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## WEEK 31 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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8/5 – 8/12

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DANIEL 2

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Daniel is set in the sixth century BC while Israel is exiled in Babylon. This book stands as a witness to, and sometimes illustration of, God's sovereignty over even the greatest empire the world had known. People in the ancient world would have believed that Israel's defeat indicated the weakness of their God in relation to the great Babylonian Empire and its powerful gods. However, the purpose of the book of Daniel is to illustrate and proclaim the absolute sovereign power of Israel's God. He alone possesses sovereign authority over all nations and establishes and deposes kings and empires to serve his purpose.

Read Daniel 2:1-16 and 2:31-35 (*pg.1007-9*).

- **Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar was so troubled by his dream? Why do you think he was so willing to dispose of his advisors?**
- **What overall picture do these verses give you about the character of Nebuchadnezzar?**
- **What are your initial thoughts about how Daniel responded when his life was at stake?**
- **Why do you think Daniel responded with such courage?**

Read Daniel 2:17-23 (*pg.1008*).

- **Why is it so important to remember that any wisdom or knowledge we possess ultimately comes from God? In what ways do we tend to forget this truth?**
- **God's sovereignty extends over every ruler and king this world has ever known. Verse 21 tells us that "he removes kings and sets up kings." Does this truth bring you comfort, confusion, fear, etc? What other questions does this truth bring to mind?**
- **What other truths and attributes of God does this passage bring forth?**

The Interpretation of the Dream:

Since the head of gold was specifically identified as Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (v. 38) we may assume that the other parts of the statue also represented specific empires or dynasties. Their identity was not yet unveiled to Daniel and his contemporaries. If they are to be identified in retrospect, the chest and arms of silver (v. 32) represent the Medo-Persian Empire. The belly and thighs of bronze (v. 32) would then symbolize the Greek Empire which would rule over the whole earth (v. 39) followed by the Roman Empire. This interpretation leads to the understanding of the rock as Christ and its growth as a reference to the advance of the kingdom of God.

- **What important truths about God's kingdom are revealed in this passage?**
- **One major truth is repeated throughout the chapter, namely that Daniel's God reigns supreme and is sovereign over all earthly kings and kingdoms (note 2:17-28, 36-38, 44-45, 47). What are the implications of this truth on your life?**



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**WEEK 32 – STUDY QUESTIONS**

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8/12 – 8/19

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EZEKIEL 16  
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In this graphically illustrated prophecy and charge against Israel, Ezekiel tells the story of an unwanted child, her marriage, and infidelity. Similar to Hosea, he is using marriage and the concept of marital faithfulness as an analogy of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. The story begins with God seeing an unwanted child kicking about in her blood, utterly helpless. He graciously takes her, washes her, nourishes her, causes her to grow and have life, and eventually enters into a marriage covenant with her. Yet in spite of all God had done – washing her, clothing her, adorning her with gold and jewelry – she was unfaithful to her loving husband.

- **Verse 14 says: “And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect.” How would you explain what God is saying to Israel? How had he made her beautiful throughout her life (existence as a nation)?**

Read Ezekiel 16:15-34 (pg.1055).

- **According to this passage, what is Israel described as being guilty of?**
- **Why does God use the imagery of prostitution so often throughout the Old Testament?**
- **What stands out to you/shocks you the most about this illustration of Israel?**
- **In what ways are we similar to Israel as portrayed in this story? How do we act as if our lives are our own and not God’s?**

Read Ezekiel 16:59-63 (pg.1056-7).

- **What does it mean that God will “establish an everlasting covenant” with his people? In what ways will this covenant be different from the old covenant?**
- **Why does God say, in verse 62, that “I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD”?**
- **What attributes of God are displayed throughout this passage of Scripture?**
- **As believers, how are we to respond to this chapter, in light of this illustration?**
- **What would it look like, practically, for us to be faithful to God?**

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## WEEK 33 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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8/19 – 8/26

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JEREMIAH 31

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As we've been reading through and studying the Old Testament this year, over and over again we've seen the failures of Israel to obey, love, serve, and fear the Lord their God. Jeremiah 9:25-26 gives us a major clue as to the underlying "heart" of the matter: *"<sup>25</sup> Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh— <sup>26</sup> Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart."*

- **What do you think it means to be "uncircumcised in heart"?**

Jeremiah 31 is a pivotal chapter in the redemptive history of God's people as God provides further insight into how He will redeem a disobedient people. Jeremiah introduces us to the new covenant and the reality that the old covenant is only a pattern of the covenant that Christ will initiate. The old covenant is dependent on man circumcising and transforming his or her own heart to follow God alone, and man is responsible for offering yearly animal sacrifices for sin. With the new covenant, God will circumcise the hearts of his children, and God will offer his son as a substitutionary sacrifice that covers all the sins of his children.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 (*pg.1084*).

