

# ROAD TRIP 4



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

# RON JONES



The Ultimate  
Road Trip Through  
the Bible

**ROAD TRIP 4**  
**The Major Prophets**

***RON JONES***





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***ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE***

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# Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up the best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this first road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our redeemer.

For a book that was written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. It is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of his Son, Jesus.

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including

# Introduction

poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, even the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain how so many people over a long period of time could write about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet do so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. . . . There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Major Prophets

Our fourth road trip along the biblical Route 66 focuses on the Major Prophets and their writings: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These books are called “major” due to their

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length, compared to the shorter writings of the twelve Minor Prophets, which are equally impactful. The Old Testament prophets arose during the ministry of Samuel, who began the first school for prophets (1 Samuel 19:18-24). There were many more prophets who spoke into Israel's national life than the seventeen who contributed to the canon of Scripture.

God sent prophets with messages that called Israel, His wayward bride, to repentance. The Old Testament prophets ministered before, during, and after Israel's Babylonian exile. Of the Major Prophets, Isaiah is the only one who served God during the pre-exile period, warning the Israelites of judgment to come if they persisted in their idolatrous ways. The rest lived and delivered their stern messages during the exile, always inserting hope into the hearts of God's chosen people. Prophets called by God delivered both forthtelling and foretelling messages. The prophetic office is still active in the church today in a forthtelling manner (Ephesians 4:11).

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Will you continue traveling on Route 66? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the next ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

***DR. RON JONES***

Virginia Beach, Virginia

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# Isaiah

## GOD IS MY SALVATION

What is your greatest need in life? Every December, I am reminded of my greatest need, expressed in a Christmas card I received many years ago.

*If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator.*

*If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.*

*If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.*

*But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior!*

A Savior, who is Christ the Lord! That is what Christmas is all about. Better yet, that is *who* Christmas is all about. The annual holiday is not about jolly ol' Saint Nick and his team of reindeers delivering gifts to children around the world. The worldwide celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ is about how God chose to meet our greatest need for forgiveness, for salvation.

Theologically, the word “salvation” means “deliverance from the penalty and power of sin, redemption.” Salvation sounds like it belongs inside the stained-glass windows of the church. Can we unwrap this word in a way that everyday people understand that salvation is indeed our greatest need? We can, with help from an





# Isaiah

## **GOD IS MY SALVATION**

Old Testament prophet named Isaiah.

Our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible is the book of Isaiah, where the word “salvation” appears twenty-eight times and the theme “God is my salvation” runs deep.

### **Holy Firebrands**

Isaiah is the first of seventeen prophetic writings found in the Old Testament. Based on the size of each book, five of them are classified as Major Prophets and twelve as Minor Prophets. The granddaddy of the Major Prophets is Isaiah. What Beethoven means to music and Shakespeare means to literature, what Michelangelo is to art and Babe Ruth is to baseball, and whom Washington and Lincoln are among the presidents of the United States, Isaiah is among the holy prophets of God.

Like the other prophets in the Bible, God sent Isaiah to deliver a word of warning to His wayward people. The Lord never sent a prophet to the nation of Israel while she was walking in obedience to His divine commands. Rather, He commissioned holy firebrands like Isaiah (6:1-11) to correct God’s chosen people and call them to repentance when they had strayed like sheep into immorality and idolatry. Often, the prophet’s messages fell on deaf ears and hard hearts. Even Jesus rebuked two men on the road to Emmaus and called them foolish for being “slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:24-25).

The writer of Hebrews says, “Long ago, at many times and in

### **CHRIST CONNECTION**

Isaiah contains numerous Christological prophecies which are fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

### **BIG IDEA**

Salvation is of the Lord.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 53:6

### **AUTHOR AND DATE**

Isaiah

740-680 B.C.



# Isaiah

**GOD IS MY SALVATION**

many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets” (1:1). These ancient word-warriors spoke with divine authority, uttering, “Thus saith the Lord!” The apostle Peter describes the prophets as having been “carried along by the Holy Spirit,” like a ship driven by a tempestuous wind (2 Peter 1:21; Acts 27:15-17).

Furthermore, the Old Testament prophets were both forth-tellers and foretellers. Their divine messages applied directly to the times in which they lived, but they also gave glimpses into the future known as prophecies, something that requires divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16). Isaiah contains much Bible prophecy, including, for example, one we recite at Christmas about the birth of our Savior (9:6-7) and many others about the second advent of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The claim of predictive prophecy is the main reason skeptics attack and malign the book of Isaiah. Modern scholars who deny the Bible’s supernatural origin go to great lengths to construct a post-exilic date for Isaiah’s writing. They propose the only explanation for chapters 40-66 is an anonymous author (Deutero-Isaiah) who wrote after the Babylonian captivity. They try to make their case by pointing to differences in the writing style. The New Testament rejects such nonsense by attributing the entire book to Isaiah.<sup>3</sup> Besides, today’s published authors often use different writing styles like fiction and non-fiction.

Who was Isaiah the prophet? Fun facts about him include that he was born to wealthy parents and grew up among the aristocracy of Israel, which gave him access to kings when he ministered God’s holy word.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah served as a prophet and statesman to the Southern Kingdom for sixty years (740 to 680 B.C.), during the time when the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria and before Judah’s Babylonian exile.<sup>5</sup> Isaiah’s wife was a prophetess, and they had two children. Strangely, God told Isaiah to walk around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of shame against Egypt and



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Cush (20:1-6). Finally, a not-so-fun fact about Isaiah is that he was eventually executed for his faith. Jewish tradition says he was sawn in two inside a hollow log during the reign of an evil king named Manasseh (696-642 B.C.), something to which the writer of Hebrews alludes (11:37).

## Salvation is of the Lord

But what do Isaiah's life and ministry have to do with salvation, with our greatest need? Let's dig deeper. For starters, Isaiah's name means "Yahweh is salvation." Isaiah 12:1 captures the book's theme beautifully, "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation."

With sixty-six chapters, Isaiah is like a miniature Bible, which also contains sixty-six books. As the Bible easily falls into two parts with thirty-nine chapters in the Old Testament and twenty-seven chapters in the New Testament, the book of Isaiah lays out similarly. Chapters 40-66 are commonly called the Book of Consolation. By way of contrast, chapters 1-39 could be called the Book of Judgment. After reading the first thirty-nine chapters, which are full of judgments against the nations of the earth, you might find it strange that the salvation of the Lord is the book's overall theme. However, the stern judgments in chapters 1-39 make perfect sense because man's need for salvation always precedes God's provision of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

Judgment always begins at the household of God (1 Peter 4:17), which is why Isaiah begins with judgments against Judah, including five "woes" aimed at the Southern Kingdom (1:1-5:30). In Isaiah's time, God's people had devolved morally, invoking a series of scathing denunciations from the Lord through His prophet. For



# Isaiah

## ***GOD IS MY SALVATION***

example, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (5:20). Also, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!” (5:21).

