8
General New Testament	Revelation 1-2

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Three men stand in front of a furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and say the bravest sentence in the Old Testament: our God is able to deliver us, and if He does not, we still will not bow. That sentence runs through everything you read this week. Daniel opens his windows and prays on the day it becomes illegal. Mary breaks open a jar worth a year's wages and pours it on feet that will be nailed in six days. And an old man exiled to a rock in the Aegean is told to write to a starving little congregation in Smyrna: be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Faithfulness that does not require a rescue first is the only kind that lasts.

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 Daniel 3-6

Before Furnace and Lions

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Four of the best known stories in the Bible, one after another. A golden image on the plain of Dura, three men who will not bow, and a furnace so hot it kills the soldiers carrying them. A proud king warned in a dream who ignores it and spends seven seasons eating grass. A drunken feast where fingers write on the plaster, and an empire falls before morning. And an old man who keeps his window open, a den of lions, and a stone with a king's seal on it.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Daniel 3:17-18 contains one of the bravest sentences in Scripture, and it turns on the words "but if not." Work out exactly what the three men were claiming about God and what they refused to claim, and discuss what faith looks like when the rescue does not come.
2. Daniel 6:10 says that when Daniel learned the decree was signed, he went home and prayed as he had always done. Which of your habits are settled enough that a law against them would not change them, and which would quietly disappear?

3. Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 and Belshazzar in chapter 5 both come under God's verdict on pride, and only one of them is restored. What made the difference between those two men, and where do you see the beginnings of each in yourself?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace what Nebuchadnezzar says about God at the end of chapter 2, chapter 3, and chapter 4. How does his understanding grow, and what did each stage cost him personally?
2. Read Daniel 3:24–28 and note who the king says was in the fire and who Daniel's account credits with the rescue. Then read Isaiah 43:1–2 and write down what God promises there and what He does not promise.
3. Daniel 5:22–23 says Belshazzar knew everything that had happened to his father and still did not humble himself. List every specific charge Daniel brings against him.
4. Hebrews 11:33–34 mentions stopping the mouths of lions and quenching the violence of fire, and then verses 35 through 38 turn to believers who were tortured, sawn in two, and killed. Which single lesson about faith does that one chapter teach by putting both groups together?
5. The three men decided before the music ever played. Write down one thing you will not do this year regardless of what it costs you, tell one person what you have written, and ask him to hold you to it.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 144–146

Not in Princes

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Psalm 144 begins with God as a rock who trains hands for battle, pauses to marvel that He notices a creature who is like a passing shadow, and ends asking for full barns, strong sons, and peace in the streets. Psalm 145 is David's great alphabetical hymn of praise, one verse for each letter, declaring God gracious, slow to anger, good to all, and King of an everlasting kingdom. Psalm 146 opens the final run of Hallelujah psalms with a warning: do not put your trust in princes.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 144:3–4 asks why God takes any notice of man, who is like a breath and a passing shadow, and the same psalm then asks God for barns, flocks, and children. How do those two things belong in one prayer?

2. Psalm 145:13 says God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that endures through all generations. You have been in Daniel this week. Where do the two books say the same thing, and why would an exile have needed to hear it?
3. Psalm 146:3 warns against putting trust in princes, in whom there is no help. Which prince, program, paycheck, or person have you quietly been leaning on, and what would moving your weight onto God actually look like?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Psalm 145 is an acrostic, each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Read it slowly and list every statement it makes about God's character. Which one do you most need this month?
2. List everything Psalm 146:7–9 says God does, and note who receives each action. Which pattern do you see in the kinds of people named?
3. Psalm 145:18 says the Lord is near to all who call on Him in truth. Read James 4:8 and Acts 17:27, and write down what is required of the person who wants to draw near.
4. Psalm 144 lists full barns and strong sons and then says happy are the people whose God is the Lord. Read Matthew 6:31–33 and explain the order that both the psalm and Jesus insist on.
5. Psalm 145:4 says one generation shall praise God's works to another. Name one young person in your life and tell him, before Sunday, one specific thing God has done in yours.

GOSPELS John 11:28–12:8

Tears and Ointment

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Mary comes out to the same place and says the same sentence her sister said. Jesus is deeply moved, and then, at a grave He is about to open, He weeps. He has the stone taken away over Martha's protest, prays out loud for the crowd's sake, and calls a dead man by name. Many believe; others report Him to the Pharisees, and the council decides He must die. Six days before Passover He is back in Bethany at supper, and Mary breaks open a pound of pure spikenard.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus, and He wept anyway (11:33–35). Why would He grieve over a sorrow He was two minutes from ending, and what does that tell you about how He meets your grief?
2. In 11:45–53 the same miracle produces faith in some people and a plot to kill in others. Why does identical evidence divide people so sharply, and where have you watched that happen?
3. Mary pours out ointment worth nearly a year's wages and Judas calls it waste. Which things has following Christ led you to waste, in the world's accounting, and what did that cost you?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List everything Jesus does and says at the tomb in 11:38–44. Which parts of it could the bystanders do, and which part could only He do?
2. Read Caiaphas' words in 11:49–52 along with John's comment on them. How could a man say something profoundly true while meaning something entirely different by it?
3. Compare where Mary is found in Luke 10:39, John 11:32, and John 12:3. Which detail stays the same in all three scenes, and what does that consistency say about her?
4. John 12:6 tells us something about Judas that the other disciples apparently did not know. Trace what that small, private dishonesty had become by John 13:27, and note how long the slide took.
5. Jesus said Mary had kept the ointment for His burial and had done what she could. Name one extravagant thing you could do for the Lord in the next month, count honestly what it will cost, and then decide.

GENERAL NEW TESTAMENT Revelation 1–2

Write What You See

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

A prisoner on a small island is told to write. He sees the risen Christ walking among seven lampstands, hair white as snow, eyes like fire, voice like many waters, and he falls down as dead until a hand touches him and says, do not be afraid. Then come the letters: Ephesus, orthodox and tireless and no longer in love; Smyrna, poor and about to suffer and told only to be faithful; Pergamos, living where Satan's throne is; and Thyatira, tolerating a woman who teaches.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Before anyone asks what the symbols mean, settle what the book is for. Read Revelation 1:1–3 and 1:9, and discuss who first received this letter, what they were living through, and how that should govern everything we do with the book.
2. Jesus tells Ephesus they have left their first love, even though their doctrine, labor, and endurance are excellent (2:2–4). How does a congregation lose its love while keeping everything else intact, and what are the early signs?
3. To Smyrna, the poorest and most persecuted of the seven, Jesus offers no correction and no rescue, only “be faithful until death” (2:10). How does a promise like that change what you expect God to do for you?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the seven churches in the order Jesus addresses them, then write one sentence for each of the first four on what He commends and what He condemns.
2. Revelation 1:5–6 says Christ has made us kings and priests to His God. Read 1 Peter 2:5 and 2:9, and explain what a priesthood of all Christians does mean and what it does not mean.
3. Trace the description of Christ in 1:12–18. Find where each detail reappears in the opening line of a letter in chapter 2, and suggest why He introduces Himself differently to each congregation.
4. Revelation 1:10 says John was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day. Read Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, and note which day the New Testament church gathered and what they did when they gathered.
5. Every letter closes with a promise to the one who overcomes. List the four promises given in chapter 2, then name the specific thing you personally have to overcome and the first step you will take this week.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Daniel 7–12 · Psalm 147–150 · John 12:9–50 · Revelation 3–4

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