

Ezra

Ezra is a story of restoration, reconstruction, and revival. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews are freed by King Cyrus of Persia and allowed to return to their homeland. Two homebound expeditions follow. The first contingent, led by Zerubbabel and involving about 50,000 people, travels to Jerusalem to reconstruct the temple (chapters 1-6). Eighty years later, Ezra leads the second expedition made up largely of priests and Levites (chapters 7-10).

FOCUS	RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE				REFORMATION OF THE PEOPLE				
DIVISIONS	Commission of the Temple Builders		Completion of the Temple Project		58-Year Gap—The Book of Esther	Commission of the Spiritual Leaders		Completion of the Spiritual Reforms	
	1	3	4	6		7	8	9	10
TOPICS	Return Under Zerubbabel				Return Under Ezra				
	Building Construction				Rebuilding Commitment				
PLACE	Persia to Jerusalem				Persia to Jerusalem				
TIME	23 Years (538–515 B.C.)				1 Year (457 B.C.)				

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Commission of the Temple Builders

Key Passage: Ezra 1, 3

CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3
A Call for Temple Builders	A Catalog of Temple Builders	Commencing to Build the Temple
Proclamation	Presentation	Progress

OVERVIEW At last the wearisome Babylonian captivity is at an end. With the declaration of King Cyrus permitting the people to leave Persia and return to their homeland, the hard work of rebuilding the nation can begin. Nearly 50,000 pilgrims journey with Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. But laying the temple foundation brings tears of remembrance as the builders recall the splendor that was once Solomon’s temple—a splendor they could not regain.

YOUR DAILY WALK How long have you lived at your present location? Statistically, if you are an American and have lived in the place you call home for seven years or longer, you are a vanishing breed.

Pulling up stakes is never easy. Anticipation and anxiety can make the ordeal as difficult emotionally as it is physically. Consider the caravan of pioneers listed in Ezra 2. The walk ahead of them was long—nearly a thousand miles. There was the constant danger of ambush from robbers, especially since the people were transporting a wealth of temple treasures (1:9-11). Notwithstanding, God had stirred people’s hearts to respond to the invitation of a pagan monarch. With such internal compulsion and external confirmation, how could they help but move out for God?

Is God calling you to pull up stakes—to move to a new home, a new school, a new job, a new level of commitment to Him? Then here is a motto to copy and display in your home or office: Even a dangerous journey of a thousand miles can be faced confidently when God is leading the expedition.

God never calls us to service without first equipping us.

INSIGHT *Cyrus, God’s Pagan Messiah*

About 150 years before the dramatic proclamation of Ezra 1:1-4, the prophet Isaiah delivered a detailed prophecy concerning King Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28–45:7). Because the Lord would prompt Cyrus to do all these things for the Jews, he is called “my shepherd” (44:28) and “[My] anointed” (literally, “messiah”; 45:1).

Completion of the Temple Project

Key Passage: Ezra 4:1-5, 24; 6:13-22

CHAPTER 4	CHAPTER 5	CHAPTER 6
Restraining the Builders	Reinstating the Builders	Reaching the Goal
Opposition	Resolution	Completion

OVERVIEW The task of rebuilding the temple involves more than simply organizing men and materials. Antagonism from local citizens soon arises to threaten the project. Deceitful offers of help, open attack, false accusations—each must be handled by Zerubbabel with conviction and courage. Though the builders are temporarily stopped, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah emerge to exhort the people not to give up. Darius, a new and sympathetic Persian king, at last ends the 15-year construction delay by reconfirming the decree of Cyrus: God’s temple must be completed!

YOUR DAILY WALK Ours is an instant society in which immediate results have almost become the rule. Fast, quick, and easy are the buzz words of our busy lives. Yet, there are many endeavors for God that will only be accomplished if the long-range perspective is maintained. Parenting a child, developing a spiritual gift, discipling a new Christian, acquiring an education, teaching a Sunday school class—all these take the investment of years of practice, patience, and perseverance for the goal to be achieved.

If Zerubbabel had allowed the short-term discouragements to deter him from his long-range determination to rebuild the temple, he never would have finished the task. But with his goal clearly in view and his faith firmly fixed in God, Zerubbabel was able to stay on target for more than 20 years.

Complete this prayer: “Though I may not experience instant success in my goal of _____, with God’s help I will commit myself to be faithful one day at a time, beginning today.”

INSIGHT *Ezra the Priest—Which Way Did He Go?*

In a book titled “Ezra,” you would expect the man to play a prominent role. With the help of a Bible concordance (or just by retracing your steps), see how many times Ezra’s name appears in the first six chapters. The answer may surprise you.

*Aligning
your goals
with God’s
goals is
the path to
spiritual
success.*

Commission of the Spiritual Leaders

Key Passage: Ezra 7:11-28; 8:31-36

CHAPTER 7	CHAPTER 8
Preparations for the Pilgrimage	Protection During the Pilgrimage
Ezra's Commission	Ezra's Companions

OVERVIEW Chapter 7 breaks a 58-year silence with the introduction of a priest and teacher named Ezra. Another kingly proclamation, this time by Artaxerxes, sets the stage for Ezra to return to Jerusalem accompanied by 1,753 priests, Levites, and laymen. After praying and fasting, Ezra and his caravan begin the four-month journey, weighed down with treasures for the temple yet buoyed up by their confidence in God.

YOUR DAILY WALK Have you ever tried to help God by doing what He has already promised to do Himself?

Abraham tried it (Genesis 16) by fathering Ishmael, even though God had promised to give him a son by Sarah. Saul tried it (1 Samuel 17:38-39) by covering David with the king's bulky armor, though the young shepherd boy knew God wanted him to use a different method to kill the giant Goliath.

Ezra was tempted to try it too. When presented with the chance to enlist pagan soldiers and horsemen for protection against enemies along the way, Ezra went to his knees and received the assurance of something he had previously told pagan King Artaxerxes: "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him" (8:22). Armed with that confidence, Ezra and the people set out on a four-month adventure in trusting God. God proved His faithfulness once more!

What human crutch are you tempted to turn to when things get tough? To your checkbook? Investments? Friends? Job security? Spouse? Or do you turn to the Lord? Turn to Him right now in confident prayer, and watch Him guide your pilgrimage.

INSIGHT *Three Leaders, Three Backgrounds*

God chose three very different men to lead the three Jerusalem "homecomings." Zerubbabel was a prince of Judah; Ezra was a priest and Levite; and Nehemiah was a politician from an unspecified tribe.

We would worry less about what others think of us if we realized how seldom they do.

Completion of the Spiritual Reforms

Key Passage: Ezra 9:1–10:17

CHAPTER 9		CHAPTER 10
1	Ezra's Anguish	Ezra's Actions
	4 5	15
Pollution Discovered		Purging Demanded

OVERVIEW Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Ezra is greeted by reports of pollution in the city. Spiritually mixed marriages—expressly forbidden in the Law of God—are taking place among people and priesthood alike. The news brings instant anguish to the “teacher well versed in the Law of Moses” (7:6). Identifying himself with his disobedient countrymen, Ezra intercedes with an emotional prayer of confession. The guilty parties, moved by Ezra’s example, assemble to bring about change appropriate to repentance. Even though it’s the rainy season, the difficult and time-consuming job of restoring purity in Israel’s families begins.

