## CONTENTS

Six-year Cycle ................................................................. v
List of Printed Texts ......................................................... vi
Preface  ................................................................. vii
Acknowledgments ....................................................... viii
Know Your Writers .................................................... ix

### Fall Quarter, 2019—Responding to God’s Grace

General Introduction .................................................... 1

**September: UNIT I—God Is Faithful**
1  Faith and Doubt (Genesis 19:1, 15-26, 29) .......................................... 3
8  God Answers Prayer (1 Samuel 1:9-20) ......................................... 13
15  Bread from Heaven (Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15) .................................. 22
22  God Hears Our Cry (Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a) .... 32
29  God Forgives (Numbers 14:10b-20) .......................................... 42

**October: UNIT II—Responses to God’s Faithfulness**
6  Obedient Faith (Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12-13) ................................... 51
13  Blessed for Faithfulness (1 Kings 17:8-16) .................................. 60
20  Faith Can Heal (Luke 7:1-10) .............................................. 68
27  Faith Saves (Luke 7:37-48) .................................................. 77

**November: UNIT III—Faith Leads to Holy Living**
3  Self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:1-11) .................................... 86
10  Be Examples of Faith (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10) .............................. 95
17  Live Holy Lives (1 Peter 1:13-25) ........................................... 105
24  Stick to Your Faith (2 Peter 1:1-15) ......................................... 114

### Winter Quarter, 2019–2020—Honoring God

General Introduction .................................................... 123

**December: UNIT I—David Honors God**
1  David Worships God in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a) 125
8  A Heart Filled with Gratitude (1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 19-27) .............. 134
15  Building God’s House (1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14; 21:18, 21-27) 143
22  The Lord Is with You (Luke 1:39-56) ........................................ 152
29  David’s Prayer (1 Chronicles 17:16-27) .................................... 160

**January: UNIT II—Dedicating the Temple of God**
5  A Place for the Ark (1 Kings 8:1-13) ........................................ 169
12  Solomon’s Speech (1 Kings 8:14-21) ........................................ 178
19  Solomon’s Dedication Prayer (1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53) .................. 186
26  Solomon’s Blessing (1 Kings 8:54-61) ...................................... 194

**February: UNIT III—Jesus Teaches about True Worship**
2  Single-minded Obedience (Matthew 4:1-11) .................................. 202
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Piety that Honors God (Matthew 6:1-8)</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Prayer of Jesus (Matthew 6:9-15)</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Perseverance in Prayer (Luke 11:5-13)</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Spring Quarter, 2020—Justice and the Prophets</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Introduction</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>March: UNIT I—God Requires Justice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1  Called to Accountability (Amos 5:18-24)</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8  A Prayer for Justice (Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-14)</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15  Consequences for Injustice (Habakkuk 2:6-14)</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22  Corrupt Leaders (Micah 3:1-2, 9-12; 6:6-8)</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29  Leading Justly (Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6)</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>April: UNIT II—God Promises a Just Kingdom</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5  God’s Just Servant (Isaiah 42:1-9)</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12  Resurrection Hope (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45)</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19  Injustice Will Be Punished (Esther 7:1-10)</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26  The Lord Loves Justice (Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a)</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>May: UNIT III—Called to God’s Work of Justice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3  A Vision of Restoration (Zephaniah 3:14-20)</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10  Peace and Justice Reign (Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17)</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17  Practice Justice (Jeremiah 21:8-14)</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24  Repent of Injustice (Jeremiah 22:1-10)</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31  Return to Love and Justice (Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14)</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Summer Quarter, 2020—Many Faces of Wisdom</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Introduction</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>June: UNIT I—Wisdom in Proverbs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7  The Call of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10-11, 20-22, 32-33)</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14  The Value of Wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-11)</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21  The Gifts of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21)</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28  Wisdom’s Feast (Proverbs 9:1-6, 8-10, 13-18)</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>July: UNIT II—Wisdom in the Gospels</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5  Wisdom’s Vindication (Matthew 11:7-19)</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12  The Boy Jesus (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b; Luke 2:39-52)</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19  The Wisdom of Jesus (Mark 6:1-6)</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26  Wisdom: The Way, Truth, and Life (John 14:1-14)</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>August: UNIT III—Faith and Wisdom in James</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2  Faith and Wisdom (James 1:1-11)</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9  Hearing and Doing the Word (James 1:19-27)</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16  Faith without Works Is Dead (James 2:14-26)</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23  Taming the Tongue (James 3:1-12)</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30  Two Kinds of Wisdom (James 3:13-18; 5:7-12)</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>Winter 2016–2017</td>
<td>Spring 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOD–SOVEREIGNTY</td>
<td>CREATION</td>
<td>LOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sovereignty of God</td>
<td>Creation: A Divine Cycle</td>
<td>God Loves Us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah; Matthew; Hebrews; Revelation</td>
<td>Psalms; Luke; Galatians</td>
<td>Psalms; Joel; Jonah; John; Romans; Ephesians; 1 Peter; 1 John</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
<th>Winter 2017–2018</th>
<th>Spring 2018</th>
<th>Summer 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVENANT</td>
<td>FAITH</td>
<td>WORSHIP</td>
<td>JUSTICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis; Exodus; Numbers; 1 Samuel; 2 Samuel; Nehemiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; 1 Corinthians; Titus; Hebrews</td>
<td>Daniel; Matthew; Acts; Ephesians; Colossians; 1 Timothy; James</td>
<td>Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; 2 Chronicles; Psalms; Luke; John; 2 Corinthians; Hebrews; Revelation</td>
<td>Matthew; Luke; Romans; 2 Corinthians; Colossians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2018</th>
<th>Winter 2018–2019</th>
<th>Spring 2019</th>
<th>Summer 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CREATION</td>
<td>LOVE</td>
<td>CALL</td>
<td>GOD–WISDOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God’s World and God’s People</td>
<td>Our Love for God</td>
<td>Discipleship and Mission</td>
<td>Many Faces of Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>Deuteronomy; Joshua; Psalms; Matthew; Mark; Luke; Philippians; 2 Thessalonians; James; 2 John</td>
<td>Matthew; Luke; Acts; Romans</td>
<td>Genesis; Job; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Matthew; Mark; Luke; John; James</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2019</th>
<th>Winter 2019–2020</th>
<th>Spring 2020</th>
<th>Summer 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAITH</td>
<td>WORSHIP</td>
<td>JUSTICE</td>
<td>GOD–LIBERATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to God’s Grace</td>
<td>Honoring God</td>
<td>Justice and the Prophets</td>
<td>God Frees and Redeems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis; Exodus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; 1 Samuel; 1 Kings; Luke; 2 Corinthians; Galatians; 1 Thessalonians; 1 Peter; 2 Peter</td>
<td>1 Chronicles; 2 Chronicles; 1 Kings; Ecclesiastes; Matthew; Luke</td>
<td>Esther; 1 Kings; Psalms; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Hosea; Amos; Micah; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Zechariah; Malachi; Matthew; Mark; 1 Corinthians</td>
<td>Deuteronomy; Ezra; Matthew; John; Romans; 2 Corinthians; Hebrews; 1 John</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2020</th>
<th>Winter 2020–2021</th>
<th>Spring 2021</th>
<th>Summer 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOVE</td>
<td>CALL</td>
<td>COVENANT</td>
<td>FAITH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love for One Another</td>
<td>Call in the New Testament</td>
<td>Prophets Faithful to God’s Covenant</td>
<td>Confident Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis; Leviticus; 1 Samuel; 2 Samuel; Luke; John; Acts; 1 Corinthians; James; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John</td>
<td>Isaiah; Matthew; Mark; Luke; John; Acts; Romans; 1 Corinthians; Hebrews; 2 Timothy</td>
<td>Exodus; Joshua; 1 Kings; 2 Kings; Ezra; Nehemiah; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Lamentations; Ezekiel; Amos; Jonah; Luke</td>
<td>Matthew; Mark; Luke; Romans; 2 Corinthians; Hebrews; 1 John</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2021</th>
<th>Winter 2021–2022</th>
<th>Spring 2022</th>
<th>Summer 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WORSHIP</td>
<td>JUSTICE</td>
<td>GOD–LIBERATION</td>
<td>CREATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating God</td>
<td>Justice, Law, History</td>
<td>God Frees and Redeems</td>
<td>Partners in a New Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus; 2 Samuel; Ecclesiastes; Psalms; Mark; Luke; Acts; Revelation</td>
<td>Genesis; Exodus; Deuteronomy; 2 Samuel; 1 Kings; Ezra; Job; Isaiah; Nahum; Luke</td>
<td>Deuteronomy; Ezra; Matthew; John; Romans; Galatians</td>
<td>Isaiah; John; Revelation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF PRINTED TEXTS

