


RADIANT LIFE

ADULT  **VOLUME**

TEACHER



Gospel Publishing House

Curriculum for
Spirit-filled living

Radiant Life Adult Teacher Volume 1

September 2020–
August 2021

Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Radiant Life Adult Teacher Volume 1 is also available online through Adobe® Acrobat® PDFs and PowerPoint® files. Visit www.MyHealthyChurch.com or call 1-855-642-2011. Accompanying videos are available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult

These lessons are based on outlines developed by the Pentecostal-Charismatic Curriculum Commission ©2017. Used by permission.

© 2020 by Gospel Publishing House, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the copyright owner.

02-1520

ISBN: 978-1-60731-622-0

Printed in United States of America

Contents

How to Use the <i>Adult Teacher</i>	v
Lesson Planning Example	vii
Planning the Session Sample Work Sheet	ix
Planning the Session Work Sheet	x
Letter to the Adult Sunday School Teacher	1
Tips for Teachers	
Life Application Made Easy	2
Teaching Pentecostal Distinctives	4
The Value of Inductive Bible Study	6
Dealing With Talkative Students	8
Welcome to the <i>New Radiant Life Teacher Guide</i>	10

Fall 2020

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament 12

Writer: Mark Jenkins

Lesson 1	The Great Story Begins	13
Lesson 2	The Making of a Nation	21
Lesson 3	Dynasty of Kings Established	29
Lesson 4	A United Kingdom Divided	37
Lesson 5	Wisdom From God	45
Lesson 6	God Sends His Messengers	53
Lesson 7	Return From Exile	61

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament 69

Writer: Jim Railey

Lesson 8	The Messiah Comes	70
Lesson 9	The Kingdom Advances	78
Lesson 10	The Letters of Paul (Part 1)	86
Lesson 11	The Letters of Paul (Part 2)	94
Lesson 12	Other New Testament Letters	102
Lesson 13	Triumph of God's Kingdom	110

Winter 2020–21

Unit 1: Studies in Isaiah 118

Writers: Rich Bennett, Scott Harrup

Lesson 1	Sin, Judgment, and Restoration	119
Lesson 2	Everlasting Judgment or Everlasting Joy?	127
Lesson 3	The Incarnation (Christmas)	135
Lesson 4	Our Great God	143
Lesson 5	God's Suffering Servant	151
Lesson 6	God's Compassion for All People	159
Lesson 7	A New World Promised	167

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark	175
Writer: Paul Zinter	
Lesson 8 Jesus' Ministry Begins	176
Lesson 9 Jesus Confronts Religious Leaders	184
Lesson 10 Jesus Reveals His Divinity	192
Lesson 11 Jesus Teaches About the End-Time	200
Lesson 12 Jesus Stands Trial	208
Lesson 13 Jesus' Death and Resurrection	216

Spring 2021

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand	224
Writers: James Hernando, Rich Bennett (Easter)	
Lesson 1 Difficult Passages in Genesis and Exodus	225
Lesson 2 Wars of Extermination.	233
Lesson 3 Imprecatory Psalms: Seeking Justice	241
Lesson 4 Puzzling Sayings of Jesus	249
Lesson 5 The Risen Christ (Easter)	257
Lesson 6 Difficult New Testament Passages.	265
Lesson 7 Mysteries in the Revelation	273

Unit 2: Letters From Peter and Jude	281
Writers: Louis Smith, Richard Bennett (Pentecost)	
Lesson 8 People of Hope	282
Lesson 9 A Holy People.	290
Lesson 10 A Steadfast People.	298
Lesson 11 An Empowered People.	306
Lesson 12 Be Filled With the Spirit (Pentecost).	314
Lesson 13 A Discerning and Persevering People.	322

Summer 2021

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible	330
Writers: John Maempa, Mike Jaffe	
Lesson 1 Interceding for God's Mercy.	331
Lesson 2 Prayer for Wisdom	339
Lesson 3 Prayer for Restoration.	347
Lesson 4 A Pattern for Prayer	355
Lesson 5 Christ's High Priestly Prayer	363
Lesson 6 Jesus' Prayer of Surrender.	371
Lesson 7 Paul's Prayers for Churches.	379

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World	387
Writer: Clancy Hayes	
Lesson 8 Who Is God?	388
Lesson 9 Who Is Jesus?	396
Lesson 10 The Bible on Sexuality	404
Lesson 11 God's Love and Judgment.	412
Lesson 12 The Problem of Evil and Suffering	420
Lesson 13 Keeping the Church Pure.	428

Index of Study Texts (Volume 1)	437
---	-----

How To Use the *Adult Teacher*

The *Adult Teacher* is a Bible-centered curriculum, written by Spirit-filled authors with a goal to clearly communicate the teachings of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, the entire Bible is covered in a period of seven years. In addition, all major Church doctrines are presented, as well as topics of special importance to help us live as Christians in our world.

Some people misunderstand the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching and the use of curriculum in study preparation. They ask, “How can you follow the Holy Spirit if you are using a curriculum?”

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Teaching

God has given teachers to the Church in order to instruct believers and equip them for life and service. The role of the Spirit is to quicken or illuminate what teachers teach and students receive. Without this teaching of the Spirit, all learning is merely head knowledge (see 1 Corinthians 2:10–16, especially verse 14). Teachers cannot give what they have not received. And students cannot learn what they have not studied (2 Timothy 2:15).

Why Use Curriculum?

Using the *Adult* curriculum in your Sunday School class does not circumvent what the Holy Spirit wants to do in a Sunday School class. Rather, by using *Radiant Life Adult* curriculum, you take advantage of Spirit-filled writers who have taken the time and effort to study and write a commentary about the passages under examination. You also are able to complete an overview of the entire Bible in seven years!

A good curriculum should do the following:

1. Ensure important information will not be omitted or overemphasized.
2. Weed out false teaching and doctrinal errors.
3. Provide a variety of resources. Remember that the Bible is the teacher’s textbook! The curriculum serves the teacher by offering Biblical insights and instructional ideas.
4. Help teachers ask the right questions.

Curriculum and Questions

A study discovered that teachers ask an average of forty-five questions weekly. Of these, one-third are rhetorically directed to students or are “class functionality” questions (i.e., asking students to distribute materials or discussing class issues). Curriculum materials provided teachers with one-third of the discussion questions asked in class, of which most were asked word-for-word from the curriculum. The other one-third of questions asked weekly were teacher-generated. Teachers who did not utilize discussion questions from curriculum were five times more likely to be asking lower-level questions (questions asking for simple recall or understanding—no application questions). The study verified that these lower-level questions resulted in much less discussion than those asked at higher levels. Those who utilized curriculum were more likely to ask higher-level questions—questions that required students to think through issues and apply the lesson material to their lives.

How Long Should You Prepare?

When preparing your Sunday School lesson, use the “3 to 1” rule: 3 minutes of study for each minute of class time. For a

45-minute class session, then, would call for 2¼ hours in lesson preparation.

Using 2¼ hours as the minimum amount of time invested in preparation for a 45-minute class, the following steps offer teachers a mental framework in which to budget time for planning lessons:

1. Skim the lesson (10 minutes)

Become familiar with the contents and direction of the lesson.

2. Pray for guidance (20 minutes)

This is a great time to pray for class members because the Holy Spirit can steer a teacher's thoughts toward specific student needs.

3. Study the Bible commentary (30 minutes)

- Pay close attention to the relationship between the Scriptures and their interpretation in the Bible commentary section.
- Avoid the temptation to memorize and recite or read the Bible commentary text in class.
- List the issues raised in the Bible commentary that might meet needs of students.
- Consider the "Response to the Word," as well as items from the *Adult Resource Packet* to provide potential activities.
- Examine how each question relates to the Bible commentary section.
- Focus on elements that seem to "leap off the page."

4. Write the lesson objective (15 minutes)

Customize each lesson objective to fit your class. The objective will begin by the words "Adults will . . ." followed with a verb, such as *believe*, *discuss*, *accept*, *respond with*, *role play*, or *write*. Each part of the study and each activity should be geared to accomplish the objective.

5. Plan for student response in Call to Discipleship and Ministry in Action (10 minutes)

Use the "Call to Discipleship" and "Ministry in Action" sections of the lesson to close the class session in prayer or in a time of personal dedication (you may need to customize them for your students).

6. Prepare Introducing the Study (10 minutes)

Begin class with a story or activity that will capture students' attention.

- Avoid starting with definitions.
- Use case studies, agree-disagree statements, and news items to spark interest.

7. Organize the Bible commentary (10 minutes)

- Use the outline in the *Adult Teacher* to guide you.
- Allow personal insight to flow from the Bible and lesson materials.
- Decide on two or three main ideas to focus on, then highlight the other topics.

8. List discussion questions (10 minutes)

Carefully select or write two to five questions that will stimulate discussion.

9. Select the pre-session activity (5 minutes)

Involve students before the class session begins by using an activity to help them interact with the lesson objective while drinking coffee and sharing with their friends.

10. Pray for anointing (10 minutes)

Ask God for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to teach the lesson, and for students to receive the teaching.

11. Gather needed materials (5 minutes)

Organize and collect all materials you will need to teach this lesson.

Lesson Planning Example

The September 6, 2020, study, “The Great Story Begins,” will serve as the basis for this lesson planning example. Please take a few minutes to skim this study and its resources, if you have purchased them. In addition, a filled-out sample of the “Planning the Session” form will be used to illustrate study planning. Think of the following as a teacher’s journal:

Sunday, August 30, 4:00 p.m.

I open up the teacher guide and skim through the table of contents. This is a unique unit in that it provides a “bird’s-eye view” of the Old Testament. The unit introduction provides guidance to what the lessons in the unit are about and helps me think about how these studies could apply to the lives of those in my class.

With the general busyness of life, and then those unexpected things that consistently pop up, I want to get an early start on preparation. Plus, I often find that events and conversations that occur during the week relate to the lesson in some way, providing ways for me to help students connect God’s Word to everyday life. As I conclude this time of overview, I ask the Spirit to prepare my heart to receive His truth and to anoint me to teach it to those in my class.

Tuesday, September 1, 6:00 p.m.

A statement from *Introducing the Lesson* has stuck with me since reading it on Sunday: “The Bible was written by more than forty people over about 1,600 years, yet within its diversity is unity of theme and purpose.” It’s so easy to think of the Old Testament as little more than a collection

of stories and wise sayings, while the New Testament tells us the truth of the gospel. I think this unit will be helpful because it will challenge students to realize that there is important truth in all of the Bible. I think a unit like this can enrich our interest in the Bible and motivate us to study all of its pages, perhaps deeper than ever before.

I decide to begin the lesson with a question that comes to mind as I study the beginning of the lesson: “Why is it important to believe that God, and only God, is responsible for having made the universe?” The key point in answering this question is found in the commentary: “Because God created the universe, it belongs to Him and He controls it.” I want to use this first Main Point to emphasize that because God made everything—including us—we are accountable to Him. And when we look at the order found in Creation, we see the first hints that God has made us with a purpose. I think it is important to emphasize that Genesis 1, then, really helps us understand our need for the gospel.

I think the resource item “God’s Orderly Creation” can be used as an effective way to help the students prepare to tell others about Christ. The first question under the chart, “How does the order in which God chose to create the world reflect His role as Provider for His people?” is a good lead in for a discussion on the goodness of God. We have the joy of knowing that God had a plan in all that He made, and we are a part of that plan. He made life possible, and so we can trust Him to give us a life filled with the hope and promise that He gives. This is good news!

The first subpoint of Main Point 2 seems to be a good place to spend a significant bit of time as I discern which portions of lesson material would be best to focus on during class. Genesis 12 is a powerful reminder of faith and hope as we take a look at the life of Abraham—the man through whom God chose to provide a people who would bring forth the Messiah. So, we will want to take some time talking about faith and trust, as highlighted in the final paragraph of the subpoint. The first and third Discussion Questions at the end of this subpoint will work well with the class.

However, I also want to highlight what is taught in the preceding paragraph. God did indeed provide a nation and a people—the Jewish people—to bring forth Jesus into the world. However, even in the Old Testament, Gentiles were a part of His plan. This paragraph does a good job of explaining this, and I think it will help students recognize that the Old Testament is more than just the story of the Jewish people. It shows us the heart of God in preparing the way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. The resource item “God’s Covenants” will help emphasize this point.

For Main Point 3, the first subpoint provides a great opportunity to talk about the hope we can have in God during times of great trial. In covering the commentary, I will focus on working toward the second and third questions in the Discussion portion of the subpoint. God was guiding Joseph’s life even during the darkest of times. This is an important point to be made for Christians today. Hard times will come. There will be struggles and challenges, and even injustices. But that does not change the reality that God is still watching over us. Sometimes, God even allows us to experience hardship as we grow in faith and trust, and are conformed to the image of Christ. In the end,

we can honor Christ with our lives even through the hard times.

I also note that the Resource item for this main point contains some valuable, practical reflection questions. So, while we will spend minimal time on the second subpoint, I would like to distribute the item for students to complete during the week, for the purpose of practical application.

To close the session, I want to emphasize a key point made in the “What Is God Saying to Us” segment: “As we study Genesis, it is easy to get caught up in the details, but we must not miss the central message: God created all things. He is our Maker, and He loves us so much that when humanity fell, He enacted a plan to redeem us.” I want to emphasize both our value to God as His creation (made in His image), as well as His marvelous plan of salvation, which had its start in Genesis.

Wednesday, September 2, 6:00 p.m.

When I go to church on Wednesday, I will take the Daily Bible Reading work sheet and the other work sheets with me to make copies. This will allow me to avoid the rush for the copier that often happens on Sunday morning.

Saturday, September 5, 8:00 p.m.

I read over the lesson and my notes again to plant the flow of the lesson firmly in my mind. Then I fill out the Planning the Session work sheet to use as a guide to manage the class time wisely. I pray for those in my class, myself, and all who will be ministering God’s Word on Sunday.

Sunday, September 6, 7:30 a.m.

I scan through the Planning the Session work sheet I filled out during my prep time to refresh my thoughts about the lesson. Then I take a few minutes to pray for the Spirit’s help and anointing, knowing that without His help my efforts are futile.

PLANNING the Session

Study: 1 Date: Sept. 6, 2020

Title: The Great Story Begins

Scriptures: Genesis 1:1-31; 12:1-7; 21:1-7; 32:22-32; 45:1-15; 46:1-7; Exodus 3:6

Objective: To affirm and worship God, the Creator and Sovereign Lord.

PRESESSION ACTIVITY

Teaching Methods

Fellowship time with coffee, juice, and donuts. Greet visitors and ask them to fill out a visitor card. Hand out copies of the Daily Bible Reading Work Sheet to students after they are seated.

Materials Needed

Food and drinks, visitor cards

Time Required: 5 min

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Teaching Methods

"Why is it important to believe that God, and only God, is responsible for having made the universe?"

Materials Needed

Time Required: 7 min

Transition: This week's study leads us to consider the powerful truths behind the reality that God made the universe, and therefore He controls everything in it.

Teaching Methods

BIBLE COMMENTARY

Materials Needed

1 God the Creator (Genesis 1:1-31) Resource Item "God's Orderly Creation"

Ask: "Why is it important to recognize that because God made us, we are accountable to Him? Why do you think some people resist the notion that they are accountable to God?"

Looking at the order in Creation, we see the first hints that God has made us with a purpose. Genesis 1 helps us understand our need for the gospel. We are accountable to Him, yet He has made the way for us to be saved from our sin and spend eternity with Him.

Ask: "What would you say to a believer to affirm God as their Creator?" Time Required: 15 min

We can respond that Creation testifies of His glory, and reminds us of our hope through Him.

2 God Used a Chosen People To Carry Out His Plan (Genesis 12:1-3; 21:1-7; 32:22-30)

Focus on Genesis 12:1-3. **Ask:** "Has God ever asked you to step out in faith and do something that seemed illogical?" Genesis 12, the story of Abraham, is a powerful reminder of faith and hope. Abraham took an incredible step of faith and trust in going to an unknown place. Yet he was also the man through which God chose to provide a people who would bring forth the Messiah. And so, in only the 12th chapter of the Bible, we see the story of Jesus begin to unfold. **Ask:** In what ways was Abraham required to trust God? How many "details" of God's plan did God give him, and how might this make his faith even more amazing?

Resource Item "God's Covenants"

Time Required: 18 min

3 God Preserved His People and His Plan (Genesis 45:1-8; 46:1-7; Exodus 3:6)

Focus on Genesis 45:1-8. **Ask:** "Has you ever been through a time when God used events to put you in the right place at the right time? Explain: God was guiding Joseph's life even during the darkest of times. There will be struggles and challenges, and even injustices, for us, too. But that does not change the reality that God is still watching over us.

Resource Item "Fortunately or Thankfully" (to take home)

Time Required: 9 min

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US?

Teaching Methods

Use the thoughts from What Is God Saying to Us to reinforce the significance of recognizing God as sole Creator, and the One whom we can trust for salvation, direction, and help in our lives.

Time Required: 3 min

LIVING IT OUT

Teaching Methods

Invite your students to reflect on their lives and trust God with any difficult circumstances they are facing. Also pray that God will lead them to someone they can encourage this week with the reality that God is Creator and Author of Salvation.

Time Required: 3 min

A full-size "Planning the Session" form is available for you to photocopy on page 5 of the *Adult Resource Packet*.

PLANNING the Session

Study: _____ Date: _____

Title: _____

Scriptures: _____

Objective: _____

PRESESSION ACTIVITY

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

Time Required: _____ min

Time Required: _____ min

Transition: _____

Teaching Methods

BIBLE COMMENTARY

Materials Needed

1

Time Required: _____ min

2

Time Required: _____ min

3

Time Required: _____ min

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO US?

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

LIVING IT OUT

Teaching Methods

Materials Needed

Time Required: _____ min

Time Required: _____ min

Dear Teacher:

On behalf of the entire editorial staff at Radiant Life, we thank you for your commitment to Christian education. You are fulfilling a critical role in the body of Christ.

It has perhaps never been more important for Christians to know what we believe, and then to be able to convey those beliefs in response to a world that is at times both curious and skeptical. We're confronted daily with messages that run contrary to Scripture. Many call for the redefinition of established beliefs, be they theological, moral, or social. How will we respond? How can we prepare to make right decisions?

A significant part of such preparation takes place in your classroom every week. We hope that the *Adult Teacher* will serve as a valued resource in helping you equip students to understand and practice God's Word.

This volume is the first of a new seven-year series. As we proceed through the next twenty-eight quarters, we will engage in numerous book studies from both the Old and New Testaments.

As we move through this volume, a variety of Scriptures, doctrines, and issues will be discussed. The first quarter provides an overview of both the Old and New Testaments, enabling your class to see how the common thread of redemption runs through the whole of Scripture.

Throughout this year we will also explore several practical issues from a biblical perspective. The unit "Scriptures Difficult To Understand" addresses some common Bible passages that elicit questions among believers and unbelievers alike. Similarly, the final unit of Summer will help students prepare for challenges and questions that accompany life in an increasingly secular world.

You will also find a variety of book studies—Isaiah, Mark, Peter, and Jude—to help you explore the teachings within each of these rich and important books. Summer also included a unit on the prayers of the Bible, providing a helpful and practical study on prayer for the students.

As always, the *Adult Teacher* will include a variety of questions, activities, and practical application to assist you in preparing and teaching each week. We recognize that the application of God's Word is key as the students live out what you teach them beyond the walls of your classroom.

For more than a century, the *Adult Teacher* has endeavored to serve as a valuable resource in discipling generations of growing Christians. In using it, you can be assured of exploring every book of the Bible and every major Christian doctrine during each seven-year series. Yet we also recognize that discipleship cannot take place without the faithful service of you, the teacher. We thank you for your ministry, and pray that these lessons will be a blessing to you and your class.

May God's anointing and blessing rest upon you,

James G. Meredith, Adult Editor
Radiant Life Curriculum

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Life Application Made *Easy*

What's the goal of your Sunday school class? Is it for every student to have a detailed knowledge of the names and customs of all the Canaanite tribes? For them to be able to name the twelve disciples in the order in which Jesus called them? If so, they will make great Bible trivia players!

Is it your goal for them to describe what scholars believe to be the order of events in the end times? To explain the differences between various theological positions? Maybe they will become professors or write books about theology.

While there is nothing wrong with learning the detailed facts of the Bible, and it is certainly important to understand and explain correct theology, a primary goal of the Sunday school class should be for the students to be able to apply and live out the truths of God's Word. We want to help them do that.

The motivation to apply God's Word in daily life flows from a growing relationship with Christ. The apostle John wrote, "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20, NIV).

While much of God's Word has immediate application for God's people, the Bible is really a book about God and His involvement in this world. When Jesus appeared to Cleopas and a second disciple while walking to Emmaus, He explained how the Scriptures spoke of himself. "He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms'" (Luke 24:44, NIV). It's ALL about Jesus. The first quarter of this 2020-2021 volume is an overview that teaches this principle. It is a great place to begin a more practical approach to our studies.

You will find that your new *Adult Teacher* book has a new look. Beyond that, it has a greater emphasis on application. You are encouraged to purchase the *Adult Resource Packet*, where many of the materials are focused on application as well as more in-depth learning for students who desire that. Even if you don't have time to use them all in class, your students will benefit from them in their personal study time.

Your teaching is important to help your students learn to apply Scripture properly. In their eagerness to grow in Christ, some new believers examine the Scriptures as though every text has

immediate application to their own situation. Likewise, many teachers believe every biblical passage under study has immediate application for their students. For example, one pastor's wife shared how she overcame marital apprehensions before her wedding. The romance of the relationship overshadowed her ability to reason. Did she really love this future minister? Was this truly God's

will for her life? Asking the Holy Spirit for direction, she allowed her Bible to fall open and her eyes landed on these words: "Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;

let all the trees of the forest sing for joy" (Psalm 96:11–12, NIV). With this text as confirmation from the Lord, she proceeded with her wedding plans and married the young Bible college student. They have been married more than 40 years.

Unfortunately, this approach to Bible study treats God's Word as a horoscope. Baby believers often ask the same questions when reading their Bibles as unbelievers ask when they consult a horoscope: Should I purchase this car? Should my family relocate? Which person should I ask to help me? Seeking direction in this manner looks very similar to the magical thinking found in pagan religions.

Paul told us how to apply Scripture to our lives. "These things happened to them as examples and were written down

as warnings for us" (1 Corinthians 10:11, NIV). Paul expected the Corinthian believers to understand basic principles of conduct found in the Bible, and then apply those principles to their own situations. Should they avoid idolatry, sexual immorality, or grumbling? Yes, because judgment would fall on anyone who repeated tragic choices of those under the leadership of Moses (Exodus 16:6–12). When

A primary goal of the Sunday School class should be for the students to be able to apply and live out the truths God's Word.

we find our situation matching those found in the Bible, then God's Word to them is also God's Word to us.

Many people claim Jeremiah 29:11 as a personal promise from the Lord: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans

to give you hope and a future" (NIV). This specific word from God was meant to encourage those who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon in judgment for the continuous sin of the Southern Kingdom (Jeremiah 29:4). The principle that we can apply to our own lives is God's will for us can be known. However, it would be inappropriate to claim this text as a promise that we would enjoy prosperity and never suffer harm. As you examine the Scriptures with your students, examine the context to be sure you are teaching appropriate application practices.

As you study the Scriptures with students, it is your great privilege to guide them in properly applying God's Word. As you do this, you will be blessed as you observe spiritual growth, both in your students and in your own life.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Teaching Pentecostal Distinctives

by Clancy Hayes

Teachers in Pentecostal churches have the great privilege of transmitting the Pentecostal faith from generation to generation. While some passages such as Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 12–14, and Romans 12 clearly proclaim the basis of our Pentecostal faith, we should not confine our teaching of that truth to these favorite passages. Our Pentecostal distinctives are found throughout the Bible. The Holy Spirit was active in Creation and throughout the Scriptures. After all, the Holy Spirit inspired the entire Bible. 1 Peter 1:21 says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (NIV)

It is important to identify the work of the Holy Spirit in each passage where it appears and weave that truth into the lesson of the day. Let’s look at ways this can be done.

First, you must become fully acquainted with the foundational distinctives of the Pentecostal faith. These include:

- The ongoing revelation of the Holy Spirit through His gifts to the Church:
- The Holy Spirit’s guidance and illumination of the minds of believers
- The Holy Spirit’s grace in the life of the believer through miracles, healings, and answered prayer
- The Holy Spirit empowerment of believers to evangelize the world.

Next, look for these concepts in the biblical text you are preparing to teach. Begin by identifying the type of literature your class will be studying. When preparing to teach a narrative or historical portion of the Bible, be aware of the Holy Spirit’s role in the lives of the Bible characters as He provides comfort, help, or guidance in the passage. Show your class how God worked in a biblical character’s life to resolve a conflict, and consider how that event serves as an example for our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in our own lives. Help your students identify similar needs in their lives and develop confidence that the same God who solved problems in biblical times is available to help them as well.

When teaching from the epistles, look for statements of fact concerning the Holy Spirit and His work in the believer's life. The epistles are foundational for many of the facts and doctrinal truths of Scripture. Much of what we know about the Holy Spirit's work comes from the epistles. Whenever a truth that reflects Pentecostal distinctives occurs, be sure to highlight this truth and challenge your students to adopt it as their own and put it into practice. The baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and healing are not simply experiences of others to learn about, but ones to personally experience.

In poetic or wisdom literature, look for the writer's perception of the Holy Spirit's intervention in his or her personal circumstance. In these passages, the writers were often struggling with a difficult situation or rejoicing over the help the Holy Spirit has given them. Help your students to feel the author's struggles and see the help that person received through the power of the Spirit. Students in your classroom struggle with similar issues in their lives. They may wonder if God has forgotten them because they have been attacked physically, spiritually, or emotionally. Help them to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit as the biblical writers did or to reflect on the Holy Spirit's previous acts

of protection, healing, or guidance thus turning their struggles into faith.

When preparing to teach from a prophetic book, to look for ways the Holy Spirit spoke to correct and direct the people of God both at the time of the writing and for periods in the future. All of these can help your students learn to interact with

the Holy Spirit in their own lives. Prophetic material lends itself to helping people see how God speaks to people through the power of the Spirit. Listen to the message being proclaimed by the prophet, and challenge your students to be open to the Spirit's instructions to believers today based on that prophecy. Point out the

various ways the Spirit continues to communicate through such vehicles as tongues and interpretation, prophecy, the Word of God, pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, apostles, and His still small voice. Use these opportunities to help prepare your students to hear directly from the Spirit and respond to Him obediently.

The message of Pentecost is found throughout the Bible. The key to teaching these truths is to intentionally look for them in the passages we study and to then find ways to help students see the truth's value to them. Being Pentecostal should touch every aspect of our Christian experience. It is the Pentecostal teacher's privilege to help share this truth with students.

Teachers in Pentecostal churches have the great privilege of transmitting the Pentecostal faith from generation to generation.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

The Value of Inductive Bible Study

by James G. Meredith

The story is told of a man who was seeking God's will for his life. *I know what I'll do*, he thought. *I'll just open my Bible, point to a verse, and that will be my answer.* So he closed his eyes, opened his Bible, pointed to a page, then read the verse out loud: "Matthew 27:5... 'So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself'" (NIV). *That doesn't sound right*, he thought. I'll try again. And so he repeated the procedure: "Luke 10:37... 'Go and do likewise'" (NIV). *This isn't getting any better. I'd better try one more time.* Slightly flustered, he closed his eyes and pointed a third time: "John 13:27... 'What you are about to do, do quickly'" (NIV).

As absurd as this story sounds, it illustrates the dangers of using improper methods of Bible study. If we want to engage in a good, inductive study of Scripture, we must avoid certain pitfalls. For instance, we must look at the entire context of a passage rather than focusing on an isolated verse or phrase. In addition, we must do all we can to understand the true meaning of the passage before we attempt to apply it to our lives.

As a teacher, using good, inductive Bible study methods will benefit you in two ways: First, you will personally begin to understand Scripture better, and be more accurate and precise in interpreting and applying Scripture. Second, you will be better equipped to accurately and concisely share the truths of Scripture with your students.

Good, inductive Bible study involves the following five key principles:

1. Observation—What does this passage say, and how does it say it? Inductive Bible study looks beyond individual verses to understand the underlying principle being taught in the surrounding paragraphs and chapters, and even considers the overall theme of the particular book of Scripture being studied. We must consider how each verse of Scripture relates to its surrounding context. As the opening story illustrated, taking verses and phrases out of context will lead to confusion or, worse yet, a tragic misunderstanding of Scripture.

2. Interpretation—What did this passage mean to its original hearers in Bible times? Although intended for all believers, Scripture was originally written to people in a culture far different from our own. Thus, inductive Bible study examines the

culture of Bible times, including how the message would have been interpreted in that culture. In addition, Scripture was often written to address a particular situation. For example, Galatians was written to a church that was being misled by false teachings, while First Thessalonians was penned to encourage a congregation enduring intense persecution. By understanding these situations, we are better able to grasp the spiritual principle God seeks to teach us through each passage.

3. Application—How do the teachings of this passage apply to our lives? Application is important; Scripture is as fresh and relevant today as it was when it was first written. But our application must be accurate or we run the risk of making Scripture say something it was never intended to say. It is only after observing the context of Scripture and interpreting its meaning that we are ready to draw out spiritual principles and apply them to our lives.

4. Response—What are we going to do about the teaching of this passage? This is where the power and authority of Scripture are discovered. If we stop at simply understanding Scripture, our Bible study is incomplete. Scripture is more than words on a page. It must become real to us and compel us to action. God's Word is meant to transform our lives. We must each personally respond to its teachings.

Be sure you structure your class in such a way that you get to the response time before the end of your class. Your Teacher's Guide includes many more activities than you will have time to complete, so be sure to prayerfully choose activities that

will lead you to the response the Holy Spirit wants from your class. Be sure to save time for that response before time to close.

5. Communication—How can we share what we've discovered with others? The "crowning jewel" of inductive Bible study is when we take

the truths that have been learned and applied to our own lives, and share them with others. This communication may take the form of teaching a Sunday School class or small group, sharing Christ with an unsaved friend, or offering encouragement to a fellow Christian who is hurting. Both you and your students are part of this communication loop.

Inductive Bible study isn't always easy. It involves a commitment of time, and may require us to "dig a little deeper" as we examine the Word and prepare to teach our students. But, in the end, we will reap the benefits of a better understanding of Scripture, a more consistent Christian walk, and a greater ability to convey God's truths to the people we are teaching.

[By teaching inductive Bible study], we will reap the benefits of a better understanding of Scripture, a more consistent Christian walk, and a greater ability to convey God's truths to the people we are teaching.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Dealing With Talkative Students

(As Well As the Quiet Ones)

by Richard Bennett

Teachers of adult students often deal with a few very different challenges in class discussions. Sometimes students will not respond at all, and you feel like you are talking to yourself. In other situations one or two students seem to dominate the discussion, sometimes commandeering the class and taking it in a direction far different from the direction it needs to go.

For some teachers, having a talkative student would be considered a huge blessing. After all, it's difficult to stand in front of the class and stare at unresponsive students who are just waiting for you to tell them what they should think. However, talkative students sometimes dominate discussions, keeping others from participating fully. So how can you balance these two extremes?

A student (we'll call him Bob) who constantly dominates the class can cause other students to become apathetic or dependent on the one who is willing to carry the discussion. Then the class becomes a dialog between you and Bob with the others simply observing. Why

should they bother to offer input either by answering a question or adding to the discussion? Bob is always quick to answer. Even when someone else speaks up, Bob always seems to get the last word.

Another problem with a talkative student is that other students in the class, especially newer ones, may begin to believe that Bob's comments reflect a consensus of how the entire class believes, thinks, and feels. Assuming this, other students simply refuse to offer opinions or comments that appear contradictory. Even teachers may become unwilling to challenge Bob's views or redirect the discussion. Failure to deal with a talkative student can allow the class to be led off the subject or even into error, even if everyone's motives are pure. We must always remember the Word of God alone is infallible and our goal is to engage every student in the Word.

Let's explore some ways we can deal with such a student. First, the best and most honest approach is to visit with the student outside the classroom setting. Depending on his personality and maturity

level, this conversation can take several different directions. It is possible that Bob may not even realize his actions are being disruptive. He may feel he's doing his part in supporting you as a teacher and being an involved class member. Often this is true of students who are quite knowledgeable. They are simply trying to help you keep the discussion from lagging. If you believe this may be the case, express appreciation, and ask the student to help you draw others into the discussion. Suggest that they do this by waiting for someone else to answer or by even making their comment into a question that invites input from others.

If Bob is not as well-meaning, and is trying to dominate or take over the class, you may need to enact your own modifications in leading the class to curtail his comments. After all, your goal is to make sure all of your students leave the class with a greater love and knowledge of God's Word. They can best do that when they are actively engaged in the learning process.

Within the classroom, there are several methods you can use to deal with the talkative student. It is always good to vary your usage of these methods.

- Intentionally begin your class with a question or activity that invites participation from everyone, whether or not they have significant Bible backgrounds. The "Opening Activity" in your *Adult Teacher Guide* is usually designed to draw responses that do not require a lot of Bible knowledge, and they encourage everyone to participate.

- Ask for other students' comments. After Bob has made his contribution, reopen the floor for other comments. You may need to call on someone by name. "Sue, what do you think about ___?" "Brother John, if someone at your workplace were to ask you about this issue, what would you say to them?" Be sure you

ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no." After someone responds, you might want to ask a follow-up question of that person or someone else to get a fuller response.

- Announce that you require at least three (or more) responses to your question before you ask it. This idea works well when you summarize each student's comments on the chalkboard. It is very important that you validate every response, even if it isn't quite what you are looking for. When you have the required number of responses, draw on what has been said as a bridge back into the lesson commentary.

- During your class preparation time, write discussion questions on index cards and hand them to individuals as they enter the room so they can be prepared to talk about them. That way, you aren't catching anyone off-guard. Some people like a little more time to think before they speak. Depending on the size of your class, you might want to give the same question to three or more people to ensure broader participation.

- When dividing the class into small groups for discussion or various learning activities, select a spokesperson from each group yourself rather than allowing students to volunteer for the job. Make sure from week to week that you are appointing a wide range of persons. Once these individuals are encouraged to speak in class, they may find they enjoy participating and feel more strongly that this is "their" class.

- Be sure to include the talkative student at the same level as others. You don't want that person to feel left out.

As you apply these suggestions, you may find that your talkative student becomes a great ally in drawing others into the discussion. He or she may just need a reminder and a bit of encouragement.



NEW! Radiant Life Teacher Guide

NEW! Suggested “Say” Statements
Make it easy to introduce each subpoint.

NEW! Opening Activity
Sets the stage for an interactive class.

NEW! What Is God Saying to Us?
Closes the class with “take-home” thoughts.

NEW! PowerPoint Presentations
Connect to different learning styles with visual elements.

Story of the New Testament

October 25, 2020

STUDY 8 The Messiah Comes

Study Text
Matthew 1:18–24; Luke 2:41–52; 3:21–22; 4:14–21, 31–37; 5:17–26; John 19:16–42; 20:1–22

Central Truth
God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin.

Key Verse
Matthew 1:23
Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (KJV).
“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”) (NIV).

Learning Objectives:

- Know and understand the culmination of the plan of God in Jesus Christ.
- Have an increased appreciation for and comprehension of the saving results of Jesus’ work.
- Live in the reality of the new spiritual relationship with Jesus provided through His death and resurrection.

Introducing the Study

Say: After our journey through the highlights of the Old Testament, focusing on God’s plan for the redemption of humankind, we now begin our journey through the New Testament where we will focus on the fulfillment of that plan. (Play the Unit 2 introduction video, available at www.PLACEHOLDER.org.)

Opening Activity—The Best-Laid Plans

Ask: What are some events or projects that you have planned or helped plan in your life?
Students may name such things as building a house, planning a fund-raiser or other event, planning a career, or something else that they planned.
Ask: Did you ever have to change those plans along the way because of unforeseen circumstances? (Ask for a show of hands for “yes” or “no.” More than likely, most plans had to be adjusted for some reason.)

Say: There is a saying that “the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” While this is true in the human realm, we can rest assured that the plans of God never go awry. In spite of Israel’s rebellion and disobedience, God’s plan to send His Son as our Savior was fulfilled with perfect timing. (Read Galatians 4:4–5 aloud, then share your highlights from the following text.)

With this lesson the focus shifts from tracing God’s plan for redeeming the world in Old Testament prophecies, patterns, and figures to the revelation of that plan in Jesus Christ (see 2 Peter 1:21; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1; 9:23–24). In a relativistic world, we need to grasp that Jesus is the plan for salvation. He is not a savior among others; He is the Savior of the world. Telling the world of that salvation is the missional purpose of the Church.

58 Adult Teacher Guide Commentary & Application

and by physical (19–22).

of the histori-

witnesses of

relationship

with Christ? The future nature of that relationship in heaven?

What is God saying to us?

Say: In spite of the sin of Adam and Eve, the frailty of the patriarchs, and the rebellion of Israel, God never gave up on humanity. He sent His Son to die for the sins of all of humankind and rise from the dead, gaining victory over Satan. We can rejoice in His love for us and enjoy our restored relationship with Him even as we anticipate our eternal home that He is now preparing for us.

Closing Prayer

Give thanks to God for the amazing gift of His Son and pray that each of your students will have an even deeper relationship with Him.


Ministry in Action

- Look for ways you can share the marvelous plan of salvation with someone who needs a relationship with Christ.
- Examine your daily life and identify actions you can take to make your relationship with Jesus stronger than it currently is.

Daily Bible Readings

- Monday:**
From the Seed of Woman.
Genesis 3:13–15
- Tuesday:**
From the House of David.
1 Chronicles 17:7–14
- Wednesday:**
Christ’s Priesthood Foretold.
Leviticus 11:1–6

Thanks to your input, the Teacher Guide is better than ever. Check out how your feedback created a more streamlined, relational, and easy-to-use guide.

The  symbol shows you which points have a coordinating slide.

STUDY 1 THE GREAT STORY BEGINS

MINIS

- Refl and diffi

STUDY 1 THE GREAT STORY BEGINS

Key Verse: **Genesis 1:1**

In the beginning God



UNIT OBJECTIVE:

Story of the Old Testament

To identify the hand of God throughout the Old Testament leading up to the coming of Christ and the plan of salvation.

CHANGED ITEMS

<p>Historical Literary Background Provided within the commentary when relevant.</p> <p>Lesson Outline Box Gives you the “nuts and bolts” you need for the lesson.</p>	<p>Questions for Application Provides discussion questions to create lively talks in class.</p> <p>More New Features -Margin space for notes -Links to video enhancements -Easy-to-read commentary with background information</p>
---	--

Story of the Old Testament

The Bible was written by more than forty different writers over the course of about 1,600 years. As a result of its diversity, there is an unfortunate tendency to view it as a collection of independent parts that can stand alone, with little regard given to other verses, chapters, and books. This unit—and indeed this entire quarter—is devoted to presenting the “big picture” view of Scripture, centered on the unifying theme of God’s plan to redeem humanity from sin and the effects of the Fall.

This unit focuses on the Old Testament, tracing the story of God’s interaction with humanity, starting from Creation and moving through the birth and history of His people until after their exile. As you study each lesson, impress upon students the unity of Scripture seen in a number of recurring themes, such as grace, mercy, love, holiness, judgment for sin, and hope for the faithful. These themes will be present in the study of the New Testament as well.

As you teach, keep the big picture in view, as it will be easy to get caught up in the specifics. For example, in Lesson 1 the emphasis is on building the foundation of Scripture’s teaching, namely that God is Creator and Sovereign Lord. By His grace, and according to His plan, He created a covenant people and a nation through which He would deliver the Messiah to the world (Lessons 2-4). Because it is difficult for God’s people to live in a sinful world, He also provided wisdom for daily living (Lesson 5), and prophets to deliver restoring truth when they strayed—if only they would listen (Lesson 6). And even when they did fall into sin, God still offered hope for the future, setting the stage for the Messiah in the New Testament (Lesson 7).

Throughout this unit, impress upon students the importance of seeing Scripture as a unified Book. It holds the answers to life’s most difficult questions. But in order to grasp these answers, we must understand its meaning, beyond a verse here and a verse there. It is hoped that this quarter will inspire your class to become enthusiastic students of the Word, actively seeking out its truths for their everyday lives.

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

September 6, 2020

LESSON 1

The Great Story Begins

Study Text

Genesis 1:1–31; 12:1–7; 21:1–7;
32:22–32; 45:1–15; 46:1–7;
Exodus 3:6

Central Truth

God is both Creator and Sovereign over all, yet He is intimately involved in the lives of His people.



Key Verse Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (KJV).

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize God as the loving Creator who is always active in students' lives.
- Appreciate the role of Abraham and his descendants in Scripture's story of salvation through Christ.
- Submit to God's purpose for students' lives, surrendering to His lordship and guidance.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Bible is the most amazing book you will ever read. While it is a collection of many smaller books, it is a unified story of God's love for His people. This quarter provides an overview of both the Old and New Testaments that will serve as a foundation for the quarters to follow. (*Play the Unit 1 introduction video, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—Quick Bible Facts

Ask your students to name as many facts about the Bible as they can in the next two minutes. Write their responses on the board. You may hear the following:

The Bible contains sixty-six books total; thirty-nine Old Testament books; twenty-seven New Testament books; written by more than forty people over approximately 1,600 years; longest chapter is Psalm 119; shortest chapter is Psalm 117; shortest verse is John 11:35; the Bible includes Law, history, poetry, prophets, Gospels, and Epistles. The Bible is the best-selling book of all time, and it takes about seventy-five hours to read.

Did you know there is a great study Bible that is distinctively Pentecostal? Check out this website to see what's available: MyHealthyChurch.com/FireBible.

Say: In today's lesson, we begin a journey through the Old Testament, covering highlights from the Book of Genesis. This unit is not a thorough survey of the Old Testament, but an overview the story of the plan of God from the beginning until the time of the Messiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Bible was written by more than forty people over about 1,600 years. Yet within its diversity is unity of theme and purpose. The Book of Genesis forms the starting point for what

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

26. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

12:1. Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

21:1. And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

2. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

32:26. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

27. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

45:4. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

7. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

46:2. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.

3. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation.

New International Version

Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

26. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

12:1. The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

2. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

21:1. Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised.

2. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

3. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

32:26. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27. The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.

28. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

45:4. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!"

7. "But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."

46:2. And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied.

3. "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

follows throughout the Old and New Testaments. Many of the great doctrines of the Bible are introduced in Genesis.

The theme of Genesis reflects the theme of Scripture: the redemption of humanity from sin and the effects of the Fall. It establishes God as the sole Creator of all things, then proceeds with the story of God's interaction with His creation.

Part 1—God the Loving Creator

□ In the Beginning, God Created the Universe

Genesis 1:1–2



Say: The creation account demonstrates the creative power of God, introduces the Trinity, and presents God's love as He provided for the needs of people before He created them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis does not give us all the details of creation. But it does describe our powerful God, who created all things. The first words of Scripture are critical: "In the beginning God created . . ." (Genesis 1:1). God has always existed; the Creator preceded the creation. And so, the first five words of Genesis repudiate atheism, for they affirm the existence of God as Almighty, eternal Creator. This simple phrase also rejects materialism (the philosophy that only matter exists), for it distinguishes between God and His material creation. And, finally, the phrase establishes God as Creator of all, for "the heavens and the earth" (NIV) is a reference to all that exists in the material world. "In the beginning God created" is, therefore, a foundational truth of Christianity. Because God created the universe, it belongs to Him and He controls it (see Psalm 24:1–2; 95:3–5; Isaiah 48:12–13).

Genesis 1:2 draws our focus from the whole of creation specifically to planet earth. It was formless, empty, and dark—utterly uninhabitable. It seems that water covered the whole earth, and the Spirit of God hovered over the water.

Discuss

- ? Of all the things that God created, what is your favorite and why?
- ? In what ways do you see the Triune God in the creation account?

□ God's Work in Creation Is Orderly and Purposeful

Genesis 1:3–31



Say: Genesis clearly indicates that God's creation was orderly. He did not make the universe in a random or haphazard way. When we consider the way plants, animals, and humans are interdependent, we gain a bit of insight into the creative mind of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 1:3–31 records immense creative activity: God said, God saw, God divided or separated, God called, God made, God set, God blessed. Here is the all-powerful God deeply involved in His creation.

The orderliness of creation is seen in its sequence. Note the relationship between the days. The first day He made light; the fourth day, light bearers. The

second day He made the expanses of water and atmosphere; the fifth day, birds to fly in one expanse and fish to swim within the other. The third day He made dry land and vegetation; the sixth day, animals and humans to live on the land and eat the vegetation.

There is also a balance. Days one and two have one work each. Day three has two distinct works. Days four and five have one work each. Day six has two distinct works (which serves to emphasize that animals and humans are distinct from one another).

The progression of Genesis 1 leads to the creation of humanity in God's image, referring in large part to the capability for righteousness and holiness (see Ephesians 4:22–24). Neither the universe nor humanity came by mere chance.



Resource Packet Item 1: God's Orderly Creation

Distribute the work sheet. You may have students work in small groups to fill in the chart and answer the questions, or you may complete it as a class. (See answers below.)

Day 1 Light

Day 2 Water and atmosphere

Day 3 Dry land and vegetation

Day 4 Lightbearers (sun, moon, stars)

Day 5 Birds and fish

Day 6 Animals and man

Discuss

? What would you say to an unbeliever to affirm the existence of God as Creator?



Part 2—God Used a Chosen People To Carry Out His Plan

Abraham Followed God's Direction

Genesis 12:1–3

Say: Genesis 1:31 says that when God finished His creation, He saw that it was “very good.” Then Adam and Eve chose to sin, plunging all of humanity into sin and bringing corruption into all of creation. But God had a plan by which humanity could find redemption. He chose Abraham to become the father of the nation from which the Messiah would be born—One who would die for the sins of the world. God made a covenant with Abraham, and Abraham trusted God's direction even when he did not understand all that God was doing. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

Genesis 3 records humanity's fall into sin, which brought about the sinfulness of every human being. Moving through chapters 3–11, we see how violence and corruption led to God sending the Flood to destroy the earth in Noah's time. Then God promised to never again destroy the earth by a flood. Yet as time went forward, humanity continued its march into wickedness. Redemption was needed, and God's answer to that is the central theme throughout the remainder of Scripture. The plan of redemption is prophesied in Genesis 3:15 and begins to take shape in Genesis 12, where Abraham was chosen by God to be the father—the first patriarch—of a covenant people through whom the whole world would be blessed by the Savior who would come (Genesis 12:1–3).

Genesis 12 is a transitional chapter, connecting humanity to the lineage of Abraham. God chose Abraham to begin a chosen nation that would prepare the way for the greater Seed of Abraham—Christ—who would bring blessing to the world. For the remainder of Scripture, this concept of God’s people as Abraham’s seed, or lineage, will be present. While we think of his descendants primarily as being the Jewish people, Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in God are also present throughout the Old Testament (i.e., Rahab, Ruth, Uriah). In Genesis 14, Abraham himself offered tithes to a Canaanite king and priest of God named Melchizedek.

In Abraham we are introduced to the great concept of faith in God and personal trust in His promises. God called Abraham to leave his homeland in Mesopotamia to go to an unnamed place of God’s choosing (Genesis 12:1–3). That place was Canaan, several hundred miles to the southwest, which is largely the land we now know of as Israel. But God also gave Abraham a promise. He would become the father of a great nation through which God would demonstrate His love to the world (Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6–9). The specifics of Abraham’s story are well-known. But we must keep the bigger picture in view. God used Abraham to prepare the way for Christ. Indeed, the New Testament refers to all who follow Christ as children of Abraham (Romans 9:6–9; Galatians 3:6–11).

Discuss

- ? What did God ask Abraham to do that required him to trust God?
- ? What promise did God make to Abraham that would endure for generations to come?
- ? Has God ever asked you to step out in faith and do something that seemed illogical? What was it? How did you respond, and what was the result? (Share your response as well.)



Resource Packet Item 2: God’s Covenants

Divide the class into groups of 2–4 people. Assign each group one of the covenants to read, then have each group report their findings to the class.

God Did the Miraculous To Advance His Plan Genesis 21:1–7; 32:22–30



Say: God’s Word reminds us that God can do anything. He had a plan to bring Christ, the Messiah, into the world through the nation of Israel, and He did the impossible to fulfill that plan. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

God had promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation. Yet Genesis 21 finds him and his wife, Sarah, childless and elderly. (He was 100 years old, and she was ninety.) But God miraculously gave them a son, Isaac. Isaac’s name meant “laughter,” a reminder of the joy that Isaac brought his parents. God kept His promise even when that required a great miracle.

God’s promise also endured despite the failures of His people. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, is a familiar example. When we hear of Jacob, we often think of his deception of Esau (see Genesis 26:34 through 28:9). But God later

shaped Jacob into a man of persevering faith. In Genesis 32:22–31, God appeared in the form of a man and wrestled with Jacob. (Many scholars believe this was an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament.) It was ultimately a spiritual struggle, as Jacob desired God’s blessing. He clung to the man even after suffering a painful injury. His perseverance brought about a name change to “Israel,” meaning “one who struggles with God.”

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remind us that God made a plan to redeem humanity, preserving that plan through seemingly impossible circumstances and flawed individuals.

Discuss

- ? What promise did God keep for Abraham and Sarah, and how does that promise relate to you?
- ? Have you ever received a promise from God, from His Word that you clung to when it seemed impossible? Share your testimony to encourage others.
- ? Many of the people God used were flawed. What were some of the faults of Abraham and his family? How can the faults of these individuals teach and encourage you?

Part 3—God Preserved His People and His Plan



□ Joseph’s Trials Were Part of God’s Plan

Genesis 45:1–8

Say: Joseph was Jacob’s favored son. His older brothers sold him into slavery, but God used him to preserve the nation of Israel during a time of famine. The story of Joseph is a crucial part of God’s plan to provide the Messiah for all people everywhere. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph was Jacob’s eleventh son, and because he enjoyed Jacob’s special favor, his ten older brothers became jealous of him. Out of this jealousy, they had sold him into slavery in Egypt. Yet what started as a tragic story became a beautiful account of God’s care and preservation of the Promise, as recorded in Genesis 45:1–8. In Egypt, over the course of years, God enabled Joseph to ascend to a high position in government. He became the overseer of food provisions in preparation for a prophesied famine. Meanwhile, the famine led Jacob’s sons to Egypt in search of food. Verse 7 is key: God had orchestrated all these circumstances in order to save the lives of Joseph’s loved ones and preserve the family line.

In saving the lives of Jacob’s descendants, God also preserved His plan for the nation of Israel. Nothing could nullify His covenant with Abraham—and His plan to bless every nation through his descendants.

Discuss

- ? How did Joseph get to Egypt?
- ? Why was it important for Joseph to be in Egypt when the famine came?
- ? What experience have you had where God orchestrated events to make sure you were in the right place at the right time? (Share your response, too.)



Say: God sometimes moves us in location, career, or some other way that seems to be a detour for us. Previously in Genesis, God had directed Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham, to leave Ur and follow Him. In chapter 46, God uprooted Jacob’s whole family and moved them. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

In Genesis 46:1–7 the story of the patriarchs draws toward its conclusion with Jacob moving to Egypt, where he would escape famine and be with his beloved son Joseph, whom he had believed to be dead. Before Jacob moved to Egypt, he had received a name change (Israel), a reminder that he was the head of the family God had promised to make into a nation (see 35:10). The descendants would become as innumerable as the sands of the sea (see 22:17).

God was leading Israel (Jacob) step by step and appeared to him in a vision as the one true God. Israel did not need to be afraid to go to Egypt, for this was a necessary step in God’s plan. The journey to Egypt was not just to obtain food. It was a stage in God’s larger purpose for His people. Though many tests were yet to come, the Children of Israel would be preserved during the famine. As the years and centuries went by, Israel’s descendants would face terrible trials and enter into slavery. Yet God would never leave them, for He was their God (Exodus 3:6). The great story of the Bible was unfolding.

Discuss

- ? Have you experienced events that could have discouraged you, yet God used them for a greater purpose? Give students opportunities to share testimonies of these events.
- ? When Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, there were seventy of them, including Joseph’s sons, who had been born in Egypt (Genesis 46:26). By the time of the Exodus and wilderness wandering, the nation had grown to about 600,000 men, plus women and children (see Exodus 12:37). How does this relate to God’s promise in Genesis 12:2?



Resource Packet Item 3: Fortunately or Thankfully

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to fill in the answers. Then ask a few of them to share their testimonies of how God has used fortunate or unfortunate events and situations for His purposes.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As we study Genesis, it is easy to get caught up in the details, but we must not miss the central message: God created all things. He is our Maker, and He loves us so much that when humanity fell, He enacted a plan to redeem us. He used people like Abraham and others to bring about His ultimate plan for our redemption.

God created us in His image, and Jesus reinforced this truth. When the Pharisees were trying to trick Jesus and asked Him about paying taxes to Caesar, He asked for a coin. He asked them whose image was on it. Of course, it was Caesar's. Jesus told them to give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God



what is God's (see Matthew 22:21). You are made in God's image and, therefore, belong to Him. Ask God to help you reflect His image to everyone around you.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Invite your students to reflect on their lives and trust God with any difficult circumstances they are facing.
- Ask your students to find someone else to encourage this week regarding God's long-term plan. That may take the form of sharing the plan of salvation with an unbeliever or encouraging another believer who is struggling with difficult circumstances.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Recounting God's Preservation.
Nehemiah 9:5–15

Tuesday

Glory and Power of God.
Psalm 33:6–9

Wednesday

The Sovereignty of God.
Isaiah 40:12–17

Thursday

The Eternal Word of God.
John 1:1–5, 14

Friday

Beginning of Salvation History.
Acts 7:2–8

Saturday

The Great Invitation.
Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

September 13, 2020

LESSON 2

The Making of a Nation

Introducing the Study

Say: Last week we talked about the beginning of the story of the Bible. God created the world, including the first human beings. They rebelled against Him, but God enacted His plan to redeem them and all of humanity. He chose a family and a people through which He would send His Son to reconcile people to himself. He also preserved His people; His plan would not be thwarted. In today's lesson, we will see how He delivered His people, making a covenant with them, and making them into a nation He would use in spite of their rebellion.

Opening Activity—The Promises of God

Ask your students to mention as many promises from the Bible as they can in the next two minutes. Write their responses on the board. You may hear the following promises and many more:

- to provide a Savior
- to not destroy the earth again with a flood
- to always be with us
- to save the repentant sinner
- to heal
- to strengthen
- to provide for our needs
- to protect
- to answer prayer
- to fill us with the Holy Spirit
- to give us a home in heaven
- the Second coming of Jesus

Say: What is the basis for your faith in God? Do you follow Christian precepts simply because you have been told that they are rules Christians are supposed to follow? (Give time for response, then share your highlights from the following text.)

God had done great things for His people in blessing and preserving them, and He called them to obedience. But as the story of Scripture moves forward, we also find that God wanted love to be the basis for obedience to His commands.

Study Text

Exodus 3:1–15; 12:1–51; 19:1–8;
Deuteronomy 7:6–11; Joshua 1:1–9;
24:1–15

Central Truth

God established His covenant with the people of Israel.



Key Verse Deuteronomy 7:8

Because the LORD loved you [Israel], . . . the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you (KJV).

Because the LORD loved you [Israel] . . . he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand the basis of God's covenant with Israel and His ability to fulfill His promises.
- Affirm that obedience to God should flow out of love for Him.
- Reflect on your motive for obedience and your willingness to forsake modern expressions of idolatry in your life.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Exodus 3:9. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

12:23. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

25. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.

19:5. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 7:6. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

8. But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Joshua 1:1. Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying.

6. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

24:13. And I have given you a land for which ye did not labor, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

14. Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

New International Version

Exodus 3:9. "And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

10. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

12:23. "When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down."

25. "When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony."

19:5. "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

6. you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Deuteronomy 7:6. For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

8. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Joshua 1:1. After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide.

6. "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them."

24:13. "So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities which you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant."

14. "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD."



Say: From the time of Moses' birth, God's hand was upon him, leading him to the place where he stood as we pick up his story in Exodus 3:1–10. Moses had been protected as a baby, had fled Egypt as an adult because of his identification with his own people, which led to his killing an Egyptian. Then, he had lived in the land of Midian for forty years. As an exile and shepherd, he may not have been considered "leadership material," but God had a plan for him and the people of Israel. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Exodus 3 describes a theophany (a visible manifestation of God). While the location of this event (Mount Horeb) is usually associated with the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, Midian is associated with the northwestern corner of Saudi Arabia just across the Gulf of Aqaba from the Sinai peninsula. Scripture says that Moses had led the flock to the "backside" (verse 1, *KJV*) or "far side" (*NIV*) of the desert (literally "behind" or "beyond" the desert). This indicates to us that Moses was "off the beaten path" in relationship to his normal shepherding activities. He was not in what would have been his usual location.

In this special setting, God manifested himself to Moses as the Angel of the Lord from the midst of a burning bush that was not being consumed (verse 2). Although many have tried to give naturalistic explanations of this phenomenon, it is important to note that Moses—a man very familiar with the desert—recognized the extraordinary nature of the event. Verse 4 identifies the Angel as God himself and uses both divine names in the process: Yahweh (*LORD*) and Elohim (*God*). The Lord's statement in verse 5 is a good reminder that His presence should be understood as "holy," and that a proper response is required with regard to this recognition.

God identified himself as the God of Moses' father and of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This reminds us that God chose Abraham, and Moses belonged to the sons of Israel. (Moses was a Levite; see Exodus 2:1–10.) Since the promise given to Abraham is a central theme in the Pentateuch, it is fitting that we are reminded of that promise, and its fulfillment, in the beginning of Exodus. In 3:7–9, we see that God was aware of the suffering of His enslaved people; He would fulfill part of the promise by delivering His people to a "land flowing with milk and honey" (verse 8). This phrase depicts Canaan as a land of great abundance. Moses was chosen by God to lead the people out of Egypt to Canaan (verse 10).

Discuss

- ? Moses was not following his usual shepherding routine when God reached out to him. Was there a time when God invited you to take up a task that was outside of your normal routine and completely unexpected?
- ? Moses was required to remove his shoes because he was on holy ground. God's holiness requires a proper response. What are some ways we should respond to God in both actions and attitudes because of His holiness?



Say: God delivered His people from Egypt, in part, through inflicting ten plagues upon that nation. Exodus 12 describes the final plague upon Egypt, and the great symbolism of the Passover points to the Savior who would eventually come to save the people from their sins. Jesus drew the parallels when He, the Lamb of God, was about to be sacrificed to save repentant sinners. The instructions and symbols of the Passover foreshadowed the work of the Messiah. The foreshadowing also reaches forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when all Christians join Christ for eternity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Exodus 12 focuses on the events surrounding the Passover and the final plague inflicted on Egypt. Verse 23 describes the use of blood from the slaughter of the Passover lamb on the door posts of the houses, which would protect them from the “destroyer.” Although a “death angel” is typically depicted as the means by which death came to the firstborn throughout Egypt, verses 12 and 29 make it clear that it is the Lord himself who brings this plague. What is true in this final plague is true of the other nine: God brought forth all that befell Egypt due to the Pharaoh’s hardness of heart. Although the word “angel” does not appear in this account, the “destroyer” may be identified with the “angel of the Lord,” who performed a similar task elsewhere in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Samuel 24:16; Isaiah 37:36).

Exodus 12:24–28 mandates preparations to be made to observe the Passover as an ordinance for succeeding generations. The yearly enactment of this event would serve as an opportunity to teach the observance as an object lesson of the miraculous protection God provided. The questioning of the children to the parent, “What does this ceremony mean?” (verse 26, NIV) does not mean that the parent was to wait for the teaching moment. Rather, it was an example of the kind of question a child might ask, and what should follow was a teaching moment concerning the events of that night. Indeed, the head of every modern Jewish household who observes the Passover Seder today will read from a prepared script called the “Haggadah” that includes explanations of every aspect of the observance, including questions that a child will ask at the appropriate time.

It is not a coincidence that the passion of Christ took place during the events leading to the Passover. In Jesus’ time, thousands of lambs were slaughtered on the temple mount in preparation. The meaning of this ritual had been handed down from that night in Egypt for well over a millennia, foreshadowing the deliverance brought about by the crucifixion of Christ as the Lamb of God sacrificed once for all (see Romans 6:10; Hebrews 9:12).

**Resource Packet Item 1: Our Passover Lamb**

Distribute the work sheet. You may want to have students work in small groups to fill in the chart and answer the questions, or you may want to do it as a class.

Discuss

- ? For generations, Jews have celebrated the Passover Seder, a ceremonial dinner in observance of Passover. Throughout the meal, participants are reminded of the meaning of the Exodus events, teaching these historical biblical realities to future generations. What family traditions can Christians use to teach their children the beliefs of Christianity?
- ? Ask if any students have participated in a Passover Seder from a Christian perspective. If so, ask them to share how it made the story of the events of the crucifixion of Jesus more meaningful.

Part 2—The Covenant Established

God Calls His People to a Covenant Relationship

Exodus 19:1–8



Say: God had done great miracles to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt. He had shown that He would protect them, provide for them, and that He had chosen them. Now they were to enter into covenant relationship with Him—a covenant with responsibilities for them to obey. Sadly, however, they did not live in long-term obedience. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

God called Moses to deliver a promise that included a summary of recent events (Exodus 19:1–11). Verse 4 offers an emphatic statement, which can be literally translated “you, you saw that which I did to the Egyptians.” (Note that, in Hebrew, repetition is often used for emphasis.) The promise was based on the people’s witness of God’s miracles and protection during the Exodus. Verse 5 follows with another emphatic construction that could be literally translated “now if to obey you will obey.” We can see this emphasis in the translation “fully” (NIV) or “indeed” (KJV). God promised to make Israel His treasured possession and a holy nation.

In the chapters that follow, God outlined the stipulations of Israel’s covenant relationship with Him. They needed to live in obedience to God, in light of the fact that they had experienced a miraculous deliverance by the hand of God.

We take note of the people’s reaction in verse 8. Although they unanimously agree to keep God’s covenant, the story that unfolds throughout the books of Judges to 2 Kings demonstrates that they were unwilling to sustain their covenant faithfulness for extended periods of time.

Discuss

- ? Although we live in an age where defending our faith seems to focus on a verbal explanation of our beliefs (apologetics), the ancient Hebrew mind-set focused on a belief in God based on experiencing what God had done in their lives. Reflect on a time when you had no doubt that God moved on your behalf, and share that memory with your class.
- ? God’s people all agreed that they would follow God’s covenant commands. Yet history would show that they did not do this because they became entangled in Canaanite idolatry. What kinds of things might be considered modern idolatry that would keep Christians from fully obeying God’s Word?



Resource Packet Item 2: My Narrative

Distribute the work sheet. If you have time, read Psalm 136 aloud, and give students time to write their own narratives about God's intervention in their lives. Ask if anyone is comfortable sharing what they have written with the rest of the class. If you do not have class time to complete this activity, suggest that your students take the work sheet home with them and write out their narratives during their own devotional time, for personal reflection.



God Loves His People

Deuteronomy 7:1–11

Say: Our relationship with God should be based on love. He loved us so much that He gave His Son as the perfect Sacrifice for our sins. The only appropriate response is that we love and obey Him. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

Deuteronomy 7:1–11 speaks to the basis for God's deliverance of His people: In verses 8–9 we find two different Hebrew words translated "love." The first, *ahabat*, is what we would see as the more common use of the word: affection one feels toward family and other loved ones. This is the word used in the clause "the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers" (verse 8, NIV). It is also used in verse 9, where it states that God would keep His covenant with "those who love him" (NIV).

But verse 9 also includes an important Hebrew word related to God's love, which is often translated "lovingkindness" or "mercy." This word, *chesed*, is used specifically in reference to God's covenant love for His people. In verse 9 we find it making reference to the fact that the faithful God keeps "covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments" (KJV; note the NIV: "his covenant love"). In a certain sense, *chesed* is similar to the more familiar Greek word *agape* in that it speaks to a kind of love rooted in promise. God offered this relationship to Israel because of His affection and covenantal love of this people. This love came as a result of God's mercy, and was not based on any merit within His people. However, as mentioned above, in verse 9 the covenant relationship is only extended to those who love Him.

Discuss

- ? For many people, Christianity is largely measured by how much time believers spend reading Scripture and attending church. Sadly, if this becomes the focus of our faith, we have forgotten that God wants us to serve Him out of love. It is vitally important that we separate human tendencies to try to earn God's favor from God's actual expectations. Make two lists: (1) things people might focus on as defining what it means to be a Christian and (2) actions that would be God's expectations for His people. Discuss how you might separate these two.
- ? When we follow Christ out of love for God rather than other motives, how should that make a difference in how we live?

Part 3—Israel’s Inheritance Affirmed and Realized

Others See the Power of Israel’s God

Joshua 9:1–9



Say: Just as those around the Israelites drew conclusions about the God of Israel based on what they saw, people around us will draw conclusions about God based on what they see in us. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

The Book of Joshua deals largely with the conquest of the Promised Land by God’s people. Joshua 9 focuses on a people group called the Gibeonites. They lived near the Israelite encampment at Gilgal and were quite afraid of them. So the Gibeonites deceived Joshua by making it appear as if they had come from a great distance. Joshua made a hasty treaty with them that was not allowed within the Law (Exodus 34:11–12; Deuteronomy 20:10–18; they had been told not to make treaties with the inhabitants of Canaan). The reasons behind the Gibeonites’ actions are clear: They had heard about what the God of Israel had done for the Israelites—specifically the victories at Jericho and Ai, as well as all that had happened in Egypt (Joshua 9:3,9).

Discuss

- ? Have you ever been approached by a non-Christian friend or co-worker who had questions because he or she had experienced or observed the power of God in some way? Share the story with the class.

God Reminds His People of All He Has Done for Them

Joshua 24:1–15



Say: Reviewing the work of God in our lives builds our faith and the faith of those around us. Doing so can also motivate us toward greater service to Him. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

Many readers are familiar with Joshua 24:15 as the subject of numerous sermons and Sunday School lessons: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (KJV). In verse 1, Joshua summoned all of Israel to Shechem, as he had done after the battle of Ai. There he gave a “thumbnail sketch” of Genesis 12 through Deuteronomy, and a synopsis of the battles in Joshua. Indeed, God had given them the land of Canaan, according to the promise made to Abraham.

Many scholars see Joshua 24 as referring to a “Suzerain Treaty,” an ancient treaty between a powerful king and his subordinate kingdom. Such ancient treaties contain stipulations for further relationship, a call to witnesses, and also curses and blessings. In light of this, we must not stop reading after the people’s positive response. Joshua followed with an ominous word about what would happen if they disobeyed (see verses 19–20). The people’s disobedience and God’s subsequent judgment are the dominant themes from Judges to 2 Kings.

Discuss

- ? We, like ancient Israel, also vow to serve the Lord. What are some ways you guard your commitment in light of modern temptations and distractions?



Resource Packet Item 3: God's Covenant With Israel and Ancient Treaties

Distribute the information sheet for students to use as further study.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In this lesson we moved from the call of Moses to the basis of a covenant relationship with God. Sometimes we may feel like God has invited us into His work, but like Moses, we feel inadequate for the task. Even when we feel inadequate, God will give us what we need to do what He has called us to do. At other times in our Christian lives, we may feel that we are “going through the motions” rather than actively connecting with God. But God desires that we serve Him because of our love for Him. As we ask the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, He will bring change where it is needed. Part of the exhortation to follow the Law was to remember God's mighty acts of deliverance. As we remember the ways in which God has moved in our lives, it is easier to keep in focus that God loves us and will fulfill His promises.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Invite your students to consider any special calling that God has given them, and to examine the motive for their commitment to Christ. Is it based on love or some other motivation?
- Challenge your students to exhibit the love of God to someone in their community or workplace this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God's Promise To Bless Abraham.
Genesis 12:1–3

Tuesday

God's Covenant Name Revealed.
Exodus 3:13–15

Wednesday

God's Promise To Restore Israel.
Jeremiah 29:10–14

Thursday

Paul's Compassion for Israel.
Romans 9:1–5

Friday

Abraham's Seed.
Galatians 3:15–21

Saturday

A Chosen People.
1 Peter 2:4–10

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

September 20, 2020

LESSON

3

Dynasty of Kings Established

Study Text

1 Samuel 8:4–22; 9:1 through 10:25; 16:1–13; 1 Chronicles 17:1–15; 2 Chronicles 1:1–6; 6:1–11; 9:1–8

Central Truth

The dynasty of the kings of Israel prefigured the eternal kingship of Jesus Christ.



Key Verse Genesis 49:10

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be (KJV).

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand why the Israelites wanted a king, and what kind of leader God expected.
- Reflect on how we may seek godly remedies to our own spiritual deficiencies.
- Trust the Holy Spirit to help us become more like Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: We concluded last week's lesson with the speech from Joshua that called the Israelites to serve God. However, the conclusion to the Book of Joshua indicates that the Israelites served God only until the death of Joshua and the others who had experienced God's miracles in conquering the land; the people struggled to serve God over time. Perhaps the Israelites were more focused on trusting their leaders than on their personal and national trust in God as their true Leader.

Opening Activity—When No One Is Looking

Ask: The Israelites seemed to be serving God out of incorrect motives—perhaps to please Joshua and their other leaders. What motives, good or bad, lead people to do the right things today? Why is it important that behavior is not different depending upon whether or not others are watching? Why do motives matter, rather than just visible actions?

Say: It seems as though every time we turn on the news we are bombarded with evidence that our world has lost its moral compass. Ancient Israel, in the time of the judges, was similar in a number of ways. They sought to solve their problems through political means by demanding a king to be “like the nations.” Although we think we are beyond that way of thinking, what are some of the ways we seek to change our nation through a political solution? How should we as Christians approach the spiritual problems of our nation? Discuss briefly. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Samuel 8:4. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

5. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

9:17. And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.

10:24. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

16:11. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

13. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

1 Chronicles 17:7. Now therefore thus shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, even from following the sheep, that thou shouldest be ruler over my people Israel.

2 Chronicles 1:1. And Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly.

6:1. Then said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.

2. But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.

10. The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.

9:5. And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom:

6. Howbeit I believed not their words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard.

New International Version

1 Samuel 8:4. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.

5. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

9:17. When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."

10:24. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

16:11. So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."

13. So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

1 Chronicles 17:7. "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel.'"

2 Chronicles 1:1. Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.

6:1. Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud;

2. I have built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever."

10. "The LORD has kept the promise he made. I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the LORD promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel."

9:5. She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true.

6. But I did not believe what they said until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half the greatness of your wisdom was told me; you have far exceeded the report I heard."

Did God ever intend for Israel to have a king? Those familiar with the Old Testament may immediately answer “no” based on 1 Samuel 8. However, up to this point in Scripture there had never been a prohibition against having a king. (It is noteworthy that if the covenant is indeed a kind of suzerainty treaty, as discussed in Lesson 2, then the people should have recognized God as their king.)

Part 1—Saul, the First King

□ The People Ask for a King

1 Samuel 8:4–9,19–22



Say: For years the Israelites suffered oppression from those around them, due to their own disobedience to God’s Law. However, they thought the solution to their problems would be to have a king like other nations. In 1 Samuel 8, we learn that the root of the issue was that the people were rejecting God as their King. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Nevertheless, Deuteronomy 17:14–20 provided guidelines on how they were to choose a king. God’s plan included a strong and capable leader similar to Moses, Joshua, and Samuel. But the underlying issue centered on the motive for their request: to lead them like the other nations (1 Samuel 8:5). Verse 8 underscores the fact that the Israelites had forsaken God from the beginning. The Book of Judges preceded the Books of Samuel, and it records a time after Joshua when there was no strong central leader and it seemed like their cycle of sin and oppression was spiraling out of control. Samuel came at the end of the judges, and it seems the people saw their problem as a political deficiency, not a spiritual deficiency. They thought that if they had a king like the other nations, they could defeat the cycle of oppression.

Israel’s problem was a result of having forsaken their promise to follow the Lord and His covenant. They had forsaken God by participating in idolatry, and they had also forsaken Him as King, and Samuel as His appointed prophet. Samuel would ultimately anoint Saul (1 Samuel 9:17; 10:1), who would be the kind of king the people wanted. But David would be the ruler who sought God for direction.

Discuss

- ? Israel’s problem was spiritual. They could not break the cycle of idolatry. What are some of the moral issues we face today in our society and in our churches in which we seek to find a political or other misguided answer?
- ? If the degradation of morality in our society is also a spiritual problem, what are some ways Christians can influence true change?

□ God Grants Israel’s Request

1 Samuel 10:1,17–25



Say: God answered Israel’s request and gave them what they wanted. The king He chose for them had the qualities they desired. The people were happy to see Saul’s appointment. He looked like he would be a good king, and God had chosen him. However, Saul still had a choice as to how he conducted his life.

He had to make decisions about how he would lead and whether or not he would obey God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 1 Samuel 9 and 10, we see two different phases of Saul's selection as king. It has been humorously noted that the story in chapter 9 records how "Saul went in search of his father's donkeys but found a kingdom." Samuel had been foretold of Saul's arrival at Ramah, where Samuel anointed him as the future king and one who would deliver the people from the Philistines (verse 16).

However, 10:17 begins a later portion of the story, in which the choice of Saul was revealed by casting lots. First the tribe of Benjamin was chosen, then the choice was narrowed down to a particular clan, and ultimately down to Saul himself. A reluctant Saul was then found hiding from the acclaim awaiting him. The important point within this story is that it was God who chose Saul as leader.

Saul's physical stature as a notably tall man may have been the basis of Israel's exclamation, "Long live the king" (10:24, NIV). Saul seemed to fit the bill of someone who looked like "king material." Later, David would be a contrast with regard to stature. Here, though, there is a sense of hopefulness that Saul would become a good king due to the fact that God had chosen him. However, Saul could not overcome his impetuosity and lack of regard for the Word of God (e.g., 1 Samuel 13, 15). He did not lead the people by seeking instruction from God.



Resource Packet Item 1: King Saul: Before and After

Distribute the work sheet. To save time, assign each Scripture passage to a different small group, then have all of them report their answers. Discuss the application questions at the bottom of the sheet as a class.

Discuss

- ? Saul appeared to be the perfect leader, based on his physical qualities and his ability to lead the military. In your experience, what are some reasons we might elevate Christian leaders other than the proper spiritual reasons? How can we better discern a true leader, anointed by God, regardless of talent, charisma, or appearance?
- ? The dilemma regarding Saul is that, on the one hand, God had chosen him. On the other hand, he refused to follow the direction of God through Samuel. What factors might have led to the undoing of a God-appointed leader like Saul? How can you guard yourself against the same types of temptations?



Part 2—David, the Shepherd King

□ God Chooses the Unlikely

1 Samuel 16:1–13

Say: Saul's choice to disobey God disappointed Samuel, but God had more for Samuel to do. He was to anoint Israel's second king, from whom the Messiah would descend. Samuel anointed David some time before he came to the throne. This reminds us that God's anointing is not subject to our understanding or expectations of timing. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

The decision by God to choose a different king was due to two separate actions of Saul. In 1 Samuel 13, Saul impetuously offered a sacrifice after he was told to wait for Samuel for seven days. In chapter 15, Saul did not kill all the Amalekites, nor Agag, king of the Amalekites. He also allowed his soldiers to take livestock after God had instructed them to destroy everything.

On both of these occasions, Samuel prophesied that God would take the kingdom from Saul and his heirs. In chapter 16, Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint the new dynasty of Israel from the descendants of Jesse. Initially, Samuel saw the first son, Eliab, and by his appearance thought that he was the Lord's anointed.

But in 1 Samuel 16:7, we clearly see that God was not concerned with what His anointed looked like; God was concerned with the heart. The seven eldest of Jesse's sons appeared before Samuel, and God did not choose any of them. Ultimately, the least likely candidate, David, was chosen. He would have been deemed least likely because he was the youngest. (The Hebrew word here can also be translated "smallest," which might be a deliberate play on words to contrast David from Saul.)

Many translations describe David as "ruddy," from the Hebrew word for "ground." This word can also mean "red," which has led some to suggest that he had red hair. Whatever the specifics, Samuel anointed David with oil in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of God came upon him from that day forward.

Discuss

- ? What characteristics make you think that a person might be a good leader? What characteristics should we look for in a good leader?
- ? Describe for the class a time when you were influenced by a man or woman of God who may have seemed unlikely to provide such influence based on talents or other limitations. (Use as general of terms as possible).
- ? Christ was a descendant of David (see Matthew 1:1–17). Lineage was extremely important in ancient times. Yet the Old Testament records a number of "unlikely" people taking on important roles within God's plan. Ruth, a Moabite, and Rahab, a Canaanite, were both Gentile women. Yet they are both a part of the lineage of Christ (see Ruth 4:18–22; Matthew 1:1–17). Why might God have utilized these unlikely individuals in such a way? (Note, for example, that it speaks to the "all-the-world" nature of Christ's sacrifice.)

□ God Blesses Those Who Follow Him

1 Chronicles 17:1–15



Say: Throughout the New Testament, the people of Israel referred to Moses as the lawgiver and David as a great king. Yet both of them failed to obey God at times. As a result, Moses was prohibited from entering the Promised Land because he disobeyed God, and David was not allowed to build the temple. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

As the historical books of Scripture, there is much overlap between the Books of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles. Yet it is important to note that Chronicles was written after the fall of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC. The depiction of David in Chronicles

focuses far more on the positives: It omits his sin with Bathsheba and the turmoil during the attempted coup of Absalom. David was flawed, but in the context of exile, Chronicles focuses on the traits that made him a man after God's own heart (see 1 Samuel 13:14). It is reiterated in 1 Chronicles 17:1–15 that David was chosen when he was among the flocks because of what God saw in him, not what others saw in him. In this passage, David wanted to defer his own comfort until the temple had been built for God. God's response echoes the promise given to David in 2 Samuel 7. God promised to establish David's throne forever.

In the time of Chronicles, the people of Judah in Babylonian exile were reeling, with many wondering if God had forsaken them and His promise. This promise would not be fulfilled until the time of Jesus. In the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, the second section of fourteen generations are the kings of Judah after Solomon. Matthew emphasized the fact that the promise given to David had been fulfilled through Jesus' direct descent from David. Jesus would be the ultimate fulfillment of 1 Chronicles 17:14: "His throne will be established forever" (NIV).



Resource Packet Item 2: David, Ancestor of the Messiah

Distribute the work sheet. If you do not have time to look up the Scriptures and read them, you may want to summarize each point to help your students see the big picture connecting the Old Testament to the Messiah.

Discuss

- ? The Books of Chronicles do not focus on the negative events of David's life after his sin with Bathsheba. How can we discern the right time and place for discussing such issues in the Christian world? How can we become better at extending grace to fellow believers who commit sin?
- ? In David's lifetime, he experienced much success, yet he was able to maintain his gratitude toward God. How might we take David's example to remain humble in light of the successes that God brings about through us?
- ? The promise made to Judah that their kingdom would endure forever seemed to be in jeopardy when they were taken into exile in Babylon. The people managed to maintain their faith in spite of this. What can we do to maintain our faith when tempted to feel that God's promises have failed in our lives?

Part 3—Solomon, the Builder King



□ Solomon Builds a Place of Worship

2 Chronicles 1:1–6; 6:1–11

Say: God did not allow David to build the temple because David had been a man of war. The temple would instead be built by David's son Solomon, who reigned in peace (1 Chronicles 22:1–10). And although Solomon later disobeyed God, the temple he built was a long-standing symbol of God's presence among His people. That temple was destroyed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. Then it was rebuilt in Ezra's time, enhanced under King Herod around the time of Jesus, and destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

As stated above, the books of Chronicles were written after the fall of the kingdom of Judah and during their exile in Babylon (beginning approximately 586 BC). Although the books seem repetitive of the books of Samuel and Kings, there are subtle differences and emphases. David was not allowed to build the temple, but 1 Chronicles 28 notes that David did extensive planning for the temple that he would pass on to Solomon. Second Chronicles 1–8 recounts Solomon’s building of the temple, emphasizing how Solomon began his reign well, asking for wisdom at the outset (2 Chronicles 1:1–6). He went to Gibeon, where the tabernacle stood, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on the brazen altar built during the time of Moses.

Second Chronicles 6:1–11 forms the beginning of a series of speeches by Solomon to dedicate the completed temple. The temple was filled with the glory of the Lord (see 5:13–14; see also Exodus 40:34–35 at the completion of the tabernacle). This reflected God’s promise to dwell with His people, as He made His presence visible in their midst. The summary of God’s activity from the Exodus, His promise to David, and the building of the temple underscore the foundational statement of 6:10: “The Lord has kept the promise He made” (NIV).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think David wanted to build a proper house for the Lord?
- ? Solomon followed covenant stipulations regarding sacrifices to impress upon Israel that he would follow the covenant. What are some concrete ways we can demonstrate our commitment to Christ?
- ? God was present in His tabernacle and His temple. Temple language is used in the New Testament to describe how the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer (1 Corinthians 6:19). What are some ways that you experience the presence of God, and how does His presence impact the way you live?

□ The Queen of Sheba Sees God’s Love for Israel 2 Chronicles 9:1–8



Say: People around us can see the hand of God in our lives in many ways.

In 2 Chronicles 9:1–8, the Queen of Sheba recognized God’s blessings on Solomon both because of his wealth and his obedience to God in offering sacrifices. Likewise, people today should be able to see God in our lives, through our actions and attitudes, as well as our obedience to Him. (Add your highlights from the following text.)

“Sheba” may refer either to the kingdom of Ethiopia or the southern Arabian kingdom of Saba near present-day Yemen, renowned for its frankincense and myrrh. Frankincense and myrrh rivaled the value of gold and silver in the ancient world. Regardless of her precise location of origin, the queen came to visit Solomon because she had been told great stories regarding his wealth and wisdom, and she was overwhelmed by both. A key principle to glean from this story, then, is that a witness outside of God’s people attested to the fact that God should be praised for delighting in Solomon, and because “he has made you king over them, to maintain justice and righteousness” (2 Chronicles 9:8, NIV).

Discuss

- ? The Queen of Sheba was impressed by what God had done through Solomon. What are some things nonbelievers would recognize as God's hand in our lives?
- ? We can become distracted in our commitment to God by our culture's emphasis on immediate gratification and selfishness. In small groups, find New Testament principles that help us recognize temptations and be a testimony to our world.



Resource Packet Item 3: A Testimony to Our World

Distribute the work sheet for the class to discuss in small groups. Encourage students to do the personal reflection portion of the sheet during the week.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We often seek leaders based on oratory, physical, and political gifts. Yet God was concerned with David's heart. God wants us to evaluate leaders based on their hearts. We can be examples to our world by being Christlike amid the temptations of modern culture.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that the Lord will keep you faithful as you become more like Christ.
- Pray that the Lord will help you overcome the temptations in the culture around you.
- Pray that the Lord will give you opportunities to share the joy and the freedom of a life devoted to Christ.
- Pray that the Lord will help you focus on those you encounter on a daily basis, to share the love and grace of Christ with them.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

The King Comes Through Judah.
Genesis 49:1,8–12

Tuesday

The Eternal Kingdom Promised.
Daniel 7:9–14

Wednesday

Jesus' Triumphal Entry Foretold.
Zechariah 9:9–10

Thursday

Zechariah's Prophecy Fulfilled.
Mark 11:1–10

Friday

Three Languages Declare Jesus' Kingship.
John 19:17–22

Saturday

The Return of the King.
Revelation 1:4–8

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

September 27, 2020

LESSON

4

A United Kingdom Divided

Study Text

1 Kings 12:1–20; 2 Kings 17:1–23;
21:1–17; 22:1–20; 23:3–5,25;
2 Chronicles 36:11–21

Central Truth

Godly people seek the Lord rather than evil counsel.



Key Verse Psalm 1:1

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (KJV).

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Identify the relationship between the failures of the kings of Israel and Judah and their disobedience to God's covenant commands.
- Recognize how we as Christians might face temptations and sins similar to the kings, especially in making decisions.
- Determine if the desire to conform to culture affects the students' decision-making, and respond with repentance.

Introducing the Study

Say: In 1948, in a speech to the House of Commons, Winston Churchill stated, “Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” The historical narrative of the Old Testament does far more than just give us a history of Israel. The story is really about God and how He dealt with humanity, most often His chosen people. We learn what God expects from us by observing their mistakes. Today we will look at some failures of Israel's leaders.

Opening Activity—Good Advice and Bad Advice

Ask your students to share a good piece of advice they have received. It could relate to their careers, their faith, or any facet of life. Then ask them to share some examples of bad advice and how they knew it was bad.

Say: Ungodly decisions can have terrible consequences. This lesson focuses on Rehoboam, who followed Solomon as king over Israel, but whose decisions led to division in the kingdom. His bad decisions were made despite the promise God had given David—a promise based on the condition of godly living. Sadly, very few kings of God's people lived godly. The key to experiencing the promises of the Bible is having a heart committed to God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Early in his reign, Solomon's actions seemed to indicate that he would follow God's commands. He even prayed for wisdom in governing the people. But his humble dependence on God was short-lived. His lust for sensual gratification would lead to his acquisition of 700 wives and 300 concubines who would lead him into idolatry (see 1 Kings 11:1–6; note that a concubine was a slave taken into a family to bear children).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Kings 12:13. And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;

14. And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

2 Kings 21:1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah.

2. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

22:1. Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

23:25. And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

17:5. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years.

22. For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them;

23. Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.

2 Chronicles 36:19. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.

20. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:

21. To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

New International Version

1 Kings 12:13. The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders,

14 he followed the advice of the young men and said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."

2 Kings 21:1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah.

2. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

22:1. Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah; she was from Bozkath.

2. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

23:25. Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

17:5. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years.

22. The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them

23. until the LORD removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.

2 Chronicles 36:19. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

20. He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

21. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.

Also, Solomon built his vast kingdom on the backs of the northern tribes of Israel, those initially aligned with Saul.

In 1 Kings 11:26–40, Solomon appointed a strong northern leader named Jeroboam to lead the coalition of indentured servants of the northern tribes. Eventually, Jeroboam rebelled against Solomon and fled to Egypt. On the way a prophet named Ahijah foretold the dissolution of the kingdom between the northern tribes and Judah. Solomon’s sin was going to be punished.

Part 1—Evil Counsel Divides the Kingdom

□ Rehoboam Follows Bad Advice

1 Kings 12:1–15



Say: Most people seek advice at times. It may be about family relationships, career decisions, or what to do about a particularly baffling personal decision. When advice is given, we choose whether to follow it or not. Often we ask more than one person for advice about the same issue. When Solomon’s son Rehoboam became king, he received advice from more than one group of people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam became king. Jeroboam returned to represent the northern tribes, petitioning Rehoboam to lighten the burdens Solomon had placed on them. Rehoboam sought the wise counsel of Solomon’s advisors regarding this unfair treatment of the northern tribes. They told him to treat the tribes favorably (12:7). However, Rehoboam rejected their advice, choosing instead to follow the advice of his younger advisors, who told him to be even more cruel than his father had been. Ultimately, the northern tribes rebelled.

Discuss

- ? In light of our society, what are some specific temptations that seem common among Christians today, and how can we protect ourselves against them?
- ? Rehoboam listened to bad counsel and made a bad decision as a result. How can we identify sources of godly counsel to help us avoid bad decisions?

□ B. Rehoboam Loses Most of His Kingdom

1 Kings 12:16–20



Say: Bad decisions bring bad consequences. After Rehoboam’s decision to be even more cruel to the people, the northern tribes rebelled and the kingdom was divided. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God’s people had revolted against leadership before (see 2 Samuel 2 and 20). However, here the divide was far more profound—and lasting. Note that in 1 Kings 12:16–20, the northern tribes are called “Israel,” while the descendants of David were characterized as sons of Israel who lived in Judah (verse 17). From this point on, those ruled by the lineage of David would be called “Judah,” and the northern tribes—beginning with the reign of Jeroboam—would be called “Israel.” Verse 19 states that “Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (NIV).

God's promise to Solomon was contingent upon his keeping the covenant requirements. Solomon did not do this and, even before his death, God had decided to divide the kingdom. However, God still gave Rehoboam Judah to rule, and this nation would outlast the kingdom that began under Jeroboam. The northern kingdom would fall in 722 BC, around 200 years after the kingdoms divided. This division would have a great impact upon the remainder of the Old Testament.



Resource Packet Item 1: A Kingdom Divided (map)

Distribute Resource Packet Item 1, making note of the division of the land between Israel and Judah. Emphasize to the class that the Messiah would come from the line of Judah.

Discuss

- ? What consequences might result today if people of influence or in leadership are not sensitive to the concerns of others?
- ? Can you think of a time when your choice of whose advice to follow has resulted in a positive or negative outcome for yourself and others? Explain.

Part 2—Divided Loyalties



Manasseh Leads Judah Away From God

2 Kings 21:1–17

Say: Everyone has leadership responsibility toward someone else—family members, other believers, employees, neighbors, and more. Decisions made by leaders have far-reaching results. The responsibility of spiritual leadership is especially heavy because the impact of such leaders includes the eternal, spiritual realm. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Books of Kings offer a kind of “report card” on the kings of Israel and Judah, noting whether each did good or evil in the eyes of the Lord. None of the kings of Israel received a good report, and very few of the kings in the southern kingdom of Judah were described as doing good. Manasseh was preceded by Hezekiah, a reformer who sought to return the nation to covenant faithfulness with God. Manasseh's fifty-five year reign reversed Hezekiah's reforms, leading to him being regarded as the worst of Judah's kings. He reintroduced Canaanite idol worship—even to the point of practicing human sacrifice. He also consulted mediums and erected a carved image of Asherah (a Canaanite deity) in God's temple.

Note that the “report card” in the verses following 2 Kings 21:2 is not based on political skill or gifts, but rather on lack of devotion to God's covenant commands. Manasseh's sins were so severe that they brought judgment on Judah. He ignored or perhaps murdered the prophets who prophesied against him. He was more wicked than the Canaanites before him (verse 11), and he caused Judah to sin. In the end, the judgment of Judah would be certain. Manasseh's son Amon would continue the wickedness, but Amon's son Josiah would become a great reformer

and delay judgment for a period of time. However, judgment would come to Judah. The sins of Josiah's predecessors would not be overlooked.

Discuss

- ? Because Manasseh ruled for over five decades, the introduction of idolatrous behavior was likely a long process. How can we avoid the “gradual process” of allowing sin’s influence to become greater and greater?
- ? What are some ways the church today might become negatively influenced by the culture around us, and how can we instead be a positive influence?

□ B. Josiah Leads Judah Back to God 2 Kings 22:1–20; 23:3–5,25



Say: Have you ever looked at the world around you and felt powerless to stem the tide of sin that seems so prevalent? After all, how can one person or a small group of people make a difference in the face of such great need? When Josiah came to power, he was stepping into a society degraded by sin, and one he had inherited from his predecessors (Share your highlights.)

King Josiah demonstrated how one man devoted to God can change the course of his nation. His “report card” was unmatched, declaring that he “followed completely the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2, NIV). It is equally remarkable that Hilkiah the priest found the book of the Law after many decades of neglect (2 Kings 22:8).

Prior to this event, Josiah had already committed in his heart to serve God and lead the nation of Judah back to God. He became king when he was eight years old and, eight years later, he had begun to seek God. After four more years, he had begun to purge Judah of idolatry (see 2 Chronicles 34:1–7). In the eighteenth year of his reign, the book of the Law was found. It is tragic that the king of Judah was surprised by the teachings of the Law when it was read to him (2 Kings 22:13). Clearly, Josiah did not know what the Law taught. Judah had become so corrupted that virtually no one knew the Law. Fortunately, Josiah responded with a desire to live by God’s requirements, as well as lead the people into a revival of covenant living. Chapter 23 outlines the steps Josiah took to rid the nation of idolatry.

After Josiah had instituted his reforms to reinstate proper worship of God, he also reinstated the Passover. There was no king like him, for he turned to the Lord “with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (verse 25, NIV).

Yet this declaration is directly followed by a reminder of the fact that God had pronounced judgment on Judah because of Manasseh (see verses 26–27). The kings who followed Josiah would return to evil, and God would ultimately bring judgment in 586 BC with the fall of Judah to the Babylonians. While Josiah’s passion for change was based on an inward commitment to God, his reforms ultimately could only bring outward change. The revival did not last because the people did not maintain an inward change toward godliness.



Resource Packet Item 2: A Royal Report Card

Distribute the work sheet and assign each of your students to look up the Scripture passage on one or more of the kings (depending on how many students are in your class). Have them give a “Pass” or “Fail” grade to each one to see how many of the kings received passing grades in their leadership of the people. Discuss the application portion at the bottom of the work sheet.

Discuss

- ? What lessons might we learn from Josiah’s response to hearing the Law read in 2 Kings 22–23?
- ? What is the difference between an outward commitment to God and an inward commitment to Him? Why is an inward commitment more sincere and lasting?



Part 3—Downfall of Israel and Judah

□ Israel Is Punished for Disobedience

2 Kings 17:1–25

Say: God is gracious and merciful, and He is also holy. He promised His people peace and prosperity in the land. In response, they were to serve Him only. Instead, they worshipped idols and committed sin of every kind. (*Play the video for Lesson 4, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

The northern kingdom of Israel, formed under King Jeroboam around 920 BC, essentially included all of the tribes except Judah and Benjamin. The history of this kingdom was marked with violence as well as apostasy in the form of idolatry. We find an accounting of all of the ways Israel had forsaken the stipulations of the covenant in 2 Kings 17:7–23. This passage begins with the familiar reminder of God’s deliverance from Egypt. In spite of the fact that God had blessed them from the beginning, Israel embraced the customs of the Canaanites, built pagan places of worship, made sacred pillars to Asherah, and served Baal. A phrase that is repeated throughout the Old Testament is that they worshipped “on every high hill and under every spreading tree” (verse 10, NIV)—a sad declaration of the vast extent of their idolatry. The great sin of Jeroboam was the establishment of worship centers of the golden calves at Dan and at Bethel (see 1 Kings 12:25–30). These cities represented the northernmost and southernmost extents of the kingdom of Israel. In addition to all of this, the kingdom of Israel practiced divination through mediums.

The end would come for Israel in 722 BC at the hands of the Assyrians. God had given them roughly 200 years of grace, even as prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, and Amos sought to see them turn from their wicked ways. The sad reality of the historical books is that Joshua had warned all the tribes of Israel about the danger of forsaking the covenant (see Joshua 24).

It is important to note also that the covenant promises were corporate in nature. If the king was willing to live by the covenant stipulations, the priests would follow, and after that, the people would follow as well. Keeping the covenant meant that they would have peace, prosperity, and fertility in the Promised Land. But rejecting the covenant would lead to judgment.

Discuss

- ? How did God warn His people about the consequences of sin in Old Testament times, and how does He warn us today?
- ? God provided two centuries of grace for the northern kingdom of Israel before judgment came. How will knowing that God is consistent in grace and judgment throughout the Bible help us understand and apply all of Scripture today?

□ B. Judah Is Punished for Disobedience

2 Chronicles 36:11–21



Say: Although Judah was the line from which the Messiah would come, God did not spare the kingdom from punishment for their disobedience. A few of their kings received a passing grade on their report cards, but they were not able to get the people to serve only God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God's judgment upon the kingdom of Judah came at the hands of the Babylonians, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. While we know that final verdict against this kingdom as a result of the sinfulness under Manasseh, 2 Chronicles 36 states that the people despised the words of the prophets until there was no remedy (verse 16). Just as God had judged the Canaanites by the hand of Joshua, Judah would now be judged by the armies of Babylon.

It is interesting that the writer of Chronicles singled out the prophet Jeremiah as one to whom King Zedekiah had not humbled himself (verse 12). Jeremiah stated that the judgment of all nations is in the hands of God, and it comes by whatever means He sees fit (see Jeremiah 25).

The people's subservience to Babylon was part of the punishment that God had leveled against Judah, and verse 17 confirms this. Zedekiah's rebellion represents a rebellion against the will of God. In the end, the people of Judah were no more loyal to God than the people of Israel had been. The city of Jerusalem and the temple of God were destroyed because the Children of Israel, north and south, would not follow the Law of God. As a result, a large portion of the people of Judah were transported several hundred miles to the northeast to endure approximately seven decades of what is known as the Babylonian Exile.



Resource Packet Item 3: Making Good Decisions

Distribute the work sheet, and give students a few minutes to answer the questions, individually or in groups of two or three. Then ask a few volunteers to share their responses.

Discuss

- ? The words of the Old Testament prophets are often neglected on the basis that New Testament believers are "under grace." How would you respond to someone who said the Old Testament lacks relevance for the Christian today?
- ? What are some ways God might warn you about a particular attitude or action that needs to be removed from your life today?

- ? Take a moment to pray that God will show students if there be any area in their lives in need of repentance. In what specific ways might the Holy Spirit be prompting them to turn from sin and serve God faithfully?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Often people see two different Gods in the Bible. They see the Old Testament God as full of judgment and the New Testament God as full of grace. This is not an accurate picture of God. The Children of Israel began their disobedience less than a year out of Egypt by making an idol to worship in the form of a golden calf. For more than 700 years after that event, God graciously pleaded with the Northern Kingdom to give up their idolatry. Then, for approximately another 200 years, He pleaded with Judah to do the same. God is slow to anger and abounding in grace, but ultimately sin has to be punished. He sent His Son, Jesus, to take our punishment, but we must accept Him by faith and walk with Him to benefit from His sacrifice.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that your decisions will be godly and that they will help your family and friends to walk with God.
- Look for opportunities to share the gospel with someone this week.
- Look for ways you can spend more time talking with and listening to God this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

A Bad Decision.
Genesis 37:13,18–28

Tuesday

Poor Decisions Result in Judgment.
Numbers 14:26–34

Wednesday

Avoid Seduction of Sexual Immorality.
Proverbs 7:18–27

Thursday

The Lure of Possessions.
Matthew 19:16–22

Friday

Consequence of Deception.
Acts 5:1–10

Saturday

Life in Christ.
Colossians 3:1–4

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

October 4, 2020

LESSON 5

Wisdom From God

Study Text

Job 28:1–28; Psalm 1:1–6; Proverbs 2:1–6; 3:1–18; 9:10; Ecclesiastes 7:11–12; 12:9–14

Central Truth

Reverence for God is the beginning of true wisdom.



