

Everyday FAITH Family Page

Old Testament 4

Law/Gospel

The fear of the Lord—reverence for God and trust in Him—is the beginning of wisdom, yet, in my sin, I am unwise, failing to trust in the Lord above all things. **Jesus, Wisdom personified, gives to me and all who believe in Him a share of His wisdom, that is, Himself.**

Bible Words

The LORD gives wisdom.
Proverbs 2:6

Fun Facts

God blessed King Solomon with much wealth.

- 40,000 horses for 1,400 chariots driven by 12,000 horsemen
- large army and fleet of ships
- vast amounts of gold, precious stones, and spices
- an ivory throne overlaid with gold that had six steps and fourteen lions decorating it
- gold tableware and cups
- peacocks and apes

Each day, his household needed:

- 180 bushels of flour
- 360 bushels of meal
- 10 head of stall-fed cattle
- 20 head of pasture-fed cattle
- 100 sheep, plus deer and other meats

Solomon's businesses brought in a yearly revenue of 666 talents of gold (about 25 tons).

SOURCES: 1 Kings 4:22–23, 26; 10:14, 18–22, 26

The Wisdom of Solomon

1 Kings 3

After David died, his son Solomon became king. The Lord promised to give Solomon anything he asked for. He requested wisdom and the Lord gladly gave this gift. The Bible credits 3,000 wise proverbs and more than 1,005 songs to Solomon (1 Kings 4:32). He authored or coauthored three books in the Bible: Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes.

Solomon became known throughout the world. His kingdom thrived. Enjoying peace and prosperity, the people “ate and drank and were happy” (1 Kings 4:20).

Sadly, Solomon unwisely turned away from the Lord. He married 700 princesses, probably in peace alliances with other nations, and had 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:1–3). Most of these wives worshiped idols and “when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 11:4).

Solomon broke God's First Commandment, which says to have no other gods. Instead, “we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things” (Meaning of the First Commandment, Luther's Small Catechism).

We may not worship statues, but we often misplace our trust in God. We seek identity, meaning, comfort, and help in other things, such as wealth, ambition, other people, and ourselves. Ultimately, these things disappoint us and fail to fulfill our deep desire to know and be known by God.

Born in sin, none of us can keep God's Law perfectly. That's why God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth as our Savior. He “justified [us] by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith” (Romans 3:24–25). Jesus did the hard work to redeem us; we receive this gift by faith in Him, the true wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24–25).

Prayer

Dear Lord, make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

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Law/Gospel

In my sin, I want to keep God at a distance; I don't want Him to see who I really am. **God, in His love, draws me near to Him through His Son, Jesus, the Word made flesh. He tabernacles (dwells) with me and all believers through Word and Sacrament, forgiving my sin.**

Bible Words

It is good to be near God.
Psalm 73:28

Fun Facts

God directed Israel to make a movable tabernacle so He could dwell with them as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land. (*Tabernacle* means "dwelling.") God provided details for making this tent sanctuary and furnishings in Exodus 25–30. When built, a cloud covered it and "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34). Later, Israel built and experienced the destruction of three replacement temples. Jesus is the final tabernacle. Jesus "dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. . . . For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14, 17).

Solomon Builds the Temple

1 Kings 5–6

King David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, a replacement for the tent tabernacle made in the wilderness, but the Lord refused his offer. Instead, David gathered materials and his successor built it.

King Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba, used the best supplies and craftsmen for the temple. King Hiram of Tyre provided workmen and cedar from Lebanon, floated south on rafts on the Mediterranean Sea.

Solomon drafted 30,000 Israelites to work in Tyre, in monthly shifts of 10,000. He sent 70,000 burden-bearers and 80,000 stonemasons to Israel's hill country to quarry large stones for the foundation and walls.

Situated on the highest site in Jerusalem, the temple stood almost four stories high, ninety feet long, and thirty feet wide. Craftsmen laid cypress wood floors and lined the internal stone walls with cedar. Artists carved the cedar with cherubim, palm trees, and flowers. Finally, metal workers overlaid all of the cedar with gold.

Solomon divided the temple into two areas, following the design of the tabernacle. Priests entered the Holy Place once a day to pray and burn incense. Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only once a year, on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement.

