

WEEK 1 – JOURNAL QUESTIONS

“Prayer of Azariah”

1. **What ideas from this document reflected some of the beliefs about God that you have?**
 - > God is greater than anything and deserves all praise, honor and glory forever; there is none higher than God. Everything that was made came from God's creation and we (man) are a part of it.
 - > Azariah and friends are aware that God created everything and that they, the Jews, exist for His glory. They are well aware, as am I, that God chose Israel for His own Self, as His people, and that they were to reflect Him to the world, as Christians are to do the same today. Israel sinned against God and went after strange gods (which were no gods). God told Azariah's ancestors (the Jews) what would happen to them if they did not obey His Word (the same thing that would happen to the heathen nations), and Azariah's statement, ⁴“Everything you've done to us is fair (just)” – is correct; and, because Believers are God's people, the same applies to us---God keeps His word.
 - > ²⁷ “He made the middle of the furnace seem like a cool breeze was blowing through it”; Hey, only God can do the impossible. We, as did Israel, serve an Amazingly Awesome God. Yes! Hallaleujah!

2. **What ideas from this document reflected some of the beliefs you hold about sin and its consequences?** The Bible tells us that the “soul that sinneth shall surely die.” (Ezekiel 18:20). It also tells us we can humble ourselves when we have done wrong/sinned and pray to the Father in Jesus' name for forgiveness, for His mercy, and for help in time of need. It's not about our works, yet we are to do good works, and yet, again, it's about our relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, that we seek to please Him in everything we do. All believers should have a song of praise, thanksgiving and blessing to God in recognition and appreciation of everything He has done for us. Although Jesus paid the price for our sin, it doesn't mean we get away scott-free---oh, we will suffer the consequences of our sin, because sin affects mankind.

3. **Do you think this document would have been encouraging to people who lived under the rule of the Greeks?** Yes! Most definitely. **Why?** It's like reading the Bible or a personal testimony, uplifting, helps to give perspective to people from all walks of life, and especially people under oppressive living conditions. It helps to refocus our thinking and/or attention back to and on God and the kind of God we serve. Reminding ourselves Who God is; the kind of God He is---the Faithful and True God; and What He has promised---If God said it, we can bank on it, but we have to remember to be a doer of the Word and not just a hearer. Just reading this “Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men” was so uplifting to me that I got caught up in the praising of God. It's like I was there with them in the furnace feeling the cool breeze in the hot heat of the furnace, in the presence of our Savior, and as if I was there with them even afterwards living and praising God. It gives me insight into the fact that in His Presence there is fullness of joy---and it's all good. So, as believers, sometimes when things go crazy we need to lift up our voice, praise God and give Him glory.

WEEK 1 – JOURNAL QUESTIONS (Continued)

“Prayer of Azariah”

4. ***Do you think these sentiments would be encouraging to people today as they struggle with the uncertainties of our day?*** There is only one answer to this question for today and that is YES---just look at the news for one week and begin to look at your life in light of God’s Word---what God says about us believers (His people), who we are, what we have, what we can do. Remember, we are royal creatures and we belong to the One Who owns everything. Our faith is not to be in ourselves nor any given thing, but in Almighty God. And while we are on this earth, in this temporary abode, we are to be about His business; although most believers don’t believe it or they are not aware, we are on assignment showing the world who the Savior, Jesus, is. We are given a charge to occupy until He returns. That’s what I see Azariah and friends were doing in this document.

WEEK 2 – JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. **What did you learn about this challenging period of history that you did not know about?** I had heard about the Maccabees, but did not know a lot of details of the story. Although the Journal reading for last week and this week's lesson is mostly of historical background, I received insight and was encouraged to look to the Word of God as my Source and Strength.
2. **What did you learn about martyrdom?** I learned that what you believe in can cause you to die for it. Put your mouth where your heart is. Like the Bible says "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." **About God?** Jesus Christ came into this world and went to the cross for every person, however, it is important that each person realize that we are all sinners and need the Savior, and that only by accepting Christ as our Savior will we be saved from eternal damnation and separation from God and receive forgiveness for sins. God has a plan for each of us, and if it leads to death for the sake of the cross (martyrdom), He has already factored it into the plan according to His plan for each believer. **About sin?** Sin is sin's own reward, even for believers; what we sow is what we will reap. As long as we are in this flesh we will sin, but we have an Advocate with the Father through Jesus Christ, our LORD.
3. **What was the attitude of this writer toward the Greek?** As the 6th brother said to his tormentors, "Don't deceive yourself in vain. We suffer these things because of our own sins against our God." Basically, the writer believed that the punishment they were receiving, even death, as members of God's chosen people, were as a result of their own actions against God. As the 4th brother said, "Death at the hands of humans is preferable since we look forward to the hope that God gives of being raised by Him. But for you, there will be no resurrection to life." The writer echoes those words under the section entitled "Divine Significance of the Persecution", "So I urge those stumbling upon this scroll not to shrink back because of these misfortunes but to understand that these punishments weren't for the destruction of our people but for their discipline." And what he says next proves his faith in God because he says "it is a sign of great kindness that those Jews who acted immorally weren't left alone for very long but experienced punishments immediately." As believers, we have to ask ourselves "what do I believe; am I living for God, have I compromised God's Word; have I accepted the world's way in place of God's way? And then ask God for His forgiveness and mercy, and seek to be a witness to the world and an example to other believers.
4. **How has your understanding of the Jews living before the time of Jesus changed?** My understanding hasn't changed, but reading these stories and listening to the videos has given me more insight into why and how the Jews could get to a place they could not recognize who Jesus was, their Messiah, the One they were supposed to be looking for. Well, I guess, I have changed my thinking because I have more compassion for them, even those living today. Either way, they are human beings, people whom God wants us, believers, to be witnesses to of His grace, mercy and love, just like they, the Jewish people, were to be towards the Gentile people.

