

## *Today's Light* Discussion Questions January–March 2021

The material here is linked to the January–March issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about forty-five minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

### Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

To subscribe to *Today's Light*, contact Concordia Publishing House via email at [cphorder@cph.org](mailto:cphorder@cph.org) or by phone at 1-800-325-3040.

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## January Week 1 Discussion Questions

January 1–3, Isaiah 1–4

1. Review Isaiah 1:1–15 and Isaiah 1:15–20. Contrast the two spiritual conditions described in these sections. Describe the new spiritual condition available to all through Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. Isaiah 3:18–26 pictures the consequences of God's judgment. Relate this picture to the ultimate consequence to be experienced by those without faith in Jesus. See also Isaiah 66:24.

## January Week 2 Discussion Questions

January 4–10, Isaiah 5–20

1. What examples can you give of calling evil good and good evil, of substituting darkness for light and light for darkness, and of exchanging bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isaiah 5:20)?
2. Compare Isaiah 6:1–8 with Ephesians 2:3–10.
3. The writer of Hebrews (2:11–14) applies Isaiah 8:17–18 to Jesus. Explain these words in light of Jesus' saving work on our behalf.
4. How did Jesus fulfill Isaiah's prophecy recorded in 9:1–2? See Matthew 4:12–16.
5. Meditate on Isaiah 12 in light of all that God has done for you in Christ Jesus. Which verses from chapter 12 are most meaningful to you as you think about your relationship with your Savior today?
6. Review Isaiah 14:12. In what way do these words remind us of the victory Jesus has won over Satan? See also 1 John 3:8.

## January Week 3 Discussion Questions

January 11–17, Isaiah 21–32

1. The words of Isaiah 22:22 appear again in Revelation 3:7 as a reference to Jesus. In what way does Jesus open what no one can shut or shut what no one can open? Describe heaven in light of Isaiah 25:6–9. See also Revelation 19:9; 7:17.
2. See Isaiah 27:2–3. Since we, the people of God, are His vineyard, in what ways does the Lord “water” us continually? See Isaiah 55:10–11.
3. Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Matthew 15:8–9). With what actions and attitudes do we become guilty of the same sin?
4. Isaiah writes, “Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore He exults Himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him” (Isaiah 30:18). Explain how the justice and grace of God work in the life of the believer. See also Psalm 112:4.
5. Compare Isaiah 9:6 and 11:6–9 with the peace described as the effect of righteousness (Isaiah 32:17–20). Tell what this peace means to you personally today.

## January Week 4 Discussion Questions

January 18–24, Isaiah 33–47

1. Read Isaiah 35. Contrast a desert without water with the desert in bloom. Apply each as a metaphor in your life.

2. Comment on the logic of Sennacherib's words (Isaiah 36:4–10, 18–20). Reflect on the difference between Sennacherib's logic and Hezekiah's faith. Note also the outcome (Isaiah 37:36–38).

3. What qualities of our Savior do you find suggested by these words? "He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

4. Explain Isaiah 42:8 in light of Exodus 20:4–6.

5. Apply Isaiah 44:21–22 to all people. See also 1 John 2:2.

6. What promise does God give to encourage His people, even when they live to be many years old (Isaiah 46:4)?

## January Week 5 Discussion Questions

January 25–31, Isaiah 48–66

1. Reflect on the enormity of God's love for each of us in light of Isaiah 49:15.
2. Imagine you are flying in an airplane, looking down upon the earth. Explain God's judgment and salvation described in Isaiah 51:6.
3. Isaiah 53 includes the beautiful and moving account of our Lord's suffering and death. Verse 10 even references us. Explain.
4. See Isaiah 54:10–13, especially 13. What promise does our God of unfailing love give for the offspring who are taught to know the one true God?
5. Explain God's almighty power and will to save us as expressed in Isaiah 59:1.
6. According to Jesus, what connection exists between the light of the world shining upon the nations (Isaiah 60:3) and the coming of the end (Matthew 24:14)?
7. Review Isaiah 66:10–13. Reflect upon God's grace and goodness in your life. What kindnesses of the Lord come to mind that you might share with someone today?

## February Week 1 Discussion Questions

February 1–7, Jeremiah 1–12

1. Apply God's promise to Jeremiah recorded in Jeremiah 1:19 to yourself as a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
2. Reread Jeremiah 3:11–18. The preaching of the Law can never stand alone. Jeremiah must speak God's message of grace and promise as well. Why is it never enough simply to condemn sin or denounce immorality? What is the purpose of "laying down the law"?
3. Review Jeremiah 5:26–31. Summarize the condition of those described here.
4. Contrast Jeremiah 8:22 with Jesus' words in Matthew 9:12–13.
5. What perspective, proclaimed in Jeremiah 10:12–13, is helpful for people always to remember?
6. Identify the themes of God's judgment and mercy as you find them in Jeremiah 12:15.

## February Week 2 Discussion Questions

February 8–14, Jeremiah 13–25

1. Review Jeremiah's prayer recorded in Jeremiah 14:7–9. To what aspects of the prayer do you readily relate?
2. Compare the person who trusts in human strength and turns away from the Lord (Jeremiah 17:5–6) with the one who trusts in the Lord (Jeremiah 17:7–8).
3. Explain the response of the people in Jeremiah 18:12 to God's plan of judgment (Jeremiah 18:11).
4. Jeremiah's words in 20:7–18 echo with despair and hopelessness due to all the prophet has suffered in his life and ministry. In the middle of these words is verse 13. What focus do these words bring to Jeremiah's feelings of frustration and despondency?
5. Explain Jeremiah 23:23–24. What does this description of God mean to you today?
6. Jeremiah 24:6–7 describes the remnant that God would bring back from exile. What words in these verses remind us that it is God who gives us the ability to know and believe in Him?