The Printed Scriptural Texts used in the 2019–2020 *Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary* are arranged here in the order in which they appear in the Bible. Opposite each reference is the page number on which Scriptures appear in this edition of the Commentary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 19:1, 15-26, 29</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 14:1-2, 5-10a</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers 14:10b-20</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12-13</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel 1:9-20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 8:1-13</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 8:14-21</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 8:54-61</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 17:8-16</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 19-27</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 17:16-27</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 21:18, 21-27</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther 7:1-10</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10-11, 20-22, 32-33</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 2:1-11</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 9:1-6, 8-10, 13-18</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 42:1-9</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 61:8-11</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 62:2-4a</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah 21:8-14</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah 22:1-10</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosea 12:1-2, 6-14</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos 5:18-24</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah 3:1-2, 9-12</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah 6:6-8</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-14</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habakkuk 2:6-14</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zephaniah 3:14-20</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachi 2:1-9</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachi 3:5-6</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 4:1-11</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 6:1-8</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 6:9-15</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 11:7-19</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 6:1-6</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 1:39-56</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 7:1-10</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 7:37-48</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 11:5-13</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 14:1-14</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Corinthians 13:1-11</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Thessalonians 1:2-10</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James 1:1-11</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James 1:19-27</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James 2:14-26</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James 3:1-12</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James 3:13-18</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James 5:7-12</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Peter 1:13-25</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Peter 1:1-15</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

The Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary, based on the International Lessons Series, was developed consistent with the curriculum guidelines of the Committee on the Uniform Series, Education Leadership Ministries Commission, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Select Christian scholars and theologians—who themselves embrace the precepts, doctrines, and positions on biblical interpretation that we have come to believe—are contributors to this publication. By participating in Scripture selection and the development of the matrices for the Guidelines for Lesson Development with the Committee on the Uniform Series, this presentation reflects the historic faith that we share within a rich heritage of worship and witness.

