

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 98 OF 104

Return to Me

Week 98 of 104 • 94% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Hosea 9-14; Joel 1-3
Wisdom Literature	Ecclesiastes 3-4
Gospels	John 14
General New Testament	Revelation 8-9

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

There are locusts everywhere this week. Joel watches a swarm strip a nation bare and tells his people it is a small picture of a much larger Day. John watches a nightmare version of the same swarm boil up out of a pit. Between those two clouds of insects stands one word, repeated until you cannot miss it: return. Hosea ends his book pleading, take words with you and return to the Lord. Joel asks for torn hearts instead of torn clothes. Solomon, counting seasons, says God has set eternity in the human heart, which is why nothing under the sun ever quite fits. And in a borrowed upstairs room, Jesus tells frightened men that the way home is a Person.

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 Hosea 9-14; Joel 1-3

Rend Your Hearts and Return

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Hosea finishes the way a grieving husband would. There is judgment: an empty vine, a harvest with no joy, exile ahead. There is also the most tender chapter in the prophets, where God remembers teaching Ephraim to walk, and a closing altar call that tells Israel exactly what words to say. Then Joel opens on a nation eaten bare by locusts, calls for a fast, promises the years the locusts ate will be restored, and announces an outpouring of God's Spirit that Peter later says arrived at Pentecost.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Hosea 11 moves from courtroom to nursery, with God remembering how He taught Ephraim to walk. Read 11:1-9 aloud and talk about what those verses show you about God that a list of His attributes never could.
2. Joel 2:12-13 asks for torn hearts rather than torn clothes. What is the practical difference between the two, and how would a congregation honestly tell them apart in itself?

3. In Acts 2:16–21 Peter stands up and says the outpouring promised in Joel 2:28–32 is happening in front of the crowd. Work through what Peter actually claims, and discuss what his claim settles about when Joel’s promise was fulfilled.

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read Hosea 14:1–3 and list exactly what Israel is told to bring when they return. Notice what is not on the list, and explain why its absence matters.
2. Hosea 11:1 is quoted in Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 15:55. Look up both and describe how each New Testament writer uses Hosea’s words.
3. Trace the four stages of ruin in Joel 1:4 and then the response Joel calls for in 1:13–14 and 2:15–17. Who is summoned to that assembly, and who is excused from it?
4. Joel 2:32 says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Read Acts 2:21 with Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16, and explain what the Bible means by calling on His name.
5. Hosea 10:12 tells Israel to break up their fallow ground. Name the hard, unplowed ground in your own life, the area you have quietly written off as hopeless, and name the first specific thing you will do to break it up this week.

WISDOM LITERATURE Ecclesiastes 3–4

Eternity in the Heart

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

These two chapters contain the most quoted lines in the book and some of the darkest. First the famous list: a time to be born and a time to die, fourteen pairs covering everything a life holds. Then the line that explains the whole book, that God has put eternity in our hearts. Then the Preacher looks at oppression with no comforter, at work driven by envy, at a man with no one to help him up, and at the strength of two.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God has set eternity in the human heart. How does that single line explain both the restlessness running through this book and the restlessness you feel on an ordinary Thursday?

2. Read 3:1–8 slowly. The Preacher is not saying every season is pleasant; he is saying every season has its place under God. Which of these seasons are you actually in right now, and what would wisdom look like in it?
3. Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 says man and beast appear to come to the same end. Read it together with 3:17 and 12:7, and discuss carefully what the Preacher can see from where he is standing and what he cannot.

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the fourteen pairs in 3:1–8. Which of them surprise you by being included among the things God has appointed a time for, and why?
2. Compare Ecclesiastes 3:17 with 12:14 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Even in the middle of his gloom, what has the Preacher already settled about judgment?
3. Trace three miserable figures in chapter 4: the oppressed with no comforter (4:1), the man driven by envy (4:4), and the man with no second (4:8). Write down what all three are missing.
4. Read 4:9–12 and list the four advantages of two over one. Then read Galatians 6:1–2 and Hebrews 10:24–25 and describe what the church adds to Solomon's observation.
5. Name the person you know who is currently the man alone of 4:8–10, with nobody to lift him up. Put a day and a time on your calendar this week when you will be the second person, and keep it.

