

EZRA

The Jews held captive in Babylonia for 70 years are allowed at last to return to their homeland. The Book of Ezra begins with a decree of King Cyrus of Persia and the homeward journey of the first returnees under Zerubbabel (chapters 1–6). With the temple rebuilt, a second group returns under Ezra the priest to rebuild the spiritual vitality of the nation (chapters 7–10). Between those two homecomings there is a 58-year interlude, during which the Book of Esther takes place.

Focus	Zerubbabel's Restoration					Ezra's Reforms									
DIVISIONS						Book of Esther									
	1	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10						
Topics	Homecoming of the People Repairing the Place of Worship					Homecoming of the Priests Reviving the People of Worship									
Place	Persia to Jerusalem					Persia to Jerusalem									
Time	23 Years (538–515 B.C.)					58-Year Interlude					1 Year (457 B.C.)				

Restoring the People of God

I Friday
May

Ezra 1-3
Heart of the Passage:
Ezra 1, 3



Overview: The Old Testament is the history of how God kept His promises to His people. Following the Babylonian captivity, God stirs the heart of a Persian king (Cyrus) to release the Jews and to charge them to rebuild their own temple in Jerusalem—an event prophesied 200 years before (Isaiah 44:28). With Zerubbabel as their

leader, some 50,000 priests, carpenters, masons, and common folk begin the long journey back to their shattered homeland. After rebuilding the altar and reinstating the sacrifices, they are ready to undertake the mammoth job of rebuilding the temple. The foundation is laid, causing joy and optimism among the workers. But tears of sadness flow from those who recall the incomparable splendor of the former temple—a splendor that disobedience destroyed.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Cyrus's Edict	Zerubbabel's Expedition	The People's Enthusiasm
Release	Registration	Rededication

Worship must precede work as surely as the nail must precede the hammer.



Your Daily Walk: Envision this setting. You are part of a 50,000-member caravan on a 900-mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. After months on the road, you finally arrive at your destination—a little footsore and weary, but eager to begin the task.

What do you do first: Draw up the blueprints? Hire the architects? Order the necessary building materials? Rebuild your own house?

While the Israelites eventually did all these things, their first thought was for God (3:1-6). They knew that the success of their building venture depended on the attitude of their hearts toward Him. And so, before they began to *work*, they began to *worship*.

Make a list of the duties awaiting you today. Then, before you tackle your list, talk to your God. You—like the Israelite returnees—have ample reason to sing His praises!



Insight: Cyrus, God's Pagan Messiah
About 150 years before the dramatic proclamation of Ezra 1:1-4, the Prophet Isaiah delivered a detailed prophecy concerning King Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28-45:7). Because the Lord would prompt Cyrus to do all these things for the Jews, he is called "My shepherd" (44:28) and "anointed [one]" (literally, *messiah*; 45:1).

Restoring the Temple of God

Sat.–Sun.

May

2/3



Overview: A seeming avalanche of hostility meets the construction efforts.

Zerubbabel, knowing that he and his countrymen are on a divine assignment, refuses to let “the adversaries of Judah” (4:1) assist in the building project. Accusations and legal action follow, halting the work for 15 long years. At last, help arrives in the form of encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and a kingly proclamation from Darius. With the way now paved for rapid progress, completion of the temple comes quickly, marked by national celebration.

Ezra 4–6

Heart of the Passage:

Ezra 4, 6

Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6
Pressure to Stop Rebuilding	Provision to Keep Rebuilding	Praise for the Completed Building
Resistance	Resurgence	Reward



Your Daily Walk: Make a list of at least five things you consider worth fighting for: your faith, your family, your country, etc. Now make another list of at least five things you consider *aren't* worth fighting for: your brand of toothpaste, the day of the week you cut the lawn, the size of the ice cubes in your freezer, etc. Compare the two lists. What do you find?

Probably you discovered the first list contains *major* items, while the ones on the second list are relatively *minor*. No one dies for his favorite TV program; few would hesitate to give their lives to defend their national freedom. Zerubbabel had to ask himself the question, “Is it worth fighting for?” when confronted by pagan interference (4:1-2). Though others might have labeled the issue a “minor” one, Zerubbabel considered it major enough to postpone his plans for 15 years!

Taking a stand for what you believe can be unpleasant—even painful. But it is often necessary if God’s work is to be done in God’s way. Look at your lists, pick one item worth fighting for, and make your stand known today by spoken word or written letter. Convictions worth having are worth communicating.



Insight: The Divine Heart-Turner

Proverbs 21:1 declares, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will,” a fact confirmed by Ezra 6:22: “For the LORD . . . turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them.” By the way, when did you last ask God to turn the heart of an unsaved relative toward Him?

The will to persevere is often the difference between failure and success.

Reforming the Priesthood of God

4

Monday

May

Ezra 7-8

Heart of the Passage:

Ezra 7



Overview: The first half of the Book of Ezra (chapters 1-6) could correctly be called “the Book of Zerubbabel,” for it tells the story of that godly leader’s rebuilding of the temple. Beginning with chapter 7, Ezra’s story unfolds. Nearly 60 years have elapsed since the completion of the temple.

Ezra, a priest, prepares to guide a second company of 1,753 Jews back to Jerusalem to oversee the affairs of the temple and to provide the nation with leadership. By kingly decree, Artaxerxes not only allows Ezra’s company to return to Jerusalem, but provides for the temple sacrifices and other necessities of worship. Demonstrating spiritual maturity and excellent leadership qualities, Ezra seeks God’s direction before, during, and after the 900-mile journey.

Chapter 7				Chapter 8			
Ezra’s Concern		Ezra’s Commission		Ezra’s Mission			
1	10	11	28	1	30	31	36
Ezra, the Teacher				Ezra, the Traveler			

The best teacher is one whose life is the text.



Your Daily Walk: Here is a principle you can spend a lifetime applying: Knowing what to do must be translated into doing what you know.

Ezra was no doubt one of the finest Bible scholars of his day. But he was more than just a teacher of knowledge. He was a man whose own heart burned for the law of the Lord and for the application of that truth to his life and the life of his nation. “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (7:10).

Are you involved in a Bible-teaching ministry? Ezra’s advice to you would be this: Let your teaching be the overflow of a life that is practicing God’s truth daily. It is hard to make God’s truth speak to others until first it has spoken to you. Pick a truth you will be communicating to others next week, and teach it to yourself this week. Pretend you will be the only person in the classroom. What must be translated into action in your life before you are ready to teach it with conviction to others?



Insight: Slim Ranks for an Enormous Task

Ezra’s goal was to rebuild the people spiritually. To do that, his primary need was not manpower (he took fewer than 2,000 men with him) but ministers. Many of those he took were priests and Levites.

Reforming the Worship of God

Tuesday

May

5



Overview: With the temple rebuilt and the spiritual leaders installed, only one thing remains before Israel can wholeheartedly worship God again. The marriage relationships with foreign women must be annulled lest the influence of pagan gods should draw the people away from the one true God. Ezra is broken with sadness over the news of forbidden inter-marriages. He knows there are no easy solutions, that the consequences of disobeying God will surpass even the sorrow of disbanding families. It is a painful—but necessary—ordeals.

Ezra 9–10

Heart of the Passage:

Ezra 9:1–10:17

Chapter 9			Chapter 10								
1	Sin of the People	2	3	Supplication of Ezra	15	1	Repentance of the People	17	18	Roll of the Offenders	44
Ezra's Repentance						Israel's Regret					



Your Daily Walk: Put yourself in the following scene. The task before you is simple: Plow 10 acres of land with a plow pulled by a team of animals. A quick check of the barnyard reveals the animals available for the job: one mule, three chickens, two pigs, and your pet collie. You hitch the collie and mule to the plow and set off making the first furrow.

Question: Will you ever get the field plowed?

Answer: Not likely! Why? Because only a matched team of work animals—with similar work habits—can get the job done.

That story illustrates the principle of equally yoked animals. But the same applies to binding agreements between a Christian (whose goal is to serve Christ) and a non-Christian (whose goal is to serve self). Pulling together is impossible because they are marching to different drumbeats!

