

# Indifference Brings Faithless Ritual

ZEC 7-8; EZR 4-6; DA 6; 1 CH 1-9; EST 1-10; MAL 1

2-8 July 2024

The prophets bring messages that are designed to shake people out of meaningless religious routines and ignite a new passion for God in their hearts. God wants repentance and right relationship, not just meaningless ritual. Daniel and Esther demonstrate the kind of faithfulness that God is seeking. God often turns the wisdom and power of the world on its head and uses surprising tactics to accomplish His plan. God helps shape the events of the faithful and His presence and caring not only reach out to protect the Biblical heroes like Daniel and Esther, but act in the lives of ordinary people like us, as well. We are called to replace complacency and injustice with repentance and love for the Lord.

## Weekly Reading Plan

Day 1: ZEC 7:1-8:23; EZR 5:2-6:22  
 Day 2: DA 6:1-28  
 Day 3: 1 CH 1:1-9:34  
 Day 4: EST 1:1-2:23  
 Day 5: EST 3:1-8:17  
 Day 6: EST 9:1-10:3; EZR 4:6-23  
 Day 7: MAL 1:1-4:6

## Outline

Replacing Fasting with Obedience [Day 1]  
 Tattenai's Opposition [Day 1]  
 Darius the Mede [Day 2]  
 Priestly Genealogies Day 3]  
 Esther [Day 4-6]  
 Opposition to Rebuilding Jerusalem [Day 6]  
 Malachi [Day 7]

## Key Characters

Darius	Zechariah	Shimshai
Zerubbabel	Joshua	Malachi
Tattenai	Haggai	Artaxerxes
Daniel	Esther	Rehum
Queen Vashti	Xerxes	Haman
Hegai	Mordecai	Hathak

## Key Locations

Bethel  
 Judah  
 Trans-Euphrates  
 Jerusalem  
 Susa

## Key Terms

Providence  
 Temple  
 Passover  
 Purim  
 Covenant  
 Faithful Remnant  
 Judgment

## Key Verses

“This is what the Lord Almighty said: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.” [ZEC 7:8]

“The Lord says this: “I will return to Zion and live in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City; the mountain of the Lord of Armies will be called the Holy Mountain [ZEC 8:3]

For he is a living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions. [DA 6:26-27]

Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this. [EST 4:14]

My name will be great among the nations, from the rising of the sun to its setting. Incense and pure offerings will be presented in my name in every place because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of Armies. [MAL 1:11]

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## Chapter Summaries (from @biblesummary)

**Zec7:** The people asked, "Should we fast?" The LORD said, "Show mercy and do not oppress. But they would not listen. So I scattered them."

**Zec8:** The LORD said: "I am jealous for Zion. I will save my people. Your fasts shall be feasts. Nations shall seek the LORD in Jerusalem."

**Ezr5:** Zerubbabel began to build the temple. Tattenai wrote to Darius: "The elders say that Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this temple."

**Ezr6:** Darius issued a decree: "The cost of the temple shall come from the treasury." The temple was completed and the Israelites celebrated.

**Da6:** The satraps urged Darius to sign a law against prayer. Daniel prayed to God and was thrown to the lions. God closed the lions' mouths.

**1Ch1:** Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Eber, Abraham; Abraham's sons were Isaac and Ishmael; Isaac's sons were Esau and Israel. Kings ruled in Edom.

**1Ch2:** Judah's line led to Obed, Jesse and David. Caleb was son of Hezron; Jerahmeel was firstborn of Hezron. Caleb's line were the Kenites.

**1Ch3:** David had six sons at Hebron, four by Bathshua and nine others. Solomon's line led to Jeconiah, and then to the sons of Elioenai.

**1Ch4:** Reaiah's sons were the Zorathites; God blessed Jabez; Shelah's sons worked for the king. Simeon's line went to Gedor to seek pasture.

**1Ch5:** Reuben lost his birthright; his sons lived in Gilead. The sons of Gad and the sons of Manasseh lived in Bashan until the captivity.

