



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 23

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 3
Psalms 49

Affliction, bitterness, shame, and more affliction: Lamentation's dire poetic illustration of Jerusalem's siege and Israel's exile continues. The first two poems developed the wide-angle image of a whole city in anguish. Today's reading zooms in on one lonesome, grieving man who speaks for all the people. Like most poems in Lamentations, the third is also an acrostic (alphabet poem), but introduces a significant twist. The other acrostic poems dedicate one verse to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The third chapter has three verses per letter. The author doesn't have a laser pointer to highlight main points or key comparisons, so he uses literary structure as a spotlight.

The first 18 verses of chapter 3 detail the man's agonizing personal experience of Babylonian destruction and exile. Like we saw in chapter 2, he never says Babylon is to blame. He appears to be operating with a bigger, wiser perspective by recognizing his suffering is ultimately an experience of God's good, restorative justice.

In the midst of despair—also literally in the middle of the poem—the man expresses his bitter grief while also remembering Yahweh's character: "Because of Yahweh's loyal love, we do not perish, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness!" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Those hopeful words do not mean the poet has finally escaped suffering. You'll find plenty of tears and terrors in the rest of the poem, but you'll also see how he's finding peace along the way.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 23 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

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SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 3
Psalms 49

Choosing to voice anger and misery through lament is to get close to God, not move further away. Other options, like blaming God or faulting others, only thwart any progress toward true peace. The lamenter stays humble while suffering and finds hope. He can find refreshing waters and green pastures in death's valley of affliction by staying close to God through lament.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 24

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

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SCRIPTURE

Lamentations 4
Lamentations 5
Psalms 50

Today's reading brings us to the last two poems of Lamentations. The fourth poem in the book follows the same design as the first two, a Hebrew acrostic poem with 22 verses. This poem draws a vivid contrast between Jerusalem in its glory days and the shattered shell of a city left behind after the siege.

In the final poem, the ordered acrostic structure we've seen in the rest of the book falls apart. There's no alphabet pattern, just poetic chaos. The whole community pours out its grief before Yahweh in prayer: Don't you see what's happened to us? Can't you do something?

The poem ends with a paradox. In the final lines of their prayer, the community praises Yahweh as the eternal king, then asks why God has forgotten about them. If Yahweh reigns over the universe, why do God's covenant partners suffer and die? Have they been totally rejected?

It's not a particularly satisfying conclusion to the book. But it is a conclusion that fits the human experience of suffering. Deep grief rarely comes to a tidy resolution. We can confess God's goodness in the midst of our anguish and the next moment wonder if God has forsaken and forgotten us.

Like Job, the suffering community brings its anguish directly to Yahweh. The lament poems in the Bible—Lamentations, Job, many of the Psalms—show us that God honors the raw, honest wrestling of his people. In a broken world, prayers of tears and fury are every bit as faithful as songs of praise.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 25

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Esther 1
Esther 2
Esther 3
Esther 4
Esther 5
Psalms 51

Carnal debauchery. Political intrigue. Assassination attempts. Murderous rage. Bold queens. Plenty of sex, drugs, and murderous rage. Welcome to the book of Esther, which strangely never happens to mention God. Not even once.

The opening scenes take place approximately one century after the Babylonian exile. The Persians have pounded Babylon to dust and risen to become the new superpower. Persia's King Xerxes just wants to rock and roll and party every day, so he's throwing an extravagant, six-month-long ballroom rager. The wine is flowing. The luxuries are sparkling. The people are gawking at the king's incredible wealth. It's all going great, until the tipsy Xerxes tries to show off his queen, Vashti, as if she's one of his expensive rugs.

Queen Vashti won't have it and bravely refuses to waltz across the stage like a puppet. So he dumps her and searches for a new queen. This eventually leads him to the young Jewish woman Esther. Through a series of (very) fortunate events, Esther finds favor from King Xerxes. Queen Vashti's crown is now on Esther's head.

And not a moment too soon. Shortly after becoming queen, Esther's cousin Mordecai offends a powerful man named Haman, a high-ranking Persian official. Enraged, Haman plots revenge not only on Mordecai but also against the entire Jewish people.