Key Verse Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding (KJV).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand the nature and message of Old Testament wisdom.
- Realize that a deeper knowledge of God can bring a closer relationship with Him, which in turn leads the believer into true wisdom.
- Examine students' relationship with God, praying that He will reveal any areas where they need to grow in and practice true, godly wisdom.

Introducing the Study

Say: Sometimes, as we walk through the Christian life, it is easy to fall into the trap of “going through the motions.” In such times, it is important to revisit the words of Scripture regarding what it means to truly know God. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament provides some valuable reminders and practical instruction. Today’s lesson reminds us that as we experience a fresh, life-changing encounter with God, true wisdom should naturally follow.

Opening Activity—Wise People

Draw two columns on the board in your classroom. Then ask your students to name a wise person they know or have known and why they chose to mention that person. List the people and the wise characteristics on the board. Look for commonality among the characteristics of wisdom, and compare what you learn in the lesson with those characteristics.

Say: What is wisdom? It depends on whom you ask. In today’s world there are many messages in various forms of media that seek to tell you how to make wise decisions. Most of these messages present wisdom framed in a twenty-first century concept of success and comfort. But true, biblical wisdom is rooted in a vibrant relationship with God based on a true knowledge of Him. This knowledge should change the way we think, act, and live, and change us from the inside out. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Job 28:1–11 sets the stage for the lesson by describing the difficulty of mining valuable metals and gems in ancient times. Treasures such as gold, silver, and gemstones were so

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Job 28:12. But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?

13. Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living.

15. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.

23. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.

28. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

Proverbs 2:1. My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee.

5. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

6. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

9:10. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

3:5. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

11. My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction:

12. For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

13. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

Psalms 1:1. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Ecclesiastes 7:11. Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.

12. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

12:13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

New International Version

Job 28:12. But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?

13. No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living.

15. It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed out in silver.

23. God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells.

28. And he said to the human race, "The fear of the LORD—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding."

Proverbs 2:1. My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you.

5. then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

6. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

9:10. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

3:5. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

6. in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

11. My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke,

12. because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

13. Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding.

Psalms 1:1. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,

2. but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

3. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

Ecclesiastes 7:11. Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.

12. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it.

12:13. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

desirable that men found a way to seek them in the depths of the earth. Verse 4 is especially descriptive in reminding us that human ingenuity was at work even in the days of Scripture.

Our lesson compares the value of wisdom with the treasures painstakingly mined from the earth. True, godly wisdom cannot be obtained through human means.

Part 1—Source of True Wisdom

□ Wisdom Is Worth Seeking

Job 28:12–22



Say: Many people spend their time seeking wealth. If they can just have their bank accounts at a certain level, they will feel secure. Others look for positions of power in their jobs or recognition and fame for their accomplishments. Some seek higher degrees, believing that more knowledge will bring fulfillment. But God places a high value on wisdom, which is vastly different from wealth, power, fame, or knowledge. True wisdom is worth seeking, and it can come only from God, who is the Source of wisdom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Bible times, great value was placed on wisdom, even outside of Scripture. Documents from Egypt and Mesopotamia extol the virtue of pursuing wisdom, for it was seen as bringing order. Job 28:12–22 provides godly direction to the innate human desire for wisdom, and it is found partly within the idea of order and purpose. In creation, God brought order to the universe. The pursuit of godly wisdom, then, gives us a proper biblical understanding of order within this world. Many of the proverbs tell us how wise living and decision-making will bring order to our lives. If the one who is wise lives righteously, he or she can expect righteous outcomes. The opposite is true as well: Foolish living leads to sorrow and disaster.

Job 28 reminds us that the source of true wisdom—the order by which all creation operates—cannot be found in this earth. It does not originate with humanity, nor can it be bought at any price.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways worldly wisdom is different from godly wisdom?
- ? Describe a time when godly wisdom made a difference in your life.

□ Fearing God Is True Wisdom

Job 28:23–28; Proverbs 2:1–6; 9:10



Say: The fear of the Lord is one of the most misunderstood concepts in Scripture, but that fear should be defined through our relationship with God. The fact that the Creator of the universe loves us and made a way to reconcile us to himself ought to lead us to recognize His holiness compared to our unworthiness. One of the best examples of such fear of the Lord is found in Isaiah 6:1–8. Upon recognizing God's holiness, compared with his own sin, Isaiah was moved to worship and serve God with all his heart. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Job 28:21–28 contains what is called “synonymous parallelism” in Hebrew poetry. Each verse consists of two lines or thoughts that are essentially saying the same thing. Verses 23–24 answer the question raised in verses 21–22: Only God can see where wisdom dwells. Verses 25–26 further emphasize that wisdom was present in the very act of creation. All of this leads to the conclusion that the fear of the Lord is wisdom.

This principle of fearing God is common in the Book of Proverbs. In 2:1–6 we are reminded that God is the sole Source of true wisdom. Then, in 9:10, we find the familiar statement that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (NIV).

The idea of fearing the Lord can be challenging to understand. The Hebrew noun translated “fear” can mean “terror” in the sense that most understand the word. But when coupled with the word “God” or “Lord” it conveys a strong sense of piety and reverence. As believers, we should have a sense that God is transcendent. He is “wholly other,” meaning that He is not like us, He is far above us, and He is sovereign and powerful over us. The Old Testament contains several examples of God’s people becoming overwhelmed with self-awareness of sinfulness and uncleanness in the presence of God (c.f., Isaiah 6:1–6).

Believers today, as in Bible times, should sense the “awesomeness” of who God is. Both Proverbs 9 and Job 28 speak of the fear of God as including “understanding.” As we understand who God is, through Scripture as well as a daily walk with Him, we learn what it means to live in fear and reverence of the Lord.



Resource Packet Item 1: My Awesome God

Distribute the work sheet and, as a class, list things that speak of the awesomeness of God. Discuss ways to respond to these as you see them.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe what it means to fear the Lord? (Encourage students to refer to Scriptures about honoring God and forsaking sin, if possible.)
- ? Do you think the concept of fearing the Lord is downplayed among Christians today? Explain.

Part 2—Wisdom for Living



□ Wisdom Brings Spiritual Blessings

Proverbs 3:1–18

Say: If you are a parent, you have undoubtedly offered advice to your children, even if they are adults. Your advice, whether or not it was heeded, was meant to help your children live happier, more successful lives. As our Heavenly Father, God’s instruction to us is always intended to benefit us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Proverbs 3 provides a “father-to-son” form of communication seen throughout wisdom literature, especially in the Book of Proverbs. Adherence to parental teaching will lead to long life and peace. Verse 3 instructs the son not to let “mercy and truth” leave him (KJV). The word for “mercy” here is *chesed*, the important Hebrew

word discussed in Lesson 2 that denotes God’s covenant love. This word is often coupled with the word “truth,” which indicates that godly wisdom reflects internal character based on love and truth.

The familiar words of verses 5–6 involve a sense of gaining a relational knowledge of God built on trust, which stands in stark contrast to leaning on one’s own understanding. Verse 7 elaborates on this by once again reminding us of the call to “fear the Lord,” which is evidenced by turning from evil. Such a life is blessed by God and brings honor to Him.

Verses 11–12 dig deeper into this relational aspect of knowing God, as it extols the virtue of accepting His discipline as a sign of His love and concern for His people. It is noteworthy, then, that these verses are followed by a description of wisdom as valuable and precious (similar to the Job passage considered earlier). As we submit to God’s instruction and discipline, we can embrace the truth that His wisdom is truly more beneficial than earthly wisdom or riches.

Discuss

- ? What do you think it means to have a “relational knowledge of God”?
- ? What are some specific ways godly wisdom can lead to God’s blessings?

☐ God’s Word Leads Us in Righteous Living

Psalm 1:1–6



Say: As we grow in our relationship with God and follow His Word, our behavior should change. Much like the psalmist in Psalm 1, Paul contrasted the behavior of those who produce the works of the flesh with that of those who live by the Spirit, in Galatians 5:19–23. Those who love God should be changed by the Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 1 offers another look at how the Bible uses literary methods in wisdom literature. Being able to recognize methods such as parallelism and repetition can help us understand the message of Scripture more clearly when we read Old Testament poetry. Verse 6, for instance, is what some call “antithetic parallelism.” That is, the second thought is the opposite of the first, and therefore the two thoughts stand in stark contrast to one another. Verse 3, however, uses parallel thoughts to elaborate on the initial statement. A tree that is planted by the water (first thought) yields its fruit (second thought), and it does not wither, (third thought). When we read Scripture this way, we are reminded to look at an entire thought as a single message rather than dividing it into two or three distinct messages.

We might also notice that Psalm 1 bears some resemblance to the Beatitudes in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:3–10). Indeed, some have called the psalm a Beatitude with an explanation. More specifically, it explains what it means for God’s people to live out the instruction of His Word—and also reaffirms the blessings of doing so.

The blessed man constantly meditates on God’s Law, or Torah (Psalm 1:2). This word, Torah, refers to the first five books of the Old Testament and is usually

translated “law,” but it can also mean “instruction” or “teaching.” As a result, we can apply this as a reference to the full teaching of the Old Testament. The person who meditates on God’s Law (and thereby puts it into practice) is like a strong tree that produces the good fruit of righteous living.

On the other hand, since God alone is the source of wisdom, those who do not meditate on His Word are classified as “the wicked” (verse 4, NIV). The righteous person has the wisdom necessary to avoid aligning himself with the wicked. In the end, the evidence of one’s wisdom or foolishness is found in the fruit of his or her life.



Resource Packet Item 2: Producing Good Fruit

Distribute the work sheet, and have someone read Galatians 5:16–25. Ask the questions and briefly discuss the answers. If class time is limited, send the sheet home for further study.

Discuss

- ? Many of us may cross paths with the “wicked” in our daily occupations. How do you find proper balance in your relationships with the unsaved who may be similar to those described in Psalm 1:1?
- ? How will having a healthy fear of the Lord impact the way you live out the Christian life?
- ? What do you think it means to delight in the Law of the Lord?



Part 3—Goal of True Wisdom

□ Wisdom Is Greater Than Wealth

Ecclesiastes 7:11–12

Say: In today’s society, concern over money (or the lack of it) often dominates our lives. While we know that many things are more important than money, most people spend a large portion of their waking hours earning money—or spending it. The Bible itself has a great deal to say about wealth, poverty, and the Christian’s response to both. As with most things, God’s Word calls for balance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ecclesiastes 7:11–12 gives a vivid contrast between wise living and foolish living, from a godly perspective. Notice, however, that verse 11 doesn’t say that an inheritance is a bad thing in itself. Wisdom and inheritance are weighed and both are found to be good. However, wisdom is far better. Both can bring protection or shelter. But wealth does not endure; it will eventually fade away. Proverbs 23:4–5 provides good perspective: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (NIV).

In itself, there is nothing wrong with being financially secure. Indeed, elsewhere the wisdom literature exhorts people to be wise and careful with finances (c.f., Proverbs 6:6–8). Hard times will befall almost everyone at some point in life, and all wealth can be lost. Later in Ecclesiastes 7 we are reminded: “When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as

the other” (verse 14, *NIV*). While financial loss will often bring adversity, godly wisdom will endure no matter our earthly circumstances. The wise person recognizes the folly of materialism, and he or she lives according to the knowledge that only God can bring real meaning to life.

Discuss

- ? How can a Christian know the difference between wisely conserving money and foolishly accumulating money because he or she trusts in it for security?
- ? What is the proper Christian understanding of wealth?

□ Godly Wisdom Brings Obedience

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14



Say: Solomon prayed for wisdom, and God granted that request. However, we know from Solomon’s life, he did not fully obey the wisdom God gave him. God has given us His Word, which is filled with wisdom for us to obey. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon likely toward the end of his life, offers a uniquely biblical exploration of the meaning of life. In the final chapter we find the very statement found in 1:1: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity” (*NIV*). Throughout its twelve chapters, Ecclesiastes expresses all of the ways in which Solomon sought to find pleasure and meaning in his life, and they were all in vain. Verses 9–14 form an epilogue that expresses the true meaning of life, expressed beautifully in verse 13.

Verses 9–10 highlight the wisdom of Solomon, including how he conveyed knowledge to God’s people under his leadership. Much of this is available to us today in the Book of Proverbs.

Verse 11 proceeds to use an agricultural metaphor that likens words of wisdom to a goad or prod in the hand of a shepherd. This points to the guidance, direction, and instruction that comes from wisdom, and suggests that without it a person will wander from the knowledge of the Lord he or she ought to be following.

What was written by the Preacher, Solomon, is enough to reach the final conclusion to what Ecclesiastes explores. Human wisdom is not necessary for this conclusion, and our flawed understanding and conjecture can be a distraction.

The essential message as to the meaning of life is simple, “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (verse 13, *KJV*). God is the sole Source of wisdom, and the wise seek to know God, follow His instruction, and keep His commands.



Resource Packet Item 3: Wealth vs. Wisdom

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups. Ask each group to summarize one of the Scriptures, then have each group share their findings with the rest of the class.

Discuss

- ? How would you explain the meaning of life to someone who has not heard the gospel?
- ? From what you know of Solomon, what are some ways he sought to find pleasure and meaning in his life?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Much of modern wisdom is based on self-serving agendas. The wisdom that originates from God is found from the beginning of creation. Old Testament wisdom teaches us that a reverence for God is the beginning of understanding what true wisdom is all about. True, godly wisdom is timeless: If we strive to live righteously then we can expect good outcomes. Godly wisdom gives us the understanding and the ability to turn from evil behavior. Do a self-evaluation to determine if your decision-making process is based on what feels right according to cultural influences, or whether that process is grounded in your love for and willingness to listen to God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find an unbeliever this week with whom you can share the awesomeness of God, and then spend some time sharing your faith.
- Pray for godly wisdom as you make decisions regarding your priorities.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live in obedience to the Word.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Moses Receives Wise Counsel.
Exodus 18:13–24

Tuesday

Bezalel Filled With God's Wisdom.
Exodus 35:30–35

Wednesday

Endowed with Wisdom and Understanding.
Daniel 1:17–20

Thursday

Wise Men Seek Jesus.
Matthew 2:1–11

Friday

Jesus Grows in Wisdom.
Luke 2:41–52

Saturday

Walk in Wisdom.
Ephesians 5:15–21

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

October 11, 2020

LESSON

6

God Sends His Messengers

Study Text

Isaiah 9:13–21; 11:1–10; Jeremiah 3:6–13; Ezekiel 37:15–23; Hosea 8:1–9; Joel 2:12–17; Zephaniah 3:14–20

Central Truth

God sent the prophets to call His people to repentance.



Key Verse Amos 3:7

Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets (KJV).

Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand the nature of idolatry and why Israel continued to enter into that sin.
- Explore how idolatry might pose a temptation to Christians in our society today.
- Identify and repent of beliefs and practices that reflect modern secular values, which should not be mingled with Christian beliefs and practices.

Introducing the Study

Say: “If I were an Israelite back in that time, I would never have bowed down to an idol!” Perhaps you’ve been inclined to say this in response to biblical passages on Israel’s idolatry. Yet we must understand that Israel adopted idolatry in part as a source of assurance of their own security (i.e., they wanted their crops to grow, so they mingled worship of the Lord with worship of the Canaanite god that was believed to bring rain). As we study, we should ask, “Whom or what do we trust in today?”

Opening Activity—Additions” to God?

Ask: What kinds of things do people sometimes put “alongside” of God as a source of hope or security for their lives? (Possible answers include superstitions, good luck charms, horoscopes, etc.)

Say: It was often the case that the Israelites worshipped *both* God and idols; that is, they mingled pagan worship into their lives rather than remain exclusive in their worship of God. This mixing of worship still poses a threat. God still demands undivided worship, not mingled with things like cultural gimmicks, popular teachings, political dogma, secular values, or human sources of security. As we explore the Old Testament prophets, we must examine our own propensity to introduce “idol worship” into our lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the Book of Judges, God’s people became guilty of all kinds of idolatry. Yet their idol worship began earlier, while Moses was on Mount Sinai. Throughout the historical books of Samuel and Kings, Israel’s successes and failures

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Jeremiah 3:11. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

12. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.

Joel 2:12. Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

13. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Isaiah 9:13. For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts.

14. Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day.

Hosea 8:1. Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.

Isaiah 11:1. And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

2. And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Ezekiel 37:21. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

22. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

Zephaniah 3:14. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

15. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

New International Version

Jeremiah 3:11. The LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah.

12. Go, proclaim this message toward the north: “Return, faithless Israel,” declares the LORD, “I will frown on you no longer, for I am faithful,” declares the LORD, “I will not be angry forever.”

Joel 2:12. “Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

13. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. **Isaiah 9:13.** But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty.

14. So the LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day.

Hosea 8:1. “Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law.”

Isaiah 11:1. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

2. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD.

Ezekiel 37:21. “And say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.

22. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.”

Zephaniah 3:14. Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!

15. The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.

were tied to their willingness to follow the Law and reject idolatry. Throughout this time, God sent various prophets to confront the people about their sins and call them back into faithful covenant relationship with Him.

Part 1—Repent and Return to Covenant

❑ Idolatry Is Infidelity Against God

Jeremiah 3:6–13



Say: In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God used marriage to symbolize His relationship with His people. Prophetic literature is no exception. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jeremiah likened Judah (the nation to which he prophesied, around 620 BC) to an adulterous wife who would be divorced for infidelity (Jeremiah 3:6; see verse 1). Unfaithfulness is devastating to a relationship. All manner of trust is severely damaged, sometimes irreparably.

The expression “on every high hill and under every spreading tree” is a telling description of their unfaithfulness (3:7, NIV). The “hill” alludes to the high places used in Baal worship, while the tree likely points to worship of Asherah, represented by poles or trees that were held sacred (see also verse 9).

Verses 11–13 also reinforce the seriousness of Jeremiah’s indictment. Judah had not learned their lesson when God “divorced” the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and they were taken captive by the Assyrians. God’s decision to send Jeremiah to the north (verse 12) delivered a harsh message to Judah: God saw faithless, exiled Israel as more righteous than unfaithful Judah.

God’s people were outwardly observing the rituals God had given them—even while they were worshipping other gods. In essence, they maintained an outward appearance of relationship with God even as they pursued other lovers (see verse 10, noting that Josiah’s reforms were ultimately not taken seriously). As Christians, we must guard against dividing our affections between God and a fallen world.



Resource Packet Item 1: Why Worship Idols Made by Hands?

Distribute the information sheet to your students. You may want to summarize it for them, or you may want to send it home with them for further study.

Discuss

- ? How is marriage a good example to describe God’s relationship with His people?
- ? What examples from other parts of the Bible can you think of that use marriage in this way?
- ? What might constitute some modern examples of idolatry among Christians? (Colossians 3:5 provides a helpful example.)

❑ God Graciously Calls His People To Repent

Joel 2:12–17



Say: Joel may be best known for his prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 2:28–29 referenced in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–21).

However, earlier in Joel 2, he delivered a plea for God's people to repent of their sin and turn to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Many believe that Joel prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah during the times of the wicked rulers, Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah, and continued to prophesy during the reign of Joash, who was one of the few good kings. If this is the case, then, repentance is a key component of his prophecy. Verses 12–13 provide a good definition of what it means to repent: It is much more than outward actions; it includes mourning over one's sins, which compels that person to turn to the gracious and loving God who forgives. In Bible times, it was customary to tear one's garments when expressing profound grief. A penitent person, then, must be brokenhearted. This sorrow leads to a forsaking of the sin. Repentance brings changes to the way a person lives.

Joel emphasized that God does not desire to bring judgment on people (Joel 2:13–14). His very nature is to be gracious, merciful, and patient. God created human beings to know and to love Him.

While we often think of repentance as an individual act, God also desires that it happen within a community. Since all of Judah had failed to obey the Lord, the whole nation needed to repent. A solemn assembly was called and every person was required to attend (verses 15–17). The priests, as spiritual leaders, were to cry out to God to spare His people. In doing so, they appealed to God's reputation: that His inheritance (His people) would not become an object of scorn, and that other nations would not conclude that He had abandoned His people. Clearly, repentance should include the sorrowful recognition that God is dishonored by sin.

Discuss

- ? In your own words, how would you define repentance?
- ? Since the Church is the community of God in the world today, how can Joel 2:15–17 apply to the way Christians deal with sin? (Note that individual sin is dealt with differently than corporate sin, where the whole body has strayed; see Matthew 18:15–17; Galatians 6:1.)
- ? How can knowing that God is gracious toward His people when they sin impact the way we deal with others when they sin?

Part 2—Lack of Repentance Punished



□ God's People Refuse To Repent

Isaiah 9:13–21

Say: Even in His anger, God did not cease to love His people. He had chosen the sons of Jacob, specifically the tribe of Judah to be the lineage through whom the Messiah would come. His punishment was meant to restore them. Just as loving parents discipline their children, God disciplines His children for their own good. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah was a prophet during the eighth century BC. He ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel until they fell to Assyria. Then, Isaiah continued to minister to

Judah until the turn of the seventh century BC. Isaiah 9:13–21 was directed at the Northern Kingdom before they fell.

The northern kingdom of Israel refused to repent in spite of God’s punishment (verses 11–16). The elders and the prophets—who should have been godly spiritual leaders—were leading the people astray. So God held the nation accountable for their stubborn rebellion, declaring that “everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks folly” (verse 17, NIV). The evil of the people burned like a self-consuming fire, and God’s wrath burned toward them (verses 18–19).

The description of the people’s rebellion culminates in graphic terms, in verses 20–21. Here, cannibalism is a metaphor for the breakup of tribal unity as Manasseh devoured Ephraim and vice-versa. Then they both turned on Judah. This reminds us of the Book of Judges, where the people’s crimes against each other reached grotesque levels, such as in the story of the Levite and his concubine (see Judges 19–20). Like the days of the judges, lawlessness and rebellion ruled the day.

Discuss

- ? What can we learn from Isaiah 9:13–21 about serving in spiritual leadership, as well as about choosing our spiritual leaders?
- ? The people of Israel did not repent of their sin in spite of the fact that God had punished them to send a clear message. What kind of messages does God send today to encourage us to repent?

□ God Allows People To Choose Their Own Way **Hosea 8:1–9**



Say: It is God’s will for everyone to love and obey Him. Peter says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). This principle was true in Old Testament times, New Testament times, and is still true today. Yet God gives people their own choice. Unfortunately, for many years, both Israel and Judah made wrong choices. In the end they had to be punished. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Hosea prophesied in the Northern Kingdom, prior to its fall in the eighth century BC. His prophecy is best known for the metaphor of adultery in the opening chapters, as Hosea was told to marry a prostitute and to have children by her. Gomer, the unfaithful wife, is symbolic of Israel’s unfaithfulness and betrayal of God’s love.

In Hosea 8:1–9, we find the explanation for God’s judgment. Simply put, they forsook the covenant and chose to go their own way (8:1). Verses 4–6 mention specific charges, such as appointing kings apart from God’s guidance. Notably, they also crafted idols of gold and silver. Hosea also alluded to the golden calves that were set up by King Jeroboam at Dan and Bethel, the northernmost and southernmost extents of the Northern Kingdom. Idolatry essentially filled the entire nation.

For their sin the people would “sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” (verse 7, NIV). Their crops would be devastated, and then they would be taken in exile

to Assyria because they would not turn from their worship of other gods. God's people—then and now—must recognize that stubborn, unrepented rebellion against God will ultimately bring terrible, tragic consequences.



Resource Packet Item 2: A Choice To Be Made

Distribute the work sheet, and let students read the story and answer the questions individually or in small groups.

Discuss

- ? What are some common ways God's people might fall into rebellion today, and how can we avoid these spiritual traps?
- ? How would you respond to a believer who claims that Christians today need not focus any attention on God's judgment for sin, since we are under grace?

Part 3—Hope for the Future



□ The Messiah Is Promised

Isaiah 11:1–10

Say: In spite of the disobedience and subsequent exile of Israel and Judah, God would not forget His promise of a Messiah. From His statement to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 to His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the only hope for Israel then—and for people today—is Jesus. In spite of the seeming hopelessness that would come during the Exile, God sent prophets to also deliver messages of hope for the future. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The prophecy of Isaiah 11:1–11 is often believed to have been given around the time of King Ahaz of Judah. Even though exile was more than a century in the future, these were tumultuous years in Judah, as Ahaz was an exceptionally evil king.

The metaphor of a tree in 11:1 describes a “rod” or “shoot” that will spring from the “stem” or “stump” of Jesse. During Isaiah's ministry, the Davidic monarchy seemed to be in jeopardy. Sin was rampant and enemies threatened God's people. Yet those who later went into exile from Judah would certainly struggle all the more, trying to process current events in light of the promise of 2 Samuel 7:16. David's line was supposed to continue forever. Yet David's lineage had been cut off and there was no king.

Isaiah's prophecy would offer hope. The dead stump (David's dynasty) would sprout and come alive once more. This ruler in the lineage of David will host the Spirit of the Lord, by whom He will rule with understanding, wise counsel, and knowledge. He will delight in the fear of the Lord, which gives evidence of a true knowledge of God. His kingdom will be exemplified by a peace in which deadly predators will live in total harmony with humans. In Isaiah 11:9–10, an earth “filled with the knowledge of the LORD” (verse 9, NIV) will result in the turning of the nations to the “Root of Jesse” (verse 10) Although Isaiah was earlier than many of the prophets, God's plan of redemption through the Messiah was already beginning

to unfold. Jesus, in the lineage of David, would be the fulfillment of this and many other Messianic prophecies, spoken by the prophets over the course of hundreds of years.

Discuss

- ? What does Isaiah 11 teach us about God's promises?
- ? What are some ways God has given you hope amid difficult times?

☐ God Promises Restoration Ezekiel 37:15–23; Zephaniah 3:14–20



Say: God's love is unfathomable. After years of disobedience Judah was exiled to Babylon, but God did not forget them. Instead, He sent them a message of hope. No matter how dark our circumstances may be, God still has a message of hope for His people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The prophet Ezekiel was one of the early exiles taken to Babylon, approximately ten years before Jerusalem fell. Thus he would have been one of the first witnesses to the crisis of faith that developed in Babylonian captivity. In response to the fears of the exiles, God sent a message of unity and restoration. Ezekiel 37:1–14 contains the familiar vision of dry bones that re-form into a living representation of a restored and unified Israel. Then, in verses 15–23, Ezekiel presented an object lesson. He was to take two sticks and write “for Judah” on one and “for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim” on the other (verse 16, KJV). Judah represented the southern kingdom, while Ephraim represented the north. These were to be joined together in the presence of the people to show that there would once again be a single nation, unified by God. What a blessing this message must have been to the people in exile so far from home.

Zephaniah, who prophesied during the reign of King Josiah and before the fall of Judah, also gave a message of hope. Even though Josiah himself was a good king, Zephaniah focused on the judgment that would befall Judah because of their infidelity. Zephaniah 3:14–20 looks forward to a time after the judgment of Judah, in which hope will return. God will punish all those who oppress His people. Then He will bring them back to Zion and restore their fortunes.



Resource Packet Item 3: Jesus, the Messiah

Distribute the work sheet and divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one pair of the Scriptures listed, and ask them to look them up and describe how the New Testament passage shows the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways God brings restoration into the lives of those who place their trust in Him today?
- ? Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zephaniah all painted a picture of joy, unity, and divine rule in the future. How might you share this kind of hope with the world around you in spite of the darkness of our times?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Even before the final judgment came upon God's people in the Old Testament, God had already made a plan to extend grace, healing, acceptance, and unity. As Christians, we have the benefit of knowing how His plan was implemented through the Messiah. In the Book of Matthew, Jesus is shown to be a direct descendant of King David. As such, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah as One coming from the "stump of Jesse." God brought a remnant of Judah back after the Exile, but Ezekiel's vision includes all Christians. In both Isaiah and Zephaniah, the picture of the kingdom the Messiah would introduce has not been fully realized. Our society cannot be characterized by peacefulness, or as being full of the knowledge of the Lord. Jesus gave us instructions to make disciples of all nations and to show the world we are His disciples by demonstrating our love one for another. By doing what God has asked us to do, we are playing our part to usher in the age these prophets foresaw.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Examine your life to see if there is anything for which you need to repent.
- Choose one thing you can do this week to be more obedient to God.
- Choose one person in your life—a family member, friend, coworker, or someone you meet in the marketplace or on the street—and begin a relationship with that person through which you can help them come to know Jesus.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

A Future Prophet Like Moses.
Deuteronomy 18:15–19

Tuesday

False Prophets Described.
Deuteronomy 18:20–22

Wednesday

Israel Judged for Rejecting
God's Messengers.
2 Chronicles 36:14–21

Thursday

God's Messenger Prepares the Way.
Matthew 3:1–6

Friday

Message to Joseph and Mary.
Luke 2:25–35

Saturday

Agabus Prophecies Paul's Arrest.
Acts 21:8–14

Unit 1: Story of the Old Testament

October 18, 2020

LESSON 7

Return From Exile

Study Text

Ezra 1:1–5; 3:8–13; 6:13–18; Nehemiah 2:11 through 3:35; 6:15–16; Malachi 3:1–18

Central Truth

Christians can trust God to keep His covenant promises.



Key Verse Ezra 1:2

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem (KJV).

“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Examine the nature of the opposition God’s people faced in their return from exile.
- Recognize that God has a plan for His people and will equip them to do what He has called them to do.
- Assess what God has called students to do and commit to following His leading.

Introducing the Study

Say: Following God isn’t always easy. The events in this lesson came at a joyous yet challenging time for Judah. They had returned from Babylonian exile to Jerusalem. Yet amid this victory they faced opposition. As we will see in the last part of the lesson, they also needed to stop mingling pagan ways with their worship of God. Despite their struggles in return from exile, we can learn much from Judah about serving God in the face of challenges—from without as well as within.

Opening Activity—A Giant Reconstruction Project

Ask: What’s the biggest reconstruction project you have undertaken? What kinds of difficulties did you run into? Did you have help, or was it strictly “do it yourself”? (Give a few minutes for responses.)

Say: Today’s lesson centers on a large reconstruction project: the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem after many decades of neglect. The lesson concludes with a call for restoration of God’s people themselves. God has a plan for us, just as He did for His people 2,500 years ago. Ezra and Nehemiah came on the scene almost 100 years after the release of Judah from captivity, and God was still working on His plan. This reminds us that God’s plan may not be fulfilled immediately, and we may face opposition. Yet God will see His plan through to completion. If we are in tune with His will, we can experience the blessings of His promises. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Although Ezra and Nehemiah appear in the first half of the Old Testament, they record some of the latest events found in these first thirty-nine books of Scripture. This is because

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Ezra 1:2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3:10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

6:14. And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

16. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.

Nehemiah 1:3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

2:18. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

6:15. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.

16. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

Malachi 3:10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

18. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

New International Version

Ezra 1:2. "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah."

3:10. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel.

6:14. So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia.

16. Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy.

Nehemiah 1:3. They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

2:18. I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

6:15. So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

16. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

Malachi 3:10. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

18. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

the Old Testament is not chronological but is grouped according to genre, with history following law. As you study, keep in focus that much sadness lay in the history of God's people at this point: Both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms had long since fallen. The tragic warnings of so many prophets had come to pass. Yet with the return from Babylonian exile, hope had been renewed. Now, however, just as God's promises seem to be progressing, more struggles had come.

Part 1—The Temple Rebuilt

□ God Sovereignly Worked Out His Plan

Ezra 1:1–5



Say: Perhaps you've heard the statement, "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." This often-quoted adaptation from a poem written by William Cowper in the eighteenth century might be applied to the circumstances in which the exiles from Judah began their task of rebuilding the temple. God's sovereignty is a difficult concept to understand. While He is completely sovereign, He allows people to make choices as to serving Him. He also sometimes uses unlikely people and circumstances to accomplish His will. This was the case in today's lesson. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we begin our look at the post-exilic books, it is helpful to understand the timeline of events. The first wave of exiles from Judah were taken to Babylon in approximately 605 BC. The final destruction of Jerusalem and a final wave of exiles went in 586 BC. In 538 BC, a new Persian regime under the kingship of Cyrus issued a decree that allowed the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple. This is recorded in Ezra 1:2–4. It is interesting to note that archaeology has confirmed the biblical text. A statement regarding his actions was found in the excavations of Babylon in 1879; the "Cylinder of Cyrus" was an ancient clay cylinder that was rolled onto wet clay (similar to a rolling pin) to create copies of his achievements. Ezra 1:2–4 records his edict as it was directed specifically to the Jewish people. It is believed that other people groups received such an edict as well.

Scripture gives us the true reason behind the policy of Cyrus, however. The Lord "moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia" (verse 1, NIV). This is consistent with prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah 41:2 and 41:25 both allude to this. Then, in 44:28 and 45:1, Cyrus is mentioned by name. Jeremiah 51:1,11 spoke of the fall of Babylon, which would bring about the return from exile and subsequent restoration. Furthermore, a dominant theme in Jeremiah is that God sovereignly controls all the nations. Although Cyrus issued the edict, it was clear in Isaiah's time (two centuries prior to Cyrus) that God would be orchestrating these events.

God can execute His plan by any means He desires. We must keep in focus His sovereign control of the nations. Our world can seem chaotic and uncertain. Yet we can rest assured that God is in control. This remains true even when opposition rises up against us—as we will see in the Book of Ezra.

Discuss

- ? Even as the people of Judah were in exile, God had a plan of redemption foretold by the prophets. Have you ever experienced a time when it seemed like God had forgotten about you, yet later you could see how God was working things out? Explain.
- ? Although Cyrus may have believed that he was making a benevolent policy on his own, he was actually operating within God's plan. Can you think of any modern parallels where decisions or events seem to have been orchestrated by God even if the participants were not believers?



□ The Temple Is Completed and Dedicated

Ezra 3:8–13; 6:13–18

Say: Delay is not the same as failure. When the temple was being rebuilt, the opposition was able to convince the king to stop the work. However, God's will would ultimately be accomplished, and the temple was completed. Sometimes there are unavoidable reasons work is delayed, but God will accomplish His will. As we surrender to Him, His work will be done in our lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Zerubbabel was a governor of Judah during the restoration of the temple. Under him, the rebuilding of the temple began in earnest and its foundation was laid (Ezra 3:8–13). Overseeing the work were numerous Levites (the priestly line). There were mixed emotions concerning the completion of the foundations. Many sang to the Lord, proclaiming His goodness and mercy. However, some of the older priests, Levites, and family leaders who had seen the original temple of Solomon wept because it lacked the splendor of Solomon's Temple.

Expressions of joy and lamenting were short-lived. Adversaries of Judah and Benjamin requested to assist in the rebuilding of the temple since they too claimed to seek the same God (see Ezra 4:1–5). When Zerubbabel refused, they began to discourage the people and, as a result, the building of the temple was hindered throughout the reign of Cyrus.

When Artaxerxes was king, a letter of accusation was sent claiming that the returnees were rebuilding the walls as well, which resulted in a halt of all building activities (4:6–24). Only later, under King Darius, were the returnees allowed to complete the temple—and with full financial support (6:1–12). The temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius, or 515 BC, very much in line with Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of captivity (see Jeremiah 25:12–14). God's Word was unfolding, just as He had declared.



Resource Packet Item 1: Dedicating the Temple

Distribute the work sheet and discuss it as a class or in small groups. Then ask the students to consider the last two questions individually, and take time for a brief prayer of dedication, either as a class or individually, that each student will truly be dedicated as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Discuss

- ? The initial joy of God's favor was interrupted by several years of opposition. Has there been a time in your life where God's direction for you was clear, but circumstances delayed fulfillment? Explain.
- ? More than two decades passed from the edict of Cyrus to the completion of the temple. What can this teach us about God's timing and our expectations? Describe how we can maintain faith in times of delay.

Part 2—Jerusalem's Wall Rebuilt

□ Nehemiah: A God-Given Leader

Nehemiah 2:11–20; 3:1–2,28–35



Say: Books and seminars on leadership abound. While training is valuable and anyone aspiring to be a leader should learn as much as possible, the first qualification for a spiritual leader is a call from God. Nehemiah had that call, stayed humble and submissive to God's will, and was not deterred from the task God had given him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and served as governor of Judah in approximately 444 BC, several decades after the time of Zerubbabel and roughly during the time of Ezra. Three days after his return, he and a few men quietly assessed the task under cover of night (Nehemiah 2:11–20). After assessing the condition of the walls Nehemiah approached the leaders. He was personally concerned about the situation, referring to the trouble that “we are in” (verse 17). He pointed out that he had favor of both the king and God himself, and advised that they begin rebuilding. It is also noteworthy that Nehemiah was a great man of prayer (see Nehemiah 1).

Sturdy and effective walls characterized the security and stability of a city in Old Testament times. It was disgraceful that Jerusalem, the great city of God's people, would find itself in the state it was in at the point of Nehemiah's inspection. Sadly, however, just as it was with the rebuilding of the temple, there was great opposition to Nehemiah's God-given plan. Several officials mocked their efforts to rebuild the walls and even accused them of rebelling against the king (2:19–20). Nehemiah exhibited calm confidence in declaring that God would make them succeed.

Nehemiah 3 recounts the specifics of the rebuilding plan. Nehemiah gave specific responsibilities to various families, which, in turn, made the people personally involved in the project, motivating them to finish the work.

Discuss

- ? What can Nehemiah teach us about being a Christian leader?
- ? Describe a memorable time when a spiritual leader gave you a responsibility in ministry. How did you respond to this responsibility, and what did you learn?

□ God's Work Intimidates the Enemy

Nehemiah 6:15–16



Say: When God's people obey Him and begin to accomplish His work, there often will be opposition. But God is greater than the opposition. After the enemies

of Nehemiah saw the completion of the wall—in only fifty-two days—they recognized that God had brought success to His people. As a result, they were intimidated. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Through God’s help, Nehemiah’s strategy and leadership were successful. In fact, it took only fifty-two days to complete the complex and difficult project (Nehemiah 6:15). As such, it speaks to Nehemiah’s qualities of leadership as a man of God. He was confident of the project’s success and made a priority of calling many others to participate in the work and share the vision of their leader. Nehemiah never sought out personal gain. The people could be confident his motives were godly.

Verse 16 is especially helpful yet today, for any who face opposition. The opposing leaders who sought to foil the plans of Nehemiah were afraid and disheartened. The literal expression regarding their frame of mind, in the original Hebrew, states, “They fell much in their own eyes.” They knew that the success of this project had come from God.

Today, the strategy of the enemy of our souls is to convince us to fear opposition and doubt the reality of God’s voice and empowerment. When a spiritual leader is confident in God and sincerely seeks Him for direction, there can be great expectation that the Lord will bring success in the endeavor.



Resource Packet Item 2: Leadership Lessons From Nehemiah

Distribute the work sheet to your class. Assign one row to each person and have them share the principle they discover, or send the sheet home with students for further study.

Discuss

- ? Why did Nehemiah’s adversaries become disheartened?
- ? How can you prepare now for future times of fear or discouragement as you seek to follow the Lord’s direction?



Part 3—God’s People Called To Reform

□ God Calls His People to Obey

Malachi 3:7–12

Say: Malachi was both a priest and a prophet to God’s people. The exiles had returned to their homeland, and had rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Yet they fell short of God’s commands. They offered blemished sacrifices in their worship, dishonored Him in their marriage relationships, and withheld their tithe from Him. Malachi warned them of judgment to come. Yet he also spoke of the coming Messiah who would usher in the new covenant. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament and was quite possibly the last book written. The time between Malachi and Matthew represents the intertestamental years between the close of the Old Testament period to the beginning of the New Testament period—a time span of slightly more than four centuries.

Malachi contains a stern warning reminiscent of the prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries BC, prior to the Northern Kingdom being taken into exile. As noted in lesson 2, Israel's idolatry began soon after the Exodus, at Mt. Sinai, as the people worshipped the golden calf. Malachi 3:7 alludes to this sad history: "Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them" (NIV).

It seems the people had become spiritually apathetic in the century that had followed the return from exile. As a result, the Lord called them to return to Him. The instruction regarding the tithe in verse 10 is familiar to many Christians. Such instruction was grounded in the law of Moses. The practice of tithing recognized that all of the fruit, livestock, and produce of the land was a gift from God. Tithing was expected of the people, and to not do so was, in fact, robbing God.

Verses 11–12 reaffirm a promise, noting the blessings of being in healthy covenant relationship with God. Adherence to the Old Testament law brought fertility and prosperity to the land. A return to the Lord would result in protection of Israel's crops. Then all of the nations would recognize that Israel had been blessed.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Christians might be guilty of robbing God today?
- ? Spiritual apathy can still be a struggle for Christians today. Why do you think a Christian might become apathetic, and how can we guard against apathy?

□ A Remnant Turns to God

Malachi 3:16–18



Say: We noted earlier that the fear of the Lord was a key theme in the Old Testament. Yet in a world today that is often apathetic toward the Lord, we must be careful to maintain a proper attitude toward and submission to God. This means looking to Him and trusting Him in every situation.

A remnant, or portion, of the people responded positively to God's invitation to trust Him. Malachi 3:16 records that those who feared the Lord came together, and the Lord heard them. There is great joy in recognizing that the Lord counted them as His "treasured possession" (verse 17, NIV). This can be a great object lesson, as well, in a world where family relationships are often strained and broken. The Heavenly Father is a loving Father to His children.

This new generation, committed to reform, would stand in contrast to previous generations. There would be a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked (verse 18). Mingling false religions and idolatry with true worship of God was a problem with God's people throughout their history. They often confused the boundaries between what actions and beliefs belonged in the faith and which ones did not. God made it clear that judgment would come to evildoers (see 4:1). But goodness would come to those who were faithful to Him (4:3). Such a promise endures among God's people at all times.



Resource Packet Item 3: What Did God Expect?

Distribute the work sheet and ask the students to complete it in small groups—perhaps one Scripture per group. Discuss their responses.

Discuss

- ? How can we assure that we are among those who fear the Lord amid a culture that is apathetic—or even antagonistic—toward God?
- ? Why do you think God’s people, then and now, often struggle with the same recurring problems? How can we overcome these tendencies?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Although God had sent His people into exile as punishment for their disobedience to Him, He did not forget them. He sent leaders and prophets, yet they still did not fully worship Him. But God is gracious, and His plan to send the Messiah would endure. When we go through a difficult time, we may feel that God has forsaken us, but His plan is still in place. God’s timetable is much different from ours, but we can still trust Him for the outcome.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find someone this week that you can encourage to trust God in the midst of difficulty. If possible, find a way you can be God’s instrument to help that person.
- Look at the principles of leadership demonstrated by Nehemiah and incorporate them into your life—in your home, job, or volunteer role.
- Evaluate your own devotion to God. Are there ways in which you are robbing God in your worship? Pray that you will worship Him sincerely and humbly.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God’s Glory in the Tabernacle.
Exodus 40:34–38

Tuesday

Promised Land Promised to Joshua.
Joshua 1:1–9

Wednesday

Daniel’s Intercession.
Daniel 9:1–2, 16–19

Thursday

Promise of God’s Son Fulfilled.
John 1:14–18

Friday

A New and Better Covenant.
Hebrews 8:7–13

Saturday

A New and Better Sanctuary.
Hebrews 9:11–15

Story of the New Testament

Unit 2 continues along the same path as Unit 1 of this quarter, tracing the “big picture” perspective on Scripture. As you move through a study of the New Testament, you and the class will observe how the prophecies, patterns, and figures of the Old Testament ultimately spoke to the revelation of God’s plan for redemption in Jesus Christ. Yet the New Testament includes a wide variety of writings that answer the fundamental spiritual needs of students as well as offer important guidance for how they can live for Jesus each and every day.

The first two lessons of the unit are foundational. First, students will form a basis of understanding what the Bible teaches about who Jesus is (Lesson 8). Then they will explore the early expansion of the gospel—within the Early Church—during the first few decades after Christ’s ascension (Lesson 9). These lessons will offer opportunity to talk about how students can respond to a skeptical world about their faith in Jesus, as well as stay true to Him in the face of opposition.

Lessons 10-12 focus on God’s messages to the Early Church in the form of epistles or letters for specific congregations. Here you will have ample opportunity to explore with students practical applications of Scripture, both with regard to belief and behavior. Your students may be interested to find that these letters dealt largely with internal issues in the church. This is a good reminder that while we are certainly called to share the love of Jesus with the lost, God is immensely concerned with how we live together as His people in a challenging world.

The unit concludes with a survey of the Book of Revelation. Here you can convey the great and blessed hope of every believer—the culmination of God’s great story. It is a fitting capstone on what promises to be a valuable unit and quarter, exploring God’s great message to His people and to the world, through the words of His Scripture.

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament

October 25, 2020

LESSON

8

The Messiah Comes

Introducing the Study

Say: After our journey through the highlights of the Old Testament, focusing on God's plan for the redemption of humankind, we now begin our journey through the New Testament where we will focus on the fulfillment of that plan. (*Play the Unit 2 introduction video, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—The Best-Laid Plans

Ask: What are some events or projects that you have planned or helped plan in your life?

Students may name such things as building a house, planning a fund-raiser or other event, planning a career, or something else that they planned.

Ask: Did you ever have to change those plans along the way because of unforeseen circumstances? (Ask for a show of hands for “yes” or “no.” More than likely, most plans had to be adjusted for some reason.)

Say: There is a saying that “the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” While this is true in the human realm, we can rest assured that the plans of God never go awry. In spite of Israel's rebellion and disobedience, God's plan to send His Son as our Savior was fulfilled with perfect timing. (Read Galatians 4:4–5 aloud, then share your highlights from the following text.)

With this lesson the focus shifts from tracing God's plan for redeeming of the world in Old Testament prophecies, patterns, and figures to the revelation of that plan in Jesus Christ (see 2 Peter 1:21; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1; 9:23–24). In a relativistic world, we need to grasp that Jesus *is* the plan for salvation. He is not a savior among others; He is the Savior of the world. Telling the world of that salvation is the missional purpose of the Church.

Study Text

Matthew 1:18–24; Luke 2:41–52;
3:21–22; 4:14–21,31–37; 5:17–26;
John 19:16–42; 20:1–22

Central Truth

God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin.



Key Verse Matthew 1:23

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (KJV).

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”) (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Know and understand the culmination of the plan of God in Jesus Christ.
- Have an increased appreciation for and comprehension of the saving results of Jesus' work.
- Live in the reality of the new spiritual relationship with Jesus provided through His death and resurrection.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Matthew 1:21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Luke 2:49. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

51. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

4:18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

21. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

5:23. Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

John 19:17. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:

18. Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

20:1. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

19. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

New International Version

Matthew 1:21. "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Luke 2:49. "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

51. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

4:18. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

19. to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

21. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

5:23. "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"

24. But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

25. Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

John 19:17. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

18. There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

20:1. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

18. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

19. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Part 1—Jesus’ Birth and Childhood



□ God Prepared the Way

Matthew 1:18–24

Say: Perhaps you have been concerned about someone’s reaction to news you might share, whether it’s good news or bad news. As we trust God with our lives, we often find that He has already prepared the other person’s heart for that news. Mary was likely apprehensive about Joseph’s reaction to the news of her pregnancy. What an honor to be chosen as an instrument to bring the Messiah into the world! Yet, as a young woman who was about to be married, a certain amount of apprehension would be normal. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the revelation of how God miraculously fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament to answer the great need of humanity: salvation from sin. Matthew noted that “Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah” (Matthew 1:16, NIV), then focused on the confirmation of this reality to Joseph, the husband of Mary (verses 18–24).

Mary and Joseph had entered into a pledge to be married that was as binding as marriage. Customarily, a year would pass between the conclusion of the parental arrangements for their children to be married and the consummation of that marriage. This allowed time for the husband to prepare to care for his wife. It was during this time that Mary was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. However, initially Joseph could only assume that Mary had been unfaithful, placing him in a difficult position. To accept Mary would potentially harm his reputation also.

Although Joseph could have called for Mary’s stoning, or embarrassed her by a public spectacle, he chose to divorce her quietly. But before he could implement this decision an angel brought him a message during his sleep: Mary’s pregnancy was through the Holy Spirit—not any human sexual relations, the Son must be named Jesus, and Jesus would bring salvation to the world (verses 20–22).

Matthew also revealed that this miraculous birth of a Son through a virgin fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, and was the way in which God would be with humans (Matthew 1:23). The name Immanuel, meaning “God with us,” assures us that God chose to redeem the world by coming to be with humanity in a special way. Joseph awoke and aligned himself with the work of God by taking Mary to be his wife, but not consummating the marriage until after the birth of Jesus.

Discuss

- ? How should we react when God works in ways we do not understand?
- ? How can we remain positive while we await the fulfillment of God’s plans?



□ Jesus Grew Up Within His Righteous Family

Luke 2:41–52

Say: Some people believe children should be allowed to grow up making their own decisions, with little or no influence on choosing their future religion. It is true that each individual must make a choice regarding a relationship with

God, yet the Bible makes it clear that parents are responsible for teaching their children God's Word. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, Luke 2:41–52 shows that Mary and Joseph took their parenting responsibilities seriously. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mary displayed true righteousness, as she joyfully accepted the mission of bearing the Messiah (see Luke 2:38). So did Joseph, who believed the message of the angel and took Mary to be his wife. Clearly, righteousness was central to their lives, illustrated by their faithful participation in the practice of Judaism. Jews were expected to go to Jerusalem for three major festivals each year: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Jesus' family attended the Festival of Passover annually (2:41), but their attendance when He was twelve years old was special. He, like all Jewish boys of that age, transitioned into a "son of the covenant," a ritual still observed today as the bar mitzvah. His approval by the Jewish religious leadership would mark an important transition in His life.

As the caravan of pilgrims, including Mary and Joseph, left Jerusalem to return home, Jesus stayed behind, unknown to His parents (verses 42–44). In New Testament times, the women and children traveled in one group, while the men and older boys traveled in another. It is possible that both Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was with the other, and His absence was not noted until the end of the first travel day. They returned to Jerusalem, a day's journey, and finally found Jesus on the third day. He was in the temple courts interacting with the teachers of the Law. His interactions were of such quality that the teachers and others who witnessed them were astounded that a twelve-year-old would have such a full and insightful understanding of God's revelation to Israel (verses 45–48).

When Mary and Joseph asked Jesus about His activities, His response revealed His understanding of His mission: He had to be in His Father's house, the temple. Even at this age, Jesus understood the will of the Father better than Mary and Joseph did. The divine will was also evidenced in Jesus' return to Nazareth, where He grew normally and showed the favor of God and man upon His life (verses 49–51).

Ongoing, regular participation in the religious life of Judaism was a hallmark of the home Mary and Joseph created for Jesus. This provided the proper setting for when Jesus affirmed His understanding of the plan of the Father for His life. Their faithfulness is a powerful example for us. Christians are called to live out their faith within a body of believers and in every aspect of life.



Resource Packet Item 1: Parenting Teenagers: A Case Study

Distribute the case study and divide your class into small groups. Have the groups read the story and answer the questions, then have a spokesperson from each group share their group's answers.

Discuss

- ? How important is it to attend church faithfully in our world today? Explain.
- ? What are some practical benefits and blessings that come from living a consistent life of faith?

Part 2—Jesus' Earthly Ministry



□ Baptized and Anointed for Ministry

Luke 3:21–22; 4:14–21

Say: Before Jesus was born, God had a plan for Him to be introduced to the people of Israel as the promised Messiah. God miraculously gave the childless Zechariah and Elizabeth a son in their old age. This son, John the Baptist, would prepare the way for the Messiah and introduce Him to Israel. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus (Luke 1:36), had a prophetic ministry that included the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His message challenged hearers to repent and turn from their sinful ways. Jesus was baptized by John, which aligned Him with the people He had come to save. Jesus' baptism was not the result of personal forgiveness, as Jesus was and is sinless (Hebrews 4:15).

Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus indicates that the baptism of others preceded that of Jesus, that Jesus was praying, and that a supernatural revelation of God occurred as He prayed (Luke 3:21–22). The heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended as a dove, and the voice of the Father affirmed Jesus as the Son of God. The anointing of the Holy Spirit, symbolized by a dove, identified Jesus as the One who saves people from their sins. Thus, in this setting, the three Persons of the Godhead—the Trinity—are clearly seen.

From the Jordan baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a time of testing (see Matthew 4). The anointing of the Spirit sustained Him during His forty days of fasting, enabling Him to gain a victory over the devil. The anointing of the Spirit also empowered Jesus for the beginning of His teaching ministry in the synagogues in Galilee (Luke 4:14–21). Jesus' regular participation in the religious life of Judaism is marked in His home town of Nazareth by His reading from Isaiah 61:1–2 and proclaiming that He was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Isaiah predicted an anointed One who would proclaim the good news of the Lord's favor that would result in deliverance, freedom from bondage and oppression, and healing. The long-anticipated Messiah, the Anointed One, was now publicly revealed.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think repentance held an important part in the ministry of John as well as that of Jesus?
- ? How can the empowerment of the Holy Spirit make a difference in your life?



□ Authority To Heal and Forgive

Luke 4:31–37; 5:17–26

Say: Jesus declared His authority to those around Him, and also demonstrated that authority in His ministry. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Luke 4 Jesus went to Capernaum, a village on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee and the home of several of His disciples, including Peter. As was His

custom, on the Sabbath He was in the synagogue teaching with authority (Luke 4:31–37). In New Testament times, rabbinical teachers gained authority by citing other rabbinical teaching. But Jesus' teaching, flowing from His anointing by the Spirit, was authoritative in itself.

The authority of Jesus was tested on that Sabbath by a demoniac who correctly identified Jesus and demanded to be left alone. Without hesitation, Jesus demonstrated His authority by delivering the demon-possessed man. The exodus of the demons from the man did not harm him, but instead left him restored and whole.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit was regularly nurtured by Jesus through seasons of withdrawal for the purpose of prayer (Luke 5:16). Note that Luke followed that report with an account of Jesus demonstrating His power to heal and forgive. As Jesus ministered in Galilee, He came under scrutiny from the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, some of whom had come from Jerusalem. The Pharisees were responsible for preserving Judaism after the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians, but had become increasingly legalistic. The teachers of the Law, probably from the sect of the Pharisees, were the experts in the Law. In this setting Luke reported that the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick (verse 17).

A paralyzed man's friends had faith in the authority of Jesus to heal, and they put that faith into practice by lowering him to Jesus through the roof. In that moment, Jesus linked His authority to forgive sins with that of healing (verse 20); He declared the man forgiven, then commanded him to stand, take up his mat, and go home. The forgiveness of sins, something easily verbalized, was confirmed by healing, something obviously miraculous (verses 23–26). What authority Jesus displayed!



Resource Packet Item 2: Anointing for Service

Distribute the work sheet. Students can fill in the acrostic individually, or you can do it as a class, writing the responses on the board.

Discuss

- ? What can Luke 5 teach us about how to respond when we encounter spiritual battles?
- ? Describe a time when you have seen or experienced a spiritual battle. How did the Lord help you in that situation?

Part 3—Jesus' Death and Resurrection

□ Jesus Died for Sinners

John 19:16–18, 28–42



Say: The words of Isaiah and many other prophets regarding the Messiah came to fulfillment in John 19. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament had pointed to this day when the sinless Lamb of God would lay down His life to redeem humanity from the depth of sin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After repeated efforts to convince the Jewish leadership of His innocence, Pilate finally acquiesced and handed Jesus over to be crucified (John 19:16–18). Jesus

submitted to the cross, the most cruel manner of inflicting death as the means of providing forgiveness for all the sins of the human race.

After being flogged and abused, Jesus carried the beam of His cross, with the assistance of Simon from Cyrene (see Matthew 27:32), to the place of execution. Jesus' hands were attached by nails, and the cross beam lifted and connected to the pole. After His feet were nailed to the pole, a long and painful death began. The ability to breathe became increasingly difficult. For many who were crucified, death could be extended for days. But for Jesus, who retained authority even over His life, death came earlier.

Jesus recognized the fulfillment of the plan of redemption (John 19:28) and declared, "It is finished" (verse 30). This referred to more than His death; God's plan had been accomplished in full. His work of redemption was complete.

Normally, the bodies of executed criminals were thrown into a common grave without proper burial processes. Not wanting to violate the impending Passover festival, the Jewish leadership petitioned that death be hastened by breaking the legs of the condemned. This was not necessary for Jesus, as He had already died. His body was removed from the cross and buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus (verses 38–42).

Discuss

- ? How would you describe to an unbeliever what Jesus experienced in dying for their sins?
- ? What is the proper response to the knowledge that Jesus died for you?



Jesus Rose From the Dead

John 20:11–22

Say: The horrors of crucifixion were not the end of God's plan to redeem fallen humanity. Jesus, the eternal Son of God—who came into this world miraculously in human form—was anointed by the Spirit, ministered with authority, and died bearing the sins of the world. This same Jesus rose from the dead, for death had no power over Him. And now, through Him, we can be victorious over sin and death! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection all identify the role of women in testifying to its reality. But John especially placed focus on Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18; see Matthew 28:1). Mary arrived at the tomb early on the first day of the week, finding the stone rolled away from the entrance. It was she who shared the news with Peter and John (referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved; John 20:2). It was she who encountered the risen Jesus at the entrance to the tomb (verse 14). And it was she who witnessed to the disciples that she had seen the Lord (verse 18). In that time, women held low social status compared to men. For a woman to be the witness of such an event reminds us of the inclusiveness of God's work through Jesus.

Mary's role also pointed toward a new relationship with Jesus, one not dependent on physical but spiritual presence. The instruction of Jesus that Mary not hold on to

Him points toward the Ascension and a future relationship—not bound by physical limitation and endowed with the power of the Spirit (see also John 20:19–22).



Resource Packet Item 3: The Resurrection—Then and Now

Distribute the work sheet and use it to spark a discussion of the historical reality of the Resurrection and the impact it holds for today.

Discuss

- ? Why is it significant that the Gospels record women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection?
- ? How would you describe the current nature of the Christian's relationship with Christ? The future nature of that relationship in heaven?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In spite of the sin of Adam and Eve, the frailty of the patriarchs, and the rebellion of Israel, God never gave up on humanity. He sent His Son to die for the sins of all of humankind and rise from the dead, gaining victory over Satan. We can rejoice in His love for us and enjoy our restored relationship with Him even as we anticipate our eternal home that He is now preparing for us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Look for ways you can share the marvelous plan of salvation with someone who needs a relationship with Christ.
- Examine your daily life and identify actions you can take to make your relationship with Jesus stronger than it currently is.
- Pray that God will open doors for you to demonstrate His love to those around you this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

From the Seed of Woman.
Genesis 3:13–15

Tuesday

From the House of David.
1 Chronicles 17:7–14

Wednesday

Christ's Priesthood Foretold.
Psalm 110:1–6

Thursday

Christ's Compassionate Ministry.
Matthew 9:35–38

Friday

Christ's Death Frees From Sin.
Romans 6:4–14

Saturday

Jesus the Messiah Brings Life.
2 Timothy 1:8–11

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament

November 1, 2020

LESSON 9

The Kingdom Advances

Introducing the Study

Say: While the plan of God for redeeming the world was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus, His relationship with most of the world was still broken. In order to come into right relationship with God, individuals must know about Jesus and accept Him as Savior. When He ascended, He left eleven leaders in a congregation of 120 on earth to pursue this seemingly daunting endeavor.

Opening Activity—A Job That’s Too Big

Ask: What tasks have you ever found to be much too big for you to tackle alone, and you found yourself needing to call someone to help you?

Give students a few minutes to share their answers.

Say: Before His ascension, Jesus charged His followers with the call to spread the gospel to the world. Such an endeavor would have been too large for such a small group to do on their own. Besides that, they were still fearful of the people who had crucified their Master. But Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue this calling. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Book of Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus, tells the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and traces the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. As we move forward in examining the beginning of the Church, we find that the great story of the Bible continued to unfold. Today, we continue to live the story of the expansion of the Church as we deliver the good news of Jesus to people around the world. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit continues to empower believers to do just that.

Study Text

Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–4,36–41; 4:9–13; 7:54 through 8:8; 10:9–23,34–44; 16:6–15; 18:1–11; 19:1–10; 28:16, 23–24,28–31

Central Truth

The Church grows through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Key Verse Acts 9:31

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied (KJV).

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Explore the expansion of the Church, and how this expansion relates to the Acts 1:8 mandate.
- Embrace the challenge to obey and follow Christ, as exemplified by the Early Church.
- Seek out opportunities to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and experience His power to be witnesses.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Acts 1:8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

2:4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

4:8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel.

13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

8:1. And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

10:34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.

44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

16:9. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

18:1. After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth.

11. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

28:30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him.

31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

New International Version

Acts 1:8. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2:4. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

41. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

4:8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!"

13. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

8:1. And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

10:34. Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism."

44. While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

16:9. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

10. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

18:1. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

11. So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

28:30. For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

31. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

Part 1—Believers Empowered To Witness



□ The Spirit Is Promised and Received

Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–4

Say: Just as the Messiah’s coming had been accomplished according to the detailed plan of God, so the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was neither haphazard nor unplanned. Even before His crucifixion, Jesus had told His disciples about the soon-coming Advocate (NIV) or Comforter (KJV). *Read John 16:7–11 aloud.* (Share your highlights from the following text.)

During the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus taught the disciples about the kingdom of God and told them to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49). He assured them that this promise would be realized in a few days (Acts 1:4–8).

The disciples believed the outpouring of the Spirit would be linked to the soon restoration of Israel. However, Jesus reminded them that times and dates are set by the Father and could not be known by them (verse 7). This led naturally into an explanation of the purpose for the Holy Spirit among them (verse 8). Jesus had already instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. Here, Jesus was further telling them that after they received this power, they would be witnesses for Him from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

The promise for which the disciples were waiting was realized on the Day of Pentecost, a festival occurring on the fiftieth day after the Passover (Acts 2:1–4). It was one of three annual pilgrimage festivals in Israel—the other two being Passover and Tabernacles. It was associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai, and was a time for remembering and recommitting to the covenant God made with Israel.

On this day, Jerusalem was filled with pious pilgrims, and God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples. It is important to note that all three manifestations occurring that day—the sound of wind, a visual presence of fire, and Spirit-enabled speech—were indicative of the presence of God in the Old Testament (e.g., Ezekiel 37:9–14; Exodus 3:2–5; Numbers 11:24–29). Holy Spirit baptism, clearly affirmed by speaking in languages unknown by the speaker, empowered believers for the task of being witnesses of the Christ to the world.

Discuss

- ? Why might it have been significant that Jerusalem was filled with Jewish pilgrims on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came?
- ? What signs gave evidence of God’s presence on that Day of Pentecost?



□ Believers Are Emboldened

Acts 2:36–41; 4:9–13

Say: Just before His ascension, Jesus asserted that the Holy Spirit would empower His disciples to be His witnesses throughout the world. (*Read or have a student read Acts 1:8 aloud.*) Remember that immediately following Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples had been hiding in fear of their lives. The power they demonstrated after receiving the Holy Spirit, then, gave strong

evidence to show that Jesus is the Son of God and that God's promises are sure. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The empowering of the disciples to be witnesses was immediately implemented as Peter preached to the assembled crowd about the central figure in God's plan for the redemption of the world: Jesus Christ (Acts 2:36–41). As Peter completed his sermon, he boldly asserted that what had occurred—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—testified that Jesus is Lord and Messiah (Christ).

Such a bold declaration caused the hearers to be convicted of their sins; verse 37 referred to it as being “cut to the heart” (NIV). This was an idiom that emphasized a deep reaction to Peter's message. The answer to such conviction was to “repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (verse 38, NIV). Water Baptism would be the visual sign of the sincerity of their repentance.

Repentance would then be followed by the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 38), which had been received earlier that day by the followers of Jesus. The gift of the Spirit was for all who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ—those present on that day, their descendants, those far off (both geographically and ethnically), indeed, all whom God would call (verse 39). The bold, Spirit-empowered preaching of Peter resulted in the conversion of about 3,000 people.

Later, Peter and John attended the regular time of prayer at the temple and encountered a lame man who was healed in the name of Jesus (see Acts 3). Soon the number of men who believed the message grew to about 5,000 (4:4). The Jewish religious leaders took the apostles aside for interrogation, attempting to determine the power, or name, used in the healing. Luke noted that Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” answered with boldness and clarity (Acts 4:8, NIV). This special enablement of power flowed from the experience on the Day of Pentecost. The promise of the Spirit's assistance when questioned by authorities, as well as the Spirit's empowerment to witness, were exemplified in Peter's response (see also Luke 21:12–15).

The leaders saw that Peter and John presented the truth of the gospel without equivocation (Acts 4:9–13). This caused them great astonishment because Peter and John had not been trained to their level of rabbinical theological discourse. As such, it was a great testimony to the Sanhedrin of the reality of the message they heard.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Day of Pentecost

Distribute the work sheet and assign the Scriptures to individuals or small groups, giving them a few minutes to read the passage and answer the questions. Then, as a class, discuss the final question on the sheet.

Discuss

- ? Jesus told His early followers that they needed the empowerment that came through baptism in the Holy Spirit. How important is it that followers of Jesus today be empowered by the Holy Spirit? Explain.
- ? What situations in your life call for the boldness exemplified by Peter and John in Acts 4?

Part 2—Persecuted and Growing



□ The Church Is Scattered To Grow

Acts 7:54 through 8:8

Say: Just as trials in our personal lives can help us grow in our spiritual lives, so opposition and persecution in the Church resulted in growth. Even today, in many of the countries where the Church is experiencing great persecution, the Church is also growing rapidly. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Early Church in Jerusalem endured persecution almost from the beginning. Peter and John were commanded to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus (see Acts 4:18). Later, the apostles were arrested, beaten, and ordered to no longer speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40). However, the persecutions served to accelerate the growth of the Church (e.g., Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1).

Acts 6–7 records an outbreak of persecution that caused the martyrdom of Stephen, which propelled the Church out from Jerusalem to Samaria. Stephen, one of the men placed in charge of the distribution of food to Hellenistic and Hebraic widows following a dispute (6:1–6), engaged in a great ministry among the people. He was brought before the religious leaders on the false charges of speaking against Moses, the temple, the Law, and God. In response, Stephen recounted Israel’s history, noting the rebellious nature of the people. He then accused those present of having Christ crucified. This resulted in Stephen being stoned (7:54–57).

The recounting of the stoning of Stephen introduces us to Saul (who became Paul) and showed him to be a chief persecutor of the Early Church (Acts 7:58; 8:1–4), driving believers outward from Jerusalem, preaching the Word wherever they went (Acts 8:4). At this point the focus falls upon Philip, another of those chosen to oversee the distribution of food in the Jerusalem church. Philip’s evangelistic ministry impacted Samaria with the gospel, confirmed with powerful signs and wonders and resulting in great joy (verses 5–8).

The Samaritan population was the product of a policy of the Assyrians, who conquered the Northern Kingdom (Israel). They replaced much of the Jewish population with foreigners, who were despised by the Jews. The Samaritans had built a competing temple on Mt. Gerizim and reinterpreted the Law. But the gospel spread into this region with great success as the Church was scattered by persecution. (**Play the video for Lesson 9, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.**)

Discuss

- ? How should we respond to opposition? How can we help fellow believers in parts of the world where persecution is very harsh?
- ? How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we obey the call to share the gospel with those around us?



□ God Includes the Gentiles in the Church

Acts 10:9–23,34–44

Say: From the very beginning, the plan of God had been to make redemption available to everyone. While He chose the family of Abraham to be the

ancestors of the Messiah, the good news of the gospel was not limited to the Jews, and the growth of the Early Church overcame the long-held prejudices of the culture around them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

From Samaria, the gospel continued its spread to the cities and nations of the Gentiles—a people-group considered by the Jews to be unclean. They had strict rules regarding contact with Gentiles. Going into the house of a Gentile, especially to share a meal, was considered inappropriate. To break down such barriers, God gave Peter a vision. Peter had ministered in Lydda, a city about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, and in Joppa, a major port for Israel on the Mediterranean, where he was staying in the home of Simon the Tanner. News of Peter’s miraculous ministry spread through the region and many believed on Jesus (see Acts 9:35).

North of Joppa sat Caesarea, a city named in honor of Caesar Augustus, and the product of the engineering and building prowess of Herod the Great. The city’s harbor had been deepened, a protective barrier against prevailing winds had been built, along with an amphitheater and temple, and the city had become the provincial capital. To protect all of this, a regiment of Roman soldiers was garrisoned there. It was commanded by Cornelius, a centurion. Centurions were officers in the Roman army who had proven their skill and risen through the ranks. Cornelius was a pious man, marked by generosity, devotion, and prayer. His search for God was rewarded by a vision of an angel who instructed him to send for Peter at Joppa, which he did immediately (see Acts 10:1–8).

God prepared Peter to accept the invitation through a thrice-repeated vision of a sheet filled with clean and unclean animals, a voice commanding him to eat, and a clear affirmation that what God declared clean was clean (Acts 10:9–23). Peter accepted the word from God, so he invited the Gentile emissaries from Cornelius into the house as his guests, then journeyed with them the next day to Caesarea. His sermon to the friends and relatives of Cornelius emphasized four key points: God is not a respecter of persons, Jesus proclaimed peace with God in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had been crucified and resurrected, and Jesus had commanded His followers to preach the message that He was the Judge of all humans (Acts 10:34–44). Peter concluded that belief in Jesus’ name was required for the forgiveness of sins. Then the Holy Spirit was poured out on those at Cornelius’s house, signaling God’s inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church.



Resource Packet Item 2: Church Growth: God’s Way

Distribute the work sheet and have a different student look up each passage and read it aloud noting the way Jesus prepared His disciples for the experience of the Early Church. Then discuss the application questions.

Discuss

- ? What are some people groups we might be inclined to neglect in the preaching of the gospel?
- ? How can we overcome any tendency to favor one group of people over another?

Part 3—Into All the World



□ Paul Follows the Spirit's Leading

Acts 16:9–10; 18:1,9–11

Say: The apostle Paul was committed to following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, he became a major figure in the continuing expansion of the gospel message. As he and his traveling party traveled, opposition and persecution often came, even from those to whom he preached. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Acts 1:8 describes the model for the growth of the Early Church: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles were evangelized by Spirit-empowered followers of Christ. The mission to the “ends of the earth” began as Paul and Barnabas embarked on a great missionary journey. The Spirit was active, guiding and empowering for miraculous signs and wonders. As Paul set out on a second missionary journey (Acts 15), this time with Silas, he received a word from the Spirit about the direction of the journey (Acts 16:9–10).

After moving westward across Galatia and Phrygia in Asia (what is today the region of Turkey), and being prevented by the Spirit from preaching in that region, Paul received the vision of a Macedonian man inviting him to go there. Paul and Silas obeyed this clear direction from the Spirit, and the gospel was heard in new territory. Great success, though not without opposition and rejection, was seen in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.

The Spirit-empowered spread of the gospel culminated on this journey at Corinth, a major metropolitan and trading center of the ancient world. Despite the opposition there, Paul ministered for a year and a half because the Lord had banished his fear. Paul knew that the Lord was at work in Corinth (Acts 18:1,9–11).

Discuss

- ? How can we become more sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit?
- ? How should we react when the Lord closes the door to an opportunity for ministry that seemed good to us?



□ The Message Moves Forward

Acts 19:1–6; 28:28–31

Say: The plan of God continued to move forward to the ends of the earth throughout the Book of Acts—and on into our world today. God is still moving to bring redemption to the lost. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

During his third missionary journey (beginning in Acts 18), Paul met twelve men at Ephesus who participated in John the Baptist's baptism of repentance (19:1–6). Paul taught them that the next step in their walk with God was the baptism in the Holy Spirit—which they received as he laid his hands on them. Paul continued to share the gospel at Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece, Troas, and back to Jerusalem.

After his arrest, assassination plot, imprisonment at Caesarea, and a perilous sea-journey, Paul took the gospel to the “ends of the earth” for that day: Rome

(Acts 28:28–31). Though a prisoner there, Paul was allowed to live in a rented house, where he continued to proclaim the gospel. Acts ends with Paul in Rome, teaching about Jesus (verse 31). This open-ended conclusion to Acts reminds us that the story was not—and is not—finished.



Resource Packet Item 3: Journeys of Paul

Distribute the map to your class as a take-home resource. Suggest that they note the cities and regions from the lesson and find them on the map.

Discuss

- ? What are some challenges confronting the spread of the gospel today, both in your community and around the world?
- ? How is God calling you to take part in spreading the gospel in your world?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Opposition and persecution can lead to growth, both in our churches and individually, but we must remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We cannot, in ourselves, take the gospel to the ends of the earth. But through the Holy Spirit, we can take part in that great mission.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray for God to give you direction on how you can help lead others into His kingdom.
- Be alert to look for “divine appointments,” those times when God puts someone in your path to whom you can minister.
- Ask your pastor what you can do to contribute to the growth of your church.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

A Holy People.
Deuteronomy 26:16–19

Tuesday

God Strengthens His People.
Psalm 68:32–35

Wednesday

Power To Evangelize Gentiles.
Isaiah 49:1–7

Thursday

Jesus Promises Power To Witness.
Luke 24:44–49

Friday

Jesus Promises New Worship.
John 4:19–24

Saturday

Many Samaritans Believe.
John 4:39–42

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament

November 8, 2020

LESSON 10

The Letters of Paul (Part 1)

Study Text

Romans 1:17–23; 3:9–24; 5:1,6–8;
8:1–4; 1 Corinthians 3:1–11;
15:12–58; Galatians 3:1–14

Central Truth

The writings of the apostle Paul provide instructions for the Church.



Key Verse Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (KJV).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Examine the specific instruction God gave the Church in the books of Romans, Galatians, and Corinthians.
- Accept our responsibility as Christians to live according to the teachings of Scripture.
- Reflect upon and rejoice in the great significance of Christ's resurrection.

Introducing the Study

Say: The apostle Paul wrote thirteen letters included in the New Testament (not counting Hebrews, as its authorship is uncertain). This lesson and next week's lesson will give an overview of those letters and how they advanced God's plan to redeem humanity.

Opening Activity—Letters

Ask: What important letters have you received?

Answers might include such things as letters from far-away loved ones, college acceptance or scholarship letters, and commendation letters for service in the military or some other career.

Say: Paul's letters were more than just a communication from him to the churches and individuals to whom they were addressed. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit and, as such, are part of God's Word. Even Paul's contemporary, Peter, recognized Paul's letters as Scripture (see 2 Peter 3:15–16). What a privilege it would have been to be one of the original recipients of these letters! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The grand story of the plan of God, revealed in Jesus, became central to the ministry of the apostle Paul. Not only did he preach and start churches, he also wrote letters of instruction and guidance to those churches. In his letters to three of those churches, in Corinth, Galatia, and Rome, he corrected a number of erroneous beliefs and also led them into great truths. These letters represent some of the richest and deepest studies of Scripture regarding the nature of Christ and salvation.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Romans 1:17. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

3:21. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

5:1. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

8:1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:3. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

9. For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

Galatians 3:1. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

2. This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

11. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

1 Corinthians 15:14. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

20. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

51. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

New International Version

Romans 1:17. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

18. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

3:21. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

22. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

5:1. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

8:1. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:3. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

9. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

Galatians 3:1. You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

2. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?

11. Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”

1 Corinthians 15:14. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

20. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

51. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—

52. in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Part 1—Being Made Right With God



□ All People Deserve God's Wrath

Romans 1:17–23; 3:20–24

Say: Almost every evangelism tool that has ever been created begins with explaining the premise that everyone is a sinner and deserves to be punished for sin. Scripture itself does the same thing. Paul began with that premise when he presented the plan of salvation in the Book of Romans. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the most straightforward expression, the plan of God for the salvation of fallen humankind is that His Son, Jesus, was sent into the world to redeem the world from the rebellion of sin that began in the Garden of Eden. This basic message was a central part of Paul's message in his Epistles. Note what he wrote to the church at Rome: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last" (Romans 1:17, NIV). The gospel, then, is not based on human effort to earn salvation from God; it must be received by faith because people deserve the wrath of God and cannot do anything on their own to change that reality.

Paul was clear: people are without excuse before God (verses 18–23). God revealed His eternal power and divine nature in creation. Its order, beauty, purpose, and grandeur testify to the Creator God, plainly calling out to humans to worship Him for who He is and what He has done. Yet people have rebelliously chosen to turn aside from that worship and oppose the plans and provisions of God. They chose instead to seek the creation over the Creator—the essence of foolishness.

The summary of this departure from what is known about God's provision is tragic: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV). The only means by which humans may know and return to a right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ, a provision made for all. And so, God offers that very promise to us (verse 24). His grace reaches out to the hopelessly lost individual, calling for belief in what He makes available: forgiveness and reconciliation.

Discuss

- ? What is it about creation that reveals the eternal power and divine nature of God to you? Why do you think not all humans see this?
- ? How can keeping Romans 3:23 in focus help us be more gracious and loving toward one another?



□ We Are Reconciled to God Through Jesus

Romans 5:1,6–8; 8:1–2

Say: If you've been estranged from a family member or friend and later reconciled, you know the joy reconciliation brings. We were estranged from God, but because He desires a relationship with us He gave His Son to restore our relationship with Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God results in justification, which refers to being in right standing with Him (Romans 5:1). Although we deserve wrath because of sin, humans can reach out to God knowing that He has already reached out to us. Thus, by faith the former sinner can stand righteous before God. Paul noted that through Jesus, humans know peace with God. Such peace is not merely an emotional release from tensions and concerns; it is the assurance that while formerly the wrath of God was looming, now that wrath has been removed. Access into this grace is a reality only because of Christ, whose sacrifice demonstrated the unsurpassed love of God (verses 6–8).

God appeared at what Paul called the “right time” (verse 6). Clearly Paul was aware of the plan of God and that His timing is perfect. But here Paul noted that the right time has to do with human powerlessness. Humans have absolutely no answer to their condition, so Christ died for fallen humanity to provide justification and reconciliation. The analogy in verse 7 drives home this point: One human might die on behalf of another, and be called “good” for doing so. But Christ died for humans while they were sinners.

The glory of the gospel truth is that believing in what Jesus has provided will result in standing before God without condemnation (8:1–2). The law of sin and death—that is, the clear relationship between sin and punishment prescribed by the Law—has been replaced for the believer by the life provided by the Spirit.



Resource Packet Item 1: Reconciled to God

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to draw the sketch depicting the concept of reconciliation. Ask a few people to show their drawings and explain them.

Discuss

- ? What are some things unbelievers (perhaps even Christians) might do in an effort to gain right standing with God? How might we help them understand that human effort is ineffective?
- ? How would you describe the difference between believing that salvation comes as a result of our own efforts and endeavoring to live a holy Christian life?

Part 2—Apostolic Correction and Counsel

□ Believers Are Encouraged Toward Unity

1 Corinthians 3:1–11



Say: The Bible is our authority for both belief and conduct. Paul’s letters to the churches instructed them in the faith and corrected them for problems in their behavior. One theme in his letters that appears repeatedly is the need for unity in the body of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle Paul wrote at least two letters to the church in Corinth, a community of believers that began under his ministry (Acts 18:1–17). Paul spent eighteen months ministering among them, yet he recognized that they still needed further teaching and maturity. This is the focus of 1 Corinthians 3:1–11.

Paul chided the Corinthians for continuing in their worldly ways instead of living by the Spirit. Their mind-set and interactions were not guided by the Spirit; rather, they were motivated by carnal factors. Because Paul saw them as still infants in the faith, they could not yet receive with profit more mature teachings. There was a tendency among them to be driven by jealousy and quarreling. Such motivations, expressed in their relationships with each other, hindered the opportunity for growth toward maturity in Christ.

A clear indication of such worldly behavior could be seen in their choosing to elevate human ministers beyond the status any person should hold. Some claimed to be followers of Paul; others were followers of a well-known teacher named Apollos. Paul rebuked them, reminding them that both he and Apollos were mere human beings. They had specific roles in the work of the mission of God, but all results were to be attributed to God.

The Corinthian Christians needed to unite in following God, not be divided by elevating humans, whom He used for the building of His Church. The grace of God allowed human participation in the work of the Church, so they needed to be careful about their attitudes. Only God can bring true, everlasting results in ministry.

Discuss

- ? To what extent is there a tendency to overly elevate human leaders in the Church today? Why is this dangerous for the Church?
- ? How can Christians overcome the tendency to be divided by jealousy and quarreling, like the Corinthian church?



□ We Are Saved by Faith, Not by Works

Galatians 3:1–14

Say: Some people believe that, if they do enough good deeds, they can earn their way to heaven. If that were true, the death and resurrection of Jesus would have been unnecessary. The only way to be reconciled to God is by having faith in His redemptive plan, in which Jesus took the punishment for sin. Other people believe they are saved by faith plus works. Again, this detracts from the completion of the plan of salvation through Jesus. That doesn't mean Christians shouldn't do good works; instead, those good works should be the outgrowth of their relationship with God. Because we love Him, we serve Him out of that loving relationship. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In his role as apostle, Paul dealt with a wide variety of problems in the churches. The church of Galatia, located in what is now western Turkey, had deviated from the strong foundation of faith in the work of Jesus. False teachers had promoted a message that commanded Christians to follow the Law and to be circumcised, which represented a return to Judaism. This drew many away from the core gospel belief that salvation is faith-based. Paul called this a “different gospel” and condemned it in no uncertain terms (Galatians 1:6–9).

In Galatians 3:1–14, we notice that Paul did not use his familiar address of “brothers and sisters.” Their moving away from the basis of faith prompted Paul to

call them “foolish,” a term indicating that they knew the correct path but chose to deviate from it. He appealed first to their own experience of receiving the Spirit, which was by believing what had been preached to them. If that was the way their walk with God began, how could they even consider it to be possible that they could continue such a relationship by the works of the Law? The work of the Spirit among them came because they believed the gospel, not because of their works.

It seems that those who had brought this different gospel to Galatia appealed to Abraham as their father and saw circumcision as the means by which that relationship was confirmed (verses 7–8). Paul explained that Abraham was declared righteous by God because of his faith, before the rite of circumcision was instituted (Genesis 15:6; 17:9–14). Those, then, who have faith in the message of the gospel—not those who rely on the Law—are Abraham’s children and part of the Church.



Resource Packet Item 2: Grace and Faith

Divide your class into small groups and distribute the case study. Give the groups a few minutes to answer the questions, then bring the class back together to discuss their responses.

Discuss

- ? Why, according to Paul, are works of the Law insufficient to bring someone into right relationship with God?
- ? How is your life, including your outlook and your lifestyle, different because you have been saved by faith in Christ?

Part 3—Significance of the Resurrection

□ The Resurrection of Christ

1 Corinthians 15:12–22



Say: The foundational truth that separates Christianity from other religions is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which provides the basis for the hope of our future resurrection. Paul presented a reasoned argument for both the resurrection of Christ and the future resurrection of believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Corinth, a city west of Athens, was a center for trade and culture in the Roman world. In part because of these factors, the city had many visitors who represented a wide array of false religious beliefs. This brought some difficult challenges to the church there. Paul addressed a number of issues through the course of the two epistles found in the Bible.

Some in the Corinthian church had come to believe that humans will not be resurrected (a belief rooted in Greek philosophy), even as they believed that Christ had risen from the dead. The Corinthian Christians failed to see the contradiction in that set of beliefs. So, Paul forcefully made the argument for the resurrection of Christ and the accompanying truth that believers will be resurrected.

Paul used a series of conditional clauses (see the unique clauses in 1 Corinthians 15:12–14, 16–17, 19) to make his position clear. The condition in each

of them is asserted as fact: It is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead; there is a resurrection of the dead; Christ has been raised from the dead; and so on. Paul never turned from the fundamental truth that Christ has been raised from the dead. It is foolish to believe that yet deny a resurrection from the dead for humans. If you deny believers' resurrection, you have denied Christ's resurrection.

To deny the resurrection of Christ is to make Paul's preaching of that truth of no value and to leave humanity in their sins. Further, to deny the resurrection of Christ is to say that those who have died as believers have no hope. Having the hope of the resurrection gives meaning to this life and to eternity.

Paul's conclusion is a declaration: "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (verse 20, *NIV*). Because He has been raised, He has reversed the death that befell humankind because of the sin of Adam (verses 21–22).

Discuss

- ? What are some human philosophies in the modern world that might threaten to mislead Christians?
- ? Why is the resurrection of Christ so fundamental to Christianity?



□ The Resurrection of Believers

1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Say: Because of Christ's resurrection, we can be certain that we, too, will be resurrected to live eternally with Him. Paul communicated that truth to the Corinthians, and it applies to each of us. We need not fear death because death has been conquered by Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Believers anticipate a future resurrection. Since mortal flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God, a transformation must occur (1 Corinthians 15:50–54). Paul taught that believers who are alive when Christ returns as well as those who have died before then will be changed. While the human body is obviously perishable, Christians will experience the wondrous transformation into an imperishable state. Paul used comparisons between mortal and immortal to show that believers who are alive when Christ returns will be granted that which is immortal.

Paul used the instantaneous language of "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye" (verse 52, *NIV*) to explain the nature of this transformation. This change will be when the trumpet sounds, when Christ returns to claim His Church. The parallel teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 leads us to the belief that this transformation is part of the rapture of the Church, the blessed hope of believers.

The final enemy, death—the sting of which is the consequence of sin among humans—will be conquered (1 Corinthians 15:55). Using two Old Testament quotations, Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, Paul proclaimed that death has been defeated, for victory has come through Jesus Christ our Lord (verses 56–57). This wonderful assurance should compel believers to be steadfast in the faith and lead them into service for the Lord. There is a rich reward for the faithful service of His Church (verse 58)!



Resource Packet Item 3: Resurrection Hope

Distribute the work sheet, then read the passages as a class or in small groups and list the discoveries you make in your reading.

Discuss

- ? Why is the hope of the Rapture more than just “escapism” for the believer?
How does this truth impact our daily living?
- ? In what sense are we to be motivated by a rich reward for faithful service?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We should be grateful for Christ’s reconciling work on our behalf, and in response witness to our world still under His wrath. It is tempting for believers to allow jealousies and quarrels to divide us. God calls us to avoid that trap, choosing instead to pursue unity. Repentance is needed if divisiveness has been allowed to develop. The resurrection of Christ as a historical fact as well as the basic element of Christian faith is central to all that the Church is. Think about ways to witness to this truth in a world that denies the miraculous.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take time to examine your heart to see if you are trying to earn your relationship with God rather than serve Him out of love for all He has done.
- If there is someone in the body of Christ against whom you are holding a grudge, take a step this week to repair that relationship.
- Do at least one thing this week to help point an unbeliever toward reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Abraham’s Faith Produces Blessing.
Genesis 22:1–2,9–19

Tuesday

David’s Cry for Mercy.
Psalm 51:1–12

Wednesday

Salvation Provided Without Cost.
Isaiah 55:1–5

Thursday

Paul Confronted by Christ.
Acts 9:1–8

Friday

Paul Receives a Revelation.
2 Corinthians 12:1–6

Saturday

Paul’s Apostleship Substantiated.
Galatians 1:11–17

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament

November 15, 2020

LESSON 11

The Letters of Paul (Part 2)

Study Text

Ephesians 2:11–23; 4:7–16; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10; 1 Timothy 6:3–12; 2 Timothy 2:1–7; 3:1–5; Titus 3:1–8

Central Truth

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church.



Key Verse Colossians 1:18

He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (KJV).

He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand the three key truths in this lesson: Christ is the Head of the Church, Christ will return for believers, and leaders are to follow Christ.
- Commit to living as one who is fully surrendered to Christ.
- Find opportunities to lead others into accepting the truth of Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today, we will continue our exploration of the letters written by Paul. The breadth of topics covered in these letters, as well as their timelessness, serve to remind us that he was inspired by God as he wrote these words. His messages are timeless and true—as relevant today as they were in the first century.

Opening Activity—Benefits of the Body

Ask: What benefits of being part of the body of Christ can you name?

Allow your students to name several benefits as you record them on the board. Some answers you may hear include: forgiveness from sin, hope for eternity in heaven, fellowship with other believers, and help from the Holy Spirit in making decisions.

Say: The original recipients of Paul's letters were still learning about the benefits of having a relationship with God. While those who have been Christians for many years have heard these truths before, they were new to the first-century audience. As we study this lesson, try to read with fresh eyes as they would have read, and ask God to help you learn the truths being taught. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This is the second lesson based on the letters of Paul. It advances the previous lesson on the reconciling work of Jesus, the encouragement of unity within the Church, and a commitment to the truth of the resurrection of Christ. This lesson further engages Paul's teaching, with a focus on Christ as the Head of the Church, Christ's soon return, and leadership in the Church.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Colossians 1:17. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Ephesians 2:19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

4:11. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:16. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

2 Thessalonians 2:12. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

1 Timothy 6:11. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

2 Timothy 2:1. Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Titus 3:5. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6. Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

New International Version

Colossians 1:17. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Ephesians 2:19. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

20. built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

4:11. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

12. to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

1 Thessalonians 4:16. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

18. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

2 Thessalonians 2:12. And so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

1 Timothy 6:11. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

12. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

2 Timothy 2:1. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

Titus 3:5. He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

6. whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Part 1—Christ and His Church



□ Christ: The Head of the Church Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 2:19–23

Say: Christ is the Head of the Church. Let's consider what the head does for the body. It chooses the direction and actions of the body. It directs members of the body to care for the body. For example, if a finger touches a hot stove, the head tells the hand, wrist, and elbow to move the finger away from the heat. Likewise, Christ uses members of the body to care for one another. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle Paul used multiple metaphors when talking about the Church. (Note that the term “Church,” with a capital “C,” refers to all believers around the world.) One of Paul's most meaningful and insightful metaphors is the comparison between the Church and the human body, detailed in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 2:19–23 offer deeper insight into this concept. In these passages, Paul taught that Christ is the Head of the Body (or, the Church). This metaphor emphasizes His supremacy, leadership, and sustenance for the believing community. Colossians 1:15–20 establishes this reality upon the fact that Jesus is divine Creator.

Note Paul's exalted language in the Colossians passage. Christ is the Son of God, the very image of God who is invisible, the One in whom all the fullness of God dwelled. Jesus himself declared this truth when He told the apostles that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father (see John 14:9). Christ was not merely a replica of the Father or a representative of the Father; He is all that the Father is. To assert that He was the “firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15, NIV) does not just recognize that Christ is eternal. It also sees Christ as preeminent over creation. Christ was and is both Creator and Sustainer of all things. And He is also the means by which sinful humanity is reconciled to the Father, having died on the cross and risen from the dead.

Paul also used a different metaphor in emphasizing the centrality of Christ in understanding the Church. In Ephesians 2:19–23, the Church is compared to a building, a reference to the holiest place in the temple, the Holy of Holies. The foundation of this building is the message of Jesus, proclaimed by the apostles and prophets. And Christ is the Cornerstone, giving unity and purpose to the building. The purpose of the Church is to be the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Discuss

- ? How can describing Christ as the “Head” of the Body, the Church, help us better understand the purpose of the Church?
- ? How does your life reflect the reality that you are a part of the Church? How should your life reflect this reality?



□ Christ's Gifts Build the Church Ephesians 4:11–16

Say: Christ, the Head of the Church, provides special gifts of leadership to the Church for the purpose of bringing it to spiritual maturity—to the “whole

measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Earlier in this chapter Paul had talked about God’s grace as a gift to His Church (see verse 7), then he sharpened his focus to center on special gifts that serve the Church, promoting service among the congregation and growth toward becoming the full expression of what God intends the Church to be.

Paul identifies five leadership gifts, three of which seem to be focused more on the larger Church, beyond the local body, and two of which are more focused on the local body. Apostles and prophets—those especially sent with a charge from Christ and those through whom clear and special messages are delivered, were identified earlier in Ephesians (2:20) as the foundation of the Church. Evangelists have the unique and important ministry of taking the gospel to unbelievers who need to hear the message of Christ. Pastors and teachers are linked in Ephesians 4. Their giftings bless a local congregation by instructing believers in the truths of the gospel and caring for their needs and concerns.

Christ gave the Church these leadership gifts to promote ministry and service among the believers, with the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ—that is, the Church as a whole as well as the local congregations. Unity and knowledge of Jesus, signs of maturity, lead us toward the full expression of Christ in us. The contrast is very clear: Instead of being infants, easily distracted and deceived, the Church is to speak and to live out truth, and thus grow into maturity as each member fulfills his or her call and purpose.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Nature of the Church

Distribute the work sheet and assign each row to someone. Ask them to read it aloud and determine what description of the Church is included.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important that believers remember that the Head of the Church is not a human leader, but Christ himself? How would fully grasping this truth alter actions and choices?
- ? How can Ephesians 4 help us understand what is meant by spiritual maturity (and spiritual immaturity)?

Part 2—About Christ’s Coming

Believers Will Rise To Be With Christ

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18



Say: A few years ago, the second coming of Christ was a major topic for sermons, conversations, and books. While there was much speculation about just how the various events would unfold, we can all agree that we have this assurance: There is a glorious future awaiting the Church. That future, as Paul taught the Thessalonian church, would be the joyous reality of eternity in the presence of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Thessalonians accepted this message because they recognized its absolute truth. But there was a serious question that concerned them: What about believers who died before Christ returns to receive believers into His eternal presence? To better understand their questions, it is helpful to understand the ancient culture of the Roman Empire. Many rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection. (This belief had impacted the Church, and even reached into the Christian understanding of Christ.) But if this were the case, some were concerned that their deceased brothers and sisters would not be included in the glorious future.

Paul answered their concern with a word of assurance, reminding them of the work of Jesus in dying on the cross and rising from the grave (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Because Jesus rose, death is not the end for believers. There is a great future for all Christians, living and dead: At the loud command and the voice of the archangel announcing the return of Christ, the dead believers will first be resurrected; then, those believers who are alive at His return will be caught up together with them into the clouds to meet Christ in the air. In Latin, the phrase “caught up” is a translation of the word *raptus*, from which the concept of Rapture comes. Not only will those who die before the return of Christ not be abandoned, but they will in fact rise first. These are very comforting and encouraging words for believers!

Discuss

- ? What does the hope of the Rapture mean to you, and how does it affect your life?
- ? The Early Church was sometimes affected by false beliefs regarding the resurrection of the dead. What are some false beliefs today that threaten to impact the Church, and how can we counter these false beliefs?



□ The Deceiver Will Be Defeated

2 Thessalonians 2:1–10

Say: You may remember being frightened by some of the events described in books and movies depicting the Second Coming. While the warnings must be heeded and some of the events are very sobering, Christians can have hope because, ultimately, Satan will be defeated and we will live with Christ the Victor in eternal joy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, he addressed a false teaching that was troubling the believers there: They wondered whether the Day of the Lord—that is, the Rapture and the events following—had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:1–10). This teaching was being wrongly attributed to Paul. He replied that there were two events that would precede the Day of the Lord: a rebellion and the revelation of one whom he called the man of lawlessness—the Antichrist.

The rebellion—an apostasy—refers to a deliberate turning away from the gospel. The man of lawlessness will be identified by the ungodly activities enumerated

in 2 Thessalonians 2:4: opposition to the will God, determination to be seen as greater than God, prideful claim to be God, and the deliberate choice to violate God's temple. He will use extraordinary powers, signs, and wonders, all enabled by Satan. His doom, however, is certain.

Paul assured the Thessalonians that his teaching was simply affirming what he had taught them while present among them. There is a factor that is presently holding back the rebellion and the man of lawlessness: the Holy Spirit working in and through the Church. The removal of the Church, which has not yet occurred, will open the way for the Day of the Lord, a time of terrible judgment.



Resource Packet Item 2: Views on the Rapture

Distribute the information sheet and briefly discuss the different views of the rapture. Point out that the Assemblies of God believes in a pre-tribulation rapture.

Discuss

- ? Is it ever helpful and edifying to speculate about the specifics of end-time prophecies, such the identity of the man of lawlessness, in relationship to current events? Explain.
- ? How are you encouraged by the message of Christ's coming?

Part 3—Pastoral Care and Instruction

□ Paul Cautioned Believers

1 Timothy 6:3–12; 2 Timothy 3:1–5



Say: This segment of the lesson moves to what is known as the pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus). Paul was a mentor to Timothy and Titus, both of whom traveled with him at some point. The rich truths he shared with them apply to the lives of believers today, and are not limited to individuals in leadership positions. Let's look at these letters as though they were written to us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul wrote letters to two of his protégés: Timothy and Titus. These were men who had worked with him in preaching the gospel and who were now leading congregations in Ephesus and Crete, respectively. Paul used 1 Timothy 5 to set out important teachings that Timothy was to reinforce with the believers: relationships within families and within the Church, such as the responsibility to care for the widows, proper respect for the elders, and proper care for one's health.

Paul, however, warned that there would be those who would not accept his positive teachings about the life of the community (1 Timothy 6:3–10). He saw these people as conceited, lacking understanding, and given to quarreling and disputing. Their opposition to sound teaching was at least partly rooted in the assumption that the goal of the Christian faith is financial gain.

That which really brings gain—not necessarily financial gain—is the contentment that grows out of godliness. The true believer recognizes that the

search for financial gain is a never-ending cycle. We should recognize that having the basic needs for existence—supplies, food and clothing—is adequate. The love of money and the over-emphasis on getting rich, however, have the potential to produce other evils.

It is no surprise that there will always be some who refuse to follow sound teaching and living. Paul noted that such refusal is a sign of the last days (see 2 Timothy 4:3). In 3:1–5 Paul provided a detailed list of character traits and actions of those who fall away from the truth, concluding with a sad commentary: They love pleasure more than they love God, and they maintain a form of the faith but deny the true power of the gospel.

Discuss

- ? What do you think it means to deny the power of the gospel? (Think about the practical results of this power in forming an answer.)
- ? Are the vices Paul enumerated in 2 Timothy 3:1–5 present today? Explain.



Paul Instructed Younger Leaders

2 Timothy 2:1–7; Titus 3:1–8

Say: Young Christians, whether or not they are in leadership roles, need spiritual mentors who will challenge them and guide them. Paul served in this role to the younger Timothy and Titus as they led their congregations. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Timothy and Titus had great responsibilities in their ministries. Paul challenged Timothy to be strong in the grace that comes through Jesus, and for good reason (2 Timothy 2:1–7). Grace provides invaluable help when facing the challenges of opposition and rejection. It is vital that leaders not only live by the truths that have been taught to them, but also transmit them to others. They can then, in turn, teach them to others. The Church endures and expands as its truths are passed on to succeeding generations.