Israel had lost the ability to discern between right and wrong. Pride had blinded the nation and its leaders! It was not easy for the prophet to deliver such stern messages. However, it was time to clean house. Isaiah, a visionary leader, first caught a vision of the exalted Lord that made him pronounce his own woe, a sixth in the flow of lamentations that begin in 5:11. After hearing the angels sing “Holy, holy, holy” around the throne of God, Isaiah saw himself clearly. “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (6:5).

The judgments accelerate in chapters 1-39. They expand to include all nations throughout history, even to the end of the age, which Isaiah views through the lens of predictive prophecy. Beyond Judah (1-6), Isaiah takes aim at the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (7-12), followed by other nations like Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, and Moab (13-23). In chapters 24-27, Isaiah foretells of a time in the future known as the Tribulation—the worst of times on planet earth—followed by the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Jerusalem becomes the focus in chapters 28-33, and then a return to the Great Tribulation, Armageddon, and the millennial blessings of Christ (34-35).

Isaiah 1-39 provides one of the broadest swaths of history and prophecy found anywhere in the Bible. Reading these chapters might make us feel sad, weary, and desperate. However, chapters 40-66 follow with consolation and hope as Isaiah unpacks God’s promises and future blessings through His Messiah.



### The Gospel According to Isaiah

Isaiah 40 begins a Hebrew poem that stretches at least through chapter 55, and some say to the end of the enormous book. It might be the greatest and most eloquent poem ever written. Jewish rabbis refer to this section of Isaiah as the Book of Consolation, in part because of the way it begins: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (40:1). Through a prophetic lens, Isaiah anticipated that God’s people would grow weary after seventy years of captivity in Babylon and would need the Lord’s consolation.

The word “salvation” appears twenty-one times in these twenty-seven chapters, providing hope and solace for hurting souls after thirty-nine chapters of judgment. As pure literature, Isaiah’s soaring eloquence pleases the ear when read aloud. But God’s word does more than tickle our ears. Holy Scripture also comforts our heart and draw us closer to our Creator.

Chapters 40 and 53 contain the most familiar sections of the biblical composition. The movie *Chariots of Fire* drew attention to Isaiah 40 when Olympic runner Eric Liddell read these beautiful words during a church service, “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (40:31). These verses inspired Liddell to run for the glory of God and fly like an eagle.

Most students of the Bible also recognize the lofty rhetoric of Isaiah 53, which sits like a jewel at the perfect midpoint of the literary structure between chapters forty and sixty-six. This famous chapter inside the grand poem contains the powerful Messianic prediction of the Suffering Servant who is to come. Isaiah 53 also explains the mystery hinted at in chapter forty relating to the restoration of God’s exiled people.



# Isaiah

## **GOD IS MY SALVATION**

Although orthodox Jews still believe Isaiah 53 has nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth, the gospel according to Isaiah is clear. The New Testament quotes or alludes to Isaiah 53 nearly forty times.<sup>7</sup> Of course, Christians believe that Jesus fulfilled this monumental prophecy. He was indeed the Suffering Servant Isaiah wrote about centuries before Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Mitch Glaser, president of Chosen People Ministries, agrees and writes, “Isaiah 53 is one of the clearest prophecies of Jesus the Messiah in the Hebrews Scriptures. This chapter has changed the lives of thousands of people—both Jews and Gentiles—who have read the text and believed in the One who fulfilled these prophecies in glorious detail.”<sup>8</sup>

Let’s return to the question I posed at the beginning. What is your greatest need in life? How you answer that question will determine what you spend your life chasing after. If your greatest need is education, you will spend your life running after knowledge. If your greatest need is for technology, you will become a slave to the latest gadget. If your greatest need is for money, you will wear yourself out trying to get rich, and the next dollar you earn will never be enough. If your greatest need is for someone to love you and make you feel secure, you are getting closer. But no human relationship can fully satisfy that ache in your heart.

However, if your greatest need is for forgiveness, Isaiah will open to you like a springtime flower. Better yet, you will understand why the writer of Hebrews warned about neglecting “such a great a salvation” (2:3). Furthermore, you will spend the rest of your life chasing after Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, who loves you so much that He purchased your salvation by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin and free you from its power.



# Isaiah

***GOD IS MY SALVATION***

<b>OUTLINE</b>	1-39	40-66
<b>FOCUS</b>	The Book of Judgment Man's need for salvation	The Book of Consolation God's provision of salvation
<b>KEY VERSE</b>	9:6-7	53:6



# Jeremiah

## A New Covenant

God loves to start new things. I know that because when I search the Scriptures for the word *new*, I am amazed by how many times God is doing something new. Here are a few examples from one of the Major Prophets named Isaiah.

*But they who wait for the Lord will renew their strength. Isaiah 40:31*

*“Behold, I make of you a threshing sledge, new, sharp, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff.” Isaiah 41:15*

*“Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.” Isaiah 42:9*

*“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” Isaiah 43:18-19*

There was also something new and refreshing about Jesus’s ministry. Some embraced the newness while others did not. The Savior spoke about pouring “new wine into new wineskins” (Mark 2:22), gave His disciples a new command to “love one another”





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(John 13:34), and offered them a “new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20).

Do you need a fresh start in your life, marriage, or relationship with your kids? Do you need a second chance? The Bible says a follower of Jesus Christ is a “new creation” where “the old has gone and the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Even the writer of Hebrews speaks of a “new and living way” found in Jesus (Hebrews 10:20).

The prophet Jeremiah also mentioned something new the Lord was doing. He writes, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (31:31). Why was the Lord making a new covenant with His chosen people? That will take some time to explain from the book of Jeremiah, which is our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. The equally important question is, “Are you ready for God to do something new in your life?”

### Who is Jeremiah?

Jeremiah grew up in a small village northeast of Jerusalem called Anathoth. His father, Hilkiah, was a priest. Some believe he was the same Hilkiah, the High Priest, who discovered the book of God’s law during Josiah’s reign and supported the king’s reforms (2 Kings 22). If so, this is a powerful example of a father’s influence on the life of his son. This might also explain why Jeremiah rebuked the people

### CHRIST CONNECTION

From the house of David, Jesus is the “righteous branch” the Lord raised up to reign as king and execute justice and righteousness (23:5-6).