Examine your relationships with non-Christians before they become too involved or permanent. Consider the implications; learn from Israel's sad example. And if you find yourself contemplating an "unequally yoked" arrangement, read 2 Corinthians 6:14–18. It's a clear word of command that you can't afford to ignore.



Insight: Dealing with a Problem . . . Pronto

The mixed marriage problem, when handled prayerfully by Ezra, produced such a sense of urgency among the people that they assembled in a driving rainstorm to deal with it—an excellent example of problem solving. If it's worth doing right, it's worth doing now.

Whatever the cost of putting a thing right, it can never be more than the cost of leaving it wrong.

NEHEMIAH

A rebuilt temple stands in Jerusalem, but only crumbled walls surround the holy city. Clearly, there is much work to be done! For the task of rebuilding the city walls, God raises up Nehemiah to lead the third and last group of Jewish returnees from Persia. In spite of stiff opposition, Nehemiah and his band of bricklayers complete the job in only 52 days. Nehemiah's zeal extends not only to reconstructing the city, but also to reforming its citizenry—a task which demands inspired leadership.

Focus	Physical Reconstruction	Spiritual Reformation
Divisions	<p>Nehemiah's Plan for Rebuilding the Walls</p> <p>Early Opposition to Rebuilding the Walls</p> <p>Growing Opposition to Completing the Walls</p>	<p>Revival in the Rebuilt City</p> <p>Protecting and Purifying the Rebuilt City</p>
	1 2 3 4 5 7 8 10 11 13	
Topics	Construction of the City	Instruction of the Citizens
	Israel's Restoration as a Nation	
Place	Jerusalem	
Time	About 25 Years (445–420 B.C.)	

Nehemiah's Plans

Wednesday

May

6



Overview: Nearly 13 years have gone by since Ezra returned to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah, cupbearer to the Persian king hears discouraging reports about his Jewish homeland. Jerusalem's defenses are in ruins and the people are being harassed. The news causes Nehemiah to mourn and intercede on behalf of his countrymen, petitioning the sovereign God to "grant him mercy in the sight of [the king]" (1:11). God responds to Nehemiah's prayers by moving the king to *permit* (and even *provide for*) Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem. Once there, Nehemiah surveys the situation and then attempts to stir the people to action with the ringing promise, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us" (2:20).

*Nehemiah 1-2
Heart of the Passage:
Nehemiah 1:4-2:8*

Chapter 1				Chapter 2			
1	Jerusalem's Broken Walls	3	4	Nehemiah's Broken Heart	11	1	Nehemiah's Request
						10	11
							Nehemiah's Report
							20
Nehemiah in Prayer				Nehemiah in Action			



Your Daily Walk: Look up 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and memorize it right now. (Don't panic—the verse consists of only three words!) Now ask yourself this question: Am I *ceaseless* or *sporadic* in my prayer life?

Nehemiah poured out his heart to God for three full months before he received an answer. (Would *you* have quit before God's answer arrived?) Then, with unexpected suddenness, God ushered in Nehemiah's long-awaited opportunity. (Would *you* have been ready when the opportunity came?) With a quick, silent prayer for grace, Nehemiah made his petition to the king. (Would *you* have stammered and stumbled for words?) And God answered.

How often do you experience the "good hand of . . . God" (2:8) in your prayer life? Every time you turn on a light today, repeat the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:17—and one petition God has laid on your heart. Then get ready for God's answer.



Insight: Other Great Prayers of Intercession in the Bible Yesterday you read the moving prayer of Ezra (9:5-15); today you will find a similar prayer in the life of Nehemiah (1:4-11). You may also want to read the great prayers of intercession by Moses (Exodus 32:11-13), Daniel (Daniel 9:3-19), Paul (Colossians 1:3-14), and Jesus (John 17:1-26). What better way to sow seed than by interceding!

The prayers of a Christian are secret, but their effect cannot be hidden.

Early Opposition to Rebuilding the Walls

7 Thursday
May

Nehemiah 3-4
Heart of the Passage:
Nehemiah 4



Overview: A tour of the crumbling remains of the walls of Jerusalem does not discourage Nehemiah. Armed with confidence in the Lord, he organizes construction crews to begin the work. Priests, goldsmiths, rulers, women, merchants—no one is exempt from the work detail. Vocal and physical opposition soon arises to threaten the project.

With morale at a low ebb, Nehemiah rallies his workers once again, instructing them to be both ready for battle and available for work. With the war cry of God and homeland on their lips, the people enter wholeheartedly into the task.

Chapter 3	Chapter 4		
Recruiting the Workers 1	Ridiculing the Workers 12	13	Reassuring the Workers 23
Organization	Opposition		

A lot can be achieved by an ounce of talent and a ton of hard work.



Your Daily Walk: Good management is getting things done through people. And few Bible characters can match the managerial skills of Nehemiah.

The monumental task of constructing the walls of Jerusalem could not have been accomplished by one man, regardless of how gifted or brilliant he might have been. But Nehemiah wisely divided the work responsibility among many small groups, employed all available workers, provided incentives for doing a good job (each person built the portion of wall in front of his own home!), and gave adequate recognition for each person involved.

Where in your life can you employ the “Nehemiah Managerial Principles”? Think through your church responsibilities, school projects, community service, or duties at work. Where could delegation of responsibility (with authority, incentives, and recognition) help to multiply your time and talents? Map out a strategy today to delegate an area of work where your physical presence is not absolutely required. Remember, others are looking for work too!



Insight: Praying Through Your Problems There is much you can learn by studying Nehemiah’s *problems, reactions, and prayers*. Make three columns on a sheet of paper with the above headings, and see what you can discover from these passages: 1:2-11; 2:1-4, 19-20; 4:1-6, 7-10, 11-14. Keep your paper handy through the rest of your study of Nehemiah.

Growing Opposition to Completion

Friday

May

8



Overview: Harsh living conditions during the period of construction place a severe financial strain upon the people and result in yet another obstacle to the completion of the walls. In spite of prohibitions against charging interest or enslaving a Jewish brother, the loan sharks and slave merchants are flourishing, prompting Nehemiah to take swift and effective action. With internal affairs once again in order, Nehemiah faces a new threat from without: a treacherous plot against his own life. But alert to the enemies' devices and with complete trust in God, he moves ahead to complete the walls in world record time: 52 days.

Nehemiah 5-7

Heart of the Passage:

Nehemiah 5; 6:15-19

Chapter 5	Chapter 6		Chapter 7
Usury Abolished	Murder Attempted ¹⁴	Walls Completed ¹⁵ ¹⁹	Workers Catalogued
Opposition Within	Opposition Without	Overall Outcome	



Your Daily Walk: Are you in the mood for a challenge today? Then try these words of our Lord on for size: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). You might call this Christ's challenge for godly living in an ungodly world. And it's a tall order.

But Nehemiah's life stands as eloquent testimony to the fact that it can be done. Faced with the task of organizing and administering thousands of amateur bricklayers, and confronted with opposition from without and within, Nehemiah nevertheless did his job in such a way that God got the glory—even from unbelievers. In Nehemiah's own words, "All our enemies . . . and all the heathen that were about us saw these things [and] . . . were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God" (6:16).

Actions speak louder than words, especially to those outside God's family. Are you ready for a challenge? Ask your spouse or a close Christian friend, "Do my actions confirm or deny my claim that God is my Father?" Then listen carefully to the response.



Insight: A Fifth Column in Nehemiah's Camp Meshullam was one of Nehemiah's leading wall builders (3:4, 30); Tobiah was one of his worst enemies (2:10). Now study 6:17-19 and see if you can discover the well-organized espionage and sabotage going on among Nehemiah's leading citizens!

When everything is coming your way, look out! You are probably in the wrong lane.

Revival in the Rebuilt City

9/10

Sat.—Sun.

May

Nehemiah 8–10
Heart of the Passage:
Nehemiah 8:1–12;
10:28–39



Overview: Once again Ezra the priest becomes the focus of attention as he steps to the podium to read the law of God before the people. A company of men assist Ezra in translating and interpreting the Bible for all the people, resulting in conviction of sin, weeping, and repentance throughout the nation. Ezra and Nehemiah exhort the people to rejoice, not mourn, for this is a time of

triumph. They lead the people in celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, which culminates in one of the most noteworthy prayers in the Bible: a covenant declaration in which the people agree to obey God (10:29), avoid foreign marriages (10:30), observe the Sabbath (10:31), and support the worship of God in the temple (10:32–39). At last, reform has come!