YOUR DAILY WALK The statement, “Confession is good for the soul,” is not a biblical quote, but it is a biblical concept. Look up the following verses to see what each says about the importance of confession:

Acts 19:18-20 _____

James 5:16 _____

1 John 1:9 _____

Real confession involves two elements: (1) an acknowledgment of wrong committed, and (2) a forsaking of wrong conduct. Chapters 9-10 of Ezra describe a situation that demanded both acknowledging (“We have been unfaithful,” 10:2) and forsaking (“Separate yourselves,” 10:11). Though the cure was painful, God found pleasure in the nation’s prompt and wholehearted confession.

Is confession overdue in your life today? There’s no better time to complete this prayer: “God, I acknowledge that I have sinned against You, and beginning today with Your help I will forsake _____.”

*Confession
without
change is
just a game.*

INSIGHT *Putting Yourself into Your Prayers*

More than 30 occurrences of the plural pronouns *us*, *we*, and *our* in Ezra’s prayer of intercession (9:5-15) show that Ezra—though innocent of the charges—identified himself with the condition of his countrymen. Do you pray that way for your family, church, and nation?

Nehemiah

Contemporary of Ezra and cupbearer to the king of Persia, Nehemiah leads the third and final return of the Jews to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Under his leadership, the people undertake the enormous task of rebuilding the holy city's shattered walls that had been destroyed almost a century earlier. Despite opposition and deceit from without and abuse from within, the task is completed in only 52 days—a feat that even Israel's enemies must attribute to God's power.

FOCUS	NEW WALLS			NEW WORSHIP	RENEWED NATION
DIVISIONS	Wall Plans Conceived	Wall Plans Commenced	Wall Plans Concluded	Renewed Worship Commenced	Renewed Nation Cleansed
	1	2 3	4 5	7 8	10 11 13
TOPICS	Reconstructing the City			Reforming the Citizens	
	Security			Purity	
PLACE	Jerusalem				
TIME	About 25 Years (445–420 B.C.)				

Wall Plans Conceived

Key Passage: Nehemiah 1:1–2:8

CHAPTER 1		CHAPTER 2
1 Jerusalem's Broken Walls	3-4 Nehemiah's Broken Heart	11 Nehemiah's Building Plans
Problem	Prayer	Preparation

OVERVIEW Nearly a century has passed since Zerubbabel led the first group of Jewish hostages from Babylon back to their homeland. But though the temple stands erect, inviting worshipers from near and far, the walls lie in rubble, inviting enemy attacks. Nehemiah, cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, hears this heartbreaking news. With a carefully and prayerfully conceived plan, he is ready when the king inquires: “What is it you want?” (2:4). Accompanied by army and cavalry units, Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem to inspect the damage and infuse his countrymen with the will to raise the walls.

YOUR DAILY WALK What would you think of a person who, upon plugging in an iron and finding that it didn't work, responded, “Well, I guess it just wasn't God's will for it to get hot”? Irons are supposed to get hot! Appliances are supposed to work. And when they don't, you need to check the connections, because something is obviously wrong. You expect a hot iron—and rightly so.

Now consider your prayer life. Does it “get hot”? That is, does God answer your prayers in regular, discernible ways? Or are you surprised when an answer to prayer comes? Your expectation should be answered prayer, for God has staked His reputation on it. Nehemiah learned that exciting truth, and you can, too.

Spend a few extra minutes basking in these biblical prayer promises: Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 7:7-11; John 16:24; 1 John 5:14-15. Pick one and “plug it in” to your prayer life today. Watch for God's answer, and be thankful when it comes. That's what prayer is all about.

INSIGHT *Persian Cupbearer: Servant or Something Else?* Nehemiah was more than a royal waiter. He was also a confidante, advisor, administrator, bodyguard, and food taster (to protect the king from poisoning)—a position of high trust and authority. Today we would call him a prime minister.

A righteous mission can fill you with a passion to complete even impossible tasks.

Wall Plans Commenced

Key Passage: Nehemiah 4

CHAPTER 3	CHAPTER 4			
Repairing the Walls	Ridiculing the Workers	Rallying the Workers		
	1	3 4	Prayerfully 12 13	Militarily 23
The Work Initiated	The Work Interrupted			

OVERVIEW Nehemiah’s dream of rebuilding the walls now becomes contagious! The people rise up in unison, trowels in hand, to begin repairing the eight gates and more than two miles of wall surrounding the city. Nehemiah’s strategy is simple: give each person a vested interest in the work. To ensure both speed and quality of workmanship, he assigns each worker the portion of the wall nearest the worker’s own house. It’s difficult to do a sloppy job when you know that if enemies break through a defective portion of the wall, the first people jeopardized will be your own family. But soon, the entire project is threatened by outside opposition. Harmless ridicule gives way to threats of violence, and Nehemiah responds with a combination of prayer and preparation.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16).

YOUR DAILY WALK “Pray like it’s up to God; then act like it’s up to you.” Although those words are not scriptural, they contain more than a germ of truth. Over and over, God has told you to take your problems and anxieties to Him. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6). Take a lesson from Nehemiah. When troubles come, turn your problems into prayers—pronto.

But once you have prayed through your problems, don’t expect angels to finish building your walls. Pick up your trowel and finish the job God has given you. “So that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 14:29).

Pick a situation in your life that needs prayer coupled with preparation. Pray it through, work it out, and watch the results.

INSIGHT *The Special Gate for God*

The East Gate (3:29), through which the *Shechinah* glory (a visible manifestation of God’s presence) left, is also the gate by which Ezekiel sees God’s glory return (Ezekiel 43:1-17) to reside in the temple’s Holy of Holies during the Kingdom Age, as he had seen its departure during the fall of Jerusalem.

Wall Plans Concluded

Key Passage: Nehemiah 5; 6:15-19

CHAPTER 5	CHAPTER 6		CHAPTER 7
Usury Abolished	Murder Averted	Deceit Avoided	Mission Accomplished
1	4 5	14 15	19
Opposition		Outcome	

OVERVIEW Internal strife in the Israelite camp causes as much unrest as the battle thrusts from outside the camp. The people are suffering under financial stress imposed by their Persian masters. Worse yet, the Israelites are exacting interest from their own brothers who have borrowed to pay their debts. After correcting this abuse, Nehemiah again turns his attention toward the threats from neighboring enemies. He is not ensnared by an assassination plot on his life, nor will he be intimidated by the threats of a slanderous letter. After 52 days of building and battling, the walls stand completed. At last the holy city of Jerusalem can be resettled.

YOUR DAILY WALK How do you react when you see the poor exploited? Does your heart beat a little faster? Now imagine it is a member of your family being exploited. How would you respond to that?