### BIG IDEA

God wants to do a new thing in your life.

### MEMORY VERSE

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

JEREMIAH 31:31

### AUTHOR and DATE

Isaiah  
627-585 B.C.



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for breaking God's covenant (11:1-23) and then grew disappointed when the reforms did not continue in subsequent generations. Certainly, Jeremiah received religious training from an early age.

Jeremiah served the Lord and the Southern Kingdom before and during the Babylonian captivity. His ministry stretched over four decades (627-585 B.C.) and happened during the reigns of Judah's last five kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Second Kings 22-25 provides the historical setting of Jeremiah's ministry, leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. Baxter says, "Jeremiah was the prophet of Judah's midnight hour."<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Isaiah, who began his prophetic ministry later in life, Jeremiah received the call of God as a youth and started his ministry around the age of twenty-one.<sup>10</sup> Chapter 1 begins with a strong pro-life message as the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (1:5). Jeremiah immediately resisted the Lord's call by saying he was "only a youth" (1:6). In Oriental culture, a young man's ministry would not start until he reached a certain age. Before then, he would not be taken seriously. However, the Lord's call upon Jeremiah's life preempted the cultural norm. God also reassured the reluctant young man by promising His presence and touching Jeremiah's mouth with divine words (1:7-10).

Jeremiah's temperament is worth noting. He is known as the "weeping prophet" for the many tears he shed over the spiritual demise of God's people. The messages of impending judgment God told him to deliver broke his heart. He writes, "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (9:1). Also, "But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the



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Lord's flock has been taken captive" (13:17). Jeremiah even wrote an entire book full of his tearful lamentations. In Lamentations 1:16, he says, "For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears, for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed."

Baxter describes Jeremiah as a man of "feminine tenderness with masculine strength."<sup>11</sup> In that way, perhaps he is more like Jesus than any other prophet. The cross required of Jesus both physical and emotional strength; however, Jesus also wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) and shed tears when His friend Lazarus died (John 11:35). Likewise, though tearful, tender, and sensitive by nature, Jeremiah also endured much opposition, physical beatings, and imprisonment. Thus, Jesus and Jeremiah are examples of real men and prophets who cry. But where are the tears flowing from today's pastors and spiritual leaders?

Jeremiah was a creative communicator. He used many physical objects to deliver the spiritual lessons the Lord laid on his heart, starting with an almond branch that pictured God watching over his word to perform it (1:11-12) and then "a boiling pot, facing away from the north," that portrayed a northern disaster the Almighty would let loose on humanity (1:13-14). On one occasion, the Lord told Jeremiah to purchase a linen loincloth and wear it but never wash it. Later God told the prophet to take the soiled loincloth and hide it in a cleft of the rock near the Euphrates River. After more time passed, the Lord told Jeremiah to retrieve the loincloth, which was now spoiled and "good for nothing" (13:1-7). Then the Lord explained the object lesson.

*Then the word of the Lord came to me: "Thus says the Lord: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart*



# Jeremiah

## A NEW COVENANT

*and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen. 13:8-11*

A visit to the potter's house provided Jeremiah with another powerful picture of what the Lord was doing with his beloved people. The prophet saw the potter working at his wheel. The clay vessel in the potter's hand spoiled, "and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do." Then, the Lord explained to Jeremiah, "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel" (18:1-11). After a visit to the potter's house, Jeremiah would never forget (nor should we) that God is the Potter and we are His clay, whom He created in His image from the dust of the earth (Genesis 1-2).

### From Captivity to a New Covenant

After twenty-three years of ministry, Jeremiah lowered the boom on the people with a stunning prophecy about seventy forthcoming years of captivity under the ruthless rule of the Babylonians (25:1-38). Jeremiah's message was never popular, but this one really put him in the doghouse. After telling the people how the Lord "will make this house like Shiloh" and "will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth," Jeremiah barely escaped with his life (26:1-24). However, he took up another object lesson, fearlessly wearing a yoke on his neck as a way of saying that God's people must live under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (27:1-22).

Then, the book turns from gloom and despair for disobedient Israel to her glorious future and hope, something that only the Lord



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could bring about. The pivot begins in 29:10-14, where the Lord says this through a letter Jeremiah wrote to the exiles.

*When seventy years are complete for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

The book pivots fully in the chapters that follow (30-33), with an equally stunning reversal of all the judgments found in 1-29. The Lord restores Israel and Judah. He turns their mourning into joy. He promises to do something new, to make a new covenant with His people.

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*  
31:31-34



# Jeremiah

## A NEW COVENANT

What is the New Covenant? It is the promise God made first to Israel and ultimately to all humanity to forgive sin and restore fellowship with those who turn their hearts to Him by faith. Jeremiah is not the only one who spoke of the new covenant while the old covenant was still in place; both Moses and Ezekiel also referred to it (Deuteronomy 29:4; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Furthermore, Jesus Christ is the “righteous branch” God raised up to serve as the mediator of the New Covenant (33:14-16). His blood sacrifice on the cross is the basis of the promise, as Jesus made clear during the Last Supper with His disciples: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20).

Why did God make a New Covenant with His people? Did the Old Covenant fail? On the contrary, the Old Covenant served its purpose and was replaced by “a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22, 8:6). The Old Covenant required strict obedience to the Mosaic Law and continual blood sacrifices to atone for sin. Moses predicted that the Israelites would fail to keep God’s law. Then, God would restore them by giving them a new heart (Deuteronomy 29:22-26, 30:1-6). The Old Covenant was unable to produce a new heart and new spirit. But the New Covenant came with the provision of the Holy Spirit to do what the Law could not by moving us to obey God (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Through the New Covenant, God also promised Israel fruitfulness, blessings, and peaceful living in the Promised Land. This will be fulfilled on earth during the Millennial Kingdom and in heaven throughout eternity.

Under the New Covenant, salvation is a gift that we receive by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), and we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In other words, all things new start at the cross of Jesus Christ.

While living under Babylonian captivity for seventy years,



# Jeremiah

## *A NEW COVENANT*

the Israelites had every reason to lose hope until God sent them a prophet named Jeremiah with a message full of hope about a New Covenant. Are you ready for God to do something new in your life? Start today by placing your faith in the righteous branch called Jesus, who is the Christ.

