

September Answers

- 1) [September 1] God concluded Lamentations by telling the people why their judgment had been so horrible: “The guilt of my people is greater than that of **Sodom**, where utter disaster struck in a moment and no hand offered help” (Lam 4:6 NLT). The destruction of Sodom had been **sudden**; the destruction of Jerusalem was **slow** and full of horrible **suffering** (mothers boiled and ate their own children). “A high calling flouted by low living results in deep suffering” (Life Application Study Bible). How true that is! Are we living in a way that brings glory and honor to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? This was because their sin was **worse** than Sodom. Indeed, they made Sodom look **righteous** by comparison! (Ezek 16:48–51). Next, God told the people to bring their sorrow and grief to him in prayer: “Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; **look**, and see our disgrace!” (Lam 5:1). They must bear their punishment without complaint, but it was appropriate for them to lay their suffering at God’s feet and beg for **mercy** (Lam 5:16). Lastly, God urged them to ask for restoration: “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored! **Renew** our days as of old” (Lam 5:21). This was an appeal for God to bring them back into covenant faithfulness and love, for true restoration is found only in a loving, obedient **relationship** with God. Thus Lamentations ends with a call to find **healing** in the one, true God.

- 2) [September 2] Instead of being sad at the devastation the Babylonians had wreaked on Jerusalem, the Tyrians chortled with **glee** (Ezek 26:2). At the time, Tyre controlled the **sea** trade routes, while Judah controlled the **land** trade routes. Controlling trade routes enabled a nation to impose **tolls** and obtain **revenue**. Now that Jerusalem was destroyed, the Tyrians could seize control of this important income. God’s reaction shows us that it’s *not* a smart idea to **laugh** at the judgment He brings on His own people! (cf. Prov 24:17–18; Obad 1:12). God said to Tyre: “Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its **waves**” (Ezek 26:3–5). The first wave of judgment brought **Nebuchadnezzar** and the Babylonians (Ezek 26:7–11). He besieged Tyre for 13 years, and when he was done, the mainland city lay in ruins. The second wave of judgment brought the **Persians**, who subjugated the Tyrians around 525 BC. The third wave of judgment brought the mighty king of **Greece**, Alexander the Great (Ezek 26:12–14). He marched against Tyre in 332 BC, some **255** years after Ezekiel’s prophecy. Alexander destroyed the mainland city and used the debris to construct a **causeway** across the water to the island stronghold. This fulfilled God’s word that Tyre’s enemies would “throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the **water**” (Ezek 26:12). The description of Tyre’s demise is one of the most detailed in Scripture, and its fulfillment is **evidence** for the truth of God’s word. Today the island stronghold of Tyre is still a pile of rubble, a testament to God’s judgment on sin!

- 3) [September 3] Jeremiah ended up living out the remainder of his life in the land of **Egypt**. This story is so frustrating to read! Gedaliah wouldn’t listen to Johanan’s warning and it cost him his **life**. Johanan wouldn’t listen to Jeremiah’s warning and it cost the remnant their **homeland**. The people claimed they would do whatever God told Jeremiah, but the minute he told them, they accused him of **lying**. The people declared God to be “the LORD our God,” but as soon as they settled in Egypt, they began to worship the Egyptian **gods**! What can be learned from such a tragic tale? It teaches us to take the warnings of others **seriously**. It teaches us that what may seem like the smart thing to do is actually a recipe for **disaster**. It teaches us to think long and hard before we follow the **crowd**. It teaches us that the safest decision we can make is to **obey** God’s will. It teaches us that living for God is always better than living for **ourselves**. It teaches us to submit when God’s word conflicts with what we **want**. Have we ever sought God’s guidance when what we really wanted was His approval of **our** will? There’s no point in asking, “Where should we go, Lord?” if we’re already halfway down the road to Egypt!

