

# 10-Week Bible Study: Politics in the Bible

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Introduction	2
Opening Check-In	3
Session 1: Genesis 1:26-2:3. <i>The Image of God</i>	4
Session 2: Genesis 11:1-9. <i>The First Empire</i>	6
Session 3: Genesis 41:25-57. <i>Joseph's Diligent Use of Political Power</i>	8
Session 4: Leviticus 25:1-42. <i>The Year of Jubilee, a Reset Button for Society</i>	10
Session 5: 1 Samuel 8:1-22. <i>The Israelites Demand a King</i>	12
Mid-point Check-In	14
Session 6: Jeremiah 29:4-14. <i>Seek God's Shalom Even in Exile</i>	15
Session 7: Nehemiah 1:1-2:8. <i>Nehemiah Advocates for His People</i>	17
Session 8: Luke 4:1-13. <i>The Temptations of Jesus</i>	19
Session 9: John 18:28-19:16. <i>The King of the Jews</i>	21
Session 10: Romans 12:9-13:8. <i>Loving Those in Authority</i>	23
Bonus Session: Revelation 18:1-13, 21:1-4, 21:23-22:2. <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	25
Closing Check-In	27

## Introduction

**Christians need to know and be able to discuss what Scripture teaches about politics.** The word “politics,” after all, comes from the Greek word “*polis*,” meaning “city-state.” Politics simply refers to the way that people living in a large community (such as a city, state, or country) make decisions about power and resources. And since Jesus calls his followers to love our neighbors, obedience to Jesus will necessarily mean every Christian is involved in “politics”—broadly speaking—in one way or another. While the particulars may vary from place to place, and person to person, no one who follows Jesus’ commands can be fully exempt from political life.

**In this 10-week guide, we will go through 10 different passages of Scripture throughout the Bible that engage with the idea of politics (plus a bonus passage at the end).** These are not an exhaustive list of passages that deal with politics; in fact, it would be difficult to find a single page of the Bible that doesn’t have some reference to rulers, justice, laws, wars, or another political topic! Instead, I tried to choose a variety of passages from both Old and New Testaments that take different looks at how God’s people are meant to engage with politics.

**But first, a warning:** This is NOT a Bible study series meant to confirm everything you already believe about politics. In fact, if you read the Bible with an open mind and expect it to align perfectly with a specific political party, you will be sorely disappointed. Instead, *this guide is designed to zoom out to take a broader look at how God’s people are meant to engage with issues of power, justice, and political organization.* Written thousands of years ago, these passages may feel challenging to you, or distant from the political questions we face today. It may be tempting to try to fit the Bible into your pre-existing beliefs. But if instead you are willing to engage with Scripture thoughtfully, wrestling with the text in small group discussion and seeking to *observe, interpret, and apply* God’s Word, you will be surprised by how relevant and timely these ancient words are. It is possible that some of your political views may be reinforced, but it’s also possible that they will be challenged.

Are you willing to let your views of politics be conformed to Scripture, rather than the other way around? Are you willing to allow God-breathed Scripture to blow into your life, even if it messes with your pre-existing categories? My hope and prayer is that you are, and that in community you are able to experience a fresh vision of God’s approach to politics.

[These passages are designed to be studied using the “inductive manuscript method” pioneered by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA. For more on how to lead an inductive manuscript Bible study, visit [howto.bible](http://howto.bible) .]

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## Opening Check-In

### **A careless conversation about politics almost cost me my future spouse.**

It was spring of my freshman year in college, and I was sitting with my friends Margaret and Liz in the student union building at Franklin & Marshall College. Margaret and I were eagerly discussing a class we were both enrolled in, "International Politics." Taught by a legendary professor with a gravelly voice and penchant for smoking cigars, International Politics emphasized the foreign policy perspective of *Realism*—a worldview that argues that soft values like "morality" and "justice" are impossible to enforce in a chaotic world, and that it is instead the nations with the most power who ultimately define reality. A Realist would argue that, regardless of their *stated* motives, all countries ultimately make foreign policy decisions based on their own selfish interests.

To Margaret and me, Realism seemed self-evidently true based on the evidence in the world. But as Liz listened to us, she felt a deep contradiction in her soul. Having been raised in the Mennonite church, Liz believed that all Christians were called to sacrificial service and nonviolent cooperation, not war and the selfish pursuit of one's own interests. As she looked at me, she thought to herself, *I could never marry Andrew*. Though I was also a Christian, she could not see any way that my worldview could possibly mesh with hers.