Chapter 8	Chapter 9	Chapter 10
Reading of the Law	Responses to the Law	Rededication to the Law
Congregation	Confession	Covenant

We would be more grateful if we only knew how much of what we take for granted is arranged by God.



Your Daily Walk: Turn in your Bible to Psalm 146, and read the first line out loud. Do the same with Psalms 147, 148, 149, and 150. Then in 10 words or less, define what the psalmist is telling you to do.

In chapter 9 of Nehemiah, the Israelites provide a good example of what praising God is all about. In their prayer the nation's leaders extol the God of heaven by remembering aloud some of His wonderful acts: He brought forth all creation from nothing; He chose Abraham to be the instrument of blessing to all nations; He brought His people out of Egypt and overwhelmed Pharaoh with miracles; He led the people by a pillar of cloud. In short, the Israelites praised God by repeating His wonderful provisions in the past.

Take a lesson from their example. Praise God by recounting some of His marvelous acts in your own personal history. See if you can complete this sentence 10 different ways: "You are exalted, O God, because in my life You have _____."



Insight: Tax Cut for Beleaguered Taxpayers (10:32) Under the Mosaic Law, every man over 20 years of age had to pay a temple tax of one-half shekel (Exodus 30:13; Matthew 17:24). But because of financial hardships in the rebuilt city, the tax was lowered to one-third of a shekel—a much-needed tax break!

Purifying the Rebuilt City

Monday

May

11



Overview: Nehemiah now takes steps to consolidate the people, organize the nation, and deal with laxness toward God's law. Though the walls and temple are completed in Jerusalem, the people are hesitant to move in. A large city with few inhabitants and no place to live has little appeal, and finally a lottery is held to bring one-tenth of the population within the city walls. At the same time, the walls are formally dedicated and the temple officers recommissioned. After an extended leave to Babylon, Nehemiah returns to find an old enemy (Tobiah) living in a temple store-room, and a shocking disregard for God's laws regarding marriage and the Sabbath. He delivers a blistering rebuke and sets matters in order once again.

Nehemiah 11–13
Heart of the Passage:
Nehemiah 13

Chapters 11–12		Chapter 13
Distributing the Nation's Population <small>11:1 12:26</small>	Dedicating the Nation's Defenses <small>12:27 12:47</small>	Defending the Nation's Purity
Families	Walls	Laws



Your Daily Walk: When Nehemiah returned from his Babylonian “furlough” and saw the dismal state of affairs in Jerusalem, he had a choice. He could (1) pray for the people and leave the whole matter in God's hands, (2) throw up his hands in disgust and go back to Babylon, or (3) pray first and then confront the people with their sin. Which option did he choose? (Which option would you choose?)

Discipline yourself so others won't have to.

In an emotion-charged scene, Nehemiah “contended with them, and cursed [reviled] them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God” (13:25). In other words, he grabbed them by their lapels and tried to shake some godly sense into their heads. In spite of their persistent waywardness, he cared enough to confront, to discipline, to get personally involved.

Is someone close to you toying with a sin that could ruin his or her life? Be sure your own life is an open book before God; then confront that individual in love. True love is willing to get involved.



Insight: The End (of the Old Testament Narrative) After the close of Nehemiah, 400 silent years of Jewish history pass before the Scripture narrative resumes with the New Testament. The rest of the Old Testament (Esther through Malachi) amplifies the history that has already been described.

ESTHER

Like an exciting novel, the real-life drama of Esther pits a beautiful heroine against a hateful villain, builds to a life-threatening climax, then ends with a surprise twist. Beautiful Esther is among the many Jews who choose to remain in Persia following the return of Israel to Zerubbabel. Selected as queen, she discovers a court official's plot to kill her and her countrymen. In a dramatic turn of events, God uses the roll of the dice to save the day and preserve His people.

FOCUS	Plotting Destruction		Preventing Destruction	
DIVISIONS	Esther Ascends to the Throne	Haman Stoops to Vengeance	Haman Receives His Just Reward	The Jews Receive a Reprieve
	1	2 3	4 5	7 8 10
TOPICS	Conflict Vashti Deposed	Cunning Haman Defeated	Courage	Conquest Purim Decreed
Place	Persia			
Time	About 10 Years (483-473 B.C.)			

Esther Ascends to the Throne

Tuesday

May

12



Overview: Esther is more than a story about heroism. It is the story of how God controls the destinies of people and nations in spite of harrowing circumstances and opposition. Esther reads like today's news: national intrigue, political unrest, attempted assassination. And over it all, the sovereign hand of God is at work in the lives of His people, placing Esther in the palace and Mordecai's name in the Persian chronicles "for such a time as this" (4:14).

Esther 1-2
Heart of the Passage:
Esther 1:1-12; 2:8-23

Chapter 1				Chapter 2			
Ahasuerus's Debauchery	9	Vashti's Divorce	22	Esther's Coronation	18	Mordecai's Courage	23
An Old Queen Deposed				A New Queen Discovered			



Your Daily Walk: Alone . . . in a strange place . . . no friends . . . scared. That's a good description of how Esther might have felt when she was taken to the palace by her cousin Mordecai.

How would you have liked her assignment? She is presented in the story as one who has been left alone in the world by the death of her parents (2:7). Although she was adopted into her cousin's home, her Jewish heritage placed her life in jeopardy when she found herself entered in King Ahasuerus's beauty contest. So there she was: without a home, without a friend, without a father . . . or was she?

Esther evidently trusted an unseen Father. When called to appear at the palace, she never faltered. Armed with her faith in God, she marched boldly into an unfamiliar place to assume unfamiliar duties. When Haman's plot was uncovered, Esther called for fasting among the Jews—a sign of humble intercession before God.

If you are a believer, then you are never alone. God is always present as your loving Father. In fact, Psalm 68:5 describes Him as a "father of the fatherless." Why not call or write your earthly father today and tell him what his fatherly role . . . and God's . . . have meant in your life. Fathers love to be loved!



Insight: The Palatial Palace at Shushan
 The Pentagon is one of the world's largest office buildings, with room for 26,700 employees on its 30-acre site. Enlarge that 10 times and you'll have an idea of the size of King Ahasuerus's 300-acre acropolis, site of the first "Miss Persia" beauty contest!

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the conquest of it.

Haman Stoops to Vengeance

13

Wednesday

May

Esther 3-4

Heart of the Passage:

Esther 3:1-6; 4:13-17



Overview: As in a masterful novel, the plot now thickens. Esther has been elevated to queen without her nationality being discovered. And now the villain, Haman, steps onto center stage. A favorite of the court, Haman also rises to the top politically. His hatred for the Jews burns hot when Mordecai fails to pay homage to him. Haman

persuades King Ahasuerus to issue an edict of destruction for the Jewish race. Superstitious by nature, Haman selects the date of the execution by the throw of the dice, thereby giving God yet another opportunity to work behind the scenes! Now Queen Esther is faced with a deadly decision. Should she risk revealing her nationality in an attempt to dissuade the king? Or should she protect her life—and silently watch while her countrymen are slaughtered?

Chapter 3	Chapter 4		
A Deadly Decree	1	A Desperate Fast	14 15
Haman's Plot	A Daring Decision 17 Esther's Promise		

In taking revenge, a man is equal to his enemy; in passing over it, he is his superior.



Your Daily Walk: Is it difficult for you to believe you could hate someone enough to want to kill him? Enough to want to kill his entire family? Even enough to want to destroy his whole town? Then imagine the hatred that smoldered in Haman's heart toward Mordecai—a hatred strong enough to drive Haman to destroy an entire nation.

Vengeful hatred is the perfect picture of the villainous Haman, and the exact opposite of the forgiving attitude God desires for you. You may not harbor the kind of grudge that Haman did, but are you guilty of an unforgiving spirit toward someone who has hurt you? Would you want God's forgiveness of you to be proportionate to your forgiveness toward others? (Matthew 6:12).