Lack of grain and oppressive Persian rule had forced some of the Hebrews in Jerusalem to mortgage their homes and sell themselves into slavery in order to pay their debts. When Nehemiah heard that the rich were extorting money from their own countrymen, his reaction was immediate and unmistakable.

You may never have exacted interest from someone suffering hardships, but have you been guilty of taking advantage of another Christian by ignoring his difficult circumstances? Leave your money at home today and let your empty wallet remind you of the usury tactics of Nehemiah's day. Then look for a way to assist, rather than simply avoid, a Christian brother or sister who is in difficult financial straits.

*Injustice
anywhere
is a threat
to justice
everywhere.*

INSIGHT *Doing Wrong to Do Right Is Wrong, Right?* Shemaiah's offer of safety in the temple for Nehemiah (6:10-14) was a direct violation of God's Law that forbade anyone other than priests from entering the sanctuary. Even if Shemaiah had been telling the truth (which he wasn't), for Nehemiah to enter the temple would have been a fatal mistake.

Renewed Worship Commenced

Key Passage: Nehemiah 8:1-12

CHAPTER 8		CHAPTER 9		CHAPTER 10	
Reading the Law	Restoring the Law	Responding to the Law	Resolving to Keep the Law		
Conviction	Commemoration	Confession	Commitment		

OVERVIEW The first half of Nehemiah’s account describes the construction of the city walls; the second half contains instruction for the city worshipers. Beginning with chapter 8 the account becomes biographical rather than autobiographical as Nehemiah deals with the spiritual, rather than the physical, well-being of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Revival breaks out when the Word of God is translated, broadcast, and explained for the common people. Ezra’s preaching produces heartfelt confession, wholehearted worship, and refreshing resolve to bring the nation’s wayward conduct in line with its covenant relationship with God.

YOUR DAILY WALK This evening as a family, with a friend, or just by yourself, go through your house and gather up every trace of Scripture you can find: every Bible, Bible motto or poster, every hymnbook or gospel recording, every gospel tract or Christian biography. Pile them all together. Then strike a match as you ponder this sobering thought: Someday you may lose the priceless freedom you enjoy today of surrounding yourself with God’s Word. (Now, blow out the match.)

*Freedom
decays as
material
society
expands.*

If that ever happened, how much of God’s Word would you have hidden away in your heart, where no tyrant can invade (Psalm 119:11)? Ezra’s reading of the long-neglected Book of the Law produced tears of gladness and grief—gladness over the return of God’s Word to its proper place in the nation, and grief that the nation had drifted so far from God’s will and way. It could never happen in your country—or could it? And isn’t it worth five minutes of daily prayer to help see that it won’t?

INSIGHT *Ezra, the Elusive Priest*

Just as Ezra did not appear until chapter 7 of the book that bears his name, he also does not appear until chapter 8 of the Book of Nehemiah—a natural dividing point for the book. Chapters 1-7 center around the work of God in building the wall; chapters 8-13 focus on the worship of God in obedience to the Law.

Renewed Nation Cleansed

Key Passage: Nehemiah 13

CHAPTER 11	CHAPTER 12	CHAPTER 13
Resettling the People	Recognizing the People	Reforming the People
New Homes	Old Names	Old Problems

OVERVIEW With his time in Jerusalem nearly at an end, Nehemiah busies himself with the final duties of his mission. He oversees the redistribution of the people in the cities—one tenth of the population in Jerusalem, and the rest in surrounding suburbs. A joyous celebration is held in which two processions of praising people march along the walls to dedicate them to God. Nine years after returning to Persia, Nehemiah again hears disturbing news from his homeland. He returns to correct abuses in the temple and deal with the stubborn problem of mixed marriages.

YOUR DAILY WALK It is sad but true that those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it. The closing chapters of Nehemiah provide a sobering warning and an opportunity to learn from the past.

The people under Nehemiah had made several vows in chapter 10. They agreed to obey God's Word, abstain from intermarriage with pagan people, keep the Sabbath, and support temple worship. Less than a decade later, they had broken every promise.

Today would be a great time to renew old promises and vows before the Lord. Are you married? If so, spend some quiet time with your spouse reminding each other of the vows you made on your wedding day. Confess your areas of failure and praise your spouse for vows faithfully kept.

If you are a single, never-married Christian, you have an extra privilege (and responsibility) to serve God with undivided attention during your single years (1 Corinthians 7:32-33). Use that privilege today.

INSIGHT Nehemiah's Prophetic Partner

Malachi, who lived and ministered during the same time as Nehemiah, spoke to the moral condition of the Jews who returned to Jerusalem. You might want to read his short four-chapter book in connection with Nehemiah. Malachi paints a bleak picture of cold-hearted indifference toward God—a condition that persisted for 400 years until the appearance of the Promised One (John 1:29).

Prayer becomes a flat and arduous business when we refuse to follow the lights and leads God has given us.

Esther

The Book of Esther provides the only biblical portrait of the majority of Jews who chose to remain in Persia after the exile rather than return to Jerusalem. Though God's name appears nowhere in the book, His divine hand of providence and protection on behalf of His people can be seen throughout. The plot of Haman to exterminate the Jews (chapters 1-4) is thwarted by the courage of Esther and the wise counsel of Mordecai, resulting in a great deliverance (chapters 5-10).

FOCUS	GOD AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES			
DIVISIONS	Esther Becomes Queen of Persia	Haman Plots to Destroy the Jews	Esther Plans to Save the Jews	Jews Commemorate God's Deliverance
	1	2 3	4 5	7 8 10
TOPICS	Esther's Entrance	Haman's Exit		Mordecai's Exaltation
	Insult	Intrigue	Invocation	Purity
PLACE	Persia			
TIME	About 10 Years (483–473 B.C.)			

Esther Becomes Queen of Persia

Key Passage: Esther 1:1-12; 2:8-23

CHAPTER 1		CHAPTER 2	
Xerxes' Party	Vashti's Predicament	Esther's Beauty	Mordecai's Bravery
An Old Queen Dismissed		A New Queen Discovered	

OVERVIEW Xerxes, the Persian king, hosts a sumptuous banquet for his court officials. After a week of partying, the king calls for Queen Vashti to entertain the guests. When she denies his request, he banishes her from the palace in a fit of anger and embarrassment and begins the search for a new queen. Esther, a beautiful Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai (2:7) and living in exile under Nebuchadnezzar, rises above the competition and wins the king's heart. Through Mordecai, Esther learns of a plot against the king and tells him in time to save his life. The heroism of Mordecai is duly recorded in the official records—and promptly forgotten.

YOUR DAILY WALK If anyone ever had reason to have vengeful thoughts, it was Mordecai. When he was first deported under Nebuchadnezzar's army in 597 B.C., Mordecai's family was transported hundreds of miles from their homeland. Life in exile was the only life Mordecai had ever known.

If anyone ever had occasion to translate vengeful thoughts into action, it was Mordecai. Unknown to the king (but well known to Mordecai), an assassination plot was afoot. It would have been easy for Mordecai to remain silent, reasoning that the Lord's vengeance was at work at last. But instead, Mordecai risked his life to save the king.