## February Week 3 Discussion Questions

February 15–21, Jeremiah 26–37

1. Review the events recorded in Jeremiah 26:1–6. What quality of God is suggested by the words of verse 3?
2. What insight does Jeremiah 29:7 provide for those who question whether to pray for the prosperity of a government that refuses to honor the true God?
3. See Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 8–9. Contrast the old covenant with the new covenant.
4. Consider Jeremiah 33:17 and Luke 1:32–33. How did Jeremiah's prophecy come true in Jesus?
5. Jeremiah 34:8–16 records how Zedekiah and the people of Jerusalem obeyed the Lord and freed their slaves, only to change their mind and bring the slaves back into slavery once again. God's people were required to free their slaves every seventh year as a reminder of the freedom God had provided them from bondage in Egypt. How do you as a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus relate to the concepts of slavery and freedom? See also Galatians 4:1–7.
6. Describe the behavior of the king and his attendants upon hearing the words of the Lord being read to them (Jeremiah 36:24). What did their response (or lack of response) indicate about their spiritual condition?

## February Week 4 Discussion Questions

February 22–28, Jeremiah 38–52

1. Review Jeremiah 38:7–13. How did Ebed-melech express his trust in God? According to Jeremiah 39:15–18, how did God bless him?
2. The people pledged themselves in obedience to God, and God promised to protect and bless them if they remained in the land (Jeremiah 42:5–12). Then at the threat of the Babylonians, the people promptly moved to Egypt. What factors might have influenced their change of heart?
3. Review Jeremiah 44:1–18. From what influences had the Lord sought to protect His people by commanding them to remain in Judah?
4. Note God's promise to His people even as He pronounced judgment against Israel's enemies (Jeremiah 46:27). Relate this promise to the security you have in Christ, even as you endure daily stresses of insecurity, turmoil, and hardship.
5. Review Jeremiah 51:10–16. How do these words also suggest a picture of the Last Day?
6. Jeremiah 52 (see especially v. 27b) tells of Judah being led away into captivity. Isaiah 61:1 talks about freedom from captivity in words that Jesus later applies to Himself (see Luke 4:16–21). How has Jesus set free from captivity those who trust in Him?

## March Week 1 Discussion Questions

### March 1–7, Lamentations 1–Ezekiel 7

1. Jeremiah lamented the sins of Judah, Israel, and the city of Jerusalem (Lamentations 1:8). Name some sins that he may have been remembering. He also acknowledged his own sin (Lamentations 1:14). What sins of his own might he have recalled (Jeremiah 1:6; 20:7–10)? What sins of our own time and of our own doing could we list and bring to the throne of God's grace? Jeremiah could see the grief the sin had brought on the people (Lamentations 1:5). What truth brought him comfort (Lamentations 1:18)?
2. Read Lamentations 3:1–21. List terms or phrases that express the prophet's sorrow. In what way was Jeremiah a living example of John 16:33 and Acts 14:22?
3. Jeremiah's last two funeral poems lament the utter destruction of the land and the people. Are there times in your life when God seems absent? How can faith and hope survive in such times? Read Lamentations 5:21–22. Then pray the prayer of stanza 3 of the hymn "Oh, That the Lord Would Guide My Ways" (*LSB* 707).
4. If you were to draw a picture of God, what aspects of His nature would you want to include? What aspects of His nature does God picture for Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1 and 2? What picture of God is presented in 1 John 4:7–12?
5. Ezekiel reports, "I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit" (Ezekiel 3:14). How is this bitterness and anger related to God's statement in Ezekiel 3:7–9? Why did Ezekiel go about his work in bitterness and anger? Is this a message of Law or Gospel for us? Explain.
6. God is the ultimate practitioner of the saying "Make lemonade from lemons." After consulting Ezekiel 6 and 7, list the "bad things" that God used in His efforts to help the people know that He is the Lord. Now read Isaiah 53:4–5; John 19:1–3; 1 Peter 2:24. Ultimately, how did God remove the evils that separated His people from Him?

## March Week 2 Discussion Questions

March 8–14, Ezekiel 8–19

1. Can you name some sins that you think others are “getting away with”? Closer to home, are you trying to “get away with” some sin? During their trip to Jerusalem, the Spirit showed Ezekiel an instance of people thinking they were getting away with sin. Explain the situation and the thoughts of the people described in Ezekiel 8:9–13. Ironically, Jaazaniah’s name means “the Lord will hear.” As far as God is concerned, do people ever “get away with” sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Galatians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 5:15, 19)?
2. Although the temple in Jerusalem was the place Israel thought of as their sanctuary, to Ezekiel God says He will be a sanctuary for the exiles wherever they reside (Ezekiel 11:16). What is a sanctuary? What did having a sanctuary mean for the Israelites (Psalm 31:20; 68:35; 91:9–10; Isaiah 4:6; Hebrews 6:19)? How is God a sanctuary for you?
3. What would you do if ordered to evacuate a building because an invisible, poisonous gas would soon be released inside? Suppose this happened two or three days in a row. No gas was ever released, but one person continued to pack up and leave the building. What would you ask that person? (See Ezekiel 12:9.) At God’s direction, Ezekiel did a similar thing—he packed up his things and acted out going into exile. (See Ezekiel 12:3–7.) What was God’s purpose in asking Ezekiel to do this? (See Ezekiel 12:11.) Will Judgment Day ever come? If we took God’s Word seriously, what are some things we would be doing? How could we be repairing the wall today (Ezekiel 13:5)?
4. Who are Noah, Daniel, and Job? What made them so noteworthy that the sovereign Lord would mention them so often in Ezekiel 14 (vv. 14, 16, 18, 20)? See Genesis 6:8–9; 2 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 11:7; Daniel 1; 6:13; Job 1:1; Hebrews 11:32–34. What is the Lord’s point? How did these men become noted for righteousness? How do we become righteous (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21)?