Paul used three images to impress upon Timothy some important lessons of leadership: the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer. Through these images, Paul offered a reminder that leadership roles include suffering; it was true for Paul and will be for all leaders (verse 3). The image of the soldier challenges the leader to have a single focus of pleasing the One who enrolled him or her in service—for the Christian leader, that is Christ. Furthermore, to receive the crown indicative of winning an athletic contest one must follow the rules of the game. Likewise, the farmer, who is hardworking and diligent about the task will enjoy the fruit of the labor.

Young leaders must remember that the mercy seen in the redemptive work of Jesus has provided justification with God and placement as an heir of God. The old life of failed relationships and enmity between others and God has passed away. This renewed life must challenge leaders to encourage right relationships among believers, marked by gentleness, peace, consideration, and doing what is good (Titus 3:1–8).



Resource Packet Item 3: Timothy and Titus

Distribute the work sheet and have students fill it out individually or in small groups. You might want to have some groups work on the “Timothy” section while others work on the “Titus” section. Then discuss ways that class members might wish to be described by someone writing about them.

Discuss

- ? What cautions and challenges from Paul to Timothy and Titus speak most directly to you? Explain.
- ? What are some ways Christians serve as leaders that are not always recognized as leadership roles? Why would Paul’s instruction be valuable in these roles?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Note three important truths from this lesson: (1) If we grasp that Christ is the Head of the Church, we will recall that He is worthy of our obedience and service. (2) Christ’s soon return should motivate us to look forward to His coming. (3) God has given leadership gifts to help equip Christians for service. With this in mind, let us seek out mentors who can help us grow in our faith, even as we look for opportunities to mentor others.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Write a note of appreciation to one or more leaders in your church. This may be a pastor or someone else whose work keeps the church running smoothly.
- Look for an opportunity to witness to someone in your sphere of influence who may not be ready for Christ’s coming.
- Find a time this week to meet with someone who can mentor you in your faith (if you are a young Christian) or with someone whom you can mentor (if you are a more mature Christian).

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Jacob’s Ladder.
Genesis 28:10–19

Tuesday

The King of Glory.
Psalm 24:1–10

Wednesday

Isaiah Sees God’s Glory.
Isaiah 6:1–4

Thursday

Jesus Referred to Jacob’s Ladder.
John 1:43–51

Friday

Isaiah Saw the Glory of Christ.
John 12:37–41

Saturday

Christ and the Church.
Ephesians 5:25–32

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament

November 22, 2020

LESSON 12

Other New Testament Letters

Introducing the Study

Say: The eight letters in the New Testament not written by Paul are referred to as the “general epistles.” Three were written by John, two by Peter, one by James (the Lord’s brother), and one by Jude (also a brother of Jesus). The writer of Hebrews is unknown and is a topic of speculation among theologians, but the message of Hebrews is important. Today’s lesson focuses on the truths contained in some of these letters.

Opening Activity—How Are Christians Different?

Ask: We know that we are saved by faith and not by works. Faith is not a visible quality. So, how can unbelievers see faith displayed in the lives of their believing friends, loved ones, coworkers, and neighbors?

You may get answers such as these: their love for one another, the way they treat their neighbors, going to church, and sharing their faith with others.

Say: This lesson focuses on three foundational truths of the Christian faith: Christ alone is our High Priest and Author of our salvation; faith without works is dead; and the love of God must shine through us to the world. Let’s pray that the Holy Spirit will make these truths real to us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This lesson considers important teachings from the Epistles of James, Peter, Jude, John, and the author of Hebrews. After two lessons on the writings of the apostle Paul, the focus here turns to those from others within the circle of leaders in the Early Church. Space will not allow lengthy treatments of the background of each book, but access to a study Bible or commentaries will be helpful.

Study Text

Hebrews 1:1–4; 3:1–6; 7:23–28;
James 2:14–26; 2 Peter 1:3–8;
1 John 3:1–3, 16–18; 4:7–12, 16–21;
Jude 1:17–21

Central Truth

God’s Word portrays the Christian life.



Key Verse 2 Peter 1:4

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (KJV).

Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand why Christians must recognize that Christ is preeminent and that faith must be accompanied by works.
- Accept the responsibility that accompanies the call to express faith through good works.
- Consider ways to express faith and godly love through good works.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Hebrews 1:1. God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:

4. Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

7:24. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

27. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

James 2:17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

2 Peter 1:5. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6. And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7. And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

Jude 1:20. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

1 John 3:1. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

18. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

4:7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

New International Version

Hebrews 1:1. In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

2. but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

3. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

4. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

7:24. But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

27. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

James 2:17. In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

26. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

2 Peter 1:5. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

6. and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

7. and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

Jude 1:20. But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,

21. keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

1 John 3:1. See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

18. Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

4:7. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Part 1—The Preeminence of Christ



□ Jesus Is God's Son

Hebrews 1:1–4; 3:1–6

Say: The lessons for this quarter have shown the Bible as the story of God's plan of redemption for humanity. Hebrews, perhaps more than any other New Testament book, ties the Old Testament and the New Testament together, showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The writer of Hebrews opened the letter with the basic theme of the book—the truth that Jesus is God and deserves all worship (Hebrews 1:1–4). The writer encouraged readers with the truth of Christ's preeminence, and for good reason. Should one fail to continue following Christ, there would be no other hope for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. This is one of the key themes of the Book of Hebrews.

From the beginning, God has always spoken to humankind. In the Old Testament, faithful and true messengers—the prophets—received and communicated the word from God, and did so in a variety of ways. However, Christ is the ultimate “Word” of God to humans. Instead of speaking through prophets, God now has spoken in His Son.

It was through the Son that creation—including the sustaining of creation—occurred, and Christ has been made the Heir of everything. The Son is the radiance of God's glory, not because He merely reflects the glory of God but because the glory of God is within Him. There is no variation as to the Son's representation of God; the representation is exact, full, complete, and accurate. After His work in providing complete cleansing for humans from sin, He took His seat in the heavenlies.

Whereas chapter 1 asserts that Jesus is superior to heavenly beings (angels), chapter 3 asserts Christ's superiority to Moses, the great deliverer who was a faithful servant in God's house (see Numbers 12:7). Jesus, by contrast, was the Builder of the house and was faithful as the Son, over the house (Hebrews 3:1–6).

The phrase “apostle and high priest” in 3:1 points to Christ's preeminence. Scholars note the connection between the apostle and high priest. Both acted on behalf of another: the apostle represented Christ to the people, and the priest represented the people before God. But while Moses represented the people before God, he was not a priest (that role was filled by his brother, Aaron). Only Jesus could fill both functions. Only He could be the living Word and the high priest.

Discuss

- ? What does Hebrews say about Jesus in comparison with angels and with Moses?
- ? Who does the unbelieving world say that Jesus is, and how does this compare with who we know Him to be?



□ Jesus Is Our High Priest

Hebrews 7:23–28

Say: The Old Testament system of sacrifices was administered by the priests who were descendants of Aaron, who, along with his sons, was ordained to

serve as a priest in Exodus 29. But Jesus, our High Priest, is far superior to the priesthood of Aaron. He was without sin so He could present himself as the Sacrifice to provide redemption for us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The theological assertion about the preeminence of Christ is seen in Hebrews 3:1, with the naming of Christ as apostle and high priest. It became more focused by the writer from Hebrews 4:14, and is carried forward throughout the remainder of the book, with differing emphases. Hebrews 7:23–28 encapsulates the basics of the argument, reminding us that Jesus, as the Son of God, is superior to anyone and anything that has been created.

Jesus is the High Priest, superior to the levitical system of sacrifices, because He has a permanent priesthood. In the levitical system, the tenure of the priests ended with physical death. But Jesus is eternal—forever past and forever future. The salvation He provides is all inclusive, not merely the temporary removal of guilt for sinful behavior. Since He is seated, a reality that testifies to His having completed His offering, He does not need to stand before the Father and remind Him of what He accomplished.

Jesus is superior to the levitical system because of His character—holy, blameless, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. The priests of the levitical system were human, subject to the frailties of humanity. So, they had to offer sacrifices both for their own sins and for those of the people, a ministry that they continued from day to day. Jesus, being without sin, offered himself a complete sacrifice for sin, once for all.

The levitical priests offered sacrifices of animals, grains, oils, etc. The great High Priest, Jesus, offered himself; He was both the Priest and the Sacrifice. His priesthood was not like that which fulfilled the Law through the tribe of Levi (see 7:1–11). He was a Priest, from the tribe of Judah, because of an oath, ascribed to God (see 7:14–22), which the writer quotes from Psalm 110:4. Melchizedek preceded the Law and was not a Levite but the King of Salem (most likely Jerusalem) and priest of the Most High God (Genesis 14:18–20). Yet Abraham submitted to him in the paying of tithes. In placing Christ within the order of Melchizedek, Hebrews affirms Him as superior to the priestly and sacrificial system of the Law.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Levitical Priesthood

Distribute the information sheet showing the purposes and limitations of the levitical priesthood. Briefly touch on each item and contrast it to the priesthood of Christ as described in the New Testament. Take time to give praise for Jesus, our great High Priest.

Discuss

- ? How might the Book of Hebrews help you better understand why Scripture teaches that Jesus is the only Way to salvation?
- ? What are some ways people attempt to reach God outside of Jesus, and how should we respond when we see someone making such an attempt?

Part 2—The Provision of Faith



□ Faith Produces Good Deeds

James 2:14–26; 2 Peter 1:3–8

Say: In Lesson 10 of this quarter, we discussed our inability to earn our salvation through good works. It is important to balance our discussion of faith and works by understanding that God's grace is attained through faith to bring us salvation, but as a result of that salvation, we are to live in a way that pleases Him. Some would have us believe that there is a discrepancy between the teachings of James and those of Paul. However, they are really just two sides of the same coin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

James 2:14–26 tackles the fundamental question of how we define saving faith. What does it mean to profess belief in the gospel? James 2:14 begins the passage by asking questions that anticipate a negative answer, for James sought to prove that faith without deeds does not save.

To make the point, James presented some illustrations, the first being the dramatic story of merely responding to a needy person with a lack of concern. Such faith, absent any provision of clothing and food, accomplishes nothing.

The contrast between one who claims faith without deeds and the other who has deeds without faith led to the challenging reminder that even devils believe in one God and shudder, but such belief accomplishes nothing unaccompanied by deeds of repentance and good works. Abraham, of whom it is said that he believed God and was credited with righteousness, testified to and fulfilled that faith by offering Isaac, the son that had fulfilled God's promise to him (see Genesis 15:6; 22:1–19).

The last illustration that faith requires works cites the story of Rahab (James 2:25). Rahab, a Canaanite and citizen of Jericho, verbalized her understanding of what God was doing in His people, then evidenced faith by hiding the spies sent by Joshua and helping them escape unharmed (see Joshua 2:1–24). Her faith is further evidenced by her incorporation into the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5) and inclusion in the list of heroes of the faith (see Hebrews 11:31).

Peter offered us a very practical teaching on this topic by exhorting God's people to add to their faith a variety of tangible and observable qualities, capped by love (2 Peter 1:3–8). This life of genuine faith, evidenced in works, brings effectiveness to our Christian lives.

Faith for salvation requires more than verbal assertion, agreeing with the gospel message. It includes demonstrating faith by involvement in the doing of good deeds of mercy and grace that engage hurting people with the fullness of the gospel.



Resource Packet Item 2: Teachings of James, Peter, and Paul

Distribute the work sheet and ask students to work in small groups to compare teachings of James, Peter, and Paul in the indicated passages. Then ask a few of the groups to share their findings. Be sure to show that these passages are not in conflict with one another, but work together to present the truth.

Discuss

- ? What are some specific examples of the deeds of a believer that evidence faith for salvation?
- ? How can we ensure that we don't confuse seeing works as a mandatory fruit of saving faith with seeing works as a means to salvation?

□ Be Persistent in Faith

Jude 1:17–21



Say: The short Book of Jude describes ungodly people who would try to lead people away from God. The book calls believers to stand up for their faith in the midst of ungodliness. It then provides instruction on how Christians can prepare for the spiritual battles they will face. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jude was compelled in his Epistle to challenge his readers to contend for the faith. Ungodly false teachers were making a negative impact on the community of faith, and Jude exposed their methods and hypocrisy. He also encouraged the community of faith to stand against them (1:17–21). As he neared the end of the small Epistle, he summarized and applied this message.

The apostles had taught that these challenges were to be expected. (See also 2 Peter 3:1–7, which asserts that such conditions will exist in the last days, especially focusing on the return of Jesus.) Jude observed those who troubled the Church in broader terms. He noted that they followed their own ungodly desires because they chose to make light of the gospel rather than believe it. They brought division to the community of faith, following their sinful desires.

To answer them, Jude instructed believers to consistently build up their grasp of and commitment to the faith. This included praying in the Holy Spirit. The enablement of the Spirit to assist the believer is priceless. Still today, we must stay strong in the love of God, always seeking to live in an environment that fosters intimacy with God. Furthermore, the hope of eternal life draws us toward God.

Dealing with those who bring trouble to the Church is a complex issue. Some need to be shown mercy; others need to be rescued from the negative direction of their lives; and still others may need a mixed response of mercy and confrontation.

Discuss

- ? How can we identify those who are bringing trouble to the Church today?
- ? How can we know the way in which we need to confront people who are bringing trouble to the Church?

Part 3—The Necessity of Love

□ God Loves Us

1 John 3:1–3,16–18



Say: It should not be surprising that the main theme of John's Epistles is love. You may recall that in the Gospel of John, the author referred to himself as

“the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 21:7; 21:20). What an amazing way to identify ourselves! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In his first Epistle, as in his Gospel, John the apostle taught extensively about the reality of God’s love as well as the impact that love must have upon daily living. He marveled that humans are children of God (1 John 3:1–3). That is possible only because of the great love the Father lavished on humanity. The extravagance of God’s love is beyond the ability to understand.

As a result, however, a world that does not know God cannot know His children, either (verse 1). It should not come as a surprise, then, when unbelievers struggle to understand the nature and breadth of our faith. Such understanding cannot be known by the unbeliever.

Yet we also have a great hope: We will one day see Christ when He appears, and we will be changed to be like Him. Such an assurance, unknown to the world, draws the believer forward to be more like Christ.

John then addressed the question fundamental to all of these teachings: “How can one know that God loves him or her?” The answer must be based on more than feelings, and John was clear; we have God’s love because Christ died in the place of fallen humanity. The sinless One died for the sinner; the guiltless One died for the guilty, God in Christ assumed humanity to become the sacrifice for sin—that is love (3:16–18)!

Such love must draw from the believer a determination to demonstrate such love to others. Such love cannot merely be couched in speeches and discussion; it must be put into action, helping those in need.

Discuss

- ? How do you know that God loves you?
- ? Describe what it means to you to know that God loves you.



□ God Calls Us To Love Others

1 John 4:7–12,16–21

Say: The majesty of the love of God for humanity, demonstrated by Christ’s sacrifice, must become more than a theological tenet that amazes and puzzles us. It must be lived out as the believer demonstrates God’s love to others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John’s challenge in 1 John 4:7 is clear, simple, and well-stated: “Let us love one another” (NIV). Since God is love (not merely one who loves) His followers demonstrate that they participate in His nature of love by loving others (see 2 Peter 1:4). In this way they testify to being born of God and knowing Him.

It is contradictory to profess that God is love and yet refuse to be instruments of His love to others. Loving others witnesses to the truth that God lives in humans and is working out His nature in them.

Such love has a further benefit and result: Believers will be able to stand with confidence on the day of judgment (verses 16–21). As our love for others continues

to shine brighter and brighter, we bear an increasing likeness to Jesus. His love, evidenced in us, can drive away all fear of not being ready for the Judgment.



Resource Packet Item 3: Love Even When It's Difficult

Distribute the work sheet and have class members discuss difficult issues facing today's culture. Discuss unloving and loving responses.

Discuss

- ? What are some specific ways in which we demonstrate God's love to others?
- ? How can John's teachings on love soothe any fears we have about the future?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: What is your perception of Christ? Your answer is the basis for what you do with this lesson. Christ is not equal to or comparable to anyone; He is preeminent. As our great High Priest, He became the sacrifice for our sins. Only through Him can we have a right relationship with God, one that will lead us to do good works, love God, and love others. God loved fallen humans, gave His Son for them, and expects His love to be expressed through them to others.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Examine your perception of Christ. Do you really recognize His preeminence in your life? Pray that God will help you overcome any misconceptions.
- Look for someone to whom you can show love this week in a tangible way. Try to find someone with whom you have never before had any interaction.
- Pray for strength, wisdom, and love as you contend for the faith in your community.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Blessings of Obedience.
Deuteronomy 28:1–13

Tuesday

Faithfulness Rewarded.
Ruth 4:9–17

Wednesday

Righteous Job Restored.
Job 42:10–17

Thursday

Jesus' Followers Experience
True Rest.
Matthew 11:28–30

Friday

A New Commandment From Jesus.
John 13:31–35

Saturday

The Necessity of Faith.
Hebrews 10:36 through 11:3

Unit 2: Story of the New Testament

November 29, 2020

LESSON

13

Triumph of God's Kingdom

Study Text

Revelation 5:6–14; 7:9–17;
11:15–19; 12:7–11; 19:11
through 21:5,22–27

Central Truth

Jesus Christ will return in glory and power to establish His kingdom.



Key Verse

Revelation 11:15

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever (KJV).

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Examine the message of Revelation, especially as it relates to the defeat of evil and the eternal kingdom of God.
- Find and value joy in the face of present circumstances through the assurance of our God-given future.
- Worship Christ and live in hope, anticipating His ultimate victory.

Introducing the Study

Say: Imagine beginning a novel by reading the last few pages first. In most cases, you probably wouldn't learn much about the characters or the plot if you started at the end. Some people try to study the Book of Revelation without first understanding God's story from the beginning. This can lead to confusion, fear, and misunderstanding.

Opening Activity—A Spectrum of Emotions

Ask: When people approach a study of the Book of Revelation, what emotions might they have?

Depending on the ages and experiences of the people in your class, answers may include: fear, confusion, and excitement. Have them explain why they gave the answers they did.

Say: The Book of Revelation has prompted many debates over the years. Discussions about Revelation's images and timing can distract from the important truths that need to be conveyed. As we move through this study, it is important that we seek the help of the Holy Spirit in staying focused on the central message of the book: the triumph of God and His kingdom over the powers of evil. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The plan of God, which began in the teachings, history, and prophecy of the Old Testament, was revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This plan has been proclaimed throughout the world from the Early Church through today and on into the future. The completion of this plan is found in the Book of Revelation. While the text of Revelation points forward to the full realization of what God has planned for the world, it also brings comfort, assurance, and even challenges for us in the present.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Revelation 5:12. Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.

13. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

7:10. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

11:15. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

12:10. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

19:11. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

15. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

21:2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

22. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

23. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

New International Version

Revelation 5:12. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

13. Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

7:10. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

11:15. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

12:10. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."

19:11. I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

15. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

16. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

21:2. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

22. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

23. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.



Say: God’s plan to redeem all of humanity through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, culminates in Revelation. Here we see Him as the Lamb who was slain to take away the sin of the world, a theme that has run like a thread through the entire Bible. He is worthy of all worship and honor. It is through Him that all people have opportunity to be reconciled to God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Book of Revelation records John’s dramatic vision regarding the culmination of the age. In chapter 5, John was saddened because there did not seem to be anyone who could open a scroll (verses 1–4). John could rejoice, however, because Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, having triumphed, would be able to open it (verse 5).

Yet as John waited for the presentation of the Lion, he instead saw a Lamb, looking like He had been slain. In this way, the vision depicted the fact that triumph had been achieved through suffering. The Lamb, who was the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, was worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the One on the throne, setting forth tremendous worship and praise to the Lamb (verses 6–14).

Note that verses 6–14 depict three groups who shout out in praise to the Lamb, each ascribing to the Lamb the praise due Him. In the first group were the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (verse 8). As representatives of the people of God, they brought their prayers into the presence of God. Their new song noted the worthiness of the Lamb because of His sacrificial death. Through Him, every tribe, language, and nation, could come together as a kingdom of priests to serve God (verses 9–10).

The second group of singers in worship of the Lamb was the angelic choir, the size of which defies our imagination (verse 11). John’s description as to the size of the angelic chorus reminds us of Daniel’s vision of the throne room of God in Daniel 7:10: “Thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Revelation 5:11, NIV). Again, the Lamb is worthy to receive worship because of His sacrificial death to redeem fallen humanity.

The third group of worshippers is composed of “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea” (verse 13, NIV). The scene in Revelation 5, then, is one of utter and undivided worship “to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (NIV). And so, as we explore the Book of Revelation, we must recognize the central theme of the glory of the Lord fully manifested and recognized at the end of the age.

Discuss

- ? What does Revelation 5 teach us about how and why we should worship Jesus today?
- ? How much of a priority do you place on the worship of Christ? How much of a priority should a Christian place on worshipping Him?



Say: In this final book of the New Testament, we see the larger scope of God’s redemptive plan. While He chose the family of Abraham through whom to bring His Son, our Savior, into the world, His plan was to redeem all of humanity from sin. In this passage, we see the result of that in the multitude that John saw in his vision. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The vision in Revelation 7 amplifies the message of Revelation 5, particularly verse 9: The Lamb has redeemed people from all nations. In verses 9–17, John saw an innumerable multitude standing before the Lamb. They are from “every nation, tribe, people, and language” (verse 9, NIV). This terminology is important because it highlights the all-inclusive nature of God’s plan for redemption. No people group is excluded from the opportunity to be a part of the family of God. The power of this scene is further depicted by the clothing of this multitude—white robes—and the palm branches in their hands. These things signify a completed redemption as well as a glorious victory. Those who have responded to Christ have received the provision of the Lamb for their salvation and have been victorious through the Great Tribulation (verse 14).

Their praise attributes salvation to God and to the Lamb. It evokes an “Amen,” and additional praise from the angels around the throne (verse 12). The future for these redeemed from all nations is wondrously described by one of the elders to John. The redeemed will be sheltered by the presence of God as they serve Him continually. All former troubles and trials will have passed, never to return, for the Lamb will be their Shepherd. The One who was slain for their salvation will lead them to places of refreshment, wiping all tears from their eyes (verse 17).

**Resource Packet Item 1: To Every Nation**

Distribute the work sheet. (If possible before class, obtain a list of missionaries your church supports.) Mark countries where your church or your students pray for and support missions.

Discuss

- ? In eternity the redeemed will include every tribe, nation, people, and language
How should that impact our involvement in missions and evangelism?
- ? How should our attitudes toward the people around us and around the world be shaped by the fact that in eternity the redeemed will include every tribe, nation, people, and language?

Part 2—Triumph of God’s Kingdom Foretold

Say: The kingdoms of the world are led by sinful human beings. Even the most righteous, benevolent ruler or governmental system pales in comparison to the rule of God himself. When we witness the raging of

nations against the Lord, we need not feel hopeless. Instead, we must remember that the final word has not yet been spoken. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The sounding of a seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15–19 completed a series of trumpet calls that began in Revelation 8:6. (Note that the first four dealt with the forces of nature and the last three dealt with people.) These calls concern God’s judgment on the sinful world. The final call ushers forth loud voices that declare the ultimate victory of God. His greatness is announced in kingdom terms—all the world’s kingdoms have been conquered by the Lord. The worldly kingdoms that have suffered under the oppression of the evil one are returned to their rightful King, who is God himself. This is not a temporary fix; rather, the reign of the Lord will be eternal.

The worship is joined by the twenty-four elders, who praise the One who is, was, and is to come (verse 17). He has exerted His power and begun to reign. The elders used language reminiscent of Psalm 2, noting that the nations raged against the Lamb but were not able to stand. The time for judgment and reward from the Lord and His Messiah had come (Revelation 11:18). The persecutions and tribulations borne by God’s people through the ages will be judged, and the greatness of God, who has been attacked and denied by His enemies, is now on full display.

Also on display is the heavenly temple, complete with the ark of His covenant (verse 19), which had not been seen since the destruction of the first temple, in 587 BC. Jesus, faithful to the covenant, conquers all. This theme of the conquering Lord and His Messiah will be explored again in Revelation 19–22.

Discuss

- ? How should we respond to the message of God’s ultimate judgment of sin?
- ? What role does the news of judgment play in our proclamation of the gospel? What role does this news play in the ongoing work of teaching and discipling believers?

□ The Enemy Defeated by the Blood of the Lamb **Revelation 12:7–11**

Say: While Revelation focuses on the future, it is comforting to know that the battle has in fact already been won. When Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, spoke from the cross saying, “It is finished,” the plan of redemption was completed. When He arose from the grave, He asserted His authority over death, the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The vision in Revelation 12:7–11 focuses on a battle in the heavens in which Michael and his angels defeat the dragon—Satan—and his angels. Because victory is ascribed to the blood of the Lamb (verse 11), this vision may depict the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The work of the Lamb defeated the work of the devil and his angels.

The larger message is clear as well: There is a cosmic battle with evil, and that battle has already been won. What continues is the battle on earth as the devil attempts to gain what he has lost by subverting humans from accepting what God has done for them in Christ. Note that a voice in heaven declares victory: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Messiah” (verse 10, NIV).

Yet there remains a battle ongoing in the earthly realm, and the voice points to the path of victory—the blood of the Lamb and human testimony (verse 11). Those who are victorious over sin and the devil are victorious because of the blood of the Lamb, who was slain from the foundations of the world (see Revelation 13:8, a reminder that God’s plan was enacted before eternity past). As we believe in the Lamb as our Savior over our sin problem, the evil one is defeated. Then, as a result, we give our commitment to the Lamb in word and deed.



Resource Packet Item 2: Victory Secured

Distribute the work sheet and answer the questions as a class. Allow a moment of reflection for the application question at the bottom of the sheet.

Discuss

- ? What are some common spiritual battles Christians face?
- ? In what ways have you experienced spiritual battles in your life, and how can knowing Jesus has already assured your victory sustain you in such battles?

Part 3—Triumph and Glory of God’s Kingdom

The King of Kings Defeats Satan Revelation 19:11 through 20:2,7–10



Say: Revelation points to the ultimate victory of God over all evil. Chapter 19 paints a wonderful picture of that occurring, as the rider on the white horse, the Word of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, leads the heavenly armies to destroy evil. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The victory of the Lamb over the devil and his angels, depicted in the vision of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15), is now more graphically described. Riding a white horse, symbol of a victor in battle, the Conqueror comes from heaven. The descriptions given in Revelation 19:11–16 are very important. He is identified as faithful and true; there is no deceit nor fraud in Him at all. He judges and wages war with justice; there are no inappropriate actions, for justice is the driving impulse. His blazing eyes are highlighted by the multiple crowns on His head; He holds all authority and power. His robe is blood-stained, likely depicting His crucifixion. His name is the Word of God, a designation for Jesus uniquely emphasized by John (see John 1:1). The conquering sword proceeds from His mouth, a clear indication that His power is so great that all that is needed is for the Word to speak. He strikes down the nations, ruling over them with strength, carrying out the wrath of God. The name on His thigh and on the robe is His well-earned title: “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

The ultimate victory of the Lamb riding the white horse follows (19:19 through 20:2). The vultures are invited by an angel to come and feast on the bodies of the followers of evil. The representatives of evil in the visions of Revelation—the beast, the false prophets, the devil, and all their followers—are defeated and cast into the lake of fire. It is a scene of great judgment, and great victory.

Discuss

- ? Why is it significant that the sword is coming from the mouth of the Lord in Revelation 19:15?
- ? What are some of the responses we might have to the sobering and dramatic scene described in Revelation 19:11–21?



□ All Things Are Made New

Revelation 21:1–5, 22–27

Say: The plan of God for the redemption of fallen humanity, which began in Eden, begins its final expression in Revelation 21. The prophecies of the Old Testament, the suffering of the Messiah in the Gospels, the spread of the Church in Acts, and the instructions to the Church in the Epistles have led to this grand finale. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The earth was so impacted by the Fall that Paul described it as waiting in frustration and bondage to decay (Romans 8:19–21). But Revelation 21:1–5 tells us of a new heaven and new earth, as the former and present will have passed away.

The defining feature of the new heavens and earth will be the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which serves as the testimony that God will dwell among His people (verses 22–27). The change from the world today to His ultimate plan is stark, and yet wonderful. Crying, death, mourning, and pain will be no more. Those elements of human existence—which exist because of sin—will be completely eliminated. The testimony of the One sitting on the throne is clear: All things will be made new.

Living in the Holy City will be more than an extension of the Edenic existence of Adam and Eve prior to sin. There will no need for a place of worship, a temple, because God himself is the temple. There will be no need for the heavenly bodies to give light and to mark seasons for humankind because the light of God will be pervasive. The antagonism, hatred, and violence so prevalent amid present interactions among nations will be removed. There, the nations will go freely into the Holy City. Impurity, shame, and deceit will no longer be factors in human existence. The plan of God will have reached its culmination—He will reign over His redeemed, and we will dwell in His presence forever.



Resource Packet Item 3: Prepared for His People

Distribute the work sheet and have someone read each of the Scriptures for the class. Pause to thank God for the future home He has prepared.

Discuss

- ? Based on Revelation 21, how would you describe the new heaven and new earth in your own words?
- ? What specific features of the new heaven and new earth bring you the greatest hope and joy?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Book of Revelation is an encouragement to believers of every generation. John was in exile for the sake of the gospel when he received this great vision, so we know those times were quite perilous for the Church. What John saw and heard reminded him, his first readers, and us that the victory of God is certain. Some feel that Revelation is obscure and frightening, that the images are too hard to understand, or that it has little relevance to us. But its overarching message is that God's plan is being accomplished and evil will be completely defeated.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find a way you can encourage a missionary this week through an e-mail, prayer, or extra financial support.
- Pray for an opportunity to share the great plan of God with an unbeliever.
- Pray that you will live each day with eternity in view in spite of the fallen world around you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God's Promise to David.
2 Samuel 7:8–17

Tuesday

The Messiah's Righteous Reign.
Psalm 2:1–12

Wednesday

God's Promise to Israel.
Ezekiel 37:21–28

Thursday

Christ the Righteous Judge.
Matthew 25:31–46

Friday

Be Ready for Christ's Coming.
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Saturday

The Day of the Lord.
2 Peter 3:10–13

Studies in Isaiah

Have you ever heard “Good News/Bad News” jokes? They often go something like this: “A doctor called a patient and said, ‘I have good news and bad news. The good news is that you have 24 hours to live.’ ‘Wow,’ the man replied. ‘Then what’s the bad news?’ To which the doctor replied, ‘I forgot to call you yesterday.’”

While these jokes are usually silly or corny, they do remind us that many things that happen in life can represent good news or bad news, depending upon our perspective. For us as Christians, this is especially true in the spiritual realm—a truth borne out as we study the prophets of the Old Testament. Perhaps no prophet better illustrates this than Isaiah. Through its pages we will find some of the harshest and most sobering warnings about sin in all of Scripture, as well as some of the greatest promises we can imagine as the people of God. Truly, Isaiah delivers the worst of news and the best of news.

As you guide students through this complex book, look for opportunities to relate timeless principles regarding holiness, separation from a sinful world, and the marvelous hope that awaits those who walk with the Lord. Sometimes these concepts exist within the same study, such as Studies 1–2. There students are challenged to contemplate the reality of judgment as well as redemption. Thus you can use this study as a reminder that we must choose the Lord.

Beginning with Study 4 (which follows the Christmas Study), students will discover that while prophets like Isaiah often deliver strong warnings of judgment, they also have much to offer us in teaching about the loving nature of God, as well as His mercy in giving us His Word. His love and compassion are perhaps most clearly displayed in Study 5, which focuses on prophecies of Christ. Emphasize that Isaiah was written centuries before the Messiah came, yet chapters 52–53 describe Christ’s life and ministry with striking detail.

The unit ends on a hopeful note, exploring Isaiah’s prophecies regarding Christ’s second coming as well as the new heavens and new earth. This study provides a great, twofold opportunity to encourage your students: 1) Encourage them to focus on God’s everlasting promises in the darkest hours of life; 2) Encourage them to search the Scriptures, rather than pop culture media and popular ideas, when contemplating the end times. Jesus is coming soon, and we have Scripture to show us how to live as we prepare for His return.

December 6, 2020

LESSON

1

Sin, Judgment, and Restoration

Introducing the Study

Say: The cycle of disobedience, rebellion, and idolatry, followed by brief times of repentance and promises to serve God had been repeated throughout the history of God's people. Today's study is set in the southern kingdom of Judah. Early in Isaiah's time, the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity in Assyria. Less than two centuries later, Judah would be captured by Babylon. Isaiah's prophecies were mainly directed to the Southern Kingdom. (*Play the video on Restoration, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—Your Favorite Pet Story

Ask: If you own a pet (or know someone who does), how does that pet respond to its owner's presence? Examples include joy, and obedience. Note that while even pets know who cares for them, humans tend to ignore or even rebel against the One who made them and takes care of them.

Say: Church leaders often have the task of delivering a difficult message from God to His people. Yet because of God's love, these unpopular and uncomfortable messages must be given—even if they make people feel convicted. Often, however, those messages are laced with hope if the hearers repent and obey. This was the case with Isaiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah was called to serve the Lord as a prophet in difficult times. Judah was isolated, with powerful enemies around her. And while the kingdom saw times of temporal prosperity, spiritually the kingdom was struggling. Many worshipped idols. Injustice was rampant. Isaiah stood as a strong voice for the Lord, rebuking the people for their idolatry and wickedness, and calling on them to repent and be restored.

Study Text

Isaiah 1:1 through 2:5

Central Truth

God will judge the sinner, but forgive and restore the penitent.



Key Verse Acts 3:19

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (KJV).

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize that God's desire is not to punish sinners but to redeem and restore them.
- Appreciate God's mercy in offering forgiveness to the penitent.
- Extend God's invitation to receive forgiveness and restoration through faith in Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Isaiah 1:4. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

10. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

13. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

14. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

15. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

16. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

17. Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

19. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

20. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

23. Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

24. Therefore saith the LORD, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies:

25. And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.

27. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.

2:3. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

New International Version

Isaiah 1:4. Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.

10. Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

13. Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.

14. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

15. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood!

16. Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong.

17. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

19. “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land;

20. but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

23. Your rulers are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not come before them.

24. Therefore the LORD, the LORD Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “Ah! I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies.

25. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.”

27. “Zion will be delivered with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness.”

2:3. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Part 1—Sins of a Nation

□ The People Are Unfaithful

Isaiah 1:1–4,10–15



Say: Isaiah’s prophecy began with a message to the rebellious nation of Judah. He even compared them, unfavorably, to animals who obey and respect their masters. In spite of God’s faithfulness, His people rebelled against Him; they went through the motions of their religious observances but were unfaithful and disobedient. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah served the Lord as a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah from around 740–700 BC, during the reigns of four kings (Isaiah 1:1). His name means “the LORD saves.” His message focused on how the Lord was at work to save not only the Jewish people from their sinful ways, but all who would turn to Him in repentance and faith.

In this opening vision, the Lord called the rebellious people of Judah to account for their waywardness (Isaiah 1:2–4). The heavens and earth are cited as witnesses to Judah’s unfaithfulness. (Note that it was not unusual for Old Testament prophets to call upon nature to testify against the ungodly; see Micah 6:1–3.) The Lord had raised them up as a people and had been faithful to keep His promises to them. In spite of His goodness, however, they had rebelled against Him.

This rebellion is illustrated by examples from husbandry (Isaiah 1:3). Oxen recognize and submit to their owners. Donkeys know their safety and care is found in their owner’s stable. The proper response of mere animals emphasizes the foolishness of rebellion, which would lead Judah to experience troubles and sorrows (verse 4). They were guilty in God’s sight because of their evil deeds and injustice. They were failing to keep His commandments, for they were not showing love for others or for God. They had forsaken the Lord and His ways.

Isaiah spoke of how the people had suffered greatly because of their unfaithfulness (Isaiah 1:5–9). Only the Lord’s mercy had kept them from being wiped out as Sodom and Gomorrah had been. The Lord called on the people to hear and listen, likening them to the people and rulers of the two destroyed cities (verse 10). The implication was that they faced suffering the same fate. The people needed to understand that their religious observances meant nothing to God (verses 11–15). Their observances were instead burdensome to Him, for He delights in obedience, not sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22).



Resource Packet Item 1: Obedience Required?

Distribute the worksheet and divide your class into groups of two to four people. Assign one of the Scriptures to each group and have them answer the questions. Then have the groups share their answers with the class.

Discuss

- ? What would you define as the key differences between focusing on sacrifices versus focusing on obedience in serving God?
- ? What can cause people who have experienced the goodness of the Lord to turn away from Him?

 **□ Injustice Prevails****Isaiah 1:21–23**

Say: Often, leaders are held to a higher standard, even in the Church today.

Through the prophecy of Isaiah, God seemed to have an especially harsh message for Judah's leadership who allowed injustice to prevail. The leaders were looking out for their own personal interests, even while refusing to take care of the most needy among them. Their unfaithfulness contributed to the unfaithfulness of those they led. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah used powerful imagery to decry the woeful condition of the Jewish people, especially of their leaders (Isaiah 1:21–23). Judah was portrayed as an unfaithful wife because the people were worshipping idols. This nation was once known as a place of justice and righteousness, but those in authority had allowed injustice to flourish. The Lord deemed them to be murderers because of the injustices against the poor and powerless they permitted.

These corrupt leaders and judges were likened to dross (mineral waste left from the process of purifying metal) and mixed (or diluted) wine. Both of these things were worthless (verse 22). The leaders were not providing justice for the poor and powerless. Instead they perverted justice by accepting bribes and gifts. They had become self-serving, forgetting they were answerable to God.

When a society abandons the welfare of its most vulnerable members, injustice will prevail. When the rights of the poor and powerless are disregarded, wickedness will increase, leading to a decline in morality and the loss of hope.

Discuss

- ? What are some common forms of injustice in the world today, and what are some ways Christians can respond?
- ? What can you do to promote justice in your sphere of influence?

**Part 2—Call to Repentance and Cleansing****□ Call to Repentance****Isaiah 1:16–17**

Say: The solution to rebellion, unfaithfulness, disobedience, and injustice begins with repentance. While everyone is guilty of sin, God offers cleansing and reconciliation. But He does not force such cleansing on His people—then or now. True repentance—marked by a change in behavior—is essential. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Aware of the unfaithfulness and injustice of the people, the Lord issued a call for the people to repent (Isaiah 1:16–17). The commands in these two verses emphasize the urgency of what God was commanding them to do.

The Lord instructed them to make themselves clean. They had the moral responsibility to change their ways, for repentance is a change of mind that acknowledges how sin defiles the sinner and dishonors God. The Lord cleanses those who repent.

The Lord described several actions that would reveal true repentance. The people needed to stop the evil things they were doing and start doing what was right and just. Promoting the welfare of the poor and vulnerable would be evidence of their changed hearts.

Discuss

- ? How does Isaiah 1:16–17 compare with Mark 12:30–31 and Leviticus 19:18?
- ? How is seeking justice related to loving your neighbor as yourself?

□ Promise of Cleansing

Isaiah 1:18–20



Say: God promised cleansing for His people if they would repent. Otherwise they would receive judgment. We still face that choice today: Serve God and be blessed or reject Him and be punished. If we choose to repent, He cleanses us. We do not clean up our lives and do the right things in our own power. Rather, the blood of Jesus cleanses us, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to live for Him. But we still must make the choice to turn from sin and follow Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Lord called on the people to “reason together” (Isaiah 1:18, KJV; “settle the matter,” NIV), that is, to reach the obvious conclusion to what He has been saying to them. If they will repent and change their ways, cleansing from sin is promised. “Scarlet” and “crimson” refer to dyes. Scarlet dye was a fast color that could not be washed out. Crimson dye was used primarily to color wool. The Lord was assuring the people that repentance would bring cleansing that would make them pure despite their impurities—as white as snow and as untainted as undyed wool. God’s assurance was that He could forgive and cleanse them of any sin.

A willingness to worship the Lord and serve Him as commanded in His covenant with His people would lead to bountiful blessings (Isaiah 1:19). However, if they continued to live in rebellion, they would experience judgment (verse 20). Isaiah’s play on words drew out the sharp contrast between the consequences of their choice: Obey and eat the good of the land or disobey and be eaten by the sword.

The promise of cleansing was not just for people in Old Testament times. Jesus provided cleansing from sin by His sacrificial death on the cross (Ephesians 1:3,7). All who confess and repent of their sins have the assurance of forgiveness (1 John 1:9).



Resource Packet Item 2: You Don’t Know What I’ve Done

Distribute the case study and discuss the questions, either in small groups or as a class.

Discuss

- ? On what basis can we feel assurance that God is able and willing to forgive even our most terrible sins?
- ? How would you respond to someone who thinks his or her sins are so terrible they could never be forgiven?

Part 3—Judgment and Restoration Promised



□ The Penitent Are Restored; the Rebellious Are Judged Isaiah 1:24–31

Say: God calls people to repent, but when they do not repent, He will send judgment. Throughout history, God had sent judgment upon the enemies of His people, even as His own people had chosen to rebel. Consequently, His judgment would come upon them. Yet, there was still hope in Isaiah’s message. Sprinkled throughout his prophecies of judgment are promises such as the one in 1:26–27, that Jerusalem would “be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City” (verse 26, NIV). God would never forget His people and His covenant with them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 1:24 sounds an ominous tone in its threefold identification of God as He declares judgment on the people. The Lord reminded the people that He was their Master, and He was calling them to task for their failure to obey Him. The phrase “Lord of hosts” (KJV; “Lord almighty,” NIV) could be translated “Lord of armies.” The phrase speaks to His supreme power. Unlike idols, the Lord was able to bring the judgment He decreed. The “mighty One of Israel” was another reminder of His strength. No one can stop the Lord when He chooses to act.

Unlike times past when the Lord moved against the enemies of His people, now His hand would be turned against His people to enact judgment (verse 25). The Lord’s actions against His people would result in cleansing—forgiveness and restoration were His goal in judgment (verse 26). Jerusalem would again be known as a place of righteousness and faithfulness. God would restore justice and righteousness for those who turned to Him in repentance (verse 27).

Yet just as certain as the Lord’s promise of restoration was His pronouncement of judgment (verses 28–31). Those who continued in their rebellion against the Lord would perish. They would be ashamed of their idolatry, which included the worship of the pagan fertility gods, likely referenced by the mention of the oaks and gardens. The idolatry the people thought would make them strong would instead make them weak and vulnerable. The people’s unfaithfulness and injustice is likened to a spark that sets tinder on fire. God’s judgment would be a fire that burned away both idol and idolaters. No one could stop God’s just judgment of the rebellious who failed to repent.

Discuss

- ? How should we respond to Old Testament declarations of God’s judgment?
- ? How are proclamations of God’s coming judgment on sinners received today? Why do you think this is so?



□ Walk in the Light

Isaiah 2:1–5

Say: The hope briefly mentioned in Isaiah 1:26–27 is further described in the next vision of Isaiah. No doubt, many who heard Isaiah’s prophecies did not

see the long separation between the judgment of the coming exile and the wonderful future that God has in store for those who love and serve Him. Yet they held onto that hope. During New Testament times, the Jews were looking forward to the Messiah, but they did not realize that the time of restoration was even further into the future. God's timing is in His hands. Just as the Jews of Isaiah's time and even the believers in the Early Church did not understand God's plan, we are often puzzled by it. But God calls us to repent and be prepared for Jesus' second coming. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah was likely troubled by the vision recorded in chapter 1 (see verse 1). While it held out the promise of forgiveness and restoration if the people would repent, it also made clear the judgment that would take place if they continued in their unfaithfulness and injustices. Chapter 2 presents another vision, which continues through chapter 4. The vision opens with hope for those who will be redeemed and restored in Judah and Jerusalem (2:1). This hope looks to the millennial reign of Christ, when the Messiah will come to reestablish true worship and rule in peace (verses 2–4). Of course, as Christians we understand that Jesus is the Messiah.

The prosperity the Messiah's rule will bring includes the reestablishment of the true worship of God. The people of Isaiah's day had been chastised for their empty worship, which included meaningless ceremonies and worthless sacrifices at the temple (1:11–15). In the last days, true worship at the temple of the Lord will be practiced (2:2). The preeminence of godly worship is portrayed by stating that the mountain the temple rests on will be raised above other mountains and hills.

Another aspect of the Messiah's rule will be that all nations will be drawn to worship and serve the one true God (verses 2–3). Not only will the Jewish people rightly worship the God of Jacob, but Gentiles also will come to learn of Him and His ways. Instruction in God's Word will play a major role in this religious revival.

These future days of the Messiah's rule will also be a time of peace (verse 4). Military solutions to disputes between nations and peoples will be a thing of the past. The efforts and resources that had previously been used to bring destruction will be turned to productivity that benefits people.

This vision of such a wonderful future prompted Isaiah to call the people to follow the Lord (verse 5). They could trace their lineage back to the patriarchs, and their heritage included the promises made to their ancestors—including living in peace and prosperity in the land God had given them. They could experience these blessings if they would choose to walk in the light of the Lord.



Resource Packet Item 3: Jerusalem: Old and New

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to review the Scripture passage, then highlight the contrasting features they have found.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe what it means to live by the light of the Lord?
- ? Why is God's Word essential to spiritual renewal?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In Isaiah 1:2, God refers to the people of Judah as children He has brought up, yet they have rebelled. Such stories are all too prevalent in family relationships. Sometimes major issues, such as outright rebellion, are a cause, but other times the efforts to stay connected wane until it seems the distance is just too great. Family relationships are far too important to be taken for granted. But our relationship with God is also broken by rebellion and disobedience. We must be aware that we cannot take our relationship with God for granted. Even after our repentance, it takes commitment on our part for our relationship with Him to grow stronger and deeper. God cleanses His people from sin and restores them to himself and others. Even His correction and discipline are proof of His ongoing love for us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take time to examine your heart to see if any repentance is needed.
- Pray for those around you who do not have a relationship with God.
- Share the hope of salvation with someone this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God's Case Against Israel.
Jeremiah 2:4–13

Tuesday

God's Wayward Wife Restored.
Hosea 2:14–23

Wednesday

Judgment and Restoration of
the Nations.
Zephaniah 3:6–15

Thursday

Consequences of Neglecting
Christ's Commands.
Luke 6:46–49

Friday

Betrayal Forewarned
and Restoration.
John 13:36–38; 21:15–19

Saturday

Penetrating and Healing Words.
Revelation 2:12–17

December 13, 2020

LESSON
2

Everlasting Judgment or Everlasting Joy?

Study Text

Isaiah 34:1 through 35:10

Central Truth

God's judgment awaits all who rebel, but the redeemed of the Lord will experience everlasting joy.



Key Verse

Isaiah 35:10

The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (KJV).

Those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Acknowledge that all people are accountable to God and will face His judgment if they do not receive His gift of salvation.
- Find encouragement that God works to redeem and restore those who submit to Him.
- Rejoice that God's people can live holy lives that are pleasing to Him.

Introducing the Study

Say: In 2012, a judge sentenced a woman to hold up an embarrassing sign on a corner during rush hour traffic on two days. The sign said, "Only an idiot would drive on the sidewalk to avoid a school bus." **Ask:** "What do you think of the judge's unusual punishment?" (*Give your students a few minutes to express their opinions on this matter.*)

Opening Activity—And in Contrast . . .

Ask your students to name several contrasting circumstances, emotions, or beliefs, etc. (i.e., happy or sad). Jot them on the board, labeling each as good, bad, or neutral (not good or bad, just vastly different).

Say: In today's study we are looking at one of the greatest contrasts that will ever be known—the outcome of rejecting God contrasted with the outcome of loving and serving Him. This great contrast is sobering because it is eternal, and it will impact every person who walks on earth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Today's study focuses on God's judgment and His work to redeem and restore. God's just judgment should lead us to acknowledge that our response to God has eternal consequences, and then choose to follow Him. It should also motivate us to actively warn others of the coming judgment and tell them of God's redemptive plan to save them from that judgment.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Isaiah 34:1. Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it.

2. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter.

3. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.

4. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

8. For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.

9. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.

10. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.

35:4. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.

5. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

6. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

7. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

8. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

10. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

New International Version

Isaiah 34:1. Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it!

2. The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is on all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter.

3. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will stink; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.

4. All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

8. For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause.

9. Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch!

10. It will not be quenched night or day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.

35:4. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."

5. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

6. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

7. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

8. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.

10. And those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Part 1—God’s Judgment Against the Wicked

□ God Will Destroy Wicked Nations

Isaiah 34:1–4



Say: God has judged various people and nations, including His own chosen people, throughout the ages. But a time of everlasting judgment is coming that no nation or individual will be able to avoid. Just as God called all nations and peoples to hear Isaiah’s message of the coming judgment on the enemies of God’s people, it is important that His people today deliver the message of salvation to all peoples and nations, inviting them to accept His redemption and escape the coming judgment. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 34 begins with a call for all people in all nations to listen to what God was announcing (verse 1). This speaks to the magnitude of the announcement as well as the breadth of its subject matter. God pronounced His anger against all nations and their armies, for they were fighting against Him by fighting against His people (verse 2). And so, God declared their total destruction. The phrase “utterly destroyed” (verse 2, *KJV*; “totally destroy,” *NIV*) speaks of the non-revocable giving of things or persons over to destruction. Numbers 21:1–3 records the Israelites doing this with a city of the Canaanites, completely destroying it and its inhabitants.

The description of the aftermath of God’s judgment on the armies of the nations is graphic (Isaiah 34:3). It depicts the annihilation of these forces—thus more than just a major defeat. The dead bodies will be left unburied to rot and stink, and the blood will soak the mountains. It is truly a horrific scene.

Isaiah’s description adds further weight to the sovereignty and almighty nature of God, for His judgment will extend even to the heavens (verse 4). Like dried up leaves or withered figs fall to the earth, stars will fall when God’s judgment is meted out. All of creation will be affected when God’s wrath is poured out. Jesus may well have been making reference to these events when He spoke of how the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken (Matthew 24:29). The sixth seal, described in Revelation 6:12–14, also seems to allude to Isaiah’s prophecy, for it speaks of stars falling like figs fall from a tree and the sky being rolled up like a scroll.

God’s judgment on the wicked will be certain and final. Sadly, people may confuse God’s patience with apathy toward wickedness or impotence to deal with it. To the contrary, however, God’s patience leaves open the opportunity for the wicked to repent so they need not face judgment for their sins.

Discuss

- ? In your own words, describe the judgment of God upon wickedness.
- ? How do you reconcile the love of God and the judgment of God?

□ God Will Judge the Enemies of His People

Isaiah 34:5–7



Say: The judgment of God awaited those who were enemies of His people. Nothing could stop that judgment, and it would result in total devastation.

God had chosen the Children of Israel to be the lineage through whom the Messiah would come. He had promised them the land of Canaan as their home. Those nations who had persecuted them were singled out for judgment, especially the land of Edom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Isaiah 34:5, the attention focuses in from God's judgment on the nations to His judgment on Edom, a traditional and long-standing enemy of the Jewish people (Isaiah 34:5–7). Edom is described as being set aside for total destruction, just as the armies of the nations were in verse 2. Leviticus 27:28 notes that sacrifices, once devoted to the Lord, cannot later be redeemed. They were deemed holy by God. Normally, people kill animals and offer them as sacrifices to God. But God likened the people of Edom to sacrificial animals—rams, goats, lambs, oxen, and bulls—to be offered as burnt offerings. Isaiah's vision again makes it clear this was not just another battle. The losses would be so devastating that the blood and fat of those slain would soak the battlefield.



Resource Packet Item 1: Your View of God

Distribute the work sheet, and read the instructions with the class. If you feel that you have time now, give the students a few minutes to do the assignment. Otherwise, you may just want to discuss it orally and/or send it home with them for further reflection.

Discuss

- ? How do you react to the declaration and knowledge of God's harsh judgment upon sinners in the future?
- ? Does knowing all people will be held accountable by God in the end affect how you live? Explain.

Part 2—Divine Retribution



□ God Will Bring a Day of Vengeance

Isaiah 34:8–15

Say: The plan of God will always prevail. Even the hatred of Edom toward the people of Judah and Jerusalem would not deter God's plan to bring His Son into the world through the lineage of Judah. Yet today, working against God's plan and His people will always result in judgment. God is longsuffering, so many years may elapse, but He will judge when the time is right. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The hostility between the Children of Israel and the Edomites was not a new development, but dates back to the Book of Genesis (25:19–34; see also Numbers 20:14–21). The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, whose hatred of his brother Jacob is well documented. (See Genesis 27:41.) Even before the birth of Jacob and Esau, God had declared that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). The events of their lives and those of their descendants fulfilled this prophecy.

The judgment Isaiah prophesied was the day of the Lord's vengeance on those who had been against His people (Isaiah 34:8). Edom again was singled out, and again the description of the judgment against it was overwhelming (verse 9). What would take place would be like what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 18–19). Edom would not recover from this judgment, as is evident from the statement the burning will not be quenched (Isaiah 34:10). Whereas a nation or people might recover over the course of generations, this would not be the case with Edom. Instead, the land of Edom would become a wilderness overgrown with thorns and brambles, inhabited only by animals (verses 11–15).

God would use the tools of an architect in His judgment: “The line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness” (verse 11, *KJV*). Scripture elsewhere refers to the use of a plumb line or plummet as a tool of measurement for meting out His just judgment (see 2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 28:17). God's judgment is just and right—not merely angry retaliation or petty spite. In the case of the Edomites, they would reap what they had sown (see Obadiah 1:15). Why? Because they rejoiced over the fall of Judah and Jerusalem. Furthermore, they would aid the enemies of God's people and mistreat Jewish survivors (see Obadiah 1). They desired the desolation of the Jews' homeland, so God pronounced that the land of Edom would become desolate. For generations to come, the land of Edom would be given over as a home for wild animals (Isaiah 34:13–15).

Discuss

- ? What brought about the vengeance of the Lord upon Edom?
- ? Do you think most people believe God will judge them for how they have lived? Explain.

Retribution Is Sure

Isaiah 34:16–17



Say: The destruction of Edom as a result of God's judgment would be so complete that animals would take over its territory. While this seems extreme, those who rebel against God and mistreat others would do well to take God's judgment of Edom into account. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The certainty of the judgment being pronounced against Edom specifically and the wicked nations of the world generally is made clear in Isaiah 34:16–17. The “book” (verse 16, *KJV*; “scroll,” *NIV*) of the Lord shows the record on the Lord's pronouncement of this coming judgment. Any who would doubt that these things would come to pass was invited to read what Isaiah had written. In the time to come the accuracy of what God said would happen would become quite obvious. Everything would be fulfilled.

Edom would indeed become the home of wild animals. God said that this would take place. The lack of human inhabitants in the land is implied in the pronouncement that each animal would have its mate and that the animals would possess the land over the course of generations.



Resource Packet Item 2: Sure Judgment on Edom

Distribute the work sheet and allow students to work in small groups to answer the questions. In the interest of time, you may want to assign one question to each group, then have them share their answers.

Discuss

- ? What can we learn from Scripture’s record of the pronouncements of God’s judgment?
- ? What hope can Christians offer people who are fearful of facing God’s judgment?



Part 3—The Gladness of the Redeemed

☐ Restoration and Blessing for God’s People

Isaiah 35:1–7

Say: Here we move to the other side of the contrast of this study. The judgment God was bringing to the nations in general and to Edom in particular is contrasted with the restoration, healing, and provision He would bring to His people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 35 continues the prophecy of chapter 34. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the sure vengeance of God on the enemies of the Jewish people (Edom, in particular), chapter 35 speaks to the joy, security, and prosperity His people will have. This is a clear reminder that God desires to redeem and restore. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. His desire is that the wicked would repent and live (Ezekiel 18:32).

Whereas Edom would become a desolate wilderness, the land of the Jewish people would be restored (35:1–2). The fruitfulness and beauty of this restoration is likened to the blossoming of a “rose” (KJV) or “crocus” (NIV), bringing about rejoicing and gladness. This transformation will restore the majesty, beauty, and fertility of the land. The references to Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon make this clear. The majestic cedar trees were the glory of Lebanon. Carmel was known for its beauty, and Sharon was renowned for its fertility and fruitfulness. The glory of God will again be evident in the restoration of the land.

Based on the promises of God to avenge their enemies and restore His blessings to their land, the people can be encouraged (verses 3–4). Those who were overcome with fear at the current state of affairs could find strength to endure the future trials. While Isaiah and other prophets had warned of God’s judgment on His people, they should not despair. Even in judgment God was working to redeem and restore.

This restoration would not only be evident in the transformation of the land but also in the healing of the people (verses 5–7). The blind, deaf, disabled, and mute would receive healing. As far back as the Exodus, God had revealed himself to be the Healer (Exodus 15:26). As the people turned to God again, listening to Him and obeying Him, physical healing would be one of the many blessings they would enjoy. The wholeness God will bring will extend to the land. Areas that were desolate and unproductive will be lush and fruitful.

Discuss

- ? In what ways does your hope in the Lord change your life?
- ? Why should joy be characteristic of those God has redeemed?
- ? How do you identify joy in yourself or in others?

□ The Way of the Redeemed

Isaiah 35:8–10



Say: The people of Judah would still face a time of exile, brought on by their own rebellion; yet, there was the promise of everlasting joy ahead. Those who heard and believed Isaiah's prophecy would be able to cling to it throughout the time of exile. We too can look ahead to everlasting joy if we accept Jesus and live according to His will. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 35 continues, in verse 8, by noting that a highway will provide access to the restored land. This too reflects the blessings of God on His people after their time of judgment. Although they would be taken as captives to foreign lands, when they turned back to God, they would return to their land. The highway Isaiah described in this passage would be the way by which they would make their way back to the Promised Land. They could travel this road only if they were holy, living set apart to God.

Tragically, those who continued in their sinful ways would not walk on this road. Nor would those who lived as fools, who did as they pleased with a disregard and disdain for God. We hear a similar message in the words of Jesus, who spoke of the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to life (see Matthew 7:13–14).

For the holy, this highway will be a safe place (Isaiah 35:9). Wild beasts, which were often a danger when traveling, are not to be a hazard on the way of holiness. This is yet another manifestation of the safety and well-being that would be found in the land when the Lord restored it—and His people to it—in their return from exile. Their redemption and restoration would result in gladness and rejoicing. The sorrows of captivity having been set aside, the people would rejoice in the goodness of God, for He had returned them to their homeland and restored them into right relationship with Him (verse 10).



Resource Packet Item 3: Highway in Isaiah

Distribute the work sheet and have someone read each passage aloud. Then, answer the questions as a class. Take time for a few people to respond to the personal response question at the end of the sheet.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think that the way that leads to destruction is wide, while the way leading to life is narrow?
- ? Describe what it means to live holy.
- ? How does the holy living God asks of us differ from attempts at earning salvation by good works?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Isaiah's prophecy likely was not well received when he first gave it. If it had been, the people likely would have repented and the announced judgment averted. Perhaps even back then the certainty and severity of God's judgment was hard to accept. Denial still seems to be a common way for people to deal with the reality that their response to God has eternal consequences. Some people put their hope in the idea that all religions ultimately lead to God, so being sincere in what one believes will lead to a positive ending. Others cling to the hope they have done more good than bad in their lives, so any judgment that might come in an afterlife will go in their favor. Yet Scripture is clear that there is only one true God who is the Judge of all. And He is the One who sent His Son to the earth to lay down His life so people would not be condemned. Salvation comes as people put their faith in Jesus and choose to follow Him. Those who choose Jesus learn to follow Him by turning away from their sinful ways and living to please God. As His people, we receive the blessings that come with living as children of God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- List people you know who are not believers and are, therefore, in danger of facing God's judgment.
- Take time every day to pray specifically for the people you have listed.
- Look for opportunities to share the joy of your salvation with one or more of the people you have listed.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

The Great Flood.
Genesis 6:9–17

Tuesday

Passover Celebrated With Gladness.
2 Chronicles 30:13–23

Wednesday

Jerusalem Captured and Burned.
2 Chronicles 36:15–21

Thursday

Joyous Journey To See Jesus.
Matthew 2:1–11

Friday

Instructions for Holy Communion.
1 Corinthians 11:23–34

Saturday

Rejoicing in Heaven.
Revelation 19:1–8

December 20, 2020

LESSON
3

The Incarnation

Study Text

John 1:1–18

Central Truth

God's purpose in the Incarnation was to reveal himself through Christ.


Key Verse
John 1:14

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth (KJV).

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Explain what the Incarnation is and why it is important.
- Rejoice in all the blessings students can receive because Jesus Christ came into the world.
- Share with others the good news that Jesus was born to be the Savior.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today we are looking at an event that was prophesied by Isaiah some 700 years before it occurred: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14, NIV). This Son of God—Jesus—would dwell among His people for thirty-three years, but His kingdom would be eternal. (Read Isaiah 9:6–7.)

Opening Activity—Christmas Traditions

Ask your students to share Christmas traditions that are important to them. They can be traditions from their childhoods or traditions they currently observe.


Resource Packet Item 1: Christmas Traditions Around the World

Distribute this resource item for students to take home with them. Note that it might be a fun activity for them to do with family members during the Christmas season.

Say: Matthew and Luke tell the story of Jesus' birth through two different perspectives. Matthew focuses on the event from the perspective of Joseph, while Luke relates Mary's perspective. Meanwhile, Mark begins his narrative with John the Baptist's introduction of the Messiah. John's gospel offers a divine perspective, focusing on Jesus as the eternal Word of God sent from the Father. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is easy in the busyness of this time of the year to lose focus on the reason Christians celebrate Christmas—the birth of Jesus Christ. God's purpose in the Incarnation was to reveal himself through Christ. The Son of God became the Son of Man to reveal to people the knowledge of God that leads to salvation and eternal life.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 1:1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. The same was in the beginning with God.

3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

15. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

16. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

17. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

18. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

New International Version

John 1:1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. He was with God in the beginning.

3. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

4. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

7. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

8. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

10. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

11. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

13. children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'")

16. Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

17. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.



Say: Some people who do not believe the Bible would still concede that a man named Jesus was born near the beginning of the first century and that He offered good teachings that would help people live better lives. But Jesus did not begin to exist when He came into the world. He was, and is, eternally existent. He was with the Father in creation, He came to earth to redeem humanity, and He will still be with the Father at the end of time. (See Revelation 22:12–13,16.) Often referred to as “the gospel of belief,” John’s Gospel was written in part to correct wrong beliefs in the first century, and it still serves that purpose today. (Read John 20:31 and share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle John wrote his gospel in part to address incorrect teachings about who Jesus is and why He came. John understood that to deny the truth of who Jesus is denies the power of the gospel. Accepting that Jesus is who He said He is forms the foundation of the message that sets us free from sin to receive eternal life.

One of the errors creeping into churches in John’s time was the denial that Jesus is and always has been (and always will be) God. John’s opening remarks refuted this false teaching. When the universe began, Jesus was there (John 1:1). As the second person of the Trinity, He was there with God the Father and God the Spirit before the work of creation began. To make it absolutely clear that Jesus is God, John added “the Word was God” (John 1:1).

John’s opening words described Jesus as the Word. Much discussion has taken place as to all that is included in what the Greek word *logos*, translated “word,” conveys. What is clear is that Jesus is the means God chose to reveal himself and communicate His message and will (Hebrews 1:1–4). Hebrews 1:3 provides insight into this when it says Jesus is “the express image of [God’s] person” (KJV) or “exact representation of his being” (NIV). Jesus spoke of how He reveals the nature of God the Father by His words and actions, because He is one with the Father (John 5:19; 14:9–11).

John wanted to make sure he was clear in his declaration that Jesus is eternally God by emphasizing that Jesus was with God and existed before creation (John 1:2). Contrary to false teachings about Him, Jesus isn’t just one god among many. Nor is it accurate to say, “Jesus is like God.” The truth is, **Jesus is God, one in nature or essence with the Father and the Spirit.** John will reveal shortly that what makes this truth so vital is that Jesus is the Word made flesh—God incarnate—through whom people receive grace and truth (verse 14).

Discuss

- ? In what ways does Jesus reveal to people who God the Father is?
- ? Why is it important to recognize that Jesus is fully God, rather than just a man empowered and guided by God? How would you respond to someone who struggles to see Jesus as more than a man?

Say: Jesus is not part of God’s creation. He is fully God, with no beginning and no end. As such, He was intimately involved in creation. When God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26, NIV), this demonstrated the totality of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is also mentioned specifically in Genesis 1:2. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the one true God, has always existed and will always exist. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus is God. He is eternal and the Creator of all things (John 1:3). The phrase “in the beginning” in verses 1 and 2 is crucial. Genesis opens with the same phrase in declaring that God created the heavens and earth (Genesis 1:1). Not only was Jesus there in the beginning with God, Jesus is in fact the One who made all things. No doubt is left here. Jesus is the Creator, not a created entity—as some in John’s day were wrongly teaching.

As the Creator, Jesus is the Source of life (John 1:4). This includes not only biological life, such as plants, animals, and humans that were formed at creation, but also spiritual and eternal life. Closely related to Jesus being the Source of life is that He is also the Source of light (verses 4–5). Here, as in most references to light in John’s Gospel, light is defined in terms of spiritual enlightenment. What people can know about God comes through Jesus, who is the Light of the world. The light of the knowledge of God shines into the darkness of the human sinful condition. Though people may not come to take hold of that enlightenment or may even reject it, darkness can never overcome it.

Discuss

- ? How does false teaching about who Jesus is change the message of the gospel? What are some examples?
- ? In what ways is it helpful to think of Jesus as the Light of the world (see also John 8:12)?

Part 2—The True Light



Say: John the Baptist was born with a clear purpose: to point people to Jesus, and he fulfilled that purpose well. Great crowds of people heard him, repented, and were baptized. Then, at just the right time, he bore “witness to the Light” (John 1:8, NIV) when he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Having established the true nature of Jesus as God, the apostle John moved forward with the story of Jesus as the Word made flesh, who came into this world as the Light of the world. The story of Jesus begins before His birth, with another

miraculous birth—that of John the Baptist. John was the only child of an older couple; his mother had been barren before God intervened. God called John to be the forerunner of the Messiah (John 1:6). John’s ministry was to bear witness of Jesus as the Messiah, the Light who reveals to the world who God is so that they might believe (verse 7).

John’s Gospel is clear that the ministry of John the Baptist was to point people to faith in Jesus. Statements of John the Baptist recorded in John’s Gospel bring this out clearly. John denied being the Messiah even while proclaiming the Anointed One was coming. John described himself as the voice in the wilderness that prepared the way for the Lord’s coming. John declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God and the Son of God (John 1:15–36). John was the one who bore witness to the Light (Messiah), not the Light itself (verse 8). Only Jesus, the Light and Word, or *Logos*, could bring spiritual illumination to the hearts of people.

Discuss

- ? What is your testimony of how you experienced new birth through faith in Jesus?
- ? What are some specific ways that Christians can point others to Jesus? (Note that answers can include both speaking and sending; that is, we share Christ with the world in a variety of ways.)

□ Jesus Came Into the World

John 1:9–13



Say: When sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, mankind’s relationship with the Creator was broken. Reconciliation could come only through the perfect, sinless Sacrifice: Jesus. He came as the Light who could bring humanity out of darkness and into right relationship with God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John continued by speaking further about Jesus’ role as the Light of the world (John 1:9). Jesus came into the world He created to reveal the Father to people. The tragedy is that most people did not recognize Jesus for who He is (verse 10). Even more tragic is that His own people did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, in spite of the many promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. As a result, many of His own people failed to receive Him (verse 11).

Obviously, not all of the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their Messiah. John’s Gospel shares the stories of many who did put their faith in Jesus, such as Nicodemus (chapter 3), a blind man who was healed (chapter 9), Mary and Martha (chapter 11), and, indeed, all of the original disciples except Judas. Yet many among the Jewish leadership regarded Jesus to be a threat. The opposition of the Jewish leaders, together with the corruption of human nature, eventually led to many of the Jewish people rejecting Jesus as their promised Messiah.

The contrast between rejecting or receiving Jesus is dramatic. Faith in Jesus results in new birth as a child of God (verses 12–13). This is the work of God

alone. Salvation is not the result of anything human beings have to offer or can do. It is instead a matter of choosing to believe and follow. Believing is the active commitment on the part of an individual. Being born again is what happens to the individual as a result of the saving and redeeming action undertaken by God.

Discuss

- ? What are some reasons people today give for rejecting Jesus?
- ? How can you prepare yourself to share the gospel with those who are skeptical about Jesus?



Resource Packet Item 2: Turn On the Light

Distribute the work sheet and assign the Scripture verses to different students to read. Discuss the role of Jesus as the Light of the world in each Scripture. Then give students an opportunity to answer the personal reflection questions at the end of the work sheet.



Part 3—The Word Made Flesh

□ Jesus Lived Among Us

John 1:14

Say: When we think of the glory of the preexistent Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, it is difficult to imagine why He would be willing to give up the glory of heaven to live for thirty-three years among sinful humanity. It is even more amazing that He willingly suffered a horribly cruel death to bring reconciliation between disobedient people and Almighty God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus, whom John referred to as “the Word,” came into the world He created as a human being (see verse 1). Note that “Word” (the Greek word *logos*) has several meanings that encompass both the spoken and written word. Yet it is also a very special term that emphasizes the concept or meaning of a word, rather than just its sounds and letters. And so, in John 1:1 and 14, *logos* emphasizes Christ as being the “Person” of God in all His wisdom and power. This includes His sovereign power and wisdom as Creator. As such, we’re reminded of another “beginning,” where God spoke in all His wisdom and power, and the universe came into being.

Thus, in the term Word, or *logos*, we find great insight as we read John’s proclamation that Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). For God to take on flesh was the ultimate expression of divine love, mercy, and compassion for a human race that was hopelessly lost in sin (see John 3:16; 1 John 4:9–10). Jesus came to earth so people might not perish because of their sins, but instead receive true life that is full and eternal (see also John 10:10).

As an eyewitness of the life of Jesus, the apostle John could testify of how Jesus’ glory was displayed through the signs and miracles He did (see John 2:11). Though there were glimpses of His glory, Jesus humbly set the fullness of His

glory aside when He came to dwell among people (see Mark 9:2; Philippians 2:6–8). Rather than come to this earth in His full majesty, Jesus came to serve. His humble obedience to the will of the Father led to the cross, where He became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people.

As the “only begotten” (John 1:14, *KJV*) or “one and only Son” (*NIV*), Jesus is uniquely the Son of God; He was, is, and always will be God. By His coming to live on earth and His humble obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus made the way for people to be born anew as God’s children by faith. The unmerited favor and knowledge of God come through Jesus. Believers should express gratitude that Jesus is full of grace and truth.

Discuss

- ? How might we see glimpses of Jesus’ glory today?
- ? How would you explain the significance of the Incarnation to an unbeliever?

□ Jesus Brought Grace

John 1:15–18



Say: It is only through the grace, brought to humanity through Christ, that we can have peace with God. Think of the grace it took for God himself to take on flesh, step into a lost world, face temptations, rejection, and death for the purpose of setting us free from sin. Ephesians 2:6–8 reminds us that God expressed His grace to us through kindness by giving His Son, and it is only through this grace that we are saved. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Of his fullness” in John 1:16 looks back to verse 14, that Jesus is full of grace and truth. Believers receive grace out of the fullness of the grace found in Christ (verse 16). Indeed, the blessings received by grace lead to even more blessings.

The full expression of grace and truth comes only through Jesus Christ (verse 17). While it was true God had already shown grace and truth to people, particularly in the law of Moses, through Jesus the favor and knowledge of God finds ultimate expression. The sacrifices for sin prescribed in the Law foreshadowed the grace Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice provides. The Law also revealed truth about God. Jesus Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15, *KJV*) and “the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3, *KJV*) and so makes the truth about the nature of God more clearly known. Moses revealed what was shown to him. Jesus revealed what was known by Him.



Resource Packet Item 3: Grace

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to respond to the questions, then give volunteers opportunities to share their answers.

Discuss

- ? What do we mean when we say Jesus is full of grace and truth?
- ? What do you find to be amazing about grace?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus Christ truly is the reason for the season we celebrate as Christmas. Because Jesus came, people can know God and, through a genuine relationship with Him reflected in a life of faith, receive eternal life (John 17:3). This study, then, is more than a Christmas study. It serves as a reminder that Christians need to be centered on Christ every day of the year. He is the eternal Word who was there in the beginning. He is the Creator, the Source of life. Christ is the true Light who reveals who God is and what He does. He is the One who made it possible for people to be born anew as children of God. Through Christ this world receives grace and truth. Being a Christian is all about Christ, believing in Him and being conformed to His image. Don't let anything—not even celebrating Christmas—take your focus off of Jesus Christ.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find someone this Christmas season with whom you can share the Light of Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to help His light to shine through you during the times of stress throughout this Christmas season.
- Do something practical that will minister to someone who is alone or in need during this holiday season.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God With Us.
Isaiah 7:10–16

Tuesday

The Everlasting Kingdom.
Isaiah 9:1–7

Wednesday

The Message Foretold.
Isaiah 40:1–5

Thursday

Christ's Birthplace Announced.
Micah 5:2–4

Friday

Christ Is Born.
Luke 2:1–7

Saturday

Shepherds Worship Jesus.
Luke 2:8–20

December 27, 2020

LESSON
4

Our Great God

Study Text

Isaiah 40:1–31

Central Truth

God's greatness is manifested, not only through His divine attributes, but also in His personal care for His own.



Key Verse Isaiah 40:31

They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (KJV).

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand that God's love motivates His use of divine wisdom and power.
- Recognize that as God's people are treasured by God and the recipients of His daily care.
- Study and apply God's written Word in order to draw closer to Him.

Introducing the Study

Say: Children who grew up “saying their prayers” may have uttered the words “God is great, God is good” three times a day when thanking Him for their food. Isaiah draws a picture for us of the greatness of God that can help us to trust Him more fully.

Opening Activity—My Weakness/His Strength

Have your class sing the first verse of “Jesus Loves Me” or quote the words, “They are weak, but He is strong.”

Ask: What situations can you think of where you have been forced to confront your own weakness? How did you receive help in those situations, either directly from God or from other people God used?

Say: J. B. Phillips wrote a best-selling book titled *Your God Is Too Small*, in which he challenges readers to reexamine their concept of God. As human beings, we have a limited view of the true greatness of God, yet by walking with Him we can better grasp who He really is and how He guides our lives. His power in our lives is limitless. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah powerfully contrasted the actions of the one true God with false gods. In Isaiah 36:18–20, the Assyrian army threatened to attack Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign. The Assyrian commander's mention of powerless, false, local gods shows how communities regarded their idols. In Isaiah 37, God intervened against the Assyrians for His people.

Read Isaiah 46:3–7, then contrast God's ongoing actions for His people with the complete inactivity of idols. A key truth of Isaiah—and throughout Scripture—is that God has entered into covenant relationship with His people and is active in their lives for their good.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Isaiah 40:1. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

6. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field:

7. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.

8. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

10. Behold, the LORD God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

11. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

14. With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

15. Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

17. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

21. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

23. That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

24. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

25. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

26. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.

New International Version

Isaiah 40:1. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

6. A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

7. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

8. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

10. See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

11. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

14. Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge, or showed him the path of understanding?

15. Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

17. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing.

21. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

22. He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

23. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

24. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

25. "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

26. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

Part 1—God’s Comforting and Enduring Word

□ God’s Promise to His People

Isaiah 40:1–5



Say: God has great love for His people—both then and now. He offered comfort to the people of Judah in spite of the troubles they would endure. They would go into exile as punishment for their rebellion and disobedience, but He would prepare a way for them to come back to their homeland. But the words have even deeper meaning. John the Baptist quoted from these words in announcing the Messiah (John 1:23). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 40 opens with a reference to the intimate relationship between God and His people. God called on the prophet to proclaim comfort to “my people,” and emphasized that this command came from “your God” (verse 1). These two possessive pronouns highlighted the vast difference between God’s people, who enjoyed the care of the one true God and other nations, who sought the help of false gods who could offer no power or concern.

God wanted His people to remember that His desire was restoration and salvation. Those blessings would come about through a future appearance of the Lord as Savior. Shining the New Testament’s light on Isaiah 40:3, we picture John the Baptist announcing Jesus’ appearance during His earthly ministry (see John 1:23).

As God spoke comfort to His people amid their current distress, His divine perspective in Isaiah 40:3–4 encompassed all that He would accomplish throughout history to bring the redeemed of humanity into fellowship with himself. No lack of resources—wilderness or desert—can frustrate this plan. No obstacles—hills or valleys—can stand in His way. In God’s ultimate enactment of salvation and restoration, all people will see His glory (verse 5).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think God would offer a reminder of past judgment for sin (Isaiah 40:2)?
- ? How has God brought comfort to you during difficult times?

□ God’s Word Will Never Fail

Isaiah 40:6–8



Say: In our rapidly changing world, many things are “disposable.” Even a “lifetime guarantee” does not mean a product will really last a lifetime. Even if it did, the human lifetime is but a moment in comparison to God and His Word. Jesus reinforced the permanence of God’s Word when He said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35, NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In contrast with God’s eternal perspective and power, the frailty of His people is all the more apparent. But human frailty does not impede God’s plans. Rather, frailty should cause people to trust Him all the more. In Isaiah 40:6–8, a voice calls out to the prophet, telling him to announce far and wide the stark limitations of humanity.

Against the backdrop of human history, the longest lifespan is a wisp of time. Against the backdrop of God's eternal existence, such a life becomes immeasurably small. Like grass or flowers that grow and then wilt and die, people are born and live and die, often with little or no evidence left behind of their existence (verses 6–7).

God did not leave Isaiah with a partial message focused on human limitation, however. Recall that these verses began with God's emphasis on His relationship with His people. He gave a message of comfort that overarches all the pain and sorrow of human history with a promise of His eventual revealed glory. Such a promise was now buttressed by the guarantee in Isaiah 40:8 that God's Word endures forever.

When God's Word is accepted in faith and becomes the framework on which our lives are built, the believer can look forward to everlasting rewards. And so, in verse 8, God was referencing all that He desired to bring about for His people for all time. The Word of the Lord will last forever; may each of us take hold of its truth and allow that truth to spring up and bear fruit in our lives.



Resource Packet Item 1: God's Eternal Word

Distribute the work sheet for students to take home with them. Encourage them to use it in their personal time with God this week. If they find it helpful, they may want to duplicate it for continued use.

Discuss

- ? Do you believe Isaiah's repeated emphasis on human frailty is pessimistic or intended to cause the hearer or reader to be discouraged? Explain.
- ? How do you respond when your own frailty as a human being limits you, either in the regular endeavors of life or in your spiritual pursuits?



Part 2—King, Shepherd, and Omniscient Sage

□ God Is All-Powerful and Loving

Isaiah 40:9–12

Say: God's power is far beyond our understanding. Yet He loves His people with the tender care of a shepherd. The image of being carried in His arms, as a shepherd carries a sheep that needs help, is a beautiful picture of God. His care for us as our Shepherd is found throughout Scripture (Psalm 23; John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20–21). Both His power and His compassion demonstrate that His greatness is far above our ability to comprehend. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Isaiah 40:9 reminds us, the proclamation of God's truth is not to be a secret endeavor. Isaiah was urged to carry the message to a high mountain (a place of great prominence) and shout it out, and both the location and the action pointed to the need for God's Word to be spread far and wide.

The prophet's message concerning God included assertions of both God's power and His love. Isaiah 40:10 succinctly states both truths. God is sovereign,

completely in charge of His creation, and He is in possession of His reward, the blessings He chooses to bestow through His grace to all who come into relationship with Him.

God's love takes on a more tangible expression through the imagery of a shepherd in Isaiah 40:11, imagery that would have been very familiar to the people of Isaiah's day in a society deeply connected with the care of flocks of sheep.

This deeply compassionate picture of God as loving shepherd sets the stage as the prophet returns to an examination of God's power in Isaiah 40:12. The image of God's care for His people as His chosen flock provides perspective to the next statements about His limitless power. The images in this verse all point to God's position above the created order, but they are presented in tandem with the images of His personal connection to His highest creation, humanity. Throughout His Word, God repeatedly reveals himself as the unique, all-powerful Creator of the universe, while at the same time declaring His divine love for people.

Discuss

- ? What characteristics of Isaiah might God have been addressing in His commands? What qualities or characteristics within you help to shape the way you proclaim the gospel?
- ? How might the commands to Isaiah connect with Christ's Great Commission, the mandate to take the gospel to all people throughout the world?

□ God Is All-Wise and All-Knowing

Isaiah 40:13–17



Say: At times people struggle with the idea that God is all-knowing. Some blame God for evil circumstances in life or in the world at large: "If God were really all-wise, He would never have created a world with war and famine." They can also misappropriate the concept of omniscience (God's all-knowing quality) to contradict the reality of human choice. "God knows what I am going to do, so why even try to live a certain way?" We must be careful to recognize the omniscience of God without trying to limit Him to our finite understanding. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Human knowledge, so constrained by limited personal experience and the finite capacity of the brain, can never fathom God's knowledge of all things. God's Word proclaims the boundless scope of God's divine knowledge, so we are correct in declaring that God is all-knowing. But we need to be careful not to misapply the concept of omniscience as a means of blaming God or denying our personal responsibility for our choices.

Just as God relates to people one-on-one as well as collectively, Isaiah 40:13–17 considers hypothetical human interactions with God both individually and collectively, as a means of illustrating His omniscience. From an individual perspective, there is no person who is so wise that God would ask that person for advice. In a similar vein of thought, there is no nation that can stand up against God's knowledge. It is important to remember the purpose and larger context of biblical

imagery. Describing the nations collectively as “nothing” or “less than nothing” is a way for the prophet to magnify God’s limitless power and wisdom. God is not obliged to respond to human force, nor is He threatened by it. He is supreme.

With a slight shift in imagery in verse 16, Isaiah looked at human worship and gave another illustration, this one of a massive scale. If all of Lebanon’s majestic forests were used to fuel a sacrificial fire, and all the nation’s cattle became one big burnt offering, this would not provide an adequate sacrifice for God. For the Israelites of Isaiah’s day, Lebanon’s massive cedars represented the height of their national architecture, creating the framework of Jerusalem’s temple and Solomon’s palace (see 1 Kings 5:1–6; 7:1–8). They could look back on centuries of flocks and herds sacrificed at their tabernacle and temple, perhaps a parallel to sacrificing all of Lebanon’s animals.

Whether comparing the tiny speck of humanity in comparison to God, or describing an inconceivably great act of worship, Isaiah was pointing the people of God to one truth: God is above all earthly authority and is not obligated by any human ceremony.



Resource Packet Item 2: The Lord Is My Shepherd

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to fill it in individually or in small groups, or you may want to have someone read each passage aloud, and identify the shepherd’s role(s) as a class.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways we can misunderstand the infinite scope of God’s wisdom and knowledge?
- ? What do you think Isaiah 40:15–17 tells us about the nations of the world?



Part 3—God’s Supreme Reign

□ God Is Greater Than All the Nations

Isaiah 40:18–24

Say: The first two of the Ten Commandments focus on serving only God, and not dividing our loyalties. Throughout the Old Testament, the Children of Israel rebelled by serving idols. God is supreme, and He will not share His sovereignty with anyone or anything. He is the Creator and Ruler of all. We cannot rightly serve Him yet allow something else to take His proper place in our lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In continuing this contrast between God and the nations, Isaiah 40:18–20 considers the false gods worshipped by the nations. God’s existence is above His creation in every way. Yet, people will take tiny samples of His creation (bits of wood, metal, and stone) and form them into an image to worship. The apostle Paul succinctly denounced this aspect of human behavior, which arose consistently throughout the centuries: “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:22–23, NIV).

Isaiah 40:21–22 points to evidence of God as the all-powerful Creator who can be seen throughout His creation. It is important to remember that all specific revelation regarding the means to salvation has only been revealed in God’s written Word. But throughout the Bible, numbers of writers were inspired to direct people’s attention to the grandeur of nature as a means of encouraging praise to the Creator and refuting those who would deny His existence. The believer, who lives in personal relationship with the Heavenly Father through Jesus, can discern a multitude of reasons to offer daily praise while enjoying nature’s beauty.

Isaiah 40:23–24 can be a source of encouragement to followers of Christ today. The point is made that no earthly authority is able to stand against God successfully.

Isaiah’s illustration of princes being blown away like chaff by God’s breath may remind us of the earlier statement about human frailty (see verses 6–8). The loftiest government figures are no more able to stand against God than any other person.

Discuss

- ? What modern examples of idolatry can you name, even in cultures that hold to a basic Judeo-Christian worldview?
- ? When have you found yourself praising God in response to a display of nature’s beauty?

□ God Strengthens His People

Isaiah 40:27–31



Say: Sometimes, when life isn’t going as we had hoped, it’s easy to feel abandoned and perhaps wonder if God is hearing our prayers. Apparently, the people of Judah were struggling with such feelings, but Isaiah reminded God’s people that God will provide strength to face the trials of life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 40:27 reminds us that God relates to us intimately, fully aware of our emotions and our range of responses to life’s difficulties. When we face sorrow and pain, we cry out to God. That cry is often quite simple: “Help me, Lord!” Sometimes, we might even be inclined to ask “Why?” questions, just as we see in the Book of Psalms (see Psalms 10:1; 44:23; 88:14).

God does not shy away from our questions, but invites us to seek Him for answers, then apply those answers to our needs. God’s first answer in Isaiah 40:28 was to redirect His people’s attention to His power. He then promised in verse 29 that His power is put into action to provide His strength in place of our human weakness. This, again, is a clear presentation of God as both powerful and loving.

Isaiah 40:30–31 reminds us that God’s strength is fully capable of carrying us through every stage of life. The most energetic young person grows weary, so reliance on human strength and ability is by nature limited. In contrast, those who are faithful to God find themselves renewed regardless of age or personal strength. The clear invitation is to take hold of God’s extended helping hand, recognize both His care for us and His desire to hold the central place in our lives, and then embrace those callings that reflect His desire for our lives (see 1 Peter 5:7; Ephesians 2:10).



Resource Packet Item 3: Hard Questions

Distribute the work sheet. Explain that students can write in hard questions they are grappling with, then use the questions after each one to help them find answers. They might also take the sheet home to use in their personal time with God.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when you called out to God amid great difficulty. In what ways did He help you? What did you learn from the experience?
- ? What are some ways we see God's power at work today?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In order to renew our strength amid life's challenges, we need to deepen our relationship with God. To "wait" on the Lord is to live each day expectantly, with the goal of shaping every thought and word in light of that relationship. Such thoughts, words and actions should align with God's character as we prioritize studying God's Word, seek Him in prayer, and connect with other Christians. Let's evaluate if we have neglected one or more of these areas, and pray for new opportunities this coming week to strengthen any weaknesses we identify.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take time to tell someone about the greatness of God.
- Do something tangible to be the hand of God extended to someone in need.
- Pray for someone you know who is going through a time of illness or discouragement. Call them or send them a note to let them know you are praying for them.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God Provides a Sacrifice.
Genesis 22:7-14

Tuesday

God's Provision in the Wilderness.
Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Wednesday

God Provides for Elijah.
1 Kings 17:1-7

Thursday

God Provides Food and Clothing.
Matthew 6:25-34

Friday

Paul Is Promised Protection.
Acts 27:21-26

Saturday

Jesus Christ, Our Shepherd.
Revelation 7:13-17

January 3, 2021

LESSON
5

God's Suffering Servant

Study Text

Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12

Central Truth

God the Father's exaltation of Jesus showed His approval of Jesus' substitutionary death.



Key Verse Isaiah 53:5

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (KJV).

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand that Jesus' identity as both fully God and fully man made possible His uniquely sinless life and sacrificial death, as well as His supernatural resurrection.
- Explore Jesus' example of love and humble sacrifice as a model for daily living.
- Commit to daily service to God and seek His empowerment.

Introducing the Study

Say: Approximately seven centuries before the coming of Christ, Isaiah penned words that would accurately describe the suffering Jesus would endure in order to bring salvation to disobedient humanity. (**Play the video on the Suffering Servant, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.**)

Opening Activity—War Memorials

Ask: What famous battlefields or war memorials have you visited? Did the location depict the agony of human suffering that happened there? Explain. Why was this depiction insufficient to fully capture the agony and horror of this place?

Most students will respond that even if the site depicts the suffering, it cannot fully capture what has taken place there.

Say: National battlefields can describe historical events, but they can never enable visitors to actually experience the sights, sounds, smells, and suffering of the battle. Isaiah was extremely accurate in his prophecy of the Suffering Servant, and the Gospel writers described the event in some detail, but we can never truly understand what Jesus did for us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

By some estimates, Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* is the most successful Christian-themed film in history. Using inflation-adjusted data, it earned more than \$600 million in worldwide revenue. Audiences were shocked at the film's brutal depiction of Jesus' scourging and crucifixion. Yet no film can capture the true extent of Jesus' sacrifice for humanity's sin, and our understanding of His torturous death must move beyond gore to glory, particularly the glory God desires to receive through our lives as earthly reflections of His Son.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Isaiah 52:13. Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.

14. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.

53:1. Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

3. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

9. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

New International Version

Isaiah 52:13. See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

14. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.

53:1. Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2. He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

9. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

11. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

12. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Part 1—Despised and Rejected

□ Exalted by God

Isaiah 52:13–15



Say: Isaiah paints a picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, taking the sins of the world while experiencing an excruciating death. Yet, His death was not the end of the story, for it looked forward to the exaltation He would receive when He ascended to His Father. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

One of the most compelling paradoxes in Jesus' earthly life and mission is His commitment to fully serve the Father even as He maintains His identity as God himself. This, in short, reminds us of the struggle inherent within our attempts to understand the Trinity. The Gospels' repeated distinction between God the Father and God the Son help us by pointing us toward the earthly parallel of an authoritative father and obedient son. But the extent to which Jesus followed His Father even while He was fully God is beyond our understanding. Yet, a hint of this had been in place in Isaiah's writings centuries before Jesus was born.

The Suffering Servant narrative in Isaiah points to Jesus' commitment to give himself up on behalf of lost humanity, but to receive His exaltation in so doing. In Isaiah 52:13, the prophet pointed first to the resulting exaltation.

God's Servant would be raised up and exalted. But that expression also alludes to Jesus being physically raised up on a cross. Verse 14 then further alludes to the extreme manner in which Jesus would be disfigured. Verse 15 goes on to say that God's Servant would sprinkle the nations. In other words, the shed blood of Christ would be sprinkled for the redemption of all who would believe. God's Servant will be exalted above all earthly kings; the imagery of earthly kings shutting their mouths illustrates this truth. But this picture of God's Servant being a King over kings is brought into focus with clear allusions to the Crucifixion. Exaltation and self-sacrifice come together in this passage.

Discuss

- ? What expressions in Isaiah 52:13–15 point toward Jesus' sacrifice even as the verses announce His exaltation?
- ? How do your attitudes and priorities reflect Christ's example in sacrifice?

□ Rejected by Humanity

Isaiah 53:1–3



Say: Isaiah's prophecy foretold the coming of the Messiah. The Jews of Jesus' day, living under the oppression of the Roman Empire, were actively looking for that Messiah, but when He came into their cities and villages, many of them rejected Him. He did not fulfill their preconceived notions of who the Messiah would be. Yet, there were those who received Him, just as people receive Him today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 53 opens with a key question: "Who has believed?" (verse 1, NIV). There is a note of incredulity in this verse over the self-sacrifice of God's Servant. That

questioning voice reflects the response of people everywhere and through all time to the claims of the gospel.

The second half of verse 1 uses symbolic imagery to make it clear that the lost can never satisfactorily answer their questions by relying on their own wisdom. Such requires the intervention of the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ. Jesus is the full expression of God's Person and power; He is truly "the arm of the Lord." Only through the work of the Spirit can that arm be revealed, which takes place through the Word of God proclaimed and applied.

Contrasts continue in the description of God's Servant. That the Servant grows up (verse 2) points to Jesus' entire earthly life. The cross and resurrection came after a life that intimately connected the Savior with human experience. Jesus grew up in humble circumstances. While there were certainly miraculous elements to identify His birth as the spectacular breaking in of the divine into our world, His birth, childhood, and young adulthood leading to His ministry were much like any other Jewish boy of that time.

When Jesus did begin to attract attention through His public ministry and miracles, there was no widespread rush within the society of His day to embrace Him. Many, such as the disciples and other godly followers mentioned in the Gospels, would take to heart the truth Jesus proclaimed. But many others would reject Him (verse 3). The world at large would fail to see Jesus for who He is, and would instead be blinded by the humility and simplicity of His appearance and actions.

Jesus' identification with sorrow and suffering connected Him with the very things people naturally want to avoid. And yet, His embrace of this world's pain was a necessary part of His mission to defeat all suffering for all time.



Resource Packet Item 1: What's Really Important?

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups. Assign one of the three sections of the sheet to each small group, and give them a few minutes to read the passages and answer the questions. Then ask the groups to report their responses to the rest of the class.

Discuss

- ? Before you accepted Christ, what was your first response to the gospel?
- ? What kinds of doubting questions have you encountered from others when sharing your faith?



Part 2—Wounded for Our Transgressions

□ He Bore Our Sin and Suffering

Isaiah 53:4–6

Say: What are some examples of benefits you have received from someone else's sacrifice? (*Give opportunity for a few students to share. Examples may include a college education made possible by their parents' sacrifice or freedom protected by service personnel.*) Jesus made the greatest sacrifice when He took the sins of rebellious humanity to make reconciliation with God possible. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

A strong contrast presents itself in Isaiah 53:4. Jesus obediently went to the cross on behalf of sinful humanity, but those present at His crucifixion condemned Him as if He were guilty of His own sin before God. Moving beyond the audience at the place of His crucifixion, this verse also reminds us of a more general human reaction to the Cross, as well as to all evil. People do not naturally see evil in themselves, and they are often too quick to acknowledge the guilt they perceive in others.

Verses 5–6 dismiss any self-deceiving self-approval to which we might cling. Clearly, Jesus did not suffer and die for any crime He committed against anyone; He lived a perfect life. Rather, His wounds and pain were a direct result of humanity's sins. The collective, repeated pronoun "our" in verse 5 points to the personal debt of sin carried by every person who has ever lived or will live until God chooses to conclude the history of this world. Verse 6 leaves no one out of this classification. All of us have gone astray from the divinely planned life of holiness for which we were created. All of us have done so willingly, in purposeful rebellion against God. Yet, God's response has been to redirect the punishment we deserve and place it on the Son of God.

Isaiah 53:5–6 is not just referring to the pain and suffering we avoided because Christ was willing to bear them. A further contrast comes to light when we consider the blessings the prophet connects with our lives as a result of Christ's suffering. The punishment Christ endured brought us peace. The wounds He suffered brought us healing.

Discuss

- ? What is your reaction when you read a news story of someone convicted of a brutal murder or other heinous crime?
- ? Do you find yourself classifying convicted criminals, or people who exhibit violent or self-destructive behavior, as spiritually more needy than yourself? What would be a better response?

□ He Died Willingly

Isaiah 53:7–9



Say: Isaiah's prophecy in these verses was fulfilled when the sinless Son of God came to earth for the purpose of giving His life for the sins of humanity. He did not try to defend himself, nor did He call for the destruction of His enemies. Instead, He loved them and gave His life, even for them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 53:7 speaks prophetically of Jesus not opening His mouth in protest or in His own defense when He was oppressed, afflicted, and led to His death. This silence tells us much, given that He was unjustly condemned.

Whether Jesus was healing the sick, raising the dead, multiplying food to feed thousands, calming the Sea of Galilee in the midst of a violent storm, or allowing a horde of demons from a possessed man to go into a herd of pigs, He did so with words. As God, He possessed such boundless power that His spoken commands

could accomplish anything He desired. It is helpful to reflect on John 1 and recall that Jesus, the divine Word, is Creator of everything in the universe. On a smaller scale astounding miracles were brought about throughout Jesus' public ministry leading up to His arrest and crucifixion. Jesus' silence, then, is an act of great restraint. He refused to overcome His torturers and executioners, even though He could have easily brought help and deliverance simply through His authoritative word.

Verses 8–9 focus on the immediate consequences of Jesus' self-sacrifice. The oppressive judgment He suffered resulted in His capital punishment. He was executed even though He was an innocent Man—executed for the sins of others. He experienced the death of a criminal, between two criminals.

And yet, within the announcement of Jesus' grave in verse 9, a hint emerges that points to the fuller picture of His vindication and victory that will emerge in the verses to follow. The grave of Jesus would be that of the rich. That detail would play out with the new tomb donated by the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea (see Matthew 27:57–60). But this fulfilled prophecy would become one point among many to announce a glorious, risen Savior.



Resource Packet Item 2: The Mind of Christ

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to read the Scriptures and respond, either individually or in small groups. Then ask several volunteers to share their responses.

Discuss

- ? What are some common features in Jesus' miracles during His ministry?
- ? Why can we find hope amid the brutal description of Christ's death?



Part 3—Bruised and Exalted by God

□ He Suffered in Obedience to the Father

Isaiah 53:10–11

Say: Parents will do everything they can to keep their child from suffering. Yet God the Father loved humanity so much that He gave His Son to die on the cross for our sin—a sacrifice that God himself had ordained from the beginning (see Revelation 13:8). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christ's suffering in obedience to His Father, as described in Isaiah 53:10, gives us profound evidence of how deeply we are loved by the Heavenly Father. As Jesus said in John 3:16, God so loved this sinful world that He gave His Son. That gift included God sending Jesus into the world in human flesh, then Jesus suffering a horrible death. His suffering was a loving sacrifice made by God himself so that we could be forgiven and restored to Him as His children. Verse 10 makes the statement that it was God's will for Christ to become a sacrificial offering for us. Yet we must keep in mind that God acted out of love for us.

Sometimes the attention we give to Christ's suffering and death, while important, creates too high an emphasis on suffering and death in our own lives. Although

Jesus told us to take up our own cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24–26), this is largely a call to separation from sin in order to embark on a discipleship journey of ever-increasing personal holiness as we draw closer to our Savior. The idea behind carrying our own cross is that we die to selfishness and sinful practices—the old life—so that we can take hold of the new life afforded to us through Christ.

This emphasis on new life comes into view in Isaiah 53:10–11. Verse 10 transitions from a picture of Christ’s death as an offering for humanity to an announcement that Christ will see His own descendants. Psalm 22:30 can help us better understand this statement: Even though He will die, and even be regarded as being among the wicked, future generations will be told about Him, and the will of the Lord will continue to be enacted through Him. Furthermore, verse 11 connects a risen Savior with “the light of life.” All of this reminds us that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and His work on the cross was part of an eternal plan.

