

## September 16 — The Lord's Hand

### READ

Ezra 4:7-23, 7:1-8:36

*Ezra 7:27-28, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem in this way and who has extended His good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me."*

### THINK

Consider the difference between being comfortable and being courageous.

Comfort is a natural choice; courage may require a step of faith into the unknown. Comfort is often the peace and quiet of minding our own business; courage may demand us to speak up and step away from the crowd. Comfort lets us stay in place; courage requires some form of movement. Comfort tends towards selfishness; courage most often affects others!

Ezra was courageous and followed obediently where God was leading. He did not depend on his own strength or his own abilities, but he stepped out of his comfort zone in faith because the hand of the Lord was on him. The Lord greatly blessed Ezra's journey and allowed even the pagan king to extend his favor on him — and where the hand of the Lord is, blessing is sure to follow.

Are you too comfortable? If so, it may be time to stand up and speak out, despite what those around you may say or think. Maybe it's time to skip the snooze button and roll out of bed earlier to serve others. Or maybe you need to finally invite that friend to church. As a Christ-follower, trust that His hand is on you, have faith, and find the courage to act!

### PRAY

Lord, show me. Am I moving towards comfort based on my own abilities? Or am I stepping out in faith, focused on Your glory? Lord, lead me and place Your hand of blessing on me! Amen.

## September 15 — Be Careful What You Wish For!

### READ

Esther 5:1-10:3

*Esther 7:7-9, "Then the king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden. Haman, however, stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther, for he knew that the king intended to kill him. In despair, he fell on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining, just as the king was returning from the palace garden. The king exclaimed, 'Will he even assault the queen right here in the palace, before my very eyes?' And as soon as the king spoke, his attendants covered Haman's face, signaling his doom. Then Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said, 'Haman has set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet tall in his own courtyard. He intended to use it to impale Mordecai, the man who saved the king from assassination.' Then impale Haman on it! 'the king ordered."*

### THINK

Have you ever wanted something so bad you'd do anything to get it? Hopefully, not as much as Haman in the book of Esther. He was so jealous of Mordecai, Esther's uncle, that he tried to have all the Jews in the land killed due to his ineptitude and inability to give credit where credit was due.

But jealousy always comes back to bite in the end. All of Haman's carefully laid plans for Mordecai's demise came back to haunt him as he suffered the very ending that he'd hoped Mordecai to suffer — he was impaled on a high pole just as he'd tried to orchestrate for his foe's death.

Be careful what you wish for! If we have animosity towards others — especially those who live in light of God's will and plans, it will always go wrong for us in the end. Seek God first! If someone is God's enemy, then the Bible says it is for God to repay their wrath. If they are of God and we seek their downfall, we befall that wished-for outcome. Bottom line: Seek God first and His righteousness, as Matthew 6:33 tells us to do, and all things will be added unto us! We can't go wrong if we seek to live out the path and purpose God has placed before us!

### PRAY

God, I seek Your will and righteousness first, trusting that all things will be added to me in return. Forgive me when I think ill of others and hope the worst for them. I know that it only leads me along the wrong path. I want to live out Your perfect will. Amen.

## September 14 — Put Your Brave On

### READ

Ezra 6:14-22, 4:6

Esther 1:1-4:17

Esther 4:14-16, *"If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.' "*

### THINK

Esther, known for her beauty, caught the eye of King Xerxes of Persia, and he crowned her queen. One day, she received word from her uncle, Mordecai, that there was a terrible plot to kill her people, the Jews, who were living in the land. His message was clear: act now. Use the power of your position or you'll be answerable to God. Talk about a nail-biting decision! As we see in today's reading, she potentially risked death either way.

You might be thinking, "What's so courageous about talking to your husband?" Well, it was illegal for anyone (family included) to approach the king without his summons. The penalty for breaking the law was death — even for his queen!

Esther feared God and was willing to take a stand for God's people — even if it meant she would perish. And we can reasonably deduce that, by asking her fellow Jews to join her in a three-day fast, she strongly believed in the power of prayer. She sought God's will first, which gave her the courage to act.

Courage comes in all forms. Sometimes it's going against the crowd or speaking truth to power. Other times it's quietly doing the right thing even in the face of great opposition. It's doing what the Holy Spirit prompts you to do, even if it doesn't make sense at the time. As long as it's within God's will, we never have to be afraid, and we'll always find victory in the end. So, today, be an "Esther" — put your brave on and trust God because He wants to work through you to accomplish great things!

### PRAY

Father, Thank You for giving me a courageous heart to accomplish Your purpose for my life. As I put my brave on and take action, I trust You to strengthen my steps. Like Esther, I want to seize the opportunities You place before me! In Jesus' name, Amen!

## September 13 — The Greatest Gift of All

### READ

Zechariah 9:1-14:21

*Zechariah 9:9, "Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet He is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt."*

### THINK

Have you ever looked forward to something with great anticipation? That was how the people of Israel felt as they awaited the coming of the Messiah, the world's Savior.

Today's verse is a direct prophecy of the coming Messiah. Not only did Mary, His mom, ride on a donkey before giving birth to Him in a smelly manger, but He also rode into Jerusalem on a donkey prior to His death, as the King of kings. He humbled Himself to ride like a commoner before dying on the cross — a death reserved for the worst of criminals. We have a Savior who was willing to suffer for us, to shed His blood for our salvation. That is our greatest gift! A gift we should never lose sight of, something we should always approach with great appreciation.