The format of the Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary lessons consists of the following: the Unit Title, the general subject with age-level topics, Printed Text from the King James Version and the New International Version of the Bible, Unifying Lesson Principle, Objectives of the Lesson, Points to Be Emphasized, The Chronological Setting of the Lesson, The Geographical and Cultural Setting of the Lesson, Prominent Characters in the Lesson, Key Terms in the Lesson, Topical Outline of the Lesson—with the Biblical Background of the Lesson, Exposition and Application of the Scripture, Concluding Reflection (designed to focus on the salient points of the lesson), and the Home Daily Bible Readings. Each lesson concludes with a prayer.

The Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary is designed to be an instructional aid for persons involved in the ministry of Christian education. While the autonomy of the individual soul before God is affirmed, we believe that biblical truths find their highest expression within the community of believers whose corporate experiences serve as monitors to preserve the integrity of the Christian faith. As such, the Word of God must not only be understood, but it must also be embodied in the concrete realities of daily life. This serves to allow the Word of God to intersect in a meaningful way with those realities of life.

The presentation of the lessons anticipates the fact that some concepts and Scripture references do not lend themselves to meaningful comprehension by children. Hence, when this occurs, alternative passages of Scripture are used, along with appropriate content emphases, that are designed to assist children in their spiritual growth. There will, however, remain a consistent connection between the children, youth, and adult lessons through the Unifying Principle developed for each session.

We stand firm in our commitment to Christian growth, to the end that lives will be transformed through personal and group interaction with the Word of God. The challenge issued by the apostle Paul continues to find relevance for our faith journey: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NRSV). May we all commit ourselves to the affirmation expressed by the psalmist: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary is recognized as the centerpiece of a family of church-school literature designed especially to assist teachers in their presentation of the lessons as well as to broaden the knowledge base of students from the biblical perspective. Our mission has been and will always be to provide religious educational experiences and spiritual resources for our constituency throughout this nation, as well as many foreign countries. To achieve this end, the collaborative efforts of many people provide the needed expertise in the various areas of the production process. The editorial personnel, too numerous to list, approach their respective tasks with the dedication and devotion of those who serve God by serving His people. This Commentary is presented with gratitude to God for all those who desire a more comprehensive treatment of the selected Scriptures than is provided in the church-school quarterlies, and it is intended to be a complementary resource to the quarterlies.

This Commentary came into being as a result of employees with expertise in their assigned areas whose self-understanding is that of “workers together with God” and partners with those who labor in the vineyard of teaching the Word of God in order to make disciples and nurture others toward a mature faith.

Our gratitude is expressed to Dr. Cleo LaRue, expositor for the Fall and Spring Quarters, and Dr. Christopher Jackson, expositor for the Winter and Summer Quarters, for their devotion to the development of the respective lessons. These two writers bring diversity and a broad spectrum of ministerial, theological, and educational experience to bear on the exposition and application of the Scripture.

The task in which we are all involved would be meaningless and fruitless were it not for the many readers for whom this publication has been so diligently prepared. The faithfulness of our constituency has been enduring for more than a century, and we consider ourselves blessed to be their servants in the ministry of the printed Word—exalting the living Word, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray that God’s grace will complement our efforts so that lives will be transformed within and beyond the confines of classroom interaction as the Spirit of God manifests Himself through the intersection of teaching and learning.
Dr. Cleo LaRue

Fall and Spring Quarters

Dr. Cleophus J. LaRue, Princeton Theological Seminary’s Francis Landey Patton Professor of Homiletics, received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Baylor University, and his M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary. He specializes in the theory and method of African-American preaching and worship. An ordained minister in the National Baptist Convention of America, LaRue is the former pastor of two churches in Texas as well as the former interim pastor of churches in Harlem and Jamaica Queens, New York. He is a frequent speaker at churches, seminaries, and conferences throughout the country, and is a member of the Academy of Homiletics.

A prolific author, Dr. LaRue has published several major publications. His latest work, *Toward a Deeper Understanding of Celebration in African American Preaching*, was released in Spring 2016. He has also written and/or edited the following works:

- *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), Co-editor with Paul Scott Wilson, Jana Childers, and John M. Rottman

LaRue is currently researching a volume entitled *Colored Preaching: The Shape of Proclamation in the Global South*.

LaRue received an honorary doctorate in 2003 from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and in 2012, Baylor University named him a Distinguished Alumnus of the school.

He has taken Princeton students on travel study courses to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. His most recent trips include travelling to Salvador, Brazil, and India.

For more than twenty years he has served on Princeton’s faculty, and currently serves as the chairperson of the Practical Theology Department.

LaRue continues to lecture and preach throughout the United States. He has also spent time teaching homiletics in various settings on five continents.

He is married to Lori Neff LaRue and they reside in Princeton, New Jersey. His daughter, Coryell, resides in Houston, Texas.
Dr. Christopher Jackson
Winter and Summer Quarters

Dr. E. Christopher Jackson is a native of Chattanooga, Tennessee, the second son of Andrew and Christine Jackson. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Tennessee–Knoxville. He completed his Master of Divinity degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and his Doctor of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

His ministry experience includes serving in campus ministry at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville and the University of Louisville. Full-time professional campus ministry positions include nine years at Lincoln University in Missouri and ten years at Tennessee State University, Fisk University, and American Baptist College in Nashville. He co-founded Creative Ministry Consultants, which provides seminars, counseling, and ministry consulting on a national basis. He served as Minister of Nurture at the Temple Church and as Adjunct Professor in Sociology at Tennessee State University, where he taught Courtship & Marriage and the Family. He currently serves as senior pastor of Nashville’s Pleasant Green Missionary Baptist Church.