What would you have done in a similar situation? Look up the following verses and see what each has to say about the way God wants you to respond to those in authority over you: Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:17. Now complete this sentence: "Instead of getting even, with God's help I will respond to someone who deserves my vengeance by _____."

You can't win by trying to even the score.

INSIGHT *The Girl Who Went from Rags to Riches*
 Esther changed overnight from an obscure Jewish girl to the queen who had at her disposal up to "half the kingdom" of Persia (5:3). That kingdom extended from modern-day Greece (west) to India (east) and from southern Russia (north) to Saudi Arabia (south), an area of more than 600,000 square miles!

Haman Plots to Destroy the Jews

Key Passage: Esther 3:1-6; 4:13-17

CHAPTER 3					CHAPTER 4		
Haman's Anger Against . . .					Mordecai's Anguish for . . .		
1	One Jew	5	6	All Jews	15	All Jews	One Jewess
A Plot Conceived					A Plot Confronted		

OVERVIEW After Mordecai's heroic deed, the villain Haman enters the drama. Enraged by Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him in reverence, Haman devises a sinister plot to exterminate Mordecai along with every Jew in Persia. The superstitious throw of the dice determines the date of his proposed massacre, and the 11-month countdown begins. When Mordecai confronts Esther with the danger of Haman's plan, she is left with a painful choice: either approach the king (and possibly lose her life), or remain silent (and allow the annihilation of her people and herself).

*Every life
needs a
purpose
to which
it can give
the energy
of its mind
and the
enthusiasm
of its heart.*

YOUR DAILY WALK Make a mental list of things you know about yourself that no one else knows: details that could be used against you if they were public knowledge. Now consider that Esther's secret ancestry changed overnight from an asset to a liability. The same Jewish ancestry that provided her incredible beauty now put her life in jeopardy. She could have turned her back on her "roots" and her countrymen, enjoying the protection of the palace. Instead she identified herself with the people of God and made herself available for God's service.

Are you tempted to disqualify yourself from God's service because of something in your background? Perhaps God has raised you up "for such a time as this" (4:14). But before God can use you, He must possess you—assets, liabilities, and all.

INSIGHT *Moses, Esther, and Who?*

Esther could have turned her back on the plight of the Jews and relied on the privilege of her rank and the protection of the palace. This was also true of Moses. He abandoned all the privileges of the Egyptian palace and "chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Hebrews 11:25). Can you think of another who abandoned kingly privileges in order to rescue His people?

Esther Plans to Save the Jews

Key Passage: Esther 5, 7

CHAPTER 5	CHAPTER 6	CHAPTER 7
Esther's First Banquet	Mordecai's Forgotten Bravery	Esther's Second Banquet
Haman's Delight	Haman's Demotion	Haman's Destruction

OVERVIEW Fortified with faith, Esther courageously enters the king's court to make known her request. Wisely, she invites the king and Haman to a special banquet in their honor and uses the occasion to invite them to a second banquet. Before the second banquet takes place, however, three events happen in rapid sequence: Haman builds an enormous gallows for hanging Mordecai; King Xerxes discovers Mordecai's previously overlooked act of bravery in saving his life; and Haman is forced to endure the humiliation of bestowing on Mordecai the very honor that he himself so greedily craved. At the second banquet Esther uncovers the plot against the Jews, and then Haman is hanged on his own gallows.

YOUR DAILY WALK Toss a coin in the air, and see how many times in a row you can correctly guess which way it will land. Statistically, if you succeed five times in a row, you have done what only one person in 32 might be expected to do.

In the first seven chapters of Esther, at least a dozen events show the fingerprints of God's sovereign control, including Esther's coronation, Mordecai's forgotten act of bravery, Haman's lots, Esther's uninvited audience with the king, the timing of Esther's two banquets, and the king's insomnia. (Can you suggest six more?) The odds of 12 events happening in consecutive order by chance are one in 479 million! Incidentally, the "odds" of this happening in God's sovereign plan are one in one. Both the *what* and the *when* of life are under His loving control. Take a minute to acknowledge that fact before Him right now in a prayer of praise for His providence in your life.

INSIGHT *The Fickle, Forgetful Monarch (6:1-11)*

During his sleepless night following Esther's first banquet, King Xerxes discovered Mordecai's act of heroism duly recorded in the court chronicles. The king instructed Haman to give Mordecai the equivalent of a modern-day ticker-tape parade—completely forgetting he had just signed an edict to exterminate the Jews.

In 1,000 trials, it is not 500 of them that work for the believer's good, but 999 of them—and one beside!

Jews Commemorate God's Deliverance

Key Passage: Esther 8:1–9:19

CHAPTER 8	CHAPTER 9	CHAPTER 10
Counteracting Haman's Orders	Commemorating the Jews' Deliverance	Commemorating Mordecai's Greatness
Protection	Purim	Prime Minister

OVERVIEW Haman is dead, but his murderous decree against the Jews lives on. Though a “law of the Medes and the Persians” could never be reversed, its effects could be counteracted by a subsequent decree. The king issues a new edict permitting the Jews to defend themselves throughout the empire on the day Haman had selected to annihilate them. The Feast of Purim is inaugurated as an annual celebration to commemorate this historic deliverance of the Jewish people.

YOUR DAILY WALK What do the following words have in common: *Tishri, Chislev, Nisan, Adar, and Sivan*?

Answer: They are all months in the Jewish calendar. For the devout Jew, the calendar was more than a way of marking time. It provided a ready-made way to annually recall God's dealings in the life of the nation. Nisan marked Passover, the time of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Sivan brought the Feast of Pentecost, the celebration of yet another bountiful harvest from God. Tishri took the people back to their wilderness wanderings through the Festival of Booths. Each holiday became a holy day—a time of recalling, repenting, and renewing commitments to follow the God of Israel.

Why not establish your own annual “Feast of Purim,” a time when you and your family rehearse God's special provisions over the past year? Begin tonight.

You can observe a lot just by watching.

INSIGHT Present-Day Purim

Devout Jews observe Purim as follows: The day preceding (13th of Adar) is kept as a day of fasting in accordance with the command of Queen Esther (4:15-16). As soon as the stars appear, candles are lit and the Book of Esther is read in the synagogue. Every time the name of Haman is mentioned in the reading, the congregation stamps on the floor exclaiming, “Let his name be blotted out. The name of the wicked shall rot!” The rest of the festival involves feasting, games, and an exchange of presents.

Job

The Book of Job addresses the ancient question of man's suffering. Overnight, the patriarch for whom the book is named finds his blessings turned into heartaches as he loses his health, wealth, family, and status in a crushing series of tragedies. Seeking to know why, Job soon finds the wisdom of his four human counselors inadequate. Finally, Job questions God Himself and learns valuable lessons about the sovereignty of God and the need for complete trust in Him.