- 4) [September 4] Six months later, news of Jerusalem’s destruction finally reached Ezekiel and the exiles. In response, Ezekiel proclaimed God’s word concerning five groups of people. First, he spoke of the few Jews who remained in the “waste places” of Israel. Rather than repenting and turning to God, they said, “Abraham was only one man, yet he got possession of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to possess” (Ezek 33:24). God told them that He was going to wipe them all out, no matter where they were. This teaches us that we cannot claim God’s promises while we’re **disobeying** His commands. Second, Ezekiel spoke of the exiles who lived with him in Babylon. They listened to what he had to say, but they had no intention of obeying. God told them that they would know a prophet had been among them when everything he said came to pass. This teaches us to **respect** those who speak God’s word lest we ignore their message to our own destruction. Third, Ezekiel spoke of the “shepherds” of your people, the leaders and rulers who had neglected the flock and used their positions to satisfy their own selfish desires. God told them that He would personally come and shepherd His people—the Messiah would feed them and be a prince among them. This teaches us that we will be held **accountable** for how we lead those under our authority. Fourth, Ezekiel spoke of Edom, the neighbor of Israel. Instead of mourning what had happened to their brother-nation, they laughed and jeered at the destruction of Jerusalem. God told them that He would pay them back by filling their land with their dead bodies. This teaches us not to take **delight** in the misfortune of others, especially those who have a right to expect our compassion and support. Fifth, Ezekiel spoke of the house of Israel, who said of themselves, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off” (Ezek 37:11). God told them that He was able to bring even dead bones back to life. One day God would cleanse them from their sin and restore them to their land. This teaches us that Christ’s Kingdom will surely come to pass. We can **love** God and be a part of it, or we can **reject** God and be cast aside. The choice is up to us.
- 5) [September 5] The fall of Jerusalem is the context of Ezekiel’s famous “Gog and **Magog**” prophecy (Ezek 38–39). The people of Judah had lost their **homes**, their city and their **temple**, and they had been **exiled** to the land of their conquerors. Why give them a vision of another invasion? Because in the future, the nations who gathered together to conquer them would be **destroyed**. Why? Because in that day, Israel would be living in **obedience** to God. This taught the people that their true **security** lay in their commitment and loyalty to God, and it teaches us the same lesson. When we **follow** God with our whole heart, we can rest securely in his love. God said, “Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, **none** of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall **die**” (Ezek 33:13). This is a sobering reminder that saving faith is not the **act** of a moment but the **attitude** of a lifetime. We must have a present, **living** faith!
- 6) [September 6] In the twenty-fifth year of the exile of Jehoiachin, God showed Ezekiel the Millennial **temple**. An angel took him on a guided **tour** of the complex, carefully measuring each section so he could remember and “**declare** it to the house of Israel” (Ezek 40:4). Why? (see Ezekiel 43:7–10). God wanted this vision to **convict** the people’s hearts and make them **ashamed** of their wickedness. This vision also teaches us that God cannot dwell in a place that is **defiled** by idolatry and sin. In the same way that persistent, unrepentant wickedness caused God to leave the temple (1 Kgs 9:3), such rebellion will cause God to leave the **heart** of a person who will not remain loyal and obedient (1 Kgs 9:6–9). This revelation of the future should **stir** our hearts with desire. It should motivate us to **reject** temptation and **cling** to God in love, for who wouldn’t want to be a part of what God has in store!
- 7) [September 7] God’s return to a temple on this present earth will mean a return of the laws and statutes which maintain the **holiness** of the temple. God wanted Ezekiel to emphasize the sanctity of the Millennial temple so that the exiles would be **convicted** for how they had defiled Solomon’s

temple with their “abominations” (Ezek 44:6). This reminds us that God is a **holy** God. We must be vigilant to **maintain** the holiness of our hearts where his Spirit dwells. The fact that Christ’s coming kingdom will have laws teaches us that laws are not a source of **bondage** or repression. Rather, they are intended to **guide** our behavior and show us how to **please** God. God’s return also means the institution of a **sacrificial** system that will be similar to the Levitical sacrifices of the First Covenant. This in no way implies that the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus is no longer efficacious, nor does it mean that blood sacrifices will now “make perfect those who draw near” (Heb 10:1). Rather, these sacrifices will look back on and **memorialize** Christ’s sacrifice in the same way the sacrifices of the First Covenant looked forward to and anticipated the “offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). The past sins of the Levites had **consequences** that reached into the Millennium: they were not allowed to enter the inner court, serve as priests to God, or have any contact with the sacred offerings (Ezek 44:9–14). This shows us that with great privilege comes great **responsibility** (Num 18:23), and while there is **forgiveness** for failure, certain privileges may be **lost**. In the same way, past obedience will be richly **rewarded** in the future: the Zadokite Levites were given the privilege of serving God **directly** (Ezek 44:15–16). This teaches us that what we do now, in the present, can affect our role and place of service in the future!

