

Foundations Devotional

• FOR THE WEEK OF JAN 31 - FEB 6 •

MONDAY // ZECHARIAH 1:1-6; 2; 12

Zechariah was one of God's prophets appointed to deliver His messages to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the exile. God sent Zechariah to encourage the people to continue work on the temple even in the face of opposition. Through a series of visions to Zechariah, God revealed His purposes. He would restore their city and their relationship with Him, and eventually He would give Israel final victory over its enemies. These verses also contain God's promise of a Messiah and His promise to pour out the Spirit of grace on the people of Jerusalem. These prophecies point to Jesus—the One who was pierced on the cross for the sins of mankind and the One through whom final victory against sin and death is accomplished. Zechariah also prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit. As believers, we can rejoice that salvation in Christ brings peace today and hope for eternal peace tomorrow.

TUESDAY // EZRA 7-8

Ezra 7-8 tells about the return to Jerusalem for the second group of exiles from Babylon, this time led by Ezra himself. Ezra was a scribe who lived as an exile in the area of Babylon, and he longed to see his homeland again. A new Persian king, Artaxerxes I, finally gave Ezra permission to lead a delegation of exiles back home. Their task was to reestablish proper worship of "the God of heaven." God's providential hand appears in every act leading to the return of His people and the restoration of the nation. God not only used faithful believers like Ezra, but also moved pagan rulers like Artaxerxes to participate in His plan. Ezra wanted to implement a spiritual revival in Israel. God's people were meant to lead the way in demonstrating what life can be like when lived in accordance with God and His Word. Today, we have the opportunity to obey God and to show a lost world how abundant life can be through faith in Jesus Christ and faithfulness to God's Word.

WEDNESDAY // EZRA 9-10

After settling into Jerusalem, Ezra received an official report on affairs in Judah, but what Ezra heard was devastating. Instead of living as God's chosen and set-apart people, men had married foreign wives, which was in direct opposition to God's covenant. This issue was not one of race or nationalism; it was a spiritual problem because the women worshiped false gods. Casual acceptance of these religions by husbands denied the Lord's claim that He alone was God. Consequently, the nation the Lord commanded to be holy had become no different from its pagan neighbors. Ezra grieved over how far God's people had fallen, and his very public grief moved many people to confession of sins and repentance. Like Ezra, we need to be people who are grieved over the presence of sin in our lives and the lives of our loved ones. God has chosen us and set us apart for His glory and to be lights for Him in our world. Only with a healthy view of our sin can we live the life of repentance and obedience to God that He calls us to live for our own good and His glory.

THURSDAY // ESTHER 1-2

The events described in the Book of Esther cover a 10-year period during the reign of Xerxes I, also known as Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus was an arrogant ruler, and when his queen refused to put herself on display at a lavish and drunken banquet, the king deposed her and launched an empire-wide search for a replacement. The quest for a new queen lasted four years. Esther was brought before Ahasuerus as part of this search. The king loved Esther—she won his favor and was selected as his new queen. Esther's unusual story is a clear picture of God's protection and care of His covenant people. Esther was a Jew God placed in a position to influence the destiny of His people and nations at a time when they would need an advocate. Even in our most trying situations, God is always at work for our long term good, even if in the short term it is not clear how He's doing so. He wants His people to trust Him wholeheartedly and confidently—even in the midst of radical, unexpected change.

FRIDAY // ESTHER 3-4

The plot of the Book of Esther thickens with the introduction of the villain, a man named Haman who held a powerful position in the king's court. Haman descended from a Canaanite tribe that consistently opposed Israel, from the exodus out of Egypt to the reign of David. When Mordecai failed to show Haman the respect he desired, he determined to eliminate all the Jews from the empire. Haman persuaded King Ahasuerus that the Jews threatened the Persian Empire's national security. He obtained a royal decree, setting aside a time for slaughtering the Jewish people. But God had placed Esther in a situation in which she could make an astounding difference so long as she trusted Him. Mordecai challenged Esther with the truth that God had a specific purpose in placing her in her royal position. God will not fail to keep His promises or fall short of His purposes. Therefore, the deliverance of the Jews was certain. The only question was what Esther's role would be. God had made her queen so that she would deliver His people through His provision. Esther's account serves as a reminder that God places people where they can serve Him.

WEEKEND // FINISH UP ANY YOU DIDN'T DO