- **Is it possible for us to turn our hearts to God completely, to fully live for the glory of God alone (in other words, to circumcise our hearts)?**
- **Why was the old covenant, the Law and the sacrificial system, unable to do this for us?**
- **How are our hearts circumcised? What does that mean exactly?**
- **Does having a circumcised heart mean that we are sinless?**
- **What role does the old covenant play in our life as Christians? Are the 10 commandments important to us? How do we read the Old Testament?**
- **What is the evidence in a person's life that they have a circumcised heart?**

Read Ezekiel 36:24-32 (*pg.1125-6*).

- **How does this affect how we view Acts 2, Pentecost, and the coming of the Holy Spirit?**
- **How should this entire discussion cause true Christians to view the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives on a daily basis?**

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## WEEK 34 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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8/26 – 9/2

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### LAMENTATIONS

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Lamentations consists of five dirges written to capture and to console those mourning over the just destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. The people had failed to heed the word of the Lord, and all that Jeremiah and the other prophets had prophesied. Now that judgment has come in the form of a ruthless Babylonian siege, the city and its inhabitants lie in utter ruin and many are wondering if restoration is even possible. Lamentations is divided into five chapters reflecting the five distinct poems found therein. Four of the poems are single acrostics structured on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of each stanza begins with a different letter of the alphabet; hence why chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 contain 22 verses. Since English translations cannot capture fully the acrostic structure of the book, it is important to point this out because the book's design highlights chapter 3 as the crux of the matter. The third chapter is a triple acrostic containing 66 verses and the climactic appeal of the book.

Read Lamentations 1:1-11 (*pg.1103-5*).

- **Do you ever feel like the punishment for sin outweighs the offense?**
- **Why is this never the case?**
- **Why do you think our first instinct, in the midst of suffering and sorrow, is to defend ourselves rather than to confess our sins?**

Read 2:11-22 (*pg.1107-9*).

- **Who is the cause of the destruction of Israel and Judah? What truths about God are conveyed by this passage?**
- **Have you ever been tempted to accuse God of wrong doing? Is God ever guilty of sin?**

Paul, in Romans 2:4, says *“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”*

- **What does “presumption” mean? What does it look like to presume upon the LORD?**
- **Do you think this is a common sin? Do you think Christians can be guilty of this as well?**

Read 3:22-33 (*pg.1110*).

- **Why is it important that God be the sole object and source of one's hope?**
- **What does it mean for God's mercies to be new every morning?**
- **What does waiting on the LORD look like?**
- **What does it mean that *“though [God] brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone”* (v. 32-33)?**
- **Share testimonies of how you have experienced Divine restoration.**



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## WEEK 35 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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9/2 – 9/9

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DANIEL 3

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- **When faced with the choice to stand for what is right and godly in the face of opposition or persecution, what causes us to often struggle in deciding what to do? Why do we sometimes fail to make the right choice?**
- **Are these two questions related? That is, what is the connection (if any) that exists between what we worship and our struggle in making the right choice?**

Read Daniel 3:1-7 (pg.1134).

- **In what ways do we actually face the same dilemma that Daniel's three friends faced?**
- **What, ultimately, was at stake for them? What is at stake for us in these tough situations?**
- **What does it mean that they were to "worship the image of gold"?**

Read 3:8-18 (pg.1135).

- **Why do you think King Nebuchadnezzar was so adamant that they bow down to the image?**
- **What stands out to you the most about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response?**
- **When we come before God, what takes more faith: praying and believing for a specific answer to prayer to happen, or praying for God's will to be done?**
- **What can we learn about trusting God from their response? About prayer?**

Read 3:19-30 (pg.1135-6).