- 8) [September 8] In the Millennium, life-giving **water** will come from beneath the temple: half will flow **west** to the Mediterranean Sea, and half will flow **east** to the Jordan valley and the Dead Sea (Zech 14:8). The Dead Sea, which today is a symbol of barrenness and death, will be filled with fresh water and will teem with **fish**. This is a beautiful picture of the life and healing that comes from God’s presence. God is the God of **life**—the source of all blessing and health! Ezekiel’s vision ends with the giving of Israel’s national **boundaries** and the allotment of the land to the tribes. Note that Israel will dwell in the land, but it will not be for them alone. Any **Gentiles** who settle among the tribes will inherit portions of land just like the natives (Ezek 47:21–23). This shows God’s desire to incorporate “**strangers**” and “sojourners” into the nation of Israel (cf. Lev 19:34). What a compelling picture of the unity between Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ! In Him, we’re **children** of Abraham and spiritual **Jews** (cf. Rom 9–11)! The book of Ezekiel ends with the words, “And the name of [Jerusalem] from that time on shall be, The **LORD** Is There (*Yahweh-Sammah*)” (Ezek 48:35b). This means that one day God will dwell with his people **forever**. Never again will they be separated from him because of sin. How wonderful to serve a God who **tabernacles** with his people! We need to ask ourselves: are we living in consistent **obedience** to God’s will? Can it be said of our lives, “The LORD Is There”? If there’s anything the book of Ezekiel teaches us, it’s that **wickedness** will drive away the presence and glory of God.
- 9) [September 9] Toward the end of his life, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a **dream** which warned him to turn from his sin and **pride** (Dan 4:27). At first, Nebuchadnezzar seemed to obey God’s command, but a **year** later, he looked out over the city of Babylon and took credit for its greatness. In that moment, God struck him with **madness**, and he lived like a beast until the period of time was over. Then his reason returned and his kingdom with it, and he glorified God as the one true God. His last words are an important lesson to us: “He is able to **humble** those who walk in pride” (Dan 4:37). Far better to humble ourselves and submit to God’s will, than exalt ourselves and be **cast** to the ground (Ps 147:6). Jehoiachin was released after **37** years in prison! Just when we had all but forgotten him, God remembered and gave him **mercy**. What wonderful grace! Even in the midst of judgment, God is willing to forgive and **restore** those who humble themselves in repentance.
- 10) [September 10] The fall of Babylon and the rise of Medo-Persia. The Persian army advanced against Babylon, and the commander, **Ugbaru**, besieged the city. Yet Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, was not concerned. To show his confidence in the city’s defenses, Belshazzar held a great **feast** for his nobles. In his insolence, he called for the gold and silver vessels from God’s

temple and drank wine from them while praising the gods of Babylon. Then the fingers of a hand appeared and wrote on the wall, and Daniel was brought before the king. Daniel **rebuked** Belshazzar, but he wouldn't repent. That very night Belshazzar was killed, and the Babylonian empire fell to Darius the **Mede**. This teaches us the folly of **rejecting** the godly example of our parents. God took care of Daniel during the transition of empires, and he distinguished himself among the rulers and leaders because of his "**excellent** spirit" (Dan 6:3). Darius was so impressed that he planned to appoint Daniel over the entire empire. This led to jealousy from the other officials and satraps, and they conspired to kill Daniel (Dan 6:3). This teaches us that **trials** come to even the most godly of men (cf. Ezek 14:14). Yet God is faithful. If we trust and obey, God will watch over us and deliver us from the enemy.

- 11) [September 11] Part 1 of the genealogical records of Israel. These records played an important role in the next great event in Israel's history—the **return** of the Jews to Jerusalem after their long exile in Babylon. The genealogical records kept track of which people belonged to which **tribe**. This had great significance because God allotted the land on the basis of tribal descent. The records also showed which people were eligible for service in the **priesthood**. Both Ezra and Nehemiah record that some of the returning "sons of the priests" were excluded from the priesthood as **unclean** because they could not be found among those enrolled in the genealogies (Ezra 2:61–63; Neh 7:63–65). Also, during Nehemiah's term as governor, God prompted him to make sure the people were enrolled in the genealogies (Neh 7:5). The time and effort God required for maintaining accurate genealogical records teaches us that God cares about His **promises**. God swore to give the land to the sons of Jacob, and He always keeps His word. This encourages us to put our **trust** in Him and rest in His leadership. Israel's genealogies begin with Adam. This reminds us of our connection with the two Adams of history. We have a **physical** union with the first Adam, and because of his sin, we were born separated from God and bent on having our own way (Rom 5:12; Isa 53:6). But now, through the precious blood of the Lamb, we have a **spiritual** union with the second Adam, Jesus Christ! (1 Cor 15:45). As Paul told the Corinthians, "For as in Adam all **die**, so also in Christ shall all be made **alive**" (1 Cor 15:22).
- 12) [September 12] Part 2 of the genealogical records of Israel. Among the descendants of Judah, one individual stands out: Jabez (1 Chr 4:9–10). Jabez recognized this truth: "**Commit** your work to the LORD, and your plans will be **established**" (Prov 16:3). His prayer reminds us that the key to personal success is to make **God** the center of our lives. It also shows us how important it is to stay close to God and rely on His **daily** grace and provision (Matt 6:11–13). We cannot make it on our own—we have to have God's help each and every day. If we will **trust** God with all our heart and **know** Him in all our ways, He will make our paths **straight!** (cf. Prov 3:5–6).
- 13) [September 13] Part 3 of the genealogical records of Israel. **Dan** and **Zebulun** were not included in the genealogical records of 1 Chronicles. The tribe of **Dan** refused to possess their inheritance, abandoned their land, and seized control of a peaceful city far to the north. They also created a rival **religion**, adopting Micah's god as their own (Judg 17–18). The tribe of **Zebulun** did not distinguish itself throughout Israel's history, and it received little mention after the time of the judges (cf. Isa 9:1). Tribes and nations who refuse to honor and serve God inevitably decline, first **morally**, then territorially, and finally, **physically** (2 Kgs 10:31–32). The graveyard of history is filled with nations and empires which rose to prominence on the world stage, only to be destroyed because of **pride** and moral **decay**. This teaches us the importance of loving and obeying God, lest we fall into the same **ruin** which has overtaken so many others. (How do Ezek 13:9 and Ps 69:28 increase our understanding of the significance of enrollment in the genealogies? What do you think about Ps 87:5–6?).