Discuss

- ? What might the sacrificial death of Jesus teach us about His will for our lives?
- ? How does God continue to demonstrate His love in the lives of believers?

□ Jesus Won the Victory

Isaiah 53:12



Say: Jesus was victorious over death, and He is now seated at the right hand of the Father where He is interceding for us. Romans 8:34 says, “Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Isaiah 53:12 encompasses a great deal of truth. Because of His obedient sacrifice, Jesus has received a reward that will be shared with all who put their trust in Him. The language is that of a victory celebration following a battle. Jesus is the One who is truly and supremely great and possesses infinite divine strength. He is given a portion “among the great” and divides the spoils “with the strong” (NIV). In Old Testament times, a victorious leader would take the possessions that had been captured through the course of battle and divide them among those who had participated in the battle. This was called the “spoils” of war. In verse 12, Isaiah used such terminology in reference to the Suffering Servant—Jesus. Because of His willingness to die for many, Christ would receive the spoils of the victor, redeeming many through His sacrificial death.

As a result, verse 12 calls us, and all of God’s people, to solemnly acknowledge what Jesus has done for us—acknowledgment that should take the form of worshipful words as well as a lifestyle that honors Him. Christ poured out His very life on our behalf. He was humbled to the extent that He was identified as, or numbered among, those who have transgressed God’s laws. He bore our sin on the cross. And now, He continually intercedes for us before the throne of God. His actions, the actions of a loving servant, are altogether worthy of our devotion and praise.



Resource Packet Item 3: Who Gets The Credit?

Distribute the work sheet and encourage students to take it home and prayerfully work through it in the following week.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to remember that Christ is our Source for anything that might come of our lives?
- ? What is the appropriate response to the spiritual victory we have in Christ?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Reexamining fundamental concepts that form the basis of the Christian faith—Christ’s life, death and resurrection—can sometimes lull believers into a false sense of familiarity. After all, these truths receive a great deal of attention at Christmas, Easter, and throughout the year. But the move from “head knowledge” to “heart commitment” and then to daily enactment is a lifelong process in every believer’s life. Use today’s study to reflect upon Christ’s sacrifice. We should focus on how transformed our lives can become when we put our faith in our risen Savior.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Look for ways to reflect the attitudes of Jesus to others this week.
- Encourage a fellow believer to rejoice in God’s love.
- Pray for opportunities to share Jesus with an unbeliever.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Jesus Betrayed and Arrested.
Matthew 26:47–56

Tuesday

Jesus Before the Sanhedrin.
Mark 14:53,55–65

Wednesday

Jesus Mocked by the Romans.
Mark 15:16–20

Thursday

Jesus Crucified.
John 19:17–25

Friday

Jesus Insulted on the Cross.
Matthew 27:38–43

Saturday

Jesus Died on the Cross.
Luke 23:44–48

January 10, 2021

LESSON

6

God's Compassion for All People

Study Text

Isaiah 54:1 through 55:13

Central Truth

God is full of love and compassion for all people.



Key Verse Isaiah 55:1

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (KJV).

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand that God's invitation to receive His mercy and pardon has been issued to all people.
- Respond to His invitation in such a way that includes daily obedience and spiritual growth.
- Identify specific people who need to be reached with the gospel.

Introducing the Study

Say: God's plan to include not just the Children of Israel but all of humanity in His plan of salvation is clear in the Book of Isaiah. While the first hearers of Isaiah's message were the people of Judah, it is evident from today's study that the message is for all people and for all times. The invitation in Isaiah 55:1, our key verse, is an oft-quoted passage showing God's compassion and provision for all who will come to Him.

Opening Activity—God's Provision

Ask: From your life or from the testimony of someone you know, what examples can you share of taking a step of faith in obedience to God, believing that He would follow through with increased provision and blessing? What was the outcome?

Allow a few students to share. If you have a story from your own life, you may want to share it to start the discussion.

Say: God has great plans for people, if they will trust and follow Him. God's plan for the people of Judah was far beyond anything they could see or understand, especially amid difficult circumstances. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Although having children is greatly valued today, in ancient Israel, having (or not having) children greatly impacted your standing and well-being in society. At key points in the Old Testament, God intervened in the plight of a barren wife and brought about a birth of historic significance (consider the stories of Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah). The sons born in these situations all played key roles in the larger history of God's people. Repeatedly, God used a divinely orchestrated human birth to carry forward His plan to provide spiritual rebirth.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Isaiah 54:7. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.

8. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.

10. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.

11. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.

12. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.

13. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children.

14. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee.

55:1. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

2. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

3. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

4. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

6. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

11. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

New International Version

Isaiah 54:7. “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back.

8. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD your Redeemer.”

10. “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

11. “Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with lapis lazuli.

12. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.

13. All your children will be taught by the LORD, and great will be their peace.

14. In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you.”

55:1. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

2. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

3. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

4. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples.”

6. Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

7. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

11. “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Part 1—God’s Everlasting Mercy and Kindness

□ Rejoice in God’s Blessings

Isaiah 54:1–2



Say: Living by faith sometimes calls for actions that do not seem logical. When God told the barren woman to sing and rejoice, it would not seem logical based on the values of the day. Neither did it seem logical to tell her to enlarge her tent. If she was barren, why would she need more space? But God is not limited to the logical. He was using this as an illustration of His great plans for His people. Although they would go into bondage, He would bring them back and make their influence larger than ever before. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Isaiah’s day, a barren woman would have been pitied. And so, the depiction of an enlarged tent in contrast to a barren woman, in Isaiah 54:1–2, would speak clearly to the future blessings of God that were being promised. The prophet invited the readers to make these alterations on their “tent” in faithful anticipation of what God would do. Think how often, in our walk of faith, God invites us to find hope in expectation of His blessings to come.

Isaiah 54:1 invites a song in the midst of barrenness. When we look beyond the historical context of God’s people facing judgment and exile into a distant, foreign land, this gives a compelling picture of the experience of the redeemed. In ourselves, we live barren lives, an emptiness powerfully expressed through the imagery of a barren womb. Yet because of God’s saving work in us, we can become fruitful and contribute to bringing new life into the world.

God not only transforms our lives through the work of Christ, but He leads us in communicating the gospel to others and inviting them into relationship with Him. We should expect to see others brought into the Kingdom as we obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and proclaim the gospel. In this way, the “tent” in which we dwell is enlarged.

Discuss

- ? What cultural expressions in Isaiah 54:1–2 would have special meaning to Isaiah’s original audience?
- ? How can believers today relate to the image of a barren woman?

□ Rejoice in God’s Promises

Isaiah 54:3–10



Say: The promises of God are sure, but His timing and plan may differ from our expectations. When the people of Judah were instructed to expand their tent, they could have perceived that they were going to become a great nation right away. However, there would be a time of exile, followed by a return to their homeland, where they would be ruled by the Roman Empire centuries later. Even when the Messiah came, the fulfillment of the promise did not match their expectations. His closest disciples wondered when Jesus would set up His earthly kingdom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The call to expand one's tent precedes the promise that the people of God will multiply and spread throughout the nations (see 55:5). On one level, Isaiah 54:2–3 offers the promise of renewed growth and expansion of the people of Jerusalem following their exile. But the verse also has a beautiful allusion to the growth and expansion of the Church. When the next verses are considered, the promises God offers to His people can be seen in the context of the New Testament Church.

Verse 4 promises freedom from fear, shame, and disgrace. For the Christian, these most clearly connect with freedom from the effects of sins. God our Creator is also called our husband (verse 5), a word picture similar to John's vision in Revelation of the Church as the bride of Christ (see Revelation 21:2). This relationship is only possible through Christ's identity as our Redeemer, a role He fulfills thanks to the measureless power He possesses as "the God of all the earth" (Isaiah 54:5, NIV).

Much of Judah's history is summarized in verses 6–8, including events Isaiah prophesied. Following centuries of idolatry and rebellion, God's people would be driven from their homeland to endure exile in the lands of their conquerors. But God would call them back, renewing His covenant presence among them after allowing them to suffer the consequences of their actions. His divine anger would be felt for a season.

For the Christian, a wonderful promise emerges in the contrasting time elements of these verses. God does judge sin, but He desires to do so for only a season. His redemptive goal is to transform sinful lives so that they can be brought into His presence for eternity. The references to God's judgment of a "moment" in verses 7–8 sits next to the promise of God's everlasting kindness and compassion.

Verses 9–10 offer historic and even apocalyptic (end-time) promises of God's unfailing love. But within these large-scale pictures of His commitment, the Christian can rest in personal assurance of God's mercy.



Resource Packet Item 1: The Timeless Promises of God

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to answer the questions. The first four questions can be answered in small groups, but the final question should be prayerfully answered individually, either during class or at home.

Discuss

- ? What similarities do you see between Isaiah's original audience and Christians today?
- ? What can we learn about the nature of God and His attitude toward humanity, in Isaiah 54:3–10?



Part 2—God's Promise to His People

□ Jerusalem Will Be Restored

Isaiah 54:11–15

Say: When God promised the restoration of the city of Jerusalem, He was speaking both in a physical and a spiritual sense. The city would be restored after the exile that would come upon them. But, beyond that, the city would

be restored in a spiritual sense as the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven” (Revelation 3:12; 21:2, NIV). This promise applies to every believer of all time. We will be part of that New Jerusalem. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Woven throughout Isaiah’s prophecies are references to Jerusalem and Zion. The names refer to the same city, and that city has held a central role in God’s redemptive work in human history from the earliest references in Abraham’s day to the prophesied conclusion of this world’s history in Revelation (see Genesis 14; Revelation 21–22). The references in Isaiah 54:11–12 to a city built of precious stones foretells the description of the New Jerusalem within the new heavens and earth (see Revelation 21:15–21).

But even when Scripture directs attention toward the city of Jerusalem, the purpose of those references is to reinforce the truths concerning God’s actions on behalf of His people. Idealistic pictures of Jerusalem are never just about foundations of precious stones, or any other structural detail. God’s redemptive actions are ultimately aimed at its inhabitants. Verse 13 speaks of the descendants of the righteous being “taught by the LORD” (NIV). His wisdom and knowledge among them will be a source of great peace. As a current application within this promise for the future, Christians who live according to God’s wisdom experience His peace.

One day the city of Jerusalem will be impervious to attack, as described in verses 14–15. Until God’s people reach this great city of hope, God promises the power of the Spirit to resist temptation and find freedom from fear. Opposition to the gospel and the Church will continue to be realities until Christ returns. But His followers can live in joyful hope of their ultimate victory even as they trust Him to carry them through the trials and challenges of today.

Discuss

- ? What might the descriptions of Jerusalem adorned with precious stones tell us about God’s promises for us?
- ? What causes fear in your life today, and how can you find relief and deliverance from that fear?

□ No Enemy Will Prevail

Isaiah 54:16–17



Say: God is the Creator of all things, including even the enemy of our souls, who chose to rebel against Him. However, God promises His servants victory over the enemy. His people will “refute every tongue that accuses you” (Isaiah 54:17, NIV). In Revelation 12:10, we read, “The accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down” (NIV). What a blessing to know that, in due time, the enemy of our souls will be destroyed. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Speaking through the prophet, God proclaimed a deep mystery about His own power, one with which His followers have grappled through the ages. In Isaiah

54:16, God describes himself as the One who gives the blacksmith the ability to forge weapons. He is also the Creator of the destroyer. Then, in verse 17, God promised protection for His people from those evil forces.

Throughout Scripture, we see two principles restated: God is the Creator of everything, but God is not the author of evil. There are many instances in both the Old and New Testaments when physical weapons caused injury and death to godly people. But woven throughout that narrative, God's plan of redemption carried forward. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, Christians have the promise of victory over Satan's attempts to destroy them spiritually. Ultimately, Christ's followers will witness His eternal victory over Satan.

A key word in verse 17 is very helpful in evaluating the long-term nature of this promise of protection. Isaiah speaks of the "heritage of the servants of the LORD" (NIV). God promises great blessings for His faithful servants, yet these are only partially realized in this world. Contrary to the claims of some, the Christian cannot guarantee personal wealth and health and a trouble-free life by repeating certain Bible verses. The believer's heritage, however, gives ample promise that blessings will be revealed and fulfilled over the course of God's eternal plan.



Resource Packet Item 2: Ultimate Victory

Distribute the case study sheet from your *Adult Resource Packet*. Divide your class into small groups and assign one of the three case studies to each group. After a few minutes ask each group to report their answers. As you gather their responses, write them on the board for everyone to consider.

Discuss

- ? How can followers of God maintain faith and hope even when God's promises seem far away in the future?
- ? What challenging circumstances do you face? What biblical promises can you apply to those situations now? What promises give you hope for God's blessing beyond those challenges?



Part 3—God's Invitation to the Nations

□ Seek the Lord

Isaiah 55:1–9

Say: God's plans are far above any human plans we can make. While the people of Judah were looking at their current situation, God was looking far beyond it. He was going to use them to reach the nations. How would He do that? Through accepting the Messiah, who would come from the lineage of Judah, all of humanity could be reconciled to Him. Each one of us is included in these verses. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Isaiah 55, God issued a wonderful invitation resting on two powerful truths outlined in verse 1 and expanded upon in the verses following: First, this was a universal invitation to all people; and, second, God called on all to receive blessings, which will be received by God's grace, not because of human merit or ability.

Verse 2 asked a rhetorical question of Isaiah's audience: Why would anyone rely on their own limited resources to obtain flawed and limited benefits? There would be no need for the question if God had already determined whom He would bless and whom He would condemn. But the people would have the freedom to turn to God in response to His invitation, or ignore Him and continue their futile search for fulfillment and meaning in life. Such an invitation continues today.

God's plan for our lives immeasurably surpasses anything we might accomplish for ourselves. Our souls can "delight in the richest of fare" (verse 2, NIV) and experience true life (verse 3). That these promises ultimately have their foundation in Christ becomes clear when Isaiah prophesies of their eternal nature (the "everlasting covenant") and their Davidic identity. While Isaiah's audience could look back on the splendor of David's reign, the Christian can also see that Jesus, David's descendant, is truly the One who is a witness to the peoples of the world (verse 4). Verse 5 again points to the global scope of God's redemptive plan and the obedient witness of His followers that will speak to the nations.

Verses 6–9 remind God's people, including believers today, that our sin separates us from God and there is a limited season in this life during which we can accept God's offer of salvation (see 2 Corinthians 6:2). Those who respond in faith during the time of opportunity must turn from sin—in their actions, their thoughts, and their motivations. When they do so, they discover that God freely offers mercy and pardon. The immeasurable gulf between God's exalted nature and our lowly, sin-flawed existence can be bridged, but only through the bridge of salvation God has provided.

Discuss

- ? How does Isaiah 55:1–9 acknowledge that people must choose to accept or to reject God's invitation?
- ? To what degree did you resist God's invitation to salvation before accepting Christ? Why do you think you resisted Him?

□ Respond to His Word

Isaiah 55:10–13



Say: God's Word produces results. Just as rain and snow fall down from heaven to water the earth and produce crops, so the power of God's Word accomplishes its purpose. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The concept of "the Word" is often referenced in Scripture. As a result of God simply speaking His Word, this universe came into existence. Throughout history God has continued to speak with divine power to shape human lives collectively and individually. His written Word guides all who will both read and apply its truth. And the living Word, the Messiah Jesus Christ, is the fulfillment of the great written promises concerning redemption. Isaiah extolled the great virtues and significance of God's Word in Isaiah 55:10–13. By His Word, the world was made and functions properly. In a sense, the intricate nature of creation is a constant reminder that we cannot comprehend the ways of the Lord (verses 10–11).

God's Word should always be at work in the life of the believer. Through His Word, we learn and follow His purposes. Ultimately, our relationship with Jesus Christ brings to fruition God's plan for our lives. The result is deep fulfillment and joy, both in this life and the life to come (verses 12–13).



Resource Packet Item 3: Divine Seed

Distribute the group discussion sheet, and divide your class into two sections, with smaller groups within each section to discuss the sheet. After a few minutes, ask some of the groups to report their answers.

Discuss

- ? When you plant a garden, how much credit do you take for what grows? How can you liken this to acknowledging God's power over our own abilities?
- ? How does God's Word shape and guide your life on a daily basis?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God has given every believer the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel to the lost. The Church is the means by which He communicates His truth to the nations.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Identify areas of your life where you need to grow, and ask God to help you.
- Look for volunteer opportunities in your church or community where you can serve God.
- Pray that God will point you to lost people with whom you can share your faith.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God Prevents Sin.
Genesis 20:1–7

Tuesday

God Blesses Potiphar's Home.
Genesis 39:1–5

Wednesday

God's Mercy to All.
Psalm 145:8–16

Thursday

God's Law Written on the Heart.
Romans 2:12–16

Friday

God Desires All To Be Saved.
1 Timothy 2:1–7

Saturday

God Establishes Governments.
1 Peter 2:13–21

January 17, 2021

LESSON 7

A New World Promised

Introducing the Study

Say: If you've ever driven toward a large mountain range, you've probably noticed that one peak may seem to be very close behind the other, only to realize that there are many miles between the two. Isaiah's prophecy is similar to those mountain peaks. The prophet spoke of Jesus' ministry on earth at His first coming and immediately after spoke of events that will take place at the end of the age. His original audience had no way to know that more than 2,000 years would lie between the events.

Opening Activity—Sequels

Ask: Have you ever watched a two-part episode of your favorite TV show, or read a book that promised a sequel? Name some of them.

Say: Today we are studying a two-stage prophecy of Isaiah. We are now living in the "between" stage. Jesus came and fulfilled many of the prophecies of Isaiah, but many more have yet to be fulfilled. Studying these along with other prophetic Scriptures gives us a preview of the sequel and offers us great hope for the future. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

One day—a day promised in Scripture but still unknown—Christians from throughout the Church Age will join God's faithful servants from the Old Testament era and rejoice together over Jesus Christ's fully completed mission. It will be a mission carried out in two phases. Jesus first came to earth to live and die and be resurrected in order to provide the means for our redemption. Upon Christ's return, He will bring about the complete fulfillment of God's blessing for God's redeemed people.

Study Text

Isaiah 61:1–9; 62:10–12; 65:1–12, 17–25

Central Truth

Jesus Christ will return to judge the nations and welcome the redeemed.



Key Verse 2 Peter 3:13

We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (KJV).

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Explore Christ's redemptive plan from the perspective of how it will unfold in the future.
- Take to heart the desperate plight of people without Christ who face judgment rather than blessing.
- Model their lives today on the complete freedom from sin to be experienced in the promised world to come.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Isaiah 61:1. The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

2. To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

3. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

62:11. Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

65:1. I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.

11. But ye are they that forsake the LORD, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number.

12. Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.

17. For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

18. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

21. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

22. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

New International Version

Isaiah 61:1. The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

2. to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

3. and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

62:11. The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'"

65:1. "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'"

11. "But as for you who forsake the LORD and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for Fortune and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny,

12. I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will fall in the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."

17. "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

18. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

19. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

21. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

22. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands."

Part 1—Coming of the Messiah

□ The Mission of the Messiah

Isaiah 61:1–3



Say: While the people of Isaiah’s day did not fully understand the long-term nature of Isaiah’s prophecy, Jesus certainly did. As He taught His disciples and others around Him, He began to clarify its message. Their understanding (and ours) is still lacking in many of the details. But, as we trust Him, He will guide us to be ready for the full realization of His mission. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Jesus began His ministry during His earthly life some 2,000 years ago, He announced His mission in the synagogue of His hometown of Nazareth. There He read from Isaiah 61, including the phrase “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61:2, NIV; see Luke 4:18–19).

When Isaiah wrote this passage, he could not foresee the significant span of time contained within Isaiah 61:2. What Jesus read through the first half of the verse to His synagogue audience would come about during His brief season of earthly ministry before His death, resurrection, and ascension. However, the next phrase, “the day of vengeance of our God” (verse 2b, NIV), pointed to a day yet to come, a day still in the future.

On that future day, God will bring about a season of divine judgment that will forever defeat evil and forever preserve life and blessing for those made righteous through His Son. Verse 3 follows on this theme, as ashes were symbolic of deep mourning and grief, while oil, a crown, and a garment all allude to preparations for a great celebration. Despair over sin and its resulting judgment, then, will someday be replaced by everlasting gladness. And God’s people, made as strong and enduring as oaks, will display His splendor.

Discuss

- ? In what ways have you announced the news of Christ to those around you, including ways that may not involve words?
- ? How do you think Christians should respond to the news that there is divine judgment coming for those who do not know Christ?

□ God’s People Will Be Restored

Isaiah 61:4–9



Say: When Isaiah spoke of the restoration of God’s people, he was looking far into the future—beyond the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem and beyond any political restoration of the nation of Israel. Both of those are temporal. He was speaking of a permanent restoration of all God’s people, including the Christians of today, and that restoration would be everlasting. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The wording of Isaiah’s next prophecies, beginning in Isaiah 61:4, gives two clues as to its future setting. The first clue is one of degree. Every action described on

the part of God's people is broad and all-encompassing. Ruin and devastation that have been endured for generations will be reversed (Isaiah 61:4). No single region is identified, pointing to widespread restoration. Human history, rife with war, has seen nations and cities repeatedly overrun and crushed. In this future age, no evidence of such destruction will remain.

The people of God will receive an unprecedented degree of respect, in stark contrast to the world's hatred that the godly experience today. The reference to "aliens" and "foreigners" serving the righteous (verse 5) is not intended as a judgment of those laborers but as an acknowledgment of God's favor on His people that places them in a position of leadership. Similarly, the function of God's people as a nation of priests will be fully supported by the wealth of the nations (verse 6).

A second clue to the future fulfillment of this passage is one of duration. In this sense, much of the scene involves the Millennial Reign of Christ after His return, with the restoration of national Israel (see Zephaniah 3:19–20; Romans 11:26–27). We also find allusions to the never-ending new heavens and new earth, following the defeat of all evil. The joy of God's people will be "everlasting" (Isaiah 61:7), as will God's covenant (verses 8–9). Certainly, followers of Christ experience the joy of serving Him today, but that joy is interwoven with continued sorrows and trials. The future joy of the righteous will never again be interrupted, but will endure forever.



Resource Packet Item 1: Priests and Ministers

Distribute the work sheet and have someone read each passage aloud. Answer the first question about each one as a class. At the end of the exercise, give a couple of minutes for personal reflection and application.

Discuss

- ? What distinguishes the promised blessings in Isaiah 61:4–9 from God's blessings upon His people today?
- ? How can your confident expectation of your future life with God motivate you to fulfill God's desire for you to reach others for Him?



Part 2—Invitation Accepted or Rejected?

□ Judgment on Those Who Reject

Isaiah 65:1–7, 11–12

Say: Have you ever seen people holding signs on the street with one of the following messages: "Hellfire and brimstone!" "The end is near!" "Repent, sinner!" "Turn or burn!"? As a believer, what is your reaction to these methods of evangelism? What would be a better choice? (Allow a brief time of discussion, then share your highlights from the following text.)

The opening verses of Isaiah 65 confront us with a God of judgment who is also a God of mercy—characteristics that exist simultaneously. It is a heartrending tragedy to realize that Isaiah was writing about God's desire to bring His own covenant people back into fellowship with Him, and they rejected Him (Isaiah 65:1–2).

This passage also describes God's loving overtures to the lost people of the world. As the apostle Paul explains, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NIV). Jesus, as the Messiah, is God the Son, who reveals himself even to those who do not ask for Him, and are intent on seeking their own way.

Sadly, there will be those who continue to reject God no matter how many times they are invited to enter into relationship with Him. Isaiah described various practices of the idolatrous Israelites (Isaiah 65:3–5). While the specifics of some are a bit unknown, we can see references to efforts at communicating with the dead, offering pagan sacrifices, and disobeying God's commands (here, with regard to eating food that was prohibited by the Law). In many ways, these sinful practices are similar to sins we might observe all around us today

The promise of judgment is as direct as God's earlier invitation. God will one day enact "full payment" (verse 7, NIV) for the accumulated sins of generations. Clearly, God's wrath awaits those who insist on clinging to sin (verses 11–12). These sobering words might remind us of Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NIV).

Discuss

- ? How might a Christian convey the reality of judgment to a lost person, and how might he or she recognize the right time to convey such truth?
- ? How has popular culture attacked both the reality of God's judgment of sin and the messengers He has sent to warn of that judgment?

□ Blessings for Those Who Accept Isaiah 62:10–12; Isaiah 65:8–10



Say: God still transforms people. The Children of Israel, both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom, had rebelled and disobeyed Him over and over. Both kingdoms would suffer in exile, and Jerusalem itself would be trampled. But God would bring new life. The same is true of our lives. Each of us has rebelled against God, but He will still transform those who accept His Son, Jesus Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As in other passages in Isaiah, the setting of Zion (Jerusalem) is used in Isaiah 62 to direct attention to God's saving work among the redeemed. The people of God are invited to come through Jerusalem's gates into the security and blessing to be found within (verse 10). The source of that blessing is Jesus himself, the Savior who will come to Jerusalem in view of the whole world (verse 11). Jerusalem will be sought after by one and all. This detail alone speaks of a new order, different from what we see today.

Isaiah 65 expands this promise of blessing beyond the city of Jerusalem to the land of Israel. While the prophet woefully reviewed the idolatrous history of God's people in verses 1–7, verses 8–10 look to the day when divine judgment will be forever in the past and God will again multiply and bless His people. Even places of historic judgment will become locations of God's favor. The Valley of Achor was

where Achan and his family were executed after his disobedience at the battle of Jericho. Familiar to generations as a place of punishment, it will one day become a resting place for God's people (verse 10).

Christians receive a taste of this transformation today. The power of redemption in our lives can radically change our environment. Homes once wracked with discord can experience the daily peace of God's presence. Jobs where tension and stress ruled each workday can be changed when employees reflect the love of Christ. Although secular historians may disagree, Christians can review the large-scale history of their cities or homelands and recognize the difference made when God is honored.



Resource Packet Item 2: The Great Transformation

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few moments to write some transformations in their lives. They may want to mention a few of them then take the sheet home for additional reflection.

Discuss

- ? How can you maintain your commitment to love as Christ loves in spite of how others treat you?
- ? What opportunities can you identify to compassionately warn the lost of the eternal destiny they will face without Christ?

Part 3—Everlasting Joy for God's People



□ A New Heavens and New Earth Will Come

Isaiah 65:17–19

Say: Six times in Genesis 1, God pronounced all of His creation as “good” (verse 31 says “very good”). There was no reference to pain or sickness in the world as God created it. Yet we need only watch one newscast to know that the world is no longer good, now that sin has entered the picture. Even so, such evil is only temporary. God will bring about a new heavens and a new earth, providing everlasting joy for His people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When Isaiah wrote of a new heavens and earth (Isaiah 65:17–19), he was not suggesting that God made mistakes with His original creation, nor is this an indication that God saw His present creation as a mistake. The creation narrative reminds us that God's plan for the original heavens and earth was only good. The future heavens and earth will fulfill God's intentions as they existed before the dawn of human history in Eden.

God's promise to create a new heavens and new earth offers wonderful encouragement to Christians regarding their future. But viewing that new creation in light of God's original plan for this creation can help believers better understand some of the challenges they encounter today. Much of what is painful in life is an outgrowth of the presence of sin in our world. And the end-times prophecies of Scripture point to the eventual defeat and removal of sin. When followers of Christ look toward the

new heavens and new earth as their destiny, they can more readily identify hints of that perfection in the beauty and joy to be found in limited measure today.

Verse 17 describes such a radical transformation in creation that memories of this world's imperfection will forever fade. God invites His people to "be glad and rejoice forever" in what He will create (verse 18, *NIV*). The focus on Jerusalem serves as a reminder of the salvation narrative that has unfolded in that city through the ages (verse 19). But wherever they may reside in the new creation God brings about, all of His people will experience the perfect joy attributed to the Holy City.

Discuss

- ? Taken together, what do the original creation and the creation to come tell us about God's intentions for us?
- ? Explain why you look forward to the new heavens and new earth.

□ A New Order Will Come

Isaiah 65:20–25



Say: People have various ideas of what heaven will be like. While some are based on a careful study of biblical passages, others are based on stories told by people who have had "near-death experiences" and received glimpses of heaven. Our perceptions might even be based on songs we sing or have sung. Regardless, Scripture offers the only sure guide as to what God tells us about eternity. And we know that the new heavens and earth will reflect His ultimate plan for His creation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Since Isaiah does refer to the reality of death within this passage (Isaiah 65:20), many scholars see these verses as describing a blending of the millennial reign of Christ and the new heavens and new earth. Ultimately, the new heavens and new earth, as described in Revelation 21, will completely remove death. During the millennial reign of Christ, humans will still die but at a much greater age than people die today.

The overall focus of verses 20–25 is consistent with God's ultimate plan for His redeemed people. The emphasis is on life, blessing, and universal peace. In the absence of conflict, people will never need to fear being oppressed or robbed. They can take joy in the works of their hands, with no concern that they might toil in vain.

For the redeemed, there is great hope in these words. While we might struggle to understand why an answer to a prayer is delayed in this life, such questions will not be part of our future, glorified life with God. His answer will be evident before we can finish a prayer (verse 24).

God's blessings will continue through the generations to follow, and those blessings will affect even the broader cycles of nature. The absence of evil will bring about a very different life for all the inhabitants of Earth.



Resource Packet Item 3: John's Glimpse of Heaven

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to work on it. You may want to divide the Scriptures up and have one student report on each of them. Then ask all of them to share their view of heaven, based on what they have learned.

Discuss

- ? What do you think life would be like in a world without evil?
- ? What opportunities might you have this week to point others to new life in Christ?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Christ expects His followers to view heaven's promise in light of today's responsibilities. At the Last Supper, Jesus promised, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3, NIV). That promise of future reunion and reward, however, was followed by a call to be productive for the Kingdom throughout life. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:1–2, NIV). As we walk with God, we should see ourselves becoming productive branches within the Vine, joyfully awaiting that day when the fruit of our work for the Kingdom will be revealed.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Talk to someone this week about whether or not they are prepared to meet Jesus and are walking with Him on the road to heaven.
- Make a conscious effort to reflect the joy of the Lord in your interactions with others this week.
- Pray each day for someone who is not a believer.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Reign of David's Greater Son.
2 Samuel 7:12–17

Tuesday

Messiah Declared.
Psalm 2:1–12

Wednesday

Coming of the Son of Man.
Daniel 7:9–14

Thursday

The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry.
Luke 4:16–21

Friday

Prepare for That Day.
2 Peter 3:8–14

Saturday

New Heaven and New Earth.
Revelation 21:1–7

Gospel by Mark

Fast-paced action is a popular element in books, movies, and television shows. Entertainment often begins with heart-pounding action, then uses flashbacks to give the audience the background for that action. On the other hand, many literary masterpieces begin with pages of background and descriptions to set the stage for the action to come. Regardless of the style, there is always a main character around whom the story is built.

The Gospel writers in the New Testament approached the subject of the Messiah in different ways. Both Matthew and Luke began with background information, including genealogies. John began even earlier, with Jesus as Creator. Mark's Gospel, however, is more brief, and focuses more on the events of Christ's ministry. Of course, all of the Gospel writers focused on Jesus, the Messiah who came to provide salvation for all of humankind, but their approaches differed, thus reaching their audiences in different ways.

A key element throughout the Book of Mark is the authority of Jesus. We will see His authority over demons, illness, human traditions, and even death. The book provides glimpses of urgency throughout Jesus' ministry. The word "immediately" occurs seventeen times in the KJV text and twelve times in the NIV text. Similarly, the phrase "at once" appears seven times in the NIV.

The Book of Mark introduces us to the life and teachings of Jesus in a way that is easy to understand and compelling to read. It leaves the reader wanting to know more about Jesus—and such additional information is readily available in the other Gospels and throughout the Scriptures.

Study 8 begins with John's introduction of Jesus and the launch of Jesus' ministry. In Study 9, Jesus confronts the religious leaders about healing and forgiveness, eating and fasting, and the Sabbath, showing His authority over the many human traditions they held dear. In Study 10, He is teaching His disciples about who He is and tells them of His coming death. In Study 11, He teaches about the end times, ending with the instruction to always be ready for the return of Christ. Study 12 provides the account of His betrayal and trials before the high priest and Pilate. Study 13 concludes the quarter with an exploration of His death and victorious resurrection.

Enjoy your journey through the life of Jesus as described by the writing of Mark. Help your students as they seek to submit their own lives to His authority, and watch as He works in their lives and in yours.

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark

January 24, 2021

LESSON 8

Jesus' Ministry Begins

Introducing the Study

Say: Today, we are beginning a study of the Gospel as recorded by Mark. While the text of the book itself does not identify the author, it is generally understood that it was written by the man named Mark who began a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas but did not complete it. Later, Paul and Barnabas parted ways because Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along again, and Paul did not agree (See Acts 15:36–40.) In 2 Timothy 4:11, however, Paul referred to Mark as a valued fellow worker.

Opening Activity—Authority

Ask: What authority do you have in your home, your job, or other setting? Who gave you that authority?

Say: A common theme in the Gospels is the authority of Jesus. We begin our lives under the authority of our parents, and later live under the authority of our teachers, our bosses, and the various levels of government over us. We also often hold some type of authority over others. But earthly authority pales in comparison to the authority of Jesus—and the authority He gives to His disciples and to us. (Read Mark 16:15–18 aloud and share your highlights from the following text.)

Some people struggle with the concept of authority. It is human nature to want to do things our own way. But as the Book of Mark begins, we are reminded that, first and foremost, we live under the authority of Jesus Christ. He called us to repent and to believe His kingdom message, and demonstrated His authority to do so by performing miraculous works of healing and deliverance. We will examine Mark's fast-paced account of these miracles.

Study Text

Mark 1:1–39

Central Truth

Jesus began His ministry with miraculous signs.



Key Verse Mark 1:17

Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men (KJV).

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- To review the events of Jesus' earliest ministry, following His introduction by John the Baptist.
- To appreciate the authority and power Jesus displayed in His ministry of teaching, healing, and deliverance.
- To respond to Jesus' message by turning from sin and believing His Word.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Mark 1:4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

7. And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

8. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

9. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

10. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:

11. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

14. Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

16. Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

17. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

18. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

22. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

23. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

24. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

25. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

27. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

New International Version

Mark 1:4. And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

5. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

8. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9. At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

11. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

14. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

15. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

16. As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

17. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."

18. At once they left their nets and followed him.

22. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

23. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out,

24. "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

25. "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!"

27. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him."

Part 1—John Prepares the Way



□ A Forerunner Is Sent

Mark 1:1–3

Say: Mark, likely the earliest of the Gospels, does not begin with Jesus' birth or His pre-existence (see John 1). Instead, Mark began with a simple statement that he was telling the “good news” (NIV) or “gospel” (KJV) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Throughout the book, Mark presented evidence of Jesus' divinity by reporting His actions. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Mark began writing, he made his subject clear. He was recording more than history, although his account was based upon historical events. Mark was recording the gospel—the good news—of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of “Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God” (verse 1, NIV).

In giving the Savior's title as Messiah, Mark described Christ's identity and ministry. “Jesus,” a Greek form of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” was a common name for Jewish boys at the time. However, it was God's chosen name for His Son, given because of its meaning: “the Lord saves” (see Matthew 1:21). Just as Joshua led God's people in delivering them from Egyptian slavery by bringing them into the Promised Land, Jesus would deliver human beings from slavery to sin.

“Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” God's people had been waiting for the appearance of their Messiah, and those who accepted Him would discover He was not only a human being; He was also divine, the Son of God.

About 700 years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah foresaw that God would send John the Baptist as a forerunner of Christ. The wording of Isaiah's prophecy was cited by Mark in verses 2–3: John would “prepare” and “make straight . . . a highway” (see Isaiah 40:3). This indicated that John would do more than acknowledge that Jesus was coming soon. He would also call his listeners to prepare their hearts to accept the Person and message that could change their lives for eternity. As a person approached Jesus by faith and in repentance, Jesus would deliver that person from sin to experience God's kingdom (see Mark 1:15; John 3:3).

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to know the truth about who Jesus is? What can hinder a person from knowing and accepting who He is?
- ? What responsibility do we have to call others to Jesus?



□ Pointing to Christ

Mark 1:4–8

Say: John the Baptist had a singular focus in life. His calling was to point people to the Messiah. He was not interested in building a kingdom for himself. He was only interested in building the kingdom of God. He knew his purpose, and he knew to say, “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30, NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Isaiah had foretold, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness (Mark 1:4). His message was simple; he urged his followers to turn from sin and to be baptized as a sign of their commitment. Verse 5 describes the widespread response to John's God-given message, as people traveled from Jerusalem and throughout the Judean countryside to receive baptism by John in the Jordan River.

John was similar in appearance to the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who also wore a garment of hair and a leather belt (verse 6; see 2 Kings 1:8). Also, John, like Elijah, existed for a time on a primitive diet, confronted evil rulers, and reprimanded Israel for corrupt religion (see Matthew 14:3–4; Luke 3:7–9; also 1 Kings 17:6; 18:16–21).

John's humble appearance was consistent with his humble testimony. Despite the conjecture of some that he was the Messiah, he declared himself unworthy even to untie the sandals of the "more powerful" or "mightier" one who would come (Mark 1:7; see John 1:19–20).

All four Gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—record John the Baptist's declaration that Jesus would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; see Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Jesus himself promised to send the Holy Spirit after His ascension to heaven, and He did just that on the Day of Pentecost (see Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1–4).



Resource Packet Item 1: Which Baptism?

Distribute the work sheet. You can either divide the class into small groups to do the activity, or you can have volunteers read the Scriptures and discuss the questions as a class.

Discuss

- ? In what ways did John prepare the way for Christ?
- ? What calling has God placed on your life, and how are you fulfilling it?

Part 2—Ministry Beginnings

□ Baptized and Tested

Mark 1:9–13



Say: Spiritually significant experiences are often followed by times of testing.

Even Jesus was faced with temptations after His baptism, which was accompanied by the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of His Father confirming the Father's love for His Son. Mark's description of Jesus' time of temptation is brief, but other Gospel writers describe His use of the Word of God to defeat Satan. We, too, are often tempted, but we can face those temptations with God's Word. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When Jesus was about thirty years old, He went from Nazareth (where He had spent most of His life up to this point) to the Jordan River. There He was baptized by John. This was accompanied by the supernatural sign of the Holy Spirit descending on Him like a dove (Mark 1:9–10). Jesus later promised to pour out the

Spirit on believers to empower them for ministry, just as He was anointed by the Spirit (see Matthew 3:11; Luke 4:18).

In Mark 1:1, Mark recorded that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. At Jesus' baptism, the Father confirmed His Son's identity publicly by declaring from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (verse 11, NIV). In this account, all three persons of the Godhead are mentioned: God the Son—Jesus—was baptized; God the Holy Spirit descended like a dove; and God the Father spoke from heaven.

Immediately following this experience of baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan (verses 12–13; see also Matthew 4:1–11). The New Testament teaches that Christians will undergo times of testing and trial as well. So it is valuable to recall that Jesus, our Savior and the great example for how to live, was not exempt from temptations, just like us (see 1 Peter 5:8–9). Jesus defeated each of Satan's temptations by using the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit (see Ephesians 6:17). Following Christ's example, Christians can face temptation with confidence (see Revelation 12:11).

Discuss

- ? What examples can you give, either from Scripture or your own experience, where times of spiritual victory were followed by testing?
- ? Jesus himself ministered in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. How might this shape a believer's commitment to Spirit-filled living?



Resource Packet Item 2: Similar Paths

Distribute the work sheet. Discuss how Jesus' experiences before beginning His public ministry bear similarity to what we as His followers experience. Discuss the personal response question as a class.



□ Proclaiming and Calling

Mark 1:14–20

Say: As John the Baptist passed off the scene, having completed the task he was called to do, Jesus began to increase, just as John had said He would do. John had prepared the way for the Messiah, and the time had come for Jesus to begin His ministry. God's timing is always perfect. Paul echoed this concept when he said, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son . . ." (Galatians 4:4, NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Because of his stand against the sin of King Herod Antipas, who had divorced his wife and married his brother's wife, John was imprisoned and later beheaded (Mark 1:14; see Mark 6:17–29). As John's public ministry ended, Jesus' public ministry began. John had accomplished the task for which he had been called.

Jesus' announcement that "the time has come" referred to the time when God's plan of drawing people into His kingdom through Jesus Christ would be put into action (Mark 1:15, NIV). The only proper response to the nearness of the Kingdom is repentance from sin and faith in Christ.

Jesus would not be alone in His work of kingdom ministry. First He called Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew from their work of fishing on the Sea of Galilee to follow Him (verse 16). Although the brothers had previously met Jesus, He now called them to full commitment, joining Him in the work of “fishing” for men and women (verse 17; see John 1:35–42). Their response was immediate, as they left their daily occupations and became disciples of Jesus (Mark 1:18).

Jesus called another pair of brothers a short time later (verses 19–20). Some ten years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, James would be put to death for his faith in Christ (see Acts 12:1–2). John would become part of Christ’s “inner circle” of disciples, along with Peter and James, and later in life would write a Gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation. In Scripture, he referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, NIV), perhaps signaling his joy at being loved by the Savior. It is possible that James and John came from a wealthier family than other fishermen, as Mark mentioned their father’s “hired servants” (Mark 1:20, KJV).

The choices Jesus was making were not haphazard accidents. He had a plan for each of the disciples He chose. He would be training them to carry on the work of the Church after His crucifixion and resurrection.

Discuss

- ? John the Baptist challenged King Herod Antipas regarding his behavior. How should Christians confront sin in our world today?
- ? Jesus’ earthly disciples walked away from their livelihood to follow Him. What is the most valuable thing you have left behind to follow Jesus?

Part 3—Manifesting Unequaled Authority

□ By Word and By Action

Mark 1:21–28



Say: Imagine that you’re traveling along with Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they accompany Jesus. While they already believed in Him and were following Him, they had much to learn. The first stop that Mark relates is in Capernaum, which became a “home base” for much of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Those who heard Him there were amazed at His authority. It is likely that even the disciples were astonished. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus took His four newly chosen disciples to Capernaum, an important city on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. There, He entered the synagogue to teach (Mark 1:21). Synagogues originated during the time of the Jewish exile as places of worship and teaching; in the first century they gave Jesus, and later Paul, an important location to share the message of the kingdom of God.

Those who heard Jesus speak were amazed (verse 22). It was evident that Jesus’ authority came not as a result of merely quoting other teachers who had taught before Him, but directly from God. Jesus’ authority was evident also to the forces of the demonic realm, causing one caught in their grip to cry out (verse 23).

The evil spirit spoke both for itself and for others in asking, “Have you come to destroy us?” (verse 24, NIV). This evil spirit recognized both Jesus’ authority and the

future judgment of all evil spirits (see Luke 8:31; Matthew 25:41). By calling Jesus “the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24, NIV), the evil spirit admitted Jesus’ divine identity and superior position.

Jesus responded by commanding the spirit both to be silent and to depart (verse 25). Causing the man to shake violently, the spirit complied and exited with a shriek (verse 26).

The authority that those in the synagogue recognized earlier in Jesus’ speaking had now been confirmed by His actions (verse 27). Jesus had the ability to command evil spirits—and force them to obey. This put a seal on the truth of His teaching. In part through this event, all of Galilee soon heard about Christ (verse 28).

Discuss

- ? If you had been one of those first four disciples, how do you think you would have felt and responded to what you saw and heard in the synagogue?
- ? The authority of Jesus was confirmed in a supernatural way. How can the Holy Spirit do the same in our witnessing today?



□ Healing and Praying

Mark 1:29–39

Say: The next stop was at the home of Peter (Simon) and Andrew, where Peter’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever. Perhaps the scene at the synagogue had bolstered Peter’s faith, prompting a sense of anticipation that Jesus would do something great. Hearing testimonies of or observing modern-day miracles can certainly increase the faith of others, prompting them to trust God for the miracles they need as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After the remarkable deliverance in the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:29). There, Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. Suffering no aftereffects, she rose and waited on her guests (verses 30–31).

News of the one who could both cast out demons and heal illnesses could not be kept quiet. No doubt those who had been at the synagogue were eager to tell others what they had seen. Waiting until sunset to avoid breaking the Sabbath (see Jeremiah 17:21–22), people brought all the sick and those possessed by demons to the door of Peter’s house (Mark 1:32–33). No disease proved too difficult for Christ to heal.

As He did earlier in the synagogue, Jesus forbade demons to speak through those He was setting free (Mark 1:34). Although their factual knowledge of His identity was correct, Jesus would reveal himself in His own time and manner.

Jesus’ actions highlight the important place of prayer in His life and ministry. Despite the demanding events of ministry in the synagogue, and ministry to the entire town after sunset, Jesus rose early in the morning for a time of communion with His Father (verse 35). His disciples were surprised that He was not continuing to meet with the crowd from the day before (verses 36–37).

Yet instead of remaining in Capernaum another day, Jesus drew attention to the greater picture—reaching out to a lost world to bring redemption to humanity (verses 38–39).



Resource Packet Item 3: Jesus' Authority

Distribute the work sheet and discuss each type of authority Jesus demonstrated during His time on earth. **Ask:** How does this information give you confidence to trust Him for your needs?

Discuss

- ? How do the miracles in today's lesson help build your faith?
- ? Jesus made prayer a priority, even in demanding circumstances. How can we make prayer a priority in our lives today?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Human beings do not live under their own authority. Not only are they required to obey other people who are over them, but most importantly, they are called to follow God's plan for their lives through Christ. Many voices compete for our attention; but above them all, we must hear Jesus calling us away from sin and into the life of His kingdom.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that God will use you to point someone else to Him.
- Look for God's hand in your life this week, both in your private time with Him and in your interactions with others.
- Find someone who is ill or in need and take time to minister to him or her in a practical way.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God's Angel Prepares the Way.
Exodus 23:20–26

Tuesday

A Voice in the Wilderness.
Isaiah 40:3–5

Wednesday

Behold, He Is Coming.
Malachi 3:1–3

Thursday

Jesus, the Son of God.
Luke 4:38–44

Friday

Jesus' Authority Questioned.
Luke 20:1–8

Saturday

Jesus' Authority Affirmed.
Hebrews 1:1–4

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark

January 31, 2021

LESSON

9

Jesus Confronts Religious Leaders

Study Text

Mark 2:1 through 3:6

Central Truth

Jesus confronted errors and legalism with authority.



Key Verse Mark 2:28

The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (KJV).

“The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- To explain how Jesus fulfilled His mission, both in forgiving sin and healing sickness, despite legalistic opposition.
- To adopt Jesus’ priority of doing good for others, and do so without the error of legalism.
- To share in Jesus’ work by spreading His message of forgiveness and healing, and by helping others in practical ways.

Introducing the Study

Say: Throughout the Gospels, Jesus faced more opposition from the religious leaders than from those outside the Jewish community. Those who had studied the Law and the Prophets, who had received the promise of His coming and claimed to be waiting for the Messiah, refused to recognize and accept Him. He did not fit their image of who the Messiah would be, and He challenged many of their traditions. (*Play the video on the Pharisees, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—Just Because

Ask: What activities or tasks can you name that you do a certain way because your parent(s) or someone else did them that way or because you’ve always done them that way? Answers may range from baking pie crusts to washing the car or cleaning house. The point is that we do many things the way Mom or Dad taught us, whether or not that is the only (or the best) way to do them.

Say: The religious leaders of Jesus’ time considered themselves the guardians of Jewish faith and traditions. Since Israel was under Roman rule, it was important that their long-held traditions be protected. However, some of the issues they were concerned about were traditions they had created, rather than the true laws of God. These were the traditions Jesus challenged. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus came to bring salvation from sin and new life in the Spirit. At times during His ministry, the voices of legalism opposed His work, appealing to man-made rules and human additions to God’s commands. This lesson explores these challenges to help us recognize and deal with obstacles in our lives.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Mark 2:3. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6. But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7. Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

10. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11. I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

12. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

15. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

16. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

17. When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

23. And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.

24. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

25. And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him?

26. How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

27. And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:

28. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

New International Version

Mark 2:3. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

6. Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,

7. "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

10. "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man,

11. "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

12. He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

15. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

16. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

17. On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

23. One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.

24. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

25. He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need?

26. In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

27. Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

28. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."



Part 1—About Healing and Forgiveness

□ First Things First

Mark 2:1–7

Say: The Messiah had come to provide forgiveness from sins and reconciliation with the Father. However, He also provided healing, often in response to faith, as we see demonstrated in Mark 2. Jesus was again in Capernaum where He had previously delivered a demon-possessed man and had healed Peter’s mother-in-law and many others. The events of this chapter continue to demonstrate His authority as He forgave sin and provided healing to prove that authority. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At this point in Jesus’ ministry, His fame—which came as a result of His miraculous works—was beginning to make it challenging for Him to move around openly and to fulfill His priority of preaching (Mark 2:1–2; see 1:38,44–45).

Jesus was surrounded by a crowd, but that did not discourage four men with a paralyzed friend. They climbed on top of the house where Jesus was speaking, and dug through the clay and branches used at the time as roofing material (Mark 2:3–4). Then they lowered their friend through the roof to Jesus.

Jesus recognized the faith of the paralyzed man and his friends, made evident through their act of perseverance. He then declared, “Son [or, “child”], your sins are forgiven” (verse 5, NIV). Although Jesus healed countless individuals with physical illness during His earthly ministry, He also made clear that a person’s standing with God in a state of forgiveness was their primary need (see Luke 24:46–47; Matthew 1:21). At times there is a relationship between a person’s sin and his sickness; James encourages us, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NIV). However, we must be careful not to assume that a person’s sickness has any relationship to a spiritual problem in his or her life.

Only God can forgive sins; this is a truth central to the teachings of the Jewish faith. And so, the teachers of the Law reacted strongly to His words. No human could rightfully claim to forgive sins—to do so was to claim oneself to be God. Thus these teachers considered Jesus’ claim to forgive sins to be blasphemy (Mark 2:6–7; see Luke 5:17).



Resource Packet Item 1: Sin and Sickness

Distribute the work sheet. If time allows, you may wish to assign the questions to small groups and have them present their answers to the class. Otherwise, the sheet can be sent home with the students for further study.

Discuss

- ? Jesus forgave the man’s sins before healing his body. Why is it necessary to pay close attention to our spiritual health?
- ? The paralyzed man and his friends demonstrated their faith by perseverance. In what ways can you demonstrate your faith by perseverance?



Say: When Jesus spoke forgiveness to the man in need, the religious leaders were appalled. So Jesus drove home the reality of His authority by healing the man physically as well. Forgiveness of sin was not a visible sign to the audience, but when the paralyzed man began to walk, there was visible evidence of Jesus' authority. Clearly, His authority was beyond any they had seen before. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When the teachers of the Law considered Jesus to be blasphemous for claiming to forgive sins, Jesus knew their objection immediately, without it being spoken (Mark 2:8). He asked them which was easier: to declare that the man's sins were forgiven, or to tell him to rise and walk (verse 9). Immediately, Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and told him to get up and go home (verses 10–11). This miracle was an outward sign of Jesus' authority to forgive sins—an authority they had rejected.

In the Scriptures, sickness began at the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden, as part of the death that resulted from sin (Genesis 2:16–17). Forgiveness and healing are also connected numerous times in the Bible; Isaiah 53:4–5 teaches that the atonement provides for both forgiveness and physical healing. In this setting, which was of course prior to His crucifixion, Jesus performed a physical healing to demonstrate His ability to also perform spiritual healing (forgiveness). This act was met with amazement and praise (Mark 2:12).

In these acts of forgiveness and healing, Jesus drew attention to His identity as the “Son of Man,” a title He used 81 times in the four Gospel accounts (κν) to refer to himself. Outside of the Gospels, it is used for Jesus by the martyr Stephen (Acts 7:56); the apostle John (Revelation 1:12–13); Daniel the prophet (Daniel 7:13); and the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 2:6).

Discuss

- ? One of Jesus' titles is “the Son of Man.” What other titles of Christ can you name? What is the significance of each?
- ? Jesus both forgives sins and heals sicknesses. What effect should this have on our faith as we encounter our deepest needs?

Part 2—About Eating and Fasting



Say: When traditions are challenged, those who hold tightly to those traditions often become adamant in defending them. In defending their traditions the religious leaders opposed the One who was sent to fulfill the very Law they wanted to safeguard. In this passage, Jesus was reaching out to sinners, the very people He came to save, yet the religious leaders accused Him of blasphemy. As you study, consider how much of their behavior is duplicated among believers today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Shortly after calling Levi (also called Matthew) to follow Him, Jesus went to Levi's house for a meal (Mark 2:15; see verse 14). Mark records that many tax collectors and sinners were now following Christ, and many of them were also present at the meal. Levi, himself a tax collector, likely invited (or at least allowed) them to attend.

Jewish tax collectors were outcasts in the eyes of other Jews. Working with the occupying force of Rome, they appeared as (and often were) traitors or collaborators with the enemy. They were forbidden to serve as witnesses in legal matters. Their status also extended to the spiritual life of the community—they were even expelled from their synagogues.

Another category with whom Jesus was eating were simply called “sinners.” Although the Bible states that every human being (except Jesus Christ, the God-man) has sinned (see Romans 3:23), Mark likely referred to those whose sinful actions were blatant or long-standing, such as adulterers, thieves, and prostitutes.

Those who opposed Jesus on this occasion—teachers of the Law who were also Pharisees—did not approach Him directly, but questioned His disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Mark 2:16, NIV). Jesus, hearing their objection, used the occasion to state clearly the purpose of His ministry (verse 17). Just as sick people need a physician, sinners need a Savior. Many people consider themselves already “righteous,” and not in need of salvation. Those who admit they are sinners—like all humanity—are ready to receive all that Christ offers.

Discuss

- ? Jesus spent time with those rejected by the self-righteous. How can Christians reflect His openness and love today?
- ? Jesus came to call sinners. Why is it vital that a person never thinks he or she is “good enough” without Him?



□ A Time To Fast

Mark 2:18–22

Say: Jesus continued to depart from the accepted norms of many of the religious leaders of His day. Not only had He been observed eating with people who were considered undesirable by the religious leaders, but He and His disciples were not fasting when others were. While fasting is an important spiritual discipline, there is also a time for celebration and rejoicing in the Christian life. The disciples did not need to fast at that time because they were in a celebratory time—the time of the promised Messiah. As people of God, we must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in discerning the time for fasting and the time for celebration. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In contrast to his report of Jesus dining at Levi's house, Mark reported that others—the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees—were fasting (Mark 2:18). Fasting in the Bible takes several forms, but the simplest is abstaining from food during a set period of time for a spiritual purpose. When asked why He and His disciples were not fasting as others were, Jesus compared His time on earth to a wedding celebration, with himself as the

bridegroom (verse 19). Jewish wedding celebrations usually lasted for days, and they were times of joy, not fasting (furthermore, fasting was often connected with mourning; see 2 Samuel 3:31–35). Jesus referred to His followers as wedding guests, for whom fasting was inappropriate as long as the bridegroom was present.

The ministry of Christ brought the blessings of forgiveness, entry into God's kingdom, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, all of which gave reason for great joy. A time would come, however, when the disciples would indeed fast (Mark 2:20). After Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, His followers fasted (e.g., Acts 13:2–3; 14:23).

The new life that Christ offered stood in contrast to His disciples' previous lives (Mark 2:21–22). Just as new wine would expand and burst old wineskins as it underwent fermentation, the experience of salvation would change the convert dramatically. The old had gone. The new had come! (See 2 Corinthians 5:17.)



Resource Packet Item 2: Why Fast?

Distribute the work sheet for the students to take home for reflection during their personal time with God. Suggest that they read through the list of times to fast and seek God for direction on fasting in their own lives.

Discuss

- ? Do you take time to celebrate God's salvation? What distracts you from daily worship and praise?
- ? Jesus came to bring “new wine” into our lives. What, in your walk with God, is brand-new?

Part 3—About the Sabbath

□ Lord of the Sabbath

Mark 2:23–28



Say: Again, the Pharisees opposed Jesus because He was not conforming to their legalistic regulations. And again, Jesus had to remind them of His authority. He was and is “Lord of the Sabbath.” He also demonstrated that human need is far more important than the man-made rules the Pharisees were defending as the way to keep the Sabbath. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Walking with Him through fields of grain on the Sabbath, Jesus' disciples satisfied their hunger by picking heads of grain and rubbing them between their hands to separate the kernels to eat (Mark 2:23). Such an act was allowed by the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 23:25). The Pharisees, however, went beyond the Old Testament law and reflected Jewish tradition as recorded in the Mishnah. (The Mishnah was a commentary on Jewish oral law; it was considered to be authoritative.) This declared the disciples' actions to be forbidden on the Sabbath (Mark 2:24).

Jesus brought up Israel's history to answer the Pharisees (verses 25–26). When God established the practices of worship in the tabernacle, He specified that

twelve loaves of bread be placed before Him every Sabbath. This bread was a gift for God from the twelve tribes of Israel, commemorating God's provision for their needs. Following its presentation, it could be eaten—but only by those who were priests (Exodus 25:30; Leviticus 24:5–9).

First Samuel 21:1–6 tells how David, on the run from King Saul, had obtained the consecrated bread from the tabernacle to share with his men—an act allowed by the presiding priest. Jesus noted that the actions of David's party were justified, just as His own actions were justified, because they were examples of doing good and preserving life on the Sabbath (see Mark 3:4).

Jesus reminded the Pharisees that God had made the Sabbath for people—for them to be refreshed physically and spiritually (Mark 2:27). As the Son of Man had authority to forgive sins, He also had authority to overrule wrong ideas about the Sabbath (verse 28).

Discuss

- ? How does knowledge of the Old Testament help us understand the teachings of Jesus?
- ? By what authority is Jesus able to interpret and apply the Old Testament?



□ Doing Good on the Sabbath

Mark 3:1–6

Say: The appropriate way to keep the Sabbath was an important part of Jewish tradition. While God had commanded that the Sabbath be kept holy, the Pharisees had expanded the commandment by adding many regulations about exactly what it meant to keep the Sabbath. But Jesus continued to challenge their thinking. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus further illustrated His lordship over the Sabbath in Mark 3:1–6. When He encountered a man needing healing in the synagogue, He was being watched by certain Pharisees (verses 1–2). Scripture notes that they knew He had the power to heal; clearly they were looking for Him to do so in a way that would violate their tradition, which held that aid could be given on the Sabbath only if life was in danger.

Unlike other healings Jesus performed away from the crowds or with an order to tell no one, Jesus had the man position himself for all to see (verse 3). To set up the lesson Jesus desired to teach, He asked His listeners, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (verse 4, NIV). Rather than give a response, which could have been used by Jesus to argue against them, they refused to respond.

Jesus taught them the necessity of doing good at all times, including on the Sabbath. Today, His followers are still under obligation to respond to the needs of those around them in whatever way they are able—using what God has given them to bless others (see Proverbs 3:27; Matthew 25:31–4). Jesus would not neglect this man's need, or the Father's plan for Him to meet that need, even though it was the Sabbath (Mark 3:5).

Because Jesus did not comply with the traditions of the Pharisees, they began plotting His death with the Herodians (verse 6, note that Herodians were Hellenistic Jews who supported the family of King Herod; they were more of a political party than a religious group). Ironically, Jesus had worked to do good on the Sabbath day, while the Pharisees had used the day to plot His death.



Resource Packet Item 3: Sunday Behavior

Distribute the case study. Read it and discuss the questions as a class if your class is small. If your class is large enough, you may want to divide into groups so everyone can participate. Have each group report and record responses on the board.

Discuss

- ? Jesus showed us that it is always the right time to demonstrate love and compassion. What hinders you from giving assistance to those around you?
- ? In what ways might your commitment to Christ need to become stronger?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: At times, even people who profess Christ will assume limitations on His work in their lives, based on their own ideas. Ask students if their faith has ever suffered from the unbelief of others, and encourage them to build their faith directly on the biblical account of Jesus' words and works.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray with (or for) someone who is ill.
- Consider fasting for at least one or two meals this week, using the time to pray for needs of which you are aware.
- Evaluate your own rules for living in order to see which ones may just be traditions rather than commands from God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

With Him There Is Forgiveness.
Psalm 130:1–8

Tuesday

By His Stripes.
Isaiah 53:1–5

Wednesday

True Fasting.
Isaiah 58:1–8

Thursday

Forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer.
Matthew 6:9–15

Friday

Jesus Confronts and Heals.
Matthew 21:12–17

Saturday

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath.
Luke 13:10–17

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark

February 7, 2021

LESSON 10

Jesus Reveals His Divinity

Introducing the Study

Say: Today's lesson focuses on how the identity of Jesus was revealed to His disciples. Even after He was revealed to them, they still had questions and areas of belief that needed correcting. God wanted them to know the truth about the One He had sent, and to commit themselves in full discipleship to the One who would give His life for them.

Opening Activity—Secrets

Ask: What's the most exciting thing you have been told or experienced that you had to keep secret until the proper time for it to be revealed? How hard was it to keep the secret?

Say: Jesus came to show us the Father, yet, on several occasions, He told His disciples or others not to tell anyone what they had seen or experienced. In some cases, He specified that they should wait until after His resurrection. Later, in promising the Holy Spirit, He said that the Holy Spirit would give them power to witness. The time to be quiet about Him was over. It was now time to tell everyone about the Messiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mark 8 teaches us a critical fundamental truth about Jesus Christ: He is the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the Messiah (or "Christ"). God the Father sent Him to die as our sacrifice so we may be set free from the penalty of sin and be born again as His adopted children. As we study the Scriptures, we learn more about what this means as well as how we can better share this important good news with those around us.

Study Text

Mark 8:27 through 9:13

Central Truth

Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man.



Key Verse Mark 8:29

[Jesus] saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ (KJV).

"What about you?" [Jesus] asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah" (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Explain how the identity of Jesus as the divine Son of God and Messiah was revealed to His disciples.
- Appreciate Jesus' commitment to the plan of salvation, as the sacrifice for our sins.
- Examine and deepen their own commitment to God's plan, regardless of the cost.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Mark 8:27. And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

28. And they answered, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

29. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

30. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

31. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

33. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

34. And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

35. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

36. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

9:2. And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.

3. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.

New International Version

Mark 8:27. Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28. They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

29. "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

32. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

34. Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

35. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

36. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

9:2. After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.

3. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.

**❑ Mistaken Identity****Mark 8:27–28**

Say: In Bible times, theories abounded regarding the identity of Jesus. People have theories about Him today, as well. Some say He was just a good man while others say He was a fraud. But as believers, we know that He was and is the Messiah, the Son of God, who was crucified, and rose again so we could be in right relationship with God. We also know He is our soon-coming King. Mark also knew who Jesus was and stated it clearly in the opening words of his book. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mark began his book by calling his Savior “Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” a statement that affirms both Christ’s divinity and His saving mission (Mark 1:1, κϰν). Jesus brought up the subject of His identity himself in Mark chapter 8. He asked the disciples about the thoughts and opinions of those around them concerning who He was (Mark 8:27). It appears that Jesus wanted to expose false ideas and clear the way for a revelation of His true identity to those closest to Him.

Jesus’ disciples responded by repeating to Him a few of the opinions they had heard (verse 28). Some of the people, including King Herod, believed Jesus to be John the Baptist, risen from the dead. John had been imprisoned for his opposition to Herod’s sinful lifestyle, and was later executed by the king’s order. The miraculous works of Jesus caused some to believe that John had returned (see Matthew 14:1–2; Mark 6:14–29).

Others speculated that Jesus was Elijah, returning to the world. Many Jews expected Elijah to appear prior to the coming of the Messiah. Those who viewed Jesus as Elijah saw Him as being one sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, and not as the Messiah himself.

If Jesus was not Elijah, the people conjectured, perhaps He was one of the other prophets. Matthew recorded in his account of this exchange that some guessed Jesus to be the prophet Jeremiah, whom they expected to return to life and inaugurate the reign of the Messiah (see Matthew 16:14).

Discuss

- ? Jesus’ identity was vital to the writer, Mark. How do you respond to those who believe Jesus to be simply a great teacher or moral example?
- ? What are some false ideas people—even professed Christians—have about Jesus today?

**❑ Knowing the Truth About Jesus****Mark 8:29–30**

Say: Listening to what others say about Jesus is not sufficient. Even listening to those who know Him and describe Him accurately is no substitute for knowing Him personally and recognizing His lordship over our lives. The disciples could report what others were saying, but Jesus wanted them to express their own belief in Him. When He asked for their statements about

Him, Peter clearly stated that Jesus was (and is) the Messiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In seeking to expose incorrect beliefs about His identity, Jesus gave His disciples an opportunity to share what they themselves believed about Him. Unlike the crowds, they were His chosen and called as followers, living in close fellowship with Him. They could be expected to have a fuller idea of His identity than others (see 1 John 1:1–4). Mark records only the response of Peter, when Jesus asked for a statement of their belief. Peter replied simply, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29, NIV).

Peter’s answer is a stark contrast to the false beliefs many held at that time about Jesus. While others believed that He would only prepare for, or assist, the Messiah to come, Peter realized that Jesus was himself the Messiah, the One whom the Jews had been waiting for so long.

Jesus followed Peter’s confession of faith in a surprising way: Instead of allowing them to spread the news of the Messiah’s arrival, Jesus “warned them not to tell anyone about him” (Mark 8:30, NIV). Several reasons for this strong prohibition are possible. First, most Jews at that time pictured the Christ as a political or military figure who would conquer the Roman forces occupying Israel. Some even wanted to crown Jesus as king (John 6:15). Declaring Him as Messiah at that time could have led to difficult misunderstandings. Second, Jesus’ training of His apostles was not complete and might be cut short by a public announcement of His messiahship. Also, those who opposed Him might be moved by such a declaration to act against Him, and it was not yet time for Jesus to be crucified.

Discuss

? Is there any reason to hide Jesus’ full identity today? Explain.

Part 2—Jesus Predicts His Death

□ On the Way to the Cross

Mark 8:31–33



Say: Jesus knew that it would be His own people who would demand His death.

Peter, however, did not want to believe that Jesus would die on the cross, and the idea of the resurrection was far beyond Peter’s ability to understand.

The next step in Jesus’ self-revelation was to teach His disciples the truth about His ministry as the Messiah. Using the messianic title “the Son of Man,” Jesus told them that He would suffer, be rejected and killed, and rise again (Mark 8:31). Jesus would return to this theme again and again prior to His crucifixion; it is clear that His sacrifice on the cross would be the foundation for His followers’ faith and ministry (see Mark 9:31; 10:33–34).

Those who would bring about Jesus’ suffering and death were the religious leaders of Israel. The Sanhedrin—the high court of the Jews—was made up of the elders, the chief priests, and teachers of the Law. Although the physical act of crucifixion was carried out by members of the Roman army, Jesus was falsely accused by His own people (see Matthew 27:19–23).

By making it clear that He would die at the hands of His own people, Jesus challenged the beliefs of His disciples about the Messiah. Peter could not remain silent; he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him (Mark 8:32). Jesus recognized Peter's words as a temptation from Satan, attempting to lead Him astray from God's plan for His sacrificial death followed by His resurrection (verse 33). As Jesus' public ministry began, Satan had tempted Him to receive rulership of the world on the condition that Jesus worship him (Matthew 4:8–10). Philippians 2:9 declares that "God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (NIV).



Resource Packet Item 1: Why Did Jesus Suffer and Die?

Distribute the work sheet and assign each Scripture to a student to read aloud. After it is read, have the students write their observations in their own words. Discuss their results in class.

Discuss

- ? Jesus told His disciples repeatedly about His upcoming death and resurrection. How might His disciples have reacted to His execution if they had received no preparation?
- ? How does Satan tempt us today with wrong ideas about Jesus and suffering?



Take Up Your Cross

Mark 8:34 through 9:1

Say: While the Christian life brings joy and peace, it also involves self-denial.

Jesus showed the ultimate in sacrificial love when He took on human flesh and gave His life for the sins of the world, even though He had never sinned. He calls His followers to deny their human desires in favor of having a relationship with God—even when it is difficult. Far more important than temporal pleasures and physical comfort is the eternal well-being of our souls. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

To fulfill the plan of salvation, Jesus gave His life on a cross. To follow Jesus, His disciples would need to take up their own cross, in the form of lives of self-denial, being willing even to die at the hands of those who do not know Him (Mark 8:34).

The crowds who surrounded Jesus were not aware that He had been revealed to His disciples as the Messiah, or that Jesus had told them the Messiah would be put to death. However, Jesus called them to join the Twelve to hear the necessity of complete self-denial and following Him. Jesus became the ultimate example of commitment and servanthood.

Jesus described the experience of being a disciple as a paradox. The person who "saved" his life, spending it as he pleased apart from God, would lose it spiritually (verse 35). Conversely, the one who "lost" (i.e., gave up) his life to live for Christ would "save" his or her life forever.

Jesus taught that nothing was more valuable than preserving one's soul through a right relationship with God (verses 36–38). This relationship is rooted in a public

confession of faith in Christ—even when it may be deadly to do so. Jesus calls His followers to be faithful, ready for His glorious return. He gave three of His closest followers a taste of His glory following this teaching (see Mark 9).



Resource Packet Item 2: A Step in the Wrong Direction

Distribute the case study and divide your class into small groups to discuss it. Then bring their responses back to the class.

Discuss

- ? Jesus calls us to follow Him with a life of total commitment. How might this affect our closest relationships?
- ? What types of things might destroy our commitment to Christ if we focus on them?

Part 3—The Transfiguration

□ The Father’s Approval

Mark 9:2–8



Say: Mark’s presentation of the identity and authority of Jesus continues as Peter, James, and John witnessed His Transfiguration and heard the Father’s approval of Him. That approval comes along with instructions to “Listen to him” (Mark 9:7, *NIV*). After such an experience, it would seem that they would be eager to hear His every word. Again, they were told not to share this experience with the other disciples until after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Can you imagine their excitement when they joined the other disciples, but knew they could not share the event they had just witnessed? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter’s knowledge of the identity of Jesus came as an inner revelation (see Matthew 16:17). Along with James and John, Peter would again serve as a witness to the revelation of Jesus, which came this time in an outwardly visible way. Jesus took them up on a mountain—possibly Mount Hermon—to be alone with Him (Mark 9:2). There, they watched as Jesus’ appearance changed, and His clothing became “exceeding white as snow” (verse 3, *KJV*). For a brief time, Peter, James, and John were privileged to witness Christ in a way that expressed His divine identity, beyond the usual limitations of His human form (see John 1:14).

Appearing with Jesus were Moses and Elijah, who talked with Him (Mark 9:4). Moses represented the old covenant, which was completed with the sacrifice of Christ. Elijah represented the prophets, whose words were also fulfilled in the work of Christ. Peter was so enthusiastic about the experience that he suggested building three shelters to accommodate Christ and His guests (verses 5–6). Peter may have seen this as a means by which their appearance could be prolonged, and perhaps He could spend more time with them. (The Bible notably mentions that Peter was so frightened that he did not know what to say.)

Peter’s idea was short-lived, as a cloud (often signifying God’s presence in biblical accounts) formed around them (Mark 9:7; see Exodus 40:34–38). As He

had at Jesus' baptism, God the Father affirmed Jesus as the beloved Son of God. Here, the Father added the command that Jesus' disciples—and all of Jesus' followers since—must listen to Him. When the Father was finished speaking, Peter, James, and John were again alone with Christ (Mark 9:8).

Discuss

- ? Jesus chose Peter, James, and John to witness His Transfiguration. How should we respond when Jesus reveals himself in certain ways to someone else?
- ? If Christ has revealed himself to you in a special way, what should your attitude be toward those who have not received this revelation?



□ The Disciples Have Questions

Mark 9:9–13

Say: Put yourself in the place of Peter, James, and John as they came back down the mountain. They had just seen an amazing display of God's presence that they could not share with others. But they were full of questions. They had already heard that Jesus would die and be raised again, but that was so far beyond anything they could imagine that they were having trouble grasping it. For their entire lives, they had looked for the Messiah, but they were still thinking in terms of a political figure who would free them from Rome. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The incredible experience of witnessing the Transfiguration would remain a secret for the time being. Jesus ordered Peter, James, and John to refrain from telling the other nine disciples what they had seen until after His resurrection from the dead (Mark 9:9). After He had risen, the entire message of Jesus—including His identity as the Son of God, Son of Man, and Messiah—could be shared with the entire world.

These three disciples complied with Jesus' orders. But this did not quiet the questions they had, including what Jesus meant by saying He would rise from the dead (verse 10). Even though Jesus had taught them earlier that He would rise again, they were slow to grasp the truth that the Messiah would suffer and die (Mark 8:31–32).

The disciples also wanted to know why the teachers of the Law held that Elijah must come before the Messiah's arrival (Mark 9:11; see Malachi 4:5–6). Jesus answered their question by referring back to the prophetic life and violent death of John the Baptist (Mark 9:12–13). John's life resembled that of Elijah in clothing, diet, and the preaching of righteousness. Like Elijah, he also suffered persecution by an ungodly ruler and the ruler's wife; unlike Elijah, however, he was executed for his bold ministry (compare 1 Kings 19:1–18 and Mark 6:17–29). In referring to John's experience, Jesus again drew His disciples' attention to His own impending trial.



Resource Packet Item 3: To Tell or Not To Tell

Distribute the work sheet and assign one of the “not to tell” passages to each group. After they have filled in the chart, read Matthew 28:19–20 aloud in class, and discuss the believer’s responsibility to witness.

Discuss

- ? Following Christ’s resurrection, the disciples could share all they knew about Him. Is there anything we are tempted to hold back when communicating about Christ today? Explain.
- ? Jesus referred to the Scriptures when answering His disciples’ question about Elijah. Why is it important to look to the Scriptures first for answers to our own questions?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We can learn the truth about a variety of topics—such as science, art, and politics—and yet feel no desire to take action. However, the truth about Jesus Christ—His identity, His teachings, and what He has done for us—calls us to action. He has given His life for us and calls us to total commitment to Him. The life He offers is worth any sacrifice we are called to make. Have you heard His voice calling you to a deeper walk with Him?

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your own level of commitment to Jesus.
- Find a way to share the gospel with someone this week.
- Pray for an unbelieving friend or family member.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

The First Sin.
Genesis 3:6–13

Tuesday

Sin Atoned For.
Leviticus 1:1–9; 17:11

Wednesday

Sin’s Final Sacrifice Prophesied.
Psalm 22:14–18

Thursday

Divine Birth.
Luke 1:26–38

Friday

Divinity Affirmed by His Miracles.
John 9:13–15, 24–33

Saturday

Called To Belong to Christ.
Romans 1:1–6

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark

February 14, 2021

LESSON

11

Jesus Teaches About the End-Time

Study Text

Mark 13:1–37

Central Truth

We must be prepared for Christ's return.



Key Verse

Mark 13:33

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is (KJV).

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Identify for students the events Jesus foretold and the directions Jesus gave concerning the end-time.
- Help students realize the importance of being prepared to face persecution, and to be watching and waiting for Christ's return.
- Challenge students to deepen their commitment to Jesus and develop a lifestyle of readiness in light of future events.

Introducing the Study

Say: While the word “gospel” means “good news,” we know that some of the events prophesied for the end-times are not especially good news, even for believers. Sometimes, bad news precedes good news. Even in Jesus' life, He suffered and died before the Resurrection. The disciples would have considered His death to be bad news, but that news was followed by the best news of all! We will face bad news at times in our lives, but God's plan for us includes the good news of eternal life with Him.

Opening Activity—Good News/Bad News

Ask: What are examples of good news and bad news that people might receive in this life? (Write answers on the board.) Ask: What examples of good news and bad news can you name that are related to each other in such a way that one does not happen without the other?

Say: Jesus has shared the “good news” of experiencing forgiveness and everlasting life through Him. Yet, He also shares with us the seemingly “bad” news that persecution often happens to His followers. He does so because He loves us and wants us to be ready for anything we may face as we serve Him and await His return. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Mark 13, as Jesus responded to His disciples' questions, He established certain priorities. One such priority is that we protect ourselves from spiritual deception. Another priority is that we prepare for the reality of coming persecution. In everything He says, Jesus wants to prepare us to remain spiritually strong in the face of adversity, and to witness powerfully for Him in even the darkest hour.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Mark 13:3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,
4. Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?
5. And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you:
6. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.
7. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.
23. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.
24. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,
25. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.
26. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.
27. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.
28. Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near:
29. So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.
30. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.
31. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.
33. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.
34. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.
35. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:
36. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.
37. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

New International Version

Mark 13:3. As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,
4. “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”
5. Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you.
6. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.
7. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”
23. “So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.
24. “But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;
25. the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”
26. “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.
27. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.
28. “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.
29. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.
30. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.
31. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”
33. “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.
34. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.
35. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.
36. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.
37. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Part 1—Do Not Be Deceived



□ The Beginning of the End

Mark 13:1–8

Say: The second coming of Christ is the subject of many sermons and provides the backdrop for many books and movies, both fiction and nonfiction. Just as believers today have questions about the details of the end times, the disciples had questions. But Jesus' major concern was about the spiritual well-being of His current disciples and those to follow. Far more important than understanding the sequence and nature of end-time events is the goal of being ready for His return—and leading others to Christ so they can be ready as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Mark chapter 13, the awe of Jesus' disciples at the magnificence of the Jewish temple marked the beginning of an extended lesson on the end of the age (verses 1–2; note that, by that time, King Herod had greatly enhanced and expanded the temple area as a gesture of goodwill toward the Jewish people, making the structure even more impressive). Jesus said that the temple—made of massive blocks of white marble that gleamed in the sun and was visible for miles—would be totally destroyed.

Not surprisingly, several of Jesus' disciples responded with questions. Peter, James, and John were joined by Andrew as they spent time with Jesus on the Mount of Olives (verses 3–4). As they viewed the temple, they wanted to know when the temple would be destroyed, and what sign would precede this action.

Although Jesus would provide a general summary of future events, His first response was aimed at protecting them from spiritual predators: “Watch out that no one deceives you” (verse 5, NIV). Many imposters would arise and claim to be Him (verse 6). Sadly, people continue to believe their lies even today.

Jesus encouraged His disciples not to be alarmed at reports of wars near and far, for this would happen before the end arrived (verse 7). In a similar way, there would be reports of famines and earthquakes. Jesus calls such happenings “the beginning of birth pains” (verse 8, NIV). In other words, they would indicate that the end of the age is on its way, even if the actual events are still in the future.

Discuss

- ? Read John 4:19–24. What do these verses tell you about God's desire for worship?
- ? How can believers protect themselves from the claims of false Christs?



□ Powerful Witnessing

Mark 13:9–11

Say: Persecution began immediately after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for that persecution. While Jesus' words applied to what the disciples would endure during the formation and expansion of the Early Church, those same words apply to believers today as we carry on the task of taking the gospel to all nations. The early disciples began the task, but it is yet unfinished. God still has a plan for all nations to

hear His Word, and He continues to call and empower believers to carry that good news to those who do not know Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus told His disciples to be on their guard for coming persecution—not so they could escape it, but so that they would be spiritually prepared to endure it (Mark 13:9). Amid the bitter punishment Jesus mentioned was flogging, which He himself would later suffer. The apostle Paul would undergo this excruciating treatment five times at the hands of his own people (see 2 Corinthians 11:23–24). In the midst of these adverse circumstances, Jesus’ followers would be called to account for the claims of their Lord and Master. The trials they endured would bring them before the Jewish authorities of the Law and of the Roman government (see Acts chapters 4, 23, and 24).

God desires that the gospel be shared with all the nations in the world (Mark 13:10). The persecution that came into the lives of God’s people would not hinder the spread of the gospel; rather, it would create situations in which the message would be declared fully to those in power.

Jesus’ followers need not fear the day of trial. Jesus promised them that the Holy Spirit (whom He would send after His ascension) would provide them with the words to say to their accusers (verse 11). The same Spirit who empowers God’s people to preach and to teach would also be present with them when their ministry was attacked and their lives were threatened. When speaking through them, the Spirit would draw attention to the One they served: Jesus Christ (see John 15:26–27).



Resource Packet Item 1: To All Nations

Distribute the information sheet on unreached people groups. Take time to pray for unreached people. Check out www.joshuaproject.net for further information.

Discuss

- ? What are some current examples of Christians suffering persecution for Christ?
- ? What are some ways the Holy Spirit works through believers to draw attention to Jesus Christ?

Part 2—Recognize Signs of Christ’s Return

□ Distress Like No Other

Mark 13:12–23



Say: Jesus said the time leading up to His return would be filled with distress, and He alerted His followers to the types of distress they could expect. He especially warned of the coming of false messiahs, or christs, and false prophets. Again, His primary concern was that His people would recognize such deceivers and be on their guard against them. Knowing God and His Word are essential elements of being on guard against such deception. Just

as the best way to recognize counterfeit money is to know the feel of genuine cash, the best way to recognize false Christs is to know the real Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the end, some of the most painful suffering that God's people endure will come at the hands of their own families; Jesus said this may even result in death (Mark 13:12). Such rejection will tempt some Christians to give up; however, Jesus promised, "The one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (verse 13, NIV).

Jesus drew from the Old Testament prophet Daniel to prepare His followers for the "abomination that causes desolation" (verse 14, NIV; see Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Many believe Daniel's prophecies were fulfilled in part by Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king who built a pagan altar to Zeus upon the altar in the temple at Jerusalem in approximately 167 BC. In addition, many believe the prophecies of Daniel and Jesus were further fulfilled in the Roman destruction of the temple in AD 70, and await one more stage of fulfillment when an image of the Antichrist is set up in Jerusalem (see 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:14–15).

The disciples were told to flee the "abomination of desolation" swiftly and decisively, without turning back even for basic necessities (Mark 13:15–16). These events would prove especially horrendous for any unable to make a rapid exit (verse 17). Similarly, Jesus told His disciples to pray that their flight to safety would not take place in the winter, because the distress of these events would be unequalled in all of history (verses 18–19). In the wintertime in Israel, cold and rainy weather made traveling extremely difficult. God had already decided to shorten this time of adversity, for the sake of His people (verse 20).

At this time, false Christs and false prophets would appear, likely giving promises of deliverance (verses 21–22). They would attempt to mislead God's people by means of signs and miracles. By warning of their appearance, Jesus prepared His followers to guard themselves against those claiming to come in His name (verse 23; see verse 6).

Discuss

- ? How can Christians assist brothers and sisters rejected by non-Christian family members?
- ? How can God's people prepare to discern true signs from false signs that are performed by false prophets?



Jesus Is Coming Soon

Mark 13:24–31

Say: While believers can look forward to the joy of being with Jesus in eternity after His return, that good news also includes the bad news of judgment upon those who do not accept Him. If all believers truly grasped the full meaning of the judgment to come, perhaps we would be more intentional about reaching our friends and family and, indeed, all nations for Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The next event Jesus described would be the darkening of the sun and moon, along with the stars falling to earth (Mark 13:24–25). This prophetic imagery represents God’s judgment (see Isaiah 24:21–23; Ezekiel 32:7–8).

After a period of judgment the Son of man will appear “coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26, *KJV*). Jesus will return in a way that demonstrates His authority over those who passed judgment upon him. Further, He will send forth angels to gather His people from the entire world, ending the suffering they have endured (verse 27). Jesus’ followers are to anticipate these events in the way that spring makes them anticipate summer (verses 28–29).

Jesus’ next statement has challenged Bible scholars: “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (verse 30, *NIV*). Some believe that “this generation” refers to those alive at the time He made the statement; therefore, “all these things” were fulfilled in the Roman destruction of the temple in *AD* 70. However, it is more in keeping with verses 24–28 to see these events as referring both to the fall of Jerusalem as well as the time of the Great Tribulation. Thus, many believe that “this generation” refers to a future generation who would see the events of Mark 13 fulfilled in their own lifetime.

End-time events will bring the followers of Christ the persecution that accompanies discipleship. Jesus assured them that the words of truth He had spoken to them would remain firm forever, the only certain foundation for their faith, regardless of their circumstances (verse 31; see John 6:68).

Discuss

- ? The Bible shows Jesus both suffering for us and returning in power and glory. How can we draw strength from His example during times of adversity?
- ? What are your strategies for keeping Bible study a priority in your life?

Part 3—Always Be Ready

□ Alert and Watching

Mark 13:32–33



Say: Perhaps you have seen detailed charts showing the possible sequence of end-time events. Books and movies have attempted to portray these events. Instead of mapping out details, Jesus gave this teaching to warn His disciples to be ready because no human being would know the time He would come. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus’ disciples were curious about the timing of events about which Jesus spoke (Mark 13:4; see also Acts 1:6). Yet Jesus repeatedly turned the conversation around to highlight their own need to be ready to face adversity, while watching and waiting for His coming. He explained in Mark 13:32 that only God the Father has knowledge as to this end-time event. This statement by Jesus has challenged Bible scholars: Since Jesus is God the Son, does He not share the complete knowledge possessed by God the Father? Some scholars point to Philippians 2:5–11 for help in understanding this passage. This passage says that Jesus “made himself nothing”

in becoming a human being and a servant among us (see Philippians 2:7, NIV). This phrase is translated from a word in the original language that means to “empty” or “make empty.” Jesus did not cease to be divine, but it seems that He allowed certain prerogatives of His deity to be set aside during His earthly ministry. Having been resurrected and having ascended into heaven, Jesus’ time of self-emptying has been completed, and He again shares the Father’s complete knowledge of future events.

The only way for disciples of Jesus to be prepared for His return is to maintain a constant state of readiness. The verb translated “Be alert!” in Mark 13:33 (NIV) carries a meaning of “Stay awake!” or “Be vigilant!” This is not merely a state of awareness; it means acting to protect one’s own spiritual health and that of other believers. (See also Ephesians 6:18.)

Discuss

- ? Read Acts 1:6–8. What are Jesus’ disciples told to do rather than speculate about the timing of Jesus’ actions?
- ? Read Ephesians 6:18. What is the place of prayer in our preparation for the coming of Christ?



□ Don’t Fall Asleep

Mark 13:34–37

Say: Almost everyone has endured long waiting times in airports or other places. In the absence of activity, it’s easy to get distracted or weary, or even fall asleep. But, as we wait for Jesus’ return, we must be actively watching for Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Mark 13:34–37, Jesus compared himself to a man who leaves his servants in charge during his absence. In this parable, the homeowner assigns each servant a task to perform, including a special task of keeping watch assigned to one servant. Between Jesus’ ascension and His return, His followers have been given gifts to use and ministries to perform faithfully as they watch and wait for Him (see Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 4:10–11).

Because His followers do not know the time of His return, they must keep watch at all times (Mark 13:35). Jesus used the four watches, or divisions, of the night observed by Roman soldiers on sentry duty to teach His disciples that they must also keep watch for His coming. Just as a sentry would not want the embarrassment—or the penalty—of being caught sleeping when assigned to keep watch, no disciple of Jesus should want to be caught not watching or waiting for His return (verse 36).

Jesus concluded His teaching by stating, “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (verse 37, NIV). Regardless of the time when His second coming will take place, each believer must be prepared to meet Christ at the moment of his or her own death. The end-time message of Jesus began with the disciples’ questions about timing and signs. Jesus’ responses centered around the absolute necessity of a strong, faithful spiritual life, until the very end.



Resource Packet Item 2: What Is Your Assignment?

Distribute the work sheet and ask students to prayerfully reflect on the questions and the accompanying Scriptures as they seek God's will. Perhaps some could share testimonies next week of how God is directing their lives.

Discuss

- ? How would you respond to a friend who wanted you to join in speculation as to when the Lord will return?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus spent about three years with His first followers, teaching, preaching, and eventually dying and rising from the grave for us. We, as His followers, will spend eternity with Him. And for this life, He has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit (see John 15:26). We need never fear the persecution that Jesus foretold. The Holy Spirit will be right beside us, helping us to remain firm in our faith in every circumstance.



Resource Packet Item 3: Watching. Waiting. Working.

Distribute the checklist, and suggest that students take it home and evaluate their own preparation for Jesus' return, then use it as a guide to help them in their spiritual growth.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Prayerfully reflect on God's assignment for you as you await Jesus' return.
- Live each day as though this is the day Jesus will return.
- Pray for opportunities to reflect God's love to those around you.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream.
Daniel 2:26-36

Tuesday

Kingdoms To Come.
Daniel 2:37-45

Wednesday

The End-Times.
Daniel 12:1-4

Thursday

Be Spiritually Alert.
Matthew 25:1-13

Friday

Terrible Times.
2 Timothy 3:1-9

Saturday

Jesus Returns.
Revelation 19:11-21

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark

February 21, 2021

LESSON 12

Jesus Stands Trial

Introducing the Study

Say: Since its founding in 1992, a nonprofit organization called the Innocence Project has been responsible for exonerating hundreds of people through DNA testing. Most of these people had been tried and sentenced by mistake, because they had been falsely accused. Jesus was tried and convicted without due process, on the basis of false accusations. His own people wanted Him to be convicted and “handed him over to be killed” (Acts 3:13).

Opening Activity—No Justice

Write on the board “Unjustly accused. Unfairly tried.”

Ask, “What feelings do these words stir up in you, especially as you consider the possibility that they could happen to you?”

Most people would do all they could to avoid such treatment, and to fight back when finding themselves in this situation.

Say: Betrayed by one of His disciples, deserted by the rest, and tried before the Roman government, Jesus faced rejection beyond anything we can imagine. Yet, His attitude and behavior in the darkest hours of His life serve as our best example when we face harsh treatment from others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Since Jesus did nothing but good, it may seem surprising that He was arrested and put to death. However, Jesus was not surprised by these events. He knew the sinfulness of human hearts. He also knew that the Father’s plan required His death and resurrection. As we study Mark 14, we are reminded that the events of our own lives do not surprise God either; we can trust Him to help us respond in His love when confronted by the challenges we face.

Study Text

Mark 14:43 through 15:15

Central Truth

Jesus displayed humility in the darkest hours of His life.



Key Verse

Mark 14:60–61

The high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing (KJV).

The high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Lead students in recounting the events of Jesus’ trial.
- Help students recognize how Jesus submitted to the plan for our salvation, even when it meant enduring false accusations and an unjust trial.
- Challenge students to examine their own willingness to serve God regardless of the cost, and submit to God in a deeper way.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Mark 14:43. And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

44. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely.

45. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him.

46. And they laid their hands on him, and took him.

53. And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

55. And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.

60. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

61. But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

63. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

64. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

15:1. And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.

2. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto them, Thou sayest it.

8. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them.

9. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?

13. And they cried out again, Crucify him.

15. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.

New International Version

Mark 14:43. Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

44. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard."

45. Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him.

46. The men seized Jesus and arrested him.

53. They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together.

55. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.

60. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"

61. But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

62. "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

63. The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked.

64. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.

15:1. Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

2. "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied.

8. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

9. "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate.

13. "Crucify him!" they shouted.

15. Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.



Part 1—Betrayed and Arrested

□ Betrayed With a Kiss

Mark 14:43–47

Say: Many of us may have felt betrayed, but such experiences pale in comparison to the utter betrayal Jesus endured. For more than three years, Judas had followed Jesus, listened to His teachings, and witnessed His miracles. Now he betrayed Jesus with a kiss, as part of a seemingly respectful greeting. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The events of Mark 14 took place the night before Christ’s crucifixion. As the time of His death was approaching, He took His disciples to a place called Gethsemane to pray. Then He took Peter, James, and John further as He approached His place of prayer. Going a little further, He fell to the ground in heart-wrenching prayer.

Meanwhile, Jesus’ disciples allowed themselves to fall asleep instead of watching and praying (Mark 14:41–42). Just as Jesus was rousing them for the third time, Judas appeared—and with him a crowd bearing swords and clubs (verse 43). Sent from the highest religious authorities of Israel, this mob was ready to apprehend Jesus and to fight off any resistance mounted by His followers.

Judas told them to “lead him away under guard” (verse 44, NIV). Early in His ministry, Jesus had walked through an angry crowd intent on killing Him and escaped (see Luke 4:28–30). Judas did not want those accompanying him to lose Jesus, whether through Jesus’ own actions or those of His disciples.

Jesus’ treatment by Judas epitomizes the bitterness of betrayal by someone close. Judas called Jesus “Rabbi,” meaning “master,” or “teacher” (Mark 14:45), a title of great honor. He greeted Jesus with a kiss. Note that this was not only a common practice for a disciple to his teacher; it was encouraged by both Paul and Peter as a greeting in the Early Church (see Romans 16:16; 1 Peter 5:14).

The Gospel accounts portray Peter as prone to impulse. Here, he attempted to defend Jesus by lashing out at the servant of the high priest (Mark 14:46–47; see John 18:10). However, Jesus willingly accepted His arrest as a part of God’s redemptive plan. Then, He even healed the injury inflicted by Peter (see Luke 22:51).



Resource Packet Item 1: It Hurts All the More

Distribute the case study and divide the class into small groups to read it and respond to the questions. Then discuss the answers as a class.

Discuss

- ? Read 1 Timothy 6:10. What results might the love of money have had in Judas’ life?
- ? Do you think Peter regretted his actions of trying to defend Jesus? Explain.



□ Taken by Force

Mark 14:48–52

Say: While Jesus held all authority as we have noted in earlier studies, He allowed himself to be taken by force in Gethsemane. Jesus was never stripped

of His authority. He gave His life willingly. (See John 10:17–18. Share your highlights from the following text.)

After His arrest, Jesus uttered a statement that foreshadowed events that would occur several hours later: “Am I leading a rebellion . . . that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?” (Mark 14:48, NIV). One who had actually been involved in a rebellion, Barabbas, would be offered to the crowd along with Jesus, and the crowd would be allowed to choose freedom for only one of the prisoners.

Jesus pointed out the ironic nature of His arrest: He was taken by force, as though He were dangerous. He was taken at night, despite the many times He could have been arrested while teaching publicly (verse 49). This provided the opportunity to point out that God allowed the events of Jesus’ arrest to occur as they did so that the prophecies of His Word could be fulfilled. One such prophecy is Zechariah 13:7, which says in part, “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (NIV). Jesus’ disciples, fearing for their own lives, deserted Jesus and fled from those who seized Him (Mark 14:50).

Verses 51–52 record an incident that appears only in Mark’s Gospel: A young man following Jesus fled naked, leaving his garment in the hands of those who tried to apprehend Jesus. It seems that this man had probably covered himself in a linen garment, perhaps in haste, without any other clothing. Some commentators believe this young man may have been Mark himself. It is noteworthy that this man stayed with Jesus until He was taken. Yet he, like the others, ultimately fled.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think the disciples fled at this time, even though they had stayed true to Jesus up until this point?
- ? How do you think you would respond if you faced apprehension by authorities because of your faith?

Part 2—Before the High Priest

□ Attacked by False Testimony

Mark 14:53–64



Say: The Jewish leaders were determined to have Jesus put to death, yet they lacked the power to do so. Neither did they have the evidence needed to request His death. Instead, they enlisted witnesses who were willing to lie about what Jesus had said, but even then, the witnesses did not agree. Therefore their statements were not considered valid. Not to be deterred, they used Jesus’ own true statement—that He is indeed the Messiah—against Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus was taken to the high priest Caiaphas (Mark 14:53; see Matthew 26:3) and the entire body of the ruling Sanhedrin. Peter followed, and was admitted with the help of John into the high priest’s courtyard (verse 54; see John 18:15–16).

Rome did not allow the Sanhedrin to carry out the death penalty. The Jewish court needed to first condemn Him, then hand Him over to the Romans. According

to Deuteronomy 17:6, the death penalty required the testimony of at least two witnesses. Unfortunately for the Sanhedrin, they were not able to find sufficient witnesses to enact their plan (Mark 14:55–56).

Two false witnesses quoted Jesus as saying, “I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands” (verses 57–58, NIV). This appears to be a misrepresentation of Jesus’ words in Mark 13:2 and John 2:19, as Jesus did not in fact say that He would destroy the temple. (Such words would have constituted a capital offense.) Time and again, those testifying leveled false accusations that contradicted each other (Mark 14:59).

Having failed to build a case with witnesses, the high priest attempted to get Jesus to incriminate himself (verse 60). When asked to respond to the testimony of these false witnesses, Jesus was silent (verse 61; see Isaiah 53:7). Then Jesus was asked directly if He was the Messiah. Jesus answered, “I am,” then continued by asserting that He was the “Son of Man” (a messianic title) and would return “on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62, NIV; see Daniel 7:13–14).

Believing Jesus’ words to be blasphemous, Caiaphas tore his clothing as an act of mourning. In his view, Jesus had just committed a capital offense (verse 63; see Leviticus 24:16). He then questioned the Sanhedrin to find their judgment on the matter. The determination was made that Jesus must die (Mark 14:64; see Luke 23:50–53, noting that Joseph of Arimathea dissented).



Resource Packet Item 2: Falsely Accused

Distribute the work sheet, and allow students to work in small groups to answer the questions. Then have groups share their answers. To save time, you may want to assign each question to a different group.

Discuss

- ? How do the enemies of Jesus twist His words to misrepresent His message today? What are some examples?
- ? Why is it significant that Jesus’ testimony identifies himself as the Messiah, and thus as divine?



Denied by Peter

Mark 14:65–72

Say: In addition to being betrayed by one of His disciples, Jesus was also denied by Peter, a member of His inner circle and one who had witnessed the Transfiguration. Jesus was not surprised by Peter’s failure. Yet Jesus had a great plan for Peter. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After being condemned by the Sanhedrin, Jesus suffered physical and verbal attacks by those who held Him. Mocking His miraculous knowledge and power, they blindfolded Him, struck Him, and demanded that He identify those delivering the violent blows (Mark 14:65).

Meanwhile, Peter attempted to avoid being identified with Christ, even as one of the high priest’s servant girls identified Peter as being with Him (Mark 14:66–67).

Peter denied her claims forcefully: “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about” (verse 68, NIV).

Although Peter tried to avoid her, the servant girl found him again, and drew the attention of others (verse 69). Following Peter’s second denial, the bystanders determined that Peter was a Galilean, perhaps by his speaking or dress (verse 70). This brought Peter’s strongest denial; he asked that the curses of God would fall upon him if indeed he knew Jesus (verse 71). The mention that Peter “swore” likely does not mean “profanity,” as we sometimes use this word. Rather, Peter was likely swearing an oath (note that the term for curse is also used in Acts 23:12–14 that would result in his being cursed if he broke his word. In this sense, then, Peter was expressing a level of shame for the Lord (see also Mark 8:38).