- **How does the conclusion of this story, of the salvation of Daniel's three friends, point to the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ?**



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## WEEK 36 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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9/9 – 9/16

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JOB 1-2  
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- **When we go through suffering, what questions do we typically ask and why?**
- **What often happens to our attitude toward God? Why?**
- **Is suffering always a negative event in people's lives?**

Read Job 1:1-12 (*pg.1156*).

- **How did Satan come to notice Job initially? What is our first reaction to seeing that God pointed Job out to Satan? Why?**
- **What does our answer indicate about our belief in God's sovereignty and goodness?**
- **Why does our culture often feel that believers who are faithful do not deserve to suffer? Is that a biblical perspective?**
- **What is the point in serving God faithfully if we may encounter the same, if not greater, hardships as everyone else?**
- **Would suffering actually be easier if we understood the reason? Why does it matter?**

Read 1:13-2:10.

- **In Job 1:12 and 2:5-6, Satan basically asks God for permission to cause harm to Job. What does this indicate about God's control over Satan?**
- **Why can it make us feel uneasy to know that God gave permission to harm Job?**
- **How is there comfort in knowing that He is control in the midst of our suffering?**
- **Why is it often difficult to praise God in our suffering?**
- **What are we saying about God if we believe that His worth is determined by our circumstances? Would He truly be God if He were dependent upon our lives?**
  
- **Job's three friends insist that his suffering is a punishment for sin in his life. Does suffering always result from sin? Explain.**



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**WEEK 37 – STUDY QUESTIONS**

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9/16 – 9/23

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JOB 38-42  
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Last week we discussed suffering from the opening verses of the book of Job. We saw that suffering is often unexplainable, that God is always worthy of our worship, and that suffering is not partial or necessarily the result of discipline, sin, or even disbelief. Even Christ-followers are not immune to suffering. But the question remains: “why?”

Read Job 38:1-35 (*pg.1202*).

- **How did God respond to Job’s request for vindication from God?**
- **What are your first impressions upon hearing/reading this passage?**
- **Describe the picture that God painted of himself to Job. What attributes are described?**
- **If you notice, God is not directly or explicitly telling Job *why* he was suffering. However, in some sense, he actually *is* telling him why he was suffering. What does this great speech from God tell us about the answer to the question of suffering presented in the book of Job?**

Read 42:2-6 (*pg.1208*).

- **What role did Job’s suffering play in revealing God more deeply to Job more than prosperity could have?**
- **How can it be comforting to rest in the truth that we do not understand God’s ways? How can it be scary or unsettling?**
- **Why should we trust and take comfort in the God who is supreme in all matters?**
- **What are questions that we often ask during times of suffering?**
- **What are questions that we *should* ask during times of suffering?**
- **How can we apply the truths of this book to those among us who are going through times of suffering or loss?**

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## WEEK 38 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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9/23 – 9/30

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ZECHARIAH 1-4

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Israel has finally been released from exile and has come back to their homeland. At this time, the prophet Haggai speaks about rebuilding the temple and being restored to the glory of God. The prophet Zechariah sounds hope of restoration to God as he expresses the longing of the people of God for the glory of God. Both of these books leave us in the Old Testament longing for Christ, for He alone is the true temple, where we encounter the glory of God, and He alone can reconcile and restore us to the presence of God.

Read Zechariah 1:1-6 (*pg.1249*).

- **These people were faithfully rebuilding the temple under the leadership of Joshua (the priest) and Zerubbabel (the prince); yet, God calls them to repent and return to him! Is it possible for someone to try and faithfully serve God and obey him, but yet have not repented of their sins and turned to God to worship and serve him alone? Explain.**
- **What does this call to repentance show (once again) about what God desires of us?**

Read 3:1-10 (*pg.1252*).

- **What is so shocking about the Joshua the high priest's clothes? What does this signify?**
- **How does Satan accuse humanity? What are his charges against us? Are they valid?**
- **What does this show us about the old covenant priesthood? The sacrificial system?**
- **How does this vision point us to our need for a Savior and the gospel of Jesus Christ?**
- **Can Satan rightly accuse those who are in Christ?**

Read 4:1-14 (*pg.1252-3*).