Carry five pennies in your pocket or purse today. Then each time you are tempted to respond in anger to a person or circumstance, leave a penny—and the resentment it represents—at the point of the offense. By the end of the day you might be a nickel poorer, but you will have done what Jesus urged in Matthew 6:12!



Insight: The High Price of Cold Blood
One commentator has valued the Hebrew talent of silver at \$12,000. That means Haman was willing to pay \$120 million to exterminate the Jews—a fabulous sum for a Persian hit man!

Haman Receives His Just Reward

Thursday

May

14



Overview: Esther boldly approaches the throne to ask a humble request: The king and Haman are invited to a special banquet. At the conclusion of the festive occasion, Esther makes another petition: The king and Haman are invited to yet another banquet! Esther's wise and timely delay allows the Divine Director to stage Haman's exit. As Haman returns home, he is insulted by Mordecai's presence in the king's gate and orders gallows built for the speedy execution of Mordecai. Meanwhile, King Ahasuerus has trouble sleeping and tries to cure his insomnia by reading the court records. To his surprise he discovers the unrewarded kindness of Mordecai and orders Haman to lead the regal procession in Mordecai's honor. Thoroughly humiliated, Haman returns to Esther's banquet, where she reveals both her nationality and his treachery. The king directs his servants to hang Haman on the very gallows prepared for Mordecai.

Esther 5-7
Heart of the Passage:
Esther 5, 7

Chapter 5				Chapter 6	Chapter 7
1	Esther's Banquet	8	Haman's Boasting	14	Mordecai's Reward
Hope			Honor	Hanging	



Your Daily Walk: It has been well said: "Pride always demands that *I* be in the middle." And no truer proverb was ever spoken than this one: "Pride goeth before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18).

Trace Haman's proud path to destruction. It began with a promotion (perhaps for faithful service) by King Ahasuerus (3:1); it moved to boastful arrogance over his advancement; and it culminated in self-exaltation. Three steps to the gallows!

Proverbs 29:23 cautions, "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit." Where has a recent promotion in your life set the stage for possible boasting, self-exaltation, and demotion? Haman fell into the painful trap of pride. Look up 1 Peter 5:6-7 and let it guide your next step today.



Insight: Epitaph for an Agagite Etched into Haman's tombstone might well have been the words "He died of *I* trouble." An actual epitaph for Haman has been discovered in the collection of Jewish writings called the Talmud (Megillah 7b). It reads simply, "Cursed be Haman; blessed be Mordecai!"

Swallowing of pride seldom leads to indigestion.

The Jews Receive a Reprieve

15

Friday

May

Esther 8-10

Heart of the Passage:

Esther 8:1-8;

9:1-2, 12-32



Overview: The final chapters of Esther's drama read like the ending of a fairy tale. Mordecai is promoted, the Jews' enemies are destroyed, and Esther secures letters from the king establishing the feast of Purim as a perpetual reminder of God's great deliverance. In the epilogue (chapter 10), Mordecai receives historical recognition in the Persian annals. Such acclaim from pagan historians comes not because of arrogant claims or self-exaltation (as with Haman) but because Mordecai exemplifies servanthood in his speech and conduct.

Chapter 8	Chapter 9		Chapter 10
Reversing the Law	Repulsing the Enemy 1 19	Remembering Purim 20 32	Rewarding Mordecai
Fighting		Feasting	Favoring

Faith is as simple, and as difficult, as believing that God cares.



Your Daily Walk: If you have ever watched an Oscar or Emmy Awards presentation, you have probably heard many of the winners attribute a large portion of their success to the *director*. Can you suggest why?

Now that you have completed reading the Book of Esther, a divine drama that unfolds on the real stage of history, to whom do you think Esther and Mordecai would attribute *their* success?

Think back over the characters you have met in the book; then briefly answer the following questions:

1. How many events in the book clearly demonstrate God's sovereign control? roll of the dice, king's insomnia, _____

2. What is one lesson you can learn from . . .

Esther's two banquets? _____

Mordecai's unrewarded kindness? _____

Haman's casting of lots? _____

Haman's hanging? _____

3. What is one way you can cooperate with the Director of *your* life to bring glory to Him? _____



Insight: The Feast of Dice

The Feast of Purim derives its name from the lots or dice (Hebrew, *purim*) which Haman cast (3:7; 9:24). Archaeological digs at Susa have uncovered numbered dice similar to those which Haman might have used in his superstitious choice of a date.

JOB

The Book of Job examines one of life's most perplexing questions. It introduces a pious man of God named Job, who lived perhaps 4,000 years ago. In a sudden series of catastrophes, Job loses his family, fame, fortune, and fitness. For 35 chapters he searches his soul and debates his best friends to find a reason for his misfortune. After exhausting the conventional wisdom of his counselors, Job is confronted by God Himself, and his demanding "why" melts into humble worship.

FOCUS	Situation	Search	Solution
Divisions	Controversy Between Jehovah and Satan	Controversy with Job's Four Friends: { Eliphaz and Job (4-7) Bilhad and Job (8-10) Zophar and Job (11-14) Cycle #1 { Eliphaz and Job (15-17) Bilhad and Job (18-19) Zophar and Job (20-21) Cycle #2 { Eliphaz and Job (22-24) Bilhad and Job (25-31) Zophar and Job (32-37) Cycle #3	Controversy Between Jehovah and Job
Topics	Dialogue in Heaven The Onset of Suffering	Dialogue on Earth The Failure of Human Wisdom	Dialogue in Heaven The Final Word from God
Place	The Land of Uz (North Arabia)		
Time	Patriarchal Period (about 2000 B.C.)		

Sat.–Sun.

16/17

May

Job 1–3

Heart of the Passage:

Job 1, 2



Overview: Southeast of the Dead Sea lies the land of Uz, a sheep and cattle ranching region and home of the wealthy herdsman Job.

Job's exemplary life of service for God is placed in the furnace of testing. In a heavenly drama (unknown to Job but revealed to the reader), Satan accuses Job of serving God for material reward. By divine permission, Satan tests Job by removing all that he holds dear: his family, wealth, health, and prestige. Yet through it all Job maintains his steadfast worship of God, though nagging questions remain.

Chapter 1			Chapter 2			Chapter 3
Satan's First Attack			Satan's Second Attack			Job's Agony
Planned	11	12	Planned	6	7	
		Performed			Performed	
1		22	1		13	
Disaster						Doubt

Of all the devil's tools for making us miserable, discouragement is his finest and most frequently used.



Your Daily Walk: What is your first response when someone points a finger at you? Do you find it a painful or a pleasant experience?

There is someone who takes great delight in pointing an accusing finger at your life. One of his names is “the devil” (1 Peter 5:8), which literally means “slanderer.” (Some of his other names are equally revealing—see Matthew 12:24; 13:19; Luke 10:18; John 8:44; Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 9:11; 12:10; 20:2).

Now that you know something about your enemy, you'll want to know how you—like Job—can stand firm against your enemy's fiery attacks. Job, who experienced the worst Satan could hurl against him, maintained an attitude of confident trust in his sovereign God.

Did that mean . . .

. . . Job deserved the treatment he received? (2:3)

. . . all of Job's questions were answered? (3:11-12, 23)

The answer in both cases is “No!” But even though Job's misery came unexplained and undeserved, Job demonstrated in the midst of it an unshakable confidence in the One who held his life in His very hands. It wasn't *what* he knew, but *whom* he knew that gave him strength to stand against any trial.



Insight: A Name from Antiquity

The name of both the book and its hero, Job (Hebrew, *iyjob*), appears in extra-Biblical texts as early as 2000 B.C., indicating that Job is perhaps the oldest book of the Bible.

Eliphaz and Job (First Debate)

Monday

May

18



Overview: Onto the stage now step three counselors to begin a series of poetic debates with Job, which will stretch from chapters 4–31. These three friends, previously introduced in 2:11, represent three differing points of view as they analyze Job’s sorry plight. Eliphaz, the senior spokesman and “chief counsel for the prosecution,” bases much of his insight on personal experience. Courteously, Eliphaz reasons from the general assumption that all people stand guilty before a perfect God. All suffering results from sin—a diagnosis that proves inadequate in Job’s case. Job expresses disappointment with Eliphaz’s counsel and challenges him to identify anything standing between Job and his God.