It would only be much later in my college career when I would finally realize that although Realism may be a fairly accurate *description* of how the world tends to work, for Christians it ought not be a *prescription* of how we are to behave. Now, over a dozen years later, Liz and I are happily married! But we continue to learn and discuss what it looks like to be *in* this world but not *of* it, because that is a growth process that continues day by day.

### **As we begin this Bible study series about Politics in the Bible, consider:**

- What are some of your default beliefs when it comes to politics? Where did those beliefs come from (family, media, education, church, etc.)?
- How open are you to letting Scripture *prescribe* a different way of operating in this world, even if it feels countercultural?

## Session 1: Genesis 1:26-2:3. *The Image of God*

**Introduction:** *In this passage, we dive into the foundational starting point for any Christian political framework: the belief that every human is made in the image of God, and thus has inherent value and dignity. Moreover, here we can see God’s original intent that humans faithfully exercise dominion over the Earth as God’s appointed rulers, filling the world with life, beauty, order and harmony.*

### **Observation Questions:**

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### **Interpretation Questions:**

- Why do you think that God calls this day “very good”, and not just good?
- Other ancient Middle Eastern cultures (such as the Sumerians and Babylonians) also have creation narratives somewhat similar to this one, but in those stories the gods create humans as an afterthought to be slaves to the gods. How is that different from the creation story here in Genesis?
- What is the significance that humans are made in God’s image and likeness?
- Can you rephrase God’s command in verse 28 into your own words?
- Why would God give them this power? How did he intend them to use it?
- Imagine that humans hadn’t sinned and broken God’s commands here. What might the world have looked like 100 years later, or even 1000 years later? What would have been beautiful about it?

### **Application Questions:**

- If all humans are made in the image of God, how might that change how we think and act in politics?
- We see here that for God, power, governance, growth, multiplying, and spreading across the Earth are “very good” things. Is this similar or different to how you think of power? Why or why not?
- Think about a well-maintained garden, greenhouse, farm, or even a beautiful college campus. In what ways do you see humans using their dominion for good here?

**Genesis 1** <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created humans in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." <sup>29</sup> God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. **2** <sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup> On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

## Session 2: Genesis 11:1-9. *The First Empire*

**Introduction:** *The first humans fall into sin in Genesis 3, but it is in Genesis 11 that we see the first human empire arise. Babel (also known as Babylon) is the prototypical human empire, and it stands in stark contrast to the way that God wants his people to operate in the political sphere. It will be a recurrent image throughout the Scriptures, so it's important to dive into its first usage here. [If you're leading this study, this passage is a fascinating one to invite specific friends who know about philosophy, linguistics, or colonialism. Ask them: Why is the concept of language powerful? What harms can result when there is only one language that can be used by one dominant group? What does it imply about God that he wants humans to spread out and for there to be lots of languages?]*

### **Observation Questions:**

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### **Interpretation Questions:**

- In Genesis 1 & 2, we saw God command humans to multiply and fill the earth. Now that sin has entered the world, what do the humans want to do instead?
- In vs. 4, what might be the root motivations for why the humans want to do all this?
- What is the significance of the people of Babel wanting to "making a name for ourselves"?
- When there is too much power concentrated in one people group with one language, what harms can result? Why?
- Words and languages have power. Of all the ways that God could have stopped the people of Babel, why do you think he chose to confuse their language?
- People sometimes say that God's confusing of the language is a "curse", but the word "curse" is not in this story. How might this story actually illustrate an act of mercy by God?

### **Application Questions:**

- The people of Babel were feared of being scattered, and felt a need to be great. Where do you see this temptation in politics today?
- How do you personally feel tempted to the sin of Babel? Confess to one another ways in which you fall short, and proclaim forgiveness in Jesus' name.

**Genesis 11** <sup>1</sup>Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as they migrated from the east,<sup>a</sup> they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup>The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore it was called Babel,<sup>b</sup> because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth, and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

- a. 11.2 Or *migrated eastward*
- b. 11.9 In Heb *Babel* is a play on the verb meaning *to confuse*

## Session 3: Genesis 41:25-57. Joseph's Diligent Use of Political Power

**Introduction:** This story takes place after Joseph had been sold by his Jewish brothers into slavery in Egypt, and after he had been unfairly jailed because he refused to sleep with his master's wife. Now he has an opportunity to interpret a disturbing dream for Pharaoh, the ruler of all Egypt. Pay attention to the specific ways that power operates in this story, and how Joseph creates a new political and economic structure to prevent a future catastrophe.