Despite Peter’s promise in Mark 14:31, he had denied his Lord repeatedly and emphatically. Following His resurrection, Jesus would allow Peter to reaffirm his love for Jesus (see John 21:15–19). But for now, Peter was overcome by the weight of his failure, and he began to weep bitterly (Mark 14:72).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think people mock Jesus?
- ? What should a person do when he or she has failed Christ?

Part 3—Before Pilate

□ The King of the Jews

Mark 15:1–5



Say: The enemies of Jesus twisted the truth, modifying their original accusations against Jesus in a way to manipulate Pilate into doing their wishes. They were not truly concerned about any treason or rebellion against Rome. But they framed their argument so Pilate would see it as a matter of concern to the Roman government. (Share your highlights from the following text.) (**Play the video on Pilate, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.**)

The Roman governor of Judea from approximately AD 26 to 36, Pilate made his official residence on the Mediterranean coast in Caesarea. When he was in Jerusalem, he stayed in the palace constructed by Herod the Great, southwest of the temple. Since the Roman officials began their work at daybreak, the Jewish rulers were free to bring Jesus to Pilate “early in the morning” (Mark 15:1).

The high priest and the Sanhedrin had charged Jesus with blasphemy. However, this charge would mean little to a Roman official like Pilate. It appears that the Jewish rulers altered their main claim against Christ to be treason. As a Roman governor, Pilate took much care to detect signs of a rebellion, due to the high level of political unrest in Israel. It is also noteworthy that Pilate was known for his cruelty to the Jewish people. Likely with concern for a rebellion in mind, Pilate asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews. In replying, “You have said so,” Jesus was using a figure of speech to indicate an affirmative answer (verse 2, NIV; see also John 18:36–37).

The Jews could not enter the palace, since doing so would have left them ceremonially defiled (John 18:28). Jesus had been led out of the palace and into the open court, where He was accused by the chief priests of many things (Mark 15:3). According to Luke 23:2, along with His claim to messiahship, Jesus was accused of subversion, and of opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar. Pilate was amazed that Jesus remained silent when given opportunity to reply to their accusations (Mark 15:4–5).



Resource Packet Item 3: They Said . . . He Said . . .

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to work on it, then discuss it in class. If you are short on time, suggest that they take it home for further study and reflection.

Discuss

- ? In what way did Jesus' accusers take advantage of the tense political situation in altering their charges against Him?
- ? What are some false charges used against Christians today?



□ Barabbas Freed; Jesus Punished

Mark 15:6–15

Say: When leaders are controlled by self-interest, by a need for popularity, or by fear of others, they often make bad choices. Both Pilate and the Jewish leaders made choices based on wrong motives, resulting in great injustice. However, we must remember that Jesus was still in control. He chose to lay down His life to provide salvation for all who would accept Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Those gathered at Pilate's residence had a choice to make. According to custom, one prisoner each year was released during the Passover festival (Mark 15:6–8). One choice was Jesus. The other choice was Barabbas, a man accused of insurrection and murder in an uprising. Numerous insurrections took place during the time that Rome controlled Israel, and they attempted to free the Jews from Roman power. In this case their actions resulted in the death of Roman soldiers.

Perhaps attempting to preserve Jesus' life, Pilate asked the crowd if they wanted Jesus released to them (verse 9). However, he realized that the chief priests—who could not compete with Jesus' character, teaching, and miracles—had delivered Jesus to him out of their own self-interests (verse 10). Further, the chief priests would incite the crowd to ask that Barabbas—a man who shared their contempt for Rome—be released instead of Jesus (verse 11).

At this point, Pilate, known for his harsh control of the Jews, released control to those before him, asking the crowd what he should do with Jesus (verse 12). Despite the fact that they could not name Jesus' capital offense, they kept insisting that He be crucified (verses 13–14).

Pilate's desire to please the people overcame his concerns of Jesus' innocence. (Note that the Jews were known for taking their complaints to Caesar,

which could bring trouble for Pilate.) So Pilate released Barabbas to them and had Jesus flogged (verse 15). Roman flogging utilized a whip made of leather straps embedded near the ends with pieces of bone and metal. Jewish flogging limited the number of lashes (Deuteronomy 25:1–3). Roman flogging, by contrast, imposed no such limits, and often proved fatal.

Discuss

- ? Pilate held great power over his subjects. What advantage may he have been seeking by bowing to their request for Jesus' crucifixion?
- ? What kind of ungodly actions occur when we are motivated by envy?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As we read the account of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion, there seems to be no end to the suffering—both physical and spiritual—that He went through for us. As a result of this, we see there is also no end to His love for us, as He willingly submitted to the Father's plan for our redemption. Each of us can shape our own commitment to God by using the example Jesus has given us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- If you have been betrayed or disappointed by someone, ask God to help you forgive that person. If possible, reach out to mend that relationship.
- Ask God to help you make wise decisions that come from right motives.
- Pray for those in leadership, both in the church and in government, that they will make good decisions.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

A Wrong Response to Difficulty.
Genesis 4:1–8

Tuesday

A Right Response to Difficulty.
Genesis 6:11–22

Wednesday

Jesus' Silence Predicted.
Isaiah 53:7–9

Thursday

Jesus Displays Humility.
John 13:1–5

Friday

Jesus Teaches Humility.
John 13:6–17

Saturday

Be Like Jesus.
Philippians 2:1–11

Unit 2: Gospel by Mark

February 28, 2021

LESSON 13

Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Study Text

Mark 15:16 through 16:20

Central Truth

Jesus is alive!



Key Verse

Mark 16:6

Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him (KJV).

“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Help students recognize and appreciate that Jesus was the Suffering Servant and the Savior of the world, as shown by His actions.
- Challenge students to endure joyfully any persecution or opposition they experience for their Savior.
- Encourage students to recognize and understand that suffering is part of what it means to identify with Jesus.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today we are concluding our study of the Book of Mark. One of the themes we have observed is the authority of Jesus. Today, we see His authority demonstrated as He willingly laid down His life, then took it up again by rising from the dead. As we look at the people involved in His death, it is important to remember that the plan of God from the foundation of the world was for Jesus to be the Sacrifice for lost humanity. That fact, however, does not detract from the choices each individual makes, whether to serve God or reject Him.

Opening Activity—Testimony Time

Ask several students to share their testimonies of what Jesus' death and resurrection means to them. Be sure to include students who are young in their faith as well as the more seasoned believers in your class.

Say: Each person must choose his or her response to the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we look at today's lesson, examine the characters involved and the choices they made. Which ones do you identify with at different times in your life? (Allow for a few responses, then share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus knew He would be exalted in the divine plan of salvation, the same plan that brought Him to the cross (Matthew 28:18; see John 13:3). The familiar story of Christ's death and resurrection can bring us comfort regarding God's plans for us. Whatever we are experiencing now—good or bad—we ought to recall the future that God has made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us ask God to help us maintain the attitude of Christ as we await our future hope.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Mark 15:16. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band.

20. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

22. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.

23. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.

24. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

25. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.

26. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

33. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

34. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

37. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

38. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

39. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

16:1. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

New International Version

Mark 15:16. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers.

20. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

22. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull").

23. Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

24. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

26. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

33. At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

34. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

37. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

39. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

16:1. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

4. But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

5. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

7. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'



Say: People go to great lengths to show honor to earthly kings and dignitaries. Yet the King of kings was the object of mocking and beating. Most people have endured some kind of mocking in their lives, perhaps as far back as elementary school. Often those memories are painful, even to adults. The mocking Jesus received from the Roman soldiers was far more painful and humiliating. He chose to accept it, not because they were more powerful than He and kept Him there, but because this was part of God's plan to bring salvation to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had bowed to the will of the crowd, who insisted that Jesus be crucified. He released to them Barabbas, an insurrectionist, and ordered his soldiers to flog Jesus, a punishment that sometimes proved fatal, at the hands of the Romans (Mark 15:15). In addition to being flogged, Jesus was subjected to other painful and humiliating treatment as He faced an entire company of Roman soldiers called together to mock Him (verses 16–20).

In a mock coronation ceremony, the soldiers dressed Jesus in the royal color purple (verse 17). They placed a crown of thorns upon His head to mimic the laurel wreaths worn by the Caesars. They saluted Him with the words “Hail, king of the Jews!” in the same way that Caesar’s guard hailed their master (verse 18, NIV). Repeatedly, they struck Him, spit on Him, and paid homage to Him, pretending to honor Him as a prince or a king (verse 19).

When He was an infant, Jesus’ identity as King was revealed to the Magi (Matthew 2:1–2). As an adult, Jesus avoided the people’s attempt to make Him king by force (John 6:15). He also rejected Satan’s temptation to rulership—which would have required Him to bow down to Satan himself (Matthew 4:8–10).

Jesus held “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18, NIV) but in God’s plan and timing He must suffer the Crucifixion (Mark 15:20).

Discuss

- ? How will Jesus help us when we are ridiculed for our commitment to Him?
- ? What are some situations in which we especially need to trust in God’s perfect timing despite the challenges?



Say: The suffering of Jesus continued—and escalated—as He was taken to the place where He would be crucified. As He was mocked by both the Roman soldiers and the chief priests and teachers of the Law, He could have called down an army of angels to free Him (see Matthew 26:53)—even as His enemies challenged Him to do just that. We can scarcely comprehend the love of God that kept His plan in motion. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The soldiers forced Simon, a Cyrenian who had likely come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, to carry Jesus' cross (Mark 15:21). Cyrene was a port city in what is now the nation of Libya. The identification of Simon's sons by name seems to indicate that early readers of Mark's Gospel would be familiar with them; in Romans 16:13 Paul mentioned "Rufus, chosen in the Lord" (NIV).

Jesus was brought to the hill called Golgotha, "the place of the skull" (Mark 15:22, NIV). He was offered a mixture of wine and myrrh (verse 23; myrrh is a spice taken from plants growing in Arabia and Africa). This drink was given by Jewish custom to those about to be crucified, to dull the pain. Jesus refused to drink it, choosing rather to experience the agony of the cross unaided by a pain killer.

In addition to physical agony, Jesus suffered insult. The soldiers divided His clothing and gambled for it (verse 24). This not only reflected Roman custom; it fulfilled Psalm 22:18. Further, His identity as King, twisted as a charge against Him, was posted for all to see (Mark 15:26).

To further dishonor Him, Jesus was crucified between two criminals (Mark 15:27). This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, that "he was numbered with the transgressors" (see also Luke 22:37).

Some witnesses repeated the accusation that Jesus said He would destroy and rebuild the Jewish temple (Mark 15:29–30). The religious leaders mocked Him for not delivering himself as He had others (verse 31). Like the others who mocked Him, they challenged Him to free himself from the torture He was suffering, and alleged that they would believe if He did so (verse 32).



Resource Packet Item 1: Mocking the Savior

Distribute the work sheet and complete it, either in small groups or as a class, then discuss it briefly.

Discuss

- ? Why do you suppose that Jesus rejected the pain-numbing offer of wine and myrrh?
- ? What would you say to those who mocked Jesus as unable to save himself, having saved others?

Part 2—Jesus Dead and Buried

□ Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Mark 15:33–41



Say: The moment for which Jesus had come to earth had arrived. As He hung on the cross, He was the Sacrifice—the Lamb of God—who had come to take away the sin of the world. At that moment, He was—in a way we cannot understand—separated from the Father, not because of His sin (for He was sinless), but because of ours. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

From noon until three in the afternoon on the day of Christ's crucifixion, the land was covered by darkness (Mark 15:33). Then Jesus cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (verse 34, KJV; see Psalm 22:1). This was a phrase spoken

in His native Aramaic language that meant “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Aramaic was a Semitic language similar to Hebrew that slowly became the language of the Jews after the exile.) There is no way the human mind could grasp the significance and anguish of what would be involved in the Father’s alienation from the Son, since we cannot grasp the nature of one true God in Trinity.

Some mistook Jesus’ words as a plea for Elijah the prophet to come and save Him from the cross (Mark 15:35). In response, someone offered Jesus sour wine, the common drink of Roman soldiers, and encouraged others—in faith, or perhaps sarcastically—to watch for Elijah to appear (verse 36).

The manner in which Jesus died, with a loud cry, convinced the centurion overseeing His crucifixion that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (verses 37,39). Despite the torture of flogging, the walk to Golgotha, and the hours of hanging nailed to the cross, Jesus had the strength to cry out in this manner.

At that moment, the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the Jewish temple was “torn in two from top to bottom” (verse 38, NIV). This event signified that the barrier between people and God had been broken (see Hebrews 9:24–28).

Mark records that a group of women watched from a distance. The group included Mary Magdalene, whose life had been radically changed when Jesus expelled seven demons from her (Mark 15:40–41; see Luke 8:1–3).

Discuss

- ? Why is it necessary to realize that only God could break the power of sin over our lives?
- ? Why does a miracle of deliverance or healing often strengthen us in our fellowship with Christ?



□ A Bold Request

Mark 15:42–47

Say: Two rather unlikely people who were actually members of the Sanhedrin took the bold action of burying the body of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea had become a believer and had not consented to the death of Jesus. Nicodemus, who had earlier come to Jesus under the cover of night, assisted Joseph. Both were prominent men who risked their reputations—if not more—to identify with Jesus in this way. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mark explained that Jesus’ death took place on a Friday, which was the day of preparation before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42). Therefore, it was necessary that Jesus’ body be taken down and buried before the Sabbath began at sunset.

Performing this task was Joseph of Arimathea, called “a prominent member of the Council,” that is, the Sanhedrin (verse 43, NIV). Jesus’ message—that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, resonated with him; he did not consent to the Sanhedrin’s decision to condemn Jesus to death (see Luke 23:50–51).

When asked for the body of Jesus, Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead (Mark 15:44). Crucifixion was a slow means of execution, and it could even take days for the condemned to die. Pilate called for the centurion in charge of the crucifixion, who could bring confirmation of Christ's death (verse 45; see John 19:33–35).

With the help of Nicodemus, Joseph took Jesus' body, wrapped it in linen with myrrh and aloes, and placed it in Joseph's own new tomb (Mark 15:46; see Matthew 27:59–60; John 19:38–42). The boldness and willingness of Joseph and Nicodemus contrasted sharply with the fear of Jesus' closest followers, who were nowhere to be found when it was time to bury Him.

Mark also added that two women who had followed Jesus "saw where he was laid," a detail important for the verification of events to follow (Mark 15:47, *NIV*).

Discuss

- ? Mark explains Jewish customs for his Gentile readers. What things about your faith may need to be explained to non-Christians?
- ? How can your boldness as a believer impact the lives of those who do not know Jesus Christ?

Part 3—Jesus Resurrected and Ascended

□ He Is Risen!

Mark 16:1–8



Say: The plan of God continued to unfold as some of the women who had followed Jesus went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body after the Sabbath. Although Jesus had said He would rise again, the women fully expected to find the body of Jesus right where Joseph and Nicodemus had left it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had quickly wrapped and buried the body of Jesus before the Sabbath began. Then, the day after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and two other women (Mary the mother of James, and Salome) came to anoint the body of Jesus with the spices they had purchased (Mark 16:1–2). This was part of the burial process at that time, and was done to offset the odor of decomposition.

The women were concerned about the massive stone that had been placed in front of the entrance of the tomb (verse 3). On their arrival, they saw that the stone had been rolled away and that the tomb was occupied by a young man in a white robe, identified elsewhere as an angel (verses 4–5; see Matthew 28:2–5). This angel told the women not to be afraid, and continued by repeatedly affirming the good news that Jesus was alive. Jesus had risen! He was no longer in the tomb. And, in the early morning light, the women were invited to see the stone slab where Jesus had been placed, which was now empty (Mark 16:6).

The angel gave them a mission: Tell Jesus' disciples that the risen Christ would meet them in the Galilee (verse 7; see Mark 14:28). In doing so, He singled out Peter, who had previously denied Christ (see Mark 14:27–31). Peter

was not the only one who acted in fear: the women hesitated at first to share that Christ had risen, but later proclaimed this good news (Mark 16:8).



Resource Packet Item 2: I Don't Know Him

Divide your class into small groups and distribute the case study. After a few minutes, ask each group to report their responses. Then discuss them as a class.

Discuss

- ? Why do you suppose that angels in Scripture often began speaking by saying, “Fear not!”?
- ? What are some ways Mark 16 teaches us about God’s love?



Go and Tell

Mark 16:9–20

Say: The resurrection of Jesus changed everything for His disciples. Beginning with His appearance to Mary Magdalene and, later, to the others, they became the messengers through whom the world would hear the greatest news ever shared. That news would be accompanied by signs and wonders. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Mark records an appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene alone (Mark 16:9). Mary’s report to Jesus’ disciples was met with unbelief (verses 10–11). Likewise, the experience of two disciples who encountered Jesus walking to Emmaus was met by unbelief (verses 12–13; see Luke 24:13–35).

Skeptics have argued that the disciples expected that Jesus would be resurrected, and that these expectations created the illusion that He was indeed alive; but the facts say otherwise. In reality, Jesus appeared to hundreds of people after the Resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:6). Also, Jesus’ followers did not expect Him to rise from the dead, and were convinced only when given proof that He was alive (Acts 1:3).

Jesus appeared to His disciples and rebuked them for their lack of faith in His prophesied resurrection, and for their refusal to believe eyewitnesses’ testimony of the fact (Mark 16:14). After all their experiences with Him, seeing the proofs of His divinity and the reliability of His words, they should have believed the reports that He had risen from the dead.

Despite initial unbelief, the disciples would later proclaim His resurrection (see Acts 3:15). Jesus commissioned them to preach the gospel to the entire world (Mark 16:15–16). Individuals are instructed to demonstrate their faith in Christ by following Him in water baptism (see Matthew 3:13–15).

Jesus promised those who would believe a life marked by God’s supernatural blessing, including the authority to cast out demons; the baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues; protection from harm, whether from Satan or from other people; and the power to heal the sick by the laying on of hands (Mark 16:17–18). Following Jesus’ ascension to heaven, His disciples found that He was

indeed still with them through the Holy Spirit, confirming His message by the signs He had promised (verses 19–20; John 14:18; Acts 4:30).



Resource Packet Item 3: “A Healing in Brazil”

One sign that should follow believers is healing. Distribute the work sheet, and have someone read the story aloud. Then discuss the accompanying questions. This would also be a good time to pray for those in the class who need healing.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think that Jesus personally appeared to Mary Magdalene?
- ? What experiences have you had of the signs that Jesus promised to all believers?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Our Christian faith is founded upon the love of God demonstrated through historical events, including the Incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. But the story doesn’t end there. Jesus told His followers to spread the gospel to the entire world, so that everyone, including you, would have a chance to know Him. Then, as you walk with Jesus, you can begin sharing with others the good news of Christ.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray with, either in person or by phone, someone who needs a miracle.
- Encourage someone else by sharing the story of a miracle you have received or witnessed.
- Pray for opportunities to share the good news of a living Christ with an unbeliever.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

The Savior’s Victory Foretold.
Genesis 3:13–15

Tuesday

Not Abandoned to Death.
Psalm 16:9–11

Wednesday

On the Third Day.
Hosea 6:1–3

Thursday

Resurrection Proclaimed.
Acts 2:22–28

Friday

Resurrection Believed.
Acts 2:29–41

Saturday

Resurrection Promised.
1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Scriptures Difficult To Understand

During your time teaching the Bible, whether for Sunday School, Bible Study, or some other setting, have you ever faced a particularly difficult passage of Scripture to explain? How did you handle it? What did you learn?

The fact is, while much of Scripture is relatively easy to understand, even if it might take some time and effort, there are passages that have challenged and even confounded believers since God began to reveal His Word to us in written form. This unit is designed to address some of these passages, offering insight into what they mean, as well as gleaning helpful hints on how to approach hard passages in the future. Keep in mind as you teach, however, that the lessons are not going to provide all of the answers we might desire. Simply put, there are truths about God and His ways that go far beyond what our human minds—limited by sinfulness and time, and the very fact of our humanity—can even begin to comprehend.

The unit will proceed roughly in the order of the books of Scripture. The first lesson deals with questions concerning the beginnings of God's people under Abraham and Moses. Then the unit moves to the days of Joshua, as the people prepared to enter the Promised Land, and God commanded them to destroy people groups—a heavy command for us to understand, indeed. Lesson 3 focuses on the heartfelt cries of the Psalmist who, under the Spirit's inspiration, called out for vengeance on his enemies—hardly an attitude we would see fit as modern believers. Lesson 4 focuses on hard sayings of Jesus, which deal with a shrewd (and less-than-forthright) steward, the uneasy task of turning the other cheek, and a difficult teaching from His end times prophecies. After the Easter lesson, you will explore difficult New Testament concepts like election and the perseverance of the saints (i.e., can a Christian lose his salvation). Finally, you and your class will explore topics in Revelation, such as numbers and specifics on the Antichrist.

We hope that this lesson will equip students to be better prepared to address questions from others, even as they grapple with their own tough questions. Most of all, we trust that they will recognize how to accept the mystery of Scripture, even as they grasp the value of study to discover its many deep truths.

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand

March 7, 2021

LESSON

1

Difficult Passages in Genesis and Exodus

Study Text

Genesis 15:1–21; Exodus 4:18–26;
33:11–23

Central Truth

Even difficult Scriptures contain truths for our benefit.



Key Verse

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever (KJV).

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Recognize that God leads and cares for His people in ways that are often surprising.
- Trust that God's direction is right, even when it is difficult to understand.
- Take steps to build a more intimate relationship with God in daily life.

Introducing the Study

Say: Some of the Scripture passages that are confusing and troubling to Christians of the twenty-first century may lose some of their mystique when considered in light of the history and culture of the time they portray. Such is the case with the events in today's lesson about Abraham and Moses.

Opening Activity—God Said WHAT?

Ask your students if God has ever led them to do something odd or puzzling to others. Be prepared to share something from your own life if no one responds. (It could be as simple as doing the right thing when everyone else would think it was a “no-brainer” to lie or cheat.)

Say: In today's lesson, God asked both Abraham and Moses to do things that many would think were illogical. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Bible contains many stories revealed to us by God through His inspired authors. Remarkably, they portray God as both transcendent (or, high and exalted) as well as immanent (or, close to us). As a result, He reveals truth and reality that only He can fully understand, and He explains to us what we need to know, even as there is mystery remaining.

However, Scripture also contains stories where God reveals to humans His grand plan and purpose for all humanity. In this way, He bridges the gap that exists between us and himself. He stoops to our level and uses the events and objects of history and culture so that we might understand His message. He is truly a self-revealing God. He expects a relationship that requires faith, trust, and obedience. To accomplish that goal He reveals His will and purpose to us and for us, as only He can.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 15:12. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

13. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

14. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

15. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

16. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

17. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

18. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

Exodus 4:19. And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.

24. And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him.

25. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

26. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.

33:18. And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

19. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

20. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

21. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:

22. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

23. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

New International Version

Genesis 15:12. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

13. Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there.

14. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

15. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.

16. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

17. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

18. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."

Exodus 4:19. Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead."

24. At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him.

25. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said.

26. So the Lord let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)

33:18. Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

19. And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

20. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

21. Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

22. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by.

23. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

Part 1—Supernatural Experience

□ God's Promise: Given and Confirmed

Genesis 15:7–11



Say: The story of Abram's faith when he was called to leave his home and follow God's leading without knowing the destination often causes us to examine our own faith and whether we can follow God as Abram did. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The events of Genesis 15 are familiar to most Christians. Abram was called out of Ur of the Chaldees (in the area of what is now northern Iraq) in chapter 12. God's call came with a command to leave his home and become a pilgrim on a journey to a promised land (12:1–3). Obedience would bring promised blessings to Abram and his descendants.

A famine then prompted Abram to seek survival in Egypt. However, a fearful response to a difficult situation with Pharaoh caused him to pass his wife, Sarah, off as his sister. While the ruse resulted in favorable treatment for Abram, it brought God's punishment of plagues, and the truth became known. Pharaoh rebuked Abram and ordered him to leave.

The story then continued with Abram entering the Land. He prospered so much that division of the land and separation from his nephew Lot became necessary. Unfortunately, the rival kings of the land fought, and Lot was caught in the middle and captured. When Abram heard of this he mounted a daring attack and rescue of his extended family. He was victorious against the combined forces of four kings and returned his relatives to their homes.

Sometime after his defeat of the four kings (15:1), God spoke to Abram, who apparently was engulfed in doubt and confusion over his future. He was surrounded by hostile pagan kings. Furthermore, despite God's promise to make of him a great nation (see 12:2), Abram was childless with no biological heir. But God went to Abram in a vision and delivered a message of assurance in the form of the "Abrahamic Covenant." Abraham would have a natural-born heir.

God then reassured Abram of His covenant promise with a sort of object lesson. Taking him outside, He had him look up into the night sky. Abraham's descendants would be as innumerable as the stars above. The words of 15:6 (NIV) at that moment and in that context are amazing! Abram "believed the LORD" and God counted that internal commitment of faith "as righteousness."

Nevertheless, Abram's weakness rose again in the form of another question about how the Lord was going to deliver on His promise to give him the land He had promised (verses 7–11). What follows that question might best be explained by examining the ancient ritual of treaty ratification in Bible times. This ritual of walking between animal parts was a known practice in the ancient world. Select animals were sacrificed, cut in two, and the carcasses were laid out into two parallel rows. Normally, the parties making the covenant would then each pass through the sacrifices. The image of Abram driving birds of prey from the dead carcasses helps us to better imagine the scene. This symbolic action of walking between carcasses signaled a pledge from all involved to keep the

covenant. As we will see, however, in this scene God altered the action in a significant way.

Discuss

- ? What was signified by the way Abram sacrificed the animals?
- ? What signs do we use today to show a covenant or pledge between two or more parties?



Resource Packet Item 1: Questions and Faith

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups to discuss the questions. Then have a few of the small groups report on their responses.



God's Covenant Assurance

Genesis 15:12–21

Say: God was not angry with Abraham's questions. Quite to the contrary, God appeared to him in a dream to reassure him that the promise to make him a great nation would be fulfilled. God also assured him that he would live to an old age. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We noted that as Abram waited, he had to chase off the birds of prey that attacked the slain and dissected animals: a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove, and a pigeon, each of which would be animals of sacrifice. Then night fell, and something strange and remarkable occurred. Abram fell into a deep sleep and an extreme darkness enveloped him. In verses 13–16 God repeated His covenant promise regarding the land, as well as the prophecies that his descendants would be strangers and slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. Nevertheless the Lord would bring them out with great possessions—perhaps a startling promise given the circumstances.

Then a truly amazing thing happened: A blazing torch and a smoking fire pot appeared and passed through the pieces of the sacrificed animals (verse 17). Such images evoke memories of God's presence and appearance on Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 19:18; 24:17). God and God alone ratified the covenant He was making with Abram. He would dwell in the midst of His people, protecting them from harm and providing for them.

Discuss

- ? How clearly did Abram understand the meaning of God's words and instructions? Why might he have misunderstood the message?
- ? In what areas of your life are you seeking God for direction?



Part 2—Dangerous Omission

Moses' Obedience

Exodus 4:19–23

Say: Moses became a highly regarded leader of God's people, but this passage reveals his reluctance to obey God and the excuses he made. Perhaps it was a

fear of failure or fear for his own life. After all, God was asking him to deliver a hard message to the powerful Pharaoh and to do the difficult task of leading the Israelites out of bondage. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The passage before us, Exodus 4:19–26, is intriguing because it reveals a human condition all too common among even the most faithful of God’s servants: anxiety and fear of failure. God sought to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery, and Moses was His choice to deliver a message for Pharaoh (see 5:1; “Let my people go”). Moreover, God had a dramatic message for Israel. He had seen their affliction, been moved by their anguished cries and their terrible mistreatment, and was about to release them from bondage (3:13–17). But Moses’ insecurities caused him to respond with a series of three excuses (see 3:11–15; 4:1). God responded to the first two with words of reassurance and a promise of intervention. Then, in 4:1, Moses gave his final excuse: “What if the people don’t believe me?” God answered in an even more reassuring way by describing (and demonstrating) to him multiple supernatural signs that He would perform before the people so they might believe that the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to Moses and sent this message (4:2–9).

But the reluctant prophet was not done with excuses and told God that he lacked the ability to speak properly (“slow of speech and tongue,” verse 10, *NIV*). While some have suggested Moses had a speech impediment, Scripture elsewhere seems to indicate otherwise (see Acts 7:22). Rather, here Moses seemed to express self-doubt that he could demonstrate a mastery of the Egyptian and Hebrew languages needed to fulfill this difficult task. Egypt was especially noted for placing high importance on eloquence, and words could become difficult in such a stressful situation. And so, again, it was a matter of self-doubt on Moses’ part.

Yet even after God assured Moses that the maker of his tongue would enable his speech, Moses asked God to find someone else (4:13), and God allowed Moses’ brother Aaron to be an intermediary spokesman (4:14–16). And so, Moses left Midian, where he had fled after killing an Egyptian (see Exodus 1–3), and returned to Egypt.

Next, God did something that might seem strange, but was vital in helping Moses overcome his natural fears of confronting the all-powerful ruler of Egypt with a uncompromising demand (and danger of judgment by pharaoh): Moses was to threaten the death of pharaoh’s firstborn son (4:23)! What incredible courage it would take to make such a pronouncement to a powerful ruler who could have had Moses killed. Yet this is exactly what happened, which we learn as the story unfolds.

There is a gap between verses 23 and 24, and the reader is left out of the loop about what happens next. Suddenly—unexpectedly—we learn that God met with Moses on his way and sought to kill him. No details are given. We can only look to verses 25–26 for a faint glimpse of what might have happened.

Discuss

- ? What hard things does God ask believers to do today?
- ? What excuses do we sometimes make to avoid following God’s directions?



□ Zipporah's Intervention

Exodus 4:24–26

Say: The Bible does not always tell us every detail about a given situation. Such is the case in this passage. Moses was now on his way to Egypt, and God was about to kill him. As the passage proceeds, we can deduce that he was being punished for not fully following the requirements of the Abrahamic Covenant by circumcising his son. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While we do not know the specifics of Exodus 4:24, we know that Moses' wife, Zipporah, rushed onto the scene with a flint knife and circumcised their son. Then, in disgust, she threw the foreskin at Moses' feet, calling him "a bridegroom of blood" (verse 25, NIV). The only explanation the text offers is this: "At that time she said 'bridegroom of blood,' referring to circumcision" (verse 26, NIV). Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. (See Genesis 17.) It seems reasonable to deduce that Moses had delayed or resisted circumcising his son, which God had commanded for all the sons of Israel. If God was about to redeem Israel from Egyptian bondage and make them a nation in the land of Promise, the prophet who would lead this deliverance must set the standard of obedience.

Despite his hesitancy and doubt, Moses has been faithfully obeying God's commands. Suddenly Moses found himself facing death at the hands of God—a reality that was quickly perceived by his wife, Zipporah. This story is shocking because it reveals that God's discipline on His chosen leaders can be severe. Yet it might also be consoling, demonstrating the human struggle of even a man noted through time for his faithful trust in God.

Discuss

? Why is it important that leaders set a good example in obeying the commands of God?



Resource Packet Item 2: Disobedient Leaders

Distribute the work sheet and divide the class into groups. Assign one of the listed leaders to each group. Compare and discuss their answers.

Part 3—Forbidden Vision



□ God Gives Assurance

Exodus 33:11–17

Say: Moses had such an intimate relationship with God that God spoke to him face-to-face. At this point, God was weary of the stubborn disobedience of His people. He was ready to let them proceed on their own, knowing they would fail. Moses recognized their need for God, and he interceded for the people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Exodus 33 presents us with a theological puzzle. What God said to Moses indicated that Israel's prolonged, stubborn rebellion had taken its toll on His patience. They were going to enter the Promised Land, but without Him (verse 3). God explained

that if He did go with them, it would surely mean their judgment and destruction. He ordered them to remove their festive ornaments as an act of humility, and they obeyed (verses 5–6). Moses still acted as intermediary for the people, but only he and Joshua were allowed access to the tent of meeting now pitched outside the camp. There, God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (verse 11, *NIV*). The people watched and worshipped while the pillar of cloud descended upon the tent as God and His prophet communed (see verse 10).

What is recorded next is another theological puzzle. Moses interceded on behalf of Israel, and God changed His mind. Moses reminded God that it was His presence that marked Israel as His people and nation. He appealed to God on the basis of His declared favor: “I know you by name and you have found favor with me” (verse 12, *NIV*). And God replied, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name” (verse 17, *NIV*). Did God really intend to not accompany His people into the land? Was He testing Moses to see where his heart was? Moses seemed to issue an impassioned plea, declaring that they would not leave unless God was with them (verse 15). Implied in the next verse is Moses’ argument that God’s reputation before “all the other people upon the face of the earth” was at stake (verse 16, *NIV*). It was at that moment that God agreed to follow the people into the land.

Discuss

- ? Why is intimacy with God important when we pray for His intervention in our lives and circumstances?
- ? How does what we pray for reveal our heart before God?

□ God Reveals Himself

Exodus 33:18–23



Say: Although Moses regularly spoke with God and heard from Him, he still wanted to see the glory of God. We, too can seek Him in prayer, that He would reveal himself to us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In verse 18 we gain insight into the heart of the prophet. Note Moses’ prayerful plea: “Show me Your glory” (*NIV*). This reveals that despite his privileged access to communication with God, Moses longed for greater intimacy and communion. Yes, he had often seen and sat in the presence of the Lord when the pillar of cloud descended upon the tabernacle. Yet Moses wanted more. And for a second time in this passage, God accommodated the prophet’s wishes.

However, God explained that what Moses desired is impossible, since no one can look upon the face of God and live (verse 20). Jesus would confirm this in John’s Gospel: “No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18, *NIV*).

“But,” we might ask, “what about all the theophanies (visible appearances of God) in the Old Testament? What about Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3), the elders of Israel on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19), and Gideon and the angel of the Lord (Judges 6)?” Note, however, that in none of these occasions did human beings look into the face of the unveiled glory of God, and this is what Moses wanted to

see. Yet, God did accommodate Moses by allowing him a revelation of himself that was unprecedented. Moses was placed in “a cleft in the rock” and shielded by God’s hand as God’s glory passed over him. Then, God removed His hand, allowing Moses to see His “back,” or perhaps the afterglow of His glory (verses 21–23). Yet the very face of God could not be seen by Moses, or by any mortal being.

Discuss

- ? What competes for our attention, impeding our desire for intimacy with God?
- ? How does God reveal His glory to us today?



Resource Packet Item 3: Intimacy With God—A Personal Reflection

Distribute the work sheet and encourage students to take it home and prayerfully respond to the questions, using it to challenge them to grow closer to God.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: When God’s direction to us seems illogical and difficult, we can trust that He will walk with us and take care of us. He longs for an intimate relationship with us as we live in obedience to Him.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Reflect on your relationship with God, looking for ways to grow closer to Him.
- Read God’s Word each day and seek to apply it in your life .
- Pray for your family, coworkers, and friends, that they will hear from God and follow Him.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God’s Word Is Near.
Deuteronomy 30:11–16

Tuesday

Turn Not From God’s Word.
Joshua 23:1–8

Wednesday

Understand God’s Word.
Nehemiah 8:1–8

Thursday

Jesus Explained His Parables.
Matthew 13:36–43

Friday

Prophecy Fulfilled and Explained.
Acts 2:14–21

Saturday

The Lord’s Word Proclaimed.
Acts 13:42–49

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand

March 14, 2021

LESSON 2

Wars of Extermination

Introducing the Study

Say: Today, we are looking at the difficult passages of Scripture where God told the Israelites to completely destroy nations that occupied the land He had promised to His people. We must remember that God's ways are higher than ours, and He always has reasons for the instructions He gives. (*Play the video for this lesson, available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.](https://www.radiantlifecurriculum.com/Adult/)*)

Opening Activity—Rules of Engagement

Ask if any of your students have served in the military. If so, ask them to define or describe rules of engagement. If no one responds, be prepared with the following definition: Rules of engagement are the rules used by military forces to define the circumstances, degree, and manner in which the use of force can be applied.

Say: God's "rules of engagement" that He gave to the Israelites sometimes differed from what we might expect. While they seem harsh, we will look at some of His reasons for them and the consequences of not obeying them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Some of the most difficult and challenging portions of the Bible are found where God directs Israel to kill certain enemies—and not just kill them but to totally wipe them out. These portions are especially difficult for Christians, whose beliefs are informed by the New Testament ethic of loving one's enemies, as taught by Jesus. When you place the passages under consideration in today's lesson next to Jesus' teaching about loving one's enemies, it looks like an ethical contradiction. What the God of the Old Testament commanded can seem out of character with God the Father revealed in the New Testament. Today's study will shed light on this seeming contradiction.

Study Text

Numbers 31:1–20; Deuteronomy 7:1–16; 20:10–18; 25:17–19; Joshua 6:1–21; Judges 1:28; 2:1–5; Matthew 24:6–8; 28:19–20; Romans 12:18; Ephesians 6:11–13; 2 Timothy 2:1–4

Central Truth

God enables us to live victoriously over evil.



Key Verse

Ephesians 6:12

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (KJV)

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Recognize that a literal reading of Scripture may prompt questions about other teachings in the Bible.
- Approach the Bible in faith, knowing it is to be understood through the totality of Scripture.
- Trust the Spirit to lead you into the truth of God's Word and will.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Deuteronomy 7:1. When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;

2. And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

3. Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

4. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.

Joshua 6:21. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

Judges 2:1. And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

2. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

3. Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

Matthew 24:6. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

Romans 12:18. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Ephesians 6:11. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

New International Version

Deuteronomy 7:1. When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—

2. And when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.

3. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons,

4. For they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

Joshua 6:21. They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

Judges 2:1. The angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you,

2. And you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?"

3. And I have also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; they will become traps for you, and their gods will become snares to you.'"

Matthew 24:6. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

7. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

Romans 12:18. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Ephesians 6:11. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

12. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Part 1—Mandate for Such Wars

□ Mandate of Total Annihilation

Deuteronomy 7:1–6,16; 20:16–18,21



Say: As the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land, God instructed them to completely annihilate the people who lived there. While this mandate seems harsh, there is no question that God had good reasons to give this order. Let's look at some of the reasons He may have had in mind. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Deuteronomy provides historical context as we explore this challenging topic: Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, and God was instructing them about what they were to do when they got there. What He said to Moses might sound shocking to us: “You must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy” (7:2, NIV; see also 20:16–18,21; 25:17–19). What are we to make of these directives?

To gain some perspective we should ask, “Where had Israel spent the last forty years? Why? Before that, where had they spent the previous 400 years? Why?” Genesis 15:12–16 provides a good backdrop for answering these questions. In preparation for entering the Promised Land, God warned Israel about associating with the peoples in the land. God was preparing to drive out the Canaanite tribes because of their wickedness—He was judging them (Deuteronomy 9:5). In addition, God stipulated that His people were not to intermarry with these wicked people. (See Exodus 34:16.) To do so would certainly influence Israel to turn away from the Lord, disobeying His laws and bringing about His anger and wrath on His own people.

Several questions come to mind when reading these passages: “Why so harsh? What was God trying to accomplish? What was He trying to prevent or protect against?” Reading the contexts of these passages and the broader history of Israel gives us a partial answer. We read about the wickedness of these nations (Deuteronomy 9:4–5). By this time, the Canaanite people, referred to as the Amorites in Genesis 15:16, had reached an unimaginable level of moral and spiritual corruption: idolatrous worship which included child sacrifice to pagan gods, sodomy, bestiality, and other practices that could only be described as “abominations” to God (Leviticus 18:24–30; note the list of sins that precede this passage). They were so wicked that God declared it was time to remove them from the land.

Moses admonished the people to fearlessly carry out this directive from the Lord (see Deuteronomy 7:16–18,21). Why? One critical reason lies with what is at stake if they fail to obey. They will surely be seduced by the people of the land into serving other gods (7:4). This will incur God's judgment upon them. What is at stake is Israel's spiritual survival and status as God's people. But that is not all. Israel is central to God's plan to bring salvation to all nations in the world through them (see Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8).

Moses called the people to remember their deliverance from Egypt. As God's mighty arm of deliverance was clearly seen by the Israelites, so shall it be again in conquering the land and driving out the Canaanites. He twice mentions the goal of total destruction even if it is accomplished “little by little” (Deuteronomy 7:19–23).

Discuss

- ? What would have been at stake if the Israelites had assimilated into the culture of the Promised Land rather than destroying it?



Mandate of Action

Deuteronomy 25:17–19; 1 Samuel 15:1–3

Say: While God does not call us to violently wipe out people and cultures today, He does expect us to eliminate from our lives the sources of spiritual seduction. Many people want to live as close to the “edge” of sin as they can, but God calls us to live as close to Him as we can. In so doing, we can positively influence those around us rather than being negatively influenced by them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The judgment Israel would mete out on their enemies had a vital practical effect. They were eliminating the source of spiritual seduction towards idolatry: “The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 7:25, NIV). Such idolatry would demand God’s judgment on His own people, just as the Canaanites were being judged. God’s people were not even to bring these pagan artifacts into their houses. If they did so, Israel would share in the fate of those who had entered into this sin and were therefore destined for destruction.

Another consideration that helps explain God’s direction to totally destroy certain inhabitants of the land is related to what has been called God’s “retributive justice.” That is, God was punishing them for sins so blatant and severe that they call for Him to punish them severely to uphold His standards of divine justice.

For example, in Deuteronomy 25:17–19, Moses called upon Israel to remember how the Amalekites mistreated them as they came up from Egypt. They mercilessly attacked the weak and most vulnerable (those who fell behind as they traveled), and slaughtered them. In doing so they aligned themselves against God’s people and His purposes. Clearly they did not fear God. At the time, Moses and Joshua led a successful military campaign against them and declared perpetual war against Amalek (Exodus 17:16). However, “payback” awaited a more opportune time—and now that time had come. (See also 1 Samuel 15:1–3.)

Discuss

- ? What kinds of things, including philosophies and ideas, does God find detestable today, and how should we avoid bringing them into our lives?
- ? Why would God’s holiness make it important for the Israelites to destroy the cultures they encountered?



Resource Packet Item 1: Canaan Before the Conquest

Distribute the map showing the locations of the tribes before Israel came into Canaan. Suggest that students keep the map with their Bibles for reference in future Old Testament studies.

Part 2—Execution of Such Wars

☐ Qualified Destruction

Numbers 31:1–2,7, 9,15–20; Joshua 6:1–2,17,20–21



Say: People often want to make exceptions to the laws of God. However, only God can make exceptions to His commands. Often those exceptions are made because of His mercy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

These Scriptures teach us two important things about God’s directive to completely destroy particular peoples in the land: First, Israel would not immediately fulfill His command. The wars against these people would go on for a time. Second, the initial command was tempered with qualifications or exceptions which we learn about in later revelations.

Moses was commanded to execute “full vengeance” upon the Midianites. When we check out the background, we discover in Numbers 25 that they seduced the Israelites into idolatry that involved sexual immorality. One Israelite (Zimri) brazenly brought a Midianite woman into the camp for immoral purposes in full view and defiance of Jewish leaders (see Numbers 25:6). When Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, witnessed this atrocity, he took a spear and killed them both with one blow. Apparently, God had already begun to send judgment upon His people for their idolatry with a plague that took 24,000 lives (see verse 9). But Phinehas’ zeal for the Lord and desire to protect Israel from annihilation halted the plague and earned him God’s commendation. The Aaronic high priesthood from that time on would be chosen from his line of descent.

Despite this event, “full vengeance” included a caveat. They were to spare the women who had not had sexual relations with men (Numbers 31:15–17) and take them as slaves. A similar situation occurred later in the time of Joshua. God’s command to totally destroy the inhabitants of Jericho was mitigated by His directive to spare Rahab and her entire family (Joshua 6:21–23). Rahab had believed the report of the two spies and asked to be spared (see Joshua 2). She also hid them from the men of her city who were seeking to capture them. Her faith and action were rewarded with the promise of deliverance (Joshua 6:17–25).

Discuss

- ? While God’s judgment was severe, it was not without mercy. What was behind God’s mercy for Rahab and her family?
- ? What could the mention of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5) tell us about God’s sovereignty and mercy?

☐ Partial Obedience

Judges 1:28; 2:1–5



Say: Partial disobedience is displeasing to God, just as total disobedience is—and perhaps even more so. No one can please God without total obedience. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God commanded the Israelites to totally destroy the Canaanite tribes, but they did not obey (Judges 1:28). They tried with various levels of success to drive out the Canaanites but wound up either cohabiting with them in the land or subjecting them to forced labor (1:27–35).

What followed was that Israel reaped the consequences of her disobedience (see Joshua 23:13). And so, the angel of the Lord came to remind them of what they were supposed to do and

how. Because of Israel's disobedience, the Canaanites would become a perpetual and painful thorn in their sides (Judges 2:1–5). The Lord would not drive these nations out. Instead, Israel would suffer the most devastating consequence—the paganism of the land would be a snare pulling them into idolatry.

Like the story of Saul and the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15, this lesson teaches us that partial obedience is really disobedience—and it creates real dangers in our spiritual lives. It is interesting how Saul tried to justify his disobedience by first denying it (15:20), and then shifting the blame on the people who may have had the best intentions (15:21). Such actions might prompt us to ask: “Does this sound familiar to any of us in our own lives?”

Discuss

? How are believers tempted to partially obey God's commands today, and what are the results?



Resource Packet Item 2: No Substitute for Obedience

Distribute the case study and divide your class into small groups to read it and discuss the accompanying questions. Have the groups share their comments with the class.



Part 3—A Christian Perspective

□ Promises Amid Trials

Matthew 24:6–8; 28:18–20

Say: The wars between the Israelites and the earlier inhabitants of the Promised Land were meant to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that His descendants would possess the land. The wars in today's world are also related to the promises of God. In Matthew 24, Jesus promised that wars and trials would come before the final fulfillment of His promise to come again for His people, the Church. Our response to these events—remaining faithful or abandoning our faith—will determine our final destination. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus prepared His disciples to live and minister in a fallen world where the good news of the gospel would find hostile listeners—because the values and truths of the kingdom of God are always at odds with those of the world (see James 4:4).

In Jesus' end-time discourse He described a world embroiled in global conflict, but His disciples were not to fear. Fear is often dispelled when we know what is coming, and Jesus lets His people know in advance that when they hear of wars and rumors of wars, it is only the beginning (Matthew 24:6–8). The tribulation that was coming would cost many their lives. Some would suffer a martyr's death on account of His name (see verse 9). The trial would be so severe that many would abandon their faith and turn against one another—aided by the deception of false prophets. But He also issued a reassuring promise: Those who remained faithful would be saved (verses 9–13).

This reassurance is expanded in Matthew 28:18–20. Before issuing the Great Commission to His disciples, Jesus told them that they would go in the name of the One who has supreme authority over heaven and earth. Moreover, as believers make disciples of all nations, He is present all the way to the “end of the age.” This promise points to an end-time assurance.

Discuss

- ? In what ways do current events give us hope that the coming of Christ is near?
- ? In light of the soon coming of Jesus, what should we be doing in our families, communities, and the world?

□ Conduct Amid Trials Romans 12:17–19; Ephesians 6:11–13; 2 Timothy 2:1–4



Say: While wars between nations are a reality and will increase as we near the second coming of Christ, believers are waging spiritual wars every day. These wars are for our very own souls and the souls of others. Paul gives very practical advice on these spiritual battles and what it will take to be victorious. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul instructed God’s people how to conduct themselves in the midst of trials and opposition. They are not to retaliate against their enemies, but trust God to be their avenger. Their responsibility is instead to humbly respond in kindness (Romans 12:17–19). Although Paul was focusing primarily on how believers treat each other (see Romans 12:5,10), it is clear that he intended them to understand that his instruction applies to conduct toward anyone and everyone (12:17–18). Such a philosophy of life, however impractical and unrealistic as it may sound, is in fact an imitation of the Savior. We are called to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6).

Believers must also recognize that the trials they face are not of earthly origin. Their struggles are not from humans, but are the work of the devil, who marshals his demonic forces to oppose the work of God (Ephesians 6:11–12). Paul calls them “the powers of this dark world” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (verse 12, NIV). Since our battle is a spiritual one, our weapons must be suited for spiritual warfare. Paul listed what makes up the “full armor of God” which when taken up and used with ceaseless and vigilant prayer will ensure spiritual victory (see 6:13–18).

Clearly the Christian is not promised a trouble-free life or one free of temptations. We are, however promised that God will give us what we need to withstand the trials and tribulations that will inevitably come. (See 1 Corinthians 10:13.)

Discuss

- ? What should Christian parents and grandparents be doing to prepare their families for the spiritual warfare they will face?
- ? What specific trials and tribulations are facing believers today, both locally and around the world?



Resource Packet Item 3: Dressed for Battle

Distribute the diagram and read the descriptions. As you do, ask your students to privately grade themselves regarding how they are doing in using each piece of the armor.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: War is a reality of life. God had the best interest of His people and His plan in mind as He commanded the Israelites to destroy those who would lure them away from wholehearted service to Him. The wars of today are also part of God's plan as He prepares the earth for the second coming of His Son Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are engaged in a different kind of war. It is a spiritual battle that will have everlasting consequences. Like the wars of the Israelites, the enemies we fight would lure us away from Him. But God provides the weapons we need to be victorious.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray for government leaders and others who make decisions regarding national conflicts.
- Send an encouraging card or care package to someone in active military service.
- Evaluate your own readiness for spiritual warfare.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

The Lord as Warrior.
Exodus 15:1–10

Tuesday

The War Was of God.
1 Chronicles 5:18–22

Wednesday

God Makes Wars Cease.
Psalm 46:1–11

Thursday

War Between Good and Evil.
Romans 7:18–25

Friday

The Christian's Warfare.
2 Corinthians 10:1–6

Saturday

Christ, the Mighty Warrior.
Revelation 19:11–16

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand

March 21, 2021

LESSON 3

Imprecatory Psalms: Seeking Justice

Study Text

Exodus 23:4–5; Leviticus 19:14–18; Deuteronomy 32:35–43; Psalms 69:16–28; 109:1–20; 137:1–9; Proverbs 24:17–18; 25:21–22; Romans 12:19–21; Hebrews 10:30

Central Truth

God commands that we do right, and that we trust Him to do right.



Key Verse Jeremiah 11:20

O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause (KJV).

You, LORD Almighty, who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Acknowledge that, while feelings of vengeance may exist, it is God who will exact punishment.
- Embrace an attitude of love toward other believers and unbelievers in spite of hurts.
- Take steps to reconcile broken relationships.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Psalms referred to as imprecatory psalms are those where the writers are praying against their enemies. They not only wish ill upon the enemies, but pray that God would visit them with painful calamity and judgment. Comparing these passages with Jesus' teaching about loving one's enemies seems like an ethical contradiction. (*Play the video for this lesson, available at [RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult](https://www.RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult).*)

Opening Activity—Historical Atrocities

Ask your students to name atrocities from history that would have prompted people to wish for revenge. Examples might include the Holocaust, the atrocities of slavery in the United States and other places, mass shootings, and other similar events.

Say: In today's study we will look more deeply into some of the imprecatory psalms, as well as some New Testament passages, to find a good understanding of difficult psalms. We will also look at the practical application of these concepts. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We must not build our understanding of God, and His expectations of us, on isolated passages that do not take into account what God teaches elsewhere in Scripture. Nevertheless, how can someone inspired by the Holy Spirit pray such prayers? Are these prayers wrong? How do they instruct us as Christians? We can answer these questions as we bring to mind a key promise: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17, NIV).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Psalms 137:1. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

8. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

9. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Deuteronomy 32:35. To me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

43. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

Psalms 69:24. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.

25. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.

26. For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.

109:16. Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart.

17. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him.

Exodus 23:4. If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.

5. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.

Leviticus 19:17. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.

18. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.

Proverbs 24:17. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:

18. Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.

New International Version

Psalms 137:1. By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

8. Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us.

9. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Deuteronomy 32:35. "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

43. "Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people."

Psalms 69:24. Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.

25. May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents.

26. For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt.

109:16. For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted.

17. He loved to pronounce a curse—may it come back on him. He found no pleasure in blessing—may it be far from him.

Exodus 23:4. "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it.

5. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it."

Leviticus 19:17. "Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

18. "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

Proverbs 24:17. Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice,

18. Or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from them.

Part 1—A Captivity Psalm

□ The Crushing Grief of a Displaced People

Psalm 137:1–6



Say: This psalm was written during the time of the captivity of Judah in Babylon, a direct result of the Jews' sins of disobedience and idolatry. Yet the people remembered the songs of joy they had sung in Jerusalem. Their captors wanted them to sing the songs of their homeland—either out of genuine interest or to increase their sadness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When we look into the historical background of Psalm 137 we discover that it was written by a member of the Babylonian captivity, which occurred in 587 BC. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this writer spoke on behalf of Judah's crushed and captive people—a nation that had been brutally torn from their homeland and Jerusalem (Zion), their holy city. The Psalmist vowed never to forget his beloved land and Jerusalem (verses 1–6). Note how, in eloquent terms, the Psalmist described the horrible injustices inflicted upon them by the Babylonians.

The Babylonian army was well-known for its brutality. Historical reliefs (carved sculptures) from this period provide a gruesome account of what the Psalmist described. God allowed the Psalmist to speak with candor about the barbarity he witnessed. And more than that, God allowed him to express his own desires for divine vengeance. The Psalmist did so with the raw emotions of outrage and thirst for God's retribution. In a sense, then, these words provide us with a very human expression of the grief and pain suffered by a people who had been brutalized and exposed to grave injustices.

Discuss

? When you are going through a time of trouble, even of your own making, how can it help you to recount previous joys and blessings? Give examples.

□ Call for Retributive Justice

Psalm 137:7–9



Say: Turning a bad situation over to God is a necessary step in deliverance.

While this psalm calls for revenge, the Psalmist leaves that revenge in the hands of God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Psalmist recalled the Edomites, who had taken advantage of Babylon's attack and undoubtedly joined in the plunder (Psalm 137:7–9). This was not the first time they had attacked Israel and Judah in particular. In fact, Israel and Edom had a long history of trouble between them (see Numbers 20:14–21). When the Psalmist called on God to remember them (Psalm 137:7), he was calling for divine retribution on the cowardly betrayal by Esau's descendants.

Verses 8–9 are difficult to understand without acknowledging that the Psalmist was crying out, not for personal vengeance but for divine retribution against an enemy of God and His people. In doing so he is providing us with a gruesome

picture of what Judah had experienced at the hands of the Babylonian army. Such actions were part of the brutal injustice that Israel had endured. And so, the Psalmist declares “happy is” (verse 9, NIV) the one who recompenses Babylon for her cruelty dealt to God’s people. What Babylon did to the people of Judah was demon-inspired butchery. The Babylonians had ripped infants from the arms of their mothers and smashed their skulls against the nearest rocks.

What the Psalmist called for in verse 9, then, is not “pay back” in the human “tit-for-tat” sense of vengeance, but he was applauding divine retribution and the agents who would administer it. God would never endorse such destruction of innocent human life (2 Kings 16:3). He created human life in His image (Genesis 1:26) and denounced the evil of child sacrifice (see Jeremiah 19:5) as an abomination that never even entered His mind of God. This form of idolatry was abhorrent to God.

Discuss

- ? How easy or difficult is it for human beings to leave retribution in the hands of God?
- ? How important is it for us to be honest with God about our feelings? Does such honesty then make it easier to leave the results in His hands?



Resource Packet Item 1: Songs of Zion

Distribute the work sheet and give 2-3 minutes for people to list songs that are meaningful to them. Then take a few minutes to look for commonalities.



Part 2—Prayers for God’s Vengeance

God Is Sovereign Deuteronomy 32:35–43; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30

Say: God’s statement, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (verse 35, NIV), carries both judgment and hope. God will punish those who disobey, just as He punished Israel. Yet, He will avenge His people by judging those who mistreat them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Deuteronomy 32, Moses called out a rebuke of Israel for forsaking the Lord. They had turned against Him in spite of the fact that He had brought many blessings upon His covenant people. Moses also reminded them that God was their righteous and just Father. He is incapable of doing any wrong (verses 1–6). Yet they had foolishly repaid Him with betrayal despite His many blessings. Israel forsook the God who made them and scorned the Rock of their salvation (verse 15). They had forgotten, or ignored the fact, that God is sovereign over all. Tragically, their pursuit of other gods led them into the vilest forms of idolatry.

Moses then described the burning anger and wrath of God that awaited Israel. He would turn them over to their enemies for judgment, but would stop short of destroying them. God’s use of the nations to punish Israel’s sins was restrained by His sovereign will and purpose for them. He issued a warning to Israel and her enemies alike: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (verse 35, NIV; see also Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30). God’s people needed to know that the coming calamity

was from the Lord. It would be His chastening judgment to teach them the folly and futility of chasing after other gods: “See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand” (verse 39, NIV). The enemies of God’s people needed to know that they were not exempt from accountability: “The Lord will vindicate his people and relent concerning his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free” (verse 36, NIV).

In Deuteronomy 32:43, Moses called for Israel and the nations to rejoice and praise the Lord. Why? The answer was clear: “For he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on His enemies and make atonement for his land and people” (NIV). Israel—God’s servants and covenant people—would one day be overrun by their enemies, but God would avenge them. God’s vengeance is an extension of His righteousness and justice. He will not allow atrocities against His servants to go unpunished.

Discuss

? Both Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30 quote from Deuteronomy 32:35. Read those two verses and the context around them. Do they offer judgment or hope? Explain.

□ God Orchestrates Final Judgment

Psalms 69:16–28; 109:1–20



Say: Even in distress, it is important to remember the nature of God and His love for His people. David, the author of this psalm, was a direct ancestor of the Messiah whose treatment on the cross was foreshadowed here. Like many passages of the Old Testament, this psalm had significance for the current state of the Jewish people, but it also looked ahead to the time of the Messiah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Psalm 69, the Psalmist—on behalf of the nation of Israel—cried out to the Lord for deliverance from their enemies (verses 16–18). We note that he appealed to the covenant-keeping God, who is known for His goodness, lovingkindness, and mercy. The Psalmist speaks as one who is in great distress and pain, who finds no compassion from the enemies who surround him. Interestingly, the Psalmist adopting the role of God’s righteous suffering servant breaks out in a prophecy that depicts the Suffering Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose sufferings on the cross included the specific details we find in verse 21 (see also Matthew 27:34,48).

The enemies of God would be the ones who persecuted the Lord’s anointed servant, the Messiah. Thus the Psalmist called for the full wrath to fall on them. Why were they so deserving of wrath? Because they had taken upon themselves the task of adding to what was already horrible pain and persecution (verses 22–28).

Out of fury and painful indignation (verse 28), the Psalmist uttered an imprecatory petition: “May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous” (NIV). Remember that the Psalms often represent ruthlessly honest expressions of our human condition, and sometimes they are a mirror to reflect

the depths of our fallenness, even as we ever learn to trust God’s justice among the most difficult of times.

In Psalm 109, David is seeking God’s retribution on someone who has been his friend, but has lied about him, attacked him, and falsely accused him. As the psalm proceeds, we see a parallel with Judas, who similarly betrayed Christ. (See Acts 1:15–20.) The Messiah was persecuted not only by His enemies, but by a friend, one of the Twelve. The pain of betrayal by a friend is deep, and it is easy to see why David would want God to avenge his hurt.

Discuss

? Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? How would you describe the feelings that resulted?



Resource Packet Item 2: Revenge or Consequences?

Distribute the case study and divide the class into small groups to answer the questions, then have several groups share their answers, and discuss them.



Part 3—Old Testament Morality

□ Mercy Toward Neighbors and Enemies Exodus 23:4–5; Proverbs 25:21–22

Say: Now our study moves from Scriptures where people are crying out for God to avenge those who have mistreated them to passages where God told His people how to treat their enemies. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Earlier in this unit we learned to “postpone” interpreting a passage of Scripture until we have examined its larger context within Scripture. That is, we are to wait on our conclusions until we see what the rest of Scripture teaches on the subject. Exodus 23:4–5 represents a fine example of this principle of biblical interpretation. While some might be tempted to look only in the New Testament, we need to see what the Old Testament has to say about how we should treat our enemies, or even our neighbors, when they hate and abuse us. Not only should we not render evil for evil—a principle repeated in Romans 12:17–21 by the apostle Paul—but we should show kindness to them even when that kindness is very much undeserved.

The example given in Exodus 23 involves kindness and care toward an enemy’s animals. Rescue and return his wandering ox or donkey. Help his donkey if you see that it has fallen down under a crushing load. These commands involve far more than attitudes of the heart. They call the person of God to act in compassion to help an enemy. In Bible times, this was especially critical in that an ox or donkey could represent the very well-being of that enemy. And so, the help of a godly person would, in this case, be of significant value.

Why would a person of God take such action? We find that Proverbs moves forward to make this an issue of the heart. We are not to delight at our enemy’s misfortune. Such vindictive delight is displeasing to the Lord (see Proverbs 24:17–18).

Instead of delighting in their pain, we are to show compassion toward our enemies, meeting their hunger and thirst (Proverbs 25:21). Why? The next verse gives a two fold answer. First, it represents trust in God to mete out judgment in His timing. Second, this non-retaliation pleases the Lord and will be rewarded (verse 22).

Discuss

- ? What are some present-day equivalents to assisting with an enemy's lost or injured animal?
- ? What responsibilities do Christians have in responding to the physical needs of those who are unbelievers and may even be outright enemies of our faith?

☐ Love Toward One's Neighbor and Enemy

Leviticus 19:14–18



Say: When we think of the command to love our neighbor, our minds usually go to the command of Jesus to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31). There is a tendency to overlook the fact that He was citing the Law. In fact, the Law had much to say about loving one's neighbor as well as one's enemy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Old Testament command to love one's neighbor is rooted in God's treatment of His people and His will as it is revealed in the Law. The way Israel interacted with each other was to be a reflection of their covenant-keeping God, who is kind, just, fair and impartial, truthful and loving. To live out these godly virtues was actually a way to worship or fear (revere) God (Leviticus 19:14). The highest value God wants His people to express is love (verse 18). In Jesus' reminder that the command to love God and our neighbor was the greatest commandment, He also noted that upon this command rests both the Law and the prophets (see Matthew 22:37–40).

Jesus clarified the Old Testament command to love. Not only were God's people to love one another, but this command was to extend to their enemies. “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44, NIV; c.f. Luke 6:27–35). To love in this way serves to imitate the unconditional and impartial love and goodness of God, our Father. As we read in Matthew 5:45, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (NIV). Since God is willing to bless even the unjust with sunshine and rain, we ought to be willing to love our neighbors with a sincere and active love.

Discuss

- ? How does the way we treat others reflect our relationship with God?
- ? What tangible ways can you think of to demonstrate love to other believers?
To unbelievers?



Resource Packet Item 3: Love and the Law

Distribute the work sheet, and have a different student read each of the five Scriptures. As a class, discuss the questions.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: We sometimes need to air our grievances, much as the writers of the imprecatory psalms did. God wants us to be honest with Him. It is also valuable to remember that Psalms are a means of praying God's Word, and so when we pray them, we do so both recognizing that they are His Word and that we are to pray, "Thy will be done." It is not our job to carry out the judgments that belong to God alone. He is at work, both in our lives and in the lives of those who have wronged us. As believers, we must respond in love, even when it's difficult. Christ died for us—His enemies—in order to give us eternal life. We must let His love flow through us, both to other believers and to unbelievers, even in the face of unfair treatment.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Do something tangible to show love to others this week. Consider collecting food for a food pantry or some other need in your community.
- Pray for someone who has wronged you in some way.
- If you have a broken or strained relationship with someone, take a step this week to restore that relationship.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Confidence in God's Vengeance.
Psalm 94:1–7

Tuesday

Vengeance and Comfort.
Isaiah 61:1–8

Wednesday

God's Vengeance on Babylon.
Jeremiah 50:9–16

Thursday

Days of Vengeance Foretold.
Luke 21:20–24

Friday

Repent Before Christ Returns.
Acts 3:19–26

Saturday

Christ's Vengeance at His Coming.
2 Thessalonians 1:3–10

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand

March 28, 2021

LESSON 4

Puzzling Sayings of Jesus

Introducing the Study

Say: The Scriptures do not record everything Jesus did and said. According to John 21:25, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” It is easy to forget that Jesus walked this earth for approximately thirty-three years, yet even when the time came for His death, resurrection, and ascension, His followers had questions. God’s ways truly are different from our ways.

Opening Activity—One Question

Ask: If you had one question you could ask Jesus regarding His teachings, what would it be? Discuss, noting reasons why it might be challenging not to know the answer.

Say: Jesus was a masterful teacher. He displayed great skill at grabbing the attention of His disciples and getting them to think deeply about what He was saying. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus often taught by using hyperbole—a rhetorical method that uses obvious exaggeration for effect. For example, Jesus said, “If your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away” (Matthew 18:9, NIV). He did not intend His hearers to take His words literally by practicing self-mutilation. Reading the verse in context, you will discover that He was teaching the importance of not allowing things in our lives that would keep us from entering the kingdom of God. As you read the passages in this lesson, take a step backwards and ask, “What is Jesus trying to say about how a true disciple should live as His people? What is He saying about the kingdom of God, His will, or even about himself?”

Study Text

Matthew 5:38–39; 24:29–35; Mark 13:24–31; Luke 16:1–9; 21:31–33; John 18:19–23; Acts 23:1–5; Romans 13:1–4; 1 Peter 2:13–14

Central Truth

Christ desires us to discern, understand, and apply His teachings.



Key Verse Luke 8:10

He [Jesus] said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God (KJV).

[Jesus] said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you” (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- List at least three ways God’s people should be different from the world.
- Develop or enhance a proper attitude toward honesty and dishonesty.
- Demonstrate a godly response to the evils of this world.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Luke 16:1. And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

8. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Matthew 5:39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

John 18:22. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?

23. Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?

Acts 23:2. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

3. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

4. And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

5. Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Romans 13:3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Matthew 24:30. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

31. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

34. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

New International Version

Luke 16:1. Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions."

8. "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."

Matthew 5:39. "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

John 18:22. When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.

23. "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"

Acts 23:2. At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.

3. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

4. Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"

5. Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

Romans 13:3. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended.

4. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Matthew 24:30. "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

31. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

34. "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

Part 1—The Shrewd Steward

□ He Examined His Options and Took Action

Luke 16:1–7



Say: Jesus knows human nature, including the secret motivations that cause us to act in the way we do. In this story, the steward did something that seems devious and self-serving. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the parable found in Luke 16:1–9, we encounter an economic situation that was common in Bible times. A steward (or household manager) of a rich man is given notice that he is about to lose his job because he mismanaged his master's resources. He is confronted, told to give an account for his management dealings, and learns that he is losing his stewardship job. Surprisingly, however, he does not face severe punishment or imprisonment. Immediately, the steward makes a sober assessment of his situation and options, and he reaches an obvious conclusion: He is too weak to do physical labor, and his pride prohibits begging, which would be humiliating to him.

The steward puts together a plan to ensure that others will treat him favorably once he loses his current position. However, his plan seems a bit devious and dishonest. Going to his master's debtors, he settles their debts for a fraction of what is owed. Apparently, the steward was acting as a financial agent for his master's estate and his duties allowed him to make such deals. However, the settlements are clearly not in the best interests of his master. Instead he caused the debtors to become indebted to him, thereby increasing the chances of finding employment as their steward.

Discuss

- ? How wise or unwise do you think the steward was in reducing the indebtedness of those who owed his employer? Explain.
- ? How would the average business owner today react to an employee who did something similar?

□ He Received a Commendation

Luke 16:8–9



Say: Surprisingly, the master commended his steward for his wise thinking, not because he had received back only part of what was owed him, but because the steward was planning ahead to a future when he would not have employment. God is looking for people to look ahead to eternity rather than relying on the security of their wealth or other temporary assets. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

What we are told in Luke 16:8–9 might shock us. The master praised the shrewd steward, even though he acted in a way that seems devious! Why? It is important to note that the master was not praising the steward for seeming deviousness, but because he “acted shrewdly” (verse 8, NIV). It can be difficult for us to separate the two, but we must keep in focus the purpose and meaning of the parable as it is

explained. The commendation is not for doing something that is inherently wrong and unrighteous, but for being shrewd: The steward responded to a crisis by using the resources at his disposal to prepare for his inevitable future.

Jesus explained this seemingly strange commendation by exhorting us to make use of “mammon of unrighteousness” for eternal purposes (KJV; “worldly wealth,” NIV). Wealth and resources are to be used, not hoarded.

Also in the parable, Jesus instructed His followers “to gain friends for yourselves” so that when worldly wealth fails you have secured “eternal dwellings” (verse 9, NIV). Keep in mind that Jesus went on to teach about stewardship of the “true riches” of God’s eternal kingdom. Wealth in this world, then, ought to be used for the purposes of God’s kingdom. In this parable, the focus seems to be on helping brothers and sisters who are in need. In the bigger picture, however, our resources can be used in service to God in a variety of ways.

The fundamental point is that our economic pursuits in this life must always be tempered by our awareness that worldly wealth has a “shelf life” only as long as this age endures. It is not permanent but temporal. Wise use is always to invest it in projects that are everlasting in value and not subject to loss. (See Matthew 6:19–20.)

Discuss

- ? How can believers invest in things of eternal value (with or without wealth)?
- ? What should a Christian’s attitude be toward money?



Resource Packet Item 1: Planning Ahead

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups, assigning one topic to each group. After a few minutes, ask each group to report their answers and discuss.



Part 2—Turning the Other Cheek

Not Passive About Injustice Matthew 5:39; John 18:19–23; Acts 23:1–5

Say: Knowing when to speak and when to remain silent is a type of wisdom, yet most people struggle with it. In these passages, we examine a teaching of Jesus and an example of Jesus to help us distinguish the time to speak and the time not to speak. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus presented the “new” ethic of the kingdom of God. It is deeply connected to the ethics and moral behavior described in the Law, but often goes beyond it. It is an ethic based on love and the internal motivations of the heart. This ethic, if met, will surpass the demands of the Law.

In the ancient world, cruelty was common when it came to retaliation. The Old Testament Law in itself took a big step toward limiting that cruelty. Most people are familiar with the expression “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (see Exodus 21:24; cf., Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). This principle served to insert a restriction ensuring that a punishment would fit the crime. Thus, it was a matter

of ensuring justice. Jesus' "kingdom ethics" exceeds the Old Testament standard by teaching the ethic of non-retaliation when one is personally wronged.

The description Jesus gave of someone being struck on the right cheek, in Matthew 5:39, suggests a response (or non-response) to personal insult or injury. A slap to the right cheek would most often be done by the use of the back of the right hand, a gesture of grave insult and contempt. Here and in two further examples, Jesus taught that His "kingdom people" should adopt the ethic not only of non-retaliation, but also one that goes beyond what is prescribed by the Law.

We see this on display in the account of Christ's crucifixion. Our Savior was mostly silent when interrogated by His enemies. This fulfills what Isaiah wrote: "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7 NIV; see Acts 8:32). However, there are some exceptions which should be noted.

When the high priest asked Jesus to repeat what He had routinely and openly taught for years, Jesus refused (John 18:19–23). In essence His answer was, "Ask them. They're the ones who heard." The temple officer struck Him on the face for what they perceived as a disrespectful answer. Jesus, who would receive many blows in silence during His path to the cross, did not keep silent. He challenged the hypocrisy of using the Law to punish Him as a Law breaker without providing evidence of His wrongdoing.

Paul would later find himself in a similar situation. After testifying to his innocence, the high priest ordered him to be struck on the mouth. Like his Lord, Paul did not remain silent. "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" (Act 23:3, NIV). Yet Paul later retracted when he was told that he was speaking to the high priest (verses 4–5). Thus Paul demonstrated that we must exercise biblical discretion when speaking in our own defense.

Discuss

- ? Why did Jesus eventually speak after refusing to answer Pilate's earlier question?
- ? What is the difference between speaking in your own defense and physically or verbally retaliating for a wrong done to you?

□ Submitted to God-Ordained Authority Romans 13:1–4; 1 Peter 2:13–14



Say: When God places someone in authority over us—whether in the church, our jobs, or in government—He expects us to respect that authority. If we cannot, we may need to remove ourselves from the situation. God is greater than any other authority, and pleasing Him is our first priority. Even then, we can be respectful of others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Neither Romans 13 nor 1 Peter 2 represent the words of Jesus, but they do help explain what Jesus meant in commanding us not to retaliate when wronged. God has placed in human society governing authorities to protect the innocent, punish evildoers, and promote peace and prosperity. Contrary to what the people who

lead institutions may think, the authority they possess is not their own. Instead, it is delegated to them by God, and governments must ultimately give an account to Him for how they conduct themselves and treat people.

In Romans 13:1–4, Paul was speaking to Christians about their duty and obligations to the secular state. To oppose governmental authority is to oppose God, who gave it the authority to act as an agent, or servant, for good. The apostle Peter provides further light on this in defining a central role of government: “Punish wrongdoers and commend those who do right” (1 Peter 2:13–14). Truly, Scripture informs our daily living in very practical ways, reminding us of the value of living at peace with others and with those in authority (see 1 Thessalonians 4:10–11).

Discuss

- ? Read Romans 13:1–4. How can Christians be more confident that they have nothing to fear from those in authority?
- ? How can and should believers demonstrate proper submission to government authorities?



Resource Packet Item 2: An Ethical Dilemma

Distribute the case study and ask someone to read it aloud. Invite students to respond in light of Jesus’ ethical standards.



Part 3—This Generation Shall Not Pass

□ Christ’s Coming Will Bring Deliverance

Matthew 24:29–35

Say: Many people spend a great deal of time and energy attempting to map out a timeline regarding the return of Christ. This passage can be difficult to understand as we look at the end times. However, Jesus cites cataclysmic events that will serve as signs of His imminent return. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus taught that this “age” would come to an end (Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). The event that would mark its end and the beginning of “the age to come” is the return of Christ (Matthew 24:27–31; see verses 3,6,13–14). Christ will come amid the chaos and turmoil that will engulf the earth as signs point to His return (verses 29–33). Here, the parable of the fig tree is given to teach us that when these end-time signs are seen, they mark the soon return of Christ for both deliverance and judgment (see verses 37–42).

But just when we feel confident we might understand this end-time prophecy, Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (verse 34, NIV). Jesus was speaking to His disciples. But, whom was He referring to by the words “this generation”? Scholars have reached different conclusions on Jesus’ words, as to the timing of what He meant, especially that these events did not find complete fulfillment during the first century.

When we read the parallel passages in Mark 13:5–30 and Luke 21:20–34, it becomes clear that Jesus was describing apocalyptic, end-time events or signs in

the future. But, again, what is meant by “this generation”? These two words are used in the Bible as a way of bracketing those who are defined by the immediate context. In other words, in this case the words refer to the generation who are living, witnessing, and experiencing the signs that point to the nearness of Christ’s coming: “When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Luke 21:31–33). Some argue that the generation alive at the time of Jesus has to be the focus, since He mentioned Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70, as well as the domination of the Gentiles (Rome), in Luke 21:24. But biblical prophecy often predicts events that begin in the time in which it is given and then embraces events that reach far out into the future for its complete fulfillment. This seems to be the case here. Jesus’ generation would see Jerusalem destroyed by the Gentiles, but the universal and cosmic signs described in Luke 21:25–27 await the distant future and the end of the age.

Discuss

- ? What signs did Jesus say would precede His coming?
- ? What should Christians be doing in preparation for the coming of Christ?

□ Deliverance Is Coming

Mark 13:24–31; Luke 21:31–33



Say: The second coming of Christ is good news for us who love and look for His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). This is because the Righteous Judge will not only deliver us, but award us with a “crown of righteousness.” This is parallel to the Old Testament “Day of the Lord,” which brought deliverance for God’s people and judgments for Israel’s enemies (see Joel 2:31–32; Ezekiel 30:3). Those who witness that glorious deliverance are a part of “this generation,” as mentioned in Matthew 24:30. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Knowing that this world has an appointed end, which God has ordained, helps us endure hardships and trials. This was certainly true for the Early Church. I once visited the Colosseum in Rome. It was a bright, sunny day and thousands of tourists lined up to visit that massive and majestic piece of ancient architecture. As I surveyed the lower rooms underneath the main floor, I realized I was looking at numerous cells where wild animals were kept before being released into the arena. There were other cells where Christians were kept on the way to die in that same arena, torn to pieces by wild beasts. Closing my eyes I could imagine the horror of that scene played out before crowds of people screaming for blood. How can people maintain hope in the face of such a brutal death? Numerous historical accounts testify they did just that. They faced their end because their hope did not rest in this life but in the age to come, when the Lord Jesus Christ, the Righteous Judge, would meet them with their eternal reward. Ask yourself some sobering questions: “Does the second coming of Christ impact the way I live? How? If not, why not?” Could it be that our hope is tied to a world that is passing away (see 1 Corinthians 7:31)?

Discuss

- ? How is the second coming of Christ both a sobering thought and a cause for great rejoicing?
- ? Do you think your age impacts how you think about the Second Coming? Why or why not?



Resource Packet Item 3: Is It Your Generation?

Distribute the work sheet, and use it to spark class discussion regarding the signs of the end-times and the believer's responsibility to prepare and help others prepare.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The teachings of Jesus, even the difficult ones, provide us with valuable lessons in how to live in light of eternity. Whether we are talking about financial priorities or relationships with each other and with authorities, every action and attitude should be measured by its impact on our lives and the lives of others when we stand before God. Whether we are in the immediate generation of Jesus' second coming or we meet Him by way of death, the final outcome is the same. We will stand before Him and be judged by how seriously we have taken His Word.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate your finances and your attitude toward them. Are you investing in eternity?
- Pray that God will help you know when to speak and when to be silent, giving you wisdom when you speak.
- Take at least one action this week to help yourself or someone else prepare for Christ's coming.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

The Parable of Balaam.
Numbers 24:1–10

Tuesday

The Parable of Job.
Job 27:1–6

Wednesday

The Parable of Asaph.
Psalm 78:1–8

Thursday

Mystery of the Kingdom.
Mark 4:1–13

Friday

Speaking the Wisdom of God.
1 Corinthians 2:6–14

Saturday

Understand the Mystery of Christ.
Ephesians 3:1–12

April 4, 2021

LESSON

5

The Risen Christ (Easter)

Study Text

Matthew 27:57 through 28:20

Central Truth

Jesus Christ rose from the dead and lives forever.



Key Verse Matthew 28:6

He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay (KJV).

“He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay” (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Examine proofs of the burial and resurrection of Jesus.
- Acknowledge Jesus as the risen Savior and exalted Lord.
- Accept responsibility to help fulfill the Great Commission.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today, we are discussing the resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of the Christian faith. It separates Christianity from any other religion. Our Savior lives, acts in our lives, and gives us hope for eternal life.

Opening Activity—Easter Observances

Ask: In what way does your family or your local church celebrate Easter that is especially meaningful to you? How do these observances differ from the way you may have celebrated it in your childhood?

Say: In today’s study we will explore Matthew’s account of the burial and resurrection of Jesus. We will discover in this account several proofs of the reality that the One who died to atone for our sins is risen as the exalted Lord with authority over all things. As His followers, we live for Him and proclaim the gospel so others may also become His disciples. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In teaching about the Resurrection to believers in Corinth, Paul pointed to the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Without the Resurrection, the Scriptures would be false rather than the truth. Without it, those who proclaimed the gospel of Jesus that included His resurrection would be false witnesses, and those who believed their message would still be lost in their sins. In addition, believers would be living with a false hope and enduring persecution for an empty promise. Little wonder the apostle pronounced, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:19, NIV).

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Matthew 27:57. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:

58. He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

59. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60. And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

Matthew 28:1. In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

6. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

9. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

Matthew 28:18. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

New International Version

Matthew 27:57. As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.

58. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.

59. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60. and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Matthew 28:1. After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

3. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

4. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.

6. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

7. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8. So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

9. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him.

10. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:18. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20. And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Part 1—Christ’s Burial

□ Jesus Placed in a Tomb

Matthew 27:57–61



Say: One of the last things we do for loved ones is to place their bodies in a final resting place. The friends of Jesus wanted to do this for Him, but the observance of the Sabbath impacted the way they could do so. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Darkness had covered the land. The earth had quaked. Jesus had died. Joseph, a wealthy man from an obscure city called Arimathaea, did what he could at this tragic moment (Matthew 27:57–60). This disciple of Jesus went to Pilate to receive permission to take Jesus’ body to make sure He received a proper burial. After confirming that Jesus was dead, Pilate allowed Joseph to take the body of Jesus (Mark 15:44–45; Matthew 27:58).

Joseph took the body of Jesus and prepared it for burial (Matthew 27:59). The burial custom of the time was to wrap the body in linen with a mixture of myrrh and aloes. The preparation was done quickly, since it needed to be finished before nightfall, when the Sabbath would begin. Joseph placed the body of Jesus in a tomb he owned that was near the site of Jesus’ crucifixion (verse 60). Jesus was the first person to be placed in there, as it was a new tomb. Joseph rolled a large stone to cover the entrance to the tomb. In the first century a dead body usually was placed in a tomb’s antechamber (the front area of the tomb) to allow the flesh to decay. After a year, the bones would be placed in a box called an ossuary and slid into a slot in the wall in the main chamber of the tomb. With the sad task completed, Joseph left. Yet he was not the only witness to Jesus’ burial, as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there to observe what took place (verse 61).

(**Play** the video for this lesson, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.)

Discuss

- ? Read Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50–51; John 19:38. What do these verses tell you about the kind of man Joseph of Arimathaea was?
- ? Why might it be significant that Scripture identifies Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as observing Jesus’ burial?

□ The Tomb Secured

Matthew 27:62–66



Say: Two distinct groups of people had listened to Jesus’ teaching—those who followed Him out of love and those who wanted to trap Him. But neither group understood the true power of the Resurrection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus clearly understood what He was teaching. Perhaps this is understandable, for they were desperate to find something they could use against Him to discredit Him and turn the people against Him. Now that Jesus had died, they hoped that His followers would disband.

It was normal practice that the body of one who had been executed would be thrown into a common grave with others who had been executed at the same time. This, of course, was not the case with Jesus, as He had been buried by Joseph. And so, the chief priests and Pharisees recognized that they needed to take specific steps in light of Jesus' declaration: "After three days I will rise again" (Matthew 27:63, KJV).

This raised a problem for the Jewish leaders. Fearful that Jesus' disciples might take His body from the tomb and claim He had risen from the dead, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate the day following the day of preparation to request the tomb be secured until after the third day had passed (verses 62–64). There may have been an undertone of criticism in their request. If Pilate had not indulged Joseph's request for the body of Jesus, their request might not have been necessary. Pilate's lack of political savvy could cause even greater unrest among the people if Jesus' disciples took His body from the tomb and claimed He had risen from the dead. This claim could possibly lead to what they saw as a deception: a widespread belief that Jesus had risen from the dead, which would undermine their conspiracy to be rid of Him by killing Him.

Whether Pilate considered the concern of the Jewish leaders as warranted or not is not revealed. Yet he did give them permission to secure the tomb as they saw fit (verses 65–66). They placed a seal on the tomb and posted guards taken from Pilate's own soldiers at the site. Matthew 28:12–14 would indicate the guards posted at the tomb were from Pilate's troops, since he was the governor, and not from the temple guard. "Sealing" the tomb meant that a cord was probably drawn across the stone that closed the entrance, and the ends of the cord were fastened by seals to the walls. It is noteworthy that the measures Jewish leaders took to ensure the body of Jesus remained in the tomb would in fact provide convincing evidence of the Resurrection.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus' enemies paid so much attention to His teaching about His resurrection, even when His disciples did not seem to do so?
- ? Share of a time when God has used seemingly inconsequential events to work His will in your life.



Resource Packet Item 1: Significance of the Resurrection

Distribute the work sheet and assign the Scripture passages to small groups. Ask them to give a brief summary of what the passage says about the Resurrection.



Part 2—Christ's Resurrection

□ The Women Hear the News

Matthew 28:1–7

Say: The most exciting news ever to have been shared was first told to two women who were coming to anoint the body of Jesus. Try to put yourself in their places. Just before the Sabbath, their Lord whom they dearly loved, had been crucified like a common criminal and had been buried by a benevolent

man who had provided a tomb. And now they are going to His tomb to care for His body and certainly to mourn His passing as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Mary Magdalene and the other Mary,” made their way to the tomb at dawn of the day following the sabbath (Matthew 28:1). They were going to the tomb to confirm that the stone blocking the entrance was still in place. If so, they would have to find help to move it so they could anoint Jesus’ body with the spices they had bought and prepared.

At some point before the women arrived, major events occurred at the tomb (verses 2–4). An angel appeared and rolled the stone from the entrance of the tomb. A violent earthquake accompanied this event. The angel’s brilliant appearance and earthquake so frightened the guards on duty that they “became like dead men.” Ironically, then, the men who had been tasked with guarding a corpse became like dead men themselves.

When the women arrived, they found the stone rolled away. They no doubt wondered what was happening. The women entered the tomb to discern what was going on. In the tomb, they saw an angel, who spoke to them (verses 5–7). The angel offered encouragement to them, telling them not to be afraid. He had good news. They had come expecting to find Jesus’ dead body in the tomb. But He was not there, for He had risen. The angel commanded the women to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead and would meet them in Galilee, as He had previously told them He would (see 26:32). The angel’s final words dismissed the women to do as they were instructed.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think the angel rolled the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?
- ? In what ways does God work ahead of His people to remove barriers for them?

□ The Women Meet the Risen Savior

Matthew 28:8–10



Say: Having seen the empty tomb and heard the angel’s message, the women went to find the other disciples (Matthew 28:8). Their reaction to what they had just seen and heard was a mixture of fear and joy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The reaction of the women should not be surprising. Encounters with angels recorded in Scripture regularly note people being afraid when interacting with these heavenly messengers. Perhaps the women also had a sense of apprehension, since the news they received seemed too good to be true. From the human perspective, death is permanent. But they were told that Jesus had risen. Despite their natural sense of fear at this unexpected turn of events, joy filled their hearts. They clung to the evidence of the empty tomb and the message of the angel. This spurred the women to run to tell the others.

As the women went on the way, Jesus appeared and greeted them (verses 9–10). They fell at His feet and worshipped Him. What a moment that must have been! Any

doubts they had been struggling with surely melted away as He stood before them. They had watched Him die on the cross. They had seen Him placed in the tomb. Now they were with Him and He was alive!

Jesus repeated the command the women had received from the angel at the tomb. A tenderness can be found in Jesus' speaking of the disciples as His brothers. They had abandoned Him (as He had foretold). Peter had denied Him. Fear motivated their actions. Despite all this, Jesus' words offered them assurance that He hadn't given up on them. He would receive them in Galilee.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think the women had a mixed reaction to their experience at the tomb?
- ? How do you think you would have reacted if you had been with the women that morning at the tomb?



Resource Packet Item 2: Post-Resurrection Appearances

Distribute the information sheet and ask students to keep it handy for reference as you proceed through the lesson. It would also be a great resource for them to use in the coming days for their personal devotions after Easter.

Part 3—Christ's Mandate



□ Authority of the Risen Christ

Matthew 28:16–18

Say: During His time on earth, Jesus had demonstrated His authority over nature, illness, demons, death, and more. Now He once again reminded His disciples of His authority over all things in both heaven and earth. Much of His authority had been laid aside as He came to earth to be our Savior, but now His authority has been restored. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The eleven disciples (all except Judas) obeyed the command received through the women who encountered Jesus after He had risen from the dead. They returned to Galilee and met Jesus on a mountain (Matthew 28:16). The specific location of this mountain is not stated, but Jesus must have previously given them instructions concerning this. It was not the first time they had seen Jesus since His resurrection. There in Galilee the Eleven worshipped Jesus, but some doubted (verse 17).

One might think it strange that some of the disciples struggled with doubt about the reality of the Resurrection. Yet they had not expected His resurrection. This revelation of the existence of doubt serves to strengthen the argument that the Resurrection took place. Skeptics say that the disciples concocted a story claiming Jesus had risen. Instead, what is seen here is that they are convinced of its reality by the strength of the evidence, which overcame their feelings of doubt.

Jesus declared to the disciples that He had received all authority in heaven and on earth (verse 18). Through the Father, Jesus the Son humbled himself, laying

aside His authority and glory to take on flesh and blood (see Philippians 2:6–8). As the obedient Son who laid down His life as the atoning sacrifice for sin, He was raised to life and exalted to a position of authority over all things. His authority extends over the physical world, spiritual forces, and all people. This provides precious hope to all who look to Him as Savior.

Discuss

- ? Why might some of the disciples have doubted?
- ? Why did the disciples need to understand that Jesus has complete authority?

□ The Great Commission

Matthew 28:19–20



Say: A commission includes authority to act on behalf of another. Jesus had all authority, and His followers, then and now, are authorized to represent Him in the world. Unlike earthly authorities who might commission someone to act in their absence, Jesus is with His followers, helping them as they carry out the Great Commission. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Based on His divine authority, Jesus commissioned His followers to do what He had called them to do: take the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:18–20). Their role would be to go as His witnesses, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, and discipling those who believe in Jesus because of their testimony.

Water baptism holds special significance, identifying oneself with a larger message and truth (such as John’s baptism of repentance; see Acts 19:1–5). For the Christian, water baptism is an outward profession of an inward work. As we are lowered into the water, we profess that we die to self and the old way of life. As we rise from the water, we profess that we are risen in Christ to walk in new life with Him.

The Great Commission is bookended by two assurances for those who obey it. First, Jesus has all authority (verse 18). Second, Jesus will always be with His disciples as they undertake the Great Commission (verse 20). By His authority, Jesus opens opportunities for His followers to proclaim the gospel. He is with them through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who empowers believers to be witnesses for Christ.

Jesus Christ commissioned His followers to make disciples wherever they go. One of the things that hinders some Christians from doing this is fear. This fear often is based on two factors: failure on the part of believers to prepare themselves to present the gospel to others and a lack of understanding of the Holy Spirit’s role in seeing unbelievers come to faith in Jesus.

Believers often find that a good place to start in presenting the gospel to others is by sharing their own stories of how they came to believe in Jesus, interweaving a few Scriptures in their narrative. Christians can trust the Holy Spirit to do His work in opening hearts to the truth and drawing the lost to believe in Jesus as Savior. Praise God that the gospel—not human effort—is the power of God that brings salvation to those who believe (Romans 1:16).

Discuss

- ? What role does water baptism have in the discipleship process?
- ? How often do you share Jesus with an unbeliever? What keeps you from sharing more often?



Resource Packet Item 3: My Testimony

Distribute the work sheet and encourage students to use the outline provided to describe their own testimony in preparation for sharing Jesus with others. If time permits, ask two or three students to share their testimony with the class.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus Christ is the risen Savior and exalted Lord. His resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. This faith is based on evidence that is reliable and reasonable. Because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice and resurrection, people can receive forgiveness for their sins and new birth as children of God. The Christian life is about learning to live as followers of Christ: people who are set free from the slavery of sin so they can live in obedience to the teachings of Jesus.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Rejoice each day in the knowledge of Jesus' resurrection.
- Consider your testimony and how you can share it with those around you.
- Pray for God to send someone across your path who needs to hear about Him. Watch for that opportunity, entrusting the Holy Spirit to guide your words.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Resurrection Song.
Psalm 16:1–11

Tuesday

Resurrection Promise.
Daniel 12:1–3

Wednesday

Resurrection Message.
Romans 1:1–6

Thursday

Resurrection Life.
Romans 6:1–11

Friday

Resurrection Power.
Romans 8:11–16

Saturday

Resurrection Hope.
1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand

April 11, 2021

LESSON

6

Difficult New Testament Passages

Study Text

Romans 9:9–18; 10:9–11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10; Hebrews 6:1–11; 10:26–31; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:10–11

Central Truth

Studying Holy Scripture is a highly rewarding, lifelong endeavor.



Key Verse

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (KJV)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (NIV)

Lesson Objectives

- Be able to define and discuss these major terms: election, Antichrist, and apostasy.
- Express what God has done to bring us to salvation and secure our faith in Him. Explore how students might respond to and feel about what they learned.
- Know how believers should respond if they feel insecure in their faith.

Introducing the Study

Say: We cannot build an entire doctrine on one or two passages from Scripture. We must take each passage in the context of the rest of the Bible to understand what God desires from His people. Our passages for today, studied in isolation from the rest of Scripture, could lead us to inaccurate conclusions. (*Play the video for this lesson, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—Chosen for the Team

Ask: When you were in school, were you ever in an activity where teams were being chosen by team leaders? For what activities were you among the first to be chosen, and for what activities were you among the last to be chosen?

Say: Being chosen for a team is often based on ability in a sport or academic activity. Fortunately, God does not choose us based on ability. He wants everyone to be part of His body of believers. He calls us by the Spirit, and longs for us to respond by believing in Jesus.

The Jews of Jesus' time saw themselves as Abraham's descendants, and therefore were the "chosen people" of God (John 8:33–39). Clearly, the apostle Paul himself believed Israel bore a special relationship to God through the Abrahamic Covenant (see Romans 9:1–5). However, in Romans 9 Paul also grieved greatly over his people Israel. Why? In this chapter he refined the understanding of the phrase "children of God." Who are they? What qualifies a person to be a child of God? Who are the chosen, or elect, of God according to Romans 9? Through the course of this lesson, we will explore these challenging questions—and recognize that even the challenging portions of the New Testament can bring great hope and understanding to Christians today.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Romans 9:10. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;

11. (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12. It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

2 Peter 1:10. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:3. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

6. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

Hebrews 6:4. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

5. And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Romans 10:9. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

New International Version

Romans 9:10. Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac.

11. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand:

12. not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

13. Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

14. What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

2 Peter 1:10. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble,

11. and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:3. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

6. And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

7. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

8. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

Hebrews 6:4. It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit,

5. who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age

6. and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Romans 10:9. If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Part 1—What Is Divine Election?

□ God Chose a Promised People

Romans 9:9–18



Say: God’s sovereignty is often juxtaposed with the free will of humanity as though the two are in contradiction. However, God is sovereign in all He does, and He chose to make the gift of salvation available to all who respond to Him in faith. Yet, He does not force His gift upon anyone. The inclusiveness of salvation was difficult for the Jews to understand and accept. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The doctrine of election begins with understanding the sovereignty of God—His complete freedom and right to do anything He chooses to accomplish His divine purposes. In Romans 9, Paul lamented the fact that Israel had not embraced their Messiah and the salvation that He provides (verse 2). If it were possible, Paul would change places with them if that meant their salvation (verse 3). Paul had reached a kind of crisis of faith because he knew the promises God had made to His people. Had God forgotten those promises? Of course not (verse 6), and our understanding of God’s promises—including the role of Israel and ourselves in them—is found in the sovereign wisdom of God’s choice.

The doctrine of election is illustrated three times in Israel’s history. God chose to fulfill His promise to Abraham through the promised son Isaac (see Genesis 18:10–14), and again through the descendants of Jacob and not Esau (Romans 9:8–13; note that “loved” and “hated” are terms of contrast, not a reference to literal hatred; see also Luke 14:26). The third illustration might seem to be the most troubling to us because it involves pharaoh, whom God chose and raised up to reveal His power and sovereignty (Romans 9:14–18).

Romans 9 defends God’s righteousness in view of what looks like an arbitrary choice. Clearly it is not arbitrary. For example, Exodus records that pharaoh hardened his heart seven times before God hardened his heart for the first time.

Romans 9:19–22 contains Paul’s rebuke of one who would ask the question of verse 14. The rebuke is stunning, as if to say, “Who are you to question the sovereign God?” We have as much right to God’s favor and blessings as a pot on the potter’s wheel has to determine its shape (none). Certainly the prerogative is with God to fashion vessels of honor and those prepared for destruction to reveal His glory and accomplish the purposes of His redemption. But one can respond, “Isn’t the question in verse 14 legitimate, because human beings are more than lifeless, mindless pots of clay?”

Paul answered within the context of his remarks, in verses 24–25. God’s sovereignty is inclusive, not exclusive. He has chosen to include those who were formerly not His people (the Gentiles), and to call them “My people,” and “children of the living God” (see Hosea 2:23; 1:10, *NIV*). Paul acknowledged the rejection of Israel in his day, but two things explain this rejection: (1) Israel did not pursue or submit themselves to God’s way of securing His righteousness in the Messiah (verses 30–33); (2) The rejection of Israel is temporary and partial, providing opportunity for the Gentiles to be saved. It also provokes Israel to jealousy over God’s favor (see

Romans 11:1–15). His favor will again come to a remnant of Israel after “the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (11:25, NIV).

Discuss

- ? What statement of Paul demonstrates his desire to see the people of Israel accept Christ?
- ? How does God’s inclusion of the Gentiles impact your attitudes and actions toward people who differ from you, culturally, economically, and ethnically?

□ A People Cleansed; an Election Secured 1 Peter 1:1–2; 2 Peter 1:10–11

Say: In his first letter Peter addressed “the elect” or chosen of God. At the time of his writing (ca. AD 63–64) these included Gentiles and Diaspora Jews (those living outside the land of Israel). This is significant because it was written by the “apostle to the circumcised” (i.e., the Jews; see Galatians 2:8, NIV). The inclusion of the Gentiles is not an afterthought. The elect includes Gentiles. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The election of the Gentiles was accomplished at a price—by the death of the Son of God—the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world (see Revelation 13:8). Note the Trinity in 1 Peter 1: The Father elects; the Son sheds His blood; the Spirit sanctifies (“makes holy”) or consecrates these Gentiles. The purpose is to bring them into fellowship with God and obedience to Jesus Christ their Lord.

This new and living relationship, made possible by God’s election, is not a guarantee of eternal salvation regardless of what a person chooses to do in the future. If so, then there would be no need for the strong exhortation to grow in faith and the warnings against sin. “Make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:10, NIV). Faith *in* Christ will and must produce obedience *to* Christ. This will not only validate one’s calling and make secure his or her election, but will result in an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 11).



Resource Packet Item 1: Calvinism vs. Arminianism

Distribute the information sheet. As time permits, summarize each point and discuss it briefly.

Discuss

- ? How would you respond if someone said free will violates God’s sovereignty?
- ? What should believers do to continue to grow in faith?



Part 2—Who/What Restrains the Antichrist?