Job 4–7

Heart of the Passage:

Job 4:1-9; 6:1-13

Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7
Sin’s Suffering	Sin’s Solution	The Sufferer’s Sorrow	The Sufferer’s Self-Analysis
Counsel by Eliphaz		Evaluation by Job	



Your Daily Walk: Put yourself in this “fatherly” role for a moment.

You have just come home from work to find a baseball and bat lying in front of the scattered remains of what used to be your patio window. Without investigating further (an open-and-shut case, you conclude), you storm into the house, corral the “guilty party,” and administer a sound spanking. Satisfied that justice has been served, you sit down with the evening paper . . . just as your wife returns with the boy next door who has confessed to the whole thing!

No one gives advice with more enthusiasm than an ignorant person.

Jumping to conclusions is not nearly as good exercise as digging for the facts. The Bible tells us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). Take a counseling lesson from the Book of Job. What situation today requires you to act as referee? Spend adequate time looking at all the issues first. Give your counsel only after thoughtful, prayerful consideration of all the facts.



Insight: What’s Ailing You?

Job’s disease included all of these symptoms: boils (2:7), swelling (2:8), disfigurement (2:12), loss of appetite (3:24), severe depression (3:24-25), broken skin (7:5), sunken eyes (16:16), bad breath (19:17), constant pain (30:17), discoloration and fever (30:30), and an emaciated appearance (33:21).

Bildad and Job (First Debate)

19

Tuesday

May

Job 8–10

Heart of the Passage:

Job 8–9



Overview: Eliphaz has based his arguments on a cause-and-effect view of sin and suffering. Now Bildad the Shuhite arises to argue the same case, but from the perspective of tradition rather than experience. He calls on Job to meditate upon the attribute of God's justice as seen repeatedly

in history. God shows His salvation and mercy to the upright, but brings down the wicked. Therefore, there can be only one conclusion regarding Job's plight: He is guilty of some secret sin. Again the suffering patriarch concedes that God is perfect and just, but he also maintains his own innocence—a position that bewilders Job as he struggles to understand his suffering.

Chapter 8	Chapter 9	Chapter 10
"God Is Just!"	"I Know God Is Just!"	"Why Then Do I Suffer?"
Bildad's Comments	Job's Concession	Job's Confusion

The best of saints have borne the worst of sufferings.



Insight: Here Comes the Judge
The word translated "daysman" or "umpire" in 9:33 does not merely mean a judge who decides what is right. He is one who mediates between or reconciles two parties by bringing them together and then lays his hands on them both as a mutual friend.



Your Daily Walk: The need for someone who can reconcile a holy God and a sinful humanity is as old as the early chapters of Genesis. The sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:6) interrupted their fellowship with God, brought forth God's anger and judgment, and placed a barrier between God and humanity. Later, prophets would represent God to the people, and priests would establish God's order on earth for humanity, yet throughout the Old Testament there was never one who could fully heal the breach. To do that would require a man to be God, and God to become a man.

Job lived during a period of history when a perfect and sinless daysman was unknown. But today, the One who alone can bring God and humanity together and restore that lost fellowship is Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior and Mediator before God? He is waiting to bring you to God, to settle the sin problem that has estranged you from Him, to lay His loving hand upon you right now (Psalm 139:5-6). Will you let Him?

Zophar and Job (First Debate)

Wednesday

May 20



Overview: Zophar wastes little time boring straight to the heart of the matter (as he interprets it). By comparison with Eliphaz and Bildad, he is almost brutal in his bluntness. "Should thy lies make men hold their peace? . . . But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee. . . . God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (11:3, 5-6). He appeals to God's great wisdom and control, which dwarfs that of vain and ignorant men, and urges Job to return to God, where he will find both security and hope. Job responds with a lengthy defense in which he acknowledges God's power, defends his own integrity, and reaffirms his steadfast confidence in God.

Job 11-14

Heart of the Passage:

Job 11; 12:13-25

Chapter 11		Chapter 12	Chapter 13	Chapter 14
"God Is in Control" 12	"Turn Back to Him" 20	"I Never Left Him"	"You're No Help"	"Help Me, God"
Zophar's Plea for Piety		Job's Persistent Denial		



Your Daily Walk: Few passages in Scripture paint as dark a picture of depression as that found in chapter 14. What makes it more remarkable is that the author is describing a believer. But this shouldn't come as a surprise. Believers are not immune to the despair and despondency that accompany painful circumstances. But they do have a reservoir for coping with depression that the world knows nothing about!

- They know God is on their side (Romans 8:31).
- They know God is in control of both the oppressed and the oppressor (Job 12:16).
- They know justice will ultimately triumph (Job 13:18).

Are you given to times of depression about a particular circumstance in your life? The answer is not to dwell on your circumstance but on the greatness of your Creator. He is your salvation (13:16); He numbers your every step (14:16); and He cares about you. Spend some quiet moments pondering His greatness until you can respond as Job did: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15).



Insight: Zophar, the Friend Job Could Do Without
Zophar (whose name means "hairy" or "rough") appears as a mean, self-made authority who thought he understood Job's problem (and didn't), making life all the more miserable for Job, who wanted to understand his problem (and couldn't)!

If we could avoid that portion of suffering we bring upon ourselves, we might be surprised at how little would be left.

Eliphaz and Job (Second Debate)

21

Thursday

May

Job 15-17

Heart of the Passage:

Job 15:1-19; 17



Overview: Like a second wave of attacking soldiers, the three counselors launch their second cycle of debates without giving Job so much as a moment's rest! Eliphaz again leads the assault, this time increasing the intensity of his verbal attack. He describes Job's words as worthless talk; he denies that Job understands anything new or true

about God; and he broadly condemns all wickedness in man—a thinly disguised slander of Job's character. Job rejects these bitter accusations. Then, speaking to himself, he agonizes over God's apparent plot to destroy him. Depression once again overwhelms him.

Chapter 15	Chapter 16	Chapter 17
Eliphaz's Broken Record	Job's Broken Heart	Job's Broken Hope
"Wicked Men Die"	"God Shatters Me"	"God, Deliver Me"

Your ability to learn depends in part on your ability to relinquish what you have held.



Your Daily Walk: "Anything true is not new; anything new is not true."

This close-minded attitude that excludes any possibility of learning is a perfect description of the elder counselor Eliphaz (15:9-10, 17-19). Such is the fate of all who claim to know it all by reason of their years of experience. Age alone, whether chronological or spiritual, is no sure measure of a person's wisdom.

Practice a teachable spirit today. Take an index card with you everywhere you go, and write down at least four new thoughts that other people express today. Be a ready learner. Don't attempt to persuade the other person to your point of view until first you are sure you understand his. Then at the end of the day, evaluate the things you have written down. Are they Biblical? Are they practical? Are they appropriate? See if you can learn something new and useful today.

And remember this little slogan:

*"If you think you're green, you'll grow;
If you think you're ripe, you'll rot."*



Insight: The Agony of Defeat

A mortally wounded bull will often scrape at the ground with his horns. Similarly, Job sensed that he was doomed. In 16:15 he likens himself to a defeated animal who has "defiled" or "thrust" his "horn in the dust." No longer would he "lift his horn" in power—a pathetic picture of a discouraged saint.

Bildad and Job (Second Debate)

Friday
May 22



Overview: Bildad continues the seemingly endless debate by painting a horrifying picture of the terror and destruction awaiting the wicked. Job is pained, but he refuses to collapse under the pressure of his counselors-turned-accusers. Once again placing the responsibility for his plight on the Lord, Job dwells on the history of his disaster. He has been abandoned by family and friends, servants and spouse. Yet in spite of his despair, there is reason to hope. For Job knows that the future holds the promise both of resurrection and his ultimate vindication from wrong.

Job 18-19
Heart of the Passage:
Job 18:1-19:6

Chapter 18			Chapter 19							
Bildad's Hostility	4	5	Job's Hurt	12	13	Job's History	22	23	Job's Hope	29
Bildad's Taunts			Job's Thoughts							



Your Daily Walk: "There is no medicine like hope; no incentive so great, no tonic so powerful as expectation of something better tomorrow."