An artist from Tyre made bronze pillars and new items to join the ark of the covenant and other tabernacle furnishings in the temple. Workmen finished construction in seven years and the people joyfully dedicated the temple to the Lord God of Israel.

The New Testament Book of Hebrews explains how the Old Testament points to Jesus, our great High Priest, who was tempted as we are but did not sin (Hebrews 4:14–16). He offered Himself once for all sin on the cross (Hebrews 9:26). He is the mediator of the new covenant, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2, 24).

Prayer

Dear Lord, send Your Holy Spirit to dwell in us, lead us, and give us Your peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



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Law/Gospel

In sin, I complain that God does not give me what I need or deserve. **God daily supplies me with those good gifts that sustain me in body and soul, giving each of them through His Son.**

Bible Words

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

James 1:17

From the Catechism

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

God Provides for Elijah

1 Kings 17

God's prophets spoke for Him, conveying special messages or teachings to the people and leaders. They advised judges, kings, and military commanders. Prophets were not fortune-tellers, though their messages sometimes revealed future events. Some recorded these messages on scrolls, which we retain in the Old Testament Scriptures.

As role models of holiness and closeness to God, prophets visualized God's Word, sometimes in strange ways. But if a prophet spoke falsely, the Law demanded his or her death (Deuteronomy 18:20).

After the kingdom of Israel split in 931 BC, God's prophets advised those in both kingdoms. The northern tribes became Israel; two southern tribes became Judea.

Elijah was a prophet of the Lord in Israel, the Northern Kingdom, for twenty-three years. During that time, many people worshiped their neighbors' false male and female gods, Baal and Asherah. Baal, the god of rain and thunder, supposedly gave life and health. To expose Baal's falsehood, the Lord sent a drought. (Could Baal stop it? Of course not!)

The drought became very severe. Water dried up. Crops burned. Food became scarce. During this time, the Lord sent Elijah to live by a brook. Each day, the Lord sent ravens with bread and meat to him twice a day.

When the brook dried up, the Lord sent Elijah to live with a widow in Zarephath, a coastal city in a foreign country north of Israel. There, the Lord cared for this foreign widow, her son, and His prophet by providing flour and oil in containers that never emptied.

Later, the Lord raised the widow's dead son through the prophet. The ecstatic mother responded, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). May we know and trust His Word, our Savior Jesus Christ, too (John 1:14).

Prayer

Jesus, our risen Lord and Savior, care for us and open our hearts to receive by faith Your forgiveness of sin and eternal life, gained for us in Your perfect life, death, and resurrection. In Your name we pray. Amen.

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God demands that I fear, love, and trust in Him alone; yet I sinfully place my trust elsewhere. **Jesus proved that He is the true Lord by offering Himself as the sacrifice for sin, once and for all. He calls me back from my sin to His forgiving embrace.**

Bible Words

Every word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
Proverbs 30:5

Fun Fact

After the showdown, Elijah warned King Ahab God would send rain to end the drought. When a little cloud rose over the Mediterranean Sea, Elijah warned Ahab to start down the mountain because rain was coming. A great rain fell; obviously not sent by Baal.

Prayer

Dear Lord, by Your Word and Sacraments, keep us faithful to You and Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

1 Kings 18:20–46

Sparks flew at Mount Carmel when God's prophet Elijah challenged Baal's prophets to prove their god's alleged power over rain.

God refuted Baal's supposed power by stopping the rain for three years. Unconvinced, Israel's King Ahab and his wife Jezebel continued to lead the people to worship Baal and Asherah, the male and female gods of the Canaanites. Eight hundred and fifty false prophets even ate at the table of the king and queen.

In the third year of the drought, the Lord sent His prophet Elijah to challenge King Ahab to a showdown. Ahab, 450 Baal prophets, and many Israelites met Elijah on Mount Carmel to find out if Baal or the Lord was the true God. (Jezebel and her 400 false prophets stayed home.)

Elijah insisted the Israelites follow the Lord or Baal, not both. He proposed that the Baal prophets sacrifice a bull and call on their god. He would do the same. The true God would answer with fire from heaven.