5. Ezekiel 17:22–23 is a wonderful promise regarding the Messiah, whom God would provide for all people. Consider the following Bible passages as you meditate on this picture of the promised Savior as a shoot that grows into a strong tree to provide shelter for all people: Isaiah 11:1; 4:2–6; 53:2–5; Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15; Romans 11:17.

6. The Israelites in Babylon looked upon their exile as punishment from God for sins that their ancestors had committed. In Ezekiel 18, God attempts to put an end to such talk by stating that “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20). “You are suffering for your own sins,” God says to them (18:30–31). Framing His conversation with Ezekiel about the fairness of His action of placing Israel in exile are two wonderful and comforting thoughts. Summarize each one (Ezekiel 18:4a, 32). What is the comfort in each one? What does God do for the penitent sinner (Acts 3:19; 16:31; Psalm 32:5)? What does the penitent sinner do in response to God’s love (Matthew 3:8; John 8:11; Galatians 5:13, 22–23)?

## March Week 3 Discussion Questions

March 15–21, Ezekiel 20–32

1. Ezekiel and the elders of Israel sat down together to talk face-to-face (Ezekiel 20:1). What was the subject of this discussion? Think of some other serious discussions mentioned in Scripture. What was the subject of those discussions? See, for example, Genesis 50:15–21; 2 Samuel 12:1–14; Luke 24:13–32, 36–45; Acts 4:1–20. When must we as Christians be involved in serious discussions about our faith? What should be the motivation and focus of such discussion? Pray for wisdom and words to say when members of your group engage others in a serious conversation about their Christian faith.

2. Lutheran theologian Paul Kretzmann once wrote, “God punishes sin with more sin.” In Ezekiel 22–23, God speaks of using sinners to punish sin. The graphic language that is used to describe the sin of Israel is matched by the descriptions of the punishment that will come upon Israel. Can you think of instances in our own time when obvious sinners, to the Christian way of thinking, are used to punish sin? Now think in terms that acknowledge that “all have sinned.” How have you as a sinner been punished with more sin? What is God’s remedy? See Galatians 3:13; Romans 3:22–24; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:24.

3. Finally, in Ezekiel 24, God announced that Jerusalem was under siege (v. 2); her destruction was imminent. In spite of the efforts of faithful prophets, people did not repent and turn away from their evil ways, so God destroyed them. What other times in history did something like this happen (Genesis 6–8; 11:1–9)? Has something similar happened since the destruction of Jerusalem? How does the crucifixion of Jesus fit into this story (John 11:25–26)?

4. Why did God act against the various groups of people mentioned in Ezekiel 25–27? Review what He says in Ezekiel 25:3, 8, 12, 15; 26:2. What is God’s message to us from all these passages? Consult Proverbs 17:5; 24:17–18; Romans 12:17–21; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–8; Jude 17–22 as you share your ideas.

5. If you have made a promise to someone, how important is it to assure that person that you will keep that promise? Give some examples of times when we reiterate promises. In Ezekiel 28:25–26, God reiterates a promise that He had made. What was it (Genesis 35:11–12; Genesis 17:1–8)? When does God reiterate His promises to us?

6. In Ezekiel 29–30, God has the prophet continue to describe the destruction of those countries that harassed Israel and gloated over its destruction. Egypt, too, would be conquered by Babylon, joining other countries that did not follow the Lord and that warred against His people Israel. Identify and explain several of Ezekiel's vivid descriptions of the punishment God would bring to these peoples. Then discuss the prayer of Psalm 106:40–48 and pray it for yourselves and your own country.

## March Week 4 Discussion Questions

March 22–28, Ezekiel 33–44

1. In Ezekiel 33, God reminds Ezekiel that he is to be the watchman for Israel (Ezekiel 33:7), and in chapter 34, God says that He Himself will be Israel's shepherd. Jesus is both a watchman and a shepherd for Israel and for all people. During Lent, these pictures are especially apt. Review and meditate on Jesus' activities during Holy Week, using the illustration and text on pages 1690–91 of *The Lutheran Study Bible* or John 12–20 and Mark 11–16. How was Jesus a watchman for us during Holy Week? How was Jesus our shepherd during Holy Week?
2. Why did God punish Israel with defeat and exile? Why did He punish the countries around Israel? What did God really want of these people? Use Ezekiel 35–36 to formulate answers to these questions. Then discuss these questions: What does God want of us and our nation? How can we contribute to that goal as individuals and as Christian congregations?
3. As you read Ezekiel 37–39, describe some of the punishing actions that God took to cleanse the land and preserve His people in safety (Ezekiel 38:22; 39:3–6, 11, 17–20). God took out His punishment for our sins on His own Son. Describe His sufferings for us (Isaiah 53). Then praise God for His sacrificial love for us and all people. You may want to sing the words of the hymn "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (*LSB* 420).
4. All the careful measuring that Ezekiel observed indicates the life and splendor of the new community of His people that God wanted to bring into being. They would be a people ashamed of their sins (look ahead to Ezekiel 43:10) and faithful to God (Ezekiel 43:11). What kind of community does the resurrection of Jesus bring into being today? (See 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 42–44, 56–58)?



5. In Ezekiel 43, God describes for Ezekiel the various sacrifices that would be made for seven days just to cleanse the altar so that the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings of the people could be acceptable to the Lord (Ezekiel 43:25–27). How did Jesus' sacrifice of Himself differ from this? What were its blessings? (See Hebrews 10:9–10, 12, 15–22.) Sing stanza 4 of "Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us" (*LSB* 851).