Dr. Jackson is an accomplished writer and the author of two books, internationally published by Zondervan Publishing House: Straight Talk on Tough Topics, and The Black Christian Single’s Guide to Dating and Sexuality. He has also written extensively for the Sunday School Publishing Board and for LifeWay. He has been referenced in Ebony magazine and Essence magazine, and his newspaper column, “The Relationship Coach,” appears weekly in the Tennessee Tribune.

He is married to Dr. Coreen D. Jackson, who is Director of the TSU Honors College. Their sons are Joshua, Juleon, and Jemiah. His special interests include music, drama, interpretive movement, reading, nature, visual arts, basketball, and photography. His international travels include West Africa, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Spain, Venezuela, and Belize. One of his primary objectives in life is to help other people to discover their life purposes. His personal mission statement is “To honor God, pursue purpose, and empower people through practical and creative ministries of teaching, writing, conferencing, and producing the arts.” Above all, Jesus is the center of his joy.
Responding to God’s Grace

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The study this quarter focuses on God’s gift of faith and how we respond to it both personally and communally. The lessons from the Old and New Testaments illuminate how God’s grace impacts the lives of all believers, as demonstrated by their obedience, gratitude, and holy living.

Unit I, “God Is Faithful,” has five lessons that tell the story of God’s faithfulness. In the book of Genesis, God is faithful to Abraham by blessing his nephew Lot, and God is faithful in answering Hannah’s prayer in the book of 1 Samuel. In the book of Exodus, God is faithful to the people of Israel by providing manna when they complain of hunger. In the book of Numbers, Caleb and Joshua remind the Israelites of God’s faithfulness. Later, God hears their cries and forgives, although the people continue to rebel.

Unit II, “Responses to God’s Faithfulness,” contains four lessons that explore reactions to the many benefits accrued to humans because of God’s grace. The book of Deuteronomy teaches that faith requires a response of obedience. The story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in the book of 1 Kings shows that faithful obedience saves Elijah, the widow, and her son. Luke’s gospel tells about having gratitude for God’s faithfulness in the anointing of Jesus and the healing of the centurion’s servant.

Unit III, “Faith Leads to Holy Living,” is comprised of four lessons that examine letters to early churches that tell them how to live as faithful followers of Christ. The book of 2 Corinthians tells the people to examine themselves to see if they are living in faith. The book of 1 Thessalonians urges Christians to be positive examples of faith. The books of 1 and 2 Peter teach that faith requires holy living and goodness.
Genesis 19:1, 15-26, 29—KJV
AND THERE came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground.

15 And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.
16 And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.
17 And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed.
18 And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my LORD:

Genesis 19:1, 15-26, 29—NIV
THE TWO angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

15 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”
16 When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.
17 As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”
18 But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please!
19 Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: 
20 Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. 
21 And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. 
22 Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. 
23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. 
24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 
25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. 
26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. 

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 which Lot dwelt.

“Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. 
20 “Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.” 
21 He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. 
22 “But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)
23 By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 
24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. 
25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. 
26 But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 

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.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People’s lives are often affected by what others have done or are doing on their behalf. How do the actions of others affect our lives? The book of Genesis states that God preserved Lot when Sodom was destroyed because of the righteousness of his uncle Abraham.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the reasons why the angels spared Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom. 
2. Identify with Lot’s fear of impending disaster. 
3. Celebrate God’s deliverance from seemingly hopeless situations.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The city gate served as a seat of government for a city in the ancient world. Lot’s presence there may indicate (along with the events in 19:9) that he held a position of authority in Sodom.
—There seems to be a progression of Lot’s involvement with Sodom: He camped near Sodom (13:12); He later lived in Sodom (14:12) and, finally, was at the gates of Sodom (19:1).
—Abraham’s intervention for Lot in Sodom marks his second such intervention for his family member. The first was going to battle for Lot when he was captured during a rebellion against ruling kings (see Genesis 14).
—Some scholars suggest that Abraham’s bargaining with the Lord (18:24-32) was an effort to get the Lord to agree to a number equal to the number of persons in Lot’s family.
—Lot’s wife’s looking back indicated that she did not want to leave Sodom. Therefore, it was fitting punishment for Yahweh to allow her to stay—as just another salt pillar that dotted the landscape around the Dead Sea.
—In 2 Peter 2:7-8, Lot was commended as being a righteous man living among the unrighteous.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Sodom was the city where very few righteous people lived.
—The men described in 18:22, God’s angels, were headed toward Sodom and Gomorrah to destroy the cities because of the wickedness of the people. The people refused to act with justice and mercy and treated the poor with great disdain.
—Abraham had such a strong relationship with God that he was able to converse with God without fear.
—God’s faithfulness and mercy endure even amid wickedness.
—Abraham challenged God’s extension of mercy by asking if the city would be destroyed if 50, 45, or 40 righteous people lived in the city. God spared the lives of Lot and his family.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It is not only the start of the Bible, but also it is the start of all creation. The traditional view is that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). Nowadays most experts believe that the books are the work of several hands and come from different traditions. Genesis was written over a long period of time. It was probably begun in the time of Moses, but later generations added other material and edited the books together. The book probably reached its final form around the time of Solomon (970–930 BC).

