



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 30

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 10
Daniel 11
Daniel 12
Psalms 56

Empires that depend on violence will rise and fall, but people who relate rightly with God and neighbor will live forever. So the book of Daniel suggests in its final chapters. Daniel becomes a message of hope for all who walk the way of exile.

Today's reading covers Daniel's third and final vision. This vision includes the same sequence of kingdoms as before: Persia, then Greece and Alexander the Great, followed by lesser kings that all lead up to the final "king of the north."

This northern king is the same nasty ruler we heard about in yesterday's reading, the one who defiles Jerusalem's temple and exalts himself above God. Daniel's final vision concludes with this arrogant king in utter ruin, his same fate as in Daniel's other dreams. Savage empires can brandish their swords and spears, but they will all disintegrate into nothing and stay that way forever. But those bringing many into "righteousness," or right ways of relating to God and others, will be as numerous and eternal as the stars (Dan. 12:13; see also Gen. 12:2-3).

The angel's final words to Daniel also apply to the book's readers: Stay the course of faithfulness until the end. Beastly Babylons bring pain and look unstoppable, but they cannot last. Nothing good is built with evil.

God creates and rules over all. We can trust him to make things right, ultimately and forever.

The book of Daniel can bring encouragement for those suffering in their own kind of exile, showing readers a picture of faithfulness to God against all odds. Even (perhaps especially) when Babylon makes it difficult and costly to do so.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 31

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Ezra 1

Ezra 2

Ezra 3

Psalms 57

Today, light breaks on the horizon. After more than 70 years, the exile is finally over. Israel is going home.

In the Writings (Hebrew: Ketuvim) leading up to this moment, the brightness of principled wisdom in Proverbs meets the darker, harsher reality of life's suffering, where the proverbs don't all work out. The poetry in Lamentations plunges the reader into the black night of Israel's exile.

Esther and Daniel glimmer with hope for a better way, even in exile.

However, those glimmers also emphasize Israel's longing for home and a new day to come. Ezra and Nehemiah (originally compiled as one book in the Hebrew Bible) explode that glimmering hope into a full dawn.

The book of Ezra begins with the rule of a new Persian king who shows favor to Israel. He grants freedom and allows safe passage back to their land, generously supplying their needs for the journey.

Israel's first project upon returning home: to rebuild Yahweh's temple.

Zerubbabel leads a team back to Jerusalem to start the project. They bring back the golden dishes that the Babylonians plundered. They set up a new altar, and even import cedar from Lebanon—the same wood Solomon used to build the first temple.

Things are looking good and starting to sound like the restored Israel that the prophets promised! People are feeling motivated, working together in a huge restoration project, which surely feels better than unending oppression in exile. But will this rebuilding project work? And will this second temple live up to its hype?

Watch today's video to learn about prophetic expectations and post-exilic reality in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah.



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 1

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Ezra 4

Ezra 5

Ezra 6

Psalms 58

Israelites return to the promised land. They're building a new temple and are working on a new Jerusalem. This is the "happily ever after" end to exile, right?

Not exactly. In today's reading, we see conflict sparking and the people's motivation waning, as the temple reconstruction work slows to a halt. The trouble begins when descendants of the Israelites who had escaped the exile volunteer to help rebuild the temple.

That sounds like great news. The prophets foretold such a time, when Israel's tribes would unite, including all other people groups, all to follow Yahweh (Isa. 2; Zech. 8). Maybe these other Israelites' willingness to work together is a good thing, like a picture of God's new Kingdom sprouting from the rubble of past Jerusalem.

But Zerubbabel turns up his nose at the offer, telling these would-be coworkers that they can have no part in reconstructing Israel's temple. His contempt harms and offends, so they turn against Zerubbabel and the entire rebuilding project.

Eventually, the construction work gets back on track. However, it's an anticlimactic introduction to life after exile, to say the least. Exile, it turns out, isn't so much about where you live. It's more about your state of mind—and the state of your own heart.



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 1 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Ezra 4
Ezra 5
Ezra 6
Psalms 58

Already, the harmful ways of thinking about and treating one another that led to exile in the first place are starting to creep back in. Between the main lines of Ezra and Nehemiah's story, the authors seem to be winking at readers, pointing out an important truth: You cannot make it home from exile just by relocating.

Watch today's video to learn about the deeper meaning of exile in the biblical story—and how Jesus shows us the true way back home.



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 2

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Ezra 7

Ezra 8

Ezra 9

Ezra 10

Psalms 59

Today's reading fast forwards several decades into a new phase of Israel's rebuilding campaign. But some of the people's choices feel more like a rewind, back into past mistakes.

Once again, the story starts with a Persian king declaring that all Israelites are free to return home. This time, a Torah scholar named Ezra leads the journey back to Jerusalem.

Like Zerubbabel, Ezra gets off to a great start. He gathers a group of exiles to rebuild a Torah-observant community back in the land. He even includes Levites so they can transport the sacred materials for the temple (see Num. 3-4). Before they leave, Ezra leads the community in corporate fasting and prayer for God's protection on the dangerous journey through the wilderness. They make it to the promised land safe and sound.

But then Ezra's rebuilding campaign, like Zerubbabel's, turns for the worse. Ezra learns that, once again, many men have intermarried with non-Israelites. God prohibited Israel from intermarrying (Deut. 7:3-4). He said doing so would cause Israel to give allegiance to other gods. This exact thing led to idolatry and exile before. Ezra's response sharply warns against repeating those old mistakes.