Baal's 450 prophets built an altar, set wood on it, sacrificed a bull, and chanted and danced most of the day. At noon, Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry louder, for surely Baal is a true god. He might be thinking, relieving himself, traveling, or sleeping." Baal never responded.

Toward evening, God's one prophet called the people to him. Elijah rebuilt an altar of the Lord with twelve stones, dug a trench around the altar, stacked wood, and sacrificed his bull. Then he drenched the bull and wood with water, filling the trench. Then he did it again, and again.

Elijah prayed once, "Answer me, O Lord, that this people may know that You are God, and that You turned their hearts back to You." Fire from the one true God fell from heaven and burned up the bull, wood, stones, dust, and water in the trench.

The Lord showed He is the one and only true God, and His people confessed, "The LORD, He is God" (v. 39). Our true Lord created and controls the universe and its systems. This same Lord gave His only Son to pay for sin on the cross and give believers life and forgiveness in Him.

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Death overtakes me because I am permeated by sin and am subject to its penalty. **The death and resurrection of Jesus, through which He reconciles us to God, is the death of death itself, assuring me that I and all believers will rise to eternal life.**

Bible Words

[Jesus says,] "I will come again and will take you to Myself."
John 14:3

From the Catechism The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

Elisha honored his teacher Elijah with faithfulness and followed the Fourth Commandment, just as God commands us to do.

Elijah Is Taken to Heaven

2 Kings 2:1–15

When the time came for Elijah to go to heaven, God took him home in a way like no other person in history.

That day, Elijah and his student Elisha traveled to see groups of God's prophets in several places. All of the prophets knew Elijah would soon depart. Because of this, Elisha refused to leave his teacher's side. When Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he left, Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit. Elijah replied that this was a hard thing, but it would happen if Elisha saw him taken from him.

Suddenly, chariots and horses of fire divided the two men. Elisha watched as the Lord took Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind. Elisha cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" (v.12).

Why chariots? Chariots demonstrated a king's strength. They struck fear in the heart of enemies. This appearance of the fiery chariots and horses showed the strength of the Lord in His prophets and Elijah's importance in Israel's history.

Later as Elisha lay on his deathbed, Israel's King Joash tearfully offered these same affirming words: "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" (2 Kings 13:14). God's prophets were the true chariots of the Lord God, demonstrators of His strength, power, and truth.

Elijah's Replacement: Elisha

Elisha succeeded Elijah as God's primary prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 850–798 BC. Elisha's ministry differed from Elijah's. He did not confront the evil kings with the Law as Elijah did. Instead, his message offered grace and hope in the Lord.

Elisha performed many miracles such as purifying poisoned water, providing oil for a widow to pay her debts, multiplying food to feed a large crowd, curing a leper, and raising a boy from the dead.

The Bible compares Elijah to John the Baptist, while Elisha's ministry and message point to Jesus.

Prayer

Lord God, keep us in true faith today and forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Sin and its effects slowly kill me, both in body and soul. **Jesus saves me, both in body and soul. He cleanses me from sin and at the resurrection will heal my body and make it perfect, so it will be like His.**

Bible Words

The Lord is my helper.
Hebrews 13:6

Not-So-Fun Facts

Leprosy, also called Hansen's disease, results from a bacterial infection. It inflames the nerves, respiratory tract, skin, and eyes. Nerve damage causes inability to feel pain, which often results in the loss of extremities due to injury or infection. Once considered incurable, drug therapy now cures leprosy in about six months. When the World Health Organization began providing no-cost treatment, the number of chronic cases in the world decreased from 5.2 million in the 1980s to 189,000 in 2012. More than half of the new cases each year appear in India. Two hundred cases are reported each year in the United States. For more information, visit the World Health Organization's website: www.who.int.

Naaman and Elisha

2 Kings 5:1-14

A little girl played a key role in the miraculous healing of Naaman, a Syrian military commander. Syria often battled Israel, their enemy to the south. In one border skirmish, the Syrians carried off a little Israelite girl who became a servant to Naaman's wife.

The Bible calls Naaman a great and highly favored man of valor. Sadly, he suffered from the incurable disease of leprosy. The servant girl told her mistress about an Israelite prophet who could heal her husband.