FOCUS	CONFLICT	COUNSEL	CONFIDENCE
DIVISIONS	Job's Affliction and Lament	Job's Counselors and Controversy	God's Answer and Acquittal
	1 3	4 37	38 42
TOPICS	God's Works	Men's Misunderstandings	God's Words
	Satan Questions God	Friends Question Job	God Answers Job
PLACE	Land of Uz (North Arabia)		
TIME	Unknown		

Job's Affliction and Lament

Key Passage: Job 1-2

CHAPTER 1					CHAPTER 2					CHAPTER 3	
Job's First Trial:					Job's Second Trial:					Job's Heartbreak Expressed	
1	Arranged	12	13	Endured	22	1	Arranged	6	7	Endured	13
Testing Commences										Turmoil Commences	

OVERVIEW Job, a godly and wealthy resident of Uz, watches helplessly as his life of health, blessings, and prosperity collapses around him. Unknown to him (but known to you because of chapters 1-2), Job's problems do not begin on earth, but rather in heaven. With God's permission (and within divinely imposed limitations), Satan launches a series of devastating attacks in an attempt to force Job to renounce God. In the midst of each trial, Job's faith in God shines brightly, though personal turmoil tears at Job's heart as he asks repeatedly, "Why, God?"

YOUR DAILY WALK Satan is alive and well on Planet Earth! If you doubt that, just ponder the story of Job, a man who was "of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). Job was a man of integrity, moral consistency, and submission to God. And the very attributes of godliness that made Job such a usable vessel for God's service also made him an inviting target for Satan's attacks. Paul wrote: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Job is clearly "Exhibit A."

A smooth sea never made a skillful mariner.

Three times in the New Testament, Satan is referred to as a wild animal. How many of the three can you recall before looking up the Bible passages? Why is each symbol appropriate?

1 Peter 5:8 _____

Revelation 12:9 _____

Revelation 20:2 _____

Have you appropriated the protective armor that God intends for you to use to ward off the flaming missiles of Satan? Before you go any further, take a look at God's checklist of armor in Ephesians 6:11-17. Make sure each piece is firmly in place.

INSIGHT A Name from Antiquity

The name of both the book and its hero, Job (Hebrew, *'yyôb*) appears in extra-biblical texts as early as 2000 B.C., indicating that Job is perhaps the oldest book of the Bible.

Cycle #1: Eliphaz and Job

Key Passage: Job 4, 6

CHAPTER 4	CHAPTER 5	CHAPTER 6	CHAPTER 7
"God Is Just"	"You Are Guilty"	"I Am Innocent"	"Leave Me Alone, God"
Eliphaz's Reasons		Job's Rebuttal	

OVERVIEW After a week of silently commiserating with Job and his fate, Job's three human counselors begin to analyze his situation. Eliphaz, apparently the oldest, reasons that righteous conduct brings blessing, while sin brings suffering; therefore, Job must be guilty of sin and needs to repent. Job responds by stressing that his despair is justifiable. He challenges Eliphaz to produce one shred of evidence against him. After silencing his accuser, Job directs his attention to God. He bombards God with questions about the painfulness of life and pleads with Him not to treat him like a marked man (7:20).

YOUR DAILY WALK Are the following true or false?

1. Suffering in your life is always due to personal sin or disobedience (Job 1:8). T or F
2. Suffering in your life is a sure sign that you are doing what God wants you to be doing (1 Peter 4:15-16). T or F
3. Sometimes there is no earthly reason (though there may be a heavenly one) why you are allowed to suffer physically or emotionally (Job 1:12; 2:6). T or F

Eliphaz was not the first to reason that suffering is always a telltale sign of sin in the life of the sufferer. Jesus Himself laid that untruth to rest when the disciples questioned Him about a man blind from birth: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus responded: "Neither . . . this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (v. 3). God sometimes permits suffering that He might demonstrate His perfect strength in the face of human weakness.

Are you being afflicted through loss of health, finances, or family? Check to be sure there is no earthly cause for your pain; then trust God that there may well be a heavenly reason.

*Prepare for
the worst,
expect the
best, and
gratefully
receive
whatever
God sends.*

INSIGHT Eliphaz, "Wise Man" from Teman

According to Jeremiah 49:7, Eliphaz's home town of Teman was famous for its counselors and wise men—just what Job needed!

Cycle #1: Bildad and Job

Key Passage: Job 8-9

CHAPTER 8	CHAPTER 9	CHAPTER 10
"Only the Guilty Suffer"	"Both the Guilty and Innocent Suffer"	"Stillbirth Would Have Been Better"
Bildad's Theory	Job's Theology	

OVERVIEW When Bildad speaks, he lays aside the normally courteous introductions (compare 4:1-6) to confront Job directly. His charge is the same as that of Eliphaz: "God is just; Job is guilty." Bildad seeks to bolster his argument from tradition and history. As in Job's previous rebuttal, he replies first to his human counselor (9:1-24), before directing his complaint toward God. Job recognizes the justice of God, but cannot reconcile that same justice with his unexpected affliction. This leads Job even deeper into despair as he laments his very birth.

Sign on a counselor's door: "If you have troubles, come in and tell me about them. If you don't, come in and tell me how you do it."

YOUR DAILY WALK Have you ever felt as if there was a communication gap between you and God? That God seemed too big or too remote to be genuinely concerned about your little hurts? Did you sense that you needed a go-between, an umpire, an advocate to carry your complaint personally to God and see that it was communicated accurately?

In the midst of his turmoil, Job lamented: "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both" (9:33). But you have an Umpire! "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). You have a distinct advantage over Job, for you have the Lord Jesus Christ ready to intercede for you (see Hebrews 7:25).

Open your spiritual closet and conduct a search for skeletons of hurt that you have never entrusted to God. List them in the margin, and commit each to your intercessor. Remember, it is His job to go before the Father on your behalf. Then be prepared to enjoy the day, confident in the knowledge that your seeming communication gap with God has been bridged.

INSIGHT **More Than 99.44 Percent Pure** Job knew that the purest water and the strongest soap were powerless to remove the stains of sin. Only cleansing from God could accomplish that (Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18). Have you allowed the Word of God to bring cleansing to your life today (John 15:3)?

Cycle #1: Zophar and Job

Key Passage: Job 11, 13

CHAPTER 11		CHAPTER 12	CHAPTER 13	CHAPTER 14
"God Is Great" 1	"You Are Guilty" 12, 13, 20	"God Is Great"	"You Are Groundless"	"I'm Still Grieved"
Zophar's Case		Job's Conclusions		

OVERVIEW Zophar leaves courtesy even farther behind (11:2-6) as he multiplies the accusations against Job. He reminds Job that God is both awesome and all-knowing, and therefore Job must repent. Only then will God restore him. Job begins his third defense on a note of sarcasm (12:2). He acknowledges God's awesome character but still proclaims his own innocence. Again, Job turns his comments from his earthly counselors to his Heavenly Father as he bemoans man's fragile condition. But in the midst of Job's despair, there shines a glimmer of hope as he contemplates life beyond the grave.