It is one thing to speak of hope when things look doubtful . . . when the future is uncertain . . . when circumstances are crowding in. It is something else again to speak of hope when there is no doubt about the present (it is a disaster), when the future is certain (and definitely uninviting), when circumstances have crushed you to the floor. Hope in the midst of utter turmoil cannot be simply starry-eyed optimism; it must be built upon bedrock reality.

Job's testimony in 19:25-26 was no mere poetic sentiment. (Remember his plight; it was hopeless!) Rather, Job was drawing strength from the Person to whom he had entrusted his life, and from the promises that Person had made on his behalf.

Imagine that you have been deprived of possessions, health, and loved ones. Could you proclaim with Job that your hope was still in the Lord? Pick one of God's many promises (1 Corinthians 10:13 would do nicely) and make it your "Project Hope" today.



Insight: Count to 10 . . . Slowly
Ten is a prominent number in the Bible, indicating patient endurance. Jacob endured 10 changes in his wages (Genesis 31:7); the Israelites tempted God 10 times with their rebellion (Numbers 14:22); and Job put up with 10 insults from his companions (19:3).

What oxygen is for the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of life.

Zophar and Job (Second Debate)

23/24 Sat.—Sun.
May

Job 20–21

Heart of the Passage:

Job 20:1–11; 21:22–23



Overview: Zophar—who specializes in easy answers to difficult questions—now makes his last public appearance. His comments are addressed to “the wicked” (20:5) but are aimed straight at Job. The wicked will be cut off; sin and riches will devour him; those he oppressed shall see his defeat; and the fury of God’s wrath shall strike

him down. Then Job interrupts. The wicked do sometimes prosper and enjoy the luxury of their wealth. But ultimately they die just like everyone else. The wicked are mighty in power while they live, but then comes their destruction by God. Job concludes, “How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?” (21:34).

Chapter 20				Chapter 21							
1	Righteous Indignation	3	4	Repeated Insight	29	5	Understandable Patience	6	7	Undeniable Inequity	34
Zophar’s Insistence						Job’s Innocence					

Do not pray that the poor be fed unless you are willing to provide the bread.



Your Daily Walk: How can you explain the seeming inequities in the world today: the wicked generally going unpunished, the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, the swindler prospering while the honest man goes bankrupt? Isn’t God concerned about such things?

If you have pondered thoughts like those, you’re not alone. Centuries ago, Job asked the same penetrating questions about the prosperity of the wicked. He looked around him and saw distorted business ethics, perverted justice, unpunished criminals, and unjust suffering. Everywhere he looked was cause for pessimism—until he looked up! And suddenly everything snapped into sharp focus.

The God of eternity works out His plan from the perspective of eternity. In the end, all accounts will be settled justly. “The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction” (21:30). But for now, God calls upon the righteous to trust Him, leave vengeance in His hands, and walk by faith.

Pick an unfair situation from daily life and look at it from God’s perspective. What do you see? How will you respond?



Insight: Words with a Hollow (and Familiar) Ring
In his rebuttal, Job skillfully employs the words of his opponents. For example, in the space of a single verse (21:28), Job paraphrases (and parodies) the words of all three counselors: Bildad (8:22), Eliphaz (15:34), and Zophar (20:26).

Eliphaz Silenced (Third Debate)

Monday

May

25



Overview: Job's self-appointed counselors have run out of arguments—but not out of words. In the final round of debates, Eliphaz and Bildad take turns accusing Job of being the “wicked man” they have been describing all along. Eliphaz, following his cause-and-effect view of sin and suffering, continues to search for a secret sin in Job's life. In a desperate plea for acquittal, Job turns his glance heavenward. He laments that God is hard to find (23:8-9), and yet acknowledges that God's purposes are singleminded, unchanging, and beneficial for those who patiently wait upon Him.

Job 22-24

Heart of the Passage:

Job 22:1-11; 23:1-12

Chapter 22			Chapter 23	Chapter 24
1 "Don't Sin"	20	21 "Do Repent"	30 "Don't Hide from Me"	"Do Vindicate Me"
Eliphaz to Job			Job to God	



Insight: Old Testament Cattle Rustling

Job 24:3 states that the wicked “drive away the ass of the fatherless.” This should upset more than the ranchers, for such an act would be damaging beyond repair. Orphan children would be unable to round up or recover the lost livestock—a picture of utter helplessness and desperation. But such cold-hearted acts of vandalism and cruelty “are not hidden from the Almighty” (24:1).



Your Daily Walk: There is at least one thing Eliphaz and Job agreed upon—they both were appalled at the treatment received by the fatherless.

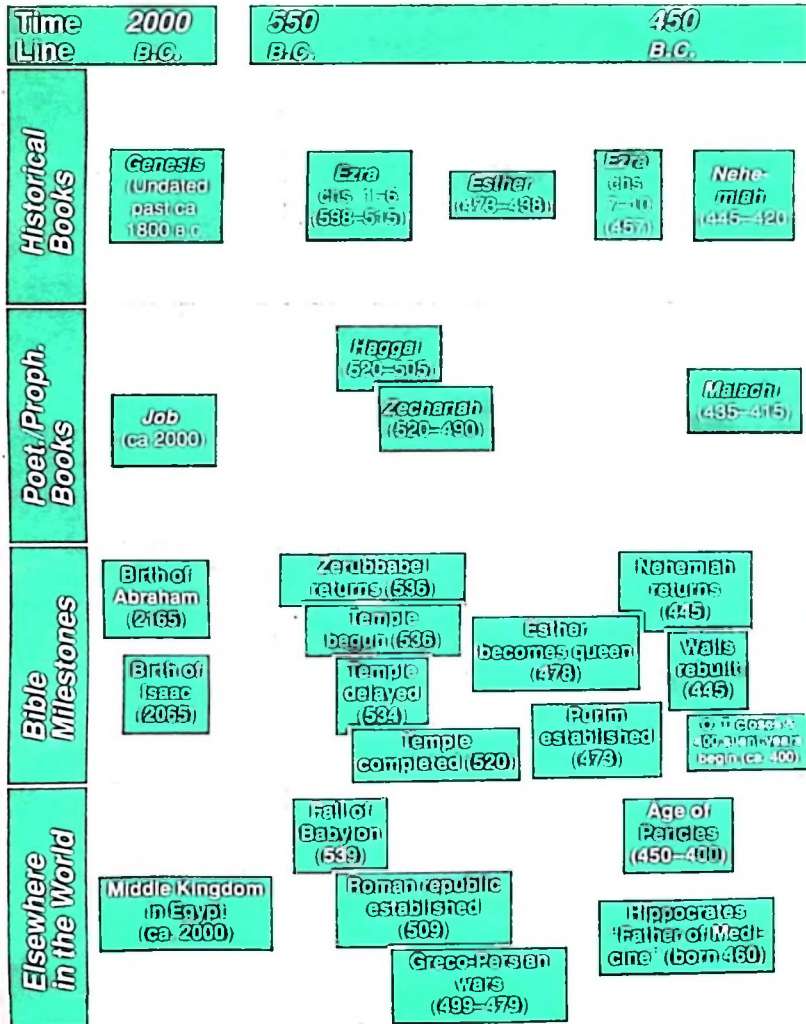
Eliphaz stated in 22:9 that the wicked broke “the arms of the fatherless.” The rightful privileges and means of support for the fatherless were taken away. Their boundary markers were moved; their flocks were driven off; they were left cold, hungry, and at the mercy of the elements. But the God of all mercy had not forgotten them.

God has a special place in His heart for the fatherless and orphaned. Psalm 82:3 exhorts us to “defend the poor and fatherless.” Do you know of a single-parent home in your neighborhood, or a family that is destitute because of unemployment or illness? You can (and should) pray for them. But don't stop there. Carve out some time to spend with the parentless youngster. Call a needy neighbor and invite him or her over for dinner. Get involved in the lives of another family. If you have Christ, you have something to share!

We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.