### Observation Questions:

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story? (What happened before?)
- What questions does this raise for you?

### Interpretation Questions:

- How might it feel if you were there to witness this story?
- How do we see political power used well here? By Joseph, Pharaoh, others?
- What political temptations might have arisen during this story, that would have needed to be overcome?
- What systems, institutions, and policies does Joseph create in order to serve the common good? How do you think the people of Egypt would have felt about Joseph and his policies during the 7 years of plenty? What about during the famine?
- Joseph is in a pagan land, married to the daughter of a pagan priest. How might he have kept his faith in God during this time? Why did he choose to help save the Egyptians, after having been enslaved by them and unfairly imprisoned by them?

### Application Questions:

- In America, it is sometimes very hard to plan for the future. Most politicians only think a few years ahead, to the next election. How do we see a different model of political leadership here?
- Joseph had been mistreated by the Egyptians in many ways, and was an outsider to their culture. Yet God grants him an opportunity to lead in that system, and save many Egyptian lives. How might he serve as a role model for us as we think about our political engagement with the world around us?



**Genesis 41** <sup>25</sup> Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. <sup>26</sup> The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. <sup>27</sup> The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. <sup>28</sup> It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. <sup>29</sup> There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. <sup>30</sup> After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. <sup>31</sup> The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. <sup>32</sup> And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. <sup>33</sup> Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise and set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup> Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. <sup>35</sup> Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. <sup>36</sup> That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine." <sup>37</sup> The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. <sup>38</sup> Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this, one in whom is the spirit of God?" <sup>39</sup> So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. <sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." <sup>41</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." <sup>42</sup> Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. <sup>43</sup> He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried out in front of him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. <sup>44</sup> Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." <sup>45</sup> Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah, and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt. <sup>46</sup> Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. <sup>47</sup> During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. <sup>48</sup> He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. <sup>49</sup> So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure. <sup>50</sup> Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. <sup>51</sup> Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." <sup>52</sup> The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes." <sup>53</sup> The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end, <sup>54</sup> and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. <sup>55</sup> When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." <sup>56</sup> And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. <sup>57</sup> Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

## Session 4: Leviticus 25:1-42. *The Year of Jubilee, a Reset Button for Society*

**Introduction:** After liberating the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God issues many commands to this new nation to begin to form them into a very different sort of community than the one they had just left. One of the most radical commands is the Year of Jubilee (the word “jubilee” refers to the “jovel” or ram’s horn that was blown to announce the start of the festivities). In the Year of Jubilee, slaves were freed, land was returned to its original owners, and debts were forgiven. It was a radical reset of social relations that would have totally rebalanced society. It is unclear if the Israelites ever successfully obeyed and practiced a year of Jubilee, but it remains a recurrent theme throughout the Bible. When Jesus announces the “Year of the Lord’s favor” in Luke 4, he is referencing this exact concept of Jubilee and connecting its theme to his ministry.

### Observation Questions:

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story? (What happened before?)
- What questions does this raise for you?

### Interpretation Questions:

- How do you think different groups of people would experience hearing these commands (ex: rich, poor, rulers, servants, native Israelites, foreigners, etc).
- What might be the significance of having Jubilee begin on the day of Atonement (a day for the forgiveness of sins)?
- In what ways might these commands have been unexpected and countercultural for their time, or even our own time?
- What would a society that did this every 50 years look like? What problems would it solve? What new issues might it create?
- What do these commands teach us about God and God’s character?

### Application Questions:

- This is a political command/policy for the Israelites with big impacts. If this is truly God’s heart for his people, what big political policies might he desire to see in our world nowadays? Why?
- It is unknown if the Israelites ever celebrated a full Year of Jubilee. What barriers might have arisen for them? Do we have similar barriers for obeying God in our political realm? How can we work to overcome those barriers?

**Leviticus 25** <sup>1</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in their yield, <sup>4</sup> but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. <sup>5</sup> You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. <sup>6</sup> You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you, <sup>7</sup> for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

<sup>8</sup> “You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the Day of Atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. <sup>10</sup> And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. <sup>11</sup> That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you: you shall not sow or reap the aftergrowth or harvest the unpruned vines. <sup>12</sup> For it is a Jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. <sup>13</sup> “In this year of Jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property.