**1Ch6:** Levi's sons were Gershon, Kohath and Merari. The musicians were Heman and Asaph. Aaron's sons made offerings. They were given cities.

**1Ch7:** Issachar's sons were 87,000. Benjamin's sons were Bela, Beker and Jediel. Ephraim's line led to Joshua. Asher's sons were 26,000.

**1Ch8:** Benjamin was father of Bela, Ashbel, Aharah, Nohah and Rapha; Ner's line was Kish, Saul, Jonathan; the sons of Ulam were mighty men.

**1Ch9:** Jerusalem was resettled by Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh; there were priests and Levite gatekeepers. Kish was father of Saul.

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Est1: King Ahasuerus gave a feast for all his officials. Queen Vashti refused to come to him, so the wise men advised him to replace her.

Est2: Mordecai raised Esther. She was taken into the king's harem and was chosen as queen. Mordecai told Esther of a plot against the king.

Est3: Ahasuerus promoted Haman, but Mordecai would not bow to him. Haman asked to destroy the Jews. The king gave his seal for the decree.

Est4: Mordecai asked Esther to plead with the king. Esther said, "Hold a fast. I will go to the king against the law, and if I die, I die."

Est5: Esther won favour with the king. She said, "Let the king and Haman come to a feast tomorrow." Haman built a gallows to hang Mordecai.

Est6: That night the king read about the plot against him. Haman came to ask about hanging Mordecai. The king told Haman to honor Mordecai.

Est7: At the feast, the king asked Esther, "What is your request?" She said, "My people have been sold by Haman." The king had Haman hanged.

Est8: The king gave his ring to Mordecai. Mordecai sent letters to the provinces allowing the Jews to defend themselves. The Jews rejoiced.

Est9: On the day of the king's decree, the Jews destroyed their enemies. Mordecai wrote to all the Jews and established the Feast of Purim.

Est10: Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus.

Mal 1: I have loved you, says the LORD. Where is my honor? You offer blind and lame sacrifices. My name will be great among the nations.

Mal 2: Now, O priests, I will curse you. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi. Judah has profaned the sanctuary. The LORD hates divorce

Mal 3: My messenger will prepare the way. I will come to judge. You have robbed me of tithes. The LORD will remember those who serve him.

Mal 4: The day is coming like a furnace. The sun of righteousness will rise. The wicked will be ashes. I will send you Elijah the prophet.

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## Teachings About God

- Zechariah emphasizes God's mercy—for his name's sake, on His beloved people. God's spirit is present to enable his people.
- Zechariah shows what God can accomplish through individuals committed to obedience.
- Esther portrays God's providential care of people committed to him amid overwhelming challenges to their faith.
- Malachi presents God's immutability (He does not change). His promises endure.

## Teachings About Humanity

- Zechariah looks forward to then God's people, having been punished for their sins, will be restored in righteousness.
- Daniel's obedience to God shows godly behavior when it would have been easier to follow the crowd.
- The genealogies in 1 Chronicles cover the generations from Adam until sometime after the Babylonian exile.
- Esther preserves the historical origins of the festival of Purim.
- Haman demonstrates human depravity.
- Malachi illustrates that in times when God does not appear to be acting on behalf of his people, it is easy for them to become complacent.

## Teachings About Salvation

- Zechariah draws attention to the future redemption of God's people corporately as they live safely in the land and God lives among them. All who share in this salvation will enjoy a city where the holiness that once resided in the temple will be pervasive throughout the city.
- Ester shows that God will accomplish his redemptive purposes and cannot be thwarted.
- Salvation comes because God has initiated it in his covenant.
- Malachi predicts the Messiah would bring cleansing and healing.