6. Ezekiel was told by his guide that the east door of the temple was to remain shut because the Lord had entered through this door and only the prince himself could go through the door (Ezekiel 44:1–3; 43:1–2). Whom does the prince represent? How might this situation be a picture of our own road to salvation (John 10:7–10)?

## March Week 5 Discussion Questions

March 29–31, Ezekiel 45–48

1. In all of the following, what is the Lord's concern (Ezekiel 45:9; 46:18)? Note the division of the land, the provisions for the priests and the prince (45:7–8), the mandate of standards for the various measures (45:10–12), the description of what the offerings are to be (45:13–25), and the descriptions of the festivals (46:1–15).
2. Suppose your city or town, your church, your school, or your home was called "The LORD Is There," as the city that Ezekiel saw was called (Ezekiel 48:35). What would be the implications of such a name for your church? school? home? Look at these Scripture passages for some ideas: Genesis 28:10–19; Matthew 5:14–16; Acts 18:10; Hebrews 11:10, 16; Revelation 21:2–4.

## January Leader Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

### January Week 1 Leader Notes

#### January 1–3, Isaiah 1–4

1. The first section describes our condition under the Law, disobedient to the point of being out of control, rebellious, stubborn, and unfaithful. Because of Jesus, we have forgiveness for these sinful acts and inclinations. In Him, we are empowered to “die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).
2. Ultimately, those without faith will experience a deplorable existence, far worse than that described in Isaiah 3:18–26. In Isaiah’s last chapter, he pictures the torments of hell where “their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh” (Isaiah 66:24).

## January Week 2 Leader Notes

January 4–10, Isaiah 5–20

1. Examples will vary. Point out that whenever people uphold perspectives or goals forbidden by God's Word as good and right, they are calling evil good and good evil, substituting darkness for light and light for darkness, and exchanging bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
2. Though we by nature are sinful and unworthy, our holy God has saved us through Jesus, His Son. Not only has He saved us, but He has saved us so that we might serve Him. What a great and awesome God we have!
3. Demonstrating complete trust in His heavenly Father, Jesus, the long-awaited Savior, took on our flesh and blood—lived, died, and rose again for us so that we might become the children of God, His brothers and sisters by faith.
4. Early in His ministry, Jesus lived and preached in Capernaum, which is by the Sea of Galilee in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew describes Jesus as the light shining in Galilee of the Gentiles—the home of a people living in darkness (Matthew 4:12–16).
5. Accept participant responses. Emphasize God's attitudes and actions as we witness them in the person of Christ Jesus and the forgiveness, new life, and salvation He provides.
6. Satan, also called Lucifer, was once an angel of God. But God cast him out of heaven. Jesus' victory over Satan has been secured. First John 3:8 proclaims, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

## January Week 3 Leader Notes

January 11–17, Isaiah 21–32

1. No one can take from a believer the treasures of forgiveness of sins, new life, and eternal salvation possessed through faith in Jesus. Similarly, no one can receive these gifts apart from Him (Acts 4:12). Revelation 19:9 describes heaven as the wedding banquet of the Lamb. As believers, we are the Lamb's Bride—the Church. Isaiah's words describing heaven as a place of comfort and happiness are echoed in Revelation 7:17.
2. Our loving God nourishes and sustains us through His Word received either by itself or together with the Sacraments. Through Word and Sacraments, the Means of Grace, God works saving faith in us and sustains it.
3. God desires us to worship Him sincerely, not merely going through the motions out of habit or through compulsion. True worship centers on the joy of our salvation as God's Spirit brings us to reflect on His great gift, which is ours through Christ Jesus (see Psalm 51:10–17).
4. God brings us to a realization of our condition under the Law (justice). When we are convicted of our sin, He forgives and restores us as His people (grace). Even when we realize we have fallen into the darkness of sin, people of faith can trust in the light of the gracious forgiveness available to all through Jesus our Lord.
5. Answers will vary. Comment that the peace we have in Jesus, our Savior, exists independent of the situations and circumstances that surround us.

## January Week 4 Leader Notes

January 18–24, Isaiah 33–47

1. A parched desert is a human life steeped in sin without the comfort and peace of Christ's forgiveness. A desert in bloom is a picture of the child of God, confident and secure in Jesus' love and forgiveness. Encourage participants' reflections and observations on these images.
2. Sennacherib's argument is convincing. He poses a question: Have any other gods delivered *their* devoted people from Assyrian oppression? But logical arguments are solidly and summarily defeated by the God in whom Hezekiah placed his trust. The angel of the Lord put to death the Assyrian army of 185,000. God acts to help and save His people. He enables us to trust in Him. (See also Exodus 14:14.)
3. Answers will vary somewhat. Jesus loves, cares for, and nurtures those who belong to Him. He gives us what we need as we need it. See also 2 Corinthians 12:9.
4. Our God is jealous for the attention of His people. He will not condone unfaithfulness or abandonment by His people. These are sins for which His Son came to die.
5. God in Christ invites all people to turn from sin in repentance and to receive the forgiveness, new life, and salvation already earned for us by Jesus.
6. God promises to sustain, carry, and rescue us even as we endure the challenges and hardships of aging.

## January Week 5 Leader Notes

January 25–31, Isaiah 48–66

1. God's love and desire to provide for us is the strongest of all desires—stronger even than the desire of a mother to nurture and care for the child she is nursing. See also Psalm 27:10.
2. This verse is a prophecy of the Last Day, when God will come to destroy this tired and worn-out earth and its unbelieving inhabitants, bringing eternal salvation in Christ Jesus to those who, by faith, belong to Him.
3. By faith, we are the spiritual descendants of Christ. Jesus died for us to accomplish the will of His Father to redeem and save us. In addition, note all the expressions similar to “He was pierced for *our* transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5, emphasis added).
4. Isaiah 54:13 records, “All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.” Our loving God gives us the deep, lasting, and sustaining peace that passes all understanding—a peace only He can provide (Philippians 4:7).
5. God's “arm is not too short” to save; He has the power to rescue us. His ear is always attentive to our cry for mercy.
6. Echoing the prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus promised that “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).
7. Answers will vary but may include the salvation Jesus earned on Calvary as well as other actions of help, encouragement, and rescue.