<sup>14</sup>When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. <sup>15</sup>When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years until the Jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. <sup>16</sup>If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price, for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. <sup>17</sup>You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God. <sup>18</sup>“You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. <sup>19</sup>The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. <sup>20</sup>Should you ask, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ <sup>21</sup>I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years. <sup>22</sup>When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating from the old crop; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old. <sup>23</sup>The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. <sup>24</sup>Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land. <sup>25</sup>“If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. <sup>26</sup>If the person has no one to redeem it but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, <sup>27</sup>the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference refunded to the person to whom it was sold, and the property shall be returned. <sup>28</sup>But if there are not sufficient means to recover it, what was sold shall remain with the purchaser until the year of Jubilee; in the Jubilee it shall be released, and the property shall be returned. <sup>29</sup>“If anyone sells a dwelling house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the right of redemption shall be one year. <sup>30</sup>If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, a house that is in a walled city shall pass in perpetuity to the purchaser, throughout the generations; it shall not be released in the Jubilee. <sup>31</sup>But houses in villages that have no walls around them shall be classed as open country; they may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the Jubilee. <sup>32</sup>As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption of the houses in the cities belonging to them. <sup>33</sup>Whatever property of the Levites that may be redeemed, that is, houses sold in a city belonging to them, shall be released in the Jubilee, for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the Israelites. <sup>34</sup>But the pasturelands around their cities may not be sold, for that is their possession for all time.

<sup>35</sup> “If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. <sup>36</sup>Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. <sup>37</sup>You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance or provide them food at a profit. <sup>38</sup>I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

<sup>39</sup> “If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. <sup>40</sup>They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of the Jubilee. <sup>41</sup>Then they and their children with them shall go out from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. <sup>42</sup>For they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold.

## Session 5: 1 Samuel 8:1-22. *The Israelites Demand a King*

**Introduction:** *Up to this point, the Israelites' leaders have been various judges and prophets that God has raised up at various times, from various tribes. Switching over to a political system based on a singular monarch would be quite different, and as we can see, distasteful to God and the prophet Samuel. While God ends up using some of the kings of Israel to do his will, it is worth reflecting on this passage to see why God is reluctant to lead his people into this specific political system.*

*Tip: In order to help your small group understand the different perspectives and factions involved in this story, try having 4 different groups of readers representing the Narrator, Samuel, God, and the elders of Israel. You could even have an impromptu mini debate between Samuel and the elders to help draw out exactly why they are in disagreement.*

### **Observation Questions:**

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### **Interpretation Questions:**

- How might it feel if you were there to witness this story?
- What are the various motives that Israelites might have for wanting a king? Are these good reasons or not?
- What are God's/Samuel's warnings to the people? Why do you think the people discount the warnings?
- God compares the people's request for a king to idolatry—the worship of other gods. In what ways are they similar?
- Why do you think God ultimately decides to allow the Israelites to have a king?

### **Application Questions:**

- In politics, it can be very tempting to do things the way our enemies (“other nations”) do them—eg. “We need to fight dirty, compromise our values, etc., because otherwise the bad guys will win!” How do you see that happening in our modern day politics? How might that actually be a form of idolatry?
- How can we combat this temptation to become just like our enemies by using their schemes and tactics? Are there any ways we need to repent of ways we've fallen short in this realm?

**1 Samuel 8** <sup>1</sup>When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. <sup>2</sup>The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second was Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. <sup>3</sup>Yet his sons did not follow in his ways but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice. <sup>4</sup>Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah <sup>5</sup>and said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." <sup>6</sup>But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the LORD, <sup>7</sup>and the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. <sup>8</sup>Just as they have done to me<sup>3</sup> from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. <sup>9</sup>Now then, listen to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." <sup>10</sup>So Samuel reported all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. <sup>11</sup>He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots, <sup>12</sup>and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. <sup>13</sup>He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. <sup>14</sup>He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. <sup>15</sup>He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. <sup>16</sup>He will take your male and female slaves and the best of your cattle<sup>3</sup> and donkeys and put them to his work. <sup>17</sup>He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. <sup>18</sup>And on that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you on that day." <sup>19</sup>But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, "No! We are determined to have a king over us, <sup>20</sup>so that we also may be like other nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles." <sup>21</sup>When Samuel heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. <sup>22</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to their voice and set a king over them." Samuel then said to the Israelites, "Each of you return home."