- 14) [September 14] The return of the exiles to Jerusalem under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua. In the first year of Darius (aka **Cyrus** the Great), Daniel realized that the **seventy**-year exile in Babylon was drawing to a close (Jer 25:11–12; 29:10). This prompted him, not to celebrate, but to turn to God in **prayer**. He clothed himself with **sackcloth**, put **ashes** in his hair and observed a **fast**. He humbled himself and offered a confession of Israel’s sin, asking God for mercy, forgiveness and restoration. This passage teaches us several lessons. First, Daniel was thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures. He was reading the prophecies of **Jeremiah**, and he was familiar with Solomon’s dedicatory prayer for the temple (1 Kgs 8:47) and the **curses** against Israel in the law (Deut 29:18–29). Daniel **knew** God’s Word, and we should as well. Second, rather than rejoicing at the thought of Judah’s restoration, Daniel **humbled** himself in mourning for Judah’s sin. He recognized that the exile was the result of rebellion against God, and that Judah’s return would be robbed of its **spiritual** significance if the people didn’t reflect on and mourn for the wickedness which had destroyed Jerusalem in the first place. This teaches us to never **forget** the sin for which God has forgiven us, for that memory will keep us from pride and future disobedience. Third, Daniel did not “name and **claim**” God’s promise to restore Jerusalem, nor did he presume to “hold God to His word.” Instead, he humbly asked God to hear and forgive and act, not for Israel’s sake, but for the sake of His great **name** (Dan 9:19). This teaches us to bring our requests before God in a spirit of humility and with an attitude that values His name and reputation above our own wants and desires.
- 15) [September 15] The arrival of the exiles in Jerusalem. There were three different times the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon: one in **604** BC (Daniel), one in **597** BC (Jehoiachin and Ezekiel), and one in **587** BC (Zedekiah). There were also three different returns by the Jews to their homeland of Judah: one in **537** BC (Zerubbabel with 49,897 exiles), one in **457** BC (Ezra with ~5,000 exiles), and one in **444** BC (Nehemiah with 42,000 exiles). Under Zerubbabel, the **temple** was rebuilt; under Ezra, the people were **reformed**; under Nehemiah, the **walls** of Jerusalem were rebuilt. The return of the exiles fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophecy of **70** years of captivity. This can be seen in two ways: from the first deportation (604) to the laying of the temple’s foundation (536), and from the destruction of the temple (587) to the completion of the temple (515). In the first case, 604 and 536 are included in the total; in the second, 587 and 515 are not included in the total. Ezra records that some of the people who returned were not able to **prove** that they were Israelites. Also, some of the “sons of the priests” could not be found in the ancestral registration lists. Because of this, they were considered **unclean** and **excluded** from the priesthood until their status was decided with the Urim and Thummim (cf. 1 Sam 14:41). This shows how important the genealogies were in following God’s covenant law, and it teaches us that God is serious about the requirements he places on his people. The Christian life is not only about matters of the **heart**; it’s also about holiness in **word** and **deed**.
- 16) [September 16] While the exiles were working to rebuild the temple, Daniel remained in the now Persian empire, and once again, he was fasting and praying. Daniel’s prayer was heard the moment he first spoke to God, but it took **21** days for the answer to reach him. The angel God sent was resisted by “the prince of the kingdom of Persia,” a **demon** who exercised some measure of control over the empire of Medo-Persia. This teaches us to **persevere** in prayer and wait **patiently** for God’s answer, for there are great forces at work that we know little about. Daniel 11 is the most **detailed** prophecy in all Scripture. The vision begins with an overview of the remaining kings of **Persia**, continues with a brief summary of the empire of **Alexander** the Great, and then focuses on the struggle between **Egypt** and **Syria** for dominance in the Middle East. The Ptolemies (“king of the **south**”) and the Seleucids (“king of the **north**”) vied with each other for political and military superiority, and Israel, which lay between the two great powers, was continually embroiled in that conflict. Various kings came and went until **Antiochus** IV Epiphanes rose to power in Syria. He was the worst of the Syrian rulers, and he defiled the temple by setting up an idol inside the sanctuary:

the “**abomination** of desolation” (Dan 11:31). In this way, Antiochus was a type of the **antichrist** who is to come (Dan 11:36). This vision teaches us that the forces of evil will meet a final and inevitable defeat, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ will one day reign supreme.