PLACING THE BOOKS OF Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, & Job



Bildad and Zophar Silenced (Third Debate)

Tuesday

May

26



Overview: The prosecution rests its case at last. All arguments have been expended.

In one final, angry, impatient outburst, Bildad repeats his well-worn case. A person cannot be justified before a high and holy God. Job, who agrees with Bildad's concept of a great God, contends that God is far bigger than even Bildad has yet shown. Insisting upon his own innocence, Job describes God as the One who wisely and justly rewards the righteous. Though humans have plumbed the depths of the earth to find rich minerals, they have yet to find anything as valuable or precious as the wisdom of God.

Job 25–28

Heart of the Passage:

Job 25, 28

Chapter 25	Chapter 26	Chapter 27	Chapter 28
"God Is Distant"	"God Is Powerful"	"God Is Just"	"God Is Wise"
Pessimism	Optimism		



Your Daily Walk: Here is a good thought from the Book of Ecclesiastes to add to your Bible reading today: "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

When words have all been used up, tempers usually flare and fists fly! Such was the case with Bildad. All his arguments had been refuted. There was nothing left to say. So he struck out in anger and showed the shallowness of his own counsel.

Work on your "anger factor" today. If possible, carry a thermometer with you in your coat pocket or purse. Or draw one on a note card with the words of Ecclesiastes 7:9 on the back, and tuck it in your pocket. Whenever you begin to boil about a problem today—a disagreement with your spouse, a traffic jam, a missed appointment, a tedious assignment, an unexpected disappointment—pull out your thermometer. Count the degree markings slowly ("96 . . . 97 . . . 98 . . ."). Then ask yourself these two questions: "Is it worth making a fool of myself?" And, "Is the God I serve big enough to handle it?" Then deal with your problem in *God's way*.

*He who
can
suppress a
moment's
anger
may
prevent a
day of
sorrow.*



Insight: How Much Is Wisdom Really Worth?

Job stated that wisdom is more priceless than the earth's gold (28:12-17). Just how valuable is that? One gold field in South Africa alone has produced 49.4 million ounces. At an average price of \$395 per ounce, that represents a "gold mine" of over \$19 billion!

Job's Final Plea (Third Debate)

27

Wednesday

May

Job 29-31

Heart of the Passage:

Job 29:1-7; 30:1-8;

31:5-15



Overview: Job's advisors have at last grown silent, but the problem of his suffering persists. Nearly overcome by depression, he longs for the good old days when he enjoyed his wealth and the presence of his children. In contrast to his former position of status and prestige, Job now experiences mockery from the young men of the city. And ever present is the excruciating pain of his loathe-

some disease. Job pauses. He thinks back over his life. Is there some area of sin he has overlooked? No. Has he manifested any bitter or negligent attitude toward his neighbors? No. Has he demonstrated an attitude of insensitivity toward God or others? No. And so, with his personal and public life an open book before God, Job rests his case.

Chapter 29	Chapter 30	Chapter 31
The Good Old Days	The Bad New Days	A Personal Inventory
Job Remembers		Job Reexamines

Suffering can produce great depths of character, mature understanding, warm compassion, and rich spirituality.



Insight: Job's Moral Inventory

Notice the three areas of Job's self-examination: (1) *personal life* (31:1-12)—to check for the sins of lust, lying, and adultery; (2) *public life* (31:13-22)—including his treatment of slaves, widows, orphans, and the needy; and (3) *spiritual life* (31:24-40)—including his use of money, worship of God, attitude toward revenge, use of hospitality, and purity of motives.



Your Daily Walk: Every good store manager periodically takes stock of his inventory. He carefully examines his goods to see what he has on hand and what he doesn't, what he needs to buy for his shelves and what he needs to throw away. And he does this at regular intervals.

That's precisely what Job did in chapter 31. He took stock of his life to see where his character, conduct, and spiritual life were deficient. Although there was no grave area of sin, Job's attitude of confession prepared him for God's instruction later.

When was the last time you took personal inventory in your life? Right now, check up on your personal thought life, your behavior toward others, and your walk with God. Confess your areas of sinful neglect; thank God for your areas of strength; and map out a project today to begin "restocking the shelves" in places where you are weak.

Elihu and Job (Part One)

Thursday
May 28



Overview: Job's three "comfortless counselors" fall silent at last, their arguments exhausted, with Job no nearer a solution to his suffering. Enter Elihu, a younger contemporary of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, to offer his counsel. He begins by analyzing Job's response to his suffering and Job's insistence that God provide answers to his questions. Elihu points out that the Sovereign's actions are often educational, not merely disciplinary, in the life of His subjects. Using many quotes from Job's previous responses, Elihu gives a lengthy defense of God's dealings with humans. His conclusion: "God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment" (34:12).

Job 32-34
Heart of the Passage:
Job 32, 34

Chapter 32	Chapter 33	Chapter 34
"Both Sides, Listen to Me"	"God Is Greater Than Man"	"Far Be It from God to Do Wickedness"
Elihu's Request	Elihu's Response	



Your Daily Walk: Can you think of three occupations from the world of government, business, medicine, or sports that demand absolute impartiality if the job is to be done correctly? Write them in the spaces provided:

Did you think of things like: Supreme Court judge, personnel manager, surgeon, or umpire? These are all examples of jobs requiring impartiality in the workaday world. But what about in the Christian life? How impartial does God want *you* to be?

Have you ever given preferential treatment to a prominent guest at church? Have you ever avoided someone who obviously came from a different ethnic, financial, or spiritual background than you? If so, you were exercising partiality. And according to James 2:9, God looks on such respect of persons as sin.

Elihu realized that God is absolutely impartial (34:16-20) and expects His children to be the same. Check up on your own personal contacts in your neighborhood, office, or church. What needs to change about your treatment of others so that James 2:1 is true of you?

Most of our suspicions of others are aroused by our knowledge of ourselves.



Insight: Words to Be Sampled and Savored
Elihu quoted a proverb, "For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat" (34:3), in order to urge his listeners to test his words as carefully as a gourmet would taste his food.

Elihu and Job (Part Two)

29

Friday

May

Job 35-37

Heart of the Passage:

Job 35; 37:14-24



Overview: Elihu deals with two of Job's most persistent complaints: "What profit is there for acting righteously when you end up suffering anyway?" (35:1-8), and "Why doesn't God listen to the cries of a broken heart?" (35:9-16). In the first case, Elihu concludes that God's perfect justice is not determined or altered by human behavior.

Concerning unanswered prayer, Elihu argues that the only prayers God ignores are those that are proud and empty (35:12-13). God is sovereign over history and nature. His character is awesome and His ways unsearchable. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out" (37:23).

Chapter 35		Chapter 36	Chapter 37
"Man Is Not Like God"		"God Is Not Like Man"	
1 His Conduct 8	9 His Pride 16	His Power	His Creativity
Elihu's Exhortation		Elihu's Explanation	

A Christian with absolutely no doubts or questions is overlooking something.



Your Daily Walk: Here are three of the most difficult words any Christian will ever have to utter: "*I don't know.*"

Somewhat the notion has developed that if you cannot explain everything about God's actions and attributes, it is a sign of spiritual weakness or immaturity. Job repeatedly took God to task because of the seemingly unreasonable things God was doing in his life. Knowing that God was absolutely just and impartial, Job concluded that God owed him an explanation. But it took young Elihu to remind Job of another important truth about God: His ways are different from human ways. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8).

Just as you must trust the surgeon to do his skillful work even though you do not understand all his techniques, so God asks you to trust Him to accomplish His purposes in your life—even though it may involve "surgery" you do not understand this side of heaven.



Insight: What's in a Name?

Many times Bible names characterize their bearers. In the case of Elihu, his name captures the major theme of his message on the sovereignty of God. *Elihu* means "He is God!" Do you know the meaning of your name and those of your family members?

Controversy Between Jehovah and Job

Saturday

May

30



Overview: Job does not answer Elihu.

The sufferer awaits the words of the One he has sought for 37 chapters! At last, God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind. But rather than answer Job's persistent questions, God ministers to the need of Job's heart. He guides Job on a panoramic sweep of nature, showing Job the vastness of the mind of God and the smallness of puny humans. Using a series of pointed questions, the infinite God challenges Job to answer: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (38:4). "Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth?" (38:18). "Canst thou number the months?" (39:2). "Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom?" (39:26). Clearly, the answer to all of these is no. The God of creation rules the world. Though a God of justice and mercy, He is intimately acquainted with all His creatures.