Naaman told his king about the prophet, and his king wrote a letter to the king of Israel to ask for healing. Taking lavish gifts, Naaman showed up at the palace in Samaria. When he read the letter, the king of Israel despaired and tore his clothing. He knew he could not heal the man and assumed the king of Syria was picking a fight with him.

When Elisha the prophet heard about this, he told Israel's king to send Naaman to him so that he would know there is a prophet in Israel. When Naaman arrived, Elisha sent a messenger to tell him to wash in the Jordan River seven times to restore his skin and become clean.

Naaman did not understand that God's Law prevented Elisha from meeting a leper in person (Leviticus 13:46) and became very angry. He expected a personal meeting and a little hocus pocus, not simple and ordinary directions. His servants talked Naaman into following the instructions. When he did, his flesh was restored. He was clean.

This narrative points us to Jesus, who cleanses us from sin through the waters of Holy Baptism. There, we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection and receive forgiveness of sin and new life, now and forever.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to remember that You made us Your own beloved children in Baptism. Help us to trust and follow You always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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In my sin, I judge and condemn others. I am unforgiving because I am blind to my own sin and guilt. **God, who sees my sin, is rich in mercy and forgives me for Jesus' sake.**

Bible Words

[Jesus said,] "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Matthew 12:40

Just Joking

Which bird helped Jonah in the belly of the fish?

A swallow

Sing

God, our Father, hear Your children

As we come to You in prayer,
Knowing You are always with us,
Giving us Your love and care.

Bless our parents, friends, and teachers,

Bless all those with whom we play.

Show us how to help each other
In the things we do and say.

"God, Our Father, Hear Your Children," stanzas 1 and 2 by Sophie Damme, *Little Ones Sing Praise*, page 14, copyright © 1989 CPH.

Jonah

Book of Jonah

Many prophets spoke God's Word, but God sent only Jonah to prophesy in Nineveh, the capital city of Israel's Assyrian enemies. Jonah didn't want this assignment, so he hopped a ship and tried to hide from the Lord.

Jonah soon learned that you can't run away from the living God. The Lord sent a great wind that railed against the ship. The sailors felt afraid and called out to their gods. They hurled cargo overboard and fought the storm. All this while, Jonah slept in the hull.

Desperate, the sailors cast lots to discern who brought this evil on them; the lot fell on Jonah. He told them to hurl him into the sea to stop the storm. They refused, but finally relented. When Jonah went overboard, the wind and sea stopped raging.

The Lord sent a great fish to swallow Jonah. For three days and three nights, Jonah survived in the fish's belly. Finally, he prayed to the Lord and repented. "And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:10).

Jonah went to Nineveh. He called the people to repent or be overtaken in forty days. The people and their king turned from their evil. God withdrew His judgment and preserved the city.

Jonah should have exulted in his success, but instead felt angry and wanted to die. He wanted God to take revenge on Israel's enemies, not offer grace. He told the Lord he fled because he knew "that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster" (Jonah 4:2). Gently, the Lord showed Jonah the reason for His grace, but the Bible does not share Jonah's response. Perhaps like us, he needed time to adjust his attitudes.

Jesus foretold that He would experience Jonah's separation from God (see sidebar Bible Words). Like Jonah, Jesus descended into darkness, forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46). For us, Jesus experienced judgment, condemnation, and death before He rose from the dead after three days to give us forgiveness and new life.

Prayer

Jesus, help us repent of our sin and trust You to save us, forgive us, and renew us, in Your name. Amen.

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Law/Gospel

Sin makes me proud. It causes me to avoid God because I think I am self-sufficient and don't need Him. **My heavenly Father is always ready to hear me and my cries for help, giving me His Son for my salvation.**

Bible Words

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16

Sing

We all believe in one true God,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Ever present help in need,
Praised by all the heav'nly host;
All He made His love enfold,
All creation He upholds.

*"We All Believe in One True God"
Lutheran Service Book 953*

Fun Facts

You can see an Assyrian relief showing Judah paying tribute to Sennacherib. Search "Lachish Relief" pictures online. Lachish was one of the other walled Judean cities that Sennacherib besieged (2 Kings 18:13-16).

