

Foundations Devotional

• FOR THE WEEK OF JAN 24 - JAN 30 •

MONDAY // DANIEL 5-6

Daniel 5 begins with a feast thrown by King Belshazzar. When Belshazzar saw a cryptic message written on the wall, God used Daniel to interpret the vision and point out Belshazzar's failure to honor the one true God. Because of the powers Daniel displayed, he was singled out by officials who felt threatened by him, and these men watched for an opportunity to pit Daniel against the king. Knowing Daniel's faith in God, they manipulated the king to force everyone to pray only to him, with the punishment of disobedience being death in a lion's den. Daniel maintained his discipline of prayer even though doing so brought a death sentence. When the king found Daniel alive the next morning, he worshiped God and cast the "wise men" to the lions. As we practice the discipline of prayer, we will grow in our faith, trusting that God can help us face any situation with courage. Prayer will prove to be a lifeline of communication with God.

TUESDAY // DANIEL 9-10; 12

In addition to demonstrating a life of faithfulness to God through strenuous circumstances, the Book of Daniel includes several chapters of prophecy concerning end times events. As these prophetic visions of judgment and tribulation unfolded, Daniel prayed for God's forgiveness, repeatedly confessing the sins of the people (Dan. 9). Among the specific things God revealed to Daniel was a time of international turmoil that resulted in the persecution and death of some of His people. There is hope, though, and the time of conflict in persecution will come to an end. Eternal life awaits those whose names are found written in the book, but eternal shame for those who rebelled against God. This eternal life—secured for us through the sacrificial life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—is the source of ultimate hope and confidence for every believer of Christ. We know that Jesus will come again and make eternal life in the presence of God our eternal reality, and until then, we are to live out our mission of being His disciples in a lost and hopeless world.

WEDNESDAY // EZRA 1-2

Just as God brought destruction upon the city of Jerusalem through the destruction of the temple of the Lord, so He brought about the eventual restoration of the temple and the return of the exiles as recorded in Ezra. For the first period of the Israelites' return, the Lord spoke to Cyrus, the king of Persia, who also happened to be a Gentile non-believer. It was through Cyrus that the Lord made the return of His people possible. Cyrus offered reentry into the land to anyone who would help rebuild the temple, to which he was also going to restore all of the treasures stolen from the original temple by Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord's divine plan is evident through both the exile and return of the people to Jerusalem. This is especially evident in His use of Cyrus to be an instrument for His divine will. Even a Persian king recognized the power, control, and sovereignty of the God of the universe. Like the Jews who responded to the opportunity, we should respond with joy, gratitude, and determination to the opportunities God gives us to be a part of His work also.

THURSDAY // EZRA 3-4

Just months after leaving Babylon, the exiles had rebuilt the altar and restored the formal forms of worship given through Moses. They also hired laborers and purchased building materials so the temple could be rebuilt. The Lord's help was evident in laying the temple's foundation, and they used that as an opportunity for worship and to bring glory to His name. The Jews praised God by declaring His essential character. Their joy came because they seized the opportunity God gave to participate in His work. But credit for the work's success was due to God, not the people. Soon after the exiles arrived in Jerusalem, word of their endeavor reached people living near the ruined city, and opposition to the rebuilding efforts quickly arose. People approached Zerubbabel with an offer of help, but in reality, they opposed the Jewish effort and intended to sabotage it. This opposition brought construction to a standstill, and nothing proceeded for well over a decade. Despite our faithfulness to God, we are guaranteed opposition to His work in the world. As this part of God's story reminds us, opposition cannot hinder God's faithfulness to His people or His purposes.

FRIDAY // EZRA 5-6

Finally, after more than a decade, construction resumed on the temple. The building activity in Jerusalem raised suspicion among local Persian officials. They allowed the work to continue while they investigated. Discovery of Cyrus' decree insured the completion of the temple. When restoration of the temple was complete, the people participated in Passover, which marked the renewal of religious life for the Jews, who could once again worship in obedience to God's Word. The restored exiles had many reasons for being joyful. Primarily, the Lord made them joyful because the Persian king's attitude had changed. We too should rejoice in a God who directs the rule of human kings. Since the time of the garden of Eden when sin entered the world, God has been restoring His people to Himself, and He continues to do so today. At the heart of our restoration is repentance of sin and obedience to Him.

WEEKEND // FINISH UP ANY YOU DIDN'T DO