Job 38-39

Heart of the Passage:

Job 38:1-18

Chapter 38	Chapter 39
The Vastness of God in the Physical World	The Variety of God in the Animal World
A Bigger Picture of Job's God	



Your Daily Walk: God is not nature (as pantheism claims) but is revealed by nature (Romans 1:18-21). You have read today how God's works in the world of nature demonstrate His power and glory.

With this thought in mind, conduct an outdoor "daily walk" today. See how many attributes of God you can find by observing the world around you. Then apply each characteristic of God to your life today.

For example, observe the sun. It rises every day—same time, same place. This shows God is unchangeable. And if God is unchanging, then His promises aren't fickle. They can be relied on today, and tomorrow, and forever! Now see what else you can learn from nature about God's infinity (not limited by space), eternity (not limited by time), omnipresence (everywhere present), and omnipotence (all-powerful). Better yet, do this while you take a walk with a friend.



Insight: A Challenge That Can Get You in Deep Trouble Drop a heavy anchor into the Pacific Ocean over the Marianas Trench, and an hour later it will still not have touched bottom—nearly seven miles below! Such was God's challenge to Job (38:16).

The greatness of the Promiser enhances the greatness of the promises.

Job's Response and Reward

31 Sunday
May

Job 40-42
Heart of the Passage:
Job 40:1-14; 42



Overview: Though Job is willing to acknowledge God's power and wisdom, there yet remains the question of God's judgment (40:8). Once again God challenges Job to a face-to-face confrontation, this time over the issue of God's justice. Through interrogation ("Do you have the strength of God?"), invitation ("Prove that you know how to exercise true justice"), and illustration ("Consider behemoth and leviathan; you can't control My creatures, so how can you hope to stand before Me?"), God brings Job to the point of repentance for his presumptuous attitude. Now Job is willing to trust God completely, though he doesn't completely understand His ways!

Chapters 40-41	Chapter 42	
God's Challenge to Job: "Can You Rule in My Place?"	Job's Response to God: Repentance 1 6	Job's Reward from God: Riches 7 17
The Sinfulness of Criticizing God		

Pray for a faith that will not shrink when washed in the waters of affliction.



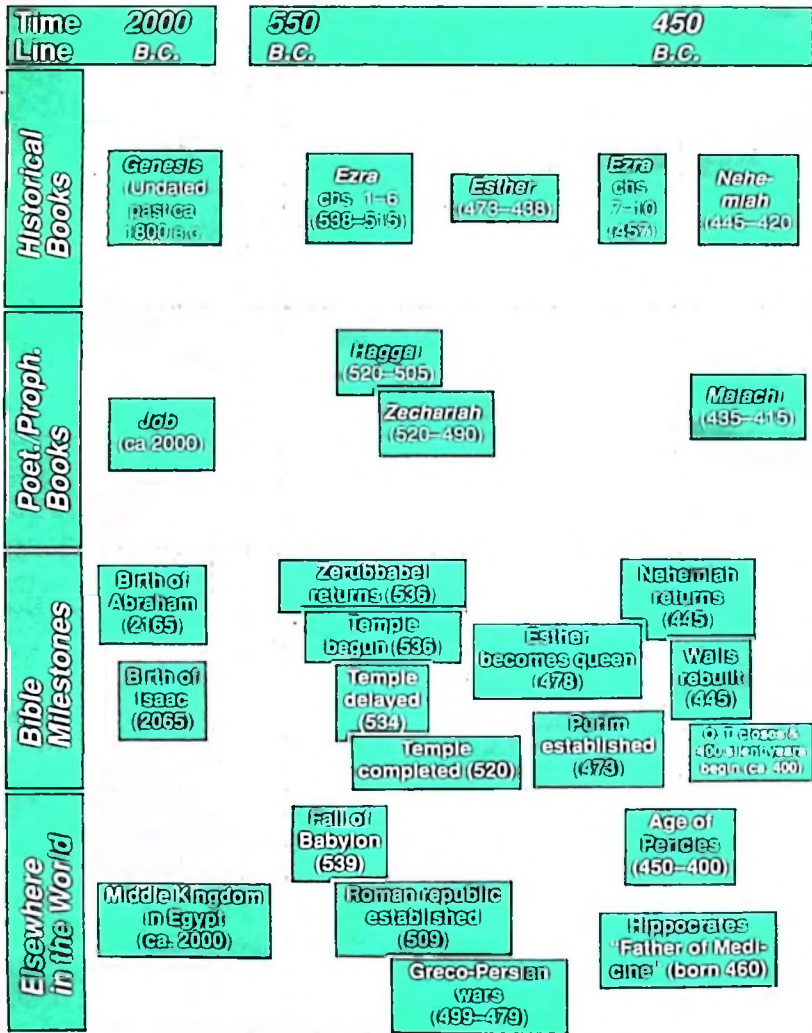
Your Daily Walk: Nowhere in the Book of Job does God answer any of the burning questions that caused so much debate between Job and his friends. He simply answers the need of Job's heart. God does not explain each phase of the battle, but He makes Job more than conqueror in it. Job's knowledge of God before his trials was primarily secondhand, "by the hearing of the ear," perhaps from his parents, friends, and acquaintances. But now, after passing through the fire of adversity, he sees God more clearly and gains faith and courage to trust Him personally.

God doesn't put just any of His children through a Job-like experience. Remember chapter 1? It was because of Job's God-fearing lifestyle that God permitted him to be tested by Satan, in order that his life and devotion might run even deeper. Are you facing a severe test of your faith today? View it not as a sign that God has left you, but as a token of His desire to deepen and strengthen your commitment to Him. Complete this sentence: "Though I do not understand why, God is asking me to show my trust in Him by _____, and I will!"



Insight: Double for Your Trouble
As his reward for "faithfulness under fire," Job received back from God twice as many sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys as he had before, but not twice as many children (since he would one day see again the ones he had lost).

Placing the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, & Job



Job's Final Plea (Third Debate)

27

Wednesday

May

Job 29-31

Heart of the Passage:

Job 29:1-7; 30:1-8;

31:5-15



Overview: Job's advisors have at last grown silent, but the problem of his suffering persists. Nearly overcome by depression, he longs for the good old days when he enjoyed his wealth and the presence of his children. In contrast to his former position of status and prestige, Job now experiences mockery from the young men of the city. And ever present is the excruciating pain of his loathe-

some disease. Job pauses. He thinks back over his life. Is there some area of sin he has overlooked? No. Has he manifested any bitter or negligent attitude toward his neighbors? No. Has he demonstrated an attitude of insensitivity toward God or others? No. And so, with his personal and public life an open book before God, Job rests his case.

Chapter 29	Chapter 30	Chapter 31
The Good Old Days	The Bad New Days	A Personal Inventory
Job Remembers		Job Reexamines

Suffering can produce great depths of character, mature understanding, warm compassion, and rich spirituality.



Insight: Job's Moral Inventory

Notice the three areas of Job's self-examination: (1) *personal life* (31:1-12)—to check for the sins of lust, lying, and adultery; (2) *public life* (31:13-22)—including his treatment of slaves, widows, orphans, and the needy; and (3) *spiritual life* (31:24-40)—including his use of money, worship of God, attitude toward revenge, use of hospitality, and purity of motives.



Your Daily Walk: Every good store manager periodically takes stock of his inventory. He carefully examines his goods to see what he has on hand and what he doesn't, what he needs to buy for his shelves and what he needs to throw away. And he does this at regular intervals.

That's precisely what Job did in chapter 31. He took stock of his life to see where his character, conduct, and spiritual life were deficient. Although there was no grave area of sin, Job's attitude of confession prepared him for God's instruction later.

When was the last time you took personal inventory in your life? Right now, check up on your personal thought life, your behavior toward others, and your walk with God. Confess your areas of sinful neglect; thank God for your areas of strength; and map out a project today to begin "restocking the shelves" in places where you are weak.