## Mid-point Check-In

**I still remember exactly when and where I was sitting when a piece of Scripture began to shake the foundations of my political convictions.**

It was late on a Thursday night, and I was sitting in the third-floor lounge of a college dormitory. Two InterVarsity student leaders, named Matt and Mike, were leading our group in a Bible study of Matthew 5:38-48, where Jesus commands his followers to “love your enemies.” As a New Yorker, I had grown up in the wake of 9/11 and eagerly supported the American invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq, seeing them as clear-cut acts of justice against real enemies. So as our Bible study discussed what it might mean to “love our enemies” in the modern day, I pushed back hard, explaining that Jesus’ words couldn’t possibly have any bearing on these acts of foreign policy. Matt and Mike acknowledged the tensions the passage might be bringing up, but gently challenged me and asked if being obedient to Jesus might require decisions that are unexpected, costly, and countercultural.

**At that moment, I realized I had a choice.** I could insist that my theology and political understanding superseded what Scripture seemed to be saying, and leave the Bible study the same as I came in without giving another thought to Jesus’ commands. In essence, I could set myself as Lord, picking and choosing which commands I would take seriously. Alternatively, I could choose to sit in the tension, and wrestle with the political implications of Jesus’ words—even if they were deeply uncomfortable to me.

I ultimately chose the second option. It was not quick or easy, but that night initiated a long process where instead of placing my pre-existing ideology above Scripture, I chose to intentionally let Scripture challenge, reshape, and reform my beliefs and actions. I began to attempt to pray for my enemies and bless those who I saw as persecutors. I tried to consider what it might mean to “turn the other cheek” when I faced acts of aggression. As I’ve grown older the people who I consider my “enemies” have changed, but the call of Jesus remains the same—to love them, just as God loves them.

**As we reach the halfway point in this Bible study series, consider:**

- What pieces of Scripture have been particularly challenging to you in this series? Why?
- What might God’s invitation to you be as we continue to explore what his Word says about politics?

## Session 6: Jeremiah 29:4-14. Seek God's Shalom Even in Exile

*Introduction: Taking place around 590 BCE, Jeremiah is a letter to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, the pagan empire that had defeated Israel and taken many captives. Jeremiah is writing this letter to combat certain false prophets who were saying that their exile was about to be over, when in reality there were still another 70 years to go. Jeremiah 29:11 is an oft-quoted verse in Christian circles, but it's worth examining its context: written to a distraught and grieving people living as a persecuted minority in a land they don't understand. With that context, the commands in the rest of the chapter become even more radical.*

### Observation Questions:

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story? How would it feel to be living in exile in Babylon, and then to hear these words?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### Interpretation Questions:

- Vs. 5-7 are pretty common desires for most humans, but God commands them to happen here in Babylon, in enemy territory. Why?
- Vs. 7 The word welfare is the Hebrew word "shalom," which also has the meaning of peace, prosperity, and wholeness. What does this say about how God views the Babylonians, their idol-worshipping captor? Why does he command the Jewish exiles to seek the welfare of their oppressors?
- If the exile is going to last 70 years, that means most of the people hearing this letter would die and not ever see their homeland again. Yet God calls them to live faithfully and productively in exile anyway, amid their enemies. Why would that be hard for the Israelites? What does it say about God and his character?

### Application Questions:

- Many of us feel like exiles in the current political landscape. What would it look like for us to metaphorically "build houses, plant gardens, and have children" in this current situation, even if we might never see the full political victory that we want to see?
- When we are under oppression, it feels pretty difficult to seek the welfare of our oppressors. Yet God commands it here, and even says that the fate of Babylon is linked to the fate of the Israelites. What would it look like to love those who feel like political oppressors, to pray for them and seek their peace? Let's pray now.

**Jeremiah 29** <sup>4</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. <sup>8</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to your dreams that you dream, <sup>9</sup>for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD. <sup>10</sup>For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. <sup>12</sup>Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup>I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.



## Session 7: Nehemiah 1:1-2:8. *Nehemiah Advocates for His People*

**Introduction:** Taking place around 400 BCE, some of the Israelites are again in exile in another idol-worshipping empire, this one of the Persians (modern-day Iran). Nehemiah is a high-ranking official serving the king of Persia and uses his political position to advocate for his people. But note how he first identifies with them, laments their fallen status, confesses their sins as a collective, and prays fervently before he seeks a political solution. I think we have a lot to learn from how Nehemiah engages with politics.

