

**Acts 24–28**

Arrested in Jerusalem, Paul has been transferred to Caesarea and is brought before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea. The apostle defends himself against false accusations, but Paul remains in custody for two years. Festus, the new governor, and emperor-appointed King Agrippa will also hear Paul's case, where he defends himself and the gospel. Agrippa would free the apostle, except that he had appealed to Caesar. The journey to Rome will depict an account of faith, peril, and divine providence.

**Ezekiel 33–48**

Ezekiel's prophetic ministry continues with a message of deliverance and restoration. He emphasizes God's sovereignty and justice and the promise of a restored covenant with his people. He also points to the restoration of the temple and true worship, the coming Messiah, and God's kingdom at the end of the age.

**John 12–17**

In these chapters of John, as Jesus approaches the cross, we will witness his humility, his sacrificial love, and the fulfillment of prophecy. He will continue to teach through his words and actions that offer warnings, as well as promises. In his High Priestly Prayer, we will see not only Jesus' love that is beyond measure but also his deep concern for those who would believe in him.

**Daniel**

A Jewish exile, Daniel served in the royal court of Nebuchadnezzar and several rulers who followed Nebuchadnezzar. The book of Daniel records the prophet's actions and visions. His unwavering faith and prophesies about future empires and the coming of God's eternal kingdom demonstrate God's sovereignty. For those facing persecution, he urges trust in God's ultimate plan for redemption and restoration.

**1 Peter**

Written as an encouragement to first-century Christians facing intense persecution, Peter encourages them to stay strong, assuring them they are chosen by God and pointing to their hope in Christ's resurrection. They are to patiently endure hardship by imitating Jesus in his suffering, living lives that testify to the power of the gospel, and trusting in the promise of eternal life with him.

**2 Peter**

In his final epistle, Peter warns Christians facing outer pressures and inner threats from false teachers. He encourages them to grow in their faith and live godly lives, remembering the truth of the gospel found in Scripture, along with apostolic witness and rejection of heresy. Peter highlights Christ's promised return and judgment when he comes to issue in the new heaven and earth.

**Scripture Union's Bible Reading Method**

PRAY that God would speak to you from the Bible passage.

READ the Bible passage slowly and thoughtfully, perhaps more than once.

REFLECT on what you've read.

APPLY what you learn from the Bible to the situations in your life.

PRAY again, using your discoveries from the Bible to guide your prayers.

## EZEKIEL 33–48

### A GRAND VISION OF RESTORATION

Ezekiel was a priest-prophet of the early exile (1:1–3), taken into Babylon in 597 BC. The first part of his book focuses on Israel's sins. However, when news of Jerusalem's fall reaches Ezekiel (33:21), his prophecies shift from judgment (that has now come) to restoration. Chapters 34–39 promise godly leadership, judgment on Israel's enemies, physical restoration, and spiritual renewal, the latter through cleansing from sin and by the work of God's Spirit. God will also reunite the nation (Israel and Judah) and will overcome forces (Chs. 38, 39) allied against him.

Chapters 40–48 describe a visionary new temple, its personnel, offerings, and the city and land around it. Interpreters are divided over questions of fulfillment, but the key is that these prophecies express theology through geography and priestly rules. To apply it today, we need to ask what it reveals about God's character and the way his people are meant to live. The form this took in Ezekiel is strange to us, but the principles are recognizable, and the symbolism still resonates.

The book's message echoes the grand narrative of Scripture: sin disrupts relationship with God (his presence leaves the temple), but there is hope because he will return to live again with his renewed people. Ezekiel focuses on God's sanctity and the dangers of sinful human beings approaching him unauthorized, but he also indicates a relationship that is life-giving and healing like, the waters flowing from the temple (47:1–12). The final image of a city called 'the Lord is there' (48:35) points beyond God's transcendent holiness to the one who is God-with-us, in the common and the ordinary.

### FOR FURTHER READING

Christopher JH Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel* (IVP, 2001).

Daniel I Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (Eerdmans, 1998).

Ezekiel's Temple Vision Animation, [www.youtube.com/@bibliaprints/videos](http://www.youtube.com/@bibliaprints/videos).