□ Christ’s Return Preceded by the Lawless One 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4,8

Say: The New Testament has a lot to say about false teachers and prophets. Peter warns us that in the end times (“last days”) there will be those who

mock the word of God and its promise of Christ's return (2 Peter 2:1–3).
(Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul warned of an end-time figure who will present a major threat to the faith of the Church. From reading 1 Thessalonians, we learn that Paul's teaching on the coming of the Day of the Lord had been misunderstood (1 Thessalonians 5:1–11) or perhaps distorted by false teachers sending letters in Paul's name (2 Thessalonians 2:2–3). In either case, the church was experiencing confusion and anxiety over the claim that the day of the Lord had come and that the end of the Age was upon them. In this passage Paul set out to allay their fears and correct this mistaken notion by reminding them of what he previously taught (2:5). He states that however they got this teaching, it is wrong: The day of the Lord had not come (verses 1–2). Those who taught the opposite were peddling a deception (2:3). Paul, in effect, said, "If it had come, you would know it because you would have seen and experienced the apostasy."

The Day of the Lord will be announced by certain unmistakable events, one of which is the coming of the "man of lawlessness" or "the lawless one." While the title "Antichrist" is not used here, the description matches descriptions of this deceiver elsewhere in the New Testament (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). The main difference is that John highlighted specific doctrinal errors regarding Christ, whereas Paul focused on what this lawless one would do. The lawless one is also called "the son of destruction" who is destined to the judgment mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and whom the Lord will slay by "the appearance of His coming" (KJV).

The lawless one will be guilty of outrageous idolatry that resembles a "lawless one" presented in Daniel's vision in Daniel 11:36–37. He will "exalt himself" as the supreme object of worship over all and every god! His blasphemy will be boundless as he actually sits in the temple of God, presenting himself as God.

Discuss

- ? What kind of idolatry will be perpetrated by the "lawless one"?
- ? What is the believer's best defense against false teachers?

□ The Lawless One Will Be Restrained

2 Thessalonians 2:5–7



Say: Although no one knows the exact day or hour of our Lord's return (Mark 13:32), that day will not overtake those who walk in the light. Jesus gave this teaching to His disciples so that they would be prepared for His coming (John 12:35), and the apostles did likewise (1 Thessalonians 5:4–5; 2 Peter 3:1–18).
(Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul reminded them that what he taught was not new. He had taught it before when with them (verse 5). Certainly they would have recognized so infamous a character as this lawless idolater and his public blasphemy. The fact that they did not yet see him was evidence that he had not yet come because what held him back prevented him. Paul's words in verses 7–9 have generated much discussion. There

is no consensus. Who is the one who restrains, or holds back? Common views are the Church, or the Holy Spirit resident in the Church, or even the system of law in secular government. The Thessalonians obviously knew to whom or what Paul was referring. Some have argued that the restrainer was the Roman Empire or some emperor preceding Christ's coming. This view seems irrelevant, given the destruction of the Roman Empire and the continuance of the Church.

For us today as believers, the identity of this restrainer remains part of the mystery regarding the man of lawlessness, whose identity will be revealed amid the events of the Second Coming. The man of lawlessness will be empowered by Satan and will display power through signs and false wonders. Until then, we live with a little ambiguity as we await with confidence the Lord's return.

Discuss

- ? Some have tried to identify certain world leaders as the Antichrist, or man of lawlessness, only for those individuals to later pass off the scene. Others have set dates for the Lord's return, and those days have come and gone. How can believers focus on Christ's return without getting into speculation?



Resource Packet Item 2: The Antichrist

Distribute the information sheet "The Antichrist," and review the facts about the Antichrist as time allows.



Part 3—Can Defectors Be Saved?

Defectors Described and Denounced

Hebrews 6:1–8; 10:26–27

Say: Can true believers ever abandon their faith and lose their salvation? A complete answer would demand a massive volume. But we are limited to a few words of analysis from just a few verses of Scripture. Hebrews contains what is perhaps the most challenging passage on this topic. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Different answers to this question represent different theological positions and doctrinal traditions (e.g., Calvinist, Arminian, Lutheran, etc.). What seems reasonable is to conduct a careful analysis of what these passages do say without superimposing a system of doctrine over them, in order to interpret the details.

We should note that the author of Hebrews began our main passage (Hebrews 6) by stating his intent. He was exhorting his readers to embark on a program of Christian maturity, which involves pressing beyond the foundational teaching of doctrinal basics. These included "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment" (verses 1–2). He intended to cover this, as the rest of his Epistle illustrates, but before doing so, he issued a warning that would safeguard the fruit and blessings of their salvation (verses 9–10).

What is described in 6:4–6 is best understood by the term “apostasy.” That is, the abandonment of faith by Christians. Most who object to this interpretation are convinced that a true believer can never lose their salvation, and so they see them as professing (but not true) believers. Let us look closely at the text.

These individuals have been spiritually enlightened. Note that the author used the same Greek verb here as Paul did when praying for the maturity (not salvation) of the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 1:18. They have “tasted of the heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6:4, *KJV*), “the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (verse 5, *NIV*). They have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit (verse 4). Elsewhere, the author of Hebrews used the terms rendered “taste” (2:9), “enlightened” (10:32) and “share” (12:10) in describing the experiences of genuine believers in Christ (or, in the case of 2:9, to describe Christ himself as “tasting” death).

If we conclude that what is described is “apostasy,” then by definition those apostasizing have, in Paul’s words, “rejected” (*NIV*) and “made shipwreck” (*KJV*) their faith (1 Timothy 1:19). This is not a momentary lapse of faith, nor a sinful indiscretion. Rather, it is a conscious choice to reject the foundation of their faith and salvation—Christ and the Cross. “They are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:6, *NIV*). Christ’s work on the cross is being rejected, and they have chosen to abandon the faith or “fall away” from the only means of salvation. That is why the author says it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. Apostasy is not a momentary sin, but a settled choice to reject what Paul calls “the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13, *NIV*).

Discuss

- ? Discuss the difference between a momentary lapse of faith and a conscious choice to abandon Christ after having received salvation.
- ? How does an understanding of apostasy impact your view of the grace of God?

□ Prevention Against Defection

Hebrews 6:9–11; Romans 10:9–11



Say: While the danger of apostasy is real, the author of Hebrews was confident that his original readers were firmly on the path of salvation and would not follow the path of apostasy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

His assurance was based on what he had seen of their love toward God and their fellow saints (Hebrews 6:9–10). Verse 11 states the author’s desire that they be diligent to continue in what they were doing, so that their hope may be realized.

How can we be sure of our salvation? Is such assurance even possible? Listen to the words of John: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, *NIV*). Salvation and eternal life are not objects that we can keep or misplace. Rather, salvation is a living relationship with a Person. “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12, *NIV*). Paul reminded us, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9–10, *NIV*).

If you have faith in Christ and cherish your allegiance to Him, you need not fear falling away. When doubts about salvation arise, revisit the Scriptures. Ask yourself, “How was I saved?” It was by grace through faith in God’s Son and His work on the cross (Ephesians 2:8–9). Do you believe? If so, then maintain that faith, for through it you are secure in Him.

Discuss

? How can you help someone who believes they have been “too bad” to come back to God?



Resource Packet Item 3: Hope for the Hopeless

Distribute the case study, and divide into small groups to read it and answer the questions. Ask each group to share their answers and discuss them.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God is not willing for anyone to perish, yet He forces no one to serve Him unwillingly. The Holy Spirit draws us to Him. Each of us must make our own decision to accept His love during the time in which we walk this earth, before it is too late.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that God will give you an ongoing sense of peace that you walk with Him, and no one can take away your salvation.
- Commit to living in such a way that you reflect faith in a love for God.
- Reject temptation to sin, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, and persevere in your faith despite trials and temptations.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God Speaks.
Deuteronomy 5:1,22–28

Tuesday

God Calls.
1 Samuel 3:1–10

Wednesday

God Saves.
Psalm 80:1–7

Thursday

Chosen by Christ.
John 15:14–19

Friday

Delivered From Evil.
2 Timothy 4:9–18

Saturday

God Wills None To Perish.
2 Peter 3:3–9

Unit 1: Scriptures Difficult To Understand

April 18, 2021

LESSON 7

Mysteries in the Revelation

Study Text

Isaiah 11:1–5; Revelation 1:4–20; 3:1; 4:1–11; 5:1–6; 8:1–2; 12:1–9; 13:1–18; 14:1–11; 15:1 through 16:2

Central Truth

John's revelation of Christ was given to reveal, not to conceal, truth.



Key Verse Revelation 2:7

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (KJV).

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Gain better understanding of the mysteries of the Book of Revelation.
- Appreciate the reality that the purpose of Revelation was to reveal the truth of Jesus Christ, not to create misunderstanding or uncertainty about the end times.
- Commit to live out the Christian faith with hope in the soon return of Jesus Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Book of Revelation records the end of the gospel story by providing us with hope for the future, in spite of troubles we face today. As someone has said, “I read the end of the book, and we win!”

Opening Activity—Important Numbers

Ask: What numbers do you use in everyday life that are important to you? (Possible answers might include: phone numbers, birth dates, bank account numbers, Social Security numbers, driver's license or car license numbers.)

Say: Many numbers may have significance to us that are not significant to others. In reading the Bible, it is apparent that certain numbers are important to the unfolding of God's Word, and He uses those numbers to communicate with us. While we don't understand everything about those numbers or other details about Revelation, we know that God has made a marvelous plan to redeem us from this fallen world.

First-century Jews held a long literary tradition outside the books of the Old Testament. A large portion of that tradition was apocalyptic literature (literature about the end of the age, or the world), much of it written during the intertestamental period between Malachi and Matthew. Revelation is the only apocalyptic book in the Bible. It bears many common literary traits with apocalyptic literature that was not accepted into our Bible. It also has some significant differences. Today's lesson explores some of the more difficult passages within the fascinating but challenging Book of Revelation. From this study, we are reminded that God has given us His Word not to conceal truth or make it confusing, but to reveal truth for our benefit.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Revelation 1:4. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.

3:1. And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

5:6. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

1:20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

4:4. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

6. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

7. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

12:3. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

13:1. And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

16. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

17. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

18. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

New International Version

Revelation 1:4. John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne.

3:1. "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

5:6. Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

1:20. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

4:4. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

6. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

7. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.

12:3. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.

13:1. The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.

16. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads,

17. so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.

18. This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.

Part 1—The Seven Spirits of God

□ The Seven Spirits Means “The Spirit” Revelation 1:4–5; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6



Say: The number “7” appears almost five dozen times in Revelation, more than any other number. Reference to the “seven spirits,” the verses we are considering here, occurs four times. The number 7 is usually associated with fulfillment, completion or perfection. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: What Is Apocalyptic Literature?

Distribute the information sheet. You may want to read it together as a class or send it home with students for further study.

The number 7 describes no less than fourteen nouns in Revelation: churches, spirits, lampstands, stars, seals, horns, eyes, angels, trumpets, thunders, heads of the dragon, heads of the beast, golden bowls, and kings. If John was using the number to indicate fulfillment or perfection, which seems most likely, then “seven spirits” refers to the Spirit of God in His fullness or complete perfection.

The context of John’s first usage seems to agree with this concept of Revelation 1:4–5. His salutation announces to the seven churches that a message is on the way. The sender is the eternal God himself, “who is, and who was, and who is to come” (verse 4, *NIV*), and from Jesus Christ, and from “the seven spirits before his throne” (*NIV*). Thus John declared that this prophetic word (verse 3) has as its source the Triune God in all His fullness, majesty, power, and authority (verses 5–8).

Later, in his letter to Sardis (3:1), John referred to the seven Spirits of God who are connected with the “seven stars” who represent seven angels (1:20) or messengers to the seven literal churches addressed in chapter 2. These messengers could be a metaphor for pastoral church leaders or even angels assigned to guard the churches. In either case we have the fullness of the Spirit engaged in rousing the church of Sardis out of sleep to remain spiritually alert and recognize where they have need of repentance and diligence to complete what they have begun.

With the next occurrence of the seven spirits (4:5), John took the reader to God’s heavenly throne, and there he described a scene of celestial splendor, majesty, and glory. The language is filled with symbols of divine royalty: twenty four elders seated on thrones clothed with white garments (signifying purity) and wearing golden crowns (signifying royalty).

The revelation of divine splendor is seen in the language of theophany (the appearance of divinity to a human): flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and fire all serve to remind us of God’s awesome presence on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). In 4:5 the fire imagery is linked to seven lamps before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Also, some say Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ.

Discuss

- ? Reflect on the perfection of God’s Spirit, and discuss what it means to know that the Holy Spirit lives within you.



□ The Messiah's Anointing

Isaiah 11:1–2

Say: Many people think of the Holy Spirit in relation to Acts 2 and the Day of Pentecost. But the Holy Spirit was active throughout the Old Testament, throughout the New Testament, and is still active in the Church today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In addressing the “seven Spirits of God,” it is important to examine Isaiah 11:1–2. Although Isaiah did not use the title “Messiah,” he saw the coming of the Messiah as Someone clearly marked by the Holy Spirit. This descendant of David (verse 1) would be anointed by the “Spirit of the LORD” (verse 2). What follows in verse 2 is a concept equivalent to the seven spirits of God in that it describes a person who is characterized by the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He will possess wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

In 2 Peter 1:2–3, Peter declared that God’s divine power has granted to us everything that we need for His life and godliness. The Holy Spirit delivers the down payment (or, earnest) of our eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:22). The Holy Spirit is not some inanimate force, but a divine Person of the Godhead. Paul told us to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) and be led by the Spirit (verse 18). He concluded by saying, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (verse 25, NIV).

The Christian life is life in the Spirit. Cultivate that life. Listen to the voice of Spirit, who is not only with you but in you. Study the Word of truth, heeding the teaching of the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Spirit has come to deliver all the redemptive blessings of God’s salvation (Ephesians 1:3,13–14).

Discuss

? Why does John refer to God the Father (Revelation 1:6), Jesus Christ (1:5), but then to “seven spirits” who are before God’s throne (1:4)? How can understanding how the Bible uses numbers help us answer questions like this?



Part 2—Numbers in the Revelation

□ Significance of Seven Revelation 1:10–13,16,20; 5:1; 8:2; 15:1; 16:1; 4:2,4,6–11

Say: We have noted how often the number “7” appears in Revelation, and that when linked to “spirits,” the number conveys the Spirit in His fullness and perfection. But what about when the number modifies things like “lampstands,” (1:12), “stars” (1:16) or the seals on a scroll (5:1)? (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 2: Numbers in Revelation

Distribute the work sheet and complete it as a class as you move through the lesson. Note how God uses numbers to convey important principles in His Word.

The first step is to determine what the Bible says about what these symbolic terms represent. Then we can apply meaning to the modifying number “7.” It is best not to assume that because “7” means the literal number 7 in one place (e.g., “churches” in 1:11), that we should conclude that the literal sense should be applied to every noun.

For example, John wrote of “seven golden lampstands” in 1:12 (NIV), referring to seven churches of Asia mentioned in verse 11. However, we can be quite sure that Asia had more than seven churches. Luke wrote in Acts that he spent two years based in Ephesus so that “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10, NIV). Moreover John saw Christ standing in the middle of these seven golden lampstands and prepared them for the messages to the seven churches addressed in chapters 2–3. Perhaps the seven golden lampstands, the seven churches, represent the entire church of that region in its completeness, comprised of perhaps hundreds of cell-like churches. Thus the messages to the seven churches of Asia ultimately serve as messages for the worldwide Church of the Lord.

Another example of the symbolic nature of numbers is found in that John said he saw Christ seated at the right hand of God with a scroll sealed with “seven seals.” Seals were placed on documents to secure their safety and protect them from being opened by anyone except one who possessed the authority to do so. “Seven seals” would be clearly seen to offer full protection. No earthly or heavenly power could open the scroll (5:3) and view its contents regarding divine judgments (see Revelation 6–8). Why? Because it held the complete seal of God himself. Only the Messiah (5:5) possessed the authority to open the scroll.

Discuss

? Why is it important to recognize the symbolic nature of many of the concepts in Revelation?

□ Significance of Other Numbers Revelation 4:4,6,8,10; 14:1; 12:1–9; 13:1,4



Say: In the Book of Revelation, several important numbers are repeated numerous times, including four, ten, twelve, twenty-four, 1,260, and 144,000. Let’s look at some of these numbers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

We first encounter the number four attached to “living creatures” who surround the throne in heaven, in Revelation 4:6. If John was seeing a vision comparable to that seen by Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 1:15–18; 10:12–15), these creatures were probably angelic beings, perhaps cherubim, who totally surrounded the throne and guarded it. The number four seems to signify totality or completeness, as the “four corners of the land” signifies all the earth in Ezekiel (7:2), and the four corners of the temple court represents the whole court (46:22).

The numbers twelve and 144,000 are connected within Judaism. Twelve is often identified with the tribes of Israel. Subsequently, the 144,000 men that God seals are

made up of 12,000 from each named tribe of Israel (see Revelation 7:4–8). Again, in 21:12, the New Jerusalem is surrounded by a huge wall with twelve gates, guarded by twelve angels and bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet despite the symbolism, the New Jerusalem is not exclusively a place for Jewish believers in the Messiah. In the wall are twelve foundation stones bearing the names of the “twelve apostles of the Lamb” (21:14). These same apostles were given the commission to go and preach the gospel to all creation and to make disciples of all nations (see Matthew 28:18; Mark 16:15).

John mentioned twenty-four elders, a reference to people of status in Jewish communities who acted as legal representatives (see, for example, Deuteronomy 21:1–9). Who are these elders who are involved in leading worship (Revelation 4:5–10)? They may be twenty-four orders of priests who are leading the worship of God.

The numbers ten and seven both connote completeness, fulfillment, and perfection, but in Revelation 12, they are used in connection with Israel, a woman pregnant with child, and a great red dragon who seeks to devour her child who is destined to rule the nations. (This child is Christ; see Psalm 2.) The great sign that appears in heaven who is a woman with a crown of twelve stars, represents Israel. This woman gives birth to the Christ child (Revelation 12:5). The use of the sun, moon, and stars is common in apocalyptic imagery.

The second sign is a “great red dragon” whom John later tells us is “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (verse 9, NIV). Satan is described as having seven heads with seven diadems, or crowns, and ten horns (12:3; cf. 13:1). Satan likely gave inspiration to the Roman emperors in John’s day who sought to receive divine honor and worship. In 13:1–2, a beast is described in the same way, indicating this to be the Antichrist, who seeks the same honor and yet worships the dragon (13:4). Thus the numbers seven and ten point to the idolatrous portrayal of Satan and the Antichrist who ascribe to themselves the complete and perfect honor, authority, and royal majesty that belongs to God alone.

After the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12–17), and before John began to recount the events of “the great day” of God’s wrath and the wrath of the Lamb, John said that God seals the “servants of our God” (7:3). He specified their number at 144,000, and that they had come from every tribe of the sons of Israel (7:4). These are Jews, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel (7:5–8). Oddly, Dan is replaced by Joseph (verse 8), possibly because of the tribe’s idolatry recorded in Judges 18 (cf. Leviticus 24:11; 1 Kings 12:28–29). The 144,000 are distinguished from (not equated with) the great (innumerable) multitude from every nation (7:9). They are mentioned later in Revelation (14:1–3) and they seem to be involved in special worship before the throne of God and preaching the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.

The final number of our study is 1,260. It is mentioned in connection with the Great Tribulation. It designates the number of days that two prophetic witnesses of God are given power and authority to preach in Jerusalem before they are killed by the beast (Revelation 11:3–7). Also, in 12:6, the woman, Israel, flees into the wilderness to a place prepared by God. There she is nourished for 1,260 days, which is halfway through the seven-year tribulation period identified as

the seventieth week of Daniel, in Daniel 9:25–27. This week, one week of years (seven years) is the period of distress that Daniel envisioned. He prophesied that in the middle of that week (1,260 days) the ruler who is to come (the Antichrist) arrives on the scene to destroy the city and put an end to Jewish temple worship.

Discuss

? Satan and the Antichrist will try to take the place of God in the last days. How can we guard against Satan’s schemes to do that in our lives today?

Part 3—The Mark of the Beast

□ Mark of Authority and Loyalty

Revelation 13:1,16–18



Say: There is probably no number in the Bible more puzzling than the one attached to the beast in Revelation 13:18. The number 666 has been the object of intense debate and study, some quite legitimate and some founded on baseless speculation. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Attempts to identify the beast as the numerical equivalent of some Roman emperor (such as Nero or Domitian) have largely failed. Although both Greeks and Jews utilized numbers in their academic study, attaching them to the letters of their respective alphabets, the numbers simply do not add up in any reasonable way. For example, the Greek letters of Caesar Nero will only calculate as 666 if one translates the name from Greek to Hebrew. We should rightly observe, then, that John, who wrote in Greek, would have to expect his Greek-speaking audience to know Hebrew. For most Bible scholars, this is not a reasonable expectation.

What do we know about the beast and this mark of identification? The beast is the personification of Satan, who mimics (and mocks) Christ. Those who follow the beast will bow to satanic authority in worship of the dragon (13:4). His desire to compete with God for worship is made clear by verses 5–7. Note the beast’s worshippers call out words that parallel those used to praise the true God when He delivered Israel (compare Revelation 13:4 and Exodus 15:11).

John invited readers to “calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man” (Revelation 13:18, *NIV*). A humble response might be to admit that the identity of the beast may only become clear during the Tribulation when these events occur. What we can say is that only those who align themselves with the beast and take his mark will have access to economic markets of commerce (verses 16–17). This ensures both their loyalty and their survival.

Discuss

? What speculations have you heard regarding the mark of the beast? Why do you think people are especially intrigued by it?



Resource Packet Item 3: What Is Important, and What Do We Know?

Distribute the work sheet and complete it as a class. Talk about how Christians can use wisdom in deciding how to discuss and debate the end times.



A Mark of Destined Judgment

Revelation 14:9–11; 15:2; 16:2

Say: Judgment is a difficult subject for discussion. Yet Revelation reminds us that Christians must see the reality of the judgment of sin, and learn from this sober truth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The beast appears again in Revelation 14. Those who follow him are destined for judgment (Revelation 13:14; 14:9–11). In the presence of angels and the Lamb (Christ), they will experience God’s anger and be tormented with fire and brimstone.

We live in the world, but we are not supposed to live like the world. Such a life will lead to the judgment described in Revelation. Let us determine not to get caught up in the spirit of this world. In 1 John 2:18 and 4:3 we see that many deceivers would seek to lead us astray—deceivers who have the “spirit of antichrist.” May we resolve today to reject the influence of this evil spirit.

Discuss

? What important truths can Christians, who live in the hope and assurance of everlasting life, draw from the judgment passages of Revelation 14–16?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: While we benefit by reflecting on the mysteries of Revelation, we must be cautious not to engage in unhealthy speculation. Let us stay focused on Jesus, knowing that His coming will bring immeasurable joy to His people.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take time to read the Book of Revelation, looking for nuggets of truth that will enrich your spiritual life.
- Reflect on how you would live this week if you knew Jesus was coming before the end of the week.
- Pray earnestly for those who are not ready for the coming of Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Ezekiel’s Apocalyptic Vision.
Ezekiel 39:1–7

Tuesday

Daniel’s Apocalyptic Vision.
Daniel 7:1–11

Wednesday

Zechariah’s Apocalyptic Vision.
Zechariah 14:1–9

Thursday

Matthew’s Little Apocalypse.
Matthew 24:4–14

Friday

Mark’s Little Apocalypse.
Mark 13:24–31

Saturday

Luke’s Little Apocalypse.
Luke 21:8–19

Letters From Peter and Jude

Much of the New Testament is comprised of letters, or Epistles, written by Early Church leaders to address problems or needs in the various churches across the Roman Empire. While we often think of the apostle Paul as having written these letters, a number of them were, of course, written by others. This unit explores the Epistles of Peter and Jude. As we study, it is important to recognize that the needs, problems, and issues of these early congregations were not unlike the issues and struggles we face today. Thus, this unit can offer some very practical instruction to your students.

Peter's first Epistle contains strong themes of hope, steadfastness, and holiness. Lessons 8–10 address these topics in practical form, reminding students, first of all, that they can find a steadfast hope of eternal life as they walk with Christ. Such hope is unique to Christianity, and certainly a contrast from the prevailing sense of angst and hopelessness found in various parts of our world. This hope also serves a purpose in strengthening the believers in times of trouble and challenge. Furthermore, our hope is demonstrated in practical ways every day through a life of Spirit-enabled holiness. This concept of holiness, the focus of Lesson 9, is especially important for students as they walk with Christ in an increasingly secular world.

Lesson 11, which moves the unit into 2 Peter, focuses on the idea of empowerment, specifically as it relates to God's power at work in His people to change their lives. This is a valuable topic for any students who grapple with the past as they strive to live for and walk with Christ. This great promise of power, as we Pentecostals well know, has its source in the Holy Spirit and is manifested in the great gift of Holy Spirit baptism. The Pentecost Sunday lesson, then, is especially valuable to us as Pentecostals.

The unit closes with a look at one of the shortest books of the Bible, the Epistle of Jude. In a sense, this book summarizes some of the key themes of the unit, and does so in even more stark terms. Your students today, like the Christians of the first century, face a constant barrage of false teaching. Often, this is in the form of unbelievers using Scripture to promote ungodly ideas and beliefs. Challenge students to be people of the Word, preparing themselves to combat any and every challenge, as they cling to the Word and rely on the Holy Spirit.

Unit 2: Letters From Peter and Jude

April 25, 2021

LESSON

8

People of Hope

Introducing the Study

Say: This first study of Peter's letters focuses on God's people and the hope that they have. No matter what is going on around us, we can have hope. Such hope is not based on our circumstances, the state of the world around us, or what political party is in power. Our hope is based on our faith in Christ and His promises, found in God's Word. When we are firmly grounded in these things, our hope is sure. However we often use the word "hope" in a very different way.

Opening Activity—Hope

Ask: How frequently do you find yourself saying the words, "I hope"? What have you hoped for in recent days or weeks? (You may hear answers such as hoping for someone to feel better, hoping for a certain outcome in a sporting event, hoping for a job, etc. You may need to mention some of these things to get people to think about the many times they have hoped for something.)

Say: There is nothing wrong with hoping for good things in this life, but our ultimate hope is in Jesus Christ and the plan He has for us in eternity.

One dictionary defines hope as "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen." It has been said that the loss of hope is worse than the loss of limbs. The Bible's definition of hope, however, is different. As one writer put it, biblical hope is less "hope-so" and more "know-so."

Salvation provides hope and confidence for today as well as for eternity. It also influences how we live each day. Refuse the hopeless life. Instead embrace the hope-filled life that Jesus Christ offers every believer.

Study Text

1 Peter 1:1 through 2:3

Central Truth

Faith in Christ and His Word gives us hope to persevere.



Key Verse

1 Peter 1:13

Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (KJV).

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the assurance of salvation, and how this produces hope.
- Comprehend the calling to live a holy lifestyle in this world, and how to detach from this world as well.
- Live according to Scripture and experience the growth that such a life provides.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Peter 1:3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

14. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16. Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

18. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

22. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

23. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

2:1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2. As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

New International Version

1 Peter 1:3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4. and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

5. who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

6. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

9. for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

14. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

15. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

16. for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

18. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,

19. but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

22. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

23. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

2:1. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

2. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

3. now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.



Say: Suffering is an inevitable part of life. All of us experience physical pain in our bodies through injury or illness. We experience emotional pain at the loss of a loved one or betrayal by a family member or friend. Other times, our suffering is for the cause of Christ. Millions around the world are tortured and imprisoned, or even killed, for their faith every day. Depending upon the type of suffering, sometimes we cannot even identify the source of the pain, but we know it is very real. As believers, however, we have reason to rejoice, even in the face of suffering, especially if we are called upon to suffer for the cause of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter began his first Epistle by affirming his own identity as well as his purpose and audience in writing (1 Peter 1:1). He opened by reminding his readers of his apostolic authority. He also named the recipients: five geographical areas throughout which these followers of Christ were scattered. The places Peter mentioned are located in what is modern-day Turkey. Peter referred to these believers as exiles who were scattered throughout these areas. This was a clear but gentle reminder that they were Christians walking through an often-hostile world. Later in the Epistle, Peter also stated that he wrote from “Babylon” (see 5:13). Some believe this might refer to the city of Babylon in Mesopotamia, but most scholars feel he was offering a figurative description of Rome—which was the center of godlessness and Christian persecution in the first century. It is believed, then, that Peter wrote this Epistle sometime around AD 60-63, not long before Nero’s horrible and genocidal martyring of Christians in AD 64. Truly, Peter and his readers knew of suffering.

Peter gave his readers reason to rejoice in their sufferings. For one thing, they had experienced new birth in Christ—the result of God’s merciful kindness to them. For another, this experience gave his readers eternal hope that would never wane or fade. All this came to his readers because they had placed their faith in Jesus, who had himself conquered death (verse 3), promising them life after death (see 1 Corinthians 6:14). Their faith gave them hope for an everlasting home, reserved for them in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). Along with all this, they were preserved by God until their ultimate deliverance (verse 5).

Life was not without its struggles for Peter’s original audience, however. Their daily lives, in difficult circumstances, presented them with all kinds of trying times (verse 6). Peter encouraged them with a reminder that their trials were temporary in nature. Their trials served to prove the sincerity of their faith, and would provide them with blessings in eternity (verse 7).

Peter recalled that even though they could not presently see Jesus, joy could fill their hearts (verse 8). This came, he said, as a result of their faith in Jesus, giving them a taste of what awaited them in eternity (verse 9).

As we live for God in our present-day environment, we too may feel like strangers in the public arena where we live and work daily. We need to remind

ourselves that we have been chosen by God, set apart for the purpose of walking with Him. The Holy Spirit works within us to enable us to love Him, and reject sin, in spite of outside pressures and temptations. The culture we live in should not influence us toward evil. We should instead influence the culture around us to see Christ in us.

Christians ought not feel hopeless when they find themselves in difficult situations due to their commitment to Jesus. Like the believers to whom Peter wrote in the first century, we too have experienced new life in Christ. As God's Word, this Epistle speaks to us as well. Through Christ, we have hope beyond the grave. We have heaven awaiting us. In the meantime, our faith in Jesus keeps us protected until we join Christ at His coming. Allow this truth to provide you hope in the difficulties you face in your life.

Discuss

- ? What effect should these verses have on us when life presents difficult, trying times for us?
- ? What reasons to rejoice did Peter's readers have?

□ Salvation Revealed

1 Peter 1:10–12



Say: Our perspective is limited by our finite vision. We see only what is around us right now. We have memories of the past, but even the best or worst of memories fade with time. We have hope for the future, but that hope is not something we can see right now. God, however, has a full knowledge and understanding of past, present, and future. We can depend on Him to take us through the present and into the future where He will reveal himself more fully. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Today, those who have experienced salvation possess a hope for a future salvation as well. Peter spoke of the salvation that awaits all believers. He stated that Old Testament prophets spoke about it. They saw ahead of time the sufferings that would await the Messiah, as well as the glory that awaited Him (verses 10–11). Their message was not just for them and their present generation, but for all believers. They spoke a message inspired by the Holy Spirit (verse 12).

Considering what Peter stated here, however, believers can rejoice in the midst of their trying times. As Peter explained, this comes about by looking at things from a larger perspective. We can remind ourselves that all that comprises this life is only temporary in nature. The day will come when all Christians will experience the ultimate deliverance that awaits in eternity. By keeping this truth alive in our hearts, we can keep hope alive even when we endure the difficult portions of life. Until this ultimate salvation becomes reality, believers can rejoice, even when life throws troubles their way.

As you experience trials on the road of life, remind yourself that this world is not all there is. Keep reminding yourself that this life is temporary, while what awaits you is everlasting.

Discuss

- ? How do you feel when you experience suffering in your life?
- ? How does the thought of everlasting life influence your present feelings about life's difficulties?



Resource Packet Item 1: It's Not an Easy Road

Distribute to your class copies of the work sheet and provide your students time to finish the sheet individually, in small groups, or as a class.



Part 2—Holy Calling

□ Live Holy

1 Peter 1:13–16

Say: Perceptions of holiness have changed over the years. There have been times when sermons on holiness dealt primarily with clothing and other matters of outward appearances. But God calls His people to a deeper holiness, one that begins in the heart. It is inner holiness and consecration to God. It should be manifested outwardly, but does not begin there, and it is related to our anticipation of and preparation for the second coming of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians should not only recognize their need to rejoice in suffering. They should live in expectation of the Lord's return. Peter urged his readers not to take lightly the subject of the Lord's return. Instead, he wrote, they should regard Christ's return seriously (1 Peter 1:13). He went further, describing for his readers what a serious attitude toward the Lord's return involves. The Second Coming should influence believers away from returning to their old, godless way of living (verse 14). Believers serve the God who is holy, and He requires them to live holy as well (verses 15–16).

Holiness can be a difficult topic for the Christian to understand. We might describe it using terms such as “purify” and “sanctify,” as well as expressions like, “separate yourself.” And so, holiness speaks to pursuing that which is godly, as well as rejecting that which is corrupting or sinful. Perhaps we might look at holiness as seeking, through the power of the Spirit, to live as Jesus lived (see 1 John 2:4–6).



Resource Packet Item 2: Called To Be Holy

Distribute copies of the work sheet. Allow your students to complete the sheet individually, or use it as a group activity—assigning different students to read the Scriptures listed on the sheet, and completing the response to each Scripture as a group.

Discuss

- ? How would you define holiness?
- ? How would you reply to someone who believed they could reach a point of perfection, or perfect holiness, in their lives? Explain your answer.



Say: Following Jesus makes us different from the world around us. And this is as it should be. In Hebrews 11:13, those who lived by faith made a clear confession “that they were foreigners and strangers on earth” (NIV). They did not “fit in” with the cultures in which they lived. Likewise, we must be content to see ourselves as foreigners in the world around us, but the gospel we share can change the world! (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter gave his readers further advice regarding holy living in 1 Peter 1:17–21. They would one day stand before the holy God in order to be judged by Him (verse 17). As a result, Peter instructed them to see their time on the earth as a sojourn, a temporary journey (verse 17). Realizing this, he urged his readers to spend their time on earth living reverent lives before God. As they did this, their future security lay in their fear of (that is, their solemn and reverent respect for) God.

Peter wrote that godly living would also serve to remind them of the unique cost of their salvation—through the sacrifice of Christ. Peter put this in terms of redemption (verse 18). The term “redeemed” made reference to the price paid to free a slave from bondage. Peter told his readers that their freedom was not the result of religious traditions they followed, nor was it accomplished by a monetary payment (verse 18).

Instead, the blood of Jesus purchased their freedom, at the high cost of His death on the cross. Peter described Jesus as the perfect, sacrificial Lamb, “without blemish or defect” (verse 19, NIV). God the Father had always known He was going to accomplish man’s salvation at the sacrifice of His Son (verse 20).

Peter explained to his readers that they had placed their faith in God, who had raised Jesus from the grave, and had exalted Jesus in doing so (verse 21). And so, because these followers of Christ had placed their faith in Him, their hope regarding eternity lay in Him as well.

Peter’s advice to his readers made sense. The world they lived in was not their home. They were destined for eternity, even as their everyday lives were a journey that was often difficult. They were not to pattern their living after the customs and habits of the world around them. They instead needed to focus their living on pleasing God, for they would one day stand before Him.

Discuss

- ? What challenges does today’s culture present to those desiring to live a holy lives?
- ? How do you reconcile living your daily life with seeing yourself as a foreigner in today’s culture, someone who is just traveling through?



Resource Packet Item 3: Judgment of Works

Distribute to your class copies of the work sheet. Again, this sheet can be completed individually, or as a group. If time is running short, send it home with them for further study.

Part 3—Incorruptible Seed



□ God's Word Never Fails

1 Peter 1:22–25

Say: Obedience to God's Word is essential to living in the holiness that God desires of us. Yet, many people try to “get by” on what they hear in one sermon per week (or even less). We will struggle to obey God's Word unless we know what it says. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Purity of life proceeds from obedience to God's Word. Such obedience, in turn, should bring about a lifestyle that honors God through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. As Peter noted, Christian love should exemplify the feelings and motivations Christians have toward each other (1 Peter 1:22).

In our fallen human nature we cannot produce this kind of living. Thankfully, God provides new birth through His Word, enabling believers to live the kind of lives God expects. Without this new birth, a person cannot live the life God calls them to live. Instead, they will wither away as grass and flowers wither. But God's Word endures forever, along with those who live by His Word (verses 23–25).

The Bible accomplishes its purpose in our lives when we live out what we read and study. We must go beyond merely reading the Word as we would read any other book. It is God's Word to each of us. We should study with the thought, “What is this Scripture teaching me today?”



□ Salvation Brings Growth

1 Peter 2:1–3

Say: Parents expect their children to grow and learn, eventually becoming independent. But such maturation requires nourishment and teaching. Children are not born knowing how to walk and talk. Newborns are not ready to complete complicated calculus problems, even if they eventually become accomplished mathematicians. Likewise, newborn Christians require the spiritual nourishment and training found in God's Word and through interacting with other Christians. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Having experienced the new birth through Christ, as described in God's Word, believers should pursue godly living by ridding themselves of the things that inhibit such living (1 Peter 2:1). The Christian life cannot be lived without an intentional desire to seek it. Such a life begins to form as we crave the Word like a newborn craves its mother's milk (1 Peter 2:2). As we do this, we grow spiritually (verse 2), even as we grow in our appreciation for the goodness of God (verse 3).

Time spent in Scripture adds to the quality of a believer's life. When Christians obey the Word on a consistent basis, they will discover the path toward purity of life. By contrast, when anyone builds a life without the influence of the Bible, this person invites disaster.

In addition, a life lived in sincere obedience to Scripture produces a life that is in a constant state of growth and maturity spiritually. This creates a life that is less likely to succumb to spiritual or moral failure—all the more reason for a believer to spend consistent time with the Bible daily. This is not to say, of course, that life in Christ is perfect and will not include spiritual struggles. Rather, as we live for Christ, we grow in faith and strength to resist sin and walk strong in Christ.

Discuss

- ? What role does the Bible play in your daily life?
- ? How can you personally develop a craving for God's Word?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In a world that seems increasingly wicked, God offers hope. True hope cannot come from this temporary world. It will come only from faith in Christ and living in obedience to His Word. What a blessing it is to know such hope. So, when we feel discouraged by circumstances, we are wise to seek the Lord for a renewal of our hope and joy.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Send an encouraging note to someone who may be struggling to maintain hope.
- Take time to give a gift of some kind to someone who is homeless or needy, as a way to bring hope into that person's life.
- Pray for those who don't know the hope that Christ gives through salvation.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Enemies' Hopes Defeated.
Esther 9:1–5

Tuesday

Vain Hope; Delivering Hope.
Psalm 33:16–19

Wednesday

Hope in the Lord.
Jeremiah 17:7–8,13–17

Thursday

Hope in the Resurrection.
Acts 26:1–8

Friday

Hope During a Storm.
Acts 27:20–25

Saturday

Anchoring Hope.
Hebrews 6:9–20

Unit 2: Letters From Peter and Jude

May 2, 2021

LESSON 9

A Holy People

Study Text

1 Peter 2:4–17; 3:1–9

Central Truth

Christians must live as citizens of God's kingdom, not worldly kingdoms.



Key Verse

1 Peter 2:11

I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul (KJV).

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the importance of living a holy life.
- Accept how holy living should impact the Christian walk in relation to the world.
- Put holy living into practice in everyday life.

Introducing the Study

Say: Last week's lesson touched on the concept of holiness, and this week we are focusing on the practical aspect of God's people as a holy people. Peter gave his readers specific instructions on how to live holy. We would do well to adopt the same standards he presented to them.

Opening Activity—Holy Living

Ask: How has the Church's perception of holiness changed over the past several years? Is the change positive, negative, or a mix of both? How can individual Christians exemplify holiness?

Say: Believers sometimes decry the unholy state of our world. Yet all too often, we become caught up in being entertained by or even participating in unholy activities. This does not mean that Christians should become legalistic about trivial matters, but it does mean that we must set an example of holy living for those around us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The concept of "holiness" may seem forgotten in our culture today. Movies, television, and other media often utilize suggestive scenes, innuendo, and more. Standards of speech and behavior in the public arena are far less constrained than in times past.

As we ponder the unholy state of our society, we ought not be surprised. Those who do not follow Christ will certainly not follow His Word. Yet the state of society is all the more reason for Christians to consider what the Bible says about being holy and living a holy lifestyle. What Peter wrote in the Scriptures in this study can help us understand what it means to be holy, and to live holy lives.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Peter 2:5. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

2:9. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;

10. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14. Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

3:1. Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;

2. While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

7. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

8. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

New International Version

1 Peter 2:5. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2:9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

10. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

12. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

13. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,

14. or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

16. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

3:1. Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,

2. when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

7. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

8. Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

9. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Part 1—Chosen by God



□ The Living Stone

1 Peter 2:4–8

Say: Peter refers to Jesus as a “living Stone.” People may choose to accept Him as the Son of God and receive salvation, or to reject Him, which leads to judgment. As the cornerstone, He is the basis for our lives and for the Church. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter wrote to people who were continually drawing near the Lord Jesus. He referred to Jesus as “a living Stone,” rejected by some, but priceless in God’s sight (1 Peter 2:4). Isaiah wrote about God laying a “foundation stone” in a city called Zion (Isaiah 28:16), which is mentioned in the Bible more than 150 times.

In Scripture, Zion referred primarily to Jerusalem (Psalm 87:2–3) or specifically the mountain of Jerusalem, and as such it extended to similar concepts, such as the Old Testament temple (Psalm 2:6), God’s people (Isaiah 60:14), and even “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22, NIV).

Peter related “Zion” to the original audience of his writing, in 1 Peter 2:4–8. He pictured them (and all Christians) as “living stones, [who] are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (verse 5, NIV). In this sense, Christians are like the temple, the dwelling place of God, which the apostle Paul also described in 1 Corinthians 6:19. (Note that “house” is commonly used in Scripture to refer to the temple.)

Jesus is the cornerstone of this house, (verses 6–7). This is fitting in that the cornerstone forms the basis upon which the whole house is measured and constructed. Also, here the term “cornerstone” can also be taken to mean “keystone,” which forms the center of an arch and therefore, enables it to bear a tremendous amount of weight, which the individual stones could not bear in themselves.

For those who do not believe in Jesus, He is a stumbling stone (verse 8). Unbelief, then, leads to stumbling, as the unbeliever follows the way of sin rather than the way of Christ, and therefore is subject to the consequences of sin.

Discuss

- ? Explain the role of Jesus as a cornerstone in the believer’s life.
- ? How can Jesus be both a cornerstone and a stumbling stone?



Resource Packet Item 1: Analogy Analysis

Distribute the work sheet, and divide your class into small groups, assigning each of the three analogies to a different group. Give them a few minutes to read the Scriptures and answer the accompanying questions, then discuss each analogy.



□ Chosen People

1 Peter 2:9–10

Say: Do you remember playing games as a child when two team captains took turns choosing the players for their team? It was exciting to be chosen for the team. As Christians, God has chosen His team and it consists of those who

have accepted the gift of salvation. Unlike the team captains from elementary school, He isn't looking for people who are already "good players." He's looking for people who will receive His Son, Jesus, to make Him the Lord of their lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The conjunction "but" informs us that a contrast begins in 1 Peter 2:9. There is, of course, a very significant difference between how Christians receive Jesus and the unbelief of those who refuse Him.

In 1 Peter 2:9–10, Peter described God's people (then and now) in five ways. First, they are a chosen generation, or chosen people. They are chosen by God to be His people. While the enemy may tempt believers to question their worth, God values them and sent His only Son, Jesus, to redeem them as His own.

Second, Christians are a royal priesthood. They have dignity and position through Christ. As believers, we are included in this and have a corporate role in worship, prayer, and ministry to others.

Third, Christians are a holy nation. The word "holy" indicates separation from sin and dedication, or consecration, to God. In both of Peter's Epistles, he emphasized holy living, calling on believers to turn away from sinful practices and live so as to honor and please the Lord.

Fourth, Christians are a "peculiar people" (verse 10, *KJV*). Peculiar here is used in the sense of "belonging exclusively to" rather than as being "odd" or "strange" (seen in the NIV translation as "God's special possession"). They are a people purchased for God's own special possession.

Fifth, Christians have now become the people of God. Although they did not previously have God's mercy, now they do. It has transformed them.

Note that verse 9 clearly states Christians are to declare God's praises. The transformed lives and holy living of His people are to be a witness to the world of God's love and power. God has brought believers out of the darkness of sin. As sinners, people are outside of God's family. Because of His mercy, they can belong to Him (verse 10). God desires Christians to share their testimony with others.

Discuss

- ? How should the realization that you have been chosen by God affect the way you live your life daily?
- ? What are the five ways that Peter describes the people of God? Committing this verse to memory can help you remember who you are in Christ.

Part 2—Sojourners, Pilgrims, and Servants

□ Set a Good Example

1 Peter 2:11–12



Say: If you have traveled internationally you have likely been in a situation where you felt as if you just didn't fit in. You didn't understand the language and customs around you, and you may have looked different from the people around you. As people of God navigating our world, we are called to view ourselves as strangers and foreigners. We shouldn't even try to "fit in."

Instead, we should be actively inviting those around us to join the family of God and prepare to live with Him, just as we will do someday. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter went on to describe believers as “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2:11, KJV; “foreigners and exiles,” NIV). These terms not only spoke of how believers had to live then, but how believers must see their lives now. The word “stranger” indicated how Peter’s original readers ought to view themselves. They were “foreigners” (verse 11, NIV) in the culture they lived in—sojourners, just traveling through, rather than permanent residents in this world. The word “pilgrim” likewise indicated that they lived in a culture that was not their own. These believers had made themselves a home in this world, but they needed to keep in mind that their true home lay elsewhere, in heaven. In the meantime, they neither belonged to the world they lived in, nor were they a part of the culture in which they lived.

This kind of worldview requires certain commitments of believers. They must resist the carnal desires unbelievers around them might readily accept (verse 11). Peter explained the problem with yielding to such desires: They would ultimately clash with spiritual desires, as such desires “wage war” against the souls of believers (verse 11, NIV). This is a good reminder that evil can be an active force at work against us. But we can avoid needless inner conflict by rejecting the sinful things that bring about this inner war.

Peter further emphasized the importance of living godly lives (verse 12). Good, godly living would have a very real and positive impact in the godless world in which believers live. While unbelievers may not accept the godly life they see, and even jeer it now, they might one day celebrate this lifestyle. This implies that the godless may one day be converted through the example of the godly living of believers.

Discuss

- ? How does being a believer impact the way you interact with the people around you?
- ? What examples can you give of times when you have been a stranger or foreigner in your own culture?



Resource Packet Item 2: Not of This World

Distribute copies of the case study. Allow the students to read the study, and answer the questions at the end as individuals, or complete the study as a group activity.



Live in Submission and Freedom

1 Peter 2:13–17

Say: Submission and freedom seem like contrasting terms. Since Christ brings freedom, it seems contradictory to talk about submission, especially submission to government, even when that government may oppose Christianity. Let’s look at what Peter had to say. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter moved forward to the matter of the Christian's relationship to government in 1 Peter 2:13. Here he called on believers to submit themselves to government. He said this knowing that government stood in opposition to Christianity in his day.

This command can be difficult to follow, or even to understand, especially in countries where the Christian faith directly conflicts with the government. Christians face persecution in many areas of the world, and in many other areas their views are mocked in the public arena. Even when we face difficulty, God calls us to honor Him with our lives—which means paying proper respect to governments even when we disagree with them, as well as enduring the consequences of an oppressive government. Such realities ought also to compel us to pray for the persecuted church.

So, how do we know whether we should submit to an ungodly authority or resist, based upon our allegiance to God? Here is a basic principle: Submit to authority except when laws lead to disobedience of God. Living as law-abiding citizens is God's will for believers (1 Peter 2:15). By doing good, Christians can silence the criticisms of those who foolishly assume living for God means people are not able to meaningfully contribute to society.

Peter then called on believers to live as people who are free (verse 16), a reference to freedom from bondage to sin and no longer following their own selfish wills (see Romans 8:1–2). Many people think of freedom as being able to do whatever they want. However, for the Christian, “freedom” means freedom from sin, guilt, and shame, and freedom to serve Christ. This freedom must not be used to cover up or excuse wrong behavior, such as refusing to pay taxes or failing to show proper respect to those in places of authority.

Discuss

- ? How can a Christian submit to government when government opposes the beliefs of Christians?
- ? How can believers practice good citizenship with the realization that they live as “pilgrims” in their culture?

Part 3—Submissive and Loving

□ Submit in Marriage

1 Peter 3:1–7



Say: Submission is important for a successful marriage, but it doesn't require anyone to be a doormat. Instead, it is a matter of mutual respect. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter also provided teaching to married couples (1 Peter 3:1–7). First, he addressed wives, instructing them to submit to their husbands (verse 1). This word refers to a voluntary adjustment of one's actions in response to an authority that is recognized as proper. If the husband is not a Christian and does not obey the Word, he may be won to the faith by the wife's behavior and respectful attitude (verses 1–2). Note that the word “conversation” (verse 2, κῆν) does not refer to how we talk, but our manner of living.

Peter also noted that the inner beauty of the heart is more valuable to God than the limited value of external adornment (verses 3–4). This does not mean things like makeup and jewelry are wrong. However, the value of inner beauty is superior to external beauty. Peter noted the Old Testament matriarch Sarah as an example for Christian wives to follow (verses 5–6). Sarah followed her husband Abraham’s leadership even when she could have used fear of the unknown and possible dangers as an excuse not to be submissive to her husband. Fear is a natural human response, but it can also become an excuse for not doing what God wants. Women who overcome fear with faith and do what is right in God’s sight are considered daughters of Sarah.

Verse 7 examines the husband’s responsibility in the area of marriage. It should be noted that the word “weaker” is a reference to physical strength. Although most husbands are physically stronger than their wives, this does not mean the husbands are morally stronger or stronger in character—sometimes, in fact, the opposite might be true. Husbands are to respect their wives as co-heirs of salvation. A man who does not show respect toward his wife should not expect to be regarded as mature in faith. His disrespect toward her can even hinder their prayers.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the wife’s submission to her husband?
- ? How would you describe the husband’s respect for his wife?



Love One Another

1 Peter 3:8–9

Say: Jesus taught that His disciples would be known by their love for one another. Peter was present to hear that teaching, and he continued to teach that same concept. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Sometimes believers define the Christian life in terms of the amount of time they spend in Bible reading, prayer, or attending worship services. But these things represent only outward, personal acts and fruit of the Christian life. Peter made it clear in 1 Peter 3:8–9 that our interactions with and treatment of others are critical. The believer’s relationships in church, marriage, business, and friendships should be seen as opportunities to bless others.

Spiritual growth also dictates that Christ’s influence on us be seen in these relationships with others. Believers are to be “of one mind” (1 Peter 3:8, *κν*; “like-minded,” *NIV*). That doesn’t mean that their thoughts are always uniform. Rather, it points toward a commitment to unity and compassion, tenderheartedness, and mutual love. This will happen only as people in a congregation get to know each other and work through their various preferences, differences, and conflicts that arise. Through this process, the qualities of sympathy, love, compassion, and humility emerge. They develop and are expressed through interaction with others. In light of Peter’s teaching, believers should see unity as part of God’s fundamental intention for the Church.

Discuss

- ? What behaviors distinguish believers from unbelievers?
- ? How should differences of opinion between believers be resolved?



Resource Packet Item 3: Love in Action

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to prayerfully think of a loving action they can do and write it in the space provided. Encourage them to follow through by implementing the action they have written.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Ask volunteers in your class to apply this lesson to their church. Allow them to say what unity in the church requires of them. Also ask them what submission within the church requires of those who attend your church.

Ask your class to pray for your church leadership team. This would include the pastor and the pastoral team, along with the teachers and other educational staff. If there should be any disunity among your church family, make this a focus of this prayer time as well. Urge your class to continue lifting up your church in prayer in their personal prayer times throughout the week.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Memorize 1 Peter 2:9, and reflect on how you can live it out in your daily life.
- Pray daily for your government leaders.
- Look for a tangible way to show Christ's love to someone outside your family and close friends.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Sanctified Day.
Exodus 16:22–30

Tuesday

Sanctified Priest.
Leviticus 22:10–15

Wednesday

Sanctified People.
Joshua 3:1–5

Thursday

Sanctified Through Truth.
John 17:11–19

Friday

Sanctified Completely.
1 Thessalonians 5:16–23

Saturday

Sanctified by Christ's Blood.
Hebrews 13:10–15

Unit 2: Letters From Peter and Jude

May 9, 2021

LESSON 10

A Steadfast People

Study Text

Acts 4:1–20; 1 Peter 3:13 through 5:11

Central Truth

By God’s grace, Christians can endure fiery trials.



Key Verse

1 Peter 5:10

The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you (KJV).

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Help students learn how to overcome the challenges of imminent trials.
- Encourage students to explore how they can face suffering for the sake of Christ, while maintaining humility and commitment to Jesus.
- Lead students to adapt the concepts of today’s study into their everyday lives.

Introducing the Study

Say: We all appreciate people we can depend on, people who are not easily swayed by whoever is talking to them at the time. In a world where social media shapes attitudes and people often measure their own value by the number of “likes” they get on a particular post, it is easy to become more concerned about what others think than about what God wants. He calls us to be steadfast in our faith, no matter what is happening around us.

Opening Activity—Steadfastness

Ask your students to name individuals they know who are steadfast in their faith or those who are steadfast in some other way. Ask them to give examples of what those people do to “make the list.”

Say: What does it mean to be steadfast in faith? Does the idea of steadfastness seem to be an important quality in today’s world? Why can steadfastness be challenging for even a mature believer?

The term “steadfast” speaks to a quality of being adamant and unswerving in one’s beliefs and convictions. But when we consider the spiritual state of the world around us, it can become easy to wonder if we can even remain steadfast today. This concern is all the more reason to explore and ponder the Scriptures covered in this study. This is also an important reason to study all of the Scriptures. It is difficult to be steadfast in your beliefs if you are unsure of what those beliefs should be.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Peter 3:13. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14. But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16. Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

4:12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

14. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

5:6. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9. Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

11. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

New International Version

1 Peter 3:13. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

14. But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."

15. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

17. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

4:12. Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

13. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

14. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

15. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

16. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

5:6. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

7. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

9. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

11. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Part 1—Speaking Up



□ Do Not Be Afraid

1 Peter 3:13–17

Say: Have you ever been in a situation where you should say something to change the course of a conversation or to defend yourself or someone else, but fear kept you from speaking up? What kinds of fears might keep you from speaking up? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Persecution against Christians was widespread in the first century. As a result, Peter was writing to believers who faced ongoing opposition to their faith. Notice, then, as you read through 1 Peter 3:13–17, the references to specific actions and attitudes: Be eager to do good, consider yourself blessed if you suffer, do not be afraid, revere Christ, prepare to answer opposition. These steps, as well as others contained in these verses, go contrary to the natural human response to opposition. As such, they convey the reality that a Christian can have confidence in God even amid the worst of what life in this world has to offer.

Peter made it clear that Christians would face difficulties. In verses 13–14, he reminded his readers of the possibility of suffering for doing good. Such suffering was far better than suffering for doing evil. After all, evil ends in judgment, while serving the Lord leads to God's promises. This is why they need not become fearful in the face of threats.

The key to facing threatening situations without giving in to fear lies in one's relationship with Jesus Christ. Peter urged his readers to honor Jesus as Lord of their lives and stay prepared to answer those who questioned their testimony (verse 15). In giving their answer, Peter urged his readers to be gentle and respectful, which would ultimately protect them from slander (verse 16). Better to go through hard times because of good living, Peter emphasized, than to face hardship because of something evil they had done (verse 17). Furthermore, they could have peace to find good, helpful words because the Holy Spirit ministers to the people of God in such trying times (see Luke 12:11–12).

Discuss

- ? What would you say if you were mocked for your faith? What if you were threatened with imprisonment (or worse)?
- ? How can suffering be considered a blessing?



□ Peter Was Not Afraid

Acts 4:18–20

Say: When Peter wrote about opposition in his Epistle, he was speaking from experience. Not only in this passage from Acts 4 do we see Peter facing opposition; later, he was imprisoned (Acts 12:1–19), but was miraculously delivered in response to the prayers of believers. Sometimes, we may think the opposition to the Church is stronger now than ever before, but a study of Church history will show that the Church has always faced opposition. Yet God's plan is never thwarted. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Fear in the face of opposition can be understandable, but Peter met his opposition courageously. In Acts 4, Peter experienced hardship for doing good. He and John were facing the Sanhedrin—the highest court in Judaism—in the aftermath of the healing of a lame man. The Sanhedrin ordered the men to cease preaching or teaching about Jesus (Acts 4:18). Peter and John gave a simple answer: the Sanhedrin could decide for themselves their guilt or innocence, but Peter and John could only speak from their own experience (verses 19–20).

Peter responded in the way he described in 1 Peter 3. He showed no fear in the face of these accusations. Rather, he stood firm before the group, confident that he and John had obeyed God. He further showed respect in the way in which he answered these men.

Opposition is common for believers who dare to live out their faith in public ways. Yet no one needs to live in fear because of this. Instead, every Christian should look to Scripture to help them know the best way to respond to opposition. Whatever the response, each believer should stand firm and confident in his or her commitment to Jesus.

Discuss

- ? Do you feel fearful when you witness to someone? If so, why?
- ? Based on this portion of the study, how should you respond when you are faced with opposition?



Resource Packet Item 1: Fear in the Workplace

Distribute copies of the case study, and allow time to read it individually, and respond to the questions. Or, use the study as a classroom exercise. Follow this by leading your class in a discussion of their responses.

Part 2—Suffering in Christ’s Name

Rejoice in Suffering

1 Peter 4:12–16



Say: Suffering is never a pleasant experience; yet, Peter teaches that we can rejoice in suffering, especially if our suffering is because of our faith in Christ. Just think of how much He suffered for us as He gave up the glory of heaven, lived among humanity, and gave His life in the most humbling and brutal way in order to provide our salvation. Suffering for Him is a small way for us to identify with His sufferings. (Read Philippians 3:10–11 aloud, then share your highlights from the following text.)

It is natural for Christians to question life’s setbacks. After all, Scripture lists many promises of blessing for Christ’s followers. Since God is our all-powerful Heavenly Father, it seems reasonable to the human mind that He would prevent any disaster from happening to His children. But He does not always do this.

Peter did not get involved with any “if/then” questions about Christians’ suffering. Instead he took a three-step approach to the subject. First, he warned Christians not to be surprised if they should meet with a “fiery trial” (1 Peter 4:12,

κλν). Second, he directed believers' attention to their Savior, stating that Christians "participate in the sufferings of Christ" (verse 13, κλν). Third, he identified joy as the fitting response to such suffering (verse 13). Peter wrote about the issue of suffering for the cause of Christ.

We might wonder how joy is possible during suffering. This kind of thinking could even seem to be a denial of reality, a desire to convince oneself that the suffering isn't really happening. But Peter was not advising believers to deny their pain. Rather, he wanted Christians to change their focus from their pain to the blessings of their relationship with Christ (verse 14). Peter would never have denied the suffering Jesus experienced on the cross. Nor was he advising Christians to mindlessly claim they were happy in the middle of life's sorrow and pain. Jesus was willing to faithfully obey His Father to bring about the plan of salvation. Followers of Christ are also part of that plan and will receive God's eternal reward when Christ's glory is revealed (verse 13).

Our response to life's difficulties will be determined by whether we limit ourselves to our human viewpoint or identify with God's plan. We can see only the present. Our Heavenly Father knows the future. He knows the endless blessing that awaits all who will identify with His Son, even to the point of persecution and enduring the world's attacks.

Yet we also must keep in mind that it is also possible to suffer because of wrong choices we have made. Peter warned Christians that this kind of suffering is not a reason for the joy he had just described, listing sinful choices that can carry harsh consequences (1 Peter 4:15). It is interesting that both murder and being a busybody are mentioned, reminding us that while we can be judged by civil authorities, seemingly small sins can ultimately bring judgment from God. Any kind of sin in the believer's life is unacceptable.

On the other hand, any suffering that Christians face in serving God is not a cause for shame but an opportunity to glorify God (verse 16). While it may seem strange to suffer for doing what is right and pleasing to God, Christians must endure, entrusting themselves to God.



Resource Packet Item 2: Responding to Suffering

Distribute copies of the work sheet. Divide your students into small groups and assign one of the Scriptures to each group. Then allow time to share their responses in class.

Discuss

- ? What kinds of suffering are not cause for rejoicing?
- ? Should we rejoice in suffering that is not specifically for the cause of Christ, yet is not related to sin? Explain your answer.

Commit Yourself to God

1 Peter 4:17–19

Say: Peter concluded his message to his suffering readers in 1 Peter 4:17–19. He referenced Proverbs 11:31, which says, "If the righteous receive their

due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!” (NIV). He then challenged his readers to commit themselves to God, even when suffering, and to continue to do good. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter connected present suffering for the cause of Christ with the everlasting results of how a person has responded to Christ (verses 17–18). When God finally judges all humankind, those who are faithful to the gospel, those who are “God’s household,” will be saved (verse 17, NIV). Although Peter did not specifically describe the destiny of those who do not follow Christ, his intended message is clear: They will have no hope when they stand before God.

Peter’s words deliver an important message to Christians: If we suffer because we are living according to God’s will, we can entrust our future to God (verse 19). He is our faithful Creator. His plan for our lives has always included everlasting blessings in heaven that we cannot begin to imagine.

There is an old saying that goes, “Trouble troubles us all.” Even while living faithfully for God, we may face troubling times. Such events sometimes come *because* we are living for God. Believers and non-believers both will find themselves suffering. Unlike the unbeliever, however, the believer can rejoice in suffering, knowing that this is the same path Jesus walked. In times of suffering, Christians must continue to live faithfully for God. The outcome of living this way far surpasses what awaits unbelievers in eternity.



Resource Packet Item 3: Judgment

Distribute to your class copies of the work sheet “Judgment.” This sheet presents Scriptures dealing with judgment of non-believers as well as believers. Allow your class time to complete the sheet. Also take time to answer any questions that may arise from the sheet.

Discuss

- ? How can suffering build your faith and help you become more committed to God?
- ? How can your response to suffering be a witness to unbelievers?

Part 3—Staying Humble and Standing Firm

Submit to One Another

1 Peter 5:1–5



Say: In this final chapter of his first Epistle, Peter instructed church leaders as well as other believers. Leading God’s people is a great responsibility, and Peter used the metaphor of a shepherd to illustrate this. We must recall that Jesus himself is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), and church leaders are representing Him. Peter also gave an assortment of relevant instructions to believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter began this passage by addressing church leaders (1 Peter 5:1–5). Pastors and other leaders must not serve out of greed, but from the desire to help people

grow spiritually (verse 2). They must also guard against the inappropriate use of power and money. Note the specific instruction of “not lording it over those entrusted to you” (verse 3, NIV). Spiritual leaders are to live as examples of humble service. Those who strive to get their way through threats, emotional pressure, or abuse of power or authority are not the good shepherds God desires to be over His flock. But for those who will lead and serve faithfully, there is a “crown of glory” waiting as their reward (verse 4).

It is evident that Peter included the concept of submission in his words, as verse 5 states: “In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (verse 5, NIV). Submission has been taught throughout this Epistle (see 2:13,18; 3:1,7). In 5:5, Peter told young men to submit to the elders in the church. Rather than allow a generational divide to occur, the younger people in the church are to show respect to their elders. Yet this is not to be one-sided; all are to submit to one another, elders and youth, and be humble toward one another by putting others first (verse 5; see also Proverbs 3:34).

Discuss

- ? How does the metaphor of a shepherd inform what God expects of leaders?
- ? List the various instructions given to believers in this passage. How can these be applied in your daily life?



God Will Exalt Those Who Stand Firm

1 Peter 5:6–11

Say: A steadfast faith will stand up under the pressures of persecution and temptation. Peter reminded us that we do have an enemy, but we have a God who is bigger. We can rely on Him to help us stand our ground in the face of the enemy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God will exalt those who are humble (1 Peter 5:6). This does not mean God will elevate them in the eyes of their peers. Rather, He will lift them up when the trials of this life weigh them down. This phrase also reminds Christians that humility is highly regarded in God’s eyes, even when humbling circumstances threaten to defeat or discourage us.

Peter’s invitation in verse 7—to cast our cares upon the Lord—reminds us of Christ’s foundational teachings about relying on Him (see Matthew 6:25–34; 11:28). We are encouraged to lay our anxieties in His hands, trusting Him to take care of us. We can find encouragement in knowing that just as the persecuted first-century Christians trusted the Lord, we can rely on Him as well.

Even with such reassurances, Peter wrote of spiritual alertness, recognizing the reality of our spiritual adversary, the devil (verses 8–9). We are not to passively hope that the devil will leave us alone, but instead guard against temptation.

In verses 10–11, Peter evoked the image of a soldier who stands his ground when the enemy attempts to overcome him. Such resistance is active but not

self-centered. Rather, we are to stand strong in our faith, not trusting in our own will or determination to get through trials. When those struggles ultimately come to an end, we will be in His presence, glorifying His name, forever.

Discuss

- ? How do you distinguish real humility from false humility?
- ? What does it mean to be spiritually alert?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Paul encouraged Christians to continue in the faith (Colossians 1:23). In today's study, Peter urged Christians to remain steadfast in their faith. When people experience salvation, they place their faith in Jesus Christ. Such a commitment, in turn, must be followed by a life lived with a steadfast faith in Christ's lordship over their lives. The Bible says nothing about what we might call "easy-believism." Instead, it calls everyone to a steadfast faith in the Son of God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Take inventory of your life in light of this study. What corrections need to be made?
- Confront any fears that you have about standing up for your faith, trusting God to help you overcome all fear.
- Pray for believers around the world who are currently suffering for their faith.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Steadfast Heart.
Psalm 57:1–11

Tuesday

Steadfast Expectation.
Psalm 62:1–12

Wednesday

Steadfast God.
Daniel 6:19–27

Thursday

Steadfast Determination.
Luke 9:51–56

Friday

Steadfast Faith.
Colossians 2:4–10

Saturday

Steadfast Confidence.
Hebrews 3:12–15

Unit 2: Letters From Peter and Jude

May 16, 2021

LESSON 11

An Empowered People

Introducing the Study

Say: “Empower” has been a popular word in secular leadership circles for many years. For example, we hear a lot about empowering employees to make decisions or take actions. While it is probably true that empowered employees are usually happier and more productive, the source of employee empowerment is from the supervisor, business owner, or another human being and is usually based on how much that employer trusts the abilities of the employee. But God empowers His people with the Holy Spirit who resides within them and gives them power far beyond their own abilities and understanding.

Opening Activity—Power Sources

Ask: What different kinds of power can you name that we use in our daily activities? What happens if that power supply is interrupted for some reason?

Say: Many things require some kind of power in order to accomplish their intended purposes. Things like hand tools are utterly worthless without human power.
(Share your highlights from the following text.)

You may give little thought to the battery that sits under the hood of your car. But without the energy it provides, you would find yourself walking to your destination instead of driving to it.

Likewise, we need the power of God in order to walk with Him every day. Without His power, our walk will become stymied. Fortunately, God does provide us with the power to live rightly, overcoming temptation and pursuing godliness. Today’s study focuses on the power God offers His people. It also shows us how we access this power.

Study Text

Matthew 17:1–5; 2 Peter 1:1–21

Central Truth

God calls and empowers Christians to overcome.



Key Verse 2 Peter 1:3

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (KJV).

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Help students understand the necessity of God’s power in their lives.
- Guide students in understanding their calling as a believer.
- Challenge students to rely on God’s presence and God’s Word in the way they live every day.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

2 Peter 1:2. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3. According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6. And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7. And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

10. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

12. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

16. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

17. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

18. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

19. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

20. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

21. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

New International Version

2 Peter 1:2. Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

3. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

4. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;

6. and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;

7. and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

10. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble,

11. and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

12. So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have.

16. For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

17. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

18. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

19. We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

20. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.

21. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.



Say: In attempting to live by the Law, the people of Israel proved that no one could fulfill God's purposes through human effort. Peter's own life had shown that even his good intentions to never forsake Jesus—even to the point of death—could not be carried out without the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus God provides the power we need to live for Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Peter began his second Epistle proclaiming the gospel's blessing on all who will accept it. Though he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, who had served alongside the Lord during His earthly ministry, Peter recognized that all followers of Christ have "received faith as precious as ours," just like those who had been closest to Jesus (2 Peter 1:1, NIV). The gospel recognizes all people equally. Peter prayed a blessing of God's grace and peace on every believer who would read his Epistle (verse 2).

Peter's prayer shows the spiritual growth that had taken place in his life. Had Peter written his Epistle earlier in his Christian life, he may not have been so generous. Peter, like the other Jewish Christians of the Jerusalem church, had once viewed the gospel as reserved for the Jews. But God intervened to connect Peter with the family of the Roman centurion Cornelius in order to show the apostle that Jew and Gentile alike can receive salvation (see Acts 10).

Peter had come to understand that God provides everything necessary to change any life. This is done through His divine power and through our knowledge of, or relationship with, the Lord (2 Peter 1:3). God sovereignly makes possible the miracle of salvation. He is the One who calls us to a life that reflects His heavenly characteristics and goodness (verse 3).

Anyone who comes to Christ in faith can experience new life. That is just the beginning. God has also provided "great and precious promises," so that we can partake of the divine nature in order to become more and more like Christ (verse 4).

Peter's words remind today's believer that Christian character depends on God's power. Experiencing this power demands commitment on the part of the believer as well. Christians must remain open to God's power in everyday living, as they continue in reading, studying, and applying God's Word to their lives. Developing godly character is no small matter. Neither is the experience of God's power. Each contributes to spiritual maturity. Each produces a life that blesses others, and blesses us as well.

Discuss

- ? How does Peter's emphasis on the gospel's availability for all impact your personal view of, and participation in, missions activities?
- ? Peter's spiritual growth is apparent when you compare his Epistles with actions in his life in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts. How would you describe your own spiritual journey in terms of growth over the past few months or years?



Say: While salvation is entirely a gift of God, and while God provides empowerment through the Holy Spirit for necessary spiritual growth, such growth is not a passive process. Peter tells us to make every effort to grow in our faith. God will help us apply the characteristics Peter lists in 2 Peter 1:5–9 as we make those efforts. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 1: The Formula for Christian Character

Distribute the work sheet as you teach verses 5–7. Take time go over the characteristics listed, and discuss the application questions at the bottom of the sheet.

Christians need not doubt that God saves them completely. Followers of Christ need not worry that their salvation is dependent on their own actions. Christ accomplished God's plan for salvation once and for all through His death and resurrection, and multitudes through the ages have received everlasting life as a result.

Yet there is also a practical aspect to the life of faith. Peter taught Christians of their need to pursue the blessings that salvation makes available to them. He urged, "Make every effort to add to your faith goodness" (2 Peter 1:5, NIV). Peter never said human effort is involved in salvation, for salvation is entirely a miracle of God's grace, but spiritual growth calls for spiritual exercise. Our faith grows as we dedicate ourselves to obeying God and placing Him at the center of our lives. In a sense, this is like the miracle of physical life. We cannot take credit for the physical body God gives us. But each of us must take the responsibility to exercise the body to grow in a healthy manner. The person who refuses to take care of the body can eventually endanger his or her own life.

Although Peter did not clearly describe the consequences of unfruitfulness, he hinted at them in his reference to spiritual fruit-bearing. Christians who pursue the qualities Peter listed in verses 5–7 will be kept from being "ineffective and unproductive in [their] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 8, NIV). Yet Christians who neglect these qualities can be both barren and unfruitful (verse 9). Peter warned that they will be like people who cannot see anything in the distance and so keep their eyes only on what is close to them, which is the sin and worldliness that characterize the present age. They risk forgetting they have been cleansed from their sins. The only way to avoid such danger is to keep growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discuss

- ? How do you balance depending on God's power to develop Christian character and your own efforts at developing Christian character?
- ? What role does Bible reading and study play in the development of a solid, Christian character?

Part 2—Divine Calling



□ Confirm Your Calling

2 Peter 1:10–11

Say: In 2 Peter 1:10–11 (NIV), Peter again used the words, “make every effort,” this time in relation to confirming our calling in Christ. Yet we are not doing it alone, and we need not be discouraged, because God’s rich welcome awaits us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As believers continue the process of growing in the character traits described earlier in 2 Peter 1, they grow in their assurance of salvation as well. While “blind” Christians—like those described in verse 9—risk succumbing to spiritual failure, those described in verse 10 mature in their walk with God. This maturation process brings assurance of their relationship with God

There is a common debate in the Church world today concerning the eternal security of believers. That is, “Can a genuine Christian forfeit his or her salvation?” During this debate, 2 Peter 1:10 is often brought into the discussion. Peter’s encouragement to “make every effort to confirm your calling and election” and the promise “if you do these things, you will never stumble” (NIV) seem to include the possibility of falling as well as the comforting reality of assurance. To understand, perhaps we need to note that Peter pointed out the realities of lifelong growth in service to Christ and the everlasting results of such service. The believer who lives a faithful life will receive an abundant welcome into everlasting fellowship with God (verse 11).

We must also be willing to recognize an inherent danger in this endeavor. Too often, Christians see themselves as tired combatants in a spiritual struggle, hoping for survival. To them, heaven seems a goal just barely within reach. But this is not how Scripture describes the life of faith. It is much the opposite, in fact. Peter painted a picture of a Christian life lived to the fullest, walking in freedom and power with Christ, and with assurance that heaven’s glories await us.

Discuss

- ? How does increasing spiritual maturity impact a person’s assurance of salvation?
- ? How would you describe the “security” of believers? Why might a sense of “perpetual insecurity” be harmful to one’s faith?



Resource Packet Item 2: Sight and Blindness

Distribute copies of the case study to your class. Divide your class into small groups to read the study and complete the accompanying questions. If your class is small, you may want to read it as a group. Then discuss the questions as a class.



□ Remember Your Calling

2 Peter 1:12–15

Say: In these verses, we can sense that Peter longed for assurance that his readers would remember their calling and continue in the faith. He knew that

he would not always be there to remind them, so he wanted to drive the point home. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The gospel's rich truths bear repeated study and application no matter how well a believer may know them (2 Peter 1:12). Throughout his ministry, even to the end of his life, Peter was determined to urge Christians toward an ever-deeper walk of faith (verse 13).

The realities Peter emphasized in these verses only help us understand verse 10 all the more. To “make your calling and election sure” and “give diligence” (verse 10, *KJV*) point to continued development and practical expression of the Christian life. Peter, who at that time was a prominent leader in the Early Church, did not rest on his reputation as an apostle who had been taught by Jesus. In all the years since Christ's ascension, Peter had continued to grow in Christ. Jesus' final admonition to him had been to always love Him supremely and serve Him without distraction (see John 21:15–22). Clearly, this was Peter's passion.

Peter's commitment to the gospel was so strong that he was ready to lay down his life in service to Christ. To the very end of his days, he determined to build up other believers in their faith. Peter's legacy, even after his death, would continue to point people to Jesus (2 Peter 1:15).

Discuss

- ? What do you feel is the best way to keep yourself knowledgeable in the truth of the Bible?
- ? How do you apply the truths of Scripture in your everyday living?

Part 3—Divine Revelation

Delivered Through Eyewitnesses

Matthew 17:1–5; 2 Peter 1:16–18



Say: Peter emphasized the truth of what he was teaching, reminding his readers that he wasn't teaching cleverly created stories, but the gospel of Jesus Christ, of which he was an eyewitness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Any time a building is built, great attention is given to the foundation. A good, solid foundation gives stability to any structure. What is true of buildings is also true regarding the life of faith. A life built on the right foundation—God's Word—will enjoy a sense of security that it otherwise would not have. This is especially true in the spiritual realm.

We can make the mistake of building our lives on falsehood and sinful choices. Opportunities abound in today's world to engage in either, and all too often these things are depicted as normal—or even healthy. The same danger existed in Peter's day. Peter wrote his second Epistle to Christians plagued by false teachers. In 2 Peter 1:16, he reminded them, and us, that a Christian's faith does not rest on the deceptive stories common to false doctrine. These kinds of stories often mark the cults and “isms” prevalent today that have been created by cunning, inventive

minds. Such stories are falsehoods that lead those who accept them down a path to destruction.

Unlike false doctrine, Christian doctrine is drawn from the truths of the Bible. Instead of falsehood, it presents God's truth passed on through people, like the apostle Peter, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ (verse 16). They did not invent the teachings they related. They fellowshipped with Christ, listening to His teaching, and then passing it on in written form.

In verses 17–18, Peter related his unique and powerful personal eyewitness experience. The incident he described occurred during the transfiguration of Christ, recorded in Matthew 17:1–5 (see also Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). Peter's dramatic encounter reminds us that the human authors God used to write the Bible often wrote out of personal experience. Their teachings did not stem from human opinion. Instead they came about by inspiration of the Spirit, from the experience of those who had actually communed with God. Some even walked with Jesus Christ. We do not build our lives on fables when we build our lives on Scripture. Instead, we build on the solid foundation of truth. In doing this, we do not risk the shame and failure that await those who promote and follow falsehood.

Discuss

- ? How does Peter's explanation of his writing support the doctrine of inspiration?
- ? How can we recognize false teachings and avoid them?



Resource Packet Item 3: Building on the Right Foundation

Distribute copies of the work sheet and assign sections to small groups or to individuals. Have them read the Scriptures and answer the accompanying questions.



Provides Light for Living

2 Peter 1:19–21

Say: The inspiration of Scripture is an important part of Christian belief and practice. In 2 Peter 1:19–21, Peter defines inspiration and challenges his readers to pay attention to God's Word. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Peter 1:19, Peter presented Christ's followers with the proper response to the Word. Here, Peter applied to all of Scripture what he had previously said about his witnessing Christ's transfiguration. He called it "something completely reliable" (NIV). What makes the Word so certain is that it came to us through eyewitnesses. Because of this, and the fact the words were inspired by God, we do well to pay attention to God's Word (verse 19).

Peter's comparison of the Bible to a light shining in darkness illustrates this. One would be foolish to ignore a well-lit path and plunge along in darkness. Traveling through life without the guidance of God's Word is foolish as well. There are many voices offering spiritual advice and teaching. But the Bible stands far above even the best of these because the Bible was not created by the writers, (verse 20).

No one created the stories and instruction found in the Bible. Instead, each writer spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (verse 21).

The Holy Spirit laid the Word on the hearts of the writers and guided them as they wrote the words. This produced something far more than a religious book. What we have in the Bible is God's own Word. God speaks to us through its pages. We neglect it at our own peril. Conversely, we exercise great wisdom when we give its teaching the attention it deserves.

Discuss

- ? How can studying the Scripture empower you for service?
- ? What suggestion can you give from your own experience in reading God's Word concerning applying Scripture to daily living?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: When you put all the elements of the study together, the idea of hope emerges. A sure salvation provides a believer with hope for eternity. A holy calling gives a Christian hope for the present, through guidance about how to live today, in this present life. The incorruptible seed of God's Word provides hope for spiritual growth to those who take time to read, study, and obey its precepts.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Seek empowerment from the Holy Spirit through the Word as you go into each day.
- Find someone to encourage in his or her walk with God this week.
- Share your personal "eyewitness" salvation experience with an unbeliever this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God's Power in Egypt.
Exodus 9:13–17

Tuesday

God's Power in the Sanctuary.
Psalm 63:1–6

Wednesday

God's Power in the Wilderness.
Psalm 106:1–12

Thursday

Power for a Paralytic.
Matthew 9:1–8

Friday

Power on the Damascus Road.
Acts 26:12–18

Saturday

Power Given to Two Witnesses.
Revelation 11:3–12

Pentecost Sunday

May 23, 2021

LESSON 12

Be Filled with the Spirit

Introducing the Study

Say: Today is Pentecost Sunday, the celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit described in Acts 2. The same power that was given to the early disciples on that occasion is still given to believers today.

Opening Activity—Pentecostal

Ask your students what comes to mind when they hear the word “Pentecostal.” Write their answers on the board and look for ways to reference them as you lead the day’s discussion.

Say: For some people, “Pentecostal” brings to mind enthusiastic worship and displays of spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues and healing. Others see the word as a reference to Christians who value experiences over Scripture, and who adjust the teachings of the Bible to explain their experiences. Speaking in tongues is all that comes to mind for others when they hear “Pentecostal.” Today’s study will lead us to discover that Scripture teaches it is God’s will for every Christian to be filled with the Spirit. The Spirit empowers believers in Christ to live pleasing to God and to powerfully serve Him.

The Holy Spirit did not first begin to work among God’s people in Acts 2. The Spirit was active throughout history from the time of creation. This lesson will look at the work of the Spirit as foreshadowed in the Old Testament and lived out in the Church today.

Study Text

Numbers 11:10–29; Acts 2:1–17, 41–47; 4:31–35; 2 Corinthians 3:1–8; Galatians 5:22–26; Ephesians 5:18–21

Central Truth

Scripture commands Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit.



Key Verse Ephesians 5:18–19

Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (KJV).

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Affirm that Scripture commands Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit
- Describe characteristics of Spirit-filled living
- Choose to serve the Lord in the power of the Spirit

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Numbers 11:25. And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

29. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!

Acts 2:4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Ephesians 5:18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Galatians 5:22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23. Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Acts 4:31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

2 Corinthians 3:5. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6. Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

New International Version

Numbers 11:25. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.

29. But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

Acts 2:4. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

16. "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."

42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Ephesians 5:18. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,

19. speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,

20. always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

21. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Galatians 5:22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23. gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Acts 4:31. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

2 Corinthians 3:5. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

6. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Part 1—Filled With the Spirit



□ Foreshadowed in the Old Testament

Numbers 11:24–29

Say: The work of the Holy Spirit is seen throughout the Old Testament. He is part of the story of creation (Genesis 1). Various individuals experienced the work of the Holy Spirit, including Joseph (Genesis 41:37–43), Bezalel and other artisans (Exodus 31:1–6), and King David (2 Samuel 23:1–5). Let’s look at one example from the Old Testament that foreshadows God’s people being filled with the Spirit. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Moses reported God’s plan to provide additional leaders to help him care for the Israelites (Numbers 11:24). Seventy elders were selected, men who had proven themselves as capable leaders. They gathered with Moses at the tent of meeting, where the Lord took of the Spirit that rested on Moses and placed the Spirit on these elders (verse 25). They prophesied as evidence that the Spirit had come on them. Verse 25 states that their prophesying “did not cease” (KJV). Newer translations state they “did not do so again” (NIV). The point is that God placed His Spirit on the elders to empower them for service.

Two of those selected to serve as elders were not at the tent of meeting at the appointed time (verse 26). However, the Spirit also came on them and they prophesied. Word quickly reached Moses concerning these two elders (verse 27), and Joshua advised Moses to stop them (verse 28).

Joshua may have been concerned Moses’ authority would be undermined. The two hadn’t followed the proper procedure, yet had been anointed for leadership. It could seem they were acting independently, eroding Moses’ position of leadership. But the Lord had just reminded Moses that He was truly in charge, and He had all power to provide what was needed (verses 16–23). So Moses did not feel his position was threatened when the Lord chose to put His Spirit on the two elders still in the camp. Moses recognized what it would mean if the Spirit would come on all God’s people.

The influence of the Spirit on the people could have been profound. They had been complaining, forgetting what life had really been like in Egypt. The Spirit’s working in them could have greatly improved their attitude and course.

Discuss

- ? Why might Joshua have wanted the two elders in the camp to be stopped from prophesying?
- ? Read Galatians 5:16–17. Discuss how the Spirit can affect the attitudes and behaviors of believers.



□ Fulfilled in the New Testament

Acts 2:1–4,16–17

Say: Regarding the infilling of the Holy Spirit upon all people, what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New. As Jesus instructed, the disciples remained in Jerusalem awaiting the baptism in the Holy Spirit

(Acts 1:4–5). On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered together (2:1). The Day of Pentecost was one of the three annual feasts that required the Jewish people to gather together, so Jewish people from around the world were in Jerusalem (2:5–11). For Christians, Pentecost would become associated with God giving the Holy Spirit to the Church of Jesus Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Three manifestations of the presence of the Holy Spirit took place as the disciples were gathered together (Acts 2:2–3). First was the sound of a violent wind. Second was the appearance of tongues of fire that rested on each of the believers. Both wind and fire are associated with the presence and power of the Spirit (John 3:8; Isaiah 4:4). Finally, the Spirit gave each of the believers that day the initial physical evidence of speaking in other tongues (Acts 2:4). People in the crowds in Jerusalem noticed what was happening. Peter explained that they were observing the fulfillment of God’s promise made through the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16–17).

In other accounts within the Book of Acts in which believers were filled with the Spirit, no mention of wind or fire occurs. But speaking in tongues does (Acts 10:44–46; 19:6). The account in chapter 8 does not state what the evidence was, but that there was observable evidence (8:17–19). It is reasonable to think the evidence was speaking in tongues. Other evidences of being filled with the Spirit should be seen in believers, such as the fruit of the Spirit and a holy lifestyle.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit is promised to believers by the Heavenly Father. The Book of Acts clearly shows that being filled with the Spirit is intended to be the norm for believers in Christ Jesus. The need for the infilling of the Spirit is just as vital today as it was then. Let us pray for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit.

Discuss

- ? What is the significance of the outpouring of the Spirit first taking place on the Day of Pentecost?
- ? Why do we believe speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit?



Resource Packet Item 1: Outpouring of the Spirit Foretold

Distribute copies of the work sheet and point out that what happened on the Day of Pentecost and on other occasions in the Book of Acts is the fulfillment of the Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus.

Part 2—Spirit-Filled Living

Spirit-Filled Community

Acts 2:41–47; Ephesians 5:18–21



Say: The events on the Day of Pentecost led to about 3,000 people becoming believers that day (Acts 2:41). The evidences of the outpouring of the Spirit, along with the Spirit-given message, brought conviction to hearts, and people responded to the invitation to repent and be baptized as followers of Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The short overview in Acts 2:42–47 of the early days of the newly born Church reveals characteristics that should be seen in all Spirit-filled communities. One characteristic is the desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. These believers devoted themselves to receiving instruction by the apostles and engaging in fellowship with other believers, which included the sharing of meals and praying together (verse 42).

A second characteristic of a Spirit-filled community is the power of the Spirit being displayed through believers (verse 43). This demonstration of the Spirit's power is a confirmation of the truth of the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:4–5; Hebrews 2:4).

Loving concern and compassionate giving also characterize a Spirit-filled community (Acts 2:44–45). Believers shared what they had so needs were met. Some sold property and possessions, sharing the proceeds. This may have been a response to the situation of these first believers. Many of them likely were among those visiting Jerusalem for the feast and had not planned for an extended stay. So others gave freely and generously to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet we also know that God desires that we care for one another in Christ.

A Spirit-filled community reflects joy (verses 46–47). These believers found joy in worshipping together. They were truly a community, not just a lot of people who met together one time a week to perform their religious duty. Other people noticed their joyous fellowship and held them in high regard. When the characteristics of a Spirit-filled community are evident, others will be saved and added to those who follow Jesus (verse 47).

Being filled with the Spirit affects how believers live. The Spirit gives them the freedom and desire to do what pleases the Lord. This is why the apostle Paul joined the “prohibitive” command of not being drunk with wine to the “receptive” command of being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Drunkenness and the behaviors that result from it are typical of those who have not experienced salvation. Sinners are mastered by sin, even though many deny its control. Those who are born of the Spirit discover they are free to follow the Lord's will. Transformed living is an expression of worship to God (Romans 12:1–2).

Music is also integral to Spirit-filled worship (Ephesians 5:19–20). References in the Old Testament to music begin in Genesis 4:21, which states that Jubal used stringed and wind instruments. Later, the Israelites sang a victory song at the Red Sea. Moses' final instructions to the Israelites were presented as a song. David wrote many of the psalms. Both Ezra and Nehemiah refer to singers and musicians in relation to worship following the return from exile.

Spirit-filled believers can use music to instruct and encourage one another and to express praise and thanksgiving from their hearts to the Lord. Paul identified three types of music in his letter to the Ephesians: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19). Many scholars understand psalms to refer to the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, which were regularly used in Jewish worship. Hymns likely refers to songs that glorify God and exalt His divine nature. Spiritual songs are likely more generic in nature but focus on spiritual matters. The Spirit often uses music to remind believers of how God is at work in their lives whatever their circumstances so they can thank Him “for everything” (Ephesians 5:20, NIV).

Paul also instructed believers to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (verse 21). He explained how submission to others is an expression of Spirit-filled living. The Spirit makes it possible for people to move past the “what’s in it for me” mentality to offering worship that focuses on blessing the Lord and others.

Discuss

- ? How are loving concern and compassionate giving expressed in Spirit-filled communities today?
- ? How does submitting to others relate to worship?

□ Spirit-Filled Character

Galatians 5:22–25



Say: The intended impact of Spirit-filled living is to grow to be more like Jesus—to be conformed to His image. As seen in Galatians 5, the Spirit bears fruit in believers’ lives so that they reflect the character of Jesus. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Fruit is the natural offspring of a plant, the product that it bears naturally. So the fruit of the Spirit naturally produces the character of Jesus in those He indwells. The love, joy, peace, and other fruit of the Spirit were evident in the life of Jesus and should also be seen in the lives of His followers.

The development of Christlike character can only take place when the flesh (sinful human nature) has been dealt with. Thankfully, that is exactly what the new birth (being born again) is all about, for those who put their faith in Jesus crucify or put to death “the flesh with its passions and desires” (verse 24, NIV). The Spirit makes people alive through faith in Christ, so as believers keep in step with, and follow the leading of, the Spirit, they grow to be more like Jesus (verse 25).

While unbelievers might exhibit qualities that resemble spiritual fruit, the flesh can never truly produce the fruit of the Spirit. So, how can we tell the difference? We must keep in mind that what the Spirit produces within us results in God receiving glory. But when the flesh is at work, people can become proud of themselves and pleased when others compliment their spirituality.

Discuss

- ? Why are these character qualities called fruit?
- ? How do we need to deal with our human nature in order for the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in our lives?



Resource Packet Item 2: Spirit-Filled Living

Distribute the work sheet. Encourage students to use it as a tool to evaluate themselves in characteristics that speak to living as Spirit-filled followers of Jesus Christ.

Part 3—Spirit-Filled Unity and Service



□ Unity in Facing Adversity

Acts 4:31–35

Say: Life in the Early Church was filled with challenges. In addition to the daily needs these new believers required for living, they also often experienced persecution (Acts 4:1–22). The Jewish authorities had commanded Peter and John not to speak in Jesus’ name anymore. These two apostles reported this to the believers, who responded by praying to God for boldness to proclaim the gospel and for Him to confirm their proclamation with manifestations of His power (verses 23–30). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Acts 4, when God’s people prayed for boldness amid adversity, God answered by shaking the place where they were gathered and filling them again with the Holy Spirit (verse 31). The shaking was evidence of the presence and power of God and assured the believers that the plots of those who opposed them would fail. The disciples continued to proclaim the gospel with boldness and power (verses 31,33).

The response to opposition and God’s working created a deeper unity (verses 32–35). Caring and generosity marked these Spirit-filled believers as from time to time those who had property sold it, contributing the funds to a common treasury. This unity, along with the anointed proclamation of the apostles, was a powerful testimony of the risen Savior.

Discuss

? Why might God shake the place the disciples were meeting, in addition to filling them again with the Holy Spirit?



□ Spirit-Empowered Service

2 Corinthians 3:5–6

Say: In his letters to believers in Corinth, Paul wrote much about the work of the Spirit in and through believers. He highlighted that the Spirit empowers believers for service (2 Corinthians 3:5–6). Only the power of God can change the human heart. Laws may suppress negative behavior, but they do not change the source of the behavior—the sinful nature. As believers minister through the Spirit, the gospel has the power to effect change in those who believe (Romans 1:16). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Spirit working through believers is what makes them competent as ministers, for the Spirit gives life. What happened in the Early Church can still be seen as believers live in unity, showing care and compassion, and boldly proclaiming the gospel. It is important that believers today pray for a renewed outpouring of the Spirit, as they tell the world about Jesus.

When unbelievers look at those who claim to be followers of Christ, do they see people who live in unity expressed through care and generosity? Believers following the leading of the Spirit should consider giving to be a blessing, not a burden. Giving that reflects unity should include time and talents.

Discuss

- ? Why is the power of the Spirit essential to gospel ministry?
- ? How can you be sure unbelievers see the power of the Spirit in your daily life?



Resource Packet Item 3: Preaching and Power

Distribute the work sheet and complete it as a class or in small groups. Discuss the answers in class.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Holy Spirit is available to all believers. If you have not received the baptism in the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, seek to receive this promised gift of the Father. Ask God, believing that He wants you to receive it (Luke 11:13). Have others pray with you (Acts 8:14–17). Trust God’s timing (Luke 24:49). Pray for the ongoing work of the Spirit in your life, renewing your desire to follow the Spirit’s leading and working through you to advance Christ’s kingdom.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your local church.
- Demonstrate generosity by giving to someone in need.
- Visit and pray with someone in your congregation who cannot attend church, such as an older Christian or someone who has a disability.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God’s Spirit in a Ruler.
Genesis 41:37–43

Tuesday

Artisans Enabled by the Spirit.
Exodus 31:1–6

Wednesday

Spirit-Anointed King.
2 Samuel 23:1–5

Thursday

Filled Again With the Spirit.
Acts 4:23–33

Friday

Gentiles Receive the Spirit.
Acts 10:44–48

Saturday

Living in the Spirit.
Galatians 5:16–25

Unit 2: Letters From Peter and Jude

May 30, 2021

LESSON

13

A Discerning and Persevering People

Study Text

2 Peter 2:1–9; 3:3–13; Jude 1:3–4, 17–23

Central Truth

Christians must adhere to and defend sound doctrine.



Key Verse

Jude 1:3

Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (KJV).

Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people (NIV).

Lesson Objectives

- Help students affirm that false teachings are just as much of a problem today as they were in the Early Church.
- Impress upon students the key signs of false teachings: They promote greed and spiritual rebellion, and often exalt the teacher even at the expense of sound biblical teaching.
- Challenge students to reject false teaching, choosing instead to live out godly truth as they look forward to the return of Christ.

Introducing the Study

Say: Today we look at the remainder of Peter's Second Epistle as well as the short Epistle of Jude. Both instruct God's people on how they should recognize and respond to false teachers, as well as how they can grow in faith and be prepared for Christ's soon return.

Opening Activity—False Teachings

Ask: Can you think of false teachings you have heard during your life? How did you determine that they were false, and what results came of those teachings? (Possible answers include cult leaders who have led people to bondage, or even harm, as well as people who have predicted a specific date for Christ's return, even though doing so is unbiblical.)

Say: Some false teachings are easy to recognize, but others take more discernment. God calls for us to study the Bible diligently so we can recognize and refute false teachings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

From the earliest years of Church history, some have misused Scripture to deceive others and promote their own agendas. Often, these individuals were successful because they were charismatic, persuasive, and included elements of truth in what they said. Yet none of this changed the reality that these men and women were false teachers.

Through the years, Christian leaders have taken great care to confront false teaching. In doing so, they have followed the instruction of Peter as well as Jude, in urging fellow Christians to contend for the faith, even as they stay strong in the face of trials. This lesson examines these critical instructions, in light of the challenges Christians face today.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

2 Peter 2:1. But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

2. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

3. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

9. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

2 Peter 3:3. Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

4. And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

8. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

13. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Jude 1:3. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

20. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

New International Version

2 Peter 2:1. But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

2. Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

3. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

9. If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

2 Peter 3:3. Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

4. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”

8. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

9. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

13. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Jude 1:3. Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.

4. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

20. But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,

21. keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Part 1—Rejecting False Teaching



□ Deception Is Subtle

2 Peter 2:1–3

Say: False teaching often does not begin with something that is blatantly wrong. Instead it begins with a concept that has just enough truth to sound right. A false teacher may even use Scriptures to support the teaching. But the Scripture may be taken out of context or twisted to fit that person's opinion. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

There is nothing new about false teaching. It goes as far back as the Garden of Eden. There, Satan used deception to twist God's clear commands and bring temptation (see Genesis 3). Adam and Eve fell into sin, and the human race has suffered under sin ever since. Every generation of God's people face deception in one form or another. False prophets led the people of Israel astray. Similarly, false teachers in the Early Church led people away from the truth of the gospel (2 Peter 2:1).

It is important to acknowledge the power of false teaching and recognize its true danger, so we can properly prepare ourselves to face it. Peter described the ability of false teachers to lead many people away from the truth (verse 2). When those who once followed the gospel become entangled in the sinful lifestyle encouraged through false teaching, their public example brings disgrace on the way of truth.

Peter identified human greed as the driving force behind false teaching (verse 3). Still today, false teachers often focus on their own gain, and they are willing to deceive and exploit people for their own benefit. A major characteristic of some modern cults is the complete devotion of cult members to a leader. The members use their strength and resources to satisfy the leader's demands. Those leaders misuse Scripture to justify their actions. Yet these dangers can be more subtle than a cult. Sometimes a popular teacher can appeal to a large audience within the church, even as he or she preaches a message that leads us away from God, His Word, and His plan for our lives.

Discuss

- ? What makes people, even some Christians, follow false teachers?
- ? Why is it important to be able to recognize false teaching when you hear it?



Resource Packet Item 1: Are You Vulnerable?

Distribute the information sheet. Depending on your time schedule and the needs of your class, you may discuss it or just send it home with them.



□ Judgment Is Promised

2 Peter 2:4–9

Say: False teachers are popular because their teachings are appealing to many people; however, they will face God's judgment. Peter gave several examples of such judgment, pointing out God's care and protection for those who are true to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Beginning in 2 Peter 2:4, Peter used several examples of divine judgment to warn against the dangers of false teachers. He wrote about God's judgment of angels (verse 4), perhaps a reference to angels that rebelled with Satan against God before human history began. This particular reference to being "sent . . . to hell" is a Greek word unique to this verse (*tartarotos*). This was a place Greeks regarded to be a kind of subterranean place of special confinement, lower than *hades*, where the condemned would be held in chains until divine judgment was meted out. And so, Peter's point was that these angels were being held specifically in anticipation of God's judgment upon them. Peter also pointed to the Flood (verse 5) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 6). Each of these examples painted a picture of extreme rebellion and subsequent judgment.