<b>OUTLINE</b>	1	2-45	46-51	52
<b>FOCUS</b>	Jeremiah's Commissioning	Judgments of Judah	Judgments of Nations	Fall of Jerusalem
<b>KEY VERSE</b>	1:5	31:31	46:1	52:1



# Lamentations

## *GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS*

Neil Postman wrote a book titled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In part, it was a critique of the entertainment culture. Because we are so committed to amusing ourselves, grief or lament is not something we easily embrace. Grief is difficult to process as a response to loss, especially the loss of a loved one or close friend through death, which is the most common life event that triggers grief. However, people can also grieve the loss of employment, health, a relationship, and a dream. There is nothing amusing about any of that.

Most often, we think of grief as an emotional response. But experts tell us that grief can also yield a physical, psychological, behavioral, social, and spiritual response. Because grieving is a process, it has a way of sneaking up on us when we least expect it. In her best-selling book *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified the five stages of grief as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The most common expression of grief is a melancholy mood full of sadness and tears.

The prophet Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, grieved the spiritual decline of God's people that led to the destruction of Jerusalem by the ruthless Babylonians. The siege upon the holy





# Lamentations

**GREAT IS THY  
FAITHFULNESS**

city did not happen overnight. It came after many warnings from the Lord through His prophet over decades. Sadly, God's people did not heed the warnings. Instead, they stiffened their necks, hardened their hearts, and deafened their ears to the word of God. In 586 B.C., the Lord finally sent Judah into captivity for seventy years.

The painful devastation was almost unbearable for Jeremiah, who carried a burden from the Lord and a message for His people for forty years. As one of the Major Prophets, Jeremiah expressed his grief in a series of brief poetic laments. You might want to grab a box of tissues because our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible is the book of Lamentations.

## Expressions of Grief

A lament is an expression of grief, sorrow, or regret. Thus, Lamentations is a collection of pensive poems. However, the book is full of more than mere melancholy. Jeremiah's goal is not that we would remain in a perpetual state of sadness. We know this because the literary structure of the book points us to a much grander theme, the faithfulness of God. Allow me to explain.

Lamentations contains five poetic chapters, of which the first and fifth correspond to each other, as do the second and fourth. According to Dr. Charles Ryrie, "These four chapters are also written in what is called a 'limping meter,' a cadence used in funeral dirges." These four

### **CHRIST CONNECTION**

Like Jesus, Jeremiah's heart broke over the plight of the holy city, Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-38).

### **BIG IDEA**

Great is God's faithfulness.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.  
LAMENTATIONS  
3:22-23

### **AUTHOR and DATE**

Isaiah  
586-585 B.C.



# Lamentations

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poems are like twin peaks on either side of chapter 3, the largest of Jeremiah's Hebrew elegies.

Furthermore, chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses, while the other chapters each have twenty-two verses, where each verse starts with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet and forms an acrostic.<sup>13</sup> In chapter 3, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet begins a triplet of verses. I am aware that only grammar nerds love this. However, the Author clearly wanted our attention riveted on the grandness of God's faithfulness, expressed around the midpoint of the entire book, which reads, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (3:22-23). The promise of God's faithfulness gives the grieving prophet hope. More on this later.

Let's explore each poem as it flows from Jeremiah's heart. The focus of the first lament is the destruction of Jerusalem following the Babylonian siege (1:1-22). "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave" (1:1). Jeremiah speaks in verses 1-11, and then he gives poetic voice to the broken city by personifying Jerusalem (1:12-22). "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger" (1:12).

Jehovah's righteous anger emerges in the second poem (2:1-22). "How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud! He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger" (2:1). Using the Babylonians as His disciplinary rod, the Lord laid waste the city walls, spurned both king and priest, and tore down the temple. In response, Jeremiah cries out, "My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out to the ground



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because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city” (2:11).

Jehovah’s righteous anger continues in chapter 4 because kings, prophets, and priests did not trust in God. “The Lord gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger, and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations” (4:11). A glimmer of hope appears in 4:22, “he will keep you in exile no longer,” followed by a quick reminder that God will punish the sin of Edom.

Chapter 5 is a melancholy prayer that revisits the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah begs the Lord to remember their plight and see their disgrace. “The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning,” he cries (5:15). But at the end, the prophet turns his heart toward hope. “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us” (5:21-22).

## The Steadfast Love of God

These laments cascade from Jeremiah’s heart like water over a steep cliff, reminding us of the “goodness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22). God is good, but He can also be stern in manner and appearance. To say that God is love and He would never punish unbelievers or discipline His children does not represent the full revelation of God in Scripture. Furthermore, to say the God of the Old Testament is harsh, cruel, and inconsistent with the love and kindness of Jesus is either disingenuous or grossly misinformed.

Lamentations contains gloomy elegies, but Jeremiah arranges them in a way that focuses our attention on God’s unfailing, steadfast love. In that way, Lamentations does not leave us hopeless. On the contrary, upon recalling God’s great faithfulness, Jeremiah says,



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“Therefore I have hope” (3:21).

In 1923, Lamentations 3:21-23 inspired Thomas Obediah Chisholm, a young Methodist minister of ill health, to write a poem that later became the lyrics to one of the most beloved hymns of the Christian faith called “Great is Thy Faithfulness.” Much later, this hymn connected a young evangelist named Billy Graham with a soloist named George Beverly Shea, who was invited to sing “Great is Thy Faithfulness” on the Moody Radio Network.

After hearing Shea on the radio, Graham, a student at Wheaton College, invited the unknown singer at the time to join his evangelistic ministry. “Great is Thy Faithfulness” became internationally popular after George Beverly Shea sang it during the Billy Graham Crusades. The lyrical power of the hymn combined with Shea’s beautiful baritone voice blessed many souls. The fact that God’s mercies are “new every morning,” inspired Chisholm to write,

*Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

What is God’s faithfulness? In both the Old and New Testaments, the words translated “faith” and “faithfulness” are logically and linguistically linked. The Greek word *pistos* means “to be trusted, reliable.” The closest English translations of the Hebrew terms are “strengthen,” “support,” or “hold up.” All of that considered, God is an eternally firm support for His people. God’s faithfulness is His guarantee that He remains true to Himself and His word.

Amid his grief over Jerusalem and the plight of God’s people, Jeremiah held onto God’s unfailing faithfulness. Good theology will do that. Think consistently right thoughts about God, and you will never lose hope.



## The Man of Sorrows

Like Jeremiah, God also grieves over this broken world. The connection between Christ and Jeremiah's laments is obvious to the well-informed Bible student. Let's start in Isaiah, where the prophet predicted that the Messiah would be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7).

Famously, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He grieved the rejection of His people and cried out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37; Luke 19:41-44). Jesus also wept at Lazarus's tomb, even though He knew His friend would rise from the dead (John 11:35).

