

Week 37

September 10 - September 16

Ezra 4:6 --8:36; Esther 1:1-10:3; Daniel 10:1-12:13; Haggai
1:1-2:23; Zechariah 1:1-14:21

This week's theme is on courage. In the readings this week, we will read about the courage of people like Esther and Mordecai whose actions saved the Jewish people. We will also examine the courage of the Jews who began to return to Jerusalem after the time of captivity to rebuild the temple of the Lord.
-D. Curtis

September 10th

Daniel 10:1-12:13; Ezra 4:24-5:1; Haggai 1:1-15. "Courage to Change"

In the past few years I have watched Dr. Phil on a number of occasions. I appreciate his bluntness and what I call "dr-phil-isms." One of my favorite "isms" is when he asks his guest "how's that working for ya?" Having read Haggai again, I realize that he didn't come up with the question. Apparently, God used that question as an effective tool to show His people that they were not meeting His standard (Hag. 1:5, 7).

This question is a tool to help someone see the deficiency in their own actions. Once that objective has been accomplished, the real work of change begins. Zerubbabel and the remnant of God's people responded in obedience and had the courage to change.

We all will realize at some point that either our actions, beliefs or thoughts will need to be changed because they are in conflict with God's will. The question you are faced with is, do you have the courage to change? To make a change requires admitting mistakes and humbling ourselves to see that God's way is best.

May you have the courage to do just that.

September 11th

Ezra 5:2; Haggai 2:1-23; Zechariah 1:1-5:11. "Ghosts of the Past"

I don't know what it is about human nature that makes us nostalgic. I have observed that in just about every area of life, there is something about 'how it used to be' that we view as better. And as we read in Haggai, this can be a discouragement to us in the present.

As the people began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, they soon realized that it would not be nearly as impressive as the temple Solomon built. Instead of disregarding that fact, the Lord acknowledged it (Hag. 2:2-3) and then encouraged the people to press on in spite of that fact (2:4-5). His message was, that regardless of how less impressive a building it was, the people were to continue on in the building of it.

No matter what task God has given you to do, whether it is business, ministry, family, whatever it is, you are to take courage and do it regardless of how much better or more successful the past may have been.

May you take courage and fulfill your tasks, knowing that God is with you.

September 12th

Ezra 5:3-6:14a; Zechariah 6:1-8:23. "Surprising Support"

Support and encouragement can come from many different sources and sometimes it can be a little surprising to us. I would imagine that God's people experienced some anxiety and discouragement when the governors of neighboring provinces began to investigate the work they were doing on the temple. There was no guarantee that Darius would honor the edict of the Babylonian King Cyrus, who had gone before him.

However, God saw fit to encourage His people by showing that King Darius fully supported them and included instruction for the governors in the area to support the effort.

It can be very encouraging when our efforts are validated by those who are in authority over us. I am sure that you have experienced this kind of encouragement from parents, teachers or bosses in your life. So, the question is, when was the last time you encouraged someone who has to answer to you?

May you be a surprising source of encouragement for someone today.

September 13th

Zechariah 9:1-14:21. "Day of the Lord"

We are all familiar with the concept of a doomsday prophet, who attempts to strike fear in the hearts of people to bring about repentance today. I remember first seeing them as a child in such movies as Ghostbusters and Superman.

Well, today I want you to consider the possibility that courage is also an appropriate response to the coming events in the Day of the Lord. How is it that a description of those events can be an encouragement to us? It is only because of the victory that we have in Jesus.

Zechariah 14:9 says, "And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—His name alone will be worshiped." Wow! Now that is something to get excited about. What an encouraging picture. The Lord reigning on earth and He will be the only one receiving praise and worship from His creation. I don't know about you, but that seems far more encouraging to me than the political corruption and idolatry that I see in the world today.

September 14th

Ezra 4:6; 6:14b-22; Esther 1:1-4:17. "Courage from Above"

On March 11, 2007, Morgan Tsvangirai, founder of Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change, was forced to cancel a prayer meeting because the attendees were in grave danger from riot police. Tsvangirai himself was beaten and jailed later when he attempted to visit the 40-some supporters who were arrested at the prayer gathering. Reflecting on that experience, Tsvangirai said, "Far from killing my spirit, the scars they brutally inflicted on me have re-energized me..."

For men like Tsvangirai and Mordecai, whom we read about today, the courage to stand against oppression and persecution does not merely come from one's own internal fortitude. Rather, it is in God that they find the courage to take a stand when governing authorities are in conflict with God's will.

When you face potential persecution or humiliation for your Christian faith, may you have the courage of Mordecai, who stood up to Haaman, or of Peter and John who stood up to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29).

September 15th

Esther 5:1-10:3. "Independence Day"

A few years ago, there was a movie titled Independence Day. Having an affection for action-adventure movies, I thoroughly enjoyed the movie. One of my favorite scenes is when the President, played by Bill Pullman, encourages a rag-tag band of fighter pilots who were about to face an invading alien force. Speaking to a group who faced certain death and the potential destruction of the human race, he inspired them to victory.

Facing a similar fate of total destruction and annihilation because one man didn't like the Jews, God's people had lost hope. That is until they received the king's edict from the hand of Mordecai, giving them permission and encouraging them to band together and defend themselves.

Mordecai was an encourager. He encouraged Esther to take full advantage of her station as Queen of Persia to help her people. Then he encouraged his people to defend themselves in the face of certain destruction.

May you, like Mordecai, encourage the people around you.

September 16th

Ezra 4:7-23; 7:1-8:36. "Adopted by God"

"If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" – Romans 8:31b

Three times in the seventh chapter of Ezra, the text says "the gracious hand" of the Lord was upon Ezra. Also in 7:28, Ezra states that this was a great source of encouragement for him in knowing that the hand of the Lord was on him.

There is a similar source of encouragement for us today as New Testament believers and partakers of a new and better covenant. Paul picks up on this theme in Romans 8:31. As believers who have been adopted into God's family (Rom. 8:15), we share in His treasures (Rom. 8:17) for we are co-heirs with Christ.

So, take courage, believer! As one who is now adopted by God, know that there is nothing that can separate you from His love (Rom. 8:35). There is no greater source of joy or encouragement for us than to know that the One who created us has also redeemed us and has secured our salvation.

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

What is the biggest hindrance for you in making necessary changes in your life?

What do you miss from the past that causes discouragement for you in the present?

Has the importance of what God has for you to do changed any at all even though the past may have been more successful or significant?

How can you take that discouragement and turn it into an encouraging thing?

When was the last time that you were able to be a surprising source of encouragement for someone?

Think of those who are accountable to you (i.e. employees, children, students, etc.). Who in this list can you encourage this week.

What is your typical response when you read about the events of the Day of the Lord?

What is it about the coming Day of the Lord that allows you to take courage in spite of the judgments the world faces?

How did you react when you read about the plight of Morgan Tsvangirai and his followers in Zimbabwe?

Can you share a story from your life when you had to courageously stand up for your faith in the face of persecution? If not, why not?

How do you respond when it appears that all hope is lost in a given situation?

Can you share an experience in your life when you were very aware of God's hand working in your life?

How is your relationship with God a source of courage?

Personal application: May you be encouraged and be an encourager this week?