Genesis is about origins. It tells the readers where we came from and why we are here. In the opening chapters of Genesis, we have all the themes that will fill the rest of the Bible—creation, sin, and rebellion; love, grace, and mercy; faith and doubt. The book is structured around the lives of several key figures, people like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, and Joseph. There are, of course, interludes which cover other topics, but these are the key characters. They are known as the patriarchs, the “fathers,” and they remind us that the Bible is not a book about God but, rather, is a book about God and humankind. Thus, the whole book is about God’s attempt to make Himself known to His creation, to inspire, cajole, and correct, and, above all, to love these people He made.
Archaeological evidence shows that something happened in the area of Sodom and Gomorrah around 2000 BC, some catastrophe which rendered the area unfit for human life. The most likely explanation is an earthquake of some kind. The biblical explanation is more direct: God did it! Sodom was a byword for all kinds of sin. It would be wrong to assume that the main evil in Sodom was the sin which has come to bear its name. Although the men of the town wanted to have sex with the strangers and the town was clearly in the grip of sexual perversion, the main sins are attempted rape and abuse of hospitality. In ancient times, the rules of hospitality were sacred, hence Lot’s appeal to the men not to harm his guests (Genesis 19:8). Lot showed how much he too had been infected by the atmosphere of the place—offering his daughters as a replacement. In the end, the angels asserted themselves. Lot and his family were given every opportunity to leave. Once again, Lot came across as a foolish figure who must be cajoled into hurrying. His wife paused as they fled and was turned to salt. Owing to her lack of faith in God, she yearned still for Sodom, and in the end, she shared its fate.

Prominent Character(s) in the Lesson

Lot: the son of Abraham’s brother Haran. Lot is first mentioned in Genesis 11:31 as migrating with his uncle Abraham and grandfather from Ur of the Chaldeans toward Canaan. A quarrel between Lot’s and Abraham’s herdsmen prompted Abraham to propose an amicable separation, offering Lot his choice of where to settle. Lot chose the well-watered Jordan plain and its prosperous towns.

Key Terms in the Lesson

Angels (verse 1)—Hebrew: mal’ak (mal-awk’): messengers, specifically of God.
Favor (verse 19)—Hebrew: chen (khane): “grace” (KJV).
Lot (verse 1)—Hebrew: Lot (lote): Abraham’s nephew who settled in Sodom and was delivered from its destruction.

Topical Outline of the Lesson

I. Introduction
   A. The Lack of Hospitality for One’s Neighbors
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Entertaining Angels Unawares (Genesis 19:1)
   B. Saved by the Goodness of Others (Genesis 19:15-16)
   C. What One Righteous Person Can Do (Genesis 19:17-22)
   D. Don’t Look Back: The Curse of Disobedience (Genesis 19:23-26)
   E. Blessed by the Promises of God (Genesis 19:29)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Lack of Hospitality for One’s Neighbors

Sodom and Gomorrah have become a conventional image for heinous sins and severe disaster. Apparently for many, these cities symbolize the worst that can be imagined. The nature of Sodom’s sins may vary, but the mistreatment of human beings tops the list. This text centers on the importance of community, not individuals in isolation. It does not deny that individuals are to be held accountable, but it focuses on communal responsibility—on what happens when sin and its effects become so pervasive that the entire community is caught up in it. Genesis 18–19 share this thematic link of hospitality, which should not be narrowly conceived, as if it were simply a matter of putting out a welcome mat. Hospitality involves a wide-ranging image, revealing fundamental relationships of well-being for individuals and society. Abraham shows hospitality in exemplary fashion. Lot follows suit to some extent, but he fails at a key juncture, while the people of Sodom show no sign of what hospitality entails at all.

Initially, Lot’s hospitality to the two angels parallels that of Abraham’s; thus, when the differences in their hospitality appear, they have a great shock value. Lot does engage the crowd on behalf of his guests, and he names directly the sin of the Sodomites (verse 7). At the same time, his language to them as “brothers” raises problems, and his treatment of his daughters reveals deep levels of inhospitality (verse 8). The author makes the depth of Sodom’s inhospitality immediately evident. Verse 4 shows that every man in the city was caught up in this threat of violence through homosexual activity. If the assault had succeeded, the result could only be described as gang rape, not a private act. The text presents the sins of Sodom more as social than individual, something that characterizes the entire city.

Lot’s reply to their plea to allow them to engage in sexual relations with the angels borders on the incredible (verse 8). He thinks the men of Sodom would be satisfied with heterosexual abuse, so he offers his daughters to them to be abused “as you please.” This is but another example of the depravity of Sodom. Lot’s daughters were betrothed (verse 14); Israel condemned to death those who raped betrothed women (see Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Threatened sexual abuse and violence, both homosexual and heterosexual, constituted sufficient evidence for God to move forward with judgment against the city. The strangers (angels) struck the men of Sodom with temporary blindness and saved Lot from their rage. We hear no more from the men of Sodom, but the city would soon hear from God.
While this text illustrates the situation in Sodom as homosexual activity, other biblical references to Sodom lift up a wide range of behavior—from neglect of the poor and needy to lies, greed, luxury, heterosexual abuse, and inhospitality to strangers. Jesus remained true to the broader implications of this text when he condemned a town to a fate like Sodom’s because of its refusal to receive strangers who bear the Word of God (see Matthew 10:14-15). In the eyes of God, it matters how we treat our fellow human beings. This passage indicates that righteous people can make a difference on God’s decision to bring punishment on a place.