- 17) [September 17] The remnant experienced **opposition** as they labored to rebuild the temple. It came from the **immigrants** who were brought to Israel by the Assyrians after the fall of the northern kingdom. These people worshipped false gods, but they also started worshipping Yahweh, since they believed Him to be the “god of the land” (2 Kgs 17:24–33). They eventually intermarried with the Jews, and their descendants became the **Samaritans**, a mixed breed both racially and religiously. When they approached Zerubbabel and offered to help, he refused because they did not worship God **exclusively**. This teaches us not to partner with those who claim to be Christians, but whose lives reveal that they are not truly born again (1 Cor 5:9–13; 2 Cor 6:14–18). When Zerubbabel rejected their offer, the Assyrian immigrants turned against the remnant and **frightened** them into stopping work on the temple. The Jews abandoned the project, and nothing was done for over **16** years. Then God sent **Haggai** to preach to the remnant (Hag 1:9). This teaches us to put Christ’s Kingdom **first** and seek His glory before our own. If we do, God will bless us and prosper our work. Haggai’s message shook the people out of their complacency and fear, and work on the temple resumed. Opposition continued in the form of governor Tattenai, and **Zechariah** joined Haggai in encouraging the people to stay the course. The people persevered, and a few months later, Darius issued a decree which commanded Tattenai to aid the remnant in their work. This teaches us that when we’re faithful to God and work hard to accomplish His will, He can turn hostility into **help**.
- 18) [September 18] The eight night visions of Zechariah. The visions came five months to the day after work resumed on the temple, and God gave them to Zechariah so he could **encourage** the people to persevere in their obedience. The people could see the difficulties they faced, but they couldn’t see what God was doing behind the scenes. In each vision, God pulled back the curtains of the physical world and revealed how He was working on their behalf. In the first vision, the people could see their own distress while the empire that oppressed them was at peace. God revealed that His angel was watching over them, and that He was “**jealous**” for their peace and safety. God assured them that His temple would be rebuilt and that Jerusalem would again “**overflow** with prosperity.” In the second vision, the people could see the enemy that had devastated their homeland. God revealed that He was raising up “four **craftsmen**” that would cast down the nations who had destroyed Judah. In the third vision, the people could see the broken walls of Jerusalem and the ruins that once housed so many people. God revealed that one day Jerusalem would be so filled with people that it would be like a **village** without walls, and that He would be a “wall of **fire** all around.” In the fourth vision, the people could see the sinfulness that tainted themselves and their spiritual leaders. God revealed that the LORD rebuked **Satan**, their accuser, and took away their iniquity. God promised that one day “my servant the **Branch**” would come—Jesus, the Messiah. In that day they would enjoy both righteousness and prosperity under His rule. In the fifth vision, the people could see the burden and responsibility of the great task God had given them. God revealed that His Spirit was actively working to help them: “Not by **might**, nor by **power**, but by my Spirit” (Zech 4:6). God’s divine blessing was on Zerubbabel, and God would help the remnant complete their task: “For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel” (Zech 4:10). In the sixth vision, the people could see the lawbreakers who surrounded them. God revealed that His **curse** was being sent out to consume those who disobeyed the law. In the seventh vision, the people could see the evil that filled the land. God revealed that He would remove that wickedness to **Babylon** where it would one day be destroyed. In the eighth and last vision, the people could see how weak and susceptible to danger they were. God revealed that His **chariots** were out on patrol, watching over them in all directions.