To a large crowd on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus taught, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). This beatitude is more than encouragement to those who generally grieve some loss. Specifically, Jesus is referring to mourning over one's sin while on the road to salvation. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, the apostle Paul also speaks of a godly grief that produces a repentance that leads to salvation.

Furthermore, King David, a type of Christ, wrote many psalms in a minor key. Because of the many laments in the book of Psalms, somebody once suggested that churches should assemble lament teams to lead in worship alongside praise teams. Something makes me think we will stick with praise teams.

Upon his departure from a lengthy ministry at Ephesus, Paul addressed the elders by saying that he served "with all humility and tears" and "for three years I did not cease night or day to



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warn everyone with tears (Acts 20:19, 31). The great apostle also ministered to the Corinthians “out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2 Corinthians 2:4).

Consider this fun fact. Did you know that God keeps our tears in a bottle? Psalm 56:8 says, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” Imagine in heaven a large warehouse of bottles full of tears shed all over the world and since the beginning of time. Some of your tears are in those bottles.

You can tell a lot about a person by what makes him cry. What causes your tears? Do you weep because you lost something that gives you pleasure? Do you weep because someone wounded your selfish pride, or you got caught doing something you should not have been doing? Do you weep because crime, injustice, and war fill our world? Or do you weep because your sin creates a chasm between you and your Creator? Do tears flow down your cheeks when your heart stubbornly rebels against God. Remember this: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

Ask God to give you a heart like Jeremiah’s that is sensitive to sin. Learn to weep over the things that break God’s heart. Embrace sorrow when it leads you to repentance. Then, remember the Lord’s great faithfulness through every season of your life.

<b>OUTLINE</b>	1-41	42-72	73-89	90-106	107-150
<b>FOCUS</b>	Jerusalem has fallen	God's anger	God's faithfulness	God's anger	Prayer for Jerusalem
<b>KEY VERSE</b>	1:16	2:5-6	3:22-23	4:11	5:21-22



# Ezekiel

## THE GLORY OF GOD

The glory of God is literally a heavy subject. In the Hebrew language, the word translated “glory” means weighty. A slogan from the 1960s comes close to the idea. Have you ever heard somebody say, “That’s heavy, man!”?

God’s majestic and manifest presence on display best defines the glory of God, which is the sum of his divine nature, attributes, and creative works. Football players lay claim to gridiron glory when inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. However, God’s glory is that which makes Him the exclusive member of His own hall of fame. In other words, there is no god like Him. He has no rival. To lump Him into a category with other so-called gods is an insult.

Therefore, Jesus is called the “one and only Son” (John 3:16). All glory belongs to Him. The apostle John says, “We beheld his glory” (John 1:14). Peter writes, “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

God’s glory is a central theme found in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. The phrase “the glory of God” appears twelve times in the first eleven chapters and then disappears; it reappears in chapter 43 when God’s glory fills a future temple envisioned by Ezekiel during



# Ezekiel

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the millennial reign of Jesus Christ after His Second Coming (40-48).

Ezekiel begins with a powerful vision of God's glory, as seen by the prophet near his house by the Chebar canal in Babylonia. The detailed description in 1:4-28 is worth reading. However, it might sound like an alien invasion. Four living creatures, each with four faces (human, lion, ox, eagle) and four wings, emerge from a great cloud, stormy wind, and flashes of fire. The creatures, each with a special wheel that connects them to the earth, move as a single unit in any direction without turning. Ezekiel says, "The spirit of the living creatures was inside the wheels" (1:21).

This is not a script, however, for a movie about UFOs and Area 51. Instead, this is the word of God putting the glory of God on display in a strange but meaningful manner. Ezekiel also saw a sapphire throne appearing above the heads of the four living creatures and said, "And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. ... Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around" (1:26-28).

This sounds more like the apostle John's vision in the Revelation of Jesus Christ than a Sci-fi thriller. While imprisoned on the island of Patmos, John writes, "At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald" (Revelation

### CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus Christ is the tender twig that grows into a strong cedar (17:22-24) and the caring Shepherd (34).

### BIG IDEA

God will be glorified when His people repent and return to Him.

### MEMORY VERSE

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

EZEKIEL 37:14

### AUTHOR AND DATE

Isaiah  
592-570 B.C.





# Ezekiel

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4:2-3).

A few chapters later, Ezekiel saw the glory of God depart from the Temple. “Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them” (10:18-19a).

When Elvis Presley, the king of rock-n-roll, finished a concert and left the stage, moments later a voice came over the loudspeaker saying, “Elvis has left the building!” In Ezekiel, God’s glory had left the Temple! This dramatic scene demonstrated that God did not limit Himself to one place, which the old covenant community believed during the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It was a sad day when the glory of God departed from the place where He met with His people.

### The Word of the Lord

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet who ministered during the Babylonian exile, Judah’s darkest hour in history. He was among thousands of hostages taken to Babylonia when King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem a second time in 597 B.C. Ezekiel’s ministry overlapped the end of Jeremiah’s ministry and the beginning of Daniel’s.

The phrase “the word of the Lord came to me” appears forty-nine times in the book, slightly more than once per chapter. Prophets like Ezekiel did not speak from their own authority but from God’s. The exiles in Judah heard Ezekiel’s strong prophetic voice for twenty years.<sup>15</sup>

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a creative and artistic communicator. He delivered the word of the Lord to Judah through a series of prophecies, parables, signs, and visions. His messages contained the sharp barbs of judgment to Judah (4-24) and to the Gentile nations (25-32), followed by prophecies pertaining to God’s promises to Israel,



# Ezekiel

## THE GLORY OF GOD

their future hope, and millennial blessings (33-48). Chapters 38-39 record a prophecy about a future attack on Israel led by Gog and Magog.<sup>16</sup> Because Israel is at peace when this war breaks out against her, it probably happens soon after the Antichrist brokers peace in the Middle East during the first half of the seven-year Tribulation, also known as Daniel's Seventieth Week (Daniel 9:24-27).

The Lord spoke through Ezekiel using a total of ten signs, some of them seemingly odd and difficult. For example, God made Ezekiel lie down on his right side for 390 days and again on his left side for forty days to, “bear the punishment for the nation of Israel” (4:4-9). God also told Ezekiel to shave his head and dispose of his hair in three specific ways, each picturing the destruction of the people of Jerusalem (5:1-17). The death of Ezekiel's wife was the most grievous sign the Lord spoke through Ezekiel. “Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down” (24:15-18). Her death was a sign to Judah that the Lord was removing their blessings.