YOUR DAILY WALK Criticism hurts, but slander pierces. Job's "friends" turned out to do little more than "smear [him] with lies" (13:4; literally, "falsehood plasterers"). The Bible has many references to accusers plastering untruths or half-truths on blameless believers. For example, the psalmist cried out: "The arrogant have smeared me with lies" (Psalm 119:69). But even in the face of such undeserved treatment, the psalmist restrained himself, saying: "I keep your precepts with all my heart." Even slanderous attacks do not justify hurtful retaliation. For the believer, God has a better way.

God wants you to react scripturally to your accuser in a sanctified way. In the words of the apostle Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Is there someone who has hurt you deeply with words? You can attempt to get even by retaliating, or you can respond in love. Map out a strategy today to turn one of your false accusers into a friend through the irresistible love of God.

INSIGHT *Malpractice . . . or Something Worse!*

Job uses imagery similar to the revoking of a physician's license because of malpractice (13:4). By contrast, the ancient law Code of Hammurabi provided that if a doctor operated on someone's eye unsuccessfully, the doctor's eye was to be blinded as well.

Repay evil with good, and you deprive the evildoer of all the pleasure of his wickedness.

Cycle #2: Eliphaz and Job

Key Passage: Job 15-16

CHAPTER 15	CHAPTER 16	CHAPTER 17
"Job Is Hypocritical"	"God Is Harsh"	"All Is Hopeless"
Eliphaz's Charge	Job's Candor	

OVERVIEW The second cycle of debates begins with Eliphaz driving straight to the point of his accusation: "Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you vent your rage against God and pour out such words from your mouth?" (15:12-13). Eliphaz graphically describes the anguish and ultimate end of the wicked, hoping that Job will make an application to his own situation. Job immediately reacts by proclaiming Eliphaz and his companions "miserable comforters" (16:2). After declaring that God alone has crushed him, he sinks deeper into despair until at last he hits bottom, seemingly hopeless and alone. And then he discovers that God has been there all along.

YOUR DAILY WALK Job's argument in 16:7-17 could be summarized this way: "If God is against us, who can be for us?" He would, however, ultimately come to know the truth: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). The answer to both questions is nobody! But is God for us or against us? How can we be sure in the face of discouraging circumstances?

The true measure of God's love is that He loves without measure.

On slips of paper, write the difficulties you are facing now that might make you conclude God is not on your side: prolonged illness, overdue bills, loss of a job or a loved one, etc. Turn to Romans 8:35-39 to see how many of your problems can actually separate you from His love. Death, distress, and famine can't. Nothing can!

Now take a match and burn those slips of paper one by one. As you do, thank God that His love is stronger than any care you have written down or any problem you will encounter today.

INSIGHT *Silence Is Golden*

Do you know the difference between minor and major surgery? It's minor when somebody else has it. It's major when you have it—right? Just so, it is easy for Job's friends to talk when it's Job who bears the pain. Their silent sympathy (2:13) helped more than their well-meaning words. Often the best thing we can do is just sit in silence and share the hurt that is in our friend's heart.

Cycle #2: Bildad and Job

Key Passage: Job 18:1–19:6

CHAPTER 18				CHAPTER 19			
"You Are Wrong"		"The Wicked Are Trapped"		"You Are Worthless"		"My Redeemer Lives"	
1	2	3	21	1	20	21	29
Bildad's Cruelty				Job's Confidence			

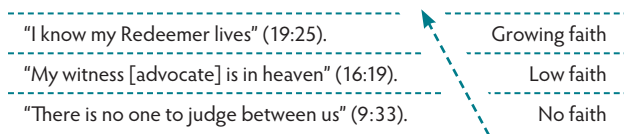
OVERVIEW In his second attempt at counseling Job, Bildad paints the darkest picture yet of the fate of the wicked: His light will be extinguished; his schemes will trip him up; his strength will be depleted; and his every step will be accompanied by darkness, weakness, and terror. Estranged from his family and friends, Job turns once again to his Heavenly Father for consolation. Rebounding from the depths of depression and desperation, Job's faith is rekindled in a majestic stanza of faith and trust: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and . . . in my flesh I will see God" (19:25-26).

YOUR DAILY WALK Be careful what or who you lean on in time of need. If your source of strength proves inadequate, you will be left broken and disillusioned.

Job counted on his friends and family to understand his plight. After all, if you can't turn to your loved ones in time of need, where can you turn? Notice the outcome of Job's misplaced trust: "He has alienated my brothers from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien" (19:13-15). Mired in disillusionment and despair, Job lifts his eyes heavenward. From the valley of dark depression, he soars to the mountain peak of God's consoling presence.

If you are all wrinkled up with care and worry, it's time to get a faith lift.

INSIGHT *Climbing the Summit of Faith with Job*
 Notice Job's growing faith in a heavenly solution to his earthly woes.



Cycle #2: Zophar and Job

Key Passage: Job 20:1-11; 21:22-34

CHAPTER 20		CHAPTER 21		
"Your Argument Upsets Me" 1	"My Argument Should Upset You" 3; 4 29; 1	"Open Your Ears" 6; 7	"Open Your Eyes" 26; 27	"Open Your Heart" 34
Zophar's Repetition		Job's Retaliation		

OVERVIEW Zophar, not noted for his originality, continues on the same theme as his two companions: the retribution of the wicked. He sidesteps Job's hope-filled defense to declare that the satisfaction of the wicked will be short-lived and his doom certain—generalizations that Zophar expects Job to apply personally! Job's rebuttal employs many of the same terms, questions, and arguments his accusers have used. There are exceptions to the theory that only the righteous prosper and only the wicked suffer. God showers His blessings on the wicked as well as the righteous—a fact which undermines Zophar's argument but brings no comfort to Job.

YOUR DAILY WALK Optimism is akin to faith; pessimism is akin to doubt. To which are you akin?

The story is told of a man who went into a restaurant with no money, figuring on paying for his meal with the pearl he hoped to find in the oyster he planned to order. That's an optimist! Then there was the man who refused to get married because he was sure he could never find a girl who deserved to be as happy as he would make her. That's a pessimist!

Somewhere in between is the biblicist, the person who, without denying the harsh realities of his present situation, can still focus on all the promises and provisions of God and live above his circumstances. Zophar had only pious cliches to offer Job. As a result, his counsel brought anguish instead of comfort.

How can you truly comfort a friend or family member who is hurting emotionally, physically, or spiritually today? Plan carefully what you will say—and won't say. Then pay that person a comforting visit.

INSIGHT *Words with a Hollow (but Familiar) Ring*

In his rebuttal, Job skillfully employs the words of his opponents. For example, in the space of a single verse (21:28), Job paraphrases (and parodies) the words of all three counselors: Bildad (8:22), Eliphaz (15:34), and Zophar (20:26).