- 19) [September 19] Two years after Zechariah's night visions, the people of **Bethel** came to ask the priests and prophets whether the **fasts** to remember the destruction of Jerusalem should still be kept. Through Zechariah, God rebuked the **attitude** which lay behind the question. Yes, they had fasted during the exile, but their fasts were times of **self-pity**, not genuine repentance and remorse (cf. Isa 58:1–8). They fasted for themselves just as they **feasted** for themselves. It was an empty ritual because it was not done in **sincerity** of heart. Zechariah urged the people to repent and practice righteousness, for their self-centeredness had been shared by their wicked and unrepentant **fathers**. God told the remnant that He was "**jealous** for Zion with great **jealousy**" (Zech 8:2). He would restore the city in the present, and He would make it even greater in the distant future (Zech 8:3–5). God then said, "All this may seem **impossible** to you now, a small remnant of God's people. But is it impossible for me?" (Zech 8:6 NLT). When we struggle with doubt and worry, we need to remember that **nothing** is too hard for God! (Gen 18:14). God's plans for their good should motivate them to live holy lives (Zech 8:16–17). If they would do this, if they would "love truth and peace," God would turn their fasts into times of "joy and **gladness** and cheerful feasts" (Zech 8:19).
- 20) [September 20] Zechariah's final prophecy to the remnant. This prophecy tells of the last great battle of the Tribulation, that period of time in which God's wrath will be poured out on the wicked. At the end of the **Tribulation**, the nations of the earth will gather together to attack **Jerusalem**. In that day, **Jesus** will descend to earth and fight against His enemies. A **plague** will rot their flesh, their eyes, and their tongues, and they will turn in panic and kill each other. Then Christ will establish His millennial Kingdom, and the world will come to worship Him at Jerusalem. Israel will be cleansed of all sin and impurity, and **holiness** will fill the city and the land: "And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the LORD.' And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts" (Zech 14:20–21). Zechariah's prophecy **assures** us that righteousness will triumph over evil, and it **encourages** us to live our lives in light of Christ's coming Kingdom. Holiness comes from a loving **relationship** with God, and we can honor the holiness that will characterize Christ's reign by putting Him first in our hearts and homes.
- 21) [September 21] The first half of the story of Esther teaches us several lessons. First, it shows us that God has a **plan** for our lives. God's plan for Esther was that she change the **mind** of Ahasuerus toward the Jews. God's plan for us is that we change the minds of the **lost** toward Jesus Christ. Esther played a pivotal role in the salvation of the Jews, and as disciples of Jesus, we play an important part in God's plan to **save** the world. Second, it teaches us that the **circumstances** of life are often beyond our control. Esther never dreamed that she would be the queen of the Persian Empire. She had to **adapt** to the unexpected situation in which she found herself, and she was forced to **trust** God for guidance and protection. It's the same with us. We have a responsibility to make wise, godly **decisions**, but circumstances can change abruptly, and we always need to have our hand firmly in God's. Third, it shows us that God is perfectly capable of taking **care** of us no matter where we find ourselves (Est 2:15). When we trust God and obey, He is faithful to bless us and give us favor in the eyes of others. This in turn allows us to be a shining **light** for Him. The text says, "Esther **obeyed** Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him" (Est 2:20). Esther had grown up being obedient to her uncle, and this godly **habit** enabled her to submit to his leadership when it really mattered. This teaches us how vital it is to obey the authorities in our lives, for if we will not submit to those we can **see**, how can we submit to God? (cf. 1 John 4:20).
- 22) [September 22] The conclusion of the story of Esther teaches us several lessons. First, Esther's method of appealing to the king shows **wisdom** and courage. Instead of **blurting** out her request, she made Ahasuerus **curious** by inviting him to a banquet. The anticipation of learning her true

desire made him all the more willing to grant her request. There may come a time when we need to appeal to someone in authority over us, and we can **adapt** Esther's example to our own situation. Second, the decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves shows that there are times when it's appropriate to take up arms to defend the **safety** and security of our families. We should "turn the other cheek" in cases where the offense is not life-threatening, and we are never to seek **revenge**, but there are times when God **authorizes** us to defend ourselves and others, even to the point of **killing** our attacker (cf. Exod 22:2; 2 Sam 2:18–23). Third, Mordecai's willingness to work for a dictator shows that we can work for good in **worldly** administrations and governments. While we should never condone **corruption** or wickedness, it's possible for us to accomplish great things for God while serving an ungodly regime (cf. Gen 41:39–44; Dan 6:1–3). We all like quotes like William Carey's "**Expect** great things from God. **Attempt** great things for God." Yet we should remember that Esther did not go looking for greatness—it came looking for her. Paul tells us to aspire to live **quietly**, and to mind our own affairs, and to work with our own hands (1 Thess 4:11). If we do this—if we lead **simple** lives of daily obedience—then when/if God does call on us to do something great, we'll be **prepared** to follow His leadership.