B. Biblical Background

This chapter records God’s judgment on a morally bankrupt Canaanite civilization; but it also provides a severe warning against becoming like them—it was difficult to get Lot and his family out of Sodom, but it was also difficult to get Sodom out of Lot’s family. No longer living in tents next to Sodom, Lot had become an upright citizen in the city of Sodom—hospitable and generous—and a leader of the community. The fact that Lot was sitting at the gate may very well indicate that he had found a consistent role in resolving issues and making decisions in the city. Judges usually sat at the gate to make such decisions. Lot sought to screen out the wickedness of the townsfolk and to give advice on good living. He knew truth and justice, righteousness and evil. He was regarded by some as a righteous man (see 2 Peter 2:7-8). Yet in spite of his denunciation of gross evil, he himself liked the lifestyle of Sodom, “the good life” as it were.

The hour of truth came with the visit of the two angels from the Lord. Lot seemed godly and pure, but he was hypocritical, and that became evident when he was forced to choose life away from Sodom or death in Sodom. Because he was a hypocrite, his words of warning for the people were not taken seriously (see Genesis 19:14). The “saint” had at first pitched his tent next to Sodom, but later Sodom controlled his life. He was moral because he opposed the men in his town for their lack of hospitality to strangers—he knew flagrant evil when he saw it. But ironically, he was willing to sacrifice his daughters’ virginity to fend off the vice of the men of the town (see Genesis 19:8). He escaped judgment by the grace of God, but his heart was in Sodom. His wife was just too attached to the place to follow the call of grace; and his daughters had no qualms about having sexual intercourse with their drunk father (see Genesis 19:30-35) when they thought the tribes were all destroyed. As long as the Lord had left Lot and his family alone in Sodom, Lot managed to live comfortably there and hold to his personal belief in God. But ultimately, he could not hold to both. Sodom would have destroyed Lot if the Lord had not destroyed Sodom.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Entertaining Angels Unawares

(Genesis 19:1)

AND THERE came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground.

The angels arrived at Sodom’s city gate (verse 1). This scene invites comparison with
the description of their arrival in Mamre and the hospitality Abraham provided there (see Genesis 18:1-8). The narrator feels no need to repeat all the details; rather, he highlights the differences in their situation. First, it is observed that two “angels” came to Sodom. Lot was sitting at the gate—the center of the city and the seat of its council and court. It is possible that Lot had become one of the city elders or judges. In any event, he saw the strangers enter the city and immediately demonstrated the same gracious hospitality which had characterized Abraham, bowing before them and inviting them to his house. They deferred, expressing their intention to abide in the street. But he insisted again, and a feast was spread before them. Before the time for their retirement, a clamor was heard without. A crowd of men, young and old, from every quarter of the city, had gathered. They demanded that Lot bring out his guests in order that they might “know” them, the common Hebrew term for sexual intimacy. He had a solemn responsibility to protect his guest—such was involved in oriental hospitality. To protect them, he offered his two virgin daughters to the mob. But they had no desire for this alternative. As they pressed upon him the angels intervened, pulling Lot inside, shutting the door, and smiting the mob with blindness so that they could not find the door. All the rumors concerning Sodom had been confirmed. Its debauchery demanded judgment.

The sin of Sodom that God intended to investigate is portrayed here in all its detail. But it would be quite wrong to think that the sin of Sodom was only what took place before the house of Lot. In fact, several sins are described here in all its detail. The attempted gang rape (see Genesis 19:5) was followed by the pandering offer of virgin daughters (see verse 8). In succeeding scenes, Lot’s sons-in-law mock him, and Lot refuses to believe what the angels have to say (see verse 16). Over and over, hospitality is mocked. Lot is not identified as righteous nor does he act in a righteous manner. He is saved only because of Abraham (see verse 29).

B. Saved by the Goodness of Others
(Genesis 19:15-16)

And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

In contrast to the account of the wickedness of the city of Sodom, which was placed in the darkness of night, the setting of the rescue of Lot occurs at the break of day (verse 15). In turning the reader’s attention to such details, the writer draws on a common biblical image that pictures salvation as a sunrise dispelling the evil darkness and consequently provides a larger context for viewing the events of this chapter. In contrast to the men of Sodom who blindly groped for the door of Lot’s house, Lot and his family were taken by the hand and led out of the city to safety (verse 16). To show that the rescue of Lot was in response to the prayer of Abraham, the angels’ words explicitly recall Abraham’s prayer on behalf of the righteous in the previous chapter. Abraham had prayed, “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23, NIV). Similarly, the messengers warned Lot and his family to leave
the city, “or you will be swept away when the city is punished” (Genesis 19:15, NIV). In fact, we are explicitly reminded by the narrator that Lot’s rescue was an answer to Abraham’s prayer in the previous chapter: God “remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived” (verse 29, NIV).

The picture of Lot then is that of a man who has been rescued from the fate of the wicked through the intercession of God’s chosen one. One further important detail is added to the picture of Lot’s rescue. Surprisingly, the basis of God’s saving Lot was not Lot’s righteousness but the Lord’s compassion. When the men took hold of Lot and led him and his family out of the doomed city, the writer is careful to note that this was because “the Lord was merciful to them” (verse 16, NIV). Lot’s righteousness is not apparent from the narrative of chapter 19. In the account of Lot’s rescue, the emphasis is on God’s compassion. Lot acknowledged later that he was saved because he had found favor in God’s sight. This is also true for us. If it had not been for the Lord who was on our side, where would we be?