## February Week 1 Leader Notes

### February 1–7, Jeremiah 1–12

1. God promised Jeremiah, “They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you” (Jeremiah 1:19). As God’s Spirit strengthens us through Word and Sacrament, He enables us to face and overcome the challenges and struggles of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Ultimately, He will rescue us and all believers and bring us to our eternal home in heaven. See Romans 8:28–30.
2. The chief purpose of the Law is to reveal people’s sins and drive them to repentance. The Law prepares people to receive the blessings of the Gospel.
3. God likens Himself to a husband who is calling His Bride, His chosen people, to leave their unfaithfulness and return to Him. Those He is choosing to bring to Zion represent the remnant—those who repent of their sins and receive the forgiveness and renewal He freely offers. These words from Jeremiah 5 describe the condition of those who are comfortable and secure in their sin. Their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek (vv. 27–28). They do not expend real energy to help those who need it. The religious leaders lie and act on their own authority, and the people love the condition in which they find themselves (v. 31).
4. Jeremiah’s words refer to the consequences of God’s judgment on sin. “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?” (8:22). Jeremiah’s words suggest the hopeless condition into which those consumed by sin ultimately find themselves. But Jesus speaks words of grace and mercy to those who recognize and repent of their sin in contrast to those who refuse. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12–13).
5. Almighty God, the maker and sustainer of all creation, remains in control of all things. People do well to approach all aspects of life bearing that perspective in mind. We may trust in ourselves, our possessions, or other people, but ultimately God is the one in control. He wants us to look to Him for help, forgiveness, and direction each day of our lives.
6. As an act of judgment, God uprooted the people. But in His mercy, He promised to “again have compassion on them, and . . . bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land” (Jeremiah 12:15). Comment that even in the midst of meeting our judgment, God’s intent is always to call people to repentance so that He may forgive and restore them.



## February Week 2 Leader Notes

February 8–14, Jeremiah 13–25

1. Answers will vary. Likely aspects of the prayer to which sinners may relate are sins that testify against us, including backsliding and the feeling of having distanced ourselves from our Savior. Yet our Savior is our hope in times of distress.
2. Those who turn their back on the Lord and trust in human strength are cursed like a bush in the wastelands, separated from the land of plenty. But those who trust in the Lord are like a tree planted by the water; its roots can nurture the tree with the unending supply of water from the stream. Therefore, the roots will always be able to resist the heat, sustain the tree in green leaves, protect against drought, and ensure that the tree bears fruit.
3. The people refused to turn back to God, as people held firmly under the bondage and disillusionment of sin often do. Though they recognized the futility of their situation, they continued with their own plans because of their stubbornness.
4. In verse 13, Jeremiah still praises God, who “has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.” No matter how bad things seem, we still have a mighty, caring Savior, who never abandons us.
5. Answers may vary. God sees and knows all things. Nothing can be hidden from Him. He is nearby, concerned about the things that worry, trouble, and concern us. At the same time, God is far away. From a distant perspective, He rules, governs, and provides and cares for all creation (Psalm 36:6).
6. God says, “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD” (Jeremiah 24:7). Emphasize that God gives us the gift of faith through His Word and Sacraments.

## February Week 3 Leader Notes

February 15–21, Jeremiah 26–37

1. Jeremiah 26:3 suggests God's steadfast love and mercy. God promises that if the people repent He will relent and not bring the disaster He had planned because of their evil.
2. In Jeremiah 29:7, God tells His people in captivity to pray for the prosperity of the government holding them in bondage. "Pray to the LORD on its behalf," He says, "for in its welfare you will find your welfare."
3. Jesus came to be the mediator between God and people. Under the old covenant, the priest served as mediator between God and the people, offering sacrifices for their sins. But under the new covenant, Christ offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins.
4. Of Jesus' "kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). As members of the family of God through faith in Christ Jesus, we, too, are members of His eternal kingdom.
5. We are freed from the slavery imposed by the old ways of life. God sent His only Son—at just the right time—to bring us freedom so that we might be the children of God and heirs of eternal life in His name.
6. "Neither the king nor any of his attendants . . . was afraid, nor did they tear their garments" (Jeremiah 36:24). Spiritually, they were dead; the words of God's Law had no effect upon them.

## February Week 4 Leader Notes

February 22–28, Jeremiah 38–52

1. Ebed-melech showed his trust in the true God by securing Jeremiah's release from the cistern. God brought rescue and prosperity to Ebed-melech as a blessing.
2. Because we are sinners, we all make promises we are not able or willing to keep. In this case, perhaps the people of God acted out of fear of the approaching enemy (Jeremiah 43:3). Or maybe they were lured by the hope of a life of peace and unbridled prosperity in a foreign land.
3. God's people had fallen under the cultural influences of the people of Egypt and had begun to worship their gods.
4. God promises to rescue all who have faith in Christ. He will save us and rescue us; we will enjoy peace and security. We already enjoy citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20–21).
5. At the Last Day, God's people will be vindicated. In His mighty power, God will come and everything will change. Those who are rich and mighty in human terms will suddenly find themselves at the mercy of the God they formerly denied or attacked. See also 2 Corinthians 5:10.
6. Jesus has freed us from the bonds of sin and given us the freedom to serve Him in willing obedience (see Galatians 5:1) by His suffering, death, and resurrection.