*A pessimist
is a person
who is
seasick
during
the entire
voyage
of life.*

Cycle #3: Eliphaz and Job

Key Passage: Job 22-23

CHAPTER 22	CHAPTER 23	CHAPTER 24
"You Are the Wicked Man"	"Where Is My Judge?"	"Where Is Justice?"
Eliphaz's Indictment	Job's Iniquity	

OVERVIEW Still refusing to admit the possibility of an innocent man having to suffer, Eliphaz begins round three of the dialogue. However, this round does not go full cycle. Bildad's contribution is very brief (ch. 25), and Zophar does not speak at all. The arguments are now painfully pointed. Eliphaz confronts Job with the question, "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?" (22:5). In the face of Eliphaz's direct accusations, Job does not retaliate.

YOUR DAILY WALK Hide-and-seek is an entertaining children's game, where the object is to find someone who is trying to evade you.

Hide-and-seek in the spiritual realm is neither entertaining nor enjoyable. In fact, it can be scary and frustrating. The question, "Where are You, God?" is as old as the days of Job.

Job 23:8-12 contains a striking mixture of doubt and trust. Job had kept God's ways, obeyed God's commands, and even "treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread" (23:12). And yet, wherever Job turned in the midst of his crisis—"east . . . west . . . north . . . south" (23:8-9)—God seemingly could not be found.

Although Job could not put the pieces of the puzzle together, he realized that God could. And that was the key, for God wanted his unquestioning confidence. Trust, not knowledge, was the issue.

A jigsaw puzzle makes a great family-fun project after dinner. If you don't have one around the house already, buy one on the way home from work. And as you struggle together to make the pieces fit, share with your family a lesson from Job's life about what to do when the pieces of life don't seem to fit.

One grain of faith is more precious than a pound of knowledge.

INSIGHT Do You Get the Point Yet, Job?

In each cycle of debates, the accusing tone of Job's counselors becomes more persistent and pointed. In cycle #1, they speak about the wicked and good; in cycle #2, the wicked; and now in cycle #3, the object of their accusations is clearly Job himself.

Cycle #3: Bildad and Job

Key Passage: Job 25, 28

CHAPTER 25	CHAPTER 26	CHAPTER 27	CHAPTER 28
"God Is Great"	"God Is Sovereign"	"God Is Just"	"God Is Wise"
Bildad's Summary		Job's Summary	

OVERVIEW Bildad does not argue with Job, but he does offer two generalizations: God is great and man is a worm—conclusions that Job finds utterly comfortless. Job's rebuttal is in the form of a discourse on God's sovereignty, in which he reemphasizes his innocence and reaffirms his confidence that God's scales of justice will ultimately balance. Job then ponders the magnitude of God's wisdom, concluding: "The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (28:28)—though that understanding still eludes him.

A person becomes wise by learning from what happens to him when he isn't.

YOUR DAILY WALK Do you understand the importance of understanding? Look up the following verses to see what each has to say about the importance of understanding in the life of a believer:

- Proverbs 3:5 Don't lean on your own understanding.
- Proverbs 4:7 Whatever else you get, get understanding!
- Proverbs 9:10 _____
- Proverbs 16:16 _____
- Job 28:28 _____
- Psalm 111:10 _____

The Hebrew word for *understanding* in Job 28:28 signifies moral discernment. It involves taking an objective look at your circumstances, having a proper perspective of God's will in the matter, and finally proceeding down the correct path of action.

To understand God's will, therefore, means more than simply knowing what to do; it means doing what you know. It means being doers of the word and not hearers only (see James 1:22). Where in your walk with God do you know more than you are doing? How can you show God you truly understand His will?

INSIGHT Counselors Out of Counsel

As each cycle of debate progresses, Job's accusers find they have less and less to say. Notice the number of verses spoken by each accuser as he moves through the three cycles: Eliphaz (48, 35, 30); Bildad (22, 21, 6); Zophar (20, 29, 0).

Cycle #3: Zophar and Job

Key Passage: Job 29:1-7; 30:1-8; 31:5-15

CHAPTER 29	CHAPTER 30	CHAPTER 31
"I Remember the Good Old Days"	"I Resent the Bad New Days"	"I Remain Completely Innocent"
Job's Past Glory	Job's Present Groaning	Job's Personal Piety

OVERVIEW Zophar, realizing the debate has reached a stalemate, maintains his silence rather than giving a third rebuttal. But while Job's advisors have at last grown silent, the problem of his suffering lingers on, prompting Job to think back to the good old days. In the past God had blessed him with protection, prosperity, and the respect of his neighbors. But now all that has changed. Poverty has replaced prosperity; respect has given way to ridicule; disease has destroyed his health and vitality. Looking inward, Job concludes his punishment is unjustified. Looking upward, he can only plead: "Let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless" (31:6).

YOUR DAILY WALK A piece of bread gets stale when left in the wrong environment too long. A room becomes stale when fresh air fails to circulate through it. Even a Christian life can become stale without fresh exposure to God's Word each day. If you don't believe it, just ask Job. His concluding statement in 31:40 is short but significant: "The words of Job are ended." There was nothing more to say. His friends had run out of arguments; Job had run out of explanations; in a word, the situation had grown stale—until God spoke.

Do you sense that your walk with God has been growing stale or stagnant? Then try what Job tried. Be still for a time and let God do the talking. Find a place free from distractions (phone, children, computer), and spend an uninterrupted 15 minutes reflecting on God's Word and listening for His voice. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

God still speaks to those who take the time to listen.

INSIGHT Past Blessings, Present Woes

In chapters 29-30, Job contrasts his lot in life ("months gone by," 29:2) with his present state of despair ("But now," 30:1). Can you discover at least three of the contrasts Job mentions?

"Months gone by . . ."

"But now . . ."

Cycle #3: Elihu and Job (Part 1)

Key Passage: Job 32:1-9; 33:8-22; 34:10-15

CHAPTER 32	CHAPTER 33	CHAPTER 34
Elihu's Alternative Answer	God's Purpose in Pain	God's Justice with Humanity
Introduction	Instruction	Impartiality

OVERVIEW Throughout the lengthy debates, three men have dialogued with Job. But standing in courteous silence is a fourth man, younger than the rest. At last, angry with Job for his self-proclaimed innocence and indignant with Job's three friends for their deficient answers, Elihu can remain silent no longer. In four lengthy monologues he declares his evaluation of Job's situation. The problem, as Elihu diagnoses it, is pride. Although Job has not brought on his trials by sinning, he does sin in the midst of his trials by proudly demanding an answer from God. Elihu reminds Job that a gracious God sometimes has to use affliction in order to gain our attention and save us from even more serious consequences.

YOUR DAILY WALK Pride is a curious, competitive thing. You are not proud because you are rich; you are proud because you are richer. You are not proud because you are good-looking; you are proud because you are better-looking.

In Job's case, he was not proud because he was righteous; he was proud because he was more righteous than other sufferers, and therefore felt he had the right to demand an explanation from God.

C. S. Lewis was right: "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you"—even if that "something" is God! Here's a thought to copy and carry with you through the day: "Pride" always demands that "I" be in the middle, but there's no place for "I" in "humble." Take it from Job, the quickest remedy for "I" trouble is looking up into the face of the great "I Am."