### Then They Will Know

Another important phrase found throughout the book of Ezekiel appears seventy-three times, nearly twice per chapter on average: “Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

The phrase first occurs in 5:13 when the Lord says, “Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. And they shall know that I am the Lord—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them.” Why did the Lord spew his anger upon Jerusalem? Because “she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her; for they have rejected my rules and have not walked in my statutes” (5:6).

Shockingly, God's people acted more wickedly than the pagan



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nations around them. Thus, the Lord compares Jerusalem to a “useless vine” (15:1-8) and a “faithless bride” (16:1-58). Later, the Lord says, “Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed” (33:29).

The Lord’s righteous judgment falling upon Judah did not come without fair warning. God sent His prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel with major messages, which they delivered over long periods of time. To say that the Lord was patient and long-suffering with His wayward people is an understatement. However, God’s goal was not punishment for punishment’s sake. Rather, His greater goal was, and always is, the redemption of His people. Sometimes that required severe mercy.

However, the Lord also defended His holy name, which He indicted Israel for profaning (36:16-22; 39:7-8). The Lord compared the way Israel defiled the Promised Land to “the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity.” After the Lord scattered Israel to the nations, He said, “They profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came” (36:20-21). So, what did the Lord do out of concern for His holy name? Surprise! Surprise! He made a new covenant with His people (36:22-28).

Almost like a big corporation protecting its brand, God acted in His own self-interest by vindicating His holy name. He would do this by redeeming His chosen people from exile and restoring them in the land that He originally gave to them. He would give them a new heart and spirit.

Chapter 36, which is about the New Covenant, ends with the phrase, “Then they will know that I am the Lord” (36:38). There is coming a day when God will vindicate His holy name by making good on every promise He made to Israel, including promises about



the land in the Middle East. Absent of arrogance, it is all about making the Lord's name great and His renown increase.

### The Valley of Dry Bones

The most compelling picture of Israel's future national restoration is a prophecy envisioned by Ezekiel about a valley of dry bones coming to life (37:1-14). This vision came to Ezekiel after the prophecy concerning the New Covenant in chapter 36. The rebirth of Israel seemed as impossible as a valley of unburied skeletons coming to life. But God was up to something good, and Ezekiel was about to learn there was no limit to His creative power.

God transported Ezekiel by a vision to a valley full of dry bones. Then, He instructed the prophet to speak to the bones. Ezekiel told the bones to "hear the word of the Lord" and that God would "cause breath to enter you, and you shall live." The Lord would also dress the bones with sinew and skin. Finally, the bones would stand to their feet like a great army.

Like dry bones, Israel was a dead nation, and the glory of God had departed. Was there any hope for her? "Can these bones live?" The answer was a resounding yes. God had a plan for Israel's future and still does. The Israelites living in the Holy Land today is not necessarily the fulfillment of this prophecy, although it is a start. This prophecy ultimately points to a time at the end of the age when God will gather believing Jews to their homeland, and Jesus Christ will return to establish His Millennial Kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime, does your life feel like a valley of dry bones? Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:1-15). By faith in Jesus Christ, your dry bones can and must come to life. Or, as a born-again believer in Jesus, does it feel as though God's presence has departed you? Was there a time when you enjoyed a greater intimacy with the Almighty than you do now?

By her continual disobedience, Israel grieved the Lord so much



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that His glory left the Temple. As New Testament believers, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, who will never leave us (1 Corinthians 6:19). However, we too can grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Our sin does not make Him depart, but it does break our sweet fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). If that describes you, do this: Hear the word of the Lord (Romans 10:17), confess your sin to God and repent, and then listen for the sound of your rattling bones.

<b>OUTLINE</b>	1-3	4-24	25-32	33-48
<b>FOCUS</b>	Ezekiel's Call	Jerusalem's Fall	Gentile Judgment	Judah's Future
<b>KEY VERSE</b>	2:3-6	5:5-6	28:12-14	37:14



# Daniel

## *STANDING STRONG UNTIL THE END OF THE AGE*

Norman Schwarzkopf was a general in the United States Army who served honorably during the Gulf War as the commander of the United States Central Command. Years later, he was invited to address the Corps of Cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point. After talking about military leaders that he had met over the years who were competent people but lacked character, the decorated General said, “To lead in the twenty-first century, to take soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coastguardsmen into battle, you will be required to have both competence and character.”

Schwarzkopf hit the leadership nail squarely on the head, starting with the need for character. Somebody once said that character is who you are when nobody is looking. The problem with that definition is that there is never a time when nobody is looking because God always has eyes on us (2 Chronicles 16:9). Tomas Payne offered a better definition of character when he said, “Reputation is what men and women think of us. Character is what God and angels know of us.”

What does God know about you? What do the angels of heaven understand about you when nobody else is looking? Those are good questions to consider during a study of the book of Daniel, which



# Daniel

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is our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Esteemed by both earth and heaven (9:23, 10:11,19), Daniel was a man of character, competence, and courage.

## Character and Competence

Daniel was from a noble family and among the Hebrew “youths without blemish” that King Nebuchadnezzar took captive to Babylon. The king placed Daniel and his three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—in his royal training program because they were “of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace” (1:4).

Nebuchadnezzar’s goal was to make loyal Babylonians out of the most gifted and talented youths he could find among the Jewish captives. How would he accomplish this? First, he attacked their homeland and stole their articles of worship from the treasury in Jerusalem, placing them in pagan Babylonian temples. Then, Nebuchadnezzar soaked Daniel and his friends in Babylonian culture and gave them an elite Babylonian education.

The king also changed their diet, from kosher Jewish meals to delicious food from the king’s table prepared by the best chefs in Babylon (1:5). Finally, he changed their identity by giving them Babylonian names. The name Daniel means “God is my judge,” but the king’s commander named him Beltshazzar, which means “may Bel protect my life.” Daniel’s three friends also received Babylonian names related to the

### CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus Messiah is the Great Stone that will crush the kingdoms of the world when He returns at the end of the age (2:34-35, 44).

### BIG IDEA

God is sovereign over the kingdoms of the world.

### MEMORY VERSE

“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.”

DANIEL 1:8

### AUTHOR AND DATE

Daniel  
537 B.C.



Babylonian gods.<sup>18</sup>

However, the assault on Daniel's Jewish religion and culture did not change him. His godly character emerged and set the course for his bright future. "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself" (1:8). Three cheers for Daniel!