- 23) [September 23] The story of Ezra's return to Jerusalem teaches us several lessons. First, the character of Ezra. The text says, "Ezra had set his heart to **study** the Law of the LORD, and to **do** it and to **teach** his statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). That should be our goal—to make God's Word a part of our very being and to teach our families and others how to please God. Second, Ezra got all the support and money he needed for the return because "the **hand** of the LORD his God was on him" (Ezra 7:6). True success in ministry comes only from God's **approval** and blessing. Third, Ezra recognized that the king's decree was a **gift** from God, and he took time to **praise** God for His faithfulness and love (Ezra 7:27–28). This teaches us to give God the **glory** for any success that comes in ministry, for without Him, our labor would be in vain. Fourth, Ezra proclaimed a time of prayer and fasting, "that we might **humble** ourselves before our God, to **seek** from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods" (Ezra 8:21). Ezra told Artaxerxes that God's hand of blessing was on those who seek Him, and Ezra honored God's **reputation** by staking the safety of the entire journey on His protection. This teaches us to **depend** on God to meet our needs and to acknowledge that we're not **strong** enough to make it on our own.
- 24) [September 24] The story of Ezra's reform teaches us several lessons. First, it shows us that any **relationship** that endangers or compromises wholehearted devotion to God is forbidden. This applies not only to marriage, but also to **friendships**, business partnerships, and military alliances. Second, it teaches us that our relationship with God is more **important** than any other relationship. This is clearly seen in the Law where God commanded that if a man's wife enticed him to idolatry, he was not to spare her or have pity on her, but was to bring her before the people and **stone** her (Deut 13:6–11). Since the Jewish men had voluntarily married these foreign women, **knowing** that they worshipped other gods, and since the women were unwilling to give up their idolatry (cf. Ezra 6:21), separation was a **merciful** solution to the problem. It spared the women, and it removed the spiritual danger they posed to their husbands and the entire community. Third, it teaches us that our actions affect the **community** in which we live. What 113 men had done brought the **entire** remnant under God's wrath (Ezra 10:14). Corporate holiness is therefore an **individual** responsibility. Our community will be holy only as we and the other members separate ourselves from sin and set our hearts to seek God.
- 25) [September 25] Nehemiah's actions teach us several lessons. First, Nehemiah based his prayer on God's **character**. This teaches us that **theology** is the foundation of devotion. We can't have a right relationship with God if we don't understand who He is. Nehemiah's prayer shows that he knew God to be an awesome, faithful and approachable God (Neh 1:5–6). Second, Nehemiah's appeal to

the king came **after** he asked for God’s guidance and blessing. This teaches us the importance of seeking God’s will in all our decisions. When our plans are in **harmony** with God’s desires, we can rest in the knowledge that His “good hand” is on us. Third, Nehemiah showed **prudence** by spending time with the leaders of the remnant and by inspecting the walls in secret before he encouraged them to rebuild (Neh 2:11–12). This teaches us to build **relationships** with those we seek to influence and thoroughly **research** a situation before we propose a solution. If we follow Nehemiah’s example, we will build consensus, demonstrate **integrity**, and give others the confidence to join us in our endeavors.

26) [September 26] Nehemiah’s enemies used every dirty trick they could think of to prevent the walls from being rebuilt. They began by **mocking** and ridiculing the work: ‘Look at that wall! If a **fox** jumped on it, it would fall down!’ Nehemiah responded by turning to God in prayer and asking Him to “turn **back** their taunt on their own heads.” This teaches us to look to God, not ourselves, for vindication and to **reject** the world’s low opinion of our service to God. Next, they threatened violence against the remnant. Nehemiah responded by asking God for help, and he set up a round-the-clock **guard** to protect the laborers. This teaches us to avoid the pitfalls of **panic** and **paralysis**. We should cast our cares on God in prayer and then take appropriate action to deal with our situation. The next difficulty came, not from their enemies, but from within—many of the people had given in to **fear**. Nehemiah responded by encouraging them: “Remember the Lord, who is great and **awesome**, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes” (Neh 4:14). This teaches us how to encourage ourselves and others in the Lord. We should **meditate** on who God is and then take action knowing that God is on our side. The remnant rallied to Nehemiah, and they worked with their weapons at their sides. Some days later, Nehemiah was made aware of **sin** in the camp. Some of the remnant had exacted **usury** from their fellow Jews, and it had resulted in slavery for some of the people. Nehemiah responded by **exposing** the sin, **rebuking** the sinners, and calling for a return to biblical living. He also sacrificed personally in order to set a good **example** for the people (Neh 5:14–19). This gives us a pattern to follow when dealing with sin in the **church**, and it shows us that there will be times when we need to **sacrifice** in order to lead by example. Shemaiah tried to trick Nehemiah into committing sin by urging him to enter the **temple** which was off limits to everyone except the priests. Nehemiah wisely recognized this as treachery, for when a prophet advises something **contrary** to God’s Word, he reveals himself to be a **wolf** in sheep’s clothing.