Now God's beloved people are facing an existential threat. Again, there's no direct mention of God at all, but his divine fingerprints are all over the story.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 25 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

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SCRIPTURE

Esther 1
Esther 2
Esther 3
Esther 4
Esther 5
Psalms 51

Watch the video to learn about the book of Esther, including her sharp mind and resilient courage. Pay special attention to the way God sometimes rescues people through seemingly convenient coincidences.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 26

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Esther 6
Esther 7
Esther 8
Esther 9
Esther 10
Psalms 52

It's midnight in the Persian royal palace. Haman sulks in the palace courtyard, furious that Mordecai refused to bow before him and fantasizing about impaling Mordecai on a 75-foot stake in his front yard. A guard approaches with a summons from the king.

Xerxes wants to bestow special honor on someone. He consults Haman for ideas about the best way to bring glory to someone who deserves it. Haman lights up! Finally, the moment he's been waiting for. "Throw him an elaborate ceremony. Give him an expensive robe and a prize stallion from the royal stables. Also, have a high-ranking herald publicly shout this man's praises."

This delights the king: "Sounds great! Now go and do all that for Mordecai!" What? Mordecai, who refused to bow as he should have, is getting this honor? Talk about humiliation for Haman.

Haman's shift from superiority to shame is just one of several brilliant reversals in today's reading. First, at the end of Esther's initial banquet, Haman stormed home with rage against Mordecai. But Esther's second banquet ends when King Xerxes storms out with rage against Haman. And Haman ends up impaled on the same stake he had hoped to use for murdering Mordecai.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 26 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

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SCRIPTURE

Esther 6
Esther 7
Esther 8
Esther 9
Esther 10
Psalms 52

After Haman's death, Esther approaches the king a second time to plead for grace—the Hebrew word *khen*, which you'll learn more about in today's video. The king extends his gracious favor, this time to Esther and her people. King Xerxes allows Mordecai to issue a counter-decree that protects the people of Israel. Similar to Haman, Mordecai seals his decree with the king's signet ring and celebrates with a different kind of feast. Mordecai's plan works. "On the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to overpower them, the tables were turned and the Jews overpowered those who hated them" (Est. 9:1).

In the overall context of Scripture, victories like this are only possible with God's help. Remember, we never hear about God in the story. The omission not-so-subtly piques readers' curiosity: Perhaps God is always working through people to undo evil and rescue life, even when God seems to be absent.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 27

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 1
Daniel 2
Daniel 3
Psalms 53

The book of Esther showed us a picture of God working (silently) behind the scenes during the exile. Daniel also shows God working to rescue his people, but the characters in this exile narrative talk about God all the time.

Daniel is the main character, an Israelite who spends most of his life in Babylonian exile. Babylon captured Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (also called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) during its first siege against Jerusalem. But Daniel and his friends are quickly recruited to serve the king and Babylon's royal court. Can you imagine? It's like the government leaders are saying, "Yes, we just viciously harmed everyone you know, but let's not dwell on the negatives. The good news is that now you'll be forced to take care of us. Yay!" Being appointed to the royal court is undoubtedly better than imprisonment or death. However, Daniel and his crew are in a bind. The authors cast them as faithful Israelites, but now they have no Levites (priests) or temple to practice their obedience. They're in a land that does not follow God's Sabbath instructions and has no concern for kosher food laws. They're still breathing, but everyone around them is pressuring them to relax the whole faithfulness thing and compromise. Go ahead! You're in Babylon now, so enjoy the rich food and exciting customs. Enjoy it, or die.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 27 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 1
Daniel 2
Daniel 3
Psalms 53

Daniel and his friends choose faithfulness to Yahweh and his torah (instruction), even when it puts their lives at risk. Whether it's not eating forbidden meat, refusing to bow to an enormous idol statue, or telling the emperor the truth that his kingdom isn't so high and mighty after all, the four friends refuse to give their allegiance to Babylon or anyone other than Yahweh.

Slated for execution, Daniel and his friends still hold fast to their commitment, and Yahweh shows up to deliver them. It's another reminder to avoid the assumption that exile amounted to God abandoning them.