WEEK 2 – JOURNAL QUESTIONS *(continued)*

5. **What does this background add to your understanding of the teaching given by the author of Hebrews?** The Jews had strong faith in God, unshakeable faith which they learned from their parents and elders when they were young and which they nurtured and observed in others in the family and community. How different learning the Word of God is today for most people I know who believe in God and has accepted Him as their Savior. The practice of studying the Word of God for our daily fellowship with Him and learning how to live this temporary life where there is constant opposition seems to be something of a chore. Sometimes it's hard to find believers who want to even talk about the Bible or grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Word.

Why do you think he included these well-known stories about the Jewish martyrs from this time? For just what those stories did for me, encouragement, insight, and a reminder not to rely on my own understanding but on God's Word and to walk in obedience leading to fellowship with Him in life, and, when the time comes, to die for His sake, since death does not interrupt our relationship with God. Persecutions are going to come, trials and tribulations are going to come, but the object of our faith is what's important. Look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, He will never fail us; He is always faithful.

WEEK 3 – JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Mathew Chapter 2

1. **Explain what seems to be Matthew's play on the title "king of the Jews" found in chapter 2 from what you learned from this week's lesson.** Matthew's play on the title "king of the Jews" is evident in the fact that the people, the Magi, were Gentiles, seeking the king of the Jews, however, they asked the puppet king, Herod where to find him. Herod wasn't seeking to know where He was, but so he could kill him, thereby, eliminating his competition. Evidently these wise men had learned about the coming Messiah possibly from individuals such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and other devoted Jews. I read somewhere that they were from the royal court of Persia, sent—to promote another king. Although the wise men could have been astronomers or stargazers, the fact that they were following the star to "the king of the Jews" for the purpose of providing gifts to Him and worshipping Him. Their desire to worship the "king of the Jews" surpasses stargazing, it goes back to the One who made the stars, and who made man. God is about all people, Jew and Gentile, He wish that none should perish, and here, Matthew basically says now it's time to be witnesses to the Gentile, but Gentiles are witnessing to the Jews.
2. **Choose two other background issues that help clarify Matthew's message. What did you learn that you had never seen before? In what way has your understanding of this chapter been stretched or deepened by knowing more about these two things?** Matthew's gospel is directed towards the Jews to help them recognize who Jesus is, since his writing is after Jesus went to the cross, died, rose from the dead and ascended back to Heaven. The significance of this is that Matthew tells us about the Magi (who were Gentiles) were used by God to pay homage to a "child who has been born king of the Jews." He's aware that his people are in grave danger of eternal damnation if they don't accept Jesus as their Messiah, because He is the Son of God, the One they had been waiting for. Now, Matthew understands that God is using Gentiles to reach His people, the Jews, because God is no respecter of person. Jesus is the true Messiah, and even though He is not here on earth physically, He lives in each convert's heart via the Holy Spirit. As his people reject this person, Jesus Christ, Matthew's heart aches for them because he understands where they are in their thinking.

My understanding of this chapter has been challenged, stretched and deepened to go beyond what I already know, and what I've learned. Even after studying the Gospel of Matthew in the past, I paid no attention to the Magi being Gentiles and the fact that God used these people to accomplish His goal of reaching the Jews through the Gentiles.

Oppression, evil and bad things can come from within homes as well as from outside. The fact that Egypt fulfilled a dual role both as a place of refuge for God's people as well as a place of oppression, where they went into slavery, a "place to come up out of" and a place to "flee to", caused me pause after reading the class article on "Egypt". It seems God has Jesus, as the Son of God, to experience what Israel experienced. Just like the nation went to Egypt for refuge and was called out, so the same with Jesus was sent to Egypt and then God called Him out.