## March Week 1 Leader Notes

### March 1–7, Lamentations 1–Ezekiel 7

1. Jeremiah points out that no one even tries to feed the children (Lamentations 4:4), people are starving and cannibalize their own children to have something to eat (4: 9–10), the streets aren't safe (4:18), they need to buy water to drink (5:4), and slaves rule them (5:8). His final prayer is that the Lord would restore His people and return them to the land He had promised to them. The Lord's rescue is their only hope. Pray the prayer together.

2. Examples abound. Receive the group's answers and ask members to consider which expressions are most striking to them. Jeremiah knew he faced the worst possible obstacles. He also knew God would overcome them. Sometimes God's people don't get the opportunity to see the promised victory. But no matter what we suffer, we share in Christ's victory and inherit the kingdom of God.

3. Answers will vary. Most Christians experience times when the Lord seems distant. As you read Jeremiah, note how often God complained that the people had "forsaken" Him. God, too, feels our rejection and distance (Jeremiah 17:13; 19:4). The Lamentations passage shows how Jeremiah felt forsaken by God but continued to pray for restoration. Recall Jesus' words from the cross (Mark 15:33–34), His prayer (Luke 23:46), and how the heavenly Father restored His life.

4. Give participants in your group time to discuss aspects of God's nature that they would want to include in their pictures of God. In Ezekiel 1, God provided Ezekiel with a vision of a windstorm (a cloud with fire and a brilliant light, v. 4) with four four-faced creatures at the center (vv. 6–10) and, near the creatures, four double wheels that had rims filled with eyes. The creatures and the wheels moved together (vv. 15–21). The picture is one of an all-powerful, omniscient, omnipresent God who is also a God of grace and peace, as symbolized by the rainbow (v. 28). In chapter 2, God depicts Himself as a God who wants His Word proclaimed to all people and as a God who protects and provides for those who proclaim His Word. He does not want them to be afraid as they go about His work (Ezekiel 2:6). John describes God as one who loves His people and shows that love by sending His Son to save them by sacrificing Himself on the cross (1 John 4:10).

5. God warned Ezekiel that the people of Israel would be obstinate and not want to listen to his words (Ezekiel 2:3–4; 3:7). God had also promised Ezekiel that He would make him as determined to speak God's Word as the people were stubborn in resisting it (Ezekiel 3:8–9). Ezekiel was not bitter and angry toward God, but he was bitter and angry that his own people had been so resistant to God's call to repentance and to amending their sinful lives. This is a message of Law for us. It is a call for us to listen to God's Word rather than to be rebellious and obstinate toward God's Law (as we find it in the Ten Commandments, for example). You might like to discuss Psalm 119:89–96 and use it as a prayer to follow your discussion of these questions. Note that the psalmist, recognizing his own sin, calls on God to save him (Psalm 119:94), which God did through the gift of His Son, who died for us on the cross.

6. The evils mentioned by Ezekiel include the following: their idols, places of worship, and towns, all of which will be destroyed (Ezekiel 6:1–7); people will die by sword, famine, and plague (6:11); the land will be desolate (6:14); God will punish them for their detestable conduct (7:1–4); God will have no pity in His punishment (7:9); violence will be used to punish wickedness (7:11); riches will not buy relief and will be given to foreigners (7:22); wicked nations will rule (7:24); God will bring His harsh judgment to bear on them (7:27). Ultimately, God “poured out [His] wrath” (7:8) on His own Son, and Jesus died on the cross so that all people—including us—would know that He is the Lord, trust in Him as Savior, be cleansed (1 John 1:7), and have life with Him forever.

## March Week 2 Leader Notes

### March 8–14, Ezekiel 8–19

1. Encourage your group to give a few general examples of sins that others seem to be getting away with, but remind your group that our own personal sins should be confessed before God and perhaps in private with our pastor. The Spirit showed Ezekiel a situation where people thought they were getting away with sin because God couldn't see them. Jaazaniah's name should have reminded them that God could hear them as they sinned. The scene is similar to a bunch of noisy children trying to rob the cookie jar, thinking they are getting away with it because no adults are in the room, even though they can be heard all over the house. God knows all about our sin. People never get away with sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Galatians 3:10). The unrepentant pay for their sin by being eternally punished for it; the repentant receive God's forgiveness by faith, trusting that His Son took the punishment for their sin on Himself (2 Corinthians 5:15, 19).

2. Dictionaries define a *sanctuary* as “a place of refuge and protection”; often sanctuaries are safe havens for those condemned by governmental laws. God was often thought of as a place of refuge and strength where people could go for protection from enemies and danger, as the passages from the Psalms indicate. The writer of Hebrews (6:19) says our hope for safety is anchored in the heavenly sanctuary where, as our High Priest, Jesus pleads our cause before the Father. In Him, we have both righteousness and peace (see Hebrews 7:2). Encourage your group members to share how God is (has been) a sanctuary for them.

3. At God's direction, Ezekiel acted out going into exile because, trusting in God's Word, he knew that God would soon force the people into exile because they did not believe or live according to God's Word. For years, the people had been unfaithful to God and had ignored His prophets. Through Ezekiel's actions, God was again calling His people to repent and trust Him as their Lord. Through His Word, God calls us to repentance and faith in Jesus as our Savior. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, to repair the wall today, we study and trust His Word, teach it diligently to our children, live according to it in our lives, and share it with others.

4. Noah, Daniel, and Job are three stalwarts of the Old Testament noted for their faithfulness toward God. Noah trusted God and followed His instructions to build a huge ark on dry land. Daniel faithfully worshiped God in spite of threats to his life if he continued such worship. Job trusted God even when he lost his family and possessions and his friends advised him to abandon his God. In Ezekiel 14, God, through Ezekiel, calls His people to be faithful to Him and emphasizes that the faith of family members or the heritage of faith from which they come will do them no good; only their own faith in God will bring them righteousness. To the Romans and the Corinthians, Paul states that only through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection for forgiveness of our sins will we be made righteous before God.