### Observation Questions:

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story? How would it feel to be living in exile in Persia, and then to hear these words?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### Interpretation Questions:

- How does Nehemiah respond to this sad news from Jerusalem?
- Which parts of Nehemiah's prayer is group ("we/us") and which is personal ("I/me")?
- Why do you think Nehemiah confesses on behalf of the sins of the Israelites? What is significant about this?
- What risks is Nehemiah taking here? Is he right to be afraid? Why or why not?
- How do we see political power used in this passage? How do we see God at work in the midst of politics?

### Application Questions:

- Nehemiah practices confession and repentance for the sins of his people, even though it is not his sins to bear. What can we learn from this? What sins of our people(s) might we need to confess and repent of?
- Nehemiah risks his power and status to help those living in a marginalized situation. What might that look like for us to do in our respective lives? Pray for God to give us strength to be like Nehemiah.

**Nehemiah 1** <sup>1</sup>The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, <sup>2</sup>one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah, and I asked them about the Jews who escaped, those who had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>They replied, "The remnant there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire." <sup>4</sup>When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

<sup>5</sup>I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the Israelites, confessing the sins of the Israelites, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. <sup>7</sup>We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded Moses your servant. <sup>8</sup>Remember the word that you commanded Moses your servant, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup>but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to establish my name.' <sup>10</sup>They are your servants and your people whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. <sup>11</sup>O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"

At the time, I was cupbearer to the king. **2** <sup>1</sup>In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. <sup>2</sup>So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup>I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" <sup>4</sup>Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." <sup>6</sup>The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date. <sup>7</sup>Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah, <sup>8</sup>and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress and for the wall of the city and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.

## Session 8: Luke 4:1-13. *The Temptations of Jesus*

**Introduction:** *Taking place just after being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness is reminiscent of the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after being delivered out of Egypt. In both cases, it is a time of formation and temptation—and Jesus succeeds where the Israelites did not. It is worth examining exactly what Jesus was tempted by, and why, in order to better contrast the kingdoms of this world vs. the Kingdom of God that Jesus was ushering in.*

### **Observation Questions:**

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### **Interpretation Questions:**

- What are the three temptations? What would make each of them uniquely tempting to Jesus?
- How does Jesus resist these temptations?
- Why doesn't Jesus just give in? It would be a lot easier and arguably good to....
- What do these temptations imply about Jesus' relationship to power, and about how kingdom is uniquely different to the kingdoms of this world?

### **Applications Questions:**

- Which of these three temptations resonates with you the most? Why? How can we help each other resist these temptations?
- All of the political kingdoms of the world do have glory and authority, yet in some sense have been given over to Satan. As we go about our lives and engage with politics, how can we ensure that we are acknowledging the glory this world offers while only serving God, and not be led into worshipping Satan?

**Luke 4** <sup>1</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup>where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "*One does not live by bread alone.*"' <sup>5</sup>Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup>And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.*"' <sup>9</sup>Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup>for it is written, "*He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you*", <sup>11</sup>and "*On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.*"' <sup>12</sup>Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test.*"' <sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

v. 4: see Deut. 8:3

v. 8: see Deut. 6:13

v. 11: see Psalm 91:11-12

v. 12: see Deut. 6:16

## Session 9: John 18:28-19:16. *The King of the Jews*

**Introduction:** *In this passage we witness the immediate lead-up to Jesus' crucifixion, particularly his interactions with the Roman Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Pilate is a conflicted political leader, who sometimes seems in charge, and sometimes seems overwhelmed by circumstances. Pay attention to the different powerbrokers in this passage and their different conceptions of power, politics, kingship, justice, and truth. Ultimately Jesus' refusal to compromise is uniquely beautiful, but also risky and dangerous. In this case it will lead to his torture and execution on the cross- the most barbaric and shameful killing method the Roman Empire knew of, and one that was solely reserved for non-citizens and slaves.*

### **Observation Questions:**

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What is the context for this story?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### **Interpretation Questions:**

- How do we see power used in this passage? (Who has it? Who doesn't have it? Who uses it? Who abuses it?)
- Let's look at the justice system here. How is it operating poorly / in a sinful manner?
- How is truth misunderstood here, or even deliberately twisted?
- Jesus as King—in what ways is he a king? In what ways is he a different kind of king?
- Why does Jesus refuse to defend himself in order to get released by Pilate? What does this say about how he viewed himself and his mission?
- Why do you think the people want Barabbas released instead of Jesus? How is Barabbas similar or different than Jesus?