## JOHN 12–17

### LOVE FROM JESUS

These central chapters of John's gospel are his slow-motion preparation for the big moment of Jesus' Passion and death. In the first part of his gospel, John explored who Jesus was and why he had come, particularly through 'many signs.'<sup>1</sup> Now, Jesus is anointed for burial and then enters Jerusalem for his last days. Repeatedly, we read that the 'hour has come' or 'Now is the time.'<sup>2</sup> The action slows down: indeed, chapters 13–17 focus on the events of a single night when Jesus enjoys a final supper with his friends. Jesus talks with his disciples and prays to the Father in these so-called 'farewell discourses'—which will soon be followed by his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

What would you tell your friends in your final moments? Although Jesus says much here, his primary statement is wordless. He adopts the posture of a slave and washes his disciples' feet, laying a path of loving service that will take him to the cross. This love is grounded in the security of his intimate relationship with the Father, to which he repeatedly refers.<sup>3</sup> Jesus invites his disciples into a similar relationship of mutual indwelling with himself and commands them to live in love with one another, following the example he has provided. He promises the Spirit to help.

John's style is ruminative and theological. He reflects conventions of his day, combining testimony to what was said by Jesus (perhaps on various occasions) with later reflection upon it.<sup>4</sup> Various time perspectives are telescoped into the narrative: Jesus speaks from a post-resurrection standpoint, as well as from the eve of his death. John's flexible approach to dates does not make his narrative any less powerful today.

#### FOR FURTHER READING:

David F Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Baker Academic, 2021).

Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Baker Academic, 2003).

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>1</sup> John 11:47; <sup>2</sup> e.g., John 12:23, 31; <sup>3</sup> e.g., John 14:10; <sup>4</sup> David F Ford, *The Gospel of John* (Baker Academic 2021), 331.

## DANIEL

### FROM 600 BC TO THE SECOND COMING

‘How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.’<sup>1</sup>

The psalmist is asking a very important question here. It is the same question that Willie Jennings asks when he says, ‘Can faith be found inside of empire?’<sup>2</sup> Empires are usually totalizing entities with power to transplant not just physical human beings but their ways of thinking and expressing themselves. The fact that I am writing this in my office, located in a residential home in the city of Leeds, northern England, lends support to these observations. I was born in northern Zambia, and Bemba is my mother tongue, but I now live (and have since midway through primary school) in an English language context because I was born in the British Empire.

Daniel was carried to Babylon when Judah was conquered by the Babylonians. He was trained in the universities of the empire and prepared for a life of civil service in Babylon and later Persia. His faith and identity were challenged, yet he managed to remain faithful to both his imperial overlords and the God of his fathers. What Babylon did for Daniel, the Romans did for the apostles. We, too, are subject to empire—whether traditionalist, capitalist, communist, academic, or even, surprisingly, church.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

FF Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Paternoster Press, 1963).  
W Brueggemann and WH Bellinger Jr, *Psalms* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).  
DR Davis, *The Message of Daniel* (IVP, 2013).  
M Wilcock, *Psalms 1–72* (IVP, 2001).  
EJ Young, *Daniel* (The Banner of Truth, 1949).

<sup>1</sup> Ps 137:4–6 <sup>2</sup> WJ Jennings, *Acts* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 4.

## 1 AND 2 PETER

### GOD'S RECIPE FOR MATURITY

Peter wrote these two epistles to Jewish and gentile Christians, possibly around 64 AD; he was reportedly martyred by 66–68 AD.<sup>1</sup> His opening statement addresses such believers as ‘exiles’ (1 Peter 1:1). Peter anchors the rest of his two letters in the experience of being born again into a living hope, because of Jesus’ blood shed for us on the cross. The promises and blessings of this new state are more than sufficient to withstand the tests that follow. Peter also addresses major themes, including alienation, persecution, and suffering. He explores both the positive and negative dimensions of the new life as supernatural. The past, present, and future—and even time itself—come under the authority of God’s steady hand. Nothing surprises him.

Our response to such staggering facts is not stoicism, Peter suggests, but turning more deeply to Jesus himself. Just as our struggles, frustrations, and sufferings are real, Jesus is also very real and present. He is our living model for responding to life’s difficulties. Submissiveness as an ingrained attitude is a *sine qua non* for husbands, wives, and children—and for all believers—marked by an appropriate respect for spiritual authority. Sound knowledge of the Scriptures is non-negotiable—so that we can identify and avoid false teaching and also so that we are ready to give an account of our lives on the day of judgment. God’s wrath and final judgment are realities that believers cannot ignore. Peter invites his audience to build their lives on the sure foundation of reliable knowledge from the Scriptures and their calling in Jesus Christ.

Some themes in Peter’s epistles may be offensive, countercultural, or even cryptic, inviting our skepticism. Repeated readings of this humble fisherman’s words may well convince such skeptical readers, if they have open minds, of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We are called to submit to and obey his Word.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-general-epistles/first-peter>.