Peter's examples are not intended to show God as cruel or merciless. Rather, they show God to be consistent and impartial in His judgment of evil. By referring to Noah and Lot, Peter reminded people that God always saves those who trust in Him even as He judges the wicked (verses 5,7).

The example of Lot can be particularly encouraging. Lot was not upright in all his ways (verses 7–8), yet God rescued him from the circumstances brought on by his own poor judgment. The brief recording of Lot's life in Genesis is not that of a spiritual giant. His flaws are very obvious, and his most personal sins are recorded in unflinching honesty. Followers of Christ today can believe in the same grace Lot experienced. We struggle at times, but God is gracious.

When it becomes obvious that a poor choice was made, believers can call out for God's help. That doesn't mean believers can avoid every consequence of a mistake, nor does it mean we should take sin lightly. Lot lost much and suffered for his choice. God intervened on Lot's behalf while all who clung to their sinful actions perished. Just as God knows how to preserve the righteous, He knows how to deal with the wicked (verses 9–11). Peter stated that the wickedness of these false teachers included indulging the sinful nature and despising authority (verse 10). Their arrogance and attachment to fleshly lusts is a clear sign of false teachers.

Christians can avoid being deceived as we focus on a few important principles. First, we must ask questions. Godly leaders will not demand blind obedience to their teaching, but respectfully and sincerely explain the biblical basis for their teaching. Second, we must look at how leaders are trying to motivate people. Do they appeal to the sinful nature—greed, pleasure, or power—to manipulate? Do they appeal to lofty ideals but try to channel all the giving or activities through their organization? These can be warning signs. Third, we must examine where they are leading us. Do they challenge us to yield more fully to the lordship of Christ, or are they building a following for themselves? We don't have to follow false teachers. We can trust the Lord to protect us if we will listen to and obey His voice.

Discuss

- ? How can Christians avoid being taken in by false teachers and sharing their judgment?
- ? How would you explain God's mercy and His judgment to an unbeliever?

Part 2—Living in Light of Christ’s Return



□ Don’t Be Deceived

2 Peter 3:3–7

Say: Peter warned that, in the last days, people would scoff at Christianity. We need only to turn on the television to hear such scoffing. Even within the church, some doubt that Jesus will come again as He promised. But God always keeps His promises. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In 2 Peter 3:3, Peter continued his warning against false teachers, explaining that false teaching will increase as the end of this world draws near. Peter was not trying to establish a timetable for Christ’s return and the events that will occur. Rather, he intended to warn believers to always remain focused on Christ’s promised return and avoid the snares of a world that scoffs at or ignores His coming.

There is a sad irony in verses 3–4. At the very time when world events are headed toward their conclusion, more people will turn against God. These scoffers, blinded to the evidence of God’s actions in human affairs, will claim that world events just repeat themselves. “Life just continues as usual,” they will argue.

Peter pointed out that God created the earth and then, through the Flood, destroyed all but eight people (verses 5–6). These same heavens and earth still exist, kept in store for God’s future and the final judgment of sinful humanity by fire (verse 7).

Christians must never doubt that God is true to His Word. The Flood proved that God judges humanity for its wickedness and rebellion against Him. His Word declares that He will again judge this world because of the sinfulness of humanity. A world once destroyed by water will one day be consumed by fire. God’s Word also promises a divine victory over all forces of evil for those who trust in Jesus and live for Him. We must remain faithful to God by obeying His Word. We are also to proclaim the gospel to others so they too can be ready when the end comes.

Discuss

- ? What are some specific ways Peter’s descriptions of scoffers can help us overcome doubt in these troubled last days?
- ? What signs do you see that indicate that we are living in the last days?



□ Anticipate Christ’s Return

2 Peter 3:8–13

Say: We expect the scoffers of the world to deny the coming of Christ and the judgment of the world. However, some in the church have been lulled into the attitude that everything will go on just as it is. Peter warns us that we must live in expectancy of Christ’s return, both in our personal lives and in our responsibility to reach others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Throughout the second and third chapters of this Epistle, Peter wrote about God’s coming judgment on false teachers in the Church and His final judgment of the world. He addressed the danger of being lulled into a false sense

of security. As noted above, skeptics mockingly declared that it was foolish to believe Christ would return; after all, much time had already passed since He had said He would return. But Peter responded by noting that God is not held to human perceptions of time (2 Peter 3:8–10). In fact, the delay of Christ’s return is actually a product of God’s grace and mercy, as He desires all people to come to repentance.

Christians, however, also need to remain alert and on guard. Peter made it clear that sin tempts even people who have risen to positions of authority in the Church. No one is immune to the pull of evil. It’s important to remember that no matter how tempting something in this world may be, one day the world will be destroyed. Peter asked a key question in 2 Peter 3:11. Since everything in this world will be destroyed and everything that truly matters will come in the next world, how should Christians live? Some have answered this question by retreating from the world and failing to proclaim and share the gospel because of their singular focus on heaven.

This was not Peter’s intention, however. All of Peter’s teaching directs the reader to the responsibility of believers in Christ to carry out God’s purpose in this world, while patiently waiting for God’s reward in eternity. In verse 14, Peter again called for believers to be diligent. Followers of Christ can look forward to and can even hasten the day of His return by faithfully proclaiming the gospel to others and being examples before a fallen world (verse 12).

Finally, there should be a constant association in Christians’ minds between the holiness that will fill the new heavens and earth (verse 13) and the believer’s commitment to holy living today (verse 14). Peter urged followers of Christ to be ready at any moment to make the transition from this world into the next, being found “spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (verse 14, NIV).

Discuss

- ? How does anticipation of heaven coexist with spiritual responsibility in this world?
- ? How is God’s mercy displayed in what appears to be a delay in the coming of Christ?



Resource Packet Item 2: Right Way/Wrong Way

Distribute the work sheet and discuss responses, either in small groups or as a class.

Part 3—Contending for the Faith



Be Alert

Jude 1:3–4

Say: The Epistle of Jude was likely one of the last New Testament books written, with most scholars dating it at AD 70–80. Many scholars believe Jude was the half-brother of Jesus and James, who had been a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church in the years before this. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 3: Who Was Jude?

Distribute the information sheet and highlight portions of it if time allows. Encourage students to study the sheet further during the week.

Jude's short Epistle focused on exposing false teachers who believed that salvation by grace allowed people to live in sin. Because these false teachings drew people away from the truth of the gospel, Jude urged his readers to "contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3, NIV). False teaching is not always as obvious as a lie, so believers need to make a determined effort to keep focused on the truth of the gospel.

Jude noted several marks of false teachers (verse 4). First, they crept into the church unnoticed. Sometimes believers only gradually become aware of the errors in a false teacher's message. Jude, however, clearly recognized that the condemnation of ungodly people like these had long ago been announced.

Also, Jude recognized that these false teachers lived ungodly lives. While preaching a message that sounded Christian, they used God's grace as permission to act out their lusts. If we see leaders who give themselves such a license, we should neither listen to them nor follow them.

Finally, the clearest sign exposing the false teachers was that they did not believe and teach the truth of the gospel. Rather they taught falsehoods about the nature of God, and specifically of Christ.

Discuss

- ? What are some signs of false teachers today, specifically those who might claim God's grace as an excuse for sin?
- ? Why is it sometimes difficult to recognize false teachings?



□ Grow in Faith

Jude 1:17–23

Say: Jude then encouraged his readers in their spiritual growth. Nothing in his message was new to them. They knew the Scriptures and accounts he mentioned. They knew there is a true faith and there are counterfeits. Jude reminded his readers to recall what they had learned from the beginning of their Christian walk. When we hear a teaching that is new to us, we must be sure that teaching agrees with the truth of the Scripture. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

There have always been people connected with the church who reject godly authority and choose to satisfy their ungodly lusts. By doing this, they cut themselves off from God, for God desires His people to live in a way that contrasts with the lives of such people (Jude 1:18–20). Believers are to focus on growing stronger in the true faith. They must not allow wrong messages to influence belief. Instead, they ought to continue in daily prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to help them become stronger Christians.

Jude further commanded believers to keep themselves in the love of God (verse 21). To do so they must stay focused on Christ, through whom that love is made

known. This is not a passive exercise. Believers must “keep [themselves] in God’s love as [they] wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring [them] to eternal life” (verse 21, NIV).

It is critical that we protect ourselves against the inroads of false teaching. In doing so, we also have a responsibility to help rescue those either tempted by false teaching or caught up in it. Jude urged believers to show compassion to those who were beginning to doubt the truth (verse 22). As for those who may have already succumbed to untruth, we need to make every effort to bring them back to the truth, snatching them, as it were, from the very fires of hell (verse 23). Yet believers must do so with caution, so they do not become deceived themselves.

Discuss

- ? What can Christians do to protect themselves from false teachers and doctrines?
- ? What steps can we take to continue in our spiritual growth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God has given us His Word as our authoritative rule of faith and conduct. He calls us to study it diligently so we can understand and share sound doctrine with those around us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray that God will give you discernment so you can recognize false teachings when you hear them.
- Look for opportunities to share the truth of the gospel with others.
- Consider leading a Bible study in your community to teach others the truth of Scripture.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Men of Truth.
Exodus 18:13–26

Tuesday

Paths of Truth.
Psalm 25:4–10

Wednesday

Truthful Lips.
Proverbs 12:15–22

Thursday

The Spirit of Truth.
John 14:15–18

Friday

Belief in the Truth.
2 Thessalonians 2:9–17

Saturday

Walking in Truth.
2 John 1:1–8

Great Prayers of the Bible

It has been said that prayer is the most talked about, yet least practiced, of all spiritual virtues. One reason might be the fact that prayer involves submission to God, a recognition of our entire dependence upon Him—evidenced both in our requests and in our worship. Prayer reminds us that our very lives depend upon Him, our Creator. Paul, inspired by the Spirit, stated it well in Acts 17:28: “In him we live and move and have our being” (NIV).

For the next seven lessons, you and your class will explore some of the greatest prayers of the Bible. As you do, be careful not to overlook a critical point: The people of God, starting in Genesis and continuing throughout the Old and New Testaments, placed a tremendous amount of importance upon seeking and speaking to their Creator and Lord. Such communication would take the form of personal petitions, intercession for others, heartfelt worship and praise, and other forms as well.

The unit begins with the well-known story of Abraham seeking God’s mercy for the righteous of Sodom, that they be spared His terrible judgment. From this passage in Genesis, we learn key truths about both the mercy of God and the judgment of God—and, as a result, we are better prepared to pray in light of both of these realities.

Lessons 2 and 3 continue Old Testament examples of great prayers, with prayers from Solomon and Nehemiah. While the subject matter is diverse (Solomon prayed for wisdom and Nehemiah prayed for restoration), together they remind us of the practical purposes of prayer. Still today, your students need godly wisdom to function well in a fallen, secularized world. Such wisdom is readily available for those who ask (see James 1:5). Similarly, your students need the help of the Lord to follow through on those things He has asked them to do.

Lessons 4–7 move to the New Testament, highlighting both instruction regarding prayer (found through the Lord’s Prayer) and a trio of powerful prayers. As you teach, remind students of the context of each of these prayers: Jesus praying for His followers then and now, Jesus praying with anguished intensity in the Garden before His sacrifice, and Paul lovingly seeking God on behalf of those he disciplined, despite his own challenges. Pray that God will help you use these lessons to convey the importance of prayer, and thereby propel your students to lifestyles that give prayer the priority it deserves.

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

June 6, 2021

LESSON

1

Interceding for God's Mercy

Study Text

Genesis 18:16–33; 19:24–29

Central Truth

God readily hears the intercessory prayers of believers.



Key Verse Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (KJV).

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Appreciate the impact of prayer on the outworking of God's purposes.
- Determine to pray and intercede regularly for God's intervention in the lives of people and circumstances in our culture and our world.

Introducing the Study

Say: This quarter of studies begins with a wonderfully appropriate focus—prayer. Prayer, together with the study of God's Word, is a critically important spiritual discipline for all of us to cultivate. During the course of these studies, it is hoped that you will carefully consider your own commitment to the practice of prayer, and commit to keep it a regular practice in your life. In this week's study we will focus on the vital role of intercessory prayer, standing before the Lord for needs in the lives of Christians and in our world.

Opening Activity—Answered Prayer

Ask: Can you share a time when either you have interceded for someone else's need or someone else has interceded for you, and God has answered that prayer? (Give several students opportunities to share.)

Say: Sometimes, we are tempted to limit our prayers to our needs and to the needs of the people closest to us. But the power of intercessory prayer can make a tremendous difference in the world around us because God answers prayer! Letting people know you are praying for them is also one of the greatest ways to encourage others. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Abraham is known throughout Scripture as a man of faith, and, when people of faith pray, God answers. Abraham was praying, not just for his family and other righteous people, but for the entire city of Sodom to be spared because of those righteous people. As it turned out, the great sin of the city resulted in God's judgment. However, God heard Abraham's prayers and saved the righteous there from destruction.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 18:17. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

20. And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

21. I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.

23. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

24. Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?

25. That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

26. And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

28. Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.

29. And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake.

32. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

33. And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

19:27. And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord:

28. And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

29. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

New International Version

Genesis 18:17. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

20. Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous

21. that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

23. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

24. What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?

25. Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26. The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

28. what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

29. Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

32. Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

33. When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

19:27. Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord.

28. He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

29. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

Part 1—Abraham Hears God’s Judgment

□ God Took Abraham into His Confidence

Genesis 18:16–19



Say: Most people can understand the value of friendship—what it means to be called a friend, as well as what it means to call someone else a friend. We can grasp, then, the significance of James 2:23, where James says Abraham “was called the Friend of God” (KJV). Just as God had shared with Abraham His plans to make Abraham a great nation through his descendants, God shared with Abraham His plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

A brief backstory to the opening verses of this passage is in order. In chapters 17 and 18, Abraham had been approached by God, who outlined the terms of His covenant with Abraham that included the sign of circumcision, a seal of His covenant with His people. Additionally, He announced that Abraham would be the father of many nations, beginning with Sarah giving birth to a son, though she was greatly advanced in years.

This divine interaction continued with the appearance of three special visitors to Abraham, an anthropomorphic manifestation of God and of two angelic beings. Again, God confirmed that Sarah would bear a son, a message received by Sarah with amazement. Both Abraham and Sarah, however, would submit to God’s purposes, knowing that nothing is impossible with God.

In these, as in earlier encounters with God, Abraham had proved himself trustworthy. Although he might not have fully understood how all things would come to be, Abraham could be counted on to follow God’s plans and purposes. Therefore, in the passage at hand, God revealed to Abraham what was about to come to pass regarding His judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. God’s question to his two companions, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” (verse 17, NIV), is asked with the anticipated response that the plans should not be hidden. God’s trust in Abraham’s faith and obedience was paramount to fulfilling His covenant through him. Verses 18 and 19 indicate that Abraham’s trustworthiness to lead would arise from the most fundamental level of guiding his household in the way they should go.



Resource Packet Item 1: Standing Before the Lord

Distribute the information sheet. You may want to highlight some of the points presented or send it home with the students for further study.

Discuss

- ? In what ways have you sensed God drawing you into prayer regarding His plans or purposes? How is a consistent prayer life important to such an experience?
- ? How does God’s regard for Abraham’s trustworthiness support the statement that greatness doesn’t begin at the top? In what way is this counterintuitive to cultural understanding and expectations today?



□ God Stated His Disapproval of Sin

Genesis 18:20–21

Say: While God provides grace for those who have sinned, He is deeply troubled when people persist in sinful behavior. Sin cannot exist in God’s presence, so people who desire to spend eternity with Him must repent of their sins and turn to God for forgiveness. Those who refuse to submit to God will face His judgment. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Sodom and Gomorrah were in a kind of “moral free fall.” Their wickedness had reached such epic proportions that the outcry against them had reached God’s ears. One needs only to review the treatment of the two angelic beings upon their arrival at Lot’s household, as recorded in chapter 19, to understand the depth of depravity to which the people of these cities had fallen.

If Abraham was to become the father of many nations, it was crucial that he understood that sin and wickedness would not be tolerated by a just and righteous God. God’s condemnation and judgment against sin are inevitable. Yet, it is significant to note that God did not rush to judgment. In His great omniscience, God was aware of the depravity that prevailed in Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, in His grace and mercy, Scripture notes that He looked to investigate the grievous reports that had reached His ears.

Furthermore, God knew that Abraham had a critical stake in the matter. His nephew, Lot, lived there, as well as Lot’s family. Though they had parted ways when their flocks had grown to where the land would not support both of them, Abraham loved his nephew. He had even once rescued Lot after Lot had been taken captive by enemy kings. (See Genesis 13–14.)

Discuss

- ? Why is it imperative that God condemn and judge sin?
- ? Many people can testify of God’s grace and mercy despite years of living in sin. How have you experienced grace that is greater than your sin? Describe such grace.



Part 2—Abraham Pleads for God’s Mercy

□ Abraham Stands Before the Lord

Genesis 18:22–26

Say: When a family member is in danger, physically or spiritually, it’s natural for parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles to pray for their healing, protection, or deliverance. Such was the case for Abraham’s nephew Lot, and Abraham prayed earnestly for him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Having expressed His great concern over what was happening in Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord and His celestial companions turned away to leave for Sodom. The account goes on to say, “Abraham remained standing before the LORD” (verse 22, NIV). Though far be it from him to interfere with God’s will, Abraham continued

to talk to the Lord on behalf of those he loved, and any who might be found righteous. Clearly, a burden to seek the Lord in a time of pending crisis had gripped his soul. With great concern, Abraham came before the Lord, to register a plea for His grace and mercy.

Abraham posed the critical question, “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (verse 23). Inherent within this plea is a need to understand the balance between God’s justice and His mercy. Abraham stood before the Lord to seek His answer. Interestingly, in this exchange with God, Abraham did not specifically mention his concern for Lot and his family, though they were no doubt at the forefront of his mind. Instead, the issue was Abraham’s belief that God could be trusted to do what is right in all circumstances.

God’s answer to Abraham’s intercession reveals both His justice and mercy. Earlier God had stated that He would evaluate the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah. In His wisdom, justice, and mercy, He would take action. And when He did, His actions would be in line with His character.

Perhaps in the hope that Lot had influenced the city for good and righteousness to at least some degree, Abraham asked if God would spare the city if only fifty righteous people could be found (verse 24). Abraham knew it would not be God’s purpose to destroy the righteous with the wicked—far be it from Him! (verse 25). Yet God assured Abraham that if He would indeed spare the city if only fifty righteous people could be found (verse 26).



Resource Packet Item 2: Strategic Intercession

Distribute the intercessory prayer sheet, and ask students to use it along with the information sheet distributed earlier to guide their prayer time this week.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when you felt especially prompted to intercede on behalf of a person or circumstance.
- ? The Flood recorded in Genesis 6–9 and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are two prominent examples of God’s summary judgment upon sin and wickedness. Though the judgment was severe, how is God’s mercy evident in these accounts?

□ Abraham Presses His Plea

Genesis 18:27–33



Say: Even in his intense intercession for Lot and his family and any other righteous people that might be in Sodom, Abraham never forgot the majesty and holiness of God. While we are invited to come boldly to God with our petitions, we must avoid being cavalier in our approach to Him. He is Almighty God and is worthy of our worship and reverence even as we bring our requests to Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Knowing now that God would spare Sodom if only fifty righteous people were found, Abraham approached God again. However, even though Abraham had a special connection with God, even being described as a friend of God by both Isaiah (41:8) and James (2:23), his closeness to God did not diminish his attitude of humility. He still knew his place before the Almighty God—he was no more than dust and ashes by comparison. He also acknowledged his boldness in asking God’s mercy upon the city if only fifty righteous people could be found. Then, as he interceded further, Abraham asked if God would also be merciful if only forty-five righteous people could be found. God promised again to have mercy.

Confident of God’s mercy, Abraham continued to press his plea that God would save Sodom if fewer and fewer righteous people could be found (Genesis 18:27–32). He approached God with descending numbers—forty, thirty, twenty. At various increments in his plea, Abraham needed reassurance that God would not be angry at him for his bold intercession. Though he was confident of God’s mercy, Abraham would not presume upon God’s grace. Yet, at each request, God granted assurance of His mercy. Eventually, the number dropped to only ten righteous people. God’s response was overwhelmingly gracious. Even if only ten righteous people could be found, He would spare the city! There was no question throughout this period of intercession that God was both just and fair. God has always desired that none perish, but that all have opportunity to come to repentance. (See 2 Peter 3:9.) It is also noteworthy that Abraham did not abandon his post as an intercessor. He stayed before the Lord, pressing forward in intense intercession.

Discuss

- ? What does Abraham’s plea for mercy if fewer righteous could be found tell us about his heart and his understanding of God’s grace and mercy? What does this suggest about the importance of persisting in prayer and intercession?
- ? As we pray, at times we can become overwhelmed by the pervasive sin and evil in our world today. How does our key verse, Romans 8:26, give us hope for making a difference as we pray?



Part 3—Abraham Witnesses Judgment and Mercy

□ God Judges the Ungodly

Genesis 19:24–25

Say: God keeps His promises. When He promises deliverance for His people, they receive deliverance. In the case of Genesis 18 and 19, He had promised destruction, and God does not make idle threats. His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was all-encompassing. God is holy, and those who refuse His grace will eventually experience judgment for their unholiness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Despite Abraham’s sincere and earnest intercession, not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom and Gomorrah. Though mercy was available to any who

were righteous, God's justice required condemnation of the pervasive wickedness that prevailed. His justice always will.

God's judgment was thorough. Verse 24 speaks of burning sulfur raining down from the heavens. Scholars and archaeologists have discussed how God might have brought the destruction—perhaps through earthquakes releasing hot gases from below the earth's surface, igniting a shower of burning sulfur. Yet the details of how the destruction came about are not revealed in the text. We can be assured, however, that the destruction was supernaturally orchestrated. Archaeological excavations have found a site that may be that of historical Sodom. That site has revealed significant evidence that a disaster took place. God's judgment against the wickedness was quick, severe, and all-encompassing in its scope. Not only were people and buildings utterly destroyed by the burning sulfur, but even the vegetation was destroyed.

In his Second Epistle, Peter referenced the absolute destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as “an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (2:6, NIV). A final day of God's wrath will come at the end of this age when His judgment upon evil and wickedness will be severe and final.



Resource Packet Item 3: Intercession in the Bible

Distribute the work sheet, and divide your class into small groups. Assign one of the Scripture passages to each group and give them a few minutes to read the passage and answer the questions. Then have at least one group report to the rest of the class on each passage.

Discuss

- ? Though God is rich in mercy, He is also a just and holy God in whose presence sin cannot dwell. In view of God's judgment, what is our responsibility to the world around us today?
- ? How can you explain God's judgment in view of His mercy?

□ God Reveals His Mercy

Genesis 19:27–29



Say: God doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we hope He will. Yet He always answers. Abraham had not prayed that Lot would be spared from Sodom; he prayed that the city would not be destroyed. And so, while God's judgment called for destruction, He spared Abraham's righteous nephew (see also 2 Peter 2:7). Abraham trusted God, believing that He had made the right decision. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

A poignant scene opens in Genesis 19:27, as Abraham rose early the morning after God's act of judgment on Sodom. Abraham returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. There, on the day prior, he had interceded with great passion, humility, and sincerity for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, as he looked toward the cities, all he saw was smoke rising from their ruins (verses 28–29).

Yet, not all had been lost; Abraham's petition had not been in vain. Though Lot's wife, in disobedience to an angel's command, had looked back on the destruction and was lost (see verses 23–26), Lot and his two daughters had escaped from the cities before judgment rained down. In His wrath, God had shown mercy, and as a result the lives of the righteous were spared. God had indeed remembered Abraham, who learned anew that God is trustworthy to do what is right and just in all that He has promised to do.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Lot's wife looked back toward the city?
- ? How do you think Abraham felt as he looked at the destruction of Sodom? What thoughts may have gone through his mind?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God invites us to approach His throne of grace with confidence. (See Hebrews 4:16.) Abraham was reverent, yet bold, in his approach to God, and his prayers were heard. Even though the answer was not exactly as Abraham expected, he trusted both the grace and judgment of God, and God kept His promises, doing so in line with His justice and holiness.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Commit to intercede to God for the needs of others.
- Let someone know you are praying for them.
- Watch for God's answers to your prayers in your daily life.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Intercession for God's People.
Numbers 16:41–50

Tuesday

Mercy for the Penitent.
Ezekiel 18:19–23

Wednesday

Intercession for a Nation.
Daniel 9:11–19

Thursday

Jesus Instructs in Intercession.
Matthew 9:35–38

Friday

Paul Requests Prayer.
Romans 15:30–33

Saturday

Sympathetic High Priest.
Hebrews 4:14–16

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

June 13, 2021

LESSON 2

Prayer for Wisdom

Study Text

1 Kings 3:1–28

Central Truth

God freely gives wisdom to those who ask.



Key Verse Proverbs 2:6

The LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding (KJV).

The LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Learn the nature and value of wisdom and understand that it is available to anyone who asks for it.
- Acknowledge that you need God's wisdom in every area of your life.
- Actively seek God's wisdom when faced with life's challenges.

Introducing the Study

Say: It has been said that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is knowing not to add tomatoes to a fruit salad. It's one thing to know facts and sometimes quite another to know how to apply those facts to solving problems. Life presents a lot of opportunities to test our wisdom. Perhaps you had one of those opportunities this past week, or you might be wondering how to navigate a challenge facing you this coming week. Today, we'll focus on where you can turn.

Opening Activity—What would you pray for?

Ask: If God came to you in a vision and said you could pray for anything and He would give it to you, what would you ask for? (You may want to write answers on the board. Some may say “wisdom” is the right answer, but encourage variety. There are no wrong answers.)

Say: Answers to our opening activity will depend on your stage of life and your individual concerns. Your prayer request may involve the salvation of your children or other loved ones. Or, you may be most concerned about the peace of the nation and the world. In 1 Kings, Solomon was at the beginning of a new challenge, being the king of God's chosen people. So his prayer request related to that. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Solomon was the second son born to David and Bathsheba. Just before David's death, he had declared that Solomon would be the new king, much to the disappointment of another son, Adonijah, who was attempting to take over the throne. In 1 Kings 1 we find the account of Solomon's appointment as king.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Kings 3:5. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

9. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

10. And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.

14. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

16. Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.

17. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.

18. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.

19. And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it.

20. And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.

22. And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king.

25. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.

26. Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

27. Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof.

28. And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

New International Version

1 Kings 3:5. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

9. "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

10. The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

14. "And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

16. Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.

17. One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me.

18. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.

19. "During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him.

20. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast."

22. The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours." But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king.

25. He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."

26. The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"

27. Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother."

28. When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.



Say: Solomon is well-known for his construction of the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. In building the temple, he was carrying out a dream of his father, David. The events of this passage occur prior to the building of the temple, shortly after Solomon had become king. He showed his devotion to God by offering great sacrifices at Gibeon, a normal place for Israel’s leaders to worship. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Not long after his father had died, Solomon took steps to establish his place as king of Israel, part of which included establishing a treaty with Egypt that was sealed by his marriage to an Egyptian princess. Solomon brought her to live with him in Jerusalem. From that time, Solomon would work to build a palace, temple, and a wall around the city. His father had longed to build a temple to worship God, but God assured him that his role had been to deliver Israel from her enemies and establish peace in the land. His son Solomon would build the temple. (See 2 Samuel 7.)

Since a permanent temple for the worship of God had not yet been built, it was customary for the Israelites to worship at “high places” or hilltops throughout Canaan. This was not ideal. In some cases, the high places had been used for pagan worship by the Canaanites. As a result, these high places were to be avoided. God had been quite explicit in His commands to the Israelites that, upon their conquest of Canaan, they were to, “Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places” (Deuteronomy 12:3, NIV). Once a temple was built, the practice of using any of the high places should have come to an end.

Solomon’s heart was devoted to the Lord. He desired to show his love for the Lord by carefully walking according to His statutes (verses 3–4). He demonstrated his devotion by regularly offering sacrifices and burning incense on the high places.

On this occasion, Solomon went to Gibeon, described as the most important high place, to offer sacrifices. Throughout much of David’s reign and into Solomon’s, Gibeon was the location of the Mosaic Tabernacle where, typically, military commanders, judges, and many leaders would gather for worship (see 2 Chronicles 1:2–3). Thus, we can understand the greatness of Solomon’s gift of devotion and worship: 1,000 burnt offerings.

Discuss

- ? Why was it urgent to establish a central place for worship among the Israelites instead of using high places? How might this apply to people today who disengage from a church and worship in their own way?
- ? Old Testament sacrifices were a vital part of praise and worship to God. Hebrews 13:15 instructs us to continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of our lips that openly profess his name. In what sense is praise a sacrifice? What is significant about the word “continually”?

 **□ God Appeared to Solomon in a Dream****1 Kings 3:5**

Say: Solomon was devoted to God, and God met him where he had gone to worship. God knew Solomon’s heart, and He knew the tremendous responsibility Solomon had in leading the people of Israel. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God was clearly pleased with the extent and depth of Solomon’s devotion to Him. During the night at Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream (1 Kings 3:5). Dreams were not an uncommon means of God’s communication to His people throughout Scripture, and He can still use them today.

**Resource Packet Item 1: Dreams and Visions**

Distribute copies of “Dreams and Visions” from the resource packet. Invite various students to respond to specific passages on the sheet.

In the dream, God posed an offer of divine generosity to the king: “Ask for whatever you want for me to give you” (verse 5, *NIV*). While this was a very non-specific offer, undoubtedly—in God’s sovereign wisdom—it was an offer founded on trust and foreknowledge. Solomon’s devotion in worship and determination to follow God’s statutes had led him to a place of great favor with God. Solomon could be trusted—at least at this point in his life—to seek the right things, giving further honor and glory to God.

Discuss

- ? Describe a time when God spoke to you or someone you know in a dream or vision. In what way is God using dreams and visions today to reach people lost in spiritual darkness?
- ? What does God’s offer to Solomon say about His regard for and trust in Solomon? On what was that trust based?

**Part 2—Solomon Prays for Wisdom****□ Solomon’s Humble Petition****1 Kings 3:6–9**

Say: Have you ever faced a task that was so overwhelming that you knew it was far beyond your own capabilities? That’s where Solomon was as he approached the great task of leading God’s people. As the son of King David, he, no doubt, had received the best education possible for the time in which he lived, yet he felt completely inadequate for the task ahead of him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As one reads the account of King Solomon’s petition to the Lord in the dream encounter, it is easy to be moved by the gratitude and humility with which he prayed. There is no sense of arrogance or pride in Solomon’s response to the Lord’s gracious offer. Instead, the king was moved by God’s great faithfulness

to David and now to His faithfulness toward him as he fulfilled the privilege of serving as king of Israel. Solomon viewed God's goodness to him as a continued expression of His regard for his father David, and not based on his own merit.

Solomon's humility and absolute dependence upon God are no more greatly expressed than in his declaration, "I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties" (verse 7, NIV). His sense of responsibility before God and Israel weighed very heavily upon him. A rendering in the King James Version captures his sense of inadequacy even more so with the words, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." Though Solomon would certainly have possessed a high degree of wisdom and understanding of his own, he clearly recognized that he needed help far beyond his own abilities. He knew he could not fulfill his responsibilities in his own strength and wisdom. He needed God's help.

As Solomon weighed what he needed most, he prayed, "Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people" (verse 9, NIV). Solomon was very aware that his youth and inexperience only contributed to his inadequacy for the task ahead. Here again, Solomon's humility and sense of accountability are remarkable. God had given him an opportunity to ask for anything he wanted. So many other things could have come to mind, yet, above all, he knew that he needed a supernatural measure of wisdom to understand how to discern between right and wrong as he governed the people of Israel.



Resource Packet Item 2: Praying Like Solomon

Distribute the work sheet, and give students a few minutes to prayerfully fill it in. You might even want to wait and use this at the end of class as a time of personal reflection and commitment.

Discuss

- ? Describe a situation you have faced that required more than knowledge to solve. In what way did seeking God's help make a difference in the situation?
- ? Our minds can spin at the thought of receiving such an offer as God gave Solomon. Why was asking for wisdom the best choice, not only to please God, but for practical application in day-to-day life?

□ The Lord's Gracious Response

1 Kings 3:10–15



Say: Solomon's request was utterly unselfish. As a young man in a position of power, he could have asked for many things that would have benefited him personally. But his goal was to do the job God had given him in the best possible way, and he knew he would need God's wisdom to carry out the task. Because Solomon's motives were right and his request was unselfish, God blessed him far beyond what he had requested. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

While Solomon could have asked for grandiose blessings from God's hand, he did not. Understandably, hearing the young king's plea for wisdom and discernment above all else was greatly pleasing to the Lord (1 Kings 3:10), and He took note that Solomon had not asked for a long life, wealth, or the death of his enemies (verse 11). Instead, Solomon asked for a discerning heart so that he might administrate with wisdom and good judgment.

Because Solomon had not asked for the other things, God was pleased to not only grant him wisdom, but a wisdom far and above what any other person in the world had or ever would have. That is demonstrated in passages such as 2 Chronicles 9 that carries the account of the visit by the Queen of Sheba who had heard of Solomon's reputation and came "to test him with hard questions" (verse 1, NIV). Despite the complexity of her test, Solomon was able to answer all of her questions. Verse 23 states, "All the kings of the earth sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart."

Upon awaking from the dream (1 Kings 3:15), Solomon responded to God's amazing blessings and favor by returning to Jerusalem, where he stood before the ark of the covenant and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. His heart was filled with praise and adoration to his gracious God, who had showered upon him blessings beyond compare. It was appropriate to celebrate God's goodness with those who served with Solomon.

Discuss

- ? Humankind has always valued power, riches, and fame. Why would a king's wisdom itself draw leaders from around the world to sit at his feet?
- ? Why did God place the conditions of obedience to His statutes and commands on his offer of a long life? Why may wisdom itself not guarantee obedient and righteous living?



Part 3—Solomon Shows Supernatural Wisdom

□ A Tragic Case Is Presented

1 Kings 3:16–22

Say: It wasn't long until Solomon's wisdom from God was put to the test.

While a particular example is given in 1 Kings 3:16–22, certainly there were countless other examples of his wise judgments regarding individual and national matters. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Not long after experiencing the amazing offer from God in the dream encounter, King Solomon was faced with a difficult case involving two prostitutes and a deceased infant. At the outset, it is significant to note that open access to the king was provided even to prostitutes (those among the outcast) in Solomon's day. We also do well to recall that King Solomon was especially known for having received great wisdom, insight, and understanding from the Lord (see 1 Kings 4:29). Such wisdom and insight would definitely be necessary at this time.

In the case at hand, the two prostitutes shared a home. One had given birth to a child, and three days later the other gave birth as well. During the night, as the

women were asleep, one of the women rolled over onto her child and smothered it. Upon discovering her infant was dead, she exchanged her child for the other woman's living child and placed the dead child near her roommate. The woman who received the dead child vehemently insisted the dead child belonged to the other woman. Given that there were no other eyewitnesses, and that these women were such who would be deemed to be of questionable character, this was a particularly difficult case.

Discuss

- ? In today's world, how does economic or social status affect the way justice is applied?
- ? Deception regarding the death of a child seems incomprehensible. What kinds of deception can you name that would call for the wisdom of Solomon to recognize?

□ Solomon Displayed God-given Wisdom

1 Kings 3:23–28



Say: Answers to difficult problems are seldom simple, but in this case, Solomon's answer was relatively simple—and quite dramatic. However, it showed the depth of wisdom he possessed. Human wisdom sometimes complicates issues that godly wisdom could easily solve. Seeking God's direction is always the best way to make a decision. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Exercising the wisdom God had given, Solomon issued a surprising order that a sword be brought to him (1 Kings 3:24). Since both women claimed the live baby to be theirs, he would simply cut that baby in two and give each woman a half. One can only imagine the surprise among others within the court. At the king's declaration, the woman who truly was the mother, cried out, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" (verse 26, NIV). When the other prostitute told Solomon to go ahead and cut the baby in two (which would leave neither with a child), the case was clear. Solomon ordered that the living baby be given to the true mother.

Once word of the king's dramatic ruling spread, the king was held in awe across all of Israel (verse 28). Truly he had been granted a supernatural measure of wisdom to administrate the affairs of the nation.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Attributes and Value of Wisdom

Distribute copies of "The Attributes and Value of Wisdom" work sheet from the *Adult Resource Packet*. If time allows, students may complete the entire work sheet individually or in groups, or you may assign specific passages for students to share. Note that Scripture strongly emphasizes the value of wisdom.

Discuss

- ? Take a moment to read James 1:5. What role do you believe prayer holds in obtaining and using godly wisdom?

- ? Describe a time when you faced an especially challenging decision and received from God an answer or direction that was beyond your understanding at the moment. What do you think would have happened without God's help?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God may not have appeared to you in a dream to tell you to ask for whatever you want, but He has invited all of us to “Ask and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7, NIV). That passage goes on to state that God, our Father, gives good gifts to those who ask Him. Like Solomon, we should seek wisdom, even in what we pray for, so we are asking within the will of God (see 1 John 5:14). Scripture tells us that it is God's desire to meet the needs of His children.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Seek God's wisdom in decisions you make this week, and enjoy the peace of knowing He is in control.
- Look for ways that you can help bring God's answer to a conflict.
- Pray for leaders of your community and nation, that they will have wisdom from God.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Benefits of Seeking Wisdom.
Proverbs 2:1–12

Tuesday

Wisdom for Living.
Proverbs 11:25–31

Wednesday

Wise and Foolish Words.
Ecclesiastes 10:12–15

Thursday

God's Wisdom Versus Man's
Wisdom.
1 Corinthians 2:1–10

Friday

Treasures of Wisdom and
Knowledge.
Colossians 2:1–7

Saturday

Ask God for Wisdom.
James 1:5–8

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

June 20, 2021

LESSON 3

Prayer for Restoration

Introducing the Study

Say: Have you ever found yourself listening to someone, whether a doctor, lawyer, financial advisor, a family member, or someone else who was giving you an extremely discouraging report? As you listened, you were dumbfounded, unable to process what you were hearing? How did you feel at that moment?

Opening Activity—Bad News

Ask: What examples can you give of discouraging news you have received? How did you cope with it? Give opportunity for several students to share their stories with the class.

Say: No matter how discouraging the news is that we receive, we can take comfort in knowing that God is never surprised by the circumstances we face—He knows our problems and crises, and He knows how we should proceed. He will give us the right way to respond as we trust Him and follow His leading. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Nehemiah found himself grieving over the plight of his people in Jerusalem—that the walls and gate of the city were in ruins—and how they ought to respond (see Nehemiah 1:3). Yet, as with Nehemiah, the key is always found in how we respond to problems—the steps we take from the point of hearing the report to dealing with the circumstance. We can find ourselves amazed at how wonderfully God can bring about His purposes to provide renewal and restoration, even in miraculous ways when we exercise courageous faith and believing prayer!

Study Text

Nehemiah 1:1 through 2:8

Central Truth

Prayer is essential for spiritual awakening.



Key Verse

2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (KJV).

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Be encouraged that God understands your circumstances and is able to provide the help needed as you believe and pray.
- Pray today for challenges you are facing and believe in God's faithfulness to intervene.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Nehemiah 1:1. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace.

3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.

6. Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

8. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

9. But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

11. O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

2:5. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

7. Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

8. And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

New International Version

Nehemiah 1:1. The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa.

3. They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

4. When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

6. let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you."

8. "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,

9. but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name."

11. "LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

2:5. and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it."

7. I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?"

8. And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.

Part 1—Nehemiah Learns of Jerusalem’s Condition

□ Nehemiah Receives a Discouraging Report

Nehemiah 1:1–3



Say: Discouragement isn’t always caused by our own situation or circumstances. Nehemiah was discouraged because of the situation of those who had returned to Jerusalem as well as for the city itself. As God’s people, it is important that we empathize with others and that we seek God for direction on anything we can do to alleviate suffering. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Not a lot of background information is available on the man Nehemiah, except that he was, no doubt, a man of significant standing and character. Prior to the account at hand, at least two groups of exiles had already returned to Jerusalem. (These returns took place in 538 BC and 457 BC. It is possible that exiles returned at other times, including after Nehemiah, but the Bible only records three returns.) Note that the Book of Ezra records the second return of God’s people and the dedication of the rebuilt temple; Nehemiah records the third return (in 444 BC) and the subsequent rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall.

Before Nehemiah’s return, in the month of December, 445 BC, Nehemiah’s brother Hanani, with some companions, traveled to the citadel of Susa where Nehemiah resided. Susa was the winter capital of the Persian kings, some 200 miles east of Babylon.

Nehemiah asked Hanani about the exiles who had returned and inquired also about the city of Jerusalem. Clearly, he was deeply concerned about the welfare of his fellow Jews who had returned to the Land, and for the welfare of Jerusalem. Sadly, however, Hanani’s response was devastating. The remnant of Jews who had returned were being greatly afflicted and lived in disgrace. Not only that, Jerusalem’s wall was in shambles and the gates had been burned. The people and the city were desperately in need of restoration and renewal.

Discuss

- ? Bad news comes to all of us at some point, and sometimes we have to be the bearer of such news to others. How has being a follower of Christ made a difference to you when presented with unpleasant news?
- ? How can empathizing with others who are suffering serve as a reflection of the love of God?

□ Nehemiah Expresses His Grief

Nehemiah 1:4



Say: Nehemiah took seriously the news he received about his countrymen and the city of Jerusalem. Too often, we hear news of suffering, and have a moment of sympathy and maybe even say a prayer, but we then move on with life, scarcely giving the situation a second thought. Yet Nehemiah responded to the need from the depth of his emotions and evaluated what he might do to bring help and provide answers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Upon hearing the crushing news, Nehemiah's response was immediate—he sat down and wept (verse 4). Concern over his countrymen and beloved city overwhelmed his emotions. Yet, his response was not just a moment of emotional expression of grief, but continued through a deliberate time of dealing with the depth of concern over what was taking place among his people. Nehemiah entered an extended time of mourning followed by fasting and prayer over a period of several days.

There was much at stake here as Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, the Holy City, was the center of national identity for all Jewish people. Clearly, there was need for intervention beyond the human level. God's help and wisdom were desperately needed.



Resource Packet Item 1: Fasting Guidelines

Distribute copies of “Fasting Guidelines” from the *Adult Resource Packet*. Encourage students to consider incorporating times of fasting in their prayer life as they face significant challenges.

Discuss

- ? Nehemiah was deeply concerned about the welfare of his countrymen who were far away from him. For whom might you have such concern even if you seldom interact with them?
- ? Have you ever entered into a time of fasting? If so, share a testimony of that experience with the class.



Part 2—Nehemiah Prays for God's Favor

□ Nehemiah Offers Praise and Confession

Nehemiah 1:5–9

Say: The prayer of Nehemiah in these verses follows a pattern that can serve as a guide to our prayers. As we walk through these verses, let's look for the following: (1) Humility; (2) Reverential awe; (3) Worship; (4) Penitence; and (5) Petition. (Share your highlights from the following text.)



Resource Packet Item 2: Pattern for Prayer

Distribute the work sheet, and have the students do the first section of it as you discuss Nehemiah's prayer. At the end of Part 2, complete the second section of the work sheet as a class.

As Nehemiah went to prayer, he did not immediately rush into his petitions, asking for God's help and intervention. Instead, in gratefulness and humility, he acknowledged that God is “great and awesome” (verse 5, NIV). He did not enter into God's presence casually or flippantly, but in a spirit of reverential awe, understanding that He is the great and mighty God. Nehemiah did not presume upon God's grace nor the privilege of entering His presence.

Nehemiah acknowledged further that God is faithful to keep His covenant with those who love and serve Him. Yet, even though he understood this, Nehemiah pleaded that God's ears would be open to hear the prayer of His humble servant.

Clearly a man devoted to prayer and intercession for the people of Israel, Nehemiah expressed to God that he had been praying night and day for them. He was earnest in his devotion to remember his beloved people before the throne of God.

Nehemiah knew that before moving to petition, the people needed to make things right with the God who had made His great covenant with them. Nehemiah also knew that he, and all God's people, must approach Him with broken and contrite hearts. As he continued to pray, Nehemiah confessed sins that were heavy on his heart (verse 6). He confessed sins not only on behalf of Israel, but on behalf of himself and his household as well. They had not always obeyed God's commands. Unconfessed sin and disobedience would block the hand of God from moving in response to prayer. Nehemiah remembered the instruction God had given Moses, that unfaithfulness and disobedience would result in Israel being scattered and lost among the nations (verse 8). They would no longer be a people under God's favor and protection. However, if they would repent and turn from their sins and continue to obey God's commands, He would restore them and claim them once again as His own. Such confession is a key ingredient to bringing about spiritual awakening and renewal.

Discuss

- ? How does the way we approach God, both individually and corporately, demonstrate reverential awe?
- ? What effect does unconfessed sin have on the effectiveness of our prayers?

□ Nehemiah Offers Petition

Nehemiah 1:10–11



Say: Many times, our prayers tend to begin with petition. We approach God with our list of needs. While He delights in meeting our needs, and there are certainly times we cry out to God in the midst of a crisis, our relationship with Him will be much stronger if we begin by recognizing His greatness and our weakness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Having acknowledged God's greatness, having confessed national and personal sins, and having remembered God's conditions for bringing His favor and blessing, Nehemiah moved to petition in his prayer. He reminded God again that the people of Israel were those whom He had redeemed by His mighty hand (Nehemiah 1:10–11). They were His chosen people, recipients of His grace and favor. Now, Nehemiah faced the imposing task of going before Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, to implore him to grant permission for Nehemiah to intervene on Israel's behalf. It seems clear that Nehemiah recognized his responsibility not only to pray, but to go. In order to help his people and restore the city of Jerusalem, he would need to provide leadership and encouragement. While there was much that could be accomplished through prayer, he needed to be present in the circumstance and help bring about the needed restoration.

Even in his petition, Nehemiah was humble and reverent, not presumptuous in any way. He pleaded that God's ear would be attentive to his request (verse 11)

as one who revered God's holy name. His request was straightforward—to have success that day as he presented his petition to the king.

Following his prayer, Nehemiah noted at the end of verse 11, “I was cupbearer to the king.” Scholars have noted that “cupbearer” was likely not a servile duty with little significance. As cupbearer, Nehemiah had direct access to the king on a regular basis. And the account that follows of Nehemiah's interaction with King Artaxerxes suggests that the king was vitally interested, not only in his servant's actions, but in his attitudes and feelings. Perhaps Nehemiah was someone with whom the king shared personal matters from time to time. At the same time, it was vitally important that Nehemiah not portray emotions or attitudes that would be deemed inappropriate or suspicious. With the matter at hand, he would need favor and confidence that only God could provide.

Discuss

- ? Often when we are presented with concerns or needs in our communities, nation, or world, we agree to pray. How did Nehemiah exemplify the fact that prayer itself sometimes isn't enough? How has God prompted you toward further engagement with Him?
- ? How has God positioned you to be an influencer for goodness and righteousness in the workplace, community, school, neighborhood, or elsewhere?



Part 3—God Grants Nehemiah's Request

□ Nehemiah Expresses His Concern

Nehemiah 2:1–4

Say: Nehemiah did not immediately approach the king in an attempt to “answer his own prayers.” Sometimes we pray for God to answer, but we don't wait for His timing before going ahead with a plan of our own. As we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will find that God prepares hearts and opens doors in response to our prayers far more effectively than we could hope to do. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After some four months had passed since Nehemiah received the distressing news from his brother, Nehemiah knew he must share his concerns with King Artaxerxes. His sadness over the plight of his fellow Jews and the city of Jerusalem was no doubt overwhelming. As Nehemiah entered the king's presence as cupbearer, his face so reflected his grief that the king took notice. He knew that Nehemiah was not ill, so the king could only suppose that Nehemiah's heart and spirit were greatly troubled over something. He directly inquired of Nehemiah about what was concerning him (Nehemiah 2:1–2).

Fear struck Nehemiah. Depending on the king's mood, Nehemiah knew that an uncommon countenance before the king could arouse suspicion and trigger a harsh, and perhaps dangerous, response. It was important to always reflect a calm demeanor before the king, regardless of inner feelings.

That King Artaxerxes inquired about Nehemiah's sad expression did, however, provide an opportunity for Nehemiah to share his concerns. So, without hesitation

he began to lay out the plight of his fellow Jews and the terrible state of Jerusalem, the city he loved. No doubt Nehemiah was greatly relieved that the king did not respond harshly but simply asked, “What is it you want?” (verse 4, NIV). While the reply seemed gracious, his question was one that would have to be answered very carefully, so as not to unsettle the king.

Nehemiah 2:4 states his response quite simply: “Then I prayed to the God of heaven” (verse 4, NIV). Here is where Nehemiah’s efforts to cultivate closeness with God through diligent devotion shone brightly. There was no time in this moment to go to a place of prayer and earnestly seek God’s guidance, but that did not matter. Nehemiah could sense the voice of direction from God. While his prayer is not recorded, it was most likely an impromptu plea for God’s wisdom in how to reply, and God heard Nehemiah. As soon as the prayer was uttered, Nehemiah was ready to answer the king.



Resource Packet Item 3: Cultivating Closeness to God

Cultivating a close relationship with God is a key component to prayer. Distribute copies of the work sheet “Cultivating Closeness to God.” To save time, ask various students or groups to focus on one or two of the exercises.

Discuss

- ? Our countenance can often reflect what’s happening inside of us emotionally. Being aware of and sensitive to a person’s countenance can provide an opportunity to be a help and encouragement. How have you experienced that personally?
- ? Describe a moment when you sent an “emergency prayer” heavenward. What was the result?

□ Nehemiah Prayerfully Presents His Request

Nehemiah 2:5–8



Say: As we examine this section, list the answers to the petitions Nehemiah presented to King Artaxerxes. (*As you work through the verses and the commentary below, note these answers: permission to go to Jerusalem, letters for safe conduct, military escort, timber for building, appointed governor of Judah.*) (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Bolstered by his confidence that God had heard his prayer, Nehemiah graciously and humbly asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem to help with the rebuilding and restoration. Here again we see Nehemiah’s characteristics of humility and integrity. He did not presume upon the king for help, but humbly asked for his consideration. After inquiring how long Nehemiah would be away, the king was satisfied with the matter and gave permission for Nehemiah to travel (Nehemiah 2:5–6).

Further encouraged by the king’s kindness, Nehemiah pressed a bit further and asked if he could have letters to governors throughout the areas in which he would travel to ensure safe conduct (verse 7). Safe passage could not be presumed

otherwise. We learn in verse 9 that the king also arranged to have army officers and cavalry escort Nehemiah and his party.

So gracious was King Artaxerxes that Nehemiah asked also to have a letter from the king to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, to supply the timber needed to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. That too was granted. Nehemiah acknowledged that God's hand had moved in amazing ways to fulfill every detail of his requests.

We learn later, in Nehemiah 5:14, that Artaxerxes also appointed Nehemiah governor of Judah. God's favor, blessing, and provision were abundant in every way, even beyond what Nehemiah had requested.

Discuss

- ? What examples can you give of times when humility and integrity have gained favor for a believer in the workplace or some other setting?
- ? How can this study of Nehemiah's prayer impact your prayer life?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: God used Nehemiah's dedication to prayer, his humility, and his integrity to bring restoration to the city of Jerusalem and the people of Judah. As people of prayer, God can use us to bring the message of reconciliation and restoration to those around us today as well.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Using Nehemiah's pattern of prayer, pray for your community, your church, and your nation.
- Be the answer to someone's prayer by providing food or clothing for a person in need.
- Consider fasting at some time during this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Solomon Prays for Israel.
2 Chronicles 6:12–21

Tuesday

God Grants Favor.
Job 33:19–30

Wednesday

Pray for Peace in Jerusalem.
Psalm 122:1–9

Thursday

Prayer for Restorative Healing.
Acts 9:10–19

Friday

God Answers Cornelius' Prayer.
Acts 10:30–36

Saturday

Pray for All in Authority.
1 Timothy 2:1–4

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

June 27, 2021

LESSON 4

A Pattern for Prayer

Study Text

Luke 11:1–13

Central Truth

Jesus Christ modeled the best way to pray.



Key Verse Luke 11:1

Lord, teach us to pray (KJV).

“Lord, teach us to pray” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Examine and learn from Jesus’ teachings on prayer.
- Realize that prayer is the means by which we communicate with God, seeking Him and praising Him for His care and blessing in every area of life.
- Commit to making prayer a regular practice.

Introducing the Study

Say: Learning to pray is not a matter of saying the right words or following a formula. But there are elements of prayer that will help us grow closer to God, creating a more effective prayer life. Last week, we looked at Nehemiah’s prayer, noting that he could pray “in the moment” because of his relationship with God. Today, we will listen in as Jesus teaches His disciples the principles of prayer.

Opening Activity—How To?

Ask: What tasks or projects have you needed to do for which you sought “how-to” information? Where did you look for that information? Examples might include projects around the house, fixing a car, growing garden plants, etc. Students may have checked out books or looked on the Internet for instructions or “how-to” videos.

Say: When we begin a project that is new to us, we may consult an expert or a book or video to show us what to do. The disciples had watched Jesus pray and knew that He was connecting with God. They had seen the results of His prayers, and they wanted to learn to pray as He did. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It has been said that you can examine prayer with the following one-word questions: “Who, what, when, where, why, and how?” Who should pray? Everyone! What should we pray about? Everything! When should we pray? All the time! Where should we pray? Wherever we are! Why should we pray? So much depends upon it! How should we pray? With confidence, power, and boldness! Prayer must be a continual, ongoing part of our lives. Like Jesus’ disciples, may we, too, plead, “Lord, teach us to pray!”

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Luke 11:1. And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

2. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

3. Give us day by day our daily bread.

4. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

5. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

7. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

8. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

11. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

12. Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

13. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

New International Version

Luke 11:1. One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

2 He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. *May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

3. Give us each day our daily bread.

4. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation, *but deliver us from the evil one*."

5. Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread;

6. a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.'

7. And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'

8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

10. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks* for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

12. Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

13. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

**marginal reading*

Part 1—Christ Teaches How To Pray

□ Jesus Demonstrates Commitment to Prayer

Luke 11:1



Say: The first and most important principle of prayer is that we make prayer a regular practice. Scripture records that prayer was central to the lives of God's people. Throughout the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and many others engaged in prayer. Yet the concept of connecting with God on an individual level may have seemed somewhat foreign to them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In reading this important chapter on prayer, it is easy to quickly move past verse 1 and focus on Jesus' familiar pattern for prayer. Yet it is worthy to note Luke's statement that after Jesus was praying one day, His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. Though He is God the Son, Jesus carefully and regularly set aside time to pray, setting an important example. Jesus sometimes arose very early while it was yet dark and went to a solitary place to pray (see Mark 1:35). On one occasion, He climbed a mountain-side for a time of prayer (Mark 6:46). In another particular instance, prior to selecting His disciples, Jesus prayed all night on a mountainside (Luke 6:12). Luke 5:16, states, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (NIV). Clearly, prayer was a vital and integral part of His life and ministry. In time, Jesus' disciples began to take special note of Jesus' devotion to prayer, which led to their request to be taught.

Some scholars have noted that in biblical times it was customary for a rabbi to give his followers a prayer that they might pray regularly. The prayers were simple and could be repeated with ease. So it is possible that, in keeping with this custom, Jesus gave His disciples the prayer that is found in this passage. Yet, there is no question that what we call "The Lord's Prayer" has borne great significance in helping every generation since then understand key elements of effective prayer.

TEACHING TIP: The Pattern for Prayer

Take a moment to write this on the board in such a way as to form the acrostic, PRAY: (1) Praise and adoration; (2) Repentance of sin; (3) Asking for God's help; (4) Yielding to God's will. Talk about what each of these points means in practice when we pray, emphasizing that they are essential elements of prayer.

Discuss

- ? What does Jesus' example tell us about the importance of the pattern of prayer we establish in our own lives?
- ? Who are some people you might identify as "people of prayer?" How can you develop a stronger sense of passion for prayer?

□ Jesus Describes Vital Elements of Prayer

Luke 11:2–4



Say: Much has been written on these verses and the parallel passage in Matthew 6:9–13. People have memorized it, and some congregations recite it every Sunday. It has been set to music that has moved hearts in worship. The

principles it contains are essential, not just for the words we say in prayer, but for the way we live our lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At the outset, in Luke 11:2, Jesus said, “When you pray” not “If you pray.” Herein is established an underlying principle regarding the prayer life of the believer: Prayer is meant to be a non-negotiable discipline for Christ’s followers through all generations.

As Jesus delivered the pattern for His followers to use, He focused first on the importance of acknowledging that prayer means entering the presence of the Heavenly Father, who loves His people with an everlasting love and has great compassion toward them. (See Psalm 103:13–18.) Furthermore, His name is hallowed, or holy, and worthy of reverence and adoration (Luke 11:2). While Christians are invited in Scripture to come boldly and confidently into His presence (Hebrews 4:16), we must also enter with reverence and humility.

Jesus further instructed His people to pray that God’s kingdom will come (Luke 11:2). While Christians are to be focused on the final consummation of all things, living in light of Christ’s return, we must also pray that God’s kingdom will reign in our hearts here and now. In so doing, the enemy will not have dominion over us, and our priorities can remain in line with God’s purposes.

Once Christians have entered into God’s presence with adoration and reverence, and have acknowledged the priority of accomplishing His will, God invites us to petition for our day-to-day needs, expressed in the words, “Give us each day our daily bread” (verse 3, NIV). God is our Source, our Provider for the things that we need to strengthen us physically, to enable us to go about our daily duties, and to serve Him. God’s provision, however, is not without condition. In Matthew 6:33, we are promised that, if we seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, the things we need will be added unto us.

Sin is a major hindrance to Christians with regard to doing God’s will and receiving His blessings and provision. Therefore, as we pray, we must always be careful to ask forgiveness for sins we have committed (verse 4). Repentance and contrition over sin clears the way for God’s purposes and provision in our lives. Being forgiven also calls us to practice a forgiving attitude toward those who have wronged us. Only with an attitude of forgiveness can we, in turn, receive forgiveness and maintain spiritual victory and vitality. (See Matthew 6:15.)

Maintaining a right relationship with God and others is also a key focus in praying the concluding plea of the Lord’s Prayer: “And lead us not into temptation” (verse 4, NIV). While God himself does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13), we are continually faced with things that can draw us away from our devotion to God. We need God’s guidance and discernment to avoid the pitfalls of temptation.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to begin prayer with adoration and praise?
- ? This pattern for prayer includes worship, repentance, petition, and yielding to God. Which of these is most difficult for you? Why?

Part 2—Christ Teaches Persistence in Prayer

□ The Need for Persistence

Luke 11:5–8



Say: At the first reading, this passage may be misinterpreted by some to mean that God is reluctant to answer our prayers or that He is annoyed by our asking. Some might even say, “I don’t want to bother God with my requests.” But the point of this passage is to teach persistence in prayer. If an earthly friend will eventually respond to the repeated pleas of his friend, how much more will our loving Heavenly Father respond to us? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we read Jesus’ continued teaching on prayer, it is clear that the Lord’s Prayer is not the only prayer we can pray. Jesus followed that teaching with a focus on the importance of persistence in prayer. We pray in different ways according to the situations or challenges we face.

In Luke 11:5–8, Jesus posed to His disciples a hypothetical situation that reflected the customs of the day: A man came to a neighbor’s house at midnight pleading for some bread to feed a guest. According to custom, setting out some food for a guest was common courtesy, but the man had none to share. So he awakened his sleeping friend for three loaves. The late hour was problematic. In many households of that day, it was customary for the family to sleep together in a common room. The father would sleep at one end and the mother at the other with the children in between. At such an hour as this, everyone would have been tucked away for the night.

Thus, the man inside argued with his friend that the hour was late and everyone was in bed. Yet his friend persisted with his request. According to Luke’s account, the homeowner finally relented, not because of friendship with his neighbor (though such friendship was certainly sincere), but because of his friend’s dogged persistence. The neighbor in need sought an answer to his plea despite the effort required or the possible consequences of inconveniencing his friend. His determined resolve reflects confident hope that supply for his need was available. The man’s confidence was rewarded as his friend produced the needed bread for his guest.

Discuss

- ? Jesus used a parable to teach about persistence in prayer. Can you write a modern-day parable that might teach the same lesson?
- ? Since God knows all things, including our needs, why is it important that we persist in prayer?

□ Keep On Asking, Seeking, Knocking

Luke 11:9–10



Say: Depending on the nature of our needs, our prayers might vary in intensity. However, God does not take lightly the needs that we bring to Him, even as His timing is often not the same as ours. If He responded to everything we

asked immediately, we might never learn the lessons of seeking and knocking. (And most importantly, we might miss God's greater purposes.) The more intense the need, the sooner we may move from simply asking to seeking and knocking. But the message we get from this is that we must never give up. Even if we don't see immediate answers, God is still hearing our prayers and working behind the scenes. His answer may not be what we expect, but we can trust Him to answer in the way that is best. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Following through on the theme of persevering in prayer, Jesus delivered His very familiar instruction, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9, NIV). The tense of the verbs in the original Greek text implies ongoing action—keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. There may also be a progression in terms of prayers offered and God's response. At times, we may ask God to meet a particular need and the answer comes readily. At other times, it is necessary to not only ask but to seek Him through earnest petition. While asking results in receiving, seeking results in finding, perhaps implying the discovery of God's will and purpose in a matter. If the answer is delayed further, it may be necessary to persevere at length. Knocking results in an open door, which may suggest a specific direction to be taken or a particular means of fulfilling God's will. In any case, the message is to keep pressing for the answer, whether the need is immediate or long-term. Diligence and sincerity are keys to receiving God's answer.



Resource Packet Item 1: Just Twenty More Minutes, Lord

Read or ask a student to read the true story, "Just Twenty More Minutes, Lord!" from the *Adult Resource Packet*. Discuss how this story from a missionary pilot in Alaska relates to the neighbor's plea for bread and the command toward asking, seeking, and knocking. If time permits, invite students to share personal testimonies of answers to prayer.

Discuss

- ? What examples can you give of times when your prayers could be described as "keeping on seeking and knocking"?
- ? Have you ever been prompted by the Spirit to pray for someone when you did not know what their need was? Share your experience.



Part 3—The Father Gives the Holy Spirit

Even Earthly Fathers Give Good Gifts

Luke 11:11–12

Say: One of the most understandable illustrations of the Heavenly Father's pleasure in responding to our needs is the attitude of loving earthly parents. Jesus used the love of a good, loving earthly father to illustrate the Father's love for us. When children are in need, a good father takes pleasure in meeting their needs. It gives children great joy when they know they can

come to their father with any problem, and the father will do his best to help them. However, human resources are limited, but God's resources are limitless. His love is even greater than our love for our children. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Jesus concluded His teaching on prayer, focusing on God's willingness to answer persistent prayer, He brought an application down to the human level, posing these questions to fathers: "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:11–12, NIV). At the absurdity of these questions, the resounding reply would be "Of course not!" Although even the most loving earthly father cannot even come close to the holiness and righteousness of God, no father who cared at all for his children would remotely consider doing such things. Even in their human weakness and propensity to fail, good fathers will do what is best for their children. The logic Jesus presents here is inescapable. Our Heavenly Father has unlimited resources, and He loves His children intensely. Truly, then, He knows how to give good gifts.



Resource Packet Item 2: God's Answers to Prayer

Distribute the work sheet, and divide your class into small groups. If possible, make the groups different from the way students would normally divide up so they are working with people they might not normally work with. Give them a few minutes to answer the four questions on the sheet, then ask the groups to share their answers. Depending on the size of your class, you may want each group to share answers to a different question.

Discuss

- ? How can you explain the heavenly Father's love for us to someone who may not have had a good earthly father?
- ? If you are a parent, how does this teaching of Jesus help your understanding of God?

□ The Heavenly Father Gives Greater Gifts

Luke 11:13



Say: Jesus was preparing His disciples for the gift of the Holy Spirit that would be given after His resurrection. At this point they did not understand the full significance of the gift He was promising.

Upon establishing an earthly father's natural tendency for benevolence toward his children, Jesus then brought the issue "home" by exploring the fundamental principle of what He taught. He asked, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13, NIV). There could be no argument. Jesus' question was clear and would logically elicit this kind of response: "Of course God would give the gift of the Holy Spirit to His children! He gives good gifts!"

Here described is a gift beyond comprehension. It is believed by many that Luke's reference here to "receiving the Holy Spirit" does not pertain to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that follows salvation, but rather to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We know that not all believers have received Holy Spirit baptism. So, while the Spirit does abide with and come alongside all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a subsequent gift, after salvation, that provides power to witness. In referencing this amazing gift, Luke was not only establishing that God will not withhold good gifts from His children, but that He also is ready to provide a gift of immeasurable value to any who will seek this blessing.

Discuss

- ? How does this teaching of Jesus on the Holy Spirit apply to believers today?
- ? Give opportunity for students to share their experiences in receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the difference it has made in their lives.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Luke 11 begins with Jesus teaching us how to pray, continues with promises of answers to our prayer, and concludes with the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit in response to the prayers of believers. This sequence is an excellent way to teach prayer in discipling new believers today.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Begin a prayer journal to record your prayer requests and the answers God provides.
- Find one or more prayer partners to agree with as you pray for the needs of each other.
- Make a list of the things for which you should thank God before beginning your petitions.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Determined Prayer.
Genesis 32:22–32

Tuesday

Earnest Prayer.
1 Samuel 1:9–18

Wednesday

Courageous Prayer.
Daniel 6:4–11

Thursday

Receive the Spirit.
Acts 19:1–7

Friday

Pray in the Spirit.
Romans 8:26–28

Saturday

Effective Prayer.
James 5:13–18

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

July 4, 2021

LESSON

5

Christ's High Priestly Prayer

Study Text

John 17:1–26

Central Truth

Jesus Christ's prayer details His desire for His followers.



Key Verse

John 17:22

The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one (KJV).

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Grasp the meaning and critical importance of Christ's high priestly prayer.
- Desire to emulate the values of Christ's high priestly prayer through attitudes as well as actions.
- Take steps to make Christ's desires a reality in day-to-day living.

Introducing the Study

Say: Last week, we looked at the pattern for prayer that Jesus gave His disciples. This week we move forward to the time when Jesus was nearing the conclusion of His earthly ministry, and praying for His followers was one of His last acts before His crucifixion. This speaks to His commitment to prayer and His concern for His disciples.

Opening Activity—"Important Prayers"

Ask: Who is the most prominent person who has prayed for you? Examples may include a high-level government official or a church or denominational leader.

Say: We might assume that the most prominent person would be a high-profile leader. But actually, the most prominent person who has prayed for you is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In John 17, He prayed for His disciples who surrounded Him at that time, but He also prayed "for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20 NIV). We are among those who believe through their message. And He continues to pray for us. Hebrews 7:25 declares that Jesus "he always lives to make intercession for them" (NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Have you ever wondered whether or not the prayer you prayed for something or someone was God's will for that individual or circumstance? At times it is hard to know God's purposes. Jesus, however, is God himself, and therefore has perfect knowledge of the will of the Father.

This week's study explores the high priestly prayer of Jesus. As we consider this wonderful prayer, let's contemplate its meaning and determine how we can fulfill God's desire for our lives.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 17:1. These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

2. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

4. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

11. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

12. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

14. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

20. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21. That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

New International Version

John 17:1. After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

2. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

3. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

4. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

11. “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

12. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

13. “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

14. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

17. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

18. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

20. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

21. that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

22. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—

23. I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”



Say: When we think of receiving glory, we think of personal praise or accolades. However, while Jesus is indeed worthy of all glory directed at His Person, here He prayed for a different aspect of glory. He was looking for the glory that would come as a result of fulfilling the plan His Father had for Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus desired to glorify the Father. He glorified the Father by consecrating himself to do the Father’s will. There was no aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry that fell short of complete obedience. The cross was to be the ultimate means of Christ’s glorification.

The end of John 16 concludes John’s account of Jesus’ farewell discourse to His disciples. Chapter 17 opens with Jesus taking the posture of prayer, which typified His full surrender to the will of the Father. John simply stated that He looked toward heaven and began to pray. Jesus’ focus at this point was that He would complete the task that was established before the foundation of the world—dying for the sins of the world.

Verse 1 declares that Jesus prayed to be glorified by the Father. That glory would come through the Cross. We should not assume that His determined focus was without struggle, however. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record Jesus’ response while praying in Gethsemane. He asked that, if it were possible, the Father would allow Him to be spared the “cup” of the Cross (see Luke 22:42). This request though was accompanied with a resolve to submit to the Father’s will.

While the Cross represented shame to the Jews and the Romans, to Jesus it would be the means of glory. Fulfilling the plan of salvation would be the path to glory. What was to bring glory to the Son would do the same to the Father. As Jesus arrived at end of His earthly journey, He was fully consecrated to seeing it through.

Discuss

- ? In what way was the Cross glorifying to Jesus?
- ? How can we participate in glorifying Jesus?



Say: In addition to being glorified by completing the work the Father had sent Him to do, Jesus would be glorified when He would return to be at the Father’s side, as He had been from eternity past. He left the realm of glory to become the Sacrifice for our sins. He was ready now to return to that glory. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus previously claimed all authority to both judge and forgive human beings. (See John 5:27 and Mark 2:10.) Only He has the authority to grant eternal life. This

authority came through the Father and was to be conferred through His atoning death and bodily resurrection.

Eternal life is no mere transaction; it is walking in the knowledge of and relationship with God. When a person comes to salvation through Jesus, that person enters into a relationship with God through Christ. Jesus made this clear in verse 3. “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (NIV). The believer’s joy is to grow in the knowledge of God throughout all eternity.

Although Christ’s work on the cross was yet to take place, Jesus spoke of it as if it were completed, or accomplished. In its fulfillment, the Father was glorified. Christ’s very act of obedience brought glory to the Father. The suffering that awaited Christ would be accompanied by the joy of perfectly fulfilling the purpose for which He entered the human realm.

With this knowledge, Jesus prayed one other prayer for himself. “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (verse 5, NIV). Only the Cross stood between Jesus and the glory He had in His eternal state. He had come to earth to bring glory to the Father through the Cross, and nothing would keep Him from returning to His state of eternal glory.

Discuss

- ? What does Christ’s obedience teach us about what pleases God?
- ? How can we imitate Christ in our attitudes and actions?



Resource Packet Item 1: The Mind of Christ

Distribute the work sheet and let students work on it in small groups. Then ask two or three of the groups to report their findings and discuss them.



Part 2— “Keep Them from Evil”

□ The Father Revealed through the Son

John 17:6–12

Say: Throughout his Gospel, John portrayed Jesus as representative of the Father. In the first chapter of the Gospel, he said, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18, NIV). Jesus had taught His disciples about the Father as He lived among them. He was now interceding for them with the Father—just as He continues to intercede for us (see, again, Hebrews 7:25). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Knowing His death was imminent, Jesus turned His attention to His disciples. We quickly see why this is called “Jesus’ high priestly prayer.” A priest is, among other things, a representative. Jesus had represented the Father to His disciples, and was now representing the disciples before the Father.

John 17:6 represents a change of focus as Christ transitions from praying for himself to praying for His disciples. Jesus felt a deep burden for their well-being. Chapters 14 through 16 of John’s Gospel detail His promise that the Holy Spirit

would come, even as Jesus was fully aware that the following hours would test them tremendously. With this in mind, Jesus committed them to the care of the Father.

Certainly, Jesus revealed himself and His purposes to His disciples over time. They observed and heard from Him throughout His three-year ministry. It is clear, however, that by this time they understood who He is. They had come to the conclusion that Jesus had come from the Father (verses 7–8). He had protected them as a Shepherd (verse 12; see John 10:1–18). Jesus also understood His disciples' vulnerability. Danger awaited them, and only God's supernatural hand could keep them safe in a world that would be increasingly hostile and dangerous.

Jesus fulfilled His role as "Good Shepherd" perfectly. Verse 12 makes clear that none of the disciples given to His protection had been lost—with the exception of Judas who had fulfilled that which was prophesied concerning His betrayal, the one "doomed to destruction" (verse 12, NIV). Today, Jesus continues His intercession for His followers (1 John 2:1).



Resource Packet Item 2: Jesus, Our Faithful High Priest

Distribute the work sheet "Jesus, Our Faithful High Priest." Have students answer the questions on the sheet. After they have taken a few minutes to do so, conclude the exercise by emphasizing how we can have confidence in Christ's understanding of the human struggle.

Discuss

- ? In what ways can Christ's prayer for His disciples provide us comfort?
- ? Why do you think Jesus prayed for protection for His disciples?

□ Set Apart in Truth

John 17:13–19



Say: Jesus was "set apart" for a specific purpose. As He died on the cross, He made it possible for His disciples, then and now, to be set apart for Him. No amount of effort on our part could do this; it took the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God. Jesus prayed that the disciples would be sanctified through His death so they could be sent into the world with the message of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus made clear that His disciples were not of the world just as He is not of the world. As a result, they would experience the same rejection as would He. Christ's prayer to the Father is not for Him to take His disciples out of harm's way. Rather it is that they be kept from the power of Satan. As His followers, they would have to endure the same kind of persecution, but they would not have to do so without God's abiding presence and sustaining power.

Christ asks the Father to "sanctify them by the truth" (verse 17, NIV). The word "sanctify" means to make holy by separation. Just as Jesus is not of the world, neither are His followers. His disciples are to be holy, separated from the things associated with the world and dedicated to the service of their Lord. The disciples of

Jesus must be set apart by the truth. Christ's words "your word is truth" (verse 17, NIV) binds His revelation of who God is to the concept of truth. It is only truth that can set humanity free (John 8:32,36).

Looking forward to the Cross, Jesus declared that He was about to sanctify (set apart) himself for the sake of His disciples or, in other words, do what they could not do for themselves: pay the penalty for their sins (John 17:19). This sacrificial act would also be an example to them as they would follow Jesus into the world to proclaim salvation through Jesus alone.

Discuss

- ? What does it mean to be "not of the world," even as we are living in the world?
- ? How does our ability to set ourselves apart unto God impact our witness to the world?



Part 3— "That They All May Be One"

□ For All Who Will Believe

John 17:20–23

Say: At this point in His prayer, Jesus begins to pray for us. Think about the significance of this. It is easy to understand how He would pray for the men who had faithfully followed Him throughout the previous three-plus years. But now He looked through time and prayed for us. And take note of what He prayed: Jesus prayed specifically for unity among believers. He certainly knew that as the Church grew, it was inevitable that there would be conflict. So He prayed for unity—and He did so with a very important purpose in mind. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John 17:20 begins the third segment of Christ's prayer: first He prayed for himself, then for His apostles, and then He switched focus onto the following generations of Christians who would walk with Him throughout the Church Age: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (verse 20, NIV). This element of Christ's prayer emphasizes the glorious truth that we, too, were on His mind as He prayed.

As Jesus prayed for the Church of the centuries that would follow, He focused on the need for unity. It is critical that those who follow Him be one—just as He is one with the Father and the Father is one with Him. In this segment of His prayer, the segment that embraced the ages to come, Jesus highlighted the reality that there is no greater threat to the Church than disunity. This seemingly bold statement is explained well as the reader realizes the potency of unity within the Church—as we will see in the verses to come.

On its face, it seems that there should be no reason to not experience the unity that Christ so fervently desires. After all, the same Spirit dwells in all of us and we follow the same Lord (Ephesians 4:1–6). Unfortunately, the Church has an adversary in Satan, who continually seeks to undermine the Church and its unity. Believers face the temptation to have conflict with one another by highlighting

unnecessary disagreements, whether they be over debatable or non-essential doctrines, or matters relating to personal convictions or opinions. Simply put, Christians are wise to focus on what holds them together, not on the things that would threaten to tear them apart. As a result, unity is not just an abstract goal. Unity in the Spirit is possible as God's people seek Him. And, indeed, unity is essential.

The importance of Christian unity is stated in verse 21. It is critical that the world believe that Jesus is more than just a mere man. The world must see that He and the Father are One. The unity of believers provides powerful evidence that this is true—that Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are who we, as believers, proclaim the Triune God to be. When followers of Jesus are able to resolve their difficulties and disagreements in love, the world will take notice. They will know that the Jesus that is proclaimed in Scripture is the Jesus of salvation. The Jesus of transformation. The Jesus Who is the one and only Son of God.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Call to Christian Unity

Distribute the information sheet “The Call to Christian Unity.” Take a few of minutes to emphasize important items on the sheet. You may wish to read some of the biblical passages. Note the important points that are made regarding unity.

Discuss

- ? Why do Christians find unity to be so elusive?
- ? Considering all of the things Jesus could have prayed for regarding the Church, including us today, why do you think unity was the subject of His prayer?

□ To Behold My Glory

John 17:24–26



Say: Jesus summarized His prayer with a petition that the disciples would be with Him. As we read this passage, we can almost feel the emotion in Jesus' prayer. He left the glory of heaven to come to earth to be the perfect sacrifice. Now, He was about to return to that glory. He had the cross and the resurrection ahead of Him, but He knew what was waiting beyond that. He loves His disciples, not just those who had walked on earth with Him, but all of us, and He wants us to be with Him in that glorious place. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The words “to be with me . . . and to see my glory” (John 17:24, NIV) almost certainly refers to Christ's desire that His followers enter into eternal glory with Him. He is looking toward eternal life. The final words of Jesus to His Father seem to reflect back to what He had already prayed. They may be a summary of Jesus' heart as He anticipated the Cross. He expressed His deep desire for His followers to be with Him in heaven and know the glory of the Godhead.

For more than thirty years, Christ had experienced the limitations and frustrations of the human struggle. Christ's humanity demonstrated His identification with

the human condition. He now was ready to return to the Father. He wanted those whom He loved to experience true glory.

Verses 25–26 provide a note of finality, not only to Jesus’ prayer but also to His ministry. His entire life pointed to the hours that were immediately ahead. While extraordinary pain and suffering lay before Him, so did an indescribable joy. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV).

Discuss

- ? How would you describe the emotions Jesus might have been feeling as He faced the end of His time on earth and the glory that would follow?
- ? How might the way Jesus prayed for you in John 17 impact the way you live for Him?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As Jesus was facing the Cross, He prayed for himself, His immediate disciples, and all of us. His primary prayer for us was that we would have unity. What are some ways you demonstrate unity with other believers? What are some things that challenge that unity, and how can you overcome those things?

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Examine yourself to identify traits that might lead to division in the Body of Christ.
- Pray for opportunities to demonstrate to the world who Jesus is, as the Son of God and Lord of your life.
- Look for an opportunity to repair a strained relationship, to whatever extent you are able, this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Moses Prays for Israel.
Numbers 14:11–20

Tuesday

Choose Obedience and Live.
Deuteronomy 30:11–20

Wednesday

Unity Among Believers.
Psalm 133:1–3

Thursday

Call to Unity.
Philippians 2:1–4

Friday

Jesus Intercedes for Us.
Hebrews 7:22–26

Saturday

Resist the Devil.
1 Peter 5:6–9

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

July 11, 2021

LESSON 6

Jesus' Prayer of Surrender

Study Text

Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42;
Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1

Central Truth

Jesus demonstrated surrender to the will of God.



Key Verse

Mark 14:36

[Jesus] said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt (KJV).

Abba, Father," [Jesus] said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Comprehend the significance of Christ's surrender to the Father.
- Determine to follow Christ's example by unconditionally surrendering to God.
- Take steps to surrender to God's will in life situations.

Introducing the Study

Say: We must not let the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane lose its significance because it is so familiar. We may, in fact, struggle to pray, "not as I will, but as You will" in our own prayers, yet none of us has faced, or will face, the kinds of trauma Jesus was about to experience. Not only was He facing the most cruel death known to man, He was also carrying the weight of the sins of the entire world—even as He always remained and remains being God the Son. This perspective will help us understand Christ's deep emotion as He prayed.

Opening Activity—Difficult Prayers of Surrender

Ask: What is the most difficult prayer you have prayed when you needed to surrender to God's will rather than trust your own judgment?

Say: No matter how hard our most difficult prayers have been, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus understands and empathizes with what we feel because He, too, prayed a prayer of surrender. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The word "surrender" prompts a number of images in our minds. It literally means to cease resistance and to submit to the authority of another. When a person surrenders, that person gives up all rights to someone, who then assumes control over his or her life. All personal prerogatives cease in the face of that submission.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus surrendered to His Father's will. It is difficult to understand precisely what that means, given that Jesus is God the Son. However, Christ's surrender provides a strong example of what our response to God should be.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 18:1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.

Luke 22:39. And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

40. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

Matthew 26:37. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

39. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Mark 14:35. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

36. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

Luke 22:41. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

42. Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Matthew 26:42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

43. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

44. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Luke 22:43. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

44. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Matthew 26:45. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

New International Version

John 18:1. When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

Luke 22:39. Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.

40. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation."

Matthew 26:37. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

38. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

39. Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Mark 14:35. Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

36. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Luke 22:41. He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,

42. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Matthew 26:42. He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

43. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

44. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Luke 22:43. An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

44. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Matthew 26:45. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

46. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Part 1—The Garden of Sorrow

□ Concern for His Disciples

John 18:1; Luke 22:39–40



Say: Despite the fact that Jesus was facing the Cross, He was concerned for His disciples. He knew they would be sorely tempted during the coming hours, and He encouraged them to pray for victory over temptations. (Share your highlights from the following text.) (*Play the video for this lesson, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

The Garden of Gethsemane sits on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. In order to arrive there, Jesus and His disciples had to cross the Kidron Valley, which separates the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives (John 18:1). Gethsemane literally means “oil press.” (This would refer to an olive press.) The Garden of Gethsemane was a grove of olive trees, and the traditional site of the Garden still contains such trees.

The Mount of Olives was a common destination for Jesus and His disciples (Luke 22:39). It is clear that Jesus and His disciples were extremely familiar with the terrain and overall setting. And so, during this crucial time approaching the crucifixion, Jesus led His followers to a place that they knew well.

Luke recorded Jesus’ immediate concern for His closest followers, noting that Jesus said, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation” (verse 40, NIV). While the Gospels of Matthew (26:41) and Mark (14:38) also refer to this, they emphasize Christ’s overall anticipation of His passion. Luke, in contrast, places special focus on how Jesus encourages the disciples to pray for themselves—saying this not once but twice (see Luke 22:40 and 46).

Jesus was not only burdened concerning His own needs, but also for those who loved Him. He was keenly aware of what awaited them. Soon, He knew, they would struggle with their faith and later they themselves would deal with suffering in the form of persecution and death. They did not have the strength to pray for themselves, so He interceded on their behalf. Thus, Gethsemane was a “garden of sorrow” for others as well as himself.

Discuss

- ? Jesus instructed His disciples to pray that they would not fall into temptation. Why is this a good prayer for believers to pray even today?
- ? As He looked toward His crucifixion, Jesus was concerned for His disciples. How can we cultivate a practice of looking outside ourselves as we pray?

□ Overwhelmed with Sorrow

Matthew 26:36–38



Say: Whether it is the loss of a loved one, a job, health, or some other traumatic loss, sorrow can be overwhelming. We can be encouraged to know that even Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow. Yet He knew He would find strength as He confided in the Father. When others forsake us, we can find solace in communion with our Heavenly Father. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Matthew emphasizes the deep emotion of Jesus' time in Gethsemane. This Gospel record that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to witness His extreme distress. Matthew states that "He began to be sorrowful and troubled" (26:37, NIV). The depths of His suffering are expressed in His words to the three disciples. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (verse 38, NIV). The expression "to the point of death" indicates the extreme nature of Jesus' distress.

It is clear that all the events of Christ's life had now come to a physical, emotional, and spiritual climax. The humiliation of the cross remained before Him. People who loved and cherished Jesus deeply and personally would either abandon Him or not be nearby to offer Him support. The agony that awaited would have to be endured in utter solitude. The fact that His disciples were sleeping at this pivotal hour had made this reality quite clear. Jesus had asked Peter, James, and John to pray and keep watch with Him, but they could do nothing but sleep.

While Jesus lacked human support throughout His ordeal, His Father was present with Him in His hour of trial. God the Father would be Jesus' Source of comfort and consolation. In Christ's hour of overwhelming sorrow, divine solace remained available.

Discuss

- ? Have you ever been in a situation where you were in a significant struggle and there was no one there to support you? How did you feel?
- ? During this time, in what ways were you able to experience God's presence?



Resource Packet Item 1: Where It Happened

Distribute the information sheet with the map and photos showing the setting for this lesson. Invite student to talk about what it might have been like for Jesus and the disciples as they moved toward the Garden of Gethsemane.



Part 2—Submission to the Father

□ If It Be Possible, Remove This Cup Matthew 26:39–41; Mark 14:35–36

Say: While the Gospels recount the temptations of Jesus just after His baptism (see Matthew 4:1–11), it is certain that His testing did not end there. As we read of Him here in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see perhaps the most profound and consequential temptation. He could have escaped, and He prayed to the Father to ask if there was another way to save humanity. Yet, He overcame the temptation to flee. As a result, the plan of salvation moved forward. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Jesus anticipated the extraordinary nature of His suffering, He made a plea asking His Father about the possibility of another way. The expression "cup"

(Matthew 26:39) is normally a figurative reference to God's judgment, thus pointing to the sin-sacrifice that awaited the Son of God. In His anguish Jesus desired to see if there was possibly another alternative, even as He did not waver in His commitment to do His Father's will.

In seeking to understand this cry from Jesus, we need to remind ourselves of His humanity. Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. Satan had previously tempted Christ, and now a similar temptation was before Him. Was there another way?

Just as all humans face temptation with regard to obeying the will of the Father, so did Jesus. The temptation was real, even if we might struggle to understand what such a temptation involved. The letter to the Hebrews declares that Christ was tempted just as we are: "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (4:15, NIV). Jesus was familiar with the spiritual trials of being human, even though He did not succumb to sin.

The Gospels make it clear that turning back from the ordeal that awaited Him was a choice Jesus could have in fact made. The escape route was in front of Him. Gethsemane lay on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. The eastern slope provided passage to the Judean wilderness, the same escape route taken by His ancestor, David. He could have fled. But instead, He followed perfectly the will of the Father.



Resource Packet Item 2: Overcoming a Final Test

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to respond individually or in small groups. Ask a few people to share their answers and discuss them.

Discuss

- ? How hard is it to say, "Not as I will, but as You will"? What examples can you think of where you might need to utter those words?
- ? Why do you think the disciples did not stay awake during the time that Jesus prayed?

□ The Way of Suffering

Luke 22:41–42



Say: Prayer provides a path of submission as our faith is increased by communing with the Father. Jesus knew the human weakness of His disciples, so He instructed them to pray. He knew prayer would be the means through which they would find strength. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Christ's prayer to His Father, we observe that His human struggle gave way to complete submission. The will of the Father was for Jesus to suffer not only the pain of a cruel physical death, but also the agony of the weight of the sins of the entire human race. In Luke 22:41–42, then, we see both Christ's divinity and humanity manifest.

Jesus may well have been reflecting upon His own struggle when He told His disciples: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (see Matthew 26:41, NIV). He would resist and overcome temptation, and they needed to do the same. Jesus knew that His followers would also need to overcome temptation in order to follow the way of the Lord. Yet He also knew that they would ultimately give way to fear, and scatter as the crucifixion approached.

Prayer would be the disciples’ vital resource in the days ahead. Their ability to appeal to the presence and power of God would be all that separated them from the enemy’s grasp. Jesus’ followers needed to learn to pray. He knew that while their hearts desired to do the will of God, their flesh was in need of the Spirit’s enablement.

Discuss

- ? In what ways does Christ’s request to have “this cup” pass from Him help you as you confront your own struggle to do the will of God?
- ? What does Jesus’ exhortation to the disciples to “watch and pray” tell you about your own prayer needs?



Part 3—The Anguish of Jesus

☐ Strengthened by an Angel

Matthew 26:42–44; Luke 22:43

Say: When everyone had deserted Jesus, the Father did not forget Him, but sent an angel to strengthen Him. As Jesus prayed, strength came not from other people, but from the Father himself. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Even though the disciples were not able to help Jesus during His deepest anguish, Jesus was not without comfort. The Father sent an angel to bring Him strength as He prepared for the coming ordeal (Luke 22:43), and made sure that His suffering Son was cared for during these dark hours. That the Father would send an angel to bring assistance to Jesus during these dark hours further highlights this. In many respects, it brings to memory the occasion of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness of Judea at the onset of His ministry. There Matthew records that when Christ successfully resisted Satan’s temptation, angels attended to Him (Matthew 4:11).

The beginning of Christ’s lonely battle had commenced. The suffering had begun. Jesus’ physical strength had begun to weaken. He needed assistance to complete the task that awaited. We do not know what specific ministry the angel performed. Luke simply states that the angel appeared to Him and gave Him strength.



Resource Packet Item 3: Angels in the Life of Jesus

Distribute the work sheet and, if time permits, have the students work in small groups to complete it. You might assign one set of Scriptures to each small group and let the groups report their findings.

Discuss

- ? How does God strengthen His people in times of loneliness or anguish?
- ? What other Bible figures can you name to whom angels appeared?

□ Extreme Anguish

Matthew 26:45–46; Luke 22:44



Say: Crucifixion is arguably one of the cruelest forms of execution ever practiced by humanity. There was nothing about it that was designed to be humane or merciful in the least; to the contrary, it was meant to be as agonizing as possible. The word “excruciating,” which is our word for horrible pain, is derived from the word “crucify” (more specifically, the Latin word *cruis*, or “cross”). However, the anguish of Jesus as He approached the cross went beyond the physical agony of crucifixion. The greater agony was the weight of the sins of the world that He would carry, making it possible for us to be reconciled to God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is believed that Luke’s words “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44, NIV), referred to a medical condition called “hematohidrosis.” This is a rare condition where people can, amid times of extreme physical or emotional stress, have droplets of blood appear in their sweat.

Physically, in these rare cases, capillaries that flow into sweat glands rupture and mix blood into the perspiration. It is interesting that Luke (a physician) alone describes this event in the Garden during the extraordinary anguish experienced by Jesus. According to Luke, the droplets were more than a few. Luke states that the drops were falling to the ground as Jesus prayed with extreme urgency.

The Greek word translated “anguish” in Luke 22 (NIV; “agony”; KJV) spoke to extreme struggling and anguish. The battle Jesus was to face not only involved the severity of death through crucifixion, but also an unknowable spiritual experience with profound dimensions. He was to carry the sins of all humanity. The sheer burden of this reality is beyond all human understanding.

As Jesus determined to embrace the suffering that was before Him, the totality of His struggle lies well beyond our ability to grasp. It would be a level of suffering never before experienced. The lonely path before the One who was both human and divine was to be experienced without any help and support once He left the Garden of Gethsemane. Anticipating this, Jesus did the only thing He could do: He engaged in the most earnest prayer.

Just as Jesus overcame the temptation to bypass the excruciating suffering of the cross at the beginning of His ministry, He faced and conquered it again in the Garden of Gethsemane. We often think of Jesus’ suffering solely in the context of the crucifixion. But, in fact, the suffering began in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He suffered physically and experienced the betrayal of a close companion (Matthew 26:45–46). There, amid these painful trials, Christ endured temptation and fully resolved to drink the “cup” His Father was placing before Him.

Discuss

- ? How does taking time to contemplate the events in the Garden of Gethsemane affect your appreciation for Christ's work on the cross on your behalf?
- ? How does Jesus' example help you as you face your temptations in your daily life?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In the face of greater agony than any human could ever imagine suffering, Jesus modeled perfect obedience as He surrendered to the will of His Father. Without that surrender, which was followed by sacrifice, we would be forever lost and without hope. God desires that we, too, surrender our will and desires to His perfect will for us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Examine your life for areas in which you need to surrender to God.
- Spend time in worship, expressing gratitude for all that Jesus has done for you.
- Share the love of Jesus with someone who needs to know Him this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Surrender to the Call.
Isaiah 6:1–8

Tuesday

Reluctant To Surrender.
Jeremiah 38:17–23

Wednesday

Totally Surrendered to God.
Daniel 3:14–25

Thursday

Deny Yourself To Follow Jesus.
Matthew 16:24–28

Friday

Surrender to God's Will.
Acts 21:10–14

Saturday

Submit to God.
James 4:7–10

Unit 1: Great Prayers of the Bible

July 18, 2021

LESSON

7

Paul's Prayers for Churches

Study Text

Ephesians 3:14–21; Philippians 1:3–11; Colossians 1:9–14

Central Truth

Christians should pray for one another to know God, show love, and live exemplary lives.



Key Verse Colossians 1:9

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (KJV).

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize critical priorities in prayer exemplified by Paul in his prayers for the churches.
- Apply proper priorities when contemplating one's own prayer life.
- Demonstrate in day-to-day living what it means to pursue effective prayer and Christlike love.

Introducing the Study

Say: After his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul became firmly committed to expanding the Church, just as he had earlier been committed to hindering it. Later, Paul wrote letters to believers in the churches he had established. Three of these letters were to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians. As we read the writings of Paul, we discover that he was a man of prayer, and he often reminded people that he was praying for them.

Opening Activity—Prayer Requests

Ask: What prayer requests have you given or heard in recent days? How seriously do you think Christians take prayer requests when they are mentioned?

Say: Most of our prayer requests revolve around our families, health, or financial needs. There is nothing wrong with praying about those things; in fact, God wants us to bring all of our needs to Him. In today's lesson, however, we are going to look at a different type of prayer request. Perhaps, in doing so, we can broaden our prayer life to include these things Paul focused on in his prayers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Have you ever wondered whether or not the prayers you offer for yourself and others represent the priorities of God? It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day affairs of life and lose sight of critical spiritual realities. We often find ourselves so consumed by our health issues, financial circumstances, and other temporal struggles that we fail to recognize God's eternal priorities. As you reflect upon the apostle Paul's prayers for the churches he mentored, consider the critical importance of these prayer emphases in your own life.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Ephesians 3:14. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15. Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16. That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18. May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19. And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

20. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Philippians 1:3. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

4. Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.

9. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

10. That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.

11. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulfulness.

13. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

New International Version

Ephesians 3:14. For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15. from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

16. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

18. may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

19. and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

20. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

21. to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Philippians 1:3. I thank my God every time I remember you.

4. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.

9. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

10. so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

11. filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,

10. so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

11. being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,

13. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

14. in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



Say: Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus focused on their spiritual growth. He wanted them to have the power of the Spirit in their lives, and this included understanding God's great love for them. Our view of God greatly impacts our spiritual growth. If our view of God does not include understanding His great love for us and the entire world, we cannot know Him in His fullness. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul's greatest priorities for the churches he established in Ephesus were eternal. His unrelenting concerns were for the spiritual growth of the ever-expanding numbers of believers in them. To the apostle, the Church is a magnificent mystery and cherished expression of divine love. His prayer for God's chosen and precious reflected this overwhelming passion.

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is one of two recorded prayers offered by him in the letter. (The other is found in 1:17–23.) His prayer in chapter 3 demonstrates his passionate desire to see God work powerfully among the Gentiles, which made up a large majority of the Ephesian believers.

Paul specifically prayed that the Ephesians would be strengthened with power by the Holy Spirit. The word translated "power" in verse 16 conveys the sense of being strengthened with might—the might necessary to live victorious Christian lives. Paul then prayed that Christ would dwell in their hearts to make this victorious living a reality.

Lastly, Paul called upon God in prayer to root and establish the Ephesian believers in love (verse 17). The Greek culture placed a great deal of value on knowledge. Because of this, churches in the Greek culture were always in danger of an overly intellectual approach to faith. Understanding God, however, required much more than intellect. A true knowledge of God would only be possible through an understanding of the vast dimensions of divine love. Paul prayed that they would have the ability to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (verses 18–19, NIV).



Resource Packet Item 1: Love that Surpasses Knowledge

Divide the class into small groups and distribute the work sheet. Give them a few minutes to respond to the questions, then ask them to share some of their thoughts.

Discuss

- ? How would you describe God's love to an unbeliever? How would you describe His love to a new Christian?
- ? How does a fuller understanding of God's love impact the way you live your life? How might such an understanding impact your relationships with other believers, as well as unbelievers?

Say: These final two verses of Ephesians 3 are some of the most quoted of Paul’s writings. Often we look at the beginning words, focusing on God’s ability to fulfill our requests, but the main part of the sentence is “Now to him . . . be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!” (Ephesians 3:20). The true focus is on giving all glory to Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle’s prayer in Ephesians chapter 3 ends with a doxology. This doxology affirms Paul’s absolute confidence in God to accomplish that which is beyond all he not only asks but conceives in his heart. Paul recognized that there is no limit to God’s power. The only limitations lie with humans who lack sufficient ability to ask or imagine.

The power inherent within Paul’s prayers, and ours, is not just some impersonal outside force. Rather, that power is found in the workings of God within us as we pray and believe boldly and confidently. Such power is due to the fact that Christ lives within His followers, and we can therefore make the most bold of requests in faith that they will become living realities (verse 20).

The doxology concludes with praise: “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (verse 21, NIV). The exaltation of God will never end. It will continue throughout time and eternity. This glory will be evident in the Church first, and that is fitting. It is incumbent upon God’s people to bring Him glory, beginning now and extending throughout all the ages to come.

Discuss

- ? Why do we tend to spend most of our prayer time asking God to meet our temporal needs, and often neglect seeking His eternal purposes in our lives?
- ? Why is it so vital that we understand the love of Christ that “surpasses knowledge”?



Part 2—To Abound in Love

□ Paul’s Joy and Confidence

Philippians 1:3–8

Say: Paul’s prayer for the Philippians, while specifically addressed to them, carries the theme of love applicable to every believer, and focuses on tangible demonstrations of love that could only come through Jesus Christ. Paul wanted their depth of love and insight to grow and bear the fruit of righteousness (1:11). Notice the end of verse 11: “to the glory and praise of God” (NIV). Like his prayer for the Ephesians, Paul’s primary goal was that God would be glorified. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from a Roman prison. Philippians is one of a number of Epistles known as “Prison Epistles.” What is astounding in so many of

these letters of Paul is their tone. They often are filled with expressions of joy. This is clearly the case in his letter to the Philippians.

The apostle's prayer for the Philippians begins with thanksgiving and expressions of joy. In 1:5, Paul stated the basis of his joy: He is grateful for their partnership with him in the proclamation of the gospel from the very beginning. Paul founded the church at Philippi at the beginning of his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11–40) and at the time of the writing of this letter, more than ten years later, the Philippians' relationship with him was unchanged. They had remained faithful partners.

