

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 103 OF 104

While It Was Yet Dark

Week 103 of 104 · 99% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Zechariah 1-8
Wisdom Literature	Song of Solomon 3:1-5:9
Gospels	John 19:28-20:18
General New Testament	Revelation 19-20

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Every reading this week happens in the dark, or just before the light. Zechariah sees his visions at night, standing among myrtle trees in a shadowed hollow, and hears God say He has returned to Jerusalem with mercies. The bride in the Song wakes in the night and goes out into the streets looking for the one her soul loves, and will not stop until she finds him. Mary Magdalene comes to a grave while it is still dark, finds a stone rolled away, and stands outside weeping until a voice says her name. And John, exiled and old, sees heaven open and a rider come out. The dark is real in all four. It is also, in all four, temporary.

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 Zechariah 1-8

Visions in the Night

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Zechariah preaches alongside Haggai to a discouraged remnant rebuilding a temple that looks nothing like the old one. In a single night he receives eight visions: horsemen patrolling a quiet earth, four horns and four craftsmen, a man with a measuring line, a high priest in filthy clothes being re dressed, a lampstand fed by two olive trees, a flying scroll, a woman in a basket carried to Shinar, and four chariots. Then a crown is set on a high priest's head, and two chapters answer a question about fasting.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Zechariah 3 shows Joshua the high priest standing in filthy garments with Satan at his right hand to accuse him, and God removes the clothes and puts new ones on him. Walk through what happens in that scene and who does the acting. How does a person come to be clothed like that today (Galatians 3:26-27)?
2. God tells Zerubbabel that the work will be done not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit (4:6), and then asks who has despised the day of small things (4:10). Where does a congregation, or a Christian, most often confuse God's work with human resources?

3. In chapter 7 men come asking whether they should keep a fast they have kept for seventy years, and God answers with a question about who they were fasting for. What kinds of religious habits do we keep without ever asking that question?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Write out the eight night visions of chapters 1 through 6 in order, one line each. Which of them are about cleansing, and which are about God dealing with the nations?
2. Zechariah 6:12–13 says the Branch will build the temple and be a priest upon His throne, with the counsel of peace between both offices. Compare Hebrews 7:1–3 and 8:1. Why could no king of Judah hold both offices, and who does?
3. Trace the word return through 1:3. God says return to Me and I will return to you. Where else in these chapters does God describe what He has already done before the people moved?
4. Zechariah 8:16–17 lists the things the people are to do. Make the list, and mark the two that name your speech. See Ephesians 4:25 before you answer.
5. Zechariah 8:23 pictures ten men taking hold of the garment of one Jew, saying, we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you. Name one person who could say that about watching you this month, and one specific thing you will do this week to make it truer.