27) [September 27] Lessons from Jerusalem’s revival. First, the people got together and asked Ezra to read aloud from the Book of the **Law** of Moses. This teaches us the importance of a **hunger** for God’s Word. Second, Ezra and the Levites “gave the **sense**, so that the people **understood** the reading” (Neh 8:8). This teaches us the importance of sound **exegesis**, for interpretation leads to **application**. Third, the people “**wept** as they heard the words of the Law” (Neh 8:9). This shows us that true faith demonstrates itself by genuine **sorrow** for sin (2 Cor 7:10). Fourth, Ezra and Nehemiah urged the people to put aside their grief and **honor** the Feast of Trumpets as God intended (cf. Lev 23:24–25). The people obeyed, which **confirmed** their faith and repentance. This teaches us that there is a time for rejoicing and a time for sorrow, and that holiness is best expressed by **happiness** in God. Fifth, the leaders of the people, together with the priests and Levites, came to Ezra in order to **study** the words of the Law. Their study was rewarded by the discovery of the Feast of **Tabernacles**. This teaches us the importance of reading **everything** in Scripture. If we don’t regularly read the entirety of God’s Word, we’ll end up missing out on something God wants us to know. Sixth, Ezra read the Law to the whole assembly each **day** during the Feast of Tabernacles. This teaches us that godliness is marked by an insatiable appetite to learn **more** of God’s Word. Bible reading must be a part of our daily lives!

- 28) [September 28] When the exiles first returned to Judah, few actually lived in Jerusalem because the city lay in **ruins**. In Nehemiah's day, some **93** years after the first return, the city was still unpopulated (Neh 7:4). Who wants to live in a city with no **walls**? Once the walls were rebuilt, the people cast **lots** to determine who would relocate (some **volunteered** and were blessed for their enthusiasm). Warren Wiersbe said, "Never under-estimate the importance of simply being physically **present** in the place where God wants you. You may not be asked to perform some **dramatic** ministry, but simply being there is a ministry. The men, women, and children who helped to populate the city of Jerusalem were serving God, their nation, and future generations by their step of **faith**." Nehemiah organized a **dedication** ceremony for the new walls. He appointed **two** great choirs, one for the right side of the city and one for the left. They marched on **top** of the walls and met at the temple. Tobiah had mocked their work: 'Look at that wall! If a fox jumped on it, it would fall down!' (Neh 4:3). I hope he was there to see those two great choirs marching on top of the walls, singing as they walked toward the temple! This teaches us to leave the **taunts** and **jeers** of the world in God's capable hands. He is more than able to make them eat their words!
- 29) [September 29] Malachi's prophecy to the remnant and Nehemiah's reforms. The walls of Jerusalem were completed in 444 BC, and Nehemiah remained in the city as governor for several years. Eventually, he was recalled to Persia (Neh 13:6), and in his absence, the spiritual fervor of the people began to **cool**. The days of national repentance and commitment receded into the past, and old **habits** and **attitudes** crept back into their hearts. This teaches us that the true test of our character comes **after** a great spiritual victory. It's one thing to do right in the midst of a national revival; it's another to **continue** to do right when the excitement is gone and the trials of life return. Apostasy comes a little at a time: first, the occasional **indulgence**, then **neglect**, and finally outright disobedience. Are we saying **no** to temptation, or are we permitting ourselves a few small sins on the side? Eventually, the people developed a harsh, critical attitude toward God. This teaches us that when people point the finger of blame at God, they are really trying to silence their own guilty **conscience**. Malachi rebuked the remnant for their sin and called them to treat God with the honor and respect He deserved. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem not long after Malachi's prophecy, and he was furious when he realized how sinful the people had become. He threw **Tobiah** out of the temple, restored the **tithes** to the Levites, enforced the keeping of the **Sabbath**, and punished those who had married foreign women. This teaches me that a righteous leader **confronts** people for their sin and refuses to overlook wrongdoing.
- 30) [September 30] The birth of John the Baptist and the conception of Jesus. Over **420** years had passed since Nehemiah rebuked the remnant and called them back to covenant faithfulness. In the intervening years, the prophecies made by **Daniel** had come to pass. Eventually, the **Roman** empire took control of Judea, and there was a long period of peace. It was during this time that the angel Gabriel announced the birth of John and Jesus. Note the reference to the **righteousness** of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Their lives testify to the fact that people could walk "**blamelessly** in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord" (Luke 1:6). They manifested the combination of outward compliance and inward obedience that God always wanted from His people, and they show us that we too can live a life of holiness. The preface to John's gospel teaches us so many important truths about Jesus: (1) Jesus is the **Son**, the eternal "only begotten" of the Father, (2) Jesus is the **Word**, the personification of the Father's self-expression in creation and revelation, (3) Jesus is the God-man, fully God and fully man, a union of two **natures** in one **Person**, (4) Jesus is the **Life**, the source of spiritual life for all who believe, (5) Jesus is the **Light**, the shining beacon of hope in a world of darkness, and (6) Jesus is the **Exegete**, the revealer and explainer of the Father.