



WEEK OF FEBRUARY 11, 2024  
(COVERS READINGS FROM FEBRUARY 11-17)

## Overview

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*The following information is provided as a basic orientation to reading the Bible. Feel free to add to it and use it in any way that is helpful for your group. Also, feel free to make copies of these pages for members of your group!*

In Ezra 1 the narrative begins with the proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, a pivotal moment signaling the end of the Babylonian exile. This decree fulfills God's promise to restore the people to the land. In Chapter 6 we hear about the completion of the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel, with the support of prophets Haggai and Zechariah, marking a significant moment of communal and religious renewal for the Israelites. The dedication of the temple and the celebration of the Passover signify the reestablishment of covenantal worship and a recommitment to God's laws.

Psalms 23, 51, and 103 all reflect deeply personal and communal aspects of faith in God. Psalm 23 is a desert/wilderness psalm, portraying God as a shepherd who provides, guides, and protects in the midst of hardship. Psalm 51, a penitential psalm attributed to David after his adultery with Bathsheba, expresses profound remorse and the desire for inner cleansing and renewal. Psalm 103 celebrates God's mercy and compassion, encouraging the soul to bless God for forgiveness and redemptive love.

Proverbs 1-4 introduces the themes of wisdom literature – that is the value of wisdom and understanding in leading a righteous life. In these chapters Wisdom (also understood as the Spirit) is a guide to moral integrity, contrasting the paths of righteousness with the ways of wickedness. The teachings advocate for a life rooted in the fear (reverence and awe) of the Lord, which is the beginning of true knowledge and true wisdom.

Proverbs 16-18 continues the exploration of wisdom, touching on themes of humility, integrity, speech, and relationships. Offering practical advice for living a life that is pleasing to God, these chapters highlight the importance of a humble spirit, the power of the tongue, and the value of a friend.

Isaiah 51-53:12 delivers a powerful message of hope and redemption. Isaiah 51 calls for the people to remember their heritage and to look to the Lord for salvation. Isaiah 52:13-53:12, known as the fourth Servant Song, presents the figure of the Suffering Servant, whose suffering and sacrifice bring redemption and justification to many. This passage is central to Christian theology, foreshadowing the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as atonement for sin.

Jeremiah 1-3:5 begins with Jeremiah's call to be a prophet, where God appoints him to speak to the nations. The early chapters highlight God's sorrow over Israel's infidelity, likening the nation to an unfaithful spouse. Yet, even as it announces impending judgment, the text also offers hope for restoration, emphasizing God's steadfast love and mercy as essential qualities of God's character.

Daniel 6 recounts the story of Daniel in the lions' den, a narrative that exemplifies faithfulness to God in the face of persecution. Despite the decree that prayer to anyone other than King Darius is punishable by death, Daniel remains steadfast in his devotion to God. His miraculous preservation in the den demonstrates God's power to save and serves as a testament to faithfulness in the midst of persecution.

## General Discussion Questions

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*Use any or all of the following questions, depending how much time you have:*

- How familiar were you with this week's readings? Was there anything that surprised you?
- What do you learn about God from these readings? What do you learn about humanity, or about human nature? How did the authors of these writings understand their relationship with God?
- What passages or aspects of these readings give you comfort or assurance? What passages or aspects of these readings do you find difficult to accept?
- Are there any particular passages that you want to study in-depth?

## This Week's Discussion Questions

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*Proverbs 1-4* | Proverbs 1:7 emphasizes that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." According to John Wesley's commentary, this fear is not about dread but a deep reverence and awe for God that moves us past theoretical knowledge into an active turning away from evil towards holiness. What practical steps can you take to deepen your reverence for the Divine, and how might it shape your decision-making and daily living? How might this principle guide us in addressing contemporary ethical and moral challenges?

*Jeremiah 1-3* | Jeremiah's prophetic ministry begins with a call to confront the people's faithlessness and idolatry. How does Jeremiah's experience of God's calling challenge us to address issues of faithfulness and accountability within our faith communities? What parallels can we draw between Jeremiah's time and contemporary challenges to living out our faith?

## Closing Prayer

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God, source of all light, by your Word give light to our lives. Amen.