### **Application Questions:**

- When are we tempted to twist the truth, or to bend the rules, to benefit our side in a political fight?
- Vs. 36. What does this imply about how we should fight (or not fight) to defend ourselves in struggles that seem like they are life or death?
- Do you wish you had a Barabbas—a fighter—for your political side? What does that reveal about your own desires?
- How do you see Jesus? Do you see him as a king, worthy of honor and obedience? Or do you see him as something else?

**John 18** <sup>28</sup> Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" <sup>30</sup> They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." <sup>31</sup> Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." <sup>32</sup> (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) <sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." <sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." <sup>38</sup> Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. <sup>39</sup> But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" <sup>40</sup> They shouted in reply, "Not this man but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a rebel.

**19** <sup>1</sup> Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. <sup>2</sup> And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. <sup>3</sup> They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. <sup>4</sup> Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." <sup>5</sup> So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" <sup>6</sup> When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." <sup>7</sup> The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." <sup>8</sup> Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. <sup>9</sup> He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?" <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." <sup>12</sup> From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against Caesar."

<sup>13</sup> When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. <sup>14</sup> Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover, and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" <sup>15</sup> They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." <sup>16</sup> Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

## Session 10: Romans 12:9-13:8. *Loving Those in Authority*

**Introduction:** *This passage has often been (mis)used by those in power who want to feel justified about the way that they are wielding power. But in actuality, this letter was written to a very powerless community, that of the early Christian church in Rome around 57-59 CE. These believers had already undergone persecution, and in the years to come would face incredible harassment, torture, and execution by the bloodthirsty Emperor Nero—he would even burn some alive to light his gardens at night. Given this cultural context, Paul’s admonitions to the Roman Christians to love their enemies and submit to the governing authorities probably felt even more challenging to them than it feels to us today.*

### **Observation Questions:**

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### **Interpretation Questions:**

- What resonates with you in this passage? What feels hard?
- What in this passage would have felt challenging to the original listeners—the Roman Christians who were suffering persecution for their beliefs and behavior?
- Based on this passage, why does God institute governing authorities? And why should citizens pay taxes, give honor, respect, etc?
- Based on this passage, what might Paul say about how to respond to an unjust ruler? What might he say about how to respond to a ruler that starts explicitly targeting and persecuting Christians?
- Why might it be that the governing authorities can “bear the sword,” while Christians are called to an ethic of love and non-resistance? Why is there a different standard for these two entities?

### **Application Questions:**

- Do you love those in power? Why or why not?
- Many Christians/ Americans actively disrespect their political leaders, and try to rebel in ways both big and small. What is one way you can show honor/respect/etc to someone in authority over you that feels challenging to love?
- (Controversial Bonus question: America was founded in 1776 as an act of rebellion against England. Based on this passage and the others we’ve studied so far, was the American Revolution justified? Why or why not?)

**Romans 12** <sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup>Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. **13** <sup>1</sup>Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval, <sup>4</sup>for it is God's agent for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's agents, busy with this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Pay to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. <sup>8</sup>Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.



## Bonus Session: Revelation 18:1-13, 21:1-4, 21:23-22:2. A Tale of Two Cities

**Introduction:** Throughout the Bible, the two cities of Babel and Jerusalem make numerous repeat appearances—as we’ve even seen in this series. From its first appearance in Genesis to its final judgment in Revelation, the city of Babel (more commonly known as Babylon) is a stand-in for all the ways that human brokenness and sin exists on a big, systemic level. (In Revelation, “Babylon” is a stand-in for Rome, the current empire that is opposing God’s people at the time of John’s vision.) In contrast, Jerusalem (which can be translated “the city of peace”) is meant to be the city where God makes himself known, a city of justice, harmony, and flourishing. Unfortunately, Jerusalem does not always live up to this calling and often becomes as compromised as Babel, but one day God promises that there will be a New Jerusalem, where his perfect love, justice, and peace are fully experienced.

In these sections of Revelation, edited for length, we see the final judgment of the empire of Babylon, and the final restoration of Jerusalem. The imagery is sharp and powerful, with a promise for each of us: one day, all wicked political powers will be ended forever, but all that is good and glorious will be raised up. Kings will bring in the glory of their nations (21:24), and those nations will experience God’s healing of all their brokenness (22:2).