Distraught, Ezra turns to Yahweh with a heartfelt prayer of repentance. But then he quickly enacts a divorce decree to cast all these women and their children out on their own—even though God opposes such divorce and relational violence against vulnerable women and children (Mal. 2:13-16).



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 2 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Ezra 7
Ezra 8
Ezra 9
Ezra 10
Psalms 59

Note: God's prohibition against intermarriage was not a universal prohibition for all humanity. It is specifically related to the Israelites' worship of idols and other gods as a result of their intermarriage practices at that time.

Notice two key points as the story concludes. First, Ezra faces an impossible situation. Either decision violates God's instruction. Second, at the end, we want to know if God approves of Ezra's choice, but Scripture does not tell us. Perhaps the authors are illustrating the desperate, impossible situations we get ourselves into, where the only way forward is to trust God's compassionate mercy.

Getting the Israelites out of Babylon was easy. God stirs the hearts of Persian rulers, and good things begin. Getting Babylon out of the Israelites is turning out to be a lot harder.



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 3

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 1
Nehemiah 2
Nehemiah 3
Nehemiah 4
Psalms 60

First Zerubbabel. Then Ezra. Now Nehemiah. Maybe the third time's the charm?

Today's reading introduces another passionate, visionary leader in Israel's post-exilic community. Nehemiah serves as cupbearer to the Persian king. When he hears about the sorry state of Jerusalem's walls, he decides to change careers. He packs his bags and heads to the promised land as a construction supervisor.

Nehemiah has barely arrived in the city and surveyed the scope of the project before harsh naysayers start mocking him and opposing the work. Not that he'll let insults or threats stop him. Nehemiah stations armed guards to protect his workers and help get those walls built. To him, it's a matter of trusting God to protect and empower the good work.

At first glance, Nehemiah's determination seems reasonable—admirable, even. In an age of aggressive empires, the city needs all the defenses it can get.

When we zoom out to consider the larger design of the book, Nehemiah's actions take on a more hostile tone. Zerubbabel told local volunteers that they had "no part" in the temple (Ezra 4:3). Ezra told local Israelites who intermarried with their neighbors that they would be excluded from the community (Ezra 10:8). Now, Nehemiah tells local officials skeptical of his project that they have "no part" in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:20).



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 3 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 1
Nehemiah 2
Nehemiah 3
Nehemiah 4
Psalms 60

On the one hand, Nehemiah is a positive character in the story. He does what he believes God called him to do, in the way he sees as faithful. On the other hand, the authors connect the dots with literary design to suggest something deeper is at play. An us-versus-them mentality has been plaguing the post-exilic community. That mentality opposes Israel's original calling to become a blessing to every family and nation on Earth (Gen. 12:2-3).

If we zoom out even further, we can see that this antagonistic attitude doesn't match the prophets' hopes for life after exile either. The prophet Zechariah, for example, said that the new Jerusalem of God's Kingdom would be a city without walls, surrounded by God's presence and joined by people from all nations (Zech. 2:3-11). Nehemiah seems to operate with the opposite vision.

The Israelites have been longing for home. But who decides who gets to call Jerusalem home?



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 4

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 5
Nehemiah 6
Nehemiah 7
Psalms 61

A new wall can protect Jerusalem from outside threats, but who will protect the people from threats within? In today's reading, Nehemiah discovers that seven decades of exile failed to sour the Israelites on slavery. The returned exiles have been selling their own people as debt slaves!

Nehemiah drags the city's elites to an emergency town hall meeting and gives them a tongue-lashing. "We just bought our fellow Israelites out of slavery. Now you're putting them back in chains?" The wealthy landowners squirm.

This story highlights the tension between failure and hope in post-exile Jerusalem. It's only been a generation or two, and the Israelites are again enmeshed in toxic patterns of injustice and exploitation that landed them in exile in the first place.

Nehemiah doesn't only rebuke the people for wrongdoing. He also urges them to make things right with a mini Jubilee. Those who have profited by oppressing their powerless neighbors agree to return everything they've swindled.

While Nehemiah has his moments of failure, he seeks justice for the vulnerable and follows God's instruction. Even though Nehemiah's vision for Jerusalem's walls falls short of the prophets' ideal, he shows remarkable courage and integrity in his work.



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 4 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 5
Nehemiah 6
Nehemiah 7
Psalms 61

Death threats, blackmail, smear campaigns—none of it makes a dent in Nehemiah's resolve. He rallies the community to persevere faithfully under pressure. Under his leadership, the builders wrap up construction in 52 days, shocking everyone.

Walls have been built. Slaves are set free. Could this be a fresh start for Jerusalem?



SEPTEMBER 2026 | DAY 5

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 8
Nehemiah 9
Psalms 62

Today, Ezra and Nehemiah gather former exiles of all ages to hear the Scriptures read aloud. We see Yahweh's people respond with attentive listening. This seven-day Bible marathon moves the people so deeply that they commit to following the terms of the Torah once again, this time with renewed energy.

It's another of many scenes showing Yahweh's desire to communicate with his people and provide good instruction. From the earliest days of walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the garden to speaking through the dreams of the patriarchs, from mediating his instruction through Moses and carved stone tablets to the bold leadership of the judges and the strange sign-acts of the prophets—throughout the Bible, God speaks words of life to humanity.

Reading the Scriptures out loud as a community involves more than just telling the people of God their story. It allows groups to practice collective listening, turning their attention to God together and embodying the story in their own time and place, to not only hear but to listen and live into the story that leads to Jesus.

Watch today's video to learn why the public reading of Scripture was so important for God's people in the Bible and today.