5. The two eagles of Ezekiel 17:3 and 7, symbolizing Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar and one of Egypt's pharaohs, did not plant shoots that grew into strong trees. But God, the

sovereign Lord, promises to plant a shoot, His own Son, who will produce strong branches that provide shelter and produce fruit that provides sustenance for His people (Ezekiel 17:22–23). Isaiah speaks of a shoot from the stump of Jesse—Jesus, who will provide shelter and refuge (Isaiah 11:1; 4:2–6). Later, Isaiah speaks of the shoot that is pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5), justifies many, and bears our iniquities (Isaiah 53:11). Jeremiah says that the branch from Jesse's root will be called "The LORD is our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15). Paul reminds us that we are shoots grafted into the tree, that we owe our salvation and our continuing growth in faith to the tree, which is Christ (Romans 11:17). Your group may want to sing a response of thanks to God for our Savior, the branch of Jesse, using the words of the hymn "Let Our Gladness Have No End" (*LSB* 381:3).

6. God begins His conversation with Ezekiel by declaring that every living soul belongs to Him (Ezekiel 18:4) and concludes by reminding Israel that He takes "no pleasure in the death of anyone" (18:32). God's comments take Israel back to creation. God created people to be His own people, loved by Him, in fellowship with Him, and living a full life with Him. What agonizes God is that His own creation constantly abandons Him, is unfaithful to Him, and consistently worships other gods. All His efforts, even in exiling His people, are aimed at calling His people back to Him so that they will not die eternally. For repentant sinners, God blots out their sin (Acts 3:19), forgives their iniquity (Psalm 32:5), and saves them (Acts 16:31). In addition, God empowers the repentant and forgiven sinner to produce fruit (Matthew 3:8) that shows a repentant heart, to give up a life of sin (John 8:11), and to serve others freely, all of which are fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:13, 22–23). To conclude your meditation, pray a prayer for a repentant heart and the blessings of God's grace through Jesus.

## March Week 3 Leader Notes

March 15–21, Ezekiel 20–32

1. In this conversation, God again directed Ezekiel to confront the leaders with Israel's sin and urge them to abandon their "detestable things" (Ezekiel 20:30) and serve the Lord faithfully. Encourage your group members to discuss other serious conversations in Scripture. Joseph had several conversations with his brothers. In the one cited in the lesson, he had to assure his brothers he would not punish them for their sins against him now that their father was dead. He again assured them that they had all been serving God's purposes to save many people from starvation. Nathan called David to repent of his sin and, when David repented, assured David of God's forgiveness. Jesus explained "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27) to two disciples as they walked to Emmaus as well as to all the disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:45). In a meeting with the Jewish Council (the Sanhedrin), the Holy Spirit guided Peter to explain that "there is salvation in no one else" but Jesus (Acts 4:12). As you discuss these stories, encourage your group members to speak seriously and forthrightly with others, especially members of their families, about the Christian faith, always out of love and concern for the eternal salvation of the person. Pray for God's blessing as each of you share the Good News of the Savior with others.

2. Your group members will probably be able to identify several examples of sin being punished with more sin. The daily news provides such examples regularly. Help your group to see that even in our own lives as Christians, we "daily sin much" and we often get on a roller coaster where one sin leads to another. Concentrate on God's remedy for sin, His Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul teaches that all of us sin and cannot justify ourselves; rather, God has provided free justification for believers by the redemption that comes through Jesus. Jesus had no sin and so could impute His righteousness to us and take our punishment for sin upon Himself. By His wounds, we are healed. As you close your discussion, praise God for His gracious gift of forgiveness given to us through Jesus.

3. When people did not respond to His calls to live according to His ways with repentance and reform, God sent the Noahic flood and scattered the people from Babel. On a smaller scale, God had 3,000 Israelites killed for their unfaithfulness in worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32:28). Some have cited the fall of the Roman Empire as punishment for the sins of Rome. Sin always brings destruction. The crucifixion of Jesus, however, is God's ultimate punishment for sin, meted out on His own Son so that those who believe in His promises can have forgiveness and salvation. Sin will continue to bring havoc into our lives, but our salvation is already assured by the resurrection of Jesus, our Savior (John 11:25–26).

4. God's message basically is that He will take care of any punishing that is to be done. God used other nations to call His people to repentance and faithfulness, as Ezekiel well knew. In these accounts, God, through Ezekiel, is comforting Israel and assuring them that He does not want these same nations gloating over the fall of Judah or taking advantage of them because they have been conquered and exiled. Both Proverbs passages warn against gloating over the mistakes and failures of others; such behavior is not to be part of the life of God's people. Paul tells both the Roman and the Thessalonian Christians not to pay back evil with



more evil. He says to let God enact whatever payback is needed. Rather, Paul encourages people to live at peace, to help those who may be enemies, and to overcome evil with good. Jude instructs Christians, even when taunted by scoffers, to live in God's love and mercy and to pray to the Holy Spirit. Pray for such strength, through Christ, as you conclude your discussion.

5. As human beings, we must be careful and thoughtful about the promises we make. And to be a trustworthy person, we must keep our promises, although we know at times we will be unable to do so (for instance, if it rains when we have promised to take the family on a picnic). Promises that we make in our marriage vows are extremely important to keep and should be entered into with careful thought and prayer. Some couples have reiterated their marriage vows in public ceremonies. For Lutheran Christians, confirmation is a reiteration of vows made for us at our Baptism. God, however, is the faithful and able promise-maker. In Ezekiel, God reiterates the promise He made to Abram and Jacob to give the land of Canaan to these families and to bless all people through them. This was God's promise of the Messiah whom He would give for the salvation of the world. The Old Testament is the story of God's working to keep that messianic promise that finds fulfillment in the coming of Jesus at Bethlehem and in His life, sacrificial death, and resurrection that all people might have forgiveness of sins. In Word and Sacraments, God reiterates His promise of salvation to us.