## Reflections of Christ/Holy Spirit

- Zechariah contains Messianic prophecies fulfilled by Jesus: his royal entrance into Jerusalem, his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, his role as shepherd, and the piercing of his body.
- The greatest glory of Jerusalem was that Jesus blessed the city with His presence.
- Zechariah, Joshua, and Zerubbabel foreshadow the coming of Jesus, the greatest prophet, priest, king.
- Christ is prophesied in Malach as the messenger who will purify priests and people; the sun of righteousness.

## Literary Genres/Techniques

- Zechariah includes prophecies, including visions and words from God, written mostly in Hebrew prose with some Hebrew poetry.
- 1 Chronicles 1 is a genealogy.
- Esther is written as a historical narrative in Hebrew.
- Ezra is comprised of court documents, lists, and narratives written in Hebrew with some Aramaic sections.
- Malachi is written as prophecy in Hebrew prose.

## Author/Date of Writing/Audience

- Zechariah was written c 518 BC to the Israelites who returned to Jerusalem.
- Esther may have been written by Mordecai. It was written c 465 BC to Jews in Persia.
- Ezra occurred from Cyrus's decree permitting the return through Ezra's initial ministry (c538-457 BC). It was written c430 BC by Ezra to those who returned to Jerusalem from exile.
- Malachi written by Malachi c450-420 BC to Judeans after the exile (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation)

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## What did I learn about God?

- How did God react to the fasting of the Bethel people (ZEC 70)? Did God's scattering of the people result in their separation from God, or were the people already separated from God? What happens when people do not put their heart in worship?
- In ZEC 8, the Lord Almighty speaks of blessings concerning Jerusalem. What moral force is given to each blessing by the constant refrain, "The Lord Almighty says"? What will it take to restore the people to covenant favor and be given the blessings?
- What saved Daniel in the lion's den (his faith, his innocence, God's faithfulness, sleeping lions, the king's prayers)?
- What is the central theological point of the book of Esther? Why would a book so obviously Jewish be devoid of any reference to the Lord? Is the God-story of Esther and Mordecai better suited to its purpose if they are seen as obedient servants of God or as unknowingly used by a sovereign God?
- How has God shown his greatness to you? Did you have to feel small before you knew he was great? Explain

## What did I learn about human nature?

- In ZEC 7:9-10, the Lord tells the people of Bethel to: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other." Where do you see this advice in action today? Where is it lacking?
- One sign of a restored Israel is that people the world over will say, "Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you" (ZEC 8:23). What does this say about how we might better worship and witness as Christians today. Where have you seen this lived out? What could we, as individuals and the church in general, do to be better at this?
- When one party says they alone are the true worshippers of God, and all others are a mixed breed, what might be expected in return? Why was Israel right to insist on religious exclusivity and spiritual purity [Ezra 4]? Today, when might it be valid to assert one's expression of the faith as the only way? Over against whom? Other denominations? Cults? State religion? Government interference?
- In Daniel 6, Daniel's peers were jealous of Daniel. Besides jealousy, what might cause people to be interested in the private lives of public figures, especially incorruptible ones?
- What do Haman's pride and racial hatred bring him? What do Mordecai's meekness and loyalty bring him? What is the object lesson?

## What did I learn about my life/relationship with God?

- In the work God has given you to do, when is his hand of blessing obvious to you? A) in warding off opponents as in EZRA 5:5? B) In "making rapid progress" as in EZRA 5:8? C) Only in the project's completion as in EZRA 6:15-17? D) In construction delays?
- When have you invoked God's authority as your own? Where do you draw the line and dare someone to cross over or defy your authority? What defiance (by your kids, partners or subordinates) would trigger you and bring them into conflict with you?
- Can you imagine a crisis in which you would go "against the law" as Esther does, to find a solution?
- In your life, have you ever experienced God in the midst of a "lion's den" (of skeptics, critics, persecutors, etc.)? Has your lifeline ever been only God and God alone?
- How do you square the story of annihilating and humiliating one's enemy in Esther 9 with what Jesus stood for: namely, to "love your enemy"? Would it make a difference to you if it were "kill or be killed"? When, if ever, have you faced such a dilemma?