GOSPELS John 14

The Way to the Father

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus has just told these men that one of them will betray Him and that Peter will deny Him, and now He says, "Let not your heart be troubled." What follows is one of the most comforting chapters in Scripture: a Father's house with room prepared, a promise to come again, the claim that He Himself is the way, an assurance that seeing Him is seeing the Father, the promise of another Helper who will teach the apostles all things, and a peace the world cannot hand out.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Jesus tells troubled men to believe rather than to calm down (14:1–3). What exactly does He give them to hold onto, and how is that different from the reassurance people usually offer each other?

2. In 14:16–17 and 14:26 Jesus promises a Helper who will teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all He said to them. Look carefully at who is in that room. To whom is the promise made, and what did it produce that we hold in our hands today?
3. Three times in this chapter Jesus ties loving Him to keeping His word (14:15, 21, 23). Where does our culture pull those two apart, and where do you find yourself doing it?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List every promise Jesus makes in 14:1–4 and write beside each one whether it concerns His work, His return, or their future with Him.
2. John 14:6 makes a claim no other religious teacher has ever made good on. Read it with Acts 4:12 and 1 Timothy 2:5, then state the claim in one sentence of your own words.
3. Read 14:12 about greater works, then read Acts 2:41 and Acts 4:4 alongside John 20:30–31. Explain what kind of greater the Lord has in mind.
4. Trace the three interruptions in 14:5, 14:8, and 14:22. What do Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Iscariot) reveal about how much the apostles still misunderstood on the last night?
5. John 14:27 offers a peace the world cannot give. Name the worry you carried into this week, then name the act of obedience you have been postponing because of it, and go do that act before Sunday.

GENERAL NEW TESTAMENT Revelation 8–9

Trumpets That Call for Repentance

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

The seventh seal opens and heaven goes silent for about half an hour. Then an angel takes a golden censer, mixes the prayers of the saints with incense, and throws fire from the altar down to the earth. Seven angels lift seven trumpets, and a third of the land, the sea, the rivers, and the lights of heaven are struck. The fifth trumpet releases locusts from a pit that torment but cannot kill; the sixth releases an army from the Euphrates. And still, John writes, they did not repent.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Revelation 8:1 answers the seventh seal with half an hour of silence, and then 8:3–5 shows the prayers of the saints rising with incense and fire coming back down. What is that picture saying to a church that has been praying under pressure and hearing nothing?
2. The trumpet judgments strike a third, never the whole. Why would God send partial judgments rather than final ones, and what do 9:20–21 report about the way people responded?
3. Revelation 9:4 says the locusts could not harm anyone who had the seal of God on his forehead. How should a Christian read that promise honestly, given that believers in Asia were losing their businesses and their lives?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the first four trumpets and what each one strikes. Compare them with the plagues of Exodus 7 through 10, and explain what the echo is meant to tell a reader who knows his Old Testament.
2. Compare the locusts of Joel 1:4 and 2:4–9 with the locusts of Revelation 9:1–11. Note what John borrows from Joel and what he deliberately changes.
3. Read 9:20–21 and write down the sins the survivors refused to leave. Which of those same practices still function as idols in a society that owns no carved images?
4. Trace the call to repent through Revelation 2:5, 2:16, 2:21–22, 3:3, 3:19, and 9:20–21. What is the book asking of the people reading it?
5. Warnings are mercy. Name one warning God has already given you, through Scripture, through a friend who loves you, or through consequences you brought on yourself, that you have not yet acted on. Act on it this week.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Amos 1–9 • Ecclesiastes 5–6 • John 15:1–16:4 • Revelation 10–11

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