Daniel continued to impress his Babylonian educators. In time, he proved to be a competent administrator and, like Joseph, served in a foreign government for his entire life. Daniel's life and ministry spanned the entire seventy years of Babylonian captivity and continued after the Medes and the Persians overcame Babylon. He served during the reigns of four kings, of which two were Babylonian (Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar) and two were Persian (Darius and Cyrus).

## Profiles in Courageous Faith

The book of Daniel contains profiles of great courage and faith. For example, Daniel's three friends refused to bow down to the king's image at the risk of being thrown into the fiery furnace (3:8-30). The king presented them with two choices: bow or burn. The Hebrews chose to place their faith in Yahweh, believing He was able to deliver them from the fiery furnace if that was His will.

Furious, the king heated up the furnace "seven times more than it was usually heated" (3:19) and tossed the three young men into the fire. A fourth man appeared to be walking around with them in the furnace. It was likely an angel of the Lord or a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. Astonished, the king called out to them, and the three friends emerged without a single singed hair or the smell of fire on them. Then, King Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because their God had protected them.

With a demonstration of valor, Daniel spoke truth to a shameless





but powerful king who invited one thousand of his lords to a drunken fest that rivaled a college fraternity party (5:1-31). When a mysterious hand began writing on the palace wall, the king turned pale and then called upon Daniel to interpret the cryptic message. “*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*” What did it mean?

Daniel held nothing back, knowing that Belshazzar could dislike what he said and order his execution. He told the exact meaning to the king’s brazen face. He was found lacking, his days were numbered, and the kingdom would be taken from him. Surprisingly, the king received the interpretation without objection and promoted Daniel to the third rank in the kingdom. That night, Belshazzar was killed according to the prophecy, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.

After Darius assumed the throne, he appointed one hundred and twenty satraps to help him lead the kingdom, and then he appointed three trusted men to lead the leaders, including Daniel, because of his “excellent spirit” (6:1-3). Daniel was now a senior statesman who had distinguished himself at every stage of his life. However, some grew jealous of Daniel and made plans to accuse him, “but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him” (6:4). Daniel is one of the few people in the Bible with such an exemplary record.

When Daniel’s enemies could find no fault in him, they devised a scheme to accuse him regarding his religion. Knowing that Daniel, who was now an old man, prayed three times a day, they convinced Darius to order anyone who did not petition the king to be thrown into the lion’s den. They entreated the king to make it “according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked” (6:8). When Daniel learned about the law, it did not faze him. He continued his daily prayer ritual by opening his window toward Jerusalem.

Daniel’s defiance of the law that limited his religious freedom led to him being thrown into the lions’ den, which saddened King



Darius, who respected Daniel. But miraculously, God shut the lion's mouths and rescued Daniel, who testified to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm" (6:21-22).

### Mysteries of Babylon

While Daniel is a great example of character, competence, and courage, there is much more to him and the Bible book that bears his name. Through Daniel, God gave His people gripping glimpses into the future.<sup>19</sup> Any study of Bible prophecy must include Daniel's divine visions, and the mysteries of Babylon contained in the book. Two prophecies are worth discussing in detail.<sup>20</sup>

In chapter 2, a disturbing dream awakens King Nebuchadnezzar. After the king's enchanters fail to interpret the dream, God gives Daniel a night vision about the massive statue that appeared in the king's dream. From head to toe, the statue is made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Suddenly, a stone flies toward the statue like a Nolan Ryan fastball and strikes the feet made of iron and clay, crushing the base of the statue. Soon after, the entire statue crashes into a pile of dust, and the wind carries it away "so that no trace of them was found." No wonder the king could not sleep. Daniel 2:35 says, "But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."

Through the king's dream, God revealed to Daniel the history of humankind from that time forward—specifically, the beginning and end of Gentile rule on planet earth. The dream envisions the rise and fall of four successive world powers. The gold head represents Babylon (2:36-38); the silver chest and arms picture the Medo-Persian empire (2:39); the bronze belly and thighs point to Greece (2:39); and Rome appears in the iron legs (2:40-43).

Some see the revival of the Roman empire before Christ returns



# Daniel

**STANDING STRONG UNTIL THE END OF THE AGE**

in the statue's feet and ten toes, which are a mixture of iron and clay. Near the end of the fourth kingdom, another kingdom will arise, the kingdom of God, and destroy all other earthly kingdoms. Jesus Christ is the stone that crushes the statue.<sup>21</sup> Then, the Lord God of heaven and earth will reign forever.<sup>22</sup>

Another prophecy takes up the least amount of space in the book of Daniel but spans the longest of time, from a king's decree in the fifth century before Christ to the end of the age. I am talking about the Messianic prediction known as Daniel's Seventy Weeks found in 9:24-27. In response to Daniel's "prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (9:3), the angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel and gave him a breathtaking vision of Israel's future.<sup>23</sup>

Almost all Bible teachers agree that a prophetic "week" equals seven weeks of years, not days. In other words, this prophecy spans four hundred and ninety years. According to the prophecy, the clock starts ticking when a future king makes a decree that allows the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. From history, we know this happened in when a Persian king named Artaxerxes made the decree.<sup>24</sup>

The short but detailed prophecy divides four hundred and ninety years into three smaller units of time: forty-nine years, four hundred and thirty-four years, and seven years. The prophecy further divides the final prophetic week of seven years in half. The purpose of the prophecy is to put an end to sin, atone for wickedness, establish righteousness, and anoint the most holy (9:24).

In summary, four hundred and eighty-three years or sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy have already been fulfilled, through the time "the anointed one shall be cut off," a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That leaves one more prophetic week or seven years to be fulfilled. Daniel's seventieth week is known as the future Tribulation, seven tumultuous years on earth following the Rapture of the Church. Presently, we are living in a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth prophetic week, a time known as the Church Age.



# Daniel

**STANDING STRONG UNTIL THE END OF THE AGE**

The purpose of Bible prophecy is to inspire trust in the sovereignty of God and hope for the future. No book of the Bible does that better than Daniel.

<b>OUTLINE</b>	1-6	7-12
<b>FOCUS</b>	Standing Strong History	Until the End of the Age Prophecy
<b>KEY VERSE</b>	2:22	9:24-27



## Small Group Discussion Questions



### **ISAIAH**

1. What is the grand theme of Isaiah? How does this theme relate to your life?
  2. Define the word “salvation” theologically?
  3. In what way is the book of Isaiah like a mini-Bible?
  4. How does the literary structure of the book point us to Isaiah 53?
  5. What is the significance of Isaiah 53? What controversies still surround this prophetic chapter?
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### **JEREMIAH**

1. Read Jeremiah 1:1-10. Describe Jeremiah’s call to ministry. What is your biggest takeaway?
2. What is the New Covenant, and why did God do something new with Israel?
3. Read 33:14-16 and discuss the Christ connection in the book of Jeremiah?
4. Read Jeremiah 29:1-23. How does 29:11 fit into the larger context?
5. What new thing does God want to do in your life?

