

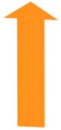
# SEVEN ARROWS



What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What does this passage tell us about man?



What does this passage demand of me?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

# NEHEMIAH 1



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God promised to restore His people to the land as an act of grace. The Bible records the return of a small group of exiled Israelites to the promised land under Nehemiah and Ezra. The main goal of these leaders was to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and restore worship in the temple. It's painful to see how far the people fell. Their land was dismantled and the temple destroyed. The work that had taken them so long to complete had fallen into ruin. If there was ever a time when the fulfillment of God's promises looked bleak, this was the time. The temple's destruction served as a picture of a broken nation. Nehemiah worked to rebuild the city, and Ezra labored to restore worship. Yet the hope of the people was never found in a renewed land, but in the hope that God would somehow bring a permanent solution to their ongoing failure. As the people waited, Nehemiah and Ezra exemplified faithfulness and trust in God in the midst of great uncertainty.

## NEHEMIAH 8:1-8



Ezra delivered a call to worship by reading God's Word in the presence of all of the people. You might imagine the significance of this moment. For years, these Israelites had been exiles in a foreign land where they had very little, if any at all, access to God's Word. At this point, they were back in the promised land and hearing clearly the Word of God once again. The religious leaders of the day did what pastors and church leaders do today. They stood before the people, read the Word of God, and explained it to the people so they could understand its meaning. Many of God's people today experience the privilege of having Bibles at home they can read in their own language. Preaching and teaching in the church helps support our personal time in God's Word and is a tool God uses to help us understand it. We should give praise to God when others guide us to know, understand, and apply His Word.

# HAGGAI 1



If you wonder how the people handled the privilege of coming back to the land and working to rebuild the temple, then you need to look no further than Haggai 1. They returned and immediately built the foundation of the temple, but then they quit. For years, they did no other work on God's house because they were more intent on building their own houses. Rather than rebuking them directly, God simply asked them to consider their ways. How did things go when they put themselves first and neglected God and His purposes? The answer was clear. They worked hard but saw little fruit from their labor. They strived for blessing, but God would not give it. The only hope they had of prospering in the land was to do what God put them there to do in the first place—to reflect His image through their worship. The reality is that the very thing they longed for—the blessing of God—would only come if they pursued Him first. By seeking the blessing of God without really worshiping God, they missed both God and His blessing.

## MALACHI 1:6-14



This is a fitting end to the Old Testament. After the book of Malachi, God would stop speaking through the prophets for over 400 years. Generations would come and go with no further word from the Lord. Before God's voice became quiet for a time, we were given one more picture of the state of worship among the people of God. You recall from the Book of Leviticus that the people were expected to offer their very best, spotless animal to God in order to pay the price for their sins. In Malachi's day, the people continued to offer sacrifices, but rather than offering God their best, they chose animals that were about to die anyway. This way they could still feel good about themselves because they were offering some sacrifice, but they did it in a way that cost nothing. God was furious! Clearly, what was the most important to was not the sacrifice but the hearts of His people. Half-hearted sacrifices proved that God didn't occupy their hearts, even after all He'd done for His people. Do the decades of silence that followed mean that God had finally had enough and given up on His promise?

# LUKE 15:11-32



Jesus often told stories to communicate who He is and what He came to do. Luke 15 records three stories, or parables, that show how He loves sinners like us. The story of the two brothers in Luke 15 is more so the story of a father's great love. This man watched as his son took his inheritance and pursued a life of blatant sin. The consequences of his rebellion, like that of the nation of Israel, produced nothing but grief. In spite of the pain he felt, the father never gave upon his wayward child. He stood watching and waiting for him to repent and return to his father's loving care. The party that followed the son's return shows the extent of the father's love. Israel could have experienced the same type of celebration had they simply returned to God with their whole heart. But they didn't. God watched as they suffered the consequences of their rebellion, but He was never idle. The Father was actively waiting until just the right time when He would send the Promised One to find the wayward children and bring them back to the Father.