WISDOM LITERATURE Song of Solomon 3:1–5:9

Sought and Found

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

The bride wakes at night and cannot find her beloved, so she goes out into the streets, asks the watchmen, finds him, and will not let him go. A wedding procession comes up out of the wilderness, Solomon's carriage with sixty armed men around it. The groom praises his bride at length and calls her a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Then she hesitates when he knocks in the night, and by the time she opens the door he is gone.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The bride searches the night streets for her beloved (3:1–4) and later hesitates when he knocks and finds him gone (5:2–6). Set the two scenes beside each other. What do they say about what delay costs in a relationship, and where does that same pattern show up in our life with God?
2. The groom calls his bride a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed (4:12). Talk about what those three images have in common. Why would exclusiveness be praised as a compliment rather than felt as a restriction?
3. Chapter 3 gives an entire wedding procession, armed men and all, and says it was the day of the gladness of his heart. What has our culture gained and lost by treating a wedding as an event rather than as the public beginning of a covenant?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read 4:1–7 and notice how the praise is built: it is specific, it is spoken aloud, and it names particular things. Write down three specific things you admire about your spouse, or about someone God has given you to love, that you have never actually said out loud.
2. The refrain about not awakening love appears again at 3:5. Note what has just happened in 3:4 and why the warning belongs there. What is the Song protecting?
3. Compare 4:12 with 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 and 7:2–5. What do those passages together say about who has a claim on a Christian's body?
4. In 5:2–8 the bride pays a real price for her delay: an empty doorway, a night search, and rough treatment from the watchmen. Trace her steps, and list what each delay cost her.
5. Pick the thing you named in the first question and say it out loud this week, to the person's face, without attaching a request to it.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus says He thirsts, receives the vinegar, says it is finished, bows His head, and gives up His spirit. Soldiers break the legs of the two beside Him, find Him already dead, and open His side with a spear. Then two men who had kept their faith quiet bury Him with a hundred pounds of spices. Early on the first day, while it is still dark, Mary Magdalene finds the stone moved, Peter and John run to the tomb, and a weeping woman hears her own name.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Jesus said, it is finished, and then gave up His spirit. What was finished at that moment, and what does Colossians 2:14–17 say was nailed to the cross along with Him?
2. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had both been careful, private believers, and they choose the moment of maximum danger to come out into the open. Talk through what it cost each of them. Where is God asking you to stop being a quiet disciple?
3. In 20:1–10 John notices the grave clothes lying there and the head cloth folded by itself, and says he saw and believed. Why would those details persuade him, and what do they rule out about what happened in that tomb?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List every detail in 19:28–37 that John says fulfilled Scripture, and look up each one: Psalm 69:21, Exodus 12:46, Psalm 34:20, and Zechariah 12:10. Which of them could no one involved have arranged?
 2. Read 19:38–42 and write down everything the text says about Joseph and Nicodemus. Then read John 3:1–2 and 7:50–52 for what Nicodemus had done before. How had he moved?
 3. Mary tells the disciples, and then tells the angels, and then tells the gardener the same thing: they have taken away my Lord. Trace her words through 20:2, 20:13, and 20:15. What is she certain of, and what has she not yet imagined?
 4. Jesus tells Mary to go to His brethren and say, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God (20:17). Compare Hebrews 2:11–12. Why is that sentence remarkable three days after those same men abandoned Him?
 5. Mary was the first person told to carry the news, and she went immediately. Name one person who has not heard you say plainly that Jesus rose from the dead, and say it to them this week.
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The Rider and the Throne**WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE**

Heaven erupts in four hallelujahs over the fall of Babylon, and then announces the marriage of the Lamb and a bride clothed in the righteous acts of the saints. Heaven opens and a rider comes out on a white horse, called Faithful and True, the Word of God. The beast and the false prophet are taken. Satan is bound for a thousand years, the martyrs live and reign, Satan is loosed and destroyed, and the dead small and great stand before a great white throne while books are opened.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Revelation 20 is the only chapter in the Bible that mentions a thousand years, and it appears in the most symbolic book in the Bible. Before you read it, read John 5:28–29, Acts 17:31, and 1 Corinthians 15:23–26 together. How many comings, resurrections, and judgments does the rest of the New Testament know, and how should that govern the way we read this chapter?
2. Satan is bound with a chain and thrown into a pit so that he should deceive the nations no more, and later loosed for a season. Given how the book has used chains, pits, beasts, and numbers all along, what is being pictured here, and what comfort would it have brought a Christian standing before a Roman magistrate?
3. At the great white throne, books are opened and another book is opened, which is the book of life (20:12). Talk through the difference between the two kinds of books. What would it mean to a person to know his name is in the second one, and how does a person get there?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List everything Revelation 19:11–16 says about the rider on the white horse: His names, His clothing, His weapon, and the army behind Him. Which details identify Him beyond any doubt?
2. Read 20:4–6 slowly and note exactly what John says he saw and where. Are the reigning ones on earth or in heaven, and does the text anywhere say that Christ is on the earth or that Jerusalem is His capital during this time?
3. Compare Revelation 20:12–13 with John 5:28–29 and Matthew 25:31–46. Who is raised, and are the righteous and the wicked raised and judged together or separately?
4. Trace how Revelation uses numbers: seven churches, seven seals, twelve times twelve thousand, three and a half, six hundred sixty six. Given that pattern, what would a first century reader most likely hear in the number one thousand?

5. Revelation 20:15 turns on one question: whether a name is written in the book of life. If you are not certain yours is, do not let this week end without settling it. Read Acts 2:36–41 and Acts 22:16, and speak with an elder or the preacher before Sunday.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Zechariah 9–14, Malachi 1–4 · Song of Solomon 5:10–8:14 · John 20:19–21:25 · Revelation 21–22

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