## Small Group Discussion Questions



### **LAMENTATIONS**

1. Why do you think God included a book about grieving in His holy Scriptures?
2. How did a reading of Jeremiah's Lamentations impact you?
3. How does the literary style and structure of the book point us to hope and God's faithfulness?
4. Read Lamentations 3:21-22. How would you define God's faithfulness? How do His mercies impact your life daily?
5. Read Psalm 51:17 and Matthew 5:3. Why is lamenting over our sin important? What role does it play in salvation and sanctification?

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### **EZEKIEL**

1. What is the major theme of the book of Ezekiel? How does it apply to your relationship with God?
2. Identify the three phrases that are repeated throughout Ezekiel? What is your takeaway from each as you think about your relationship with God?
3. Israel wanted to be like the other nations. In what way did they fulfill their own desires? What spiritual lessons can we learn from their actions?
4. What did the Valley of Dry Bones vision mean to Israel? How does it apply to Christians today?
5. How does the book of Ezekiel fill your heart with God's hope?

## Small Group Discussion Questions



### ***Daniel***

1. Why did Daniel and his three Jewish friends end up in Babylon? What challenges did they face?
2. Read Daniel 1:8. How did Daniel stand strong in his faith? How does he inspire you to do the same?
3. Read Daniel 3:1-30 and put yourself in the story. Would you have chosen to bow or burn?
4. Read Daniel 2:1-49. What does the king's dream and interpretation of the dream say about the sovereignty of God?
5. Read Daniel 9:24-27. What does the prophecy say about Israel's future?

- <sup>1</sup> Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 94.
- <sup>2</sup> See Isaiah 7:16, 8:4-7, 37:33-35, 38.
- <sup>3</sup> Recent archeology supports the credibility of Isaiah and the preservation of the Bible as a whole. In 1946, the scroll of Isaiah was found among the Qumran discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- <sup>4</sup> Isaiah served during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
- <sup>5</sup> A few years after Isaiah was born, Romulus and Remus founded Rome (753 B.C.). At that time, Greece was also emerging as a world power.
- <sup>6</sup> The apostle Paul follows the same logic in the book of Romans. In chapters 1-3, he deals with man's depravity and sin, followed by a discussion of salvation in chapters 4-5.
- <sup>7</sup> God used Jewish men who were guided by the Holy Spirit to write the New Testament. They clearly linked the prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 to Jesus of Nazareth.
- <sup>8</sup> Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, pg. 21.
- <sup>9</sup> J. Sidlow Baxter, *Exploring the Bible*, p. 259.
- <sup>10</sup> During one of the darkest times in Judah's history, Jeremiah's ministry began nearly one hundred years after Isaiah's ministry ended.
- <sup>11</sup> IBID, Baxter, p. 259.
- <sup>12</sup> See Jeremiah 11:18-23, 12:6, 18:18, 20:1-3, 26:1-24, 37:11-38:28.
- <sup>13</sup> The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters.
- <sup>14</sup> Under King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem in three stages, beginning in 605 B.C. with Daniel and his friends. After the rebellion of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem again in 597 B.C., during which time Ezekiel was among thousands of hostages taken. The final siege came in 586 B.C. when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonians.



- <sup>15</sup> The many references Ezekiel makes throughout his book to time helps calculate that he began his ministry around the age of thirty.
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- <sup>16</sup> Magog was a grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:2). Ezekiel refers to Gog as “of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal” (38:2-3). Magog’s descendants settled to the far north of Israel, leading some to believe the attack could be led by Russia and a coalition of nations from Africa and Europe.
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- <sup>17</sup> See Jeremiah 31:33, 33:14-16, Matthew 24:30-31, and Revelation 20:1-6.
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- <sup>18</sup> This is the playbook that every tyrant uses when trying to bully people into submission: Instill fear, create chaos, destroy history, attack religious liberty, control the culture, seize education, indoctrinate the youth, initiate government mandates, and reinvent the people’s identity. Does any of this sound familiar?
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- <sup>19</sup> Bible critics have taken aim at Daniel’s claim to predictive prophecy. They have tried but failed to date the writing of the book centuries after Daniel lived, and after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (167 B.C.).
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- <sup>20</sup> After an introductory chapter that sets forth Daniel’s exemplary character in historical context, the language switches from Hebrew to Aramaic (2-7) while presenting sweeping prophecies concerning the times of Gentile rule. In chapters 8-12, Daniel returns to his native language to discuss Israel’s future to the end of the age. Through the many prophecies in Daniel, God demonstrates His sovereign rule over the kingdoms of the world, which a prideful Babylonian king learned the hard way (4:28-37).
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- <sup>21</sup> In the Bible, Jesus is the stone that the builder’s rejected, the Chief cornerstone, a stumbling stone, and the spiritual rock in the desert (Acts 4:11; Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Ephesians 2:19-22; Exodus 17; 1 Corinthians 10:4). It is reasonable to assume that He is also pictured in the stone that strikes the foot of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Thus, Christ crushes the Gentile kingdoms of the earth at the end of the age before He sets up His eternal kingdom.

<sup>22</sup> Worth noting is the devolution of human government pictured in the unfolding of the prophecy. From the top of the statue to the bottom, the quality of the metals decreases in value. However, the metals also increase in strength. As we race to the end of the prophetic age, it is not difficult to see how the iron will of authoritarian government will conflict with the clay-like voice of the people who suffer under tyrants and oppressive regimes. Human history gives sad witness to this happening in various times and places. Such oppression will bloom fully under the rule of the Antichrist. Then, Jesus Christ will return to defeat His enemies and establish His earthly kingdom.

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<sup>23</sup> Because Daniel served in the Persian government at least until the third year of King Cyrus (10:1), he likely had some involvement in the decree made to send Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

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<sup>24</sup> King Artaxerxes made the decree in 445 B.C.

## About the Author



**RON JONES** is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

# ROUTE 66

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**Road Trip 3:** The Wisdom Books

**Road Trip 4:** The Major Prophets

**Road Trip 5:** The Minor Prophets

**Road Trip 6:** The Gospels and the Early Church

**Road Trip 7:** The Pauline Epistles

**Road Trip 8:** The General Epistles and Revelation

***Ron Jones*** is the lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Bible teacher on Something Good Radio and Television. A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife Cathryn. They have two adult children.