Are you truly grateful for the gift of a lifetime? Are you in awe of your Savior? Never take Him for granted. He died so that you could live eternally. Give thanks for the greatest gift of all!

### PRAY

Lord Jesus, Thank You for humbling Yourself in life and death for my salvation. It is truly the greatest gift of all! Amen.

## September 12 — Better Days Ahead

### READ

Zechariah 6:1-8:23

Ezra 5:3-6:14

*Zechariah 8:4-8, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. ... It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to Me? ... I will save My people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be My people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.'"*

### THINK

Children play in the streets while old men and women sit and watch with canes resting in their laps. A ball escapes the group of kids and bounces towards a smiling older lady. She gently swats it back towards the boy running after it. The boy gives a gentle wave of appreciation and then turns back to the game.

There is no fear along this Jerusalem street. There is no concern over war, hunger, or brutality. The children will return home safely, and the old will not be taken advantage of.

This restoration of complete peace is hard to imagine but not impossible for God to do. And if God can do that in a Jerusalem street, is there anything in your life that's beyond His ability to restore? Is there anything you fear that He can't conquer? Any relationship too far gone for reconciliation? No! If He wills it, it WILL happen. So, entrust every battle, fear, and relationship to God. He is faithful, righteous, and able to bring victory into every circumstance — for His glory and your good. God adores to restore!

### PRAY

Lord, It's hard to imagine that You can bring good out of the difficult things I'm facing today. But my life is not my own — I am YOURS. As Your child, I trust that You are more powerful than the anxieties that arise within me and that You will guide me by Your Holy Spirit in every relationship. Lord, be glorified in me, and as I continue to walk forward by faith, I pray that I will one day be able to look back and say, "What a marvelous thing You have done!" Amen.

## September 11 — You are Seen!

### READ

Haggai 2:1-23  
Zechariah 1:1-5:11  
Ezra 5:2

*Zechariah 1:11-13, “And they reported to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, ‘We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace. Then the angel of the Lord said, ‘Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?’”* ‘  
*So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.”*

### THINK

Do you ever feel invisible or unseen? Do you ever wonder why you seem to be having to endure more hardships and challenges than most? It’s as if no one sees it but you. Even more unbearable than the circumstances themselves is the solitude of facing them alone.

The Jews Zechariah was with had similar struggles. After so many years spent in captivity, they were allowed to return to what was left of their home, in Jerusalem, to begin rebuilding the temple. Meanwhile, they were met with opposition from their neighbors, and it seemed like those who ravaged their land in the first place would just get away with it all. They, too, likely had such thoughts as, “Has God forgotten us?” “Does He care?” “Why are they being allowed to get away with this?” “Is ANYONE seeing this?!” When Zechariah received God’s vision, it must have given him comfort to realize that God did, in fact, see them, and He cared about their plight. And, in fact, God was at work with a plan in mind for their redemption.

The message Zechariah received is a reminder to us today. In the darkest of circumstances, when it seems we are most alone, we are not. God is not surprised or unaware. He sees you, cares about what you are going through, and He loves you! We can take comfort in knowing that He does have a plan. We may not receive a vision of how it will play out, but we can be assured He is at work. In the meantime, hold on to His Word and let His peace that surpasses all understanding guard your heart and mind in Christ!

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for seeing and caring about me in all circumstances. When I feel alone, remind me to cling to You and Your Word. I trust that You are in control amid the chaos. Please cover me with Your peace. In Jesus ’name, Amen.

## September 10 — Consider Your Ways!

### READ

Daniel 10:1-12:13

Ezra 4:24-5:1

Haggai 1:1-15

Haggai 1:5-6, 8-9, *“Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much but harvested little. ... Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build My house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored... You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why? ... Because of My house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.’”*

### THINK

Have you ever been on a spiritual high? The world is your oyster because God is on your side, and you think, “What could possibly go wrong?” Suddenly, BOOM! You find yourself reeling because you feel attacked on all sides. It’s then you realize that the greatest mountaintop moments are also the greatest opportunities for Satan to attack, to level you, and bring you low.

The Jews were on a spiritual high. They were excited to serve God and rebuild the temple. Satan saw this as a prime opportunity to cause trouble. They were met with great opposition from the land’s new inhabitants who tried to thwart their efforts at every turn. Instead of relying on God’s power, they made excuses for why they couldn’t do it. They turned their focus towards rebuilding their own homes and livelihoods. But they’d later realize that they would be met with hardships from God Himself despite their efforts. All their toil produced little because they were more concerned with themselves than they were with obeying God.

As we see in the passage above, God sent a clear message that He was displeased and gave a directive that we, too, should consider: “Give careful thought to your ways.” We can deceive ourselves with excuses, but we can’t deceive our all-seeing God. Maybe what you’re spending your time and energy on is not God’s best for you. The busier you are with pursuits of this world, the less time you have for God, and the less you’ll tangibly produce.

The Jews heeded this message and turned it all around in a mere twenty-three days. So, consider your ways. Is there something God wants you to do which you have put off? Do you need to shift your priorities back to God? Don’t wait. Do it today — because consistent obedience is always better than any temporary spiritual high!

### PRAY

Lord, Show me any areas where I’m pursuing my own interests rather than focusing on fulfilling Your will. Guide my heart to consider my ways and make any necessary changes that will help me regain footing on Your purpose-filled path. Amen.