C. What One Righteous Person Can Do
(Genesis 19:17-22)

And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

A brief episode is recounted at the end of Lot’s rescue that prolongs further the reader’s attention to it. Lot requested shelter in the nearby city of Zoar (verse 20); and granting the request, the Lord saved the city of Zoar from destruction (verse 21). The effect of this short episode is to further strengthen the author’s point that Lot’s rescue is a result of prayer, both Abraham’s and his own. A reminder of the importance of Abraham’s prayer in chapter 18 can be seen in the fact that with Lot’s request the actual circumstances envisioned in Abraham’s prayer are realized when God saved the city because of the righteous ones in it. God had promised not to destroy the city “on behalf of” the righteous in it (Genesis 18:26). So now, though Sodom was destroyed, Zoar was saved from the destruction because of Lot (Genesis 19:21). The point of verses 17-22 is that Abraham’s prayer was specifically answered, and God did save the city of Zoar because of the righteous one living in it. Like Lot, untold numbers in our day have been saved by the prayers of righteous people in our lives. Although we all must give an account of our own actions, the Lord is inclined to hear the prayers of those who are faithful to Him.

D. Don’t Look Back: The Curse of Disobedience
(Genesis 19:23-26)

The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which
grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

The perspective of the narrative widens in scope as it recounts the destruction of the cities. The wider scope is that of Genesis 18:20-21, where both Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities are in view. We are reminded of two things before the onset of the description of God’s judgment. First, “the sun had risen over the land” (Genesis 19:23, NIV); and second, “Lot reached Zoar [safely]” (verse 23, NIV). The mention of the sun ties this section together with Lot’s early-morning rescue (verse 15) as well as with the larger biblical picture of the “sunrise” as an image of divine salvation for the righteous and divine judgment on the wicked. With that as an introduction, the author depicts the scene that will become the classic image of the fate of every wicked one: “The LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah” (verse 24, NIV).

As in the story of the Flood (Genesis 6–8), the narrative does not dwell on the destruction of the cities. Rather, our attention is centered on the response of two individuals: Lot’s wife and Abraham—both of whom “looked” at the destruction of the cities, but with very differing consequences. Few details are given about either. Lot’s wife became “a pillar of salt” because she “looked back.” Apparently, she suffered the same fate as the wicked on whom it rained burning sulfur because she disobeyed the words of the men (“Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains!” [verse 17, NIV]).

The double warning—“don’t look; don’t tarry”—that the men gave to Lot and his family may provide a narrative clue to the exact nature of the misdeed of Lot’s wife. Considering the warning, we are perhaps to infer that she did not simply look behind her but rather “tarried to look in the valley” and hence was swept away with the wicked. Abraham, on the other hand, looked from a vantage point consistent with the men’s words in verse 17. They said, “Don’t stop anywhere in the plain,” and so the writer reminds us that Abraham “returned to the place where he had stood before the lord” (verse 27, NIV) and “looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain” (verse 28, NIV). In any event, Abraham, though obviously unaware of the words of the men spoken to Lot and his family, still obeyed the words and escaped the destruction.

This picture of Abraham is consistent with the overall picture of him as one who obeys and pleases God, though with little external instruction. Lot’s wife, on the other hand, knew what to do but failed to do it. It is important to note that the narrative allows us to view the smoldering ruins from Abraham’s perspective rather than Lot’s. Clearly, the central figure in the narrative is Abraham. It was his intercession that resulted in Lot’s rescue; so, we return to the perspective of Abraham to the place where he was at the time of the intercession to see a final glimpse of the effect of that prayer. It was Abraham’s prayer that saved Lot and his family. As with Lot, so it is with us: Sometimes we are blessed by the prayers and faithfulness of others unbeknownst to us.

E. Blessed by the Promises of God

(Genesis 19:29)

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 which Lot dwelt.
The reader is not told what Abraham might have been thinking as he watched the smoke billow up from the ruined cities. Abraham was silent. His thoughts were his own. But since the writer has deliberately turned our attention back to the scene of Abraham’s prayer in Genesis 18, it is hard not to see in this final scene a reminder of the central question of that prayer: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (verse 25). At this point in the narrative, the answer to Abraham’s question is made graphically clear. Sodom, in its wickedness, has been shown to be truly deserving of divine wrath. Lot has been rescued and Abraham himself spared from the destruction. Only the disobedient among them, Lot’s sons-in-law and wife, have perished along with the wicked. The whole of the narrative seems carefully planned to focus the reader’s attention on just these points.

Verse 29 is a clear reminder of Abraham’s role in Lot’s rescue: “God remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe” (NIV). Any merit on Lot’s part that may have resulted in his own rescue has been subordinated to the central importance of Abraham’s intercession on His behalf. Lot survived Sodom and Gomorrah because God is faithful to His promises.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Three major motifs come to the fore in this chapter: God’s swift judgment on the Canaanites who lived in the plain, Lot’s close attachment to the wicked society, and God’s merciful sparing of Lot from the fate of Sodom. In summary, the writer states that Lot was not spared from the disaster because of his own deeds but because of his praying uncle. How many of us as children were saved from calamity because of a praying mother or father? And for how many others was disaster averted because they were remembered in prayer by some faithful saint? Indeed, more things are wrought by prayer than this world could ever dream of.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the prayers of the righteous that have guided and directed us through many dangers, toils, and snares. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 26–September 1, 2019)

Faith and Doubt
MONDAY, August 26: “Remember Lot’s Wife” (Luke 17:22, 26-37)
TUESDAY, August 27: “Abraham and Sarah—Becoming Parents” (Genesis 18:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, August 28: “Concerned about the Family” (Genesis 18:16-21)
THURSDAY, August 29: “Pleading Justice for the Righteous” (Genesis 18:30-33)
FRIDAY, August 30: “God Rescues the Godly” (2 Peter 2:4-10)
SATURDAY, August 31: “Sodom’s Sin Revealed” (Genesis 19:2-14)
SUNDAY, September 1: “The Family Escapes Successfully” (Genesis 19:1, 15-26, 29)
GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: Heart’s Desire
YOUTH TOPIC: Ask and It Shall Be Given

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: God Is with Us when We Pray
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Request Granted

1 Samuel 1:9-20—KJV
9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. 10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. 11 And she vowed a vow, saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.” 12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. 15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord,

1 Samuel 1:9-20—NIV
9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s house. 10 In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. 11 And she made a vow, saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” 12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”
I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

15 “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.