The lampstand signified Israel's divine calling to be a witness of God's salvation to the pagan nations around her, but Israel failed by falling into idolatry. Having brought them back from exile, God's design is that once again Israel will be a light to the nations. This prophecy tells of that day. For Zechariah's time period, the two olive trees represented Zerubbabel, the prince of Judah, and Joshua, the priest. They were filling the important roles of king and priest. In the New Testament, we know that Jesus is king, priest and prophet. This is how we explain the prophecy as it relates to the church: Christ is the two olive trees, and Christ is constantly filling the basin with oil and the basin is constantly filling each lamp of the lampstand with a plentiful supply of oil. The oil refers to the Holy Spirit. Christ is constantly pouring out the Holy Spirit into his church (Revelation 1:12-20) into the individual lamps, believers who are connected to the church.

- **What does this prophetic vision teach us about the nature/role of the church today?**
- **What is the significance of v.6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit"? How does this verse serve to encourage us?**





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**WEEK 39 – STUDY QUESTIONS**

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9/30 – 10/7

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**ESTHER**  
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The events recorded in the book of Esther take place during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) king of Persia, after the return of the first group of Jewish exiles under Zerubbabel ca. 538 B.C (Ezra 1-6) and before the second return led by Ezra ca. 458 B.C (Ezra 7-10). The book of Esther never mentions the name of God, and yet to the eyes of faith it is strikingly evident that God is providentially writing the plot of this story.

- **Esther is queen, but as we've seen with Vashti, this is a position easily changed and held at the whim of the king, a man. What fears would you have had for her if Esther were your daughter, friend, or "only hope"?**
- **What are some ways that you see God working "behind the scenes" in the story of Esther?**
- **What does this tell you about how God works in our lives and in the world?**
- **Can you look back on times in your life and see how God was working like that?**

Read Esther 4:1-17 (pg.1280).

- **What do the replies of Mordecai and Esther say about their character? About their faith?**
- **What do Mordecai's instructions to Esther in chapter 4 tell you about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility?**
- **Proverbs 21:1 says "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." What does the book of Esther teach you about how government rulers, even ungodly government rulers, fit into God's plan? How does this reflect the way that you view and respond to political events?**
- **What life lessons does Haman teach us about pride, self-centeredness, and hatred?**
- **Esther is not the first Hebrew that God positioned in a place of influence to be a source of deliverance for His people. Who are the other deliverers we have read about this year and what common threads connect Queen Esther's story to theirs?**
- **How does the book of Esther point us to the final great deliverance of God's people in Christ?**

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## WEEK 40 – STUDY QUESTIONS

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10/7 – 10/14

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EZRA 7-10, NEHEMIAH

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The first six chapters of Ezra, which we read a couple of weeks ago, recount the first return of Jews to their homeland under Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. Chapters 7-10 give the account of the second return, led by Ezra in 458 B.C. The Jews' return from exile in Babylon is presented as a second Exodus and the primary theological message of the book is that God is faithful to His covenant promises. God orchestrated the exile into Babylon and God has orchestrated the return from exile.

- **How did the reality of God's sovereignty affect Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah? Did it produce negligence or obedience in them? What did they do?**

Read Ezra 9:1-15 (*pg.1294*).

- **How do you respond to your own sin and the sins of others in your faith family? Do you grieve over it or do you take it lightly?**
- **Have you ever felt embarrassed to enter the presence of God? What is the solution to this problem?**

The book of Nehemiah is ultimately about the promises, providence, provision, and protection of the LORD, as well as the prayers of his people. As we read this book, we see the faithfulness of our God and His steadfast love toward His own, a love that eventually and fully manifests in the giving of His Son to be the better temple and to establish the better city prepared for those who love him and joyfully submit to His good rule.

Read Nehemiah 7:73-8:12 (*pg.1310*).

- **When you read your Bible or sit under someone's teaching, do you typically seek to mourn or be comforted? What do you think we should be seeking?**
- **Why do we offer so little attention to the Word of God? What are some of the things that distract you from reading and listening to the Word? How can we become a people who pay careful attention to the Word of God?**
- **What is the initial response that the people have to the Word of God (8:9)? Why?**
- **What is repentance? Is it a one-time event, a lifestyle or both?**

Read 9:5-38 (*pg.1311-3*).

- **What are some barriers that we put up against confession of sin? Are these barriers legitimate or are they excuses to ignore our sin?**
- **What role should God's Word play in our confession and repentance? What role should prayer play?**