INSIGHT *Who Is Elihu?*

Elihu (the name literally means "my God is He") was a Buzite living near Edom. He acted as a moderator, and his speeches thus served to prepare the way for the time when God Himself begins to speak in chapter 38.

Always keep your head up, but be careful to keep your nose at a friendly level.

RECAPPING

Ezra thru Job

After completing this month's devotional readings, whom do you think of when you read the following? (You may use each answer more than once.)

EZRA NEHEMIAH ESTHER JOB ZERUBBABEL

- _____ Did the job in 52 days
- _____ Rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem
- _____ Cousin of Mordecai
- _____ Uttered the fateful words: "If I perish, I perish."
- _____ Topic of a heavenly conversation
- _____ Was a priest by trade
- _____ Became a governor of Jerusalem
- _____ Led the first return to Jerusalem
- _____ Life story fits between two halves of the Book of Ezra
- _____ Carried unguarded temple treasures to Jerusalem

BONUS QUESTION:

Three men led the return to Jerusalem after the Exile. Which one brought back the most people with him? _____

BONUS QUESTION:
Zerubbabel (he brought back about 50,000 people; Ezra brought back about 20,000; Nehemiah returned with only a handful.)

ANSWERS:
1-Nehemiah, 2-Zerubbabel, 3-Esther, 4-Esther, 5-Job, 6-Ezra, 7-Nehemiah, 8-Zerubbabel, 9-Esther, 10-Ezra.

Cycle #3: Elihu and Job (Part 2)

Key Passage: Job 35; 37:14-24

CHAPTER 35	CHAPTER 36	CHAPTER 37
"Man Is Not Like God"	"God Is Not Like Man"	"God Is Sovereign over Man"
Elihu's Contention		Elihu's Conclusion

OVERVIEW Job has observed: "It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God" (34:9). Elihu now attempts to prove there really is profit in serving God, regardless of the price of pain. Through suffering, people can learn much about God's justice, chastening, and holiness. Truly, "the Almighty is . . . exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress" (37:23). Only in a clearer picture of God will Job find the answers to his questions.

There is nothing around the corner that is beyond God's view.

YOUR DAILY WALK A young son once approached his father to ask, "Dad, why does the wind blow?" To which the father responded, "I don't know, son."

The boy continued, "Dad, where do the clouds come from?"

"I'm not sure, son."

"Dad, what makes a rainbow?"

"No idea, son."

"Dad, do you mind me asking you all these questions?"

"Not at all, son. How else are you going to learn?"

The earthly father, unable to answer questions about nature, left his son with little hope that his father could handle the thornier questions about life. But there is a Heavenly Father, the God of creation, the One who made the thunder and rain, wind and clouds (37:5-11), who also knows the answers to life's deepest riddles. Is He your Heavenly Father? You can't buy your way in or work your way in. You must be born into the family of God. Sound impossible? Then spend a few minutes reading John 3:1-18. Nicodemus learned what it means to be "born again." You can, too!

INSIGHT *God's Works—Mighty, Yet Mysterious*

Elihu draws on images from the physical and natural world (36:26–37:24) to show the majesty and might of God's creative power. And yet, these wonders of nature that are a daily part of life are at the same time incomprehensible (36:26, 29; 37:5), for they perform God's bidding both as a curse and as a blessing (37:13). Even the forces of nature do not escape God's control.

God's Answer for Job

Key Passage: Job 38:1-18

CHAPTER 38	CHAPTER 39
"Do You Understand All About the Physical World?"	"Do You Understand All About the Animal World?"
God Interrogates Job	

OVERVIEW God now speaks "out of the storm" (38:1) and begins to direct probing questions at Job—questions designed to illustrate the greatness of God and the smallness of man. Obviously, this breaking of the heavenly silence is not exactly what Job had in mind in 31:35. He can only tremble in awe, silently answering, "No . . . No . . . No . . ." to God's divine interrogation. God invites Job to review the whole realm of creation from A to Z—astronomy to zoology. His questions do not answer Job's specific "why?" but they do begin to answer the bigger and as yet unasked question: "Who?"

YOUR DAILY WALK Have you ever experienced the thrill of meeting a dignitary or world leader—a queen, ambassador, president, or prime minister? Relatively few people have, but millions dream of such an event. Perhaps you have even rehearsed what you would say if such a meeting took place.

Job's deepest longing was for an audience with the Lord of the universe. However, when that dream came true, Job found himself powerless to voice his accusations or offer his excuses. God's awesome presence silenced him totally!

How many accusations or excuses have you offered to God recently for your actions (or inactions)? Would you feel comfortable offering those same excuses to God if you were to meet Him face to face? Or, would you, like Job, stand silently before Him? The exciting (yet sobering) truth is that someday you will stand before Him and see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). That purifying truth is designed to help you be prepared (not paralyzed) for that long-awaited meeting. How can you prepare today to meet the Lord gladly face to face?

INSIGHT *Job's Astronomy Lesson*

In 38:31-33, God demonstrates His sovereignty over constellations of stars. Look up the names mentioned in verse 31 online. Try to locate the constellations in the sky some night when conditions are good. Remember, your God brings them out and leads them all.

One thing you can learn by watching the clock is that it passes the time by keeping its hands busy.

Job's Acquittal

Key Passage: Job 40:1-14; 42

CHAPTERS 40–41		CHAPTER 42	
Job Sees God's Majesty	1	Job Sees God's Justice	6-17
God Instructs Job			
			17

OVERVIEW After Job's initial confession of God's sovereignty (40:1-5), the Lord continues His interrogation. Using illustrations drawn from the animal world, the Almighty shows Job his own frailty and finiteness until at last Job cries out in repentance: "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (42:3). Understanding God's control instead of asking God questions meets the need of Job's heart. Job's story is nearly at an end. Having learned the lesson for which God allowed the suffering, Job now watches as his trials and turmoil turn into triumph. The divine Judge not only restores Job's prestige, but also the patriarch's possessions and family.

YOUR DAILY WALK The most unsavory meat you will ever be called upon to eat is the time you will have to "eat crow," or "eat your words." If you don't believe it, ask Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar (42:7-9). Not only was their evaluation of Job's situation wrong (and as a result, their counsel was misguided), but in the end, Job offered a prayer for their healing.

*Experience
is what you
get when
you were
expecting
something
else.*

Think back over your study of the Book of Job. How many times were you tempted to agree with the diagnosis of one of Job's three friends? Would you have had to "eat crow" along with them?

Two lessons emerge from the aftermath of Job's suffering: Be quick to carry another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), but be slow to judge another's actions (Matthew 7:1). Write a short postscript capturing some of the lessons and insights you will take with you from your study. God may never call upon you to suffer as Job did, but He expects you to learn from Job's experience of suffering.

INSIGHT *Measuring a Generation*

How long is a generation in the Bible? Job 42:16 states: "After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation." Divide 140 years by four generations, and it appears that a generation during the time of Job was approximately 35 years.