Hezekiah Prays

2 Kings 18-19

Hezekiah inherited the throne of the Southern Kingdom of Judah from his father, Ahaz, when he was twenty-five years old.

A rare king, Hezekiah "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (2 Kings 18:3). He removed the high places, altars, and symbols used to worship idols, and reinstated worship of the true God in the temple. The people celebrated Passover again. Hezekiah kept the commandments of the Lord and "the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered" (2 Kings 18:7).

In the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to King Sennacherib, and the Assyrians took Israel into captivity (722 BC). Hezekiah stood up to the Assyrians after this happened, but Sennacherib eventually besieged Jerusalem and many other walled cities in Judea (701 BC).

During the siege, Hezekiah called God's prophet Isaiah and they prayed to the Lord. Judah paid an enormous tribute to avoid exile, equivalent to around \$43 million today. When Sennacherib tried to capture Jerusalem anyway, the Lord sent an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in the middle of the night. Sennacherib retreated and did not return.

For the most part, Judean kings after Hezekiah did not follow the Lord. As a result, God allowed Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who had defeated the Assyrians, to besiege Jerusalem. After eighteen months, Jerusalem suffered a severe famine. Nebuchadnezzar's army breached the walls, burned the Lord's temple, and tore down the city walls. Six hundred years before Jesus' birth, the educated and wealthy people of Judah went to Babylon as prisoners of war.

God's prophets pointed the people to a new hope, a new king with an eternal kingdom. This promise was fulfilled when God sent His Son, Jesus, as our Savior. Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. In His resurrection, Jesus defeated our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. He gives those who believe in Him forgiveness of sin and new life in the kingdom of God.

Prayer

Jesus, give us church leaders who trust You alone. Preserve us in true faith in You, our risen Savior and Lord. In Your name we pray. Amen.

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Law/Gospel

Disobedience to God's Law means temporal and eternal punishment for me and all people. **God saves His people not through obedience to the Law, but through Jesus, the promised Branch, who would keep the Law and suffer for my sins and for the sins of the whole world on the cross.**

Bible Words

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.
Jeremiah 29:11

Fun Facts

Jeremiah served as God's prophet from 628–ca. 580 BC. When Jerusalem finally fell, Jeremiah went into exile in Egypt with a group of Jews. He died there.

We have Jeremiah's writings in the Old Testament books of Lamentations and Jeremiah. He wrote, "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).

Jeremiah and God's New Covenant

Jeremiah 1:4–10; 29:1–14; 31:31–34; 33:14–16

Jeremiah became a prophet of the Lord as a youth. He became known as the weeping prophet because he sadly foretold the impending destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. This capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was attacked and besieged in several waves beginning in 605 BC. The final destruction came in 587 BC.

God allowed the exile as punishment for the sins of the kings, priests, false prophets, and people, especially worshipping false idols and failing to trust in God alone. Jeremiah preached the Law of God to lead the people to repent of their sins and return to the Lord, their Savior.

When the Babylonians took away the first waves of exiles, Jeremiah preached to them through letters. He said the exile was God's doing. The Lord wanted them to live peacefully, to carry on everyday life, and to pray for the welfare of the foreign cities where they lived. He warned them not to listen to false prophets who said they would soon leave Babylon. Rather, this punishment would last seventy years, after which God would lead them back to their land in Judah.

God's plan was not for destruction, but to give the people a hope and a future. After seventy years, the repentant people would call on God. He would answer them and restore them in their own land.

Through Jeremiah, God promised a new covenant, fulfilled centuries later through Jesus. Jeremiah prophesied that a "righteous Branch" would spring from David's family (Jeremiah 33:15). He would bring an eternal covenant because He lives forever. His name would be "The LORD is our righteousness" (33:16), because He would bring forgiveness, healing, and the hope of eternal life and salvation.

Jesus did this by suffering and dying to pay for sin and rising again, conquering death and the grave for all who believe in Him.