Yet again, even as Israel suffers harsh consequences from its own mistakes, God stays with them through it to rescue and bless. For mourning exiles who wonder if God even likes them anymore, Daniel's story offers bright hope, the promise of God's unbreakable love.

Watch today's video to learn more about the hopeful message of the book of Daniel.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 28

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 4
Daniel 5
Daniel 6
Psalms 54

In today's chapters, Daniel serves three different rulers of Babylon. To Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and his friends are total weirdos, at times downright offensive, for refusing to participate in certain Babylonian customs. But Nebuchadnezzar trusts Daniel to interpret his dream. After being humbled by God with an extended time of eating grass in a field like a cow, Nebuchadnezzar praises God as just and true.

His successor, Belshazzar, seems to have learned little from Nebuchadnezzar's experience. Belshazzar uses the stolen gold cups, dedicated for use in worship of Yahweh in Yahweh's temple, to throw an idol-worshiping party. A disembodied hand joins the party and draws a message that only Daniel can interpret. This causes Belshazzar to appoint Daniel to the third-highest office in the kingdom, clothing him in royalty with purple and gold (Dan. 5:29).

That very night, Belshazzar is killed. King Darius now takes the throne. Daniel serves him so well that Darius plans to appoint him over the entire kingdom. Trying to prevent this, malicious royal advisors soon convince Darius to declare a new law that forces everyone in the kingdom to pray to Darius only. A pit filled with hungry lions awaits anyone who does otherwise.

Some laws are for breaking, though, and that is a rule Daniel refuses to obey. As an Israelite, he prays to Yahweh and Yahweh alone.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 28 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 4
Daniel 5
Daniel 6
Psalms 54

Notice how Daniel faces the same test his friends faced in yesterday's reading. The king commanded everyone to worship him, threatening a fiery execution for those refusing to comply. Still, the friends say no. Daniel does the same. Even better, he's unashamed, throwing his windows wide open so everyone can see him praying to Yahweh, not Darius. By praying to Yahweh, Daniel is not merely rebelling against Babylonian oppression; he is entrusting his life to God. He's laying his life down, trusting that God knows how to preserve it better than he does. Throughout his time in Babylon, Daniel models courageous loyalty as he walks the way of exile. Today's video explores this "way of exile" biblical theme with more depth.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 29

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

With Fellowship of the Rockies

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 7
Daniel 8
Daniel 9
Psalms 55

At this point in the story, Daniel's ability to interpret other people's mysterious dreams has earned him a good reputation. But interpreting his own dreams? That's a different story.

Daniel's visions are weird. Like, really weird. A lion soars out of a stormy sea on the wings of an eagle, only to land with two feet on the shore. A bear breaks the tumultuous surface of the water with three rib bones clamped between its teeth. A leopard with four heads and four wings circles overhead. Last and most terrifying of all, a monstrous mutant with 10 horns on its head lumbers onto the beach, snorting with rage. If these four bizarre beasts have you baffled, you're not alone. Even Daniel is stumped. So an angelic figure steps in to explain that the first three beasts are powerful kings who subdue the world through violent conquest. The 10-horned super beast with iron teeth? That one is different, much more intense, ultimately destroying those other nations and devouring the whole world (Dan. 7:23).

As if those visions weren't strange enough, Daniel sees more peculiar creatures. A charging ram with mismatched horns, a rampaging unicorn-style goat, and a talking horn that sprouts into a crazy king. Daniel is scratching his head, needing more angelic help with interpretation. Be careful with biblical visions. It's easy (and common) to read things into them that aren't there. At times, the visions seem directly related to realities in or around Daniel's day. At other times, the visions seem to peer into the future.



AUGUST 2026 | DAY 29 - CONTINUED

ONE STORY THAT LEADS TO JESUS

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SCRIPTURE

Daniel 7
Daniel 8
Daniel 9
Psalms 55

However we interpret their complexities, the big picture seems to be about rulers and empires who will continue using violence to dominate one another until God finally ends it. While that end will come through a human “king” (Dan. 8:23), a true human being (or son of man), that ruler will never depend on violence or deceit (Dan. 8:25) to tame the beasts. Still, the beasts will be tamed.

Watch the video to learn how Jesus, the Son of Man, defeats the violence and evil of beastly empires.