### Observation Questions:

- What words and/or phrases stand out to you?
- What words, phrases, etc. are repeated?
- What questions does this raise for you?

### Interpretation Questions:

- What resonates with you in this passage? What feels hard?
- How might different listeners experience this passage? Ex: a poor Christian, a wealthy pagan, an emperor, a slave.
- Why does John use such graphic imagery? What might “coming out” of Babylon mean, for his listeners?
- How are Babylon and Jerusalem different from each other? But how are they similar?
- Babylon’s political and economic systems actually sound pretty productive and healthy. Yet God is very harsh about them. Why?
- What is ugly about Babylon? What is beautiful about the New Jerusalem? Why?
- What do you think it would feel like to be in this New Jerusalem (smells, sounds, sights etc)?
- Vs. 21:27 sounds very exclusive. Why do you think God has these limits? How might this be good news?

### Application Questions:

- God is very harsh about Babylon’s economic and political systems. How might he be similarly harsh about ours? How might we need to “come out” of our own Babylon?
- Do you believe God wants to “move in” with us humans, permanently? What makes that hard to believe? How can we lean more into this future reality and prepare ourselves as God’s Bride?

**Revelation 18** <sup>1</sup>After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined by his splendor. <sup>2</sup>He called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!  
It has become a dwelling place of demons,  
a haunt of every foul spirit,  
a haunt of every foul bird,  
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.

<sup>3</sup>For all the nations have fallen  
from the wine of the wrath of her prostitution,  
and the kings of the earth have engaged in sexual  
immorality with her,  
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich  
from the power of her luxury.”

<sup>4</sup>Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,  
“Come out of her, my people,  
so that you do not take part in her sins  
and so that you do not share in her plagues,

<sup>5</sup>for her sins are heaped high as heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.  
<sup>6</sup>Render to her as she herself has rendered,  
and repay her double for her deeds;  
mix a double dose for her in the cup she mixed.

<sup>7</sup>As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,  
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.

Since in her heart she says,  
‘I rule as a queen; I am no widow,  
and I will never see grief,’

<sup>8</sup>therefore her plagues will come in a single day—  
pestilence and mourning and famine—  
and she will be burned with fire,  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

<sup>9</sup>And the kings of the earth, who engaged in sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; <sup>10</sup>they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, “Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.” <sup>11</sup>And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, <sup>12</sup>cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, <sup>13</sup>cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human lives.

[...]

**21** <sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples, and God himself will be  
with them and be their God;

<sup>4</sup>he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.”

[...]

<sup>23</sup>And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup>The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. <sup>25</sup>Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup>People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. <sup>27</sup>But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life. **22** <sup>1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

## Closing Check-In

*“The imagination must come before the implementation. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing...It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the [earthly] king wants to urge as the only thinkable one.”*

- Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

In the United States, politics often looks like a zero-sum game. There seem to be only two sides, growing further and further apart, and one side’s victory means the other side’s defeat. We are told to fear and block and cancel and boycott everyone who does not totally agree with our “tribe”. Elections loom like existential threats, with the fate of the entire country dependent on a few thousand voters in a handful of swing states. Politicians and newscasters scream at us that if the wrong party wins the election, it might mean the end of world.

And yet, the Bible tells us that there is an eternal kingdom, one that has outlasted every earthly nation, empire, and kingdom, and which will outlast America too. God’s eternal kingdom has an eternal king—Jesus—who demands our entire allegiance. Our allegiance to God’s eternal kingdom does not mean that we ignore the world we find ourselves in; in fact, it’s quite the opposite. It is out of this of allegiance to Jesus that we choose to engage in seeking the shalom of our cities, that we choose to love our neighbors (and enemies), that we embrace the costly work of seeking justice, repentance, and reconciliation. If we follow Jesus, we can be both realistic about the evil we see in the world, and hopeful about the blood of Jesus that can transform broken realities.

As Christ’s ambassadors on Earth, we have the opportunity to prophetically imagine a different reality, and to work to bring about new ways of doing things—even politics! And that, to me, is deeply exciting, incredibly beautiful, and if I’m honest, a little bit scary. But I feel less scared knowing that as followers of Jesus we are in this work together, and that we have the Holy Spirit guiding us and empowering us every step of the way.

**As we conclude this Bible study series, consider:**

- What are your main take-aways from this series? How can you communicate them to the people you care about around you?
- How can you want to continue growing in God’s vision for engaging with politics?