The faithfulness of the church at Philippi produced extraordinary affection on Paul's part, toward them. He expressed this in verses 7–8. Even while he was in prison, the church had aggressively sought to bring him comfort. The apostle never doubted the love and devotion of the Philippians.

Paul also expressed his confidence in God for His work in them. God had begun a good work in the Philippians and could be counted on to finish it (verse 6). He had every confidence that their profound spiritual growth would continue until the day of Christ's return. Paul understood that the work of salvation was the work of God and not his.

Discuss

- ? How had the Philippians demonstrated love for Paul?
- ? How was Paul able to maintain a joyful attitude in the face of imprisonment?

Knowledge, Discernment, and Insight

Philippians 1:9–11



Say: Like other prayers we have considered, Paul gave thanks before moving to his petitions in Philippians 1. The nature of his petitions are much different than some of our prayers, however. He was vitally interested in the spiritual growth of the Philippians. In other prayers, he talked about praying for other things such as healing, but his primary emphasis was always on spiritual growth. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Following his expressions of thanksgiving and joy over the Philippian church, the apostle transitioned to prayer in 1:9. He asked God to give them knowledge, depth of understanding, and the ability to discern the pure from those things that would hinder.

Such qualities would be vital for the church both in good times and bad. Whenever Paul encourages the pursuit of knowledge, he never means knowledge for its own sake. Rather he calls for a knowledge motivated by and grounded in love. For Paul, love for God, reflected in love for others, is the appropriate motivation toward knowledge. Paul was praying for the Philippian church's power to understand the will, the works, and the ways of God. The apostle longed for true believer to understand life within the perspective of the Lord and have insight into God's eternal kingdom.

The word translated “discern” in the NIV (verse 10) can be translated “judge,” or “perceive.” It connotes the ability to discriminate between two or more things. There is a sense of wisdom present within this word, as it has to do with the skill and ability to separate good choices from bad.

The “knowledge,” “discernment,” and “insight” referred to in this passage have to do with moral choices rather than mere intellectual understanding. Paul prayed for the Philippians so they would be “blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ” (verses 10–11, NIV).



Resource Packet Item 2: Putting Paul’s Prayer into Practice

Distribute the work sheet and give the students a few minutes to reflect on how to implement the concepts of Paul’s prayer into their personal lives. Then pray for God’s help to fulfill the things they have noted. (You might want to close the class with this activity instead of doing it here.)

Discuss

- ? What does Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians tell you about the ability to have joy even in difficult circumstances?
- ? Why is it important to pursue knowledge through love?



Part 3—To Live Worthy of the Lord

□ Comprehending God’s Will

Colossians 1:9–10

Say: Now we move to looking at Paul’s prayer for the Colossians, the church in the city of Colossae. This prayer also focuses on spiritual growth, a good indicator of the importance of discipleship in the eyes of God. Many people want to know God’s will for their lives, but the place to begin is to study His Word. A college professor once commented that students often asked him how to find God’s will for their lives. He always pointed to the Bible and asked if they were doing everything it commanded. That’s a great place to start. As we begin to follow the Bible’s teachings, God will then reveal more specifics to us for our individual lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, written in 1646 and 1647 as an instruction for Christian life and belief, asked perhaps the most important question that could be asked: “What is the chief end of man?” The answer it provided is extraordinarily comprehensive. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

In chapter 1 of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, he wrote that his continual prayer for the church was that God would fill them with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding (verse 9). The word “fill” expresses the sense of being filled to the point of being complete. It is attained through the work of the Spirit of God in our minds and hearts. He must be the source for all our knowledge and understanding.

Biblically, understanding God's will for life begins with a recognition of His ultimate purpose for all human beings. He created humankind to bring Him glory. That is why we exist. Bringing God glory must be the central pursuit of His children. From this, all other decisions must flow. If we do not pursue this, the more specific desires for God's guidance are meaningless. It matters little to seek His direction concerning where we go or what we do if we do not desire to glorify His Name.

Paul expressed this truth in verse 10. The will of God for us is that we live lives worthy of who He is, pleasing Him, bearing fruit, and growing in knowledge of Him. Knowing God includes growing in spiritual character. The work of the Spirit is to establish the character of Jesus in the lives of all who belong to His Kingdom. Only through this character transformation can we bring God glory.



Resource Packet Item 3: The Knowledge of God's Will

Distribute the work sheet and discuss the questions as a class. If time is short, send it home with students for personal reflection.

Discuss

- ? How does the Holy Spirit help you in understanding the Scriptures and finding God's will for your life?

To Share in the Inheritance

Colossians 1:11–14



Say: The inheritance we have received in Christ is indescribable. When we think of the price He paid to rescue us from sin, we should “give thanks” (Colossians 1:12, NIV). None of us would be worthy, on our own, to share in Christ's inheritance. Such a gift calls us to demonstrate our love and gratitude, by living holy lives that are set apart for Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle Paul reminded the Colossians of their spiritual qualifications in Christ Jesus, declaring them to be qualified to share in Christ's inheritance (verse 12, NIV). God's people have been made holy by Him; that is, they have been separated unto the Lord to be a people for His possession. To say that they are in the “kingdom of light” speaks to their purity as well as the purity of their calling.

None of this, of course, was accomplished on their own. It was Jesus who rescued them from the kingdom of darkness through His saving work on the cross. His blood rescued them, atoned for their sins, and set them free. And, thanks be to God, the same can be said of believers today. We once belonged to the kingdom of darkness, but now are joint heirs of the kingdom of God's Son (verse 13). Once we were under Satan's power and dominion, but now we belong to God, for we are His people.

Verse 14 declares to the Colossian church that they have been delivered and forgiven. This concept of being forgiven speaks to the fact that all of their debts had been canceled. The work of Christ on the cross had purchased fully their eternal salvation.

They had been fully reconciled to God. What a marvelous promise this timeless truth provides for us today, as well.

We must keep in mind, however, that these precious promises do not mean that we are without obligation to God. We have been rescued so that we might honor and represent our kingdom citizenship in a fallen world. This is what Paul meant by living lives worthy of our calling. An indescribable price has been paid for our sins. We have received a marvelous undeserved gift. We now are called, in return, to give thanks to God through living holy and righteous lives, demonstrating His love to a sinful and needy world, and praising His name throughout our lives.

Discuss

- ? In what ways do you feel you may have misunderstood what it means to find and follow the will of God?
- ? How often do you reflect upon your response to Christ's death on your behalf?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Paul's prayers for these three churches had a common thread, that of spiritual growth. Sometimes the things we pray for are temporal, and God delights in meeting our physical needs. But our first priority should always be to grow in Him.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Set aside time each day to study God's Word and apply it to your life.
- Pray that God will help you to grow in Him every day.
- Provide spiritual encouragement to a younger believer.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

That I May Know Thee.
Exodus 33:12–17

Tuesday

Love the Lord.
Deuteronomy 6:4–9

Wednesday

Find the Knowledge of God.
Proverbs 2:1–7

Thursday

Exhortation To Live Worthy.
1 Thessalonians 2:8–13

Friday

Increase in Love.
1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Saturday

Abound in the Knowledge of God.
2 Peter 1:2–8

Defending the Faith in a Secular World

Have you ever heard someone state that America is a post-Christian nation. The idea behind this argument is that the United States, in general, no longer values or embraces basic biblical values and standards of morality and character. To whatever extent this is true, it has a profound impact upon how believers in the United States (and other nations in a similar situation) interact with and reach out to the society around them. Basic assumptions about knowledge of Christianity among the population can no longer be made. Furthermore, negative (and even hostile) attitudes toward Christianity may become more accepted and widespread.

All of this is to say that Christians today confront an increasingly secular world around them. As a result, they must be prepared to articulate what they believe to those who ask difficult and even skeptical questions about their faith. This unit is designed to help student do just that.

As you move through the fundamental questions and issues addressed by the lessons, take time to ask students how they would respond or have responded in the past. Jesus himself asked His disciples who people said that He is, then followed with, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15, NIV). Think about how the world sees Jesus. Who do they say that He is? How can students best respond to the many mistaken view of our Savior. Similarly, it will be important for them to answer the basic question of “Who Is God?”

From that foundation, the unit moves into questions concerning practical matters (The Bible on Sexuality, Lesson 10), and then on to questions that people often ask concerning the nature of God. As a result, the final four lessons of this unit will prepare students to defend their faith in the face of rising skepticism and animosity in our world. Yet, through these lessons, they will also learn more about God himself as well. How should we understand God’s Judgment? Why is there evil and suffering in a world made by a loving and omnipotent God? These are questions students may have even asked themselves.

Finally, the unit ends on the very practical topic of how students, and all the Church, can keep themselves pure. In essence, we must recall that, although we live in this world, we are not of this world when we follow our Savior.

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World

July 25, 2021

LESSON 8

Who Is God?

Study Text

Genesis 1:1–2; Psalms 19:1–4; 139:7–18; Isaiah 40:12–14; Acts 17:16–34; Romans 1:18–20; 2:12–16; Ephesians 4:17–24; Hebrews 11:6; 1 Peter 1:13–16

Central Truth

Because God is Creator, every person is morally responsible to Him.



Key Verse Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (KJV).

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand what the Bible says about who God is and what He is like.
- Increase in confidence that God cares for those He has created in His image.
- Commit to living in submission to the authority and sovereignty of God.

Introducing the Study

Say: Many people refer to God as a “higher power” or “the Man upstairs,” yet they struggle mightily in comprehending the Person of God. If we took time to ask children who God is, we would likely get surprising responses: Many children, in simple faith, are able to grasp God well in relational terms. God is not trying to hide himself from us in His sovereignty and authority—though He most certainly holds those traits. Rather, God desires a personal relationship with each of us, and through that relationship, believers can describe God in ways that will help others come to know Him.

Opening Activity—Descriptions of God

Ask: What descriptions of God have you heard from friends and neighbors? How accurate are those descriptions?

Say: Our upbringing almost always impacts our view of God. Some people view Him as a great disciplinarian who is waiting to catch them doing wrong. Others view Him as a benevolent dictator who rules the world and gives people what they want or need. Still others have no concept at all of God. Today’s lesson will help us prepare to share the one true God with those around us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

How do you answer the question, “Who is God”? Many answers are possible. Atheists say there is no God. Agnostics argue that you can’t know if He exists. Those who embrace Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism answer the question far differently from Christians. So who is God? And what should a person’s relationship be with Him? Today, you will discover how the Bible answers this important question.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Psalm 19:1. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.

Romans 1:20. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

Ephesians 4:22. That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24. And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

1 Peter 1:15. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16. Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Acts 17:24. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Hebrews 11:6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

New International Version

Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 19:1. The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

2. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

3. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.

4. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

Romans 1:20. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Ephesians 4:22. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

23. to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

24. and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

1 Peter 1:15. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

16. for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Acts 17:24. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.

25. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

26. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

27. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

28. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"

Hebrews 11:6. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.



Part 1—God Is Revealed in Creation

□ The Creator God

Genesis 1:1–2

Say: Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses wrote the Book of Genesis, which begins with the straightforward statement that God created everything that exists. (See also John 1:1–5.) There was no need to debate the fact that God existed. Everything He created testified to His reality. Furthermore, as we read the inspired Word of God, everything it says is built upon this reality: God is the sovereign Creator, and He shares His glory with no one. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Material found in the book of Genesis, such as the revelation of the one true God, was originally given to the Israelites, who had been in Egyptian captivity for nearly 400 years. During this time, they had been under the influence of a culture that worshipped a multitude of gods. They had, however, maintained worship of the one true God, teaching their children about Him through oral tradition (see Deuteronomy 6:4–9).

As the Book of Genesis opened, Moses did not attempt to describe God as he began to write. He simply stated that God existed, as an accepted conclusion, and then began to tell of God’s creative power. Moses declared that when the earth was first created, it was without form. The picture that he provided his audience is one of God carefully considering what He would shape the earth to be (Genesis 1:1–2).

We learn in Genesis 1 that God created an environment that would provide for the life that He put on the earth. And so, the Israelites would have been able to look at the world around them and see how their experiences confirmed the claims of Moses. The air they breathed kept them alive. The stars hung in the sky without tumbling to earth. The sun provided enough heat and light to comfort them, but not so much that they would burn up. And each night, the moon would appear to provide some measure of light by night. In addition, God’s people would have witnessed centuries of sowing and reaping. All of this organization in the created realm didn’t just happen. Clearly, one God, who controlled all things, was responsible for life on earth.



Resource Packet Item 1: Gods of Egypt

Distribute the information sheet so students have a basic overview of the worship that was happening around the Israelites during their time in Egypt. Discuss how the influences of such idol worship might have threatened to impact God’s people.

Discuss

- ? Why is it important to pass down to children the teachings of Scripture and testimonies about God?
- ? How does the story of creation impact your understanding of God? What does it clarify about the nature of God?



Say: Many volumes have been written about the attributes of God. It is impossible with the human mind and vocabulary to describe the vastness of God. The verses in this lesson provide only a brief overview of who God is, but as we study His Word and grow in our relationship with Him, we will continue to be amazed that the God of the universe loves and cares for each of us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Hundreds of years after Moses wrote Genesis, King David wrote a psalm that expressed one of the reasons he knew there is a God. David said that when he looked at the sky at night, the stars boldly declared the fact that God exists. There is no other answer for the vastness of the universe than a God who created all things. David's words remind the reader that God is "omnipotent," or "all powerful." (Psalms 19:1–4)

David, once again writing in the Psalms, declared that God is everywhere. Theologians refer to this trait of God as "omnipresence," or "all-present." In this account, David identified God as "Spirit" (Psalm 139:7). The term "Spirit" is also seen in the Genesis account, referring to God. God is seen in three distinct Persons: The Father is God. Jesus is God. The Holy Spirit is God. There are not three Gods, but one. This is known as the Trinity. The scope of this lesson is not large enough to explain the Trinity, but suffice it to say that David was referring to the God of Creation in Psalm 139:7.

Humans are always under God's observation. We cannot escape Him because He is always there. God cannot be limited or controlled. Unlike the pagan gods of the day, the God of Israel will do what He wants to do, when He wants to do it (Psalms 139:8–10), for He is everywhere. We cannot escape His presence.

It is important to recognize that the God of the Bible does act in positive ways toward His creation in the Old Testament. He will guide people as they call upon Him to do so. He loves them and wants the best for them. David looked at his own body and saw it as a testimony of God's goodness (Psalms 139:14).

In a similar way, the prophet Isaiah described the omniscience of God. Not only is God all powerful, and at all places at once, He is also all knowing (Isaiah 40:12–14). As a result, His people need not worry about Him forgetting about them or being caught off guard by a surprise. These three characteristics work in wonderful unison: God is everywhere, He knows all things, and He can do all things.

These realities about God's nature carry into the New Testament. The apostle Paul recognized that God is the creator of the universe. Paul stated a person need only look at Creation to see that there is one true God who holds all things together (Romans 1:18–20).

Discuss

- ? What aspect of creation most often makes you think of the Creator?
- ? How do the attributes of God bring comfort to those who believe in Him?



Part 2—Judge of Right and Wrong

□ The Wrong Way

Romans 2:12–16; Ephesians 4:17–19

Say: While it is important that we perceive the love and grace of God, it is also crucial that we recognize that He will, indeed, judge all people. The only way to be ready for that judgment is through accepting salvation through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament Israelites had failed miserably in keeping the Law. We are no better than they. We cannot, in our own power, do what it takes to please God. He is a holy God, and He calls His people to be holy. Thankfully, He has made the way for us to be made holy and have fellowship with Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

During the time that the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, Jewish teachers were teaching that one could be made right with God through the Law. They did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. They had the Law. They believed that if they lived according to its commands, their right actions would be enough to appease God. Paul attempted to explain to the Jews that living a righteous life did not bring salvation. He explained that God requires a relationship of faith with God—a matter of the heart, or the inner person (Romans 2:14–15). The Law did, indeed, inform people as to what is right and wrong in God’s eyes. However, the Law could not save. It could not cleanse. No matter how well the Jewish leaders thought they were keeping the Law, they would be found guilty on the Day of Judgment. God alone sets the standard that people must meet, because He created all things and He rules all of creation (Romans 2:12–16).

The Jews are not the only ones who will stand before God at the end of time. Every person will stand before Him. Paul noted that Jews obeyed a set of rules based on the Laws given by God. Conversely, the Gentiles had no concept of the Law, yet they had a conscience that impacted them to give them a sense of right and wrong. But they could never fulfill righteousness or become holy in themselves. They were instead darkened by the impact of sin (Ephesians 4:17–19). Thus, they became hardened to sin and lived to indulge every kind of sin and impurity.

Discuss

- ? In what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to submit to the holy standards of living as God’s people?
- ? How does having a personal relationship with God lead to holy living?



□ The Right Way

Ephesians 4:20–24; 1 Peter 1:13–16

Say: There is only one way to live for God, and it begins with a relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles could attain God’s righteous demands on their own. Salvation is not a matter of works. Only through accepting Jesus and being led by the Holy Spirit can anyone be saved, and subsequently live in a way that is pleasing to God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians that they should not live like the Jews or the Gentiles. They had been given a new way to live as a result of their submission to Jesus (Ephesians 4:20–24). Those who acknowledge God will live differently from those who do not acknowledge Him. Christians are not left alone to attempt to live for God in their own strength. When Christians accept Jesus as Savior, they are given a “new self” that is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as God desires. Accepting Jesus as Savior is only the beginning. The new Christian must purpose to say “no” to self-centered thinking and to say “yes” to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit directs him or her to make righteous choices. It is only when Christians learn to hear the Spirit and live in obedience that they will experience true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:20–24).

Peter likewise explained to his readers that righteous living often starts with our concept of God (1 Peter 1:13–16). The first adjustment in thinking for a new believer is to accept the fact that there is one true God. Once this mindset is in place, the person will understand that he or she is to pursue godly living. To live the holy life that God desires, a person has to stay focused on God and rely on God. Christians cannot attempt to follow God one day and follow their own desires the next. Temptations to take focus off God are all around the Christian. Peter told his readers to stay spiritually alert and sober.

The key to staying focused on God is to remember the prize that awaits followers of God after Christ has returned. Peter said that this is the hope of the Christian. Saying “no” to oneself today is a tiny sacrifice compared to the everlasting reward that awaits Christians who remain faithful to God.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think people choose to reject the reality of God?
- ? Why do you think Peter used the phrase “alert and fully sober” in this passage (verse 13, NIV)?



Resource Packet Item 2: Who Makes the Rules?

Distribute the work sheet and give students a few minutes to reflect on it and fill it out. Then take time to pray for God’s help to be obedient to His commands.

Part 3—Personally Involved Creator

□ God is Alive

Acts 17:16–31



Say: As Paul walked the streets of Athens, he saw the many false gods worshipped by the Greeks (Acts 17). He was distressed to see how the people looked for an object of worship, yet missed the One who was and is worthy of worship. Paul took the opportunity to engage those around him with a discussion of the living God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The public discussion of wisdom and philosophy was a common event in Athens, and Paul utilized it well as an opportunity to share Christ. In Acts 17, Paul introduced a new

way of thinking to the philosophers with whom he spoke. The philosophy that Paul shared was based on a deity that was not carved from stone. Paul's God was alive, had created the world, and continued to interact with His creation (Acts 17:24–25).

The God Paul described was much different from the Greek gods. The true God interacts with His creation. He does not need sacrifices of the people in order to find His fulfillment. He has everything He will ever need. His purpose is to love and care for His creation. God loves His creation so much that He provided an avenue for people to find Him. He is not a God that is unreachable. He desires a relationship with humanity (Acts 17:26–27).

Paul cited a second century BC poet to further illustrate who God is. This poet, Aratus of Tarsus, wrote a poem called “Phenomena.” This poem was mainly about the known facts of astronomy and meteorology of the day. It opened with a prayer to Zeus, pointing to Zeus as the god upon which all things depend. Paul quoted the opening of the poem to build a bridge between what the people already believed about their god and the true relationship between God and those who follow Him (Acts 17:28). (In a similar way, Paul also quoted the “hymn to Zeus” of Cretan philosopher Epimenides in verse 28.) This springboard gave Paul a way to approach the subject of the true God in terms his listeners would understand.

Paul explained that in light of humanity's ignorance, which led to idolatry, God was merciful and held back in delivering judgment. But mercy would give way to judgment eventually, and now was the time for the people to turn from their idolatry. Jesus had come to open the way of salvation to all of humankind. People who had relegated God to gold images would need to change their view of Him. God demanded that they have a living relationship with Him, and that relationship could only be established through belief in Jesus (Acts 17:29–31). While there are still those who worship idols and other false gods, we must be cautious that we do not allow a modern form of idolatry to take our attention away from the true God.

Discuss

- ? What are some ways Christians today might be drawn into the sin of idolatry?
- ? What are some helpful ways we make the gospel understandable to people who do not know about Jesus today?



□ Faith in God

Acts 17:32–34; Hebrews 11:6

Say: God calls us to live by faith. Often, we hesitate to present God's message to others because we assume they will reject it. However, we are not responsible for their choice. We are only responsible to spread the word about the one true God, giving people the opportunity to accept Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Bible is clear concerning who God is. It is up to each person to determine whether or not to accept the facts concerning God's identity. The people who were listening to Paul had mixed reactions concerning the information that Paul had shared about God. Some people immediately rejected Paul's message. Others accepted Paul's message

and became followers of Christ. Still others were intrigued and said they wanted to think about this new teaching a bit more. (Acts 17:32–34)

A person can have a relationship with God through faith in Christ. Christian faith is not wishful thinking. Christian faith is a firm commitment to a fact. Faith places trust in the object of one's faith—Jesus Christ.



Resource Packet Item 3: Two Case Studies

Distribute the sheet with two case studies on it. Assign half your class to deal with the first one and the other half to deal with the second one. They can work individually or in small groups. Invite several people to share their responses, and discuss them as a class.

Discuss

- ? Describe your journey to faith in God.
- ? What are the greatest barriers that discourage us from sharing our faith with others? How can we overcome these barriers?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: In order to reach others with the gospel, we must understand who God is. He is the Creator of all things, a merciful and righteous Judge, and is fully involved with His Creation—so much so that He made salvation and eternal life possible through His Son. This is our message to the world.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Spend some time this week enjoying God's creation as you worship your Creator.
- Turn an everyday event into an opportunity to tell someone about God.
- Pray for those who are ministering the message of Christ in other cultures.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God's Sign to Israel.
Exodus 31:12–17

Tuesday

The Unfathomable Power of God.
Isaiah 40:25–31

Wednesday

God's Everlasting Love.
Jeremiah 31:3–9

Thursday

The Lord, Our Righteous Judge.
2 Timothy 4:6–8

Friday

Christ Took Our Judgment.
Hebrews 9:24–28

Saturday

God Created Everything.
Revelation 4:6–11

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World

August 1, 2021

LESSON 9

Who Is Jesus?

Study Text

Matthew 4:12–17; 13:1–45; 10:7; 28:17–18; Luke 11:14–20; John 1:1–18; 3:1–8, 14–21; 14:6; 1 Corinthians 15:14–19; 1 Timothy 1:15

Central Truth

Jesus is our Lord and our God.



Key Verse John 20:28

Thomas answered and said unto [Jesus], My Lord and my God (KJV).

Thomas said to [Jesus], “My Lord and my God!” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Explain to students how the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is God the Son.
- Encourage students to have peace concerning their everlasting destiny as followers of Christ
- Challenge students to develop strong, biblical answers to arguments against the truth of who Jesus is.

Introducing the Study

Say: The Person of Jesus Christ sets Christianity far apart from every other religion. Multiple religions believe in one god, and some would even claim to believe in the same God that we believe in, though they would call Him by a different name. But only Christianity believes in a Savior named Jesus Christ, the Son of God and therefore God himself, who came to earth to take the punishment for our sins, opening a way for us to be saved from our sins. Understanding who Jesus is and what He has done for us is critical to understanding our faith, then sharing it with others.

Opening Activity—What do people say about Jesus?

Ask: In what ways have you heard unbelievers describe Jesus?

Say: Even people who do not know Jesus or may consider themselves to be atheists often have some concept of Jesus, even if only to use His name as an expletive. Today’s lesson will help us know how to interact with those people, giving them an opportunity to accept the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At one time, Christianity was the dominant belief in the Western world. Today many consider it unkind to celebrate Christmas or Easter because it leaves out people who do not believe that Jesus is God. How do you respond to someone who questions the deity of Jesus? How would you answer those who would say that Jesus was just a good person? In this lesson, we will examine these questions and discover answers that will build your faith.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

John 1:1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. The same was in the beginning with God.

3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Matthew 28:17. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

18. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Luke 11:14. And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.

17. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth.

18. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.

19. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges.

20. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

John 3:3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

14:6. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

1 Corinthians 15:14. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

New International Version

John 1:1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2. He was with God in the beginning.

3. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

4. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Matthew 28:17. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.

18. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Luke 11:14. Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed.

17. Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.

18. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub."

19. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.

20. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

John 3:3. Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4. "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5. Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

6. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

14:6. Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

1 Corinthians 15:14. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.



Part 1—The Eternal and Sovereign God

□ The Eternal God

John 1:1–5

Say: Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John did a marvelous job in portraying the divinity of Jesus Christ. Much like the writing of Moses, which simply stated that God exists, then showed the truth of that statement by describing what He did, John’s Gospel declares that Jesus is God, using words that would have been familiar to his original readers to prove his point. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John opened his Gospel much as Moses opened the book of Genesis. His use of the phrase, “In the beginning,” would have immediately turned the mind of a Jewish reader to the Scriptures. In Genesis, Moses declared the existence of God. John followed suit by declaring that Jesus is God.

John described Jesus as the *logos*, or “the Word.” There would have been little question in the mind of either a Jewish or Greek reader as to the significance of the term *logos*. In secular Greek usage, Greek philosophers used the word *logos* as the power that resolves confusion and conflict. They taught that *logos* was the “ultimate reason” that controls all things. Some scholars suggest that the term *logos* might be translated wisdom, in order to grasp the full significance of the word. Simply put, the term *logos* refers to far more than just a group of letters used to form a written word or spoken word. Logos has great significance.

John carefully chose the term *logos* to help his readers understand that the true *logos* is actually Jesus. He was with the Father (John 1:1) and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2), and was in the beginning when the world was created. In short, Jesus is God, the second Person of the Trinity. He, then, was the One who turned chaos into the creation that we know today. He is God and He is with God. John clearly declared that Jesus was involved in Creation, making Him inseparable from Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1–3).

John described Jesus’ role in creation, using the Greek term *zoe* to define Jesus as the source of life. The point is that Jesus is the very essence of life. John went on to say that the life Jesus possessed stood in contrast to the evil that opposed God. John declared at the outset of his account of Jesus’ life that although darkness would try to overcome Jesus, it would not succeed (John 1:4–5).



Resource Packet Item 1: Jesus in Creation

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups. Each group should select one person to help put the thoughts of the group into a paragraph as they read the Scriptures together. Ask two or three of the groups to share their completed paragraph.

Discuss

- ? What role did Jesus have in creation?
- ? How does John’s Gospel show that Jesus is both eternal and divine?

□ The King of the World

John 1:10–14,18; Matthew 28:17–18



Say: The Jews of Jesus' time were expecting a Messiah who would overthrow Rome and set up an earthly kingdom. But their understanding of the Messiah was wrong. Instead of overthrowing Rome and setting up His kingdom on earth, Jesus was setting up the kingdom of God, which, as He told Pilate, was “not of this world” (John 18:36, NIV). Jesus created all things and is worthy of all worship. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

When Jesus came to earth, He came to a planet that He had created. He was Master over the earth, but its inhabitants did not recognize His authority. They rejected the One that gave them life (John 1:10–11).

Yet not everyone was blind. Some people recognized His authority. Those who did were accepted into His family. They became the children of God. Such status was not a result of bloodline. Rather, they were born again spiritually (John 1:12–13).

The *logos* was beyond the reach of any human, whether Jew or Greek. John reported that this unreachable Being had chosen to make himself reachable by becoming a man. This idea was beyond the grasp of many of the people at that time. However, John was clear. Jesus is God. Those who witnessed His life had seen God (John 1:14,18).

Those who were willing to believe Jesus is God worshipped Him. As would be expected, some people wondered why they should worship a mere man rather than the unseen God in heaven. But as a Person of the godhead that created all things, Jesus has authority over all of heaven and earth. He is the King. He deserved the worship of the people, as did the Father who was in heaven (Matthew 28:17–18).

Discuss

- ? How would you respond to a person who said they believed in God, but not in Jesus as God the Son, but rather as a good teacher?
- ? How would you respond to someone who said that all humans are children of God?

Part 2—Proclaimer of His Kingdom

□ Proclamation through the Word

Matthew 4:12–17; 13:1–9,18–23



Say: Jesus came to bring salvation. In so doing, He also showed us the Father and explained the kingdom of God. Many of His explanations used parables to help the people understand. In the parable of Matthew 4, He focuses on the fact that not everyone who hears the Word will believe it. However, notice that He did not stop talking about the kingdom of God, even though many would reject the Kingdom. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus began to preach when He was about thirty years old. His message was focused. He did not attempt to change the philosophy taught in the Greek and Roman culture, or try to upend matters of the Roman government. His message was focused on helping people understand that they must align themselves under God's authority, recognizing the truths of the Kingdom. They had to see God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as the King, and all of humanity as servants of the King. Jesus announced that the kingdom of God had come to them (Matthew 4:12–17).

Jesus acquired a massive following in a short period of time. The crowds were fascinated by what He taught and by the miracles He performed. He often proclaimed His message through parables—that is, stories that taught and illustrated a spiritual truth. Many of His parables illustrated how the kingdom of God functions. In one of His more famous parables, He explained that not everyone was prepared to accept the truth He proclaimed. He said that some people were too hard-headed or hard-hearted to be able to accept His message. Other people would welcome His message, but walk away when the choice to be a part of the Kingdom became too high. However, there were some people who would accept the message of the Kingdom and allow that message to transform their lives. The kind of people that Jesus sought were those who would not only know about the truth, but they were people who would also embrace that truth—the truth that would set them free (Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23).



Resource Packet Item 2: Four Soils

Divide your class into small groups and have them do the work sheet. To save time, you may want to assign one of the types of soil to each group. Then have each group report on their findings. Discuss as a class.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables? How can we use similar methods to share God's Word today?
- ? How does the parable of Matthew 13 impact when and how we share the gospel?



□ Proclamation through Deed

Luke 11:14–20

Say: One of the most often misquoted Church leaders in Church history is Saint Francis of Assisi. He is frequently quoted as saying, “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” Fact-checkers have concluded that he never truly said that. He did, however, teach that people's deeds must match their words. Jesus clearly taught His disciples and the crowds of people using words. But He backed up His words with deeds. He calls His followers to do the same. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Part of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God was the demonstration of power over evil. Jesus cast demons out of many people. He did this to free

people to be able to respond to His invitation to them to become part of His kingdom. He also did this to demonstrate the superiority of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of darkness (Luke 11:14).

Those who claimed to be followers of God did not want to acknowledge that Jesus' power was from God. To do so would have meant that He was who He claimed to be. These individuals could not deny that demons were expelled, so their only choice was to attribute Jesus' ability to cast out demons to the only other power source they were familiar with—demons (Luke 11:15–16).

Jesus was aware that He had placed the Jewish leaders in a difficult spot. He was either from God or from the devil. This would be the “question” under consideration. Jesus then laid out His argument. Satan would not cast his demons out of a person if he had placed the demons in the person in the first place. The logic does not follow. So if the source of Jesus' power was not Satan, then the only other possibility was that Jesus was exercising divine power. The Jewish leaders were forced to either accept Jesus' claims concerning His deity and the kingdom of God, or proclaim He was of the devil. There was no middle ground (Luke 11:17–20), yet to concede the obvious truth would force them to confirm that Jesus was and is who He claims to be.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think some people harden their hearts toward God while others are receptive to Him?
- ? How are many unbelievers in current society similar to the Jewish leaders?

Part 3—The Only Way to Salvation

□ Be Spiritually Transformed

John 3:1–8



Say: While many of the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, even calling for His execution, He did not withhold the words of eternal life from any who would seek Him. His conversation with Nicodemus shows His willingness to engage such an individual. Jesus came to bring salvation to the whole world, regardless of social, economic, ethnic, or intellectual status. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Nicodemus was one of the few Jewish leaders who acknowledged that Jesus was sent from God. There is no indication that he was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah when he first approached Him, but he was certainly willing to listen to Jesus. He had been impressed with Jesus' miracles (John 3:1–2).

Jesus took the opportunity to share His message about the Kingdom with Nicodemus. It is clear that Nicodemus did not expect what was being said. Jesus told him that if he wanted to enter the kingdom of God, he would have to be born again (verses 3–4).

Jesus then moved from an experience Nicodemus could understand (child-birth) to a message that could transform his life, but he could not understand. Jesus often started His conversations with people by meeting them where they

were. He did not condemn them for a sinful life—a sinful past. He helped them understand the life-altering message of the Kingdom. He then called them to respond to Him.

Jesus told Nicodemus that the only way to enter into the kingdom of God was through a spiritual transformation—a spiritual rebirth (verses 4–8). This concept was difficult for Nicodemus, or any other Jewish leader, to understand. Jews believed that they had been born into God’s family because they were a part of God’s chosen people. Yet Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus that no one is born into the right to be a part of God’s kingdom. Nationality, ethnicity, and lineage are not a consideration. The only way for people to become a part of the kingdom of God is through identifying the true King and placing their faith in Him.



Resource Packet Item 3: An Outline of Jesus’ Life

Distribute the information sheet for students to take home. It will serve as an excellent tool for them to study the life of Jesus and to share with friends and family members.

Discuss

- ? Many of the Jewish leaders had a sense of entitlement regarding their relationship with God because of their lineage. How might that same attitude prevail today, and what specifically might cause that attitude?
- ? How did Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus challenge Nicodemus’s thinking? How does the conversation help us understand the work of God in our lives better?



□ Believe in the Resurrection

John 14:6; 1 Corinthians 15:14–19

Say: The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation and centerpiece of our faith as Christians. His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection sets Christianity apart from all other of the world’s many religions. Believing in the Resurrection is essential because the Resurrection proves that Jesus has authority over death, which is the consequence of sin. And, furthermore, the Resurrection demonstrates that Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be as He walked this earth. Because of the Resurrection, we can look forward to everlasting life. Without the Resurrection, our faith would be useless, and we, as His followers, ought to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:12–19). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus makes the way to God conditional upon a person first acknowledging that He is God. Why? Perhaps in part it was because Jesus knew that in just a little while, He would die on the cross for the sins of all humanity and rise again in victory. If a person did not embrace the fact that He is God, death and resurrection would be meaningless for that person. To deny Jesus as the Way, Truth, and Life is to deny the only means to salvation (John 14:6).

The apostle Paul clarified this truth when he declared the foolishness of preaching about the kingdom of God if Jesus were not God and had not risen from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:14–19). Worse yet, if Jesus is not God, Christian preachers have been leading people into foolishness and falsehood for over 2,000 years. And even worse yet, if Jesus is not God and did not rise from the dead, all of humanity will spend eternity in hell because there is no means to provide salvation from the sins that have separated humanity from God. From the human perspective, everything of eternal value hangs on the fact that Jesus is God, and He made a way for people to live in God’s kingdom and have a relationship with Him.

Discuss

- ? What is the significance of the Resurrection to our Christian faith?
- ? Why do some people reject the idea that there is only one way to heaven?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus Christ came to bring us salvation, died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the grave, proving that He truly is the Messiah. For 2,000 years, believers have proclaimed this truth, and people have chosen to accept it or reject it. In His mercy, God continues to keep the door open for people to accept His gift of everlasting life.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Write out your personal testimony in a way you could share it with an unbeliever.
- Look for someone with whom you can open a conversation about Jesus.
- Pray for opportunities to share your faith in your daily life.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

God Is My Salvation.
Psalm 62:1–8

Tuesday

God’s Everlasting Mercy.
Psalm 103:11–17

Wednesday

Everlasting King.
Isaiah 9:2–7

Thursday

Preach the Kingdom of God.
Luke 9:1–7

Friday

Salvation by No Other Name.
Acts 4:8–12

Saturday

Jesus Is the True God.
1 John 5:19–21

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World

August 8, 2021

LESSON 10

The Bible on Sexuality

Study Text

Genesis 1:27–28; 2:18–25; Matthew 19:3–6; Romans 1:20–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9 through 7:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–7; 1 Timothy 1:8–11; Hebrews 13:4

Central Truth

The Bible gives clear guidelines for human sexuality.



Key Verse

1 Thessalonians 4:3

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication (KJV).

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Understand and accept God's view of sex and sexuality
- Sense God's desire that His people live in obedience to His commands regarding morality.
- Choose to honor God with regard to sexual beliefs and behavior.

Introducing the Study

Say: Every day, we are bombarded with messages about sex, from advertising to news stories to government legislation, and the list goes on. Many of these “in-your-face” messages are promoting sexual relationships that are contrary to the Bible. As believers, we must contend with these issues in our families and among our friends and coworkers. Having a clear understanding of the Bible's message will give us a basis for our responses.

Opening Activity—More Than Marketing

Ask: What products have you seen advertised, using sexual imaging in the sales pitch, even as those products have absolutely nothing to do with sex?

Say: Sometimes, we are reluctant to talk about sexuality in the home or in the church. But we can be sure that our children and young people are hearing about it from other sources. As Christian leaders, it is important that we teach, both by words and example, a healthy and biblical view of sexuality. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

There is a great debate today concerning sexuality in our secular society. Should sex be limited to married couples? Should homosexuals be able to be married and adopt children? Should people be able to self-identify their gender and use whatever bathroom they choose? Fortunately the Bible addresses most of these issues. We, as Christians, can be prepared to inform our society as to those biblical teachings.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 1:27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

2:22. And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

24. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

1 Corinthians 6:18. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

19. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Thessalonians 4:3. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

7. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

1 Corinthians 6:9. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10. Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:9. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,

10. For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.

New International Version

Genesis 1:27. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

2:22. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

24. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

1 Corinthians 6:18. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.

19. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

20. you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

1 Thessalonians 4:3. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;

7. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

1 Corinthians 6:9. Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men

10. nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

11. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Timothy 1:9. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,

10. for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.



Part 1—Sexuality Created by God

□ Sex Was God’s Plan

Genesis 1:27–28; 2:18–25

Say: Obviously, the idea of sex did not begin in Hollywood or in the advertising industry. God created sexuality in the beginning. Genesis 1:28 says, “God blessed them [Adam and Eve] and said to them, ‘be fruitful and increase in number’” (NIV). It is interesting to note that the command is given in the context of a blessing from God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Sexuality was God’s idea. From the beginning of time, God intended to have two genders, male and female, which would complement one another. Both of these genders were made equal in value, as they were both made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

The first command given by God to human beings centered on the relationship between Adam and Eve—a command that would include sexuality. God commanded them to be fruitful and increase in number. This command, in the form of a blessing, reminds us that God blesses sex within the correct context (verse 28).

It is natural for a man to want to be in relationship with a woman. That said, a woman does not complete a man, nor does a man complete a woman. Each person is complete and can stand alone, if God directs them to do so. Each spouse in a marriage brings all of his or her talents and abilities into the relationship. Together, they make a stronger team than if each of the individuals were alone. The man and the woman were created to help one another accomplish the tasks that God has assigned to them (Genesis 2:18–24).

Christians should not be ashamed of a sexual relationship within the marriage context. Sex is a good gift, given to humanity by God. Scripture records that God placed Adam in a deep sleep, then created woman from one of Adam’s ribs. Adam awoke and discovered his bride, they both looked at one another and neither of them were ashamed, even though they were naked. Their relationship was natural and good. They had nothing to hide from one another (Genesis 2:25).

Discuss

- ? How might the way you were raised have impacted your own view of sexuality as an adult? Was this impact positive or negative? (Allow students to respond only as they feel comfortable doing so.)
- ? How can believers stay true to God’s blessing of sexual relationships within a society that endorses wrong sexual behaviors?



□ Sex Is Still God’s Plan

Matthew 19:3–6

Say: The misuse of sexuality did not begin in modern times. Early in the Old Testament, people were punished for defiling this blessing from God. Even God’s people looked for ways to get around God’s command for a lifelong

sexual union between a husband and wife. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Scripture clearly teaches, Jesus endorsed the divine plan for sexuality between a husband and wife. In Matthew 19:3–6, the Pharisees tried to trip Him up on a technicality involving the Law. In Jesus’ day, there was much debate over what constituted proper grounds for divorce. Some felt that just cause could be found in rather minor instances. Others strongly disagreed. And so, the Pharisees who approached Jesus hoped to entangle Him in one of their very sensitive disputes. But Jesus instead simply appealed to the teaching of Scripture regarding the Creation story: In marriage, the two become one flesh. In doing so, Jesus affirmed that marriage and the sexual relationship was God’s idea at the beginning, and it continued to be His plan. Sex had not become a “necessary evil” of the flesh, as some philosophies of the time had conjectured.

Marriage, and the sexual union between a husband and wife, is an outward or physical illustration of the union that occurs between God and His followers. The act of sexual relations between spouses is a means of declaring their allegiance to one another and their commitment to never leave one another or forsake one another. This is the same commitment God has given to Christians—that He would never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5; see Deuteronomy 31:6).



Resource Packet Item 1: The Bible and Sexual Morality

Distribute the work sheet. Have students complete it individually or in groups. Then discuss their results, focusing especially upon the discussion question at the bottom of the sheet.

Discuss

- ? Why do you think it is difficult for some people to talk about sex with their children? How might this be overcome?
- ? Why might it be valuable for Christians to teach, both in the home and in church, biblical teachings on sex?

Part 2—Chastity and Fidelity Required

□ Say No to Immorality

1 Corinthians 6:18 through 7:5



Say: When we look around at our society, it’s easy to feel that immorality is rampant and that it is probably worse than ever before. But Paul dealt with blatant immorality in the church at Corinth and clearly taught them that sex as God intended it is a good thing and that they must avoid anything that led them into practices that deviate from God’s plan. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The city of Corinth was known for sexual immorality. Indeed, it contained temples devoted to Greek gods, in which the act of sex with temple prostitutes served as a mode of worship. Thus, there were few mores that would restrict a person from

indulging in their sexual desires. With sexual immorality so rampant and commonplace, the church there was understandably confused concerning how to best handle the issues of biblical sexuality in such a corrupt culture. Paul gave them guidance that continues to have relevance to Christians today.

Paul's first directive was to make a choice to stay as far away from sexual immorality as possible. The term translated as "sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18, NIV; "fornication," KJV) comes from the Greek word *porneia*. *Porneia* refers to illicit sexual intercourse. The English word "pornography" is derived in part from this Greek word. When Paul told Christians to flee from sexual immorality, he was telling them to stay away from anything that would cause them to lust and desire sex outside of marriage (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Paul reminded the Corinthians that God redeemed them when they became Christians. In doing so, He also purchased their bodies. When Christians accept Jesus as Savior, they give all of themselves to Him to be used as He sees fit. When God tells Christians that they cannot be involved in immoral sexual relationships, it is a command to be obeyed (verses 19–20).

Paul also sought to assist those who were struggling to stay pure (7:1–3). There was a faction within the church that celibacy was a superior way of life, even within marriage. (Greek philosophy and religion contained a teaching that the body was inherently bad, so perhaps as a result of this influence, some believers were saying that a spiritual person would focus only on the spiritual.) But Paul certainly did not forbid marriage (note 1 Timothy 4:1–3). Indeed, because some of the people in the church struggled to control their sexual appetites, believers were not to withhold sexual relations from their spouses (1 Corinthians 7:3). Paul explained the context in which sex should occur. He stated that marriage is to be between one man and one woman.

Once a couple is married, sex should be willingly given as a gift to one's spouse. Sex should not be used to manipulate one's spouse. Sex should not be withheld for selfish reasons. Sex should focus on the needs of the partner. If there is a time of refraining from sex, it should not be for a long time, for that would give Satan the opportunity to use temptation against the couple (verses 3–5).

Discuss

- ? How would you respond to someone who said sex outside of marriage is acceptable for the Christian in certain circumstances.



Say Yes to God

1 Thessalonians 4:3–7; Hebrews 13:4

Say: While Satan uses temptations of every kind in an attempt to get believers to disobey God, it seems that he is especially adept at luring people into sexual sin. However, we have the power of the Holy Spirit within us to help us resist temptation. As we trust in the Spirit's power, we will grow in our faith, and we will find better success in resisting temptation. We must always be on our guard because Satan is persistent in his efforts to get us to sin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians are to be sanctified to God. The word “sanctified” is a reference to being set apart for God’s exclusive use. Christians should not be in a sexual relationship that is not approved by God. God makes it clear that He approves of sex between two people of opposite genders who are married to each other. Anything else is sin. When Christians become involved in any type of sexual immorality, they are violating their commitment to God (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Christians have the choice to say “no” to their lustful desires because the power of the Holy Spirit lives inside of them. This ability to say “no” to sexual desires is a learned process. Christians must actively resist sin. Over time, the ability to say “no” to lustful desires will become more natural to them (1 Thessalonians 4:4–5).

Paul also stated that Christians should not take advantage of a brother or sister in Christ. Throughout Scripture, we see God condemning the use of power to deal unjustly or harm to who are weak. Satan uses this technique on his targets. Paul clearly taught that God will punish those who prey on those who are broken or susceptible to sexual temptation (1 Thessalonians 4:6).

When God calls a person to follow Him, He desires for them to be whole and holy. He does not want those who follow Him to attempt to find their fulfillment in anything other than Him. Christians who live impure lives do so because they refuse to be content in what God has given to them. Satan seeks to pervert the gift of sex. Satan desires to destroy marriages and undermine relationships through lust, but God calls us instead to lives of purity (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

God wants believers to understand that the sexual relationship between a husband and wife is honorable. There will be temptations to engage in extramarital relationships. The author of Hebrews pleads with his readers to say “no” to these temptations and to honor God with a healthy and holy marriage (Hebrews 13:4).



Resource Packet Item 2: Flirting with Danger

Divide your class into small groups and distribute the case study. Give the groups a few minutes to read it and answer the accompanying questions. Then discuss the responses as a class.

Discuss

- ? What are ways that Satan attempts to draw people into sexual sin?
- ? How can Christians overcome the temptations toward immorality and infidelity?

Part 3—What About Homosexuality?

□ The Root of Homosexuality

Romans 1:20–27



Say: Perhaps no other type of sexual sin is more emphasized or talked about today than homosexuality. Almost everyone has a friend or loved one impacted by issues such as gay marriage. Our response to these family members and loved ones is critical. We must pray for wisdom as we respond. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Romans 1:18–25 describes how all people should know that God exists simply by looking at the world around them, but they do not recognize Him and live in spiritual darkness. Rejection of God as Creator is often motivated by pride, as people want to do things the way they want to do them. They do not want restrictions placed on them because they want to decide for themselves what is right. This results in futile thinking and foolish hearts. God does not force people to serve Him; there comes a point at which He allows the rebellious to reap the consequences of their decisions. When humans are left to live according to their own desires, the result will inevitably be destruction. They make gods in their own image rather than submitting to the one true God that made them in His image (Romans 1:20–25).

One form of rebellious living is named as homosexual behavior. Paul described homosexual relations as deviating from what is natural. Nature itself testifies to the error in thinking that homosexuality is godly and appropriate (Romans 1:26–27).



Resource Packet Item 3: Forgiven?

Distribute the case study and read it, either in small groups or as a class. Then discuss the accompanying questions.

Discuss

- ? What is your response when you see people involved in same-sex relationships? Anger? Disgust? Compassion? Love for their souls?
- ? How does homosexual behavior reflect rebellion toward God?



□ A Redeemable Offense

1 Timothy 1:8–11; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

Say: It is sometimes easy to forget that God loves the practicing homosexual just as much as He loves every other sinner—and as much as He loves you and me. He desires that all people would come to know Jesus. As believers, we would do well to remember that Jesus died for those who participate in sexual sin just as He died for those who commit every other sin. We must present the whole of God’s Word to those around us, doing our best to reach those who do not know Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The Bible is clear that homosexuality is a grievous sin. Paul placed it in the same category of a person who murders his parents, the sexually immoral, liars, and perjurers (1 Timothy 1:8–11). As a result, we are wise to remember that while it is a grievous sin, homosexuality, like other sins, is redeemable. There is hope for the homosexual, just as for those tangled in any other sin.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Paul reinforced the fact that those who practice homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God. This declaration is an offense to many in our world, but God sets the rules for citizenship in His kingdom. Yet in that same passage is found a message of great hope: “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (verse 11, NIV). Some in the church at Corinth had been tangled in the sin of homosexuality. But now they were

brothers and sisters in Christ, living under the discipleship of the apostle and other Christian leaders.

This is good news for the homosexual. Some of the very people Paul was writing to had lived a homosexual life before they accepted Jesus as Savior and were set free from their rebellion, and forgiven of their sins. Let us pray that God will help us deliver the good news of salvation to all those entangled in sin, so that they, too, can be justified, sanctified, and saved (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Discuss

- ? How would you respond to a person who asked, “Why would God be so unfair as to keep homosexuals from living together in a loving homosexual relationship?” What if a fellow Christian asked you this question?
- ? What do you think God’s attitude toward the homosexual is, and how should this shape our attitudes?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Sexuality is a gift from God, and He specified how that gift is to be used. Sadly, after the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, people desecrated this gift from God. As believers, we must recognize the right and wrong way to use this gift. We must also hold up a standard for what is right, and do all we can to help others find and follow the way of the Lord.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Pray for someone who is involved in sexual sin, whether you personally know that person or not.
- Examine your own entertainment and other activities to see if you are opening yourself up to sexual temptation.
- If you have friends or family members involved in sexual sin, look for opportunities to show them God’s love.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Wickedness of Perversion.
Genesis 19:1–13

Tuesday

Sexual Immorality Prohibited.
Leviticus 18:10–17

Wednesday

Perversion Forbidden.
Leviticus 18:21–24

Thursday

Source of Sexual Immorality.
Mark 7:14–23

Friday

Walk in the Spirit.
Galatians 5:16–25

Saturday

Guard Against Sensuality.
Hebrews 12:14–17

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World

August 15, 2021

LESSON 11

God's Love and Judgment

Study Text

Exodus 20:4–6; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalms 7:10–11; 37:37–38; 86:15–16; Matthew 13:41–43; Ephesians 2:4–5; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 4:7–10; Revelation 20:11–15; 22:12–16

Central Truth

God's judgment is governed by His love and mercy.



Key Verse Deuteronomy 32:4

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he (KJV).

He is the Rock, his works are perfect and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Define the terms mercy, grace, and judgment as used in the Bible.
- Recognize the loving compassion of God toward humanity.
- Choose to show mercy to those who oppose us, and therefore may not seem to deserve mercy.

Introducing the Study

Say: Some high-profile speakers and teachers in our secular society have made the claim that a loving God could never bring judgment upon His creation. Within this flawed and dangerous belief is an assumption that God cannot be both loving and just: He cannot both love people and hold them responsible for their sins against Him. It is important for us, as believers, to keep in mind that God's love and His judgment are not mutually exclusive. He longs for everyone to accept His love and obey Him, and in doing so avoid the judgment that will ultimately befall all who refuse to acknowledge Him as Creator and Lord.

Opening Activity—Love and Judgment—Not Opposites

Ask: What earthly examples can you think of when love and judgment may go hand-in-hand? Examples might include parents, grandparents, teachers, or church leaders who provide both love and discipline.

Say: A loving parent must provide discipline or judgment to help children learn what is right and wrong. God loves humanity even more than a parent loves a child, but He also requires that humanity recognize Him for who He is. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

People who criticize Christianity often point to the judgmental nature of what they perceive to be the Christian belief system. They say that Christians judge people rather than love them. These individuals often claim that if God exists, He would be loving and not judgmental like those who claim to follow Him. Being able to answer these critics of Christianity is important. Today's lesson will provide answers to these questions and challenge students to trust God with their futures.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Psalm 86:15. But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

Ephesians 2:4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

1 John 4:8. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Exodus 20:5. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

6. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Psalm 37:37. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

38. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off.

Revelation 20:12. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

15. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Matthew 13:41. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Hebrews 12:14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

2 Peter 3:9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

New International Version

Psalm 86:15. But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Ephesians 2:4. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

5. made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

1 John 4:8. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Exodus 20:5. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

6. but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Psalm 37:37. Consider the blameless, observe the upright; a future awaits those who seek peace.

38. But all sinners will be destroyed; there will be no future for the wicked.

Revelation 20:12. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

15. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Matthew 13:41. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

42. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

43. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Hebrews 12:14. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

2 Peter 3:9. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.



Part 1—God Is Merciful and Loving

□ The Mercy of God

Psalm 86:15–16; Ephesians 2:4–5

Say: David recognized God's great mercy, quoting from Exodus 34:6, where God said of himself, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (NIV). In that setting, God had delivered His people from Egypt, but they had already rebelled by building a golden calf, which was reminiscent of the gods the Egyptians served. In the Exodus passage, God was giving Moses the Ten Commandments for the second time, and was reminding Moses of the great mercy that He was extending to the Israelites. David, himself, relied on that mercy in his own life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Believers tend to place a lot of focus on God's grace, and rightly so. Grace refers to God's willingness to forgive, redeem, cleanse, and reward the people He has created. However, it is important not to lose focus or appreciation for a similar trait of God: His mercy. Mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone by God, even though it is within His power and righteous justice to punish. Without the mercy of God, grace would be incomplete. God's grace demonstrates one aspect of God's love by providing the means to have a relationship with Him. His mercy obliterates our sins that have separated us from God, leaving us in right standing with Him. In a sense, one might say that grace allows us to walk forward. Mercy allows us to not suffer the consequences of our past.

David recognized the importance of both grace and mercy. He recognized that God can become angry, but He is not easily provoked. God provides people every opportunity to change their behavior. David made many mistakes in his life, but he could count on God to forgive him if he humbly repented of his sins (Psalm 86:15–16).

The apostle Paul affirmed the love and mercy of God. Paul used the word "rich" when referring to God's mercy (Ephesians 2:4, NIV). God does not distribute His mercy with hesitation. He is generous with it. He has an unlimited supply. He desires to forgive the past of anyone who is willing to ask. That mercy, in turn, reminds us of His grace—the grace through which we have been saved. We were dead, but now we are alive.

Paul described the two sides of a Christian's salvation in verse 5: He wipes away a person's sin the moment he or she cries out in repentance for mercy and grace. At that moment, the Christian is given a new life. The Christian is born again. From that moment on, he or she can live without guilt or shame for what has been done in the past (Ephesians 2:5).

Discuss

- ? How do you respond to people who treat you badly?
- ? As recipients of God's great mercy, how can we show mercy to those around us? Who might those people be?



Say: The verses in this section are found in the first Epistle of John the apostle. It is appropriate for us to read about the love of God from John's perspective. In his Gospel, John referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (see John 13:23; 21:7; 21:20, NIV), possibly to avoid naming himself in his account of the Savior. In light of this focus on love, we might conclude that John recognized and cherished the great love God the Father, demonstrated through His Son in the most quoted verse of the Bible, John 3:16. [*Quote, or have a student quote John 3:16.*] (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is likely that few understood the love of God more than the apostle John. John recognized that true love is a gift from God. God's mercy is grounded in His love for all of His Creation. John stated that if Christians have God living in them, then they should be people of love as well (1 John 4:7).

John asserted that if a person does not demonstrate love to others, that person must not know God or have a relationship with Him. John based this conclusion on the fact that God is love. Love is His chief identifiable attribute (1 John 4:8). This is not to say, then, that love is His only activity, but that all of His activity is loving activity. When God creates, He creates in love. When He rules, He rules in love. When He judges, He judges in love.

God loves everyone, but everyone has, through sin, been lost in his or her rebellion against Him. In God's "economy," so to speak—His way of doing things—no human could pay the price necessary for the sins committed against Him. His love compelled Him to send Jesus, God the Son, to earth to pay the ultimate price for our transgressions against Him. Furthermore, He provided a way for Christians to live in right relationship with Him based on the relationship that Jesus has with the Father (1 John 4:9).

The greatest love that any person can hold or demonstrate will never measure up to the love that God has for the world. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit knew the pain and suffering that would be involved in sending God the Son to earth. God's love cannot be described because it transcends our understanding. It goes against all human logic. Jesus humbled himself and paid the price for sins that had been committed against God (1 John 4:10).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think some people have a hard time forgiving others?
- ? How has God's love for you affected your life?



Resource Packet Item 1: Love and Mercy

Distribute the work sheet, "Love and Mercy." You may want to divide the class into groups for their initial discussion. Reserve a few minutes for each student to individually reflect and respond to the final question in each of the two sections.



Part 2—God’s Righteous and Perfect Judgment

□ God’s Righteous Judgment

Exodus 20:4–6; Psalm 37:37–38

Say: The first two of the Ten Commandments focused on worshipping only God, our Creator—including not mingling our worship of Him with the worship of something else. Nothing else is worthy of worship because He made all things. To worship anything else is to worship created things rather than the Creator himself. Paul described sinful people by saying, “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised” (Romans 1:25). It is illogical to put a created thing on a par with or above its Creator (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God declared through Moses that He should not share His worship with anything that He had created (Exodus 20:4–6). It was not uncommon during Bible times for those who engaged in pagan worship to associate their gods with items that they could see. Often, they would limit their view of the god to the image that represented it. No image could ever be constructed that could represent the greatness of God, a truth that is evident through the teaching of Exodus 20:4.

God is not willing to share allegiances with any other god. It was common for those involved in pagan worship to add a new god to the mix and worship this new god. The God of Israel would not share His exalted status with gods that were only poor substitutions for reality. God is jealous. The term translated “jealous” here is only used of God in Scripture, and it makes reference to God as having no rival—meaning that we must recognize that nothing can compare to Him. His jealousy is based on His knowledge that nothing else deserves worship (Exodus 20:5–6).

The psalmist expressed the justice of God as he described the result of a person’s choice (Psalm 37:37–38). People who choose to recognize God and worship Him through obedient living will have a future that is peaceful. Indeed, we as Christians know that we will one day rest in the place of peace, the presence of God. People who choose to reject the authority of God also choose to reject God’s invitation to experience salvation. These individuals will not have a future of peace. They will experience the judgment of God.

Discuss

- ? What implications does God’s love have for your daily life?
- ? What created things can you name that people have worshipped? What created things might believers be tempted to worship?



□ God’s Just Judgment

Revelation 20:11–15; 22:12–16

Say: These verses are near the end of the Bible and are part of the Revelation of the end times that God gave to John. This is the culmination of God’s story of redemption. He created humankind and provided for their needs,

yet they chose to rebel against Him. He gave His Son as the Sacrifice to atone for humanity's sin, but many of them still choose to reject Him. Yet He has a perfect plan for those who choose to respond to His love by accepting salvation through Jesus Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At the end of time, every person will be judged according to their lives. This judgment is referred to as "The Great White Throne Judgment." Those who have lived their lives in rebellion against God will face horrific judgment (Revelation 20:11).

Jesus will determine the verdict of each case based on a uniform standard. The history of each person has been recorded in one of two books. One contains the names of all individuals who have placed their faith in Jesus. This document is called the Book of Life. But all who choose to live according to their own standards will have their record placed in the second book. The Bible does not give this book a name, but an apt name for it might be the Book of Death (Revelation 20:12–13).

All people throughout the ages who have rejected Jesus as Lord, will be cast into the lake of fire. This is not an act of an unloving God. This is an act of a just God. He will not ignore unrepented sin at the time of judgment (Revelation 20:14–15).

People often accuse God of being unloving because He sends people to hell. Yet this is not true. God gives everyone a chance to recognize Him and respond to Him. Hell is the place reserved for people who rejected God on earth.

Whereas the future that awaits those who reject God will be horrific, the home that is on the horizon for those who have placed their faith in Jesus will be amazing. The beautiful heavenly home that awaits the faithful will be great, yet it pales in comparison to the joy that believers will experience as they spend eternity in the presence of God. This is not a reward that Christians have earned, but it is the future they have chosen—and, as a result, they have been cleansed and been made fit for God's everlasting presence (Revelation 22:12–16).

Discuss

- ? What right does God have to judge humanity?
- ? How does the final judgment motivate you in the way you live?



Resource Packet Item 2: Parables of Final Judgment

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups. Assign each parable to one or more small groups, then ask the groups to report their findings.

Part 3—Why Does a Loving God Judge?

□ A Wrong Question Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 7:10–11; Matthew 13:41–43



Say: People who would like to justify their choices to live in sin often cite God's love as evidence that He couldn't possibly judge wrongdoers. They see love and judgment as polar opposites. However, God's love is demonstrated in

His judgment. By giving multiple warnings of judgment to come, He is giving people ample opportunities to turn from their sin and be in relationship with Him, and He has freely made a way for people to avoid His judgment. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Asking the question, “Why does a loving God judge?” reveals a basic misunderstanding of the words “love” and “judge.” Love does not preclude the ability of a person to see right from wrong. The concept that “love is blind” is romantic at best, and most often dangerous.

A second error with the question is that it assumes God is wrong to judge. This is the ultimate form of arrogance. God created all things. He keeps all things going. He knows all things. God does not make mistakes and He does no wrong. To suggest that He could do wrong is to confess that one does not believe He is truly God (Deuteronomy 32:4).

The psalmist states that God exercises righteous judgment to reward those who acknowledge Him and to punish those who oppose Him. God’s judgment toward someone who remains alive is an act of love in itself. It is His way of gaining the person’s attention. If those who oppose God are able to recognize their error and turn from it, they have the chance to ask for mercy (Psalm 7:10–11).

Jesus made the options as clear as possible when He spoke of the end of time. He proclaimed that at the end of time, those who lived sinful lives would be cast into a fiery judgment. He set this in opposition to those who chose to live righteous lives. Those individuals will shine in the kingdom of God. Jesus then invited everyone who is willing to hear and believe to become a part of the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:41–43).

Discuss

- ? Why do you think the concept of a judgment day bothers some people?
- ? How does God’s judgment of sin reflect His love for humanity?



□ Make the Right Choice

Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9

Say: God desires to have a loving relationship with each of us. He is patient and loving, but He will not force us to obey Him. Just as He gave Adam and Eve free will in the Garden of Eden, He give us the freedom to choose to worship Him or to reject Him. When we choose to serve Him, He helps us to live in the holiness that pleases Him. Each day, we make choices to obey Him or disobey Him as He guides our path. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The writer of Hebrews commanded his readers to live peaceful and holy lives. People cannot live in peace and live a holy life before God without the Spirit of God living within them. By contrast, people cannot be true followers of God if they do not commit to pursuing holy lives. Every person is responsible for the choice he or she makes with regard to holy living (Hebrews 12:14).

No one knows when the Day of Judgment will come. Some skeptics believe that it will never come because it has been so long since Jesus prophesied about it. Peter explains that God has delayed the Day of Judgment because He wants to give everyone a chance to repent of wickedness and turn to Christ for salvation (2 Peter 3:9). However, people must not fool themselves into thinking that God has forgotten about the Day of Judgment. It will happen, and when it does, it will be too late for people to change their minds about God.



Resource Packet Item 3: Mercy Before Judgment

Distribute the work sheet and allow small groups to discuss it briefly, then report to the class and discuss their answers.

Discuss

- ? If today were your last day on earth, how would you live it?
- ? What does the fact that God has not brought time to an end yet reveal to you about God's nature?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: While the idea of God's judgment often causes fear, we must be grateful that His love provided a way for us to be forgiven and to live in right relationship with Him. He calls believers to demonstrate His love to our world to help others avoid the coming judgment.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Find a tangible way to share God's love with someone this week.
- Examine the choices you make to be sure you are obeying God in your daily life.
- Pray for the salvation of a coworker or friend who is an unbeliever.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Lord, Have Mercy.
Psalm 41:4–13

Tuesday

Mercy and Refuge.
Psalm 57:1–11

Wednesday

Love Good; Establish Justice.
Amos 5:11–15

Thursday

Be Merciful to Me, a Sinner.
Luke 18:8–14

Friday

Walk in Love.
2 John 1:3–6

Saturday

Remain in God's Love.
Jude 1:20–22

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World

August 22, 2021

LESSON 12

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

Study Text

Genesis 1:29–31; 3:1–19; Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 64:6, 7; Mark 7:20–23; Romans 3:23; 5:18–21; 8:18,28, 35–39; Revelation 21:1–5

Central Truth

Despite the evil and suffering in this world, God is good.



Key Verse Revelation 21:4

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (KJV).

‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Provide a basic definition of sin.
- Gain a biblical perspective of pain and suffering.
- Commit to living a contented life.

Introducing the Study

Say: People often question the existence of a loving God because they see evil and suffering in the world. They do not understand why a loving God would allow such things. However, it is critical to keep in mind that evil and suffering came to earth because humanity rebelled against God and went the way of sin. The continued existence of evil is both a reflection of the sinfulness of this present world as well as a reminder of God’s love as He delays judgment to give opportunity for repentance.

Opening Activity—Response to Suffering

Ask: What examples can you give where the response of believers to suffering served as a testimony to others?

Say: While no one looks forward to suffering, we can probably all think of times when our response to suffering was a demonstration of our faith. It may have been a financial setback, a physical illness, or the loss of a loved one. The difference our faith makes in the way we respond to suffering and evil speaks volumes to those around us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Americans hold more than \$1,000,000,000,000 (one trillion dollars) in credit card debt. People often go into debt because they want something that they cannot afford (as opposed to borrowing for something essential to life in a time of crisis). Debt can reveal a lack of contentment also seen in other behaviors such as stealing, lying, coveting, and cheating. Such behaviors ultimately reflect a dissatisfaction with God.

In today’s lesson, we will look at sin and its effect on the world. A proper perspective on suffering and pain will help Christians live contently and trust God fully.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

Genesis 1:31. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

3:3. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

4. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

5. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

Psalms 51:5. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Romans 5:19. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

20. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

8:18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

37. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Revelation 21:2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

New International Version

Genesis 1:31. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

3:3. but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'

4. "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.

5. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Psalms 51:5. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Romans 5:19. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

20. The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

21. so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

8:18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

28. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

37. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Revelation 21:2. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."



Part 1—Sin Brought Dysfunction

□ God Is Generous

Genesis 1:29–31

Say: God’s generosity in providing for the needs of humankind began with Creation, and He has never stopped providing since. When sin entered the world, it sowed the seeds of discontentment, but we are wise to instead reflect on the love of God as He has provided, both then and now, for His people. Furthermore, He is preparing a wonderful eternity for us to enjoy. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The all-knowing Creator of the universe designed the earth to be the perfect home for human beings. He provided the atmosphere that was necessary to sustain life and the resources that would allow people to have what they needed. God looked at all He created and declared that it was very good (See Genesis 1:25).

God designed an environment that would satisfy the needs of all that He created. Trees had water to drink and sun to cause their leaves to grow. He provided water and food for the fish to swim and grow. He provided air streams for the birds to soar and places for them to land and nest. God provided for humans by allowing them to use all that He created for their benefit. There was nothing that they lacked. Humanity should have been able to live in total contentment (verses 29–31).

Discuss

- ? What are some things that you might tend to complain about needlessly, and why are such complaints needless?
- ? What things can you observe in your life that are evidence of the generosity of God?



□ Humans Are Greedy

Genesis 3:1–19

Say: When we read about all that God gave Adam and Eve, it seems inconceivable that they would become discontented. They had everything they needed, and they had only one rule to keep. Yet, they chose to disobey that one rule. That disobedience had far-reaching consequences for all of humanity. We are still living with its consequences in profound and personal ways. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

At first, Adam and Eve lived with joy and contentment in the Garden of Eden. Life was going pretty well for them. They had all they needed, plus they had a personal relationship with God. Scripture describes it by saying that He walked among them (Genesis 3:8). However, that all changed one tragic day.

Satan entered the picture in the form of a serpent that was able to communicate. Satan’s goal was to make the humans dissatisfied with what God had provided them. His plan was to make the people feel like God had not given them everything that they deserved. Simply put, he undermined their trust in

God. Satan planted a seed of doubt about God's goodness in the heart of Eve (Genesis 3:1–5).

God had given human beings as stewards of all that He had made. They were privileged to be able to enjoy what God had made. The only stipulation was that they avoid a particular tree in the Garden (verse 3). Instead of focusing on all that God had given them, Satan lured Eve to shift her focus to the one thing to which she did not have access. Having all of her needs met was no longer enough. She began to develop the sense that she did not have everything. In a sense, Eve became a greedy person whose desire was to have more. Such greed—such unholy desire—led her toward a horrible act of rebellion. However, Eve was not alone in her unwholesome desires. Adam quickly succumbed to the temptation, as well (verses 2–6). Both of them ate from the tree, against the explicit command of God.

Immediately, Adam and Eve knew that they had sinned. They could no longer look at one another in purity. They saw what moments ago had been a beautiful gift from God become something to be hidden amid the shame of nakedness. Worst of all, they began hiding from God (verses 7–8).

Thankfully, God does not give up on people when they rebel against Him. He already knew what Adam and Eve had done, yet He sought them out to question them. He called out to Adam. Adam's response revealed his new sinful condition. He was now a person driven by fear (verses 9–11).

God's response to Adam reminds us that God will not overlook sin. He questioned Adam, even though He knew what had happened. First, Adam passed blame toward Eve. In the Hebrew language, this is seen in the sentence, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (verse 12, NIV). The structure of the sentence places emphasis on Eve as the cause (and Adam even pointed toward God as the provider of Eve).

Then Eve, in turn, blamed the serpent for her actions (verse 13). Adam and Eve wanted to deflect blame for what they did. And as a result of their actions, they were forced to suffer the consequences (verses 14–19).



Resource Packet Item 1: How Content Are You?

Distribute the survey, and give students a few minutes to reflect on it and fill it out. Discuss each of the points of contentedness mentioned, challenging students to think about why a person might feel a sense of discontent in this area. Also encourage students to ponder the personal response question during the week. Take a brief time to pray for God's contentment to fill each student, regardless of circumstances.

Discuss

- ? What is the relationship between discontentment, greed, and fear in a person's life?
- ? In what ways have you seen a person's life become more difficult because that person received what he or she desired rather than felt content to live with what God had provided?



Part 2—Human Nature Corrupted

□ Universal Sinfulness

Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 64:6–7

Say: As a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, all of humanity has become corrupted by sin. That corruption has led to evil and suffering in the world. When people question why God allows suffering, it helps to remember that the source of sin is humanity’s disobedience, not God’s plan. The rebellious acts of Adam and Eve served to corrupt all of humanity. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Sin has become a part of the human condition. No matter the person’s religious background, sin is an active force of temptation in a person’s life. As believers, we are blessed with the power of the Holy Spirit to resist temptation, yet the battle against sin will be lifelong.

King David was known as a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). Clearly, Scripture confirms that he was a man with a deep desire to walk with God. Nevertheless, David lived with a sin-nature. Sadly, one of his greatest sins, which he tried to keep secret, was exposed for all to see. He committed adultery, and then he conspired to murder in an attempt to cover-up his original sin (see 2 Samuel 11–12).

Eventually, David’s sin was made known by the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12). And when David was confronted with his sin, he sought to renew his relationship with God. He wrote Psalm 51 as a prayer of repentance—a psalm that is cherished and beloved by many Christians still today. In the midst of that Psalm, David confessed the depth of his sinfulness, and then acknowledged his need for God’s help in order to live righteously.

Today we continue to live with a sin-nature. Obviously, we can do good things, but those actions do not justify us before God. We need to be made pure before God, which is something only God can do for us. Isaiah stated that no matter how good we try to be, it is not good enough to please God. Once life is over and God judges our lives, no amount of good will determine our everlasting home. Only by God’s grace can we live for Christ despite our sin-nature.



Resource Packet Item 2: Scripture Match

Distribute the work sheet and have students read the Old Testament passages in the second column, then draw a line to the portion of the Romans passage that each one matches.

Discuss

- ? How did your behavior change once you became a Christian?
- ? Why is it sometimes hard for “good people” to understand their need for Jesus?



□ Sin’s Source

Mark 7:20–23; Romans 3:23; 5:18–21

Say: Some people think all they need to do to go to heaven is to be “good enough.” However, good behavior can never remove the sin problem. It is impossible to

meet God's standard of holiness by sheer willpower. The only way to do that is by accepting the gift of His Son who died on the cross to take the punishment for the sins of all humanity. Through Christ's sacrifice, we are able to stand justified before God. That is, we are made holy by Him, and thereby fit for His presence. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Bad behavior is wrong, but it is also the symptom of the root problem. In society, it is easy to identify evil acts and to grade them as to their severity. If a person murders, he or she should go to jail for life, or face the death penalty. A person who steals from a store will probably get a fine, or worse. For many crimes in between these extremes, society puts offenders in prison to help them change their behavior when they are released back into society.

Plato, the Greek philosopher, argued that if a society would educate the people and tell them what was evil, they would avoid it. Modern society has attempted to follow his philosophy. Some believe that if students would just listen to their teachers, we would have a civil society where evil did not exist. Yet this approach has a fatal flaw, seen in the fact that neither the penal system nor the education system has eliminated evil from our world. Jesus warned of the ineffectiveness of these approaches long ago. You do not change behavior through education. Evil behavior is a result of an evil heart. The expression of evil may be suppressed, or even reshaped, but it will eventually emerge once again because the roots that cause the evil remain unchanged. As long as a sinful nature exists, evil will be present in a person's life. The answer to evil in the world is not more jails or more schools. The answer to the problem of evil will only be found through spiritually transformed hearts (Mark 7:20–23).

The apostle Paul stated that all people have sinful roots that will produce sinful fruit (Romans 3:23). The type of sinful fruit will vary, but everyone needs to have their diseased roots transformed if evil is to be eradicated and replaced by the fruit of the Spirit which the world so desperately needs.

Evil entered the world through the selfish, sinful act of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Righteousness entered the world through the selfless, merciful act of Jesus in dying on the cross. No matter how bad a person has been in the past, the grace of God is great enough to erase sin and replace the sinful roots of the person with the righteousness of Jesus (Romans 5:18–21).

Discuss

- ? How does understanding a person's sinful nature change the way you look at people who do not know Jesus?
- ? Why do you think some Christians continue to commit sinful behavior?

Part 3—Triumph of God's Justice

□ Present Suffering

Romans 8:18,28,35–39



Say: Now we come to the “victory lap.” We can overcome the problem of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. No suffering that we will endure can

compare to the glory God has in store for us. Paul endured immense suffering in his own life, yet he knew that the reward to come would far outweigh any of that suffering. In 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NIV), he said, “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (Share your highlights from the following text.)

To better understand the apostle Paul, we do well to study his eschatology. Paul lived his life looking to the future reward he would receive in heaven. For him, living with a little, or even a lot, of suffering for his faith in Jesus while on earth was a small investment to make for a life of eternity with Jesus (Romans 8:18).

Paul learned to trust God throughout his life. He suffered a great deal as a result of his decision to place his faith in Jesus as his Savior, his Messiah. On many occasions, he did not know if he was going to live or if he was going to die. A lesson that he learned and taught others was that, no matter what the circumstances looked like, God could be trusted. Paul viewed himself as an instrument in the hands of God to be used any way God desired. His attitude stands in stark contrast to the attitude held by Adam and Eve in the Garden (Romans 8:28).

Paul declared that nothing is able to separate a Christian from the love of God. Some use this verse as an argument to support the “once saved, always saved” theology. Yet Paul was clearly declaring that if a Christian has the correct perspective on suffering and truly trusts God, there is nothing on earth powerful enough to pull a Christian away from faith in Him. No matter how bad a person’s conditions may become, the Christian can be victorious because God is greater (Romans 8:35–39).

Discuss

- ? How can your view of the future help you face difficult times?
- ? What Scriptures give you strength and hope when you face suffering?



Future Reward

Revelation 21:1–5

Say: The ultimate contrast to the sin and suffering in this world will come in eternity; as a result, we can look at evil as a temporary problem. God created the Garden of Eden as an ideal place for Adam and Eve, but they chose to sin, bringing sin and suffering into the world. In the new heaven and new earth, the devil will no longer be able to tempt us, and there will be no sin, evil, or suffering. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

There will come a day when all suffering and injustice will no longer exist. It is in a place Scripture calls a new heaven and a new earth. Here, God will reside forever with those who have been faithful to the end and walked as His children in this life. Spending eternity with God is more than enough reward for whatever pain a Christian suffered on earth (Revelation 21:1–3).

John told the reader that God will wipe away tears. This indicates that anything that has happened in the past that caused pain will be forgotten and will never be

repeated. All aspects of the sin nature and its effect on humanity will be gone. All Christians will live in perfect contentment (Revelation 21:4).

Jesus assures Christians of the secure future that awaits them. Christians can trust God to care for them in this life and in the life to come. We will rest in the marvelous reality that He has made all things new (Revelation 21:5).



Resource Packet Item 3: Decisions in Light of Eternity

Distribute the work sheet and take a few minutes to discuss it as a class or in small groups.

Discuss

- ? How can a proper view of the end times help you face difficult times in this world?
- ? What do you most look forward to in heaven?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: No matter how great the evil around us is, and no matter how intense our suffering is, we can be assured of God's love. He will give us the strength we need for each trial, and He assures us of an eternal home where evil and suffering will no longer exist.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Look for ways to brighten a day for someone who is suffering.
- Commit your own suffering to God, and ask Him to help you see it as temporary.
- Consider eternity's values in any decisions you are making.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Suffering, Though Righteous.
Job 1:1,13-22

Tuesday

Questions About God's Justice.
Jeremiah 12:1-4,14-17

Wednesday

Watch for God's Justice.
Habakkuk 1:1-5

Thursday

Give an Account on Judgment Day.
Matthew 12:33-37

Friday

The Dilemma of Sin.
Romans 7:14-25

Saturday

Christ's Final Triumph.
Revelation 19:11-2

Unit 2: Defending the Faith in a Secular World

August 29, 2021

LESSON 13

Keeping the Church Pure

Introducing the Study

Say: Unbelievers sometimes claim they do not attend church because the church is full of hypocrites. It's easy for us to glibly respond that hypocrites in the church should not keep people away because we are there to worship God, not judge others. However, we do well to explore our own behavior to ensure that we are not giving the world a bad perception of the church. (*Play the video for this lesson, available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.*)

Opening Activity—What Makes a Hypocrite?

Ask: What activities among church attenders might make unbelievers think the church is full of hypocrites?

Say: While the “hypocrite excuse” is not a valid reason for not attending church, we must also be aware of our behaviors that might lead people to believe that the church is “full of hypocrites.” We are all forgiven sinners, but God calls for us to live in a way that sets us apart from the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

How much difference should there be between the life of a believer and the life of someone who does not have a relationship with Jesus Christ? How should Christians respond when they see sin creeping into the congregation? And how can Christians hold to a godly standard and not become judgmental toward others? These are the kinds of questions and issues that will be explored in today's lesson. Through this study we will become better prepared to understand holiness and live according to God's righteous commands.

Study Text

Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–13; Philippians 4:8–9; 1 John 2:15–17

Central Truth

The Church is to remain holy in an impure world.



Key Verse 1 John 2:15

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (KJV).

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Recognize how thinking, godly or ungodly, affects behavior.
- Choose to think and act in a godly manner.
- Explore how to hold others spiritually accountable in an appropriate manner.

Scripture Reading

King James Version

1 Corinthians 5:1. It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

4. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5. To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

9. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:

11. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

12. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

13. But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Matthew 18:15. Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Philippians 4:8. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

1 John 2:15. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

New International Version

1 Corinthians 5:1. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife.

4. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

5. hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

9. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—

11. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

12. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

13. God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

Matthew 18:15. "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

16. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

17. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Philippians 4:8. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

1 John 2:15. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

16. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.



Part 1—Deceived by Pagan Influences

□ Spiritually Compromised

1 Corinthians 5:1–3

Say: Paul delivered some harsh words to the Corinthian Christians in this, his first Epistle to them, and his instructions are relevant in today's churches as well. However, in our divided society, it is vital that we separate ourselves from the sin in our society without losing our love for unbelievers who are living in sin. Like the Corinthians, some in the modern church are tolerant of sin, even within our own ranks. We are called to love sinners, and we are also called to avoid being compromised by their sin. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Corinth was a sexually saturated society. In the centuries leading up to New Testament times, there were thousands of temple prostitutes who served Aphrodite, the goddess of love, pleasure, and procreation, through sex acts. Clearly, the pagan culture of the ancient Roman Empire was extremely promiscuous, even to the point of including sexuality in worship. It is important to keep in mind, then, that the people who were becoming Christians in the church had grown up in a culture that set their minds to accept sexual immorality as normal, and even religiously necessary. (It can also help us appreciate the challenges faced by the apostle Paul in reaching such a city with a message of purity, fidelity, and sexual restraint.)

Sexual immorality was a very real problem among the Corinthian believers as they struggled to move beyond spiritual immaturity to maturity (see 1 Corinthians 3:1–2). The apostle Paul heard about grossly immoral acts happening among the body of believers there, and he was greatly displeased. Christians should not accept immorality in their midst. Paul instructed the church to take strong action to remove sin from the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:1–2).

Paul refused to be shaped or warped by his culture. His priority was his citizenship in God's kingdom, and living according to God's commands as best He could. His standards were set by Scripture. The Bible is clear that sex is to be limited to a husband and wife. To allow sexual immorality in the church is to violate the rules of God's kingdom. Paul told the Corinthians to expel the sexually immoral person from the church (verses 2–3).

Discuss

- ? How has culture affected your life and behavior?
- ? In what ways might the church tend to compromise with the world's standards, and how can this be avoided?



□ Confront Sin

1 Corinthians 5:4–8

Say: When we see sin among believers, it should make us uncomfortable. And so, we should ask ourselves what to do with that discomfort. Paul instructed the Corinthians to confront the sin in their midst. The goal was to bring spiritual growth and healing to the offender, and that would take decisive action. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As we read 1 Corinthians 5:4, it may sound unloving to expel a person from a church. But Paul was careful, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to describe the manner in which this action should occur. The church was to be submissive to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would never do anything inappropriate toward a person, regardless of the sin committed. It is in the spirit of love that Paul instructed the church leaders to turn the person over to Satan. Many scholars believe this to mean that they would excommunicate the person from the church and allow his fleshly desires to move forward unabated. The ultimate desire of Paul was to see the individual turn back to God, once he or she realized the goodness of God in contrast to the pain of sin. If the church did not take this extreme action, the immoral man may well have continued in his sin and would have never recognized his need to repent. He would have been lost for eternity while deceiving himself into believing that he was in fact on the right path (1 Corinthians 3:4–5).

Casting the immoral person out of the church was potentially beneficial for him, but it was definitely beneficial for the congregation at Corinth. The Christians would understand that God is serious about His standards, and they would not suffer the negative consequences of abiding in a spiritually compromised community. Paul used the illustration of yeast's effect on dough to make his point. Just as a small amount of yeast works its way through the entire lump of dough, sin will affect all aspects of the congregation. Paul was protective of the spiritual climate of the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Paul used the Passover feast to continue his illustration of the importance of keeping the church pure from sin. He noted that the Corinthian church could regain its purity if it would realign itself with Jesus. Jesus is the Passover Lamb and it is inappropriate to claim the benefits of His sacrifice, and then live according to the standards of a pagan culture (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

Discuss

- ? How can a Christian remain uncompromised in today's ungodly culture?
- ? What is the right way to approach the need for discipline within the church?

Part 2—An Authoritative Decision

□ Avoid Immoral Influences

1 Corinthians 5:9–10,13



Say: Believers sometimes try to protect themselves and their families from the influence of sin by building what some might call a “Christian bubble” around themselves. While it is important to protect ourselves and our children from bad influences, God does not call us to isolationism from the world. Instead, He calls us to be light and salt in the world. Paul expressed that it was more important for the church to avoid contact with a sinning believer than to avoid contact with unbelievers who are sinning, perhaps in the same way. We cannot expect unbelievers to live holy lives, and it is not our job to judge them. However, those of us who profess the name of Christ must live godly lives and encourage fellow believers to do so as well, in order to avoid misleading them. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul called Christians to judge—to evaluate right from wrong—but not to be judgmental. Those outside the church often consider Christians judgmental, and some Christians condemn those who are not Christians and who live immorally. Paul argued that this should not be the case. Christians have no authority to judge those who do not know Jesus. This is God’s authority alone (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Paul anticipated that Christians will associate with people who do not know Jesus. He did not tell Christians to stay hidden behind church doors (1 Corinthians 5:9–10). Christians must follow the lead of Jesus and spend time with those outside the church in order to share the gospel with them.

It is meaningless to ask unbelievers to live righteously. Such a lifestyle would make no difference in their spiritual standing. Those who do not believe need changed hearts. A demonstration of true love toward unbelievers is a clear expression of the gospel through word and actions.



Resource Packet Item 1: Friend List

Distribute the work sheet “Friend List,” and encourage students to take it home and fill it out to evaluate their potential impact for the kingdom of God.

Discuss

- ? What is the difference between exercising righteous judgment and being judgmental?
- ? Why do you think many Christians avoid association with non-believers?



Embrace Accountability

1 Corinthians 5:11–12

Say: Some people are quite willing to hold others accountable for their actions, but are less likely to want someone to hold them accountable. Yet accountability is a two-way street. As members of the Body of Christ, we are responsible for helping one another to grow in Christ. We must be willing to correct in love and to receive correction in love. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Those who claim Jesus as Savior ought to live holy lives, in direct contrast to those who are not Christians. If a Christian associates with a fellow believer who is living an unrighteous life, while overlooking or even making excuses for the sin, then the Christian endorses the unrighteous behavior unwittingly. Paul said that a Christian should not even eat with a person who claims to be a Christian but does not live in submission to God’s standards (1 Corinthians 5:11).

Christians must be willing to confront their fellow Christians concerning their sinful behavior. In doing so, they hold one another accountable and avoid allowing compromise to grow within the church (1 Corinthians 5:12).

The difference between being judgmental and holding one another accountable in a godly fashion is often delineated by the attitude a person has toward a fellow Christian. Judgmentalism will manifest itself through a feeling of superiority. Appropriate judging of one another is based on love and a concern for the person’s

welfare, as well as the welfare of the church. Christians must be willing to hold others accountable to godly standards and must be willing to be held accountable by others.

Discuss

- ? How can personal accountability prevent the need for further church discipline?
- ? What can a Christian do to develop spiritual accountability?

Part 3—Committed to God’s Standard

□ Resolve Conflicts

Matthew 18:15–17



Say: When two or more people are involved in any endeavor, conflicts will eventually occur. This doesn’t mean one person is wrong and the other is right. It may simply mean that they have differing opinions. In this case, Christian love would call for both parties to be gracious in their words and behavior. However, when one person has truly wronged another, Jesus has provided the steps needed to resolve the conflict. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Christians are not left alone to figure out how to proceed when another Christian has offended him or her personally. Ignoring wrongs may seem to be easier than confronting the person who has hurt the Christian, but ignoring conflict can sometimes even make matters worse. Ignoring hurts might lead to deeper hurts, allowing an offender to continue to offend. Jesus taught that the best way to deal with an offense is to address it clearly and get it resolved.

Jesus outlined the process of dealing with a fellow Christian who offends. The first step is to go speak to the person face-to-face. If both people are willing to resolve the problem in a positive fashion, it advances the relationship and the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:15).

But Jesus was not willing to allow conflict to remain unresolved if the offending party rejects the individual offer of reconciliation. The offended Christian is instructed to take another Christian as a witness who could arbitrate between the two individuals. If there is still no resolution, Jesus told the believer to take the offending person before the church for a final decision. If the offending party still refused to repent of wrongdoing, the leaders of the church were to view the person as a non-believer, which means to ostracize them (Matthew 18:16–17).

Discuss

- ? Describe the difference between a personal offense and a true wrongdoing.
- ? How should Christians resolve conflict when that conflict does not represent sin in either of their lives?



Resource Packet Item 2: Judging Those Who Sin

Distribute the work sheet “Judging Those Who Sin,” and have students work on it in small groups, then discuss it as a class.

Say: The mind is the gateway to the heart. The things we allow to fill our minds will also fill our hearts and will affect our behavior. As we seek to be witnesses to the world around us, it is crucial that we control what we allow to enter our minds. Both the apostle Paul and the apostle John gave instructions on the way we should think. If we keep our minds pure, we will find it much easier to live holy lives that please God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Avoiding sin is one way to assure that the church remains pure. As important as it is to avoid sinful behavior, it is just as important to engage in godly activities that foster righteousness. The apostle Paul provided readers with a kind of road map, which would keep Christians on the path of righteousness. The behaviors Christians engage in are a result of the way Christians think. The way Christians think is determined by what they put into their minds. Paul instructed believers to think about honorable, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent things (Philippians 4:8).

Christians live in a society today that attempts to draw their attention toward things that are not pure and not honorable. Television shows regularly encourage immoral behavior, either explicitly or implicitly. Conversations often focus on the negative, even in the church. Gossip and slander find their way into Christian conversations. When Christians allow their minds to be filled with thoughts and ideas that are not pleasing to God, it is likely that ungodly behaviors will follow.

Paul encouraged his readers to follow his example. This encouragement placed a high responsibility on the apostle. He was accepting the mandate to live a holy and pure life because he was inviting the inspection of others (Philippians 4:9).

Christians must live a life that will reflect the kingdom of God to others. This can be possible if the Christian will be careful concerning that which they put into their minds. An added blessing for those who maintain a holy life is that God's peace will permeate their existence.

The world offers many delicacies. It is easy to fall into the trap of desiring to acquire everything the world offers. Many of these temptations come at a great spiritual cost. By definition, a Christian must love God supremely. If Christians love the world so much that they will turn their back on the priorities of God, it is evident that they are not living for Him and have turned from Him. When Satan attempted to dissuade Jesus from His mission, he tempted Him in three ways: through desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and through pride of life. Satan uses these same tools on people today. When Christians are being offered items that please their flesh, eyes, and pride in exchange for compromise of their obedience to God, this should be recognized as temptation and must be rejected (1 John 2:15–16).

No matter how good Satan's temptations may seem to us, they will never measure up to the prize that awaits the Christian who remains faithful to God. While a person may enjoy worldly possessions for a lifetime, every person will

die, and at that point, everything that the person has acquired will be taken from him or her. Christians can look forward to rewards that will last for eternity. When Christians keep this in mind, it will help them choose righteousness rather than temporary gain (1 John 2:17).



Resource Packet Item 3: Which Standards Shape You?

Distribute the self-evaluation, and give students a few minutes to prayerfully evaluate themselves. Then close in prayer, praying that God will direct each person in adopting godly standards for life.

Discuss

- ? How do your entertainment habits line up with your desire to live a righteous life?
- ? How does your eternal reward influence the decisions you make today?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: The Church has the responsibility of representing Jesus to the world, and that responsibility calls for us to be different from the world. We must guard our thoughts, words, and actions so unbelievers will be drawn to Jesus through us.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Exhort students to identify and reject sinful influences that commonly confront them.
- Encourage students to study the Word in an effort to know and better understand God's righteous commands.
- Challenge students to seek out resolution to any conflicts they may be involved in with other believers.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Keep from Willful Sins.
Psalm 19:7–14

Tuesday

Defiled by Deeds.
Psalm 106:34–39

Wednesday

In the Valley of Decision.
Joel 3:14–16

Thursday

Decision To Follow Christ.
John 6:60–69

Friday

Walk Worthy of Your Calling.
Ephesians 4:1–3

Saturday

Guard Against False Teachers.
Jude 1:3–13



Study Text Index

	Vol.	Page		Vol.	Page
Genesis			32:35–43	1	231
1:1–2	1	378			
1:1–31	1	3	Joshua		
1:29–31	1	410	1:1–9	1	11
1:27–28	1	394	6:1–21	1	223
2:18–25	1	394	24:1–15	1	11
3:1–19	1	410			
12:1–7	1	3	Judges		
15:1–21	1	215	1:28	1	223
18:16–33	1	321	2:1–5	1	223
19:24–29	1	321			
21:1–7	1	3	1 Samuel		
32:22–32	1	3	8:4–22	1	19
45:1–15	1	3	9:1 through 10:25	1	19
46:1–7	1	3	16:1–13	1	19
Exodus			1 Kings		
3:1–15	1	11	3:1–28	1	329
3:6	1	3	12:1–20	1	27
4:18–26	1	215			
12:1–51	1	11	2 Kings		
19:1–8	1	11	17:1–23	1	27
20:4–6	1	402	21:1–17	1	27
23:4–5	1	231	22:1–20	1	27
33:11–23	1	215	23:3–5,25	1	27
Leviticus			1 Chronicles		
19:14–18	1	231	17:1–15	1	19
Numbers			2 Chronicles		
11:10–29	1	304	1:1–6	1	19
31:1–20	1	223	6:1–11	1	19
			9:1–8	1	19
Deuteronomy			36:11–21	1	27
7:1–16	1	223			
7:6–11	1	11	Ezra		
20:10–18	1	223	1:1–5	1	51
25:17–19	1	223	3:8–13	1	51
32:4	1	402	6:13–18	1	51

	Vol.	Page		Vol.	Page
Nehemiah			64:6–7	1	410
1:1 through 2:8	1	337	65:1–12, 17–25	1	157
2:11 through 3:35	1	51			
6:15–16	1	51	Jeremiah		
			3:6–13	1	43
Job					
28:1–28	1	35	Ezekiel		
			37:15–23	1	43
Psalms					
1:1–6	1	35	Hosea		
7:10–11	1	402	8:1–9	1	43
19:1–4	1	378			
37:37–38	1	402	Joel		
51:5	1	410	2:12–17	1	43
69:16–28	1	231			
86:15–16	1	402	Zephaniah		
109:1–20	1	231	3:14–20	1	43
137:1–9	1	231			
139:7–18	1	378	Malachi		
			3:1–18	1	51
Proverbs					
2:1–6	1	35	Matthew		
3:1–18	1	35	1:18–24	1	60
9:10	1	35	4:12–17	1	386
24:17–18	1	231	5:38–39	1	239
25:21–22	1	231	10:7	1	386
			13:1–45	1	386
Ecclesiastes			13:41–43	1	402
7:11–12	1	35	17:1–5	1	296
12:9–14	1	35	18:15–17	1	418
			19:3–6	1	394
Isaiah			24:6–8	1	223
Isaiah 1:1 through 2:5	1	109	24:29–35	1	239
9:13–21	1	43	26:36–46	1	361
11:1–5	1	263	27:57 through 28:20	1	247
11:1–10	1	43	28:17–18	1	386
34:1 through 35:10	1	117	28:19–20	1	223
40:1–31	1	133			
40:12–14	1	378	Mark		
52:13 through 53:12	1	141	1:1–39	1	166
54:1 through 55:13	1	149	2:1 through 3:6	1	174
61:1–9	1	157	7:20–23	1	410
62:10–12	1	157	8:27 through 9:13	1	182

	Vol.	Page		Vol.	Page
13:1-37	1	190	Romans		
13:24-31	1	239	1:17-23	1	76
14:32-42	1	361	1:18-20	1	378
14:43 through 15:15	1	198	1:20-27	1	394
15:16 through 16:20	1	206	2:12-16	1	378
			3:9-24	1	76
Luke			3:23	1	410
2:41-52	1	60	5:1,6-8	1	76
3:21-22	1	60	5:18-21	1	410
4:14-21,31-37	1	60	8:1-4	1	76
5:17-26	1	60	8:18,28,35-39	1	410
11:1-13	1	345	9:9-18	1	255
11:14-20	1	386	10:9-11	1	255
16:1-9	1	239	12:18	1	223
21:31-33	1	239	12:19-21	1	231
22:39-46	1	361	13:1-4	1	239
John			1 Corinthians		
1:1-18	1	125	3:1-11	1	76
1:1-18	1	386	5:1-13	1	418
3:1-8,14-21	1	386	6:9 through 7:5	1	394
14:6	1	386	15:14-19	1	386
17:1-26	1	353	15:12-58	1	76
18:1	1	361			
18:19-23	1	239	2 Corinthians		
19:16-42	1	60	3:1-8	1	304
20:1-22	1	60			
			Galatians		
Acts			3:1-14	1	76
1:4-8	1	68	5:22-26	1	304
2:1-4, 36-41	1	68			
2:1-17,41-47	1	304	Ephesians		
4:1-20	1	288	2:4-5	1	402
4:9-13	1	68	2:11-23	1	84
4:31-35	1	304	3:14-21	1	369
7:54-8:8	1	68	4:7-16	1	84
10:9-23, 34-44	1	68	4:17-24	1	378
16:6-15	1	68	5:18-21	1	304
17:16-34	1	378	6:11-13	1	223
18:1-11	1	68			
19:1-10	1	68	Philippians		
23:1-5	1	239	1:3-11	1	369
28:16,23-24,28-31	1	68	4:8-9	1	418

	Vol.	Page		Vol.	Page
Colossians			2:4–17	1	280
1:9–14	1	369	2:13–14	1	239
1:15–20	1	84	3:1–9	1	280
			3:13 through 5:11	1	288
1 Thessalonians			2 Peter		
4:3–7	1	394	1:1–21	1	296
4:13–18	1	84	1:3–8	1	92
2 Thessalonians			1:10–11	1	255
2:1–10	1	84	2:1–9	1	312
2:1–10	1	255	3:3–13	1	312
			3:9	1	402
1 Timothy			1 John		
1:8–11	1	394	2:15–17	1	418
1:15	1	386	3:1–3,16–18	1	92
6:3–12	1	84	4:7–10	1	402
2 Timothy			4:7–12,16–21	1	92
2:1–4	1	223	Jude		
2:1–7	1	84	1:3–4,17–23	1	312
3:1–5	1	84	1:17–21	1	92
Titus			Revelation		
3:1–8	1	84	1:4–20	1	263
Hebrews			3:1	1	263
1:1–4	1	92	4:1–11	1	263
3:1–6	1	92	5:1–6	1	263
6:1–8	1	255	5:6–14	1	100
7:23–28	1	92	7:9–17	1	100
10:26–31	1	255	8:1–2	1	263
10:30	1	231	11:15–19	1	100
11:6	1	378	12:1–9	1	263
12:14	1	402	12:7–11	1	100
13:4	1	394	13:1–18	1	263
James			14:1–11	1	263
2:14–26	1	92	15:1 through 16:2	1	263
			19:11 through 21:5	1	100
1 Peter			20:11–15	1	402
1:1 through 2:3	1	272	21:1–5	1	410
1:2	1	255	22:12–16	1	402
1:13–16	1	378			