Prayer

Dear Lord, lead us to repent of our sins and trust You to forgive us for the sake of Jesus, our righteous Branch, who died to pay for them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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In sin, I choose what makes the world, my flesh, and the devil happy and try to avoid the suffering or trouble that sometimes comes my way because of my faith in God. **He who once walked unharmed with the three faithful men in the fiery furnace also suffered the fiery wrath of God by dying on the cross to pay for my sins. Through Word and Sacrament, He sustains me through all the troubles I have in this life and assures me of life with Him in heaven.**

Bible Words

Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

Fun Facts

The Babylonians changed Hebrew names to ones connected to Babylonian gods. Daniel was called Belteshazzar; Hananiah became Shadrach; Mishael became Meshach; and Azariah became Abednego (Daniel 1:7).

The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3

When they defeated the Assyrians in 626 BC, the Babylonians became the most powerful nation in the ancient world. Their empire covered the entire Fertile Crescent, from Egypt's upper Nile to the Persian Gulf. Ruins of their ancient city of Babylon lie within present-day Iraq, about fifty miles south of Baghdad.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah sat at key crossroads of major trade routes from Babylon to Lebanon, Egypt, and Greece. Because of their important location, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and exiled educated and wealthy Judeans in several deportations starting in 605 BC. They destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC.

The captors imposed their language, lifestyle, and religion on the Judeans. Exiles Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego became influential government officials, but they defied King Nebuchadnezzar's order to bow down to a golden image. They knew, but did not fear, the king's decree to throw those who would not bow down into a fiery furnace.

When Nebuchadnezzar questioned the three men about their offense, they said, "Our God we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, but if He does not we still won't serve your gods or worship the golden image." Furious, the king ordered the men tied up and tossed into the furnace. He looked in and saw four men walking unhurt in the fire. The appearance of the fourth he described as like "a son of the gods" (v. 25).

The king called the three men out of the fire. The fire did not affect them. Their hair was not singed. Their clothes were not burned. They didn't even smell like smoke!

The preincarnate Son of God Himself saved the three men from the fire. Our Savior is with us when we suffer for His name too. Since we are baptized into His death and resurrection, it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us, suffers in us, and remains faithful in us.

Prayer

Dear Lord, deliver us from evil and protect us by Your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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In the world, evil is called good, and those who seek to do good suffer and are brought down by sinners who hate anything good. **In Christ, I am blessed when I suffer for His name. He is with me, granting me His comfort and strength and preserving my life eternally by giving me salvation in Him.**

Bible Words

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.

1 Peter 5:8–9

Prayer

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Luther's Morning Prayer

Daniel in the Lions' Den

Daniel 6

Daniel was a Jerusalem youth exiled to Babylon in 605 BC for training in the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Daniel became a government official. When he interpreted the king's dream, the king was impressed and made Daniel "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men" (Daniel 2:48).

When the Persians ousted the Babylonians, Daniel became part of King Darius's three-man adviser group, in charge of 120 regional governors, called satraps. When the king valued Daniel above others, his political peers plotted against him.

Though Daniel lived in Babylon for years, he remained faithful to the God of Israel. He shunned the idolatry and ungodly ways of his neighbors. Three times a day, Daniel faced toward Jerusalem and prayed. Seeing this, his enemies convinced the king to decree that people could pray only to him for thirty days, or be thrown into a den of lions. Calmly, Daniel continued to pray to the Lord in front of the windows in his home.

Of course the Persians told King Darius about Daniel's prayers. The king tried all day to find a way to release Daniel, but finally sent him to the lions' den. The Lord did not abandon Daniel, but shut the lions' mouths. Daniel emerged in the morning without a scratch.

Daniel's life points to Jesus. Jealous leaders, false accusations, a "tomb" sealed with a stone, and divine deliverance echoed in His earthly life too. To save the world, Jesus fought the satanic lion (1 Peter 5:8). When God raised Him from the dead, He "delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13–14).

A Prophet of God

Like other Old Testament prophets, Daniel was highly regarded as a spiritual leader chosen by God. Daniel was a prophet, serving as God's spokesperson to reveal His will and plan to the people.

God also gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams. Daniel revealed the meaning of several dreams to King Nebuchadnezzar. With God's help, Daniel even interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's first dream without knowing its content!