6. Ezekiel's vivid descriptions of the punishment God would bring to Egypt include the picture of Egypt's crocodiles (symbolizing Pharaoh) being thrown on the land to die (29:4–5), Egypt as a wasteland (29:8–12), the pharaoh's arms broken (30:21–25), and a beautiful forest (Assyria) being wasted (ch. 31). The psalmist recalls the unfaithfulness of the Lord's own people, His punishment of them, and His great love for them. In these times marked by much flaunting of God's Word, the plea of the psalmist is our plea also, that God would gather us to Himself and keep us faithful to Him so that we can bring Him praise.

## March Week 4 Leader Notes

### March 22–28, Ezekiel 33–44

1. In both Ezekiel 33–34 and the events of Holy Week, we see God acting to save His people again. He warns them about their sinful condition through Ezekiel's prophecy (33:7, 10); calls on them to repent (33:11); and acts to save them, as would a shepherd, by rescuing them and breaking their yoke of sin (34:12–14, 27), caring for them (34:13–16), making a covenant of peace with them (34:25), and making it possible for them to live in safety (34:28), supplied by showers of blessings (34:26). Jesus does the same for His disciples and us, warning of our sin (John 12:47–50), calling us to repentance (Matthew 4:17), dying on the cross to rescue us from sin (John 20:31; 2 Corinthians 5:15), serving us (John 13:14–17), bringing us peace (John 20:19), providing safety (John 17:15), and bestowing blessing (John 20:29). Encourage your group to find more examples of Jesus being both a watchman and a shepherd in the Holy Week accounts. In prayer, praise Him for His love for us.

2. God punished Israel for their unfaithfulness to Him. God punished the countries around Israel for harboring old animosities (Ezekiel 35:5) and for taunting, harassing, and trying to conquer His people (36:5) when they were defeated and in exile (25–32; 35:10). As He has said so often in the chapters of Ezekiel, He wants us to know Him as our Lord (35:4, 9, 15; 36:23). God promised to restore Israel, not because of anything they had done (36:22), but so that He would be honored as the only true God, who loves and cares for His people. He restored us ultimately through His Son, Jesus, who lived perfectly, suffered completely, died willingly, and rose triumphantly to save us all. We, as saved people of God, respond to His love for us by honoring Him in all we do, proclaiming His love in Christ to all, and caring for others as He did.

3. To cleanse the land so that the people of Israel could return to it and live safely, God defeated Israel's enemies with "pestilence and bloodshed" (Ezekiel 38:22) and destroyed their ability to make war (Ezekiel 39:9–10). Jesus was "pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5), crushed, wounded, oppressed, afflicted, and slaughtered (Isaiah 53:5, 7–8) as well as "cut off out of the land of the living" (Isaiah 53:8). Encourage your group members to find more pictures in these texts and to thank Jesus for His sacrifice. Consider the words of the first stanza in "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (*LSB* 420).

4. We honor and praise God for raising His Son from the dead so that we might have new life in Him. We are those dead bones resurrected to new life through Jesus (Ezekiel 37). Through God's Word, the news of Christ's resurrection makes us joyfully alive in Him. Our enemy—the devil—is conquered, and we are given fully to the work of the Lord. And through God's Word, we are raised at our death with a spiritual body to live with Christ (1 Corinthians 15).

5. Compared with the offerings described in Ezekiel 43, Christ gave Himself as the offering to be made for our sin. His sacrifice was so complete that it need only be made once for our salvation; no additional sacrifices are necessary. Through His sacrifice, we have been

forgiven of all sin; we can approach God in prayer knowing we are completely cleansed. We encourage one another with God's Word.

6. Jesus speaks of Himself as the gate through which His sheep enter and are saved (John 10:7–10). Jesus is the only Savior from sin (John 3:36; 14:6; Acts 4:12). The prince is a picture of Jesus, who, as our High Priest, is the only one who can enter the Most Holy Place and make atonement for our sins (Hebrews 2:17–18). He did this on Calvary. We then can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16) at any time. Use Psalm 118:19–21 as your closing prayer.

## March Week 5 Leader Notes

March 29–31, Ezekiel 45–48

1. One of the concerns of the Lord in describing how land should be allotted, offerings made, festivals celebrated, and measures standardized is that He wanted the people treated fairly; He did not want violence, idolatry, and oppression to run rampant again (Ezekiel 45:9–10). Inheritances were not to be used to deprive the people of their property (46:18). Instead, God wanted the worship life of the people to again focus on atonement for sin (45:17, 20, 22)—the promised Messiah-Savior, who would be both priest and sacrifice, who is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Pray that your own worship and life might have that focus.

2. After his dream near the city of Luz, Jacob renamed the city Bethel, which means “house of God.” He had been assured that God would be with him, watch over him, and bless other people through his family (Genesis 28:10–19). These are all implications of the “LORD Is There” name. Jesus says that under His blessing, our “cities” (homes, churches, schools) will be filled with good deeds that bring glory to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14–16). The Lord assured Paul that he would have protection in the city of Corinth because of the Christian people who were there (Acts 18:10). Our Christian homes, schools, and churches provide protection for the faithful through the Word that is shared, the Sacraments administered, and the guidance provided by faithful parents, pastors, and teachers. These promises of safety and protection are assured because God has established this city (Hebrews 11:10, 16). Likewise, our homes, schools, and churches are established by God through His Word and Sacraments. By faith in the Lord Jesus, God’s people will one day live in His holy city, the new Jerusalem, heaven (Revelation 21:2–4), of which our Christian homes, schools, and congregations are only a foretaste.