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Old Testament 4

Law/Gospel

God's just judgment on unbelief and sin is punishment and exile from Him forever. **In mercy and grace, God forgives my sins, reclaims me as His child, and blesses me with all good things for the sake of His Son, Jesus, who will take me to the new Jerusalem, my home in heaven, where there is joy and celebration forever.**

Bible Words

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
Philippians 4:6

Sing

God loves me dearly,
Grants me salvation,
God loves me dearly,
Loves even me.

Jesus, my Savior,
Himself did offer;
Jesus, my Savior,
Paid all I owed

"God Loves Me Dearly," stanzas 1 and 4
Lutheran Service Book 392

God's People Go Home

Ezra 1-3; 7:11-28; Nehemiah 2:1-8; 12:27-43

Persia conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC while Jewish exiles lived there. The new king, Cyrus the Great, respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. He returned many prisoners of war to their homelands, often with treasures stolen from them.

The Jews benefited from Cyrus's generosity. He gave permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, the city, and its walls. He also returned 5,400 gold and silver items that were taken from the temple.

It took some time to organize, gather offerings, and travel back to Judah. Once there, the people built houses, and then rebuilt the altar of the Lord and started sacrificing. The next year, they began rebuilding the temple of the Lord.

People living near Jerusalem resisted these efforts early and often. They tattled to King Cyrus and his successors Darius and Xerxes (Ahasuerus), fearing that a strong wall in Jerusalem would enable rebellion. Political troubles in Egypt and other nations made the kings open to these accusations. Temple building stopped for fourteen years. The people finally finished the temple in 516 BC under the leadership of the Jewish governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua.

Under King Artaxerxes, Ezra and then Nehemiah moved back to Jerusalem to help their people. As a scribe and religious teacher, Ezra helped the people learn and practice God's Law. Nehemiah, the king's trusted cupbearer, returned to rebuild the city walls and gates. Under his leadership, the people completed this task in just fifty-two days!

Jesus reconciled sinners exiled from God. "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has . . . broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:13-14). Jesus builds bridges, not walls.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, when we sin, help us turn back to You and find peace and forgiveness only You can give. Amen.



Everyday FAITH Family Page

Old Testament 4

Law/Gospel

In my sin, I am apathetic and anxious, and I despair in this life. **No matter how desperate the times or how hidden God and His ways seem to be, the Lord has a plan to save me in Jesus, His Son.**

Bible Words

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.
Psalm 34:17

Fun Facts

The Book of Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not include God's name or any of the names the Bible uses for Him, such as Lord, Adonai, or Yahweh.

Sing

Anytime, day or night
God's good angels are there,
Watching over me,
Watching over me.
Anywhere, day or night,
God's good angels are there,
Watching over me,
Watching over me.

"Angels Are There," by Gail Pawlitz, from *Sing and Wonder*, p. 16, copyright © 2015 CPH.

Esther

Book of Esther

It would be hard to find a popular movie plot more dramatic than the one recorded in the Book of Esther.

A powerful king chose an orphan raised by her cousin as his new queen. Soon after, the queen's cousin infuriated a new adviser to the king because he would not bow and pay homage to him. Seeking revenge, the arrogant adviser plotted to kill the cousin and his whole tribe, not realizing the plan ensnared the queen as well. Instead, God helped the queen cleverly expose the conspirator and save her people.

All this happened in Babylon during the reign of King Ahasuerus. Exiled by an earlier king, the Jewish people lived away from their homeland, but God did not abandon them. The Lord delivered them from annihilation through the efforts of Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai.

The narrative reminds us of God's great love that rescued us from sin through the death of His sinless Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In His death on the cross, Jesus paid for our sins. When He rose from the dead three days later, He defeated death and the power of the devil. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

The Festival of Purim

To celebrate God's rescue, the Jews established the festival of Purim 473 BC in Susa. Today, Jewish people celebrate Purim for one day in late February or early March, a month before Passover.

Purim means "lot." Haman chose the date to kill the Jews by casting lots, a random process, such as picking a short stick.

During the celebration, the Book of Esther is read aloud. The people boo, hiss, and make noise whenever they hear Haman's name. The celebration also includes singing, special foods, costumes, plays, and pageants with girls dressed up as Queen Esther.

Prayer

Dear Lord, when we feel defeated or overwhelmed, give us hope and trust in You, the one true God, who protects, defends, and guides us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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