16 “Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

17 Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

18 She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her.

20 So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked him of the LORD.”

**UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE:** Many people often feel that no one hears them when they express their deepest desires. Is anyone really listening? Hannah, who had no children, asked God for a son, promising to dedicate him to God’s service; and soon she conceived and gave birth.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

*Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:*

1. Recall the story of Hannah’s desperate longing for a child.
2. Reflect on their own often unspoken longings for God to intervene in their lives.
3. Pray with confidence for God to provide what is best for them.

**AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED**

*Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH*

—Elkanah was described as being a descendant of Ephraim’s, but in 1 Chronicles 6:22-28 he is known as a Levite through Kohath (which legitimates Samuel’s service to the ark of the covenant).

—Elkanah probably had two wives because Hannah was barren, and a lack of an heir was a major problem in the Ancient East. Marrying Peninnah was one way to try to solve the problem, because the Ancient Eastern legal texts allowed an infertile wife to provide her husband her maidservant to bear children for her as his heir. Therefore, the principal wife may possess legal
rights to the children of her servants. The relationship between Elkanah and his wives is like that described in the story of Jacob and his wives Rachel and Leah (see Genesis 29:30–30:24).
—Shiloh was a city in Ephraim—a prominent town in the time of Joshua—and the home of the tabernacle until the time of Samuel.
—The Bible tells of several instances when God intervened in the lives of infertile women, allowing them to bear great heroes of the faith (i.e., Sarah [the mother of Isaac], the mother of Samson, Elizabeth [the mother of John the Baptist], etc.).
—The Lord’s remembering Hannah is reminiscent of the events of Exodus 2:24; there, God’s remembering the covenant with Abraham’s descendants leads to the calling of Moses, who would be a great leader.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Hannah was one of Elkanah’s two wives and he loved her very much.
—Although Elkanah loved Hannah, she was still unhappy because she did not have a child.
—During the family’s visit to the temple in Shiloh, Hannah prayed with much fervor to God for a male child.
—Hannah promised to raise her son as a Nazarene and give him back to the Lord as a servant.
—Because Eli the priest could not hear Hannah’s prayer, he thought that she was drunk as she stood before the Lord in prayer.
—God answered Hannah’s prayer and she gave birth to a son whom she named Samuel. Samuel’s name means “Because I asked the LORD for him” (1:20, NIV).

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The books of Samuel recount the story of Israel’s development under the leadership of Samuel, Saul, and David. During this period, Israel’s government was transformed from a loose tribal confederation under Samuel into a robust Oriental monarchy in the later years of David’s reign. Exact dates for this period are impossible to establish because of the lack of precise chronological information for Israel’s leaders before the divided monarchy. Nevertheless, Samuel appears to have been a young man when Shiloh was destroyed about 1050 BC. Thus, these materials deal with Israel’s history for a hundred-year period prior to about 965 BC.

The author’s purpose in the books of Samuel was not to write an abstract record of isolated events in Israel’s past. Instead, he was attempting to extract from past occurrences the principles upon which the Lord based His relationship to His people. Both the author and his readers saw God as the ultimate authority behind all human history. The Lord was always working for the supreme good of Israel, whether He acted in judgment or redemption.

THE GEOGRPAHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The convergent themes of this section are the decline of the Shilonite priesthood and the rise of the prophet Samuel. While precise chronological data is not given, it is clear that the story begins late in what is generally known as “the period of the judges.” The ark of God, associated with Bethel at a late point in the book of Judges, is not at Shiloh which, therefore, has claim to be regarded as the chief Israelite sanctuary during this period. But it was the worst of times when Samuel was called to be a prophet. Shiloh and its worship were in the hands of the miscreant sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas (see 1 Samuel 1:3). Indeed, one of the most conspicuous features of these opening chapters is the heavily underlined contrast between
the exemplary conduct of the young Samuel and the rascality of Hophni and Phinehas. The latter, as we shall discover, are marked out for destruction as surely as the former is destined for honor. However, a new era—the era of the monarchy—is about to be born, and the story fitly begins with the birth of the man who would be remembered above all for his part in the making (and in one case the unmaking) of the first two kings of Israel.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Eli:** the high priest of the early Israelite shrine at Shiloh and one of the last of the minor judges; in the latter role he is said to have served for forty years.

**Elkanah:** the son of Jeroham and descendant of Kohath. He had two wives—Peninnah, who bore him children; and Hannah, who, though barren, was his favorite. Hannah finally bore Elkanah a son and named him Samuel.

**Hannah:** a wife of Elkanah the Ephraimite, and mother of Samuel.

**Nazirite:** a consecrated or devoted one; an individual who made a vow to separate himself to Yahweh. The vow consisted of three important abstentions: from consuming any products of the vine, from touching dead bodies, and from cutting one’s hair.

---

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Closed** (verse 5 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: *sagar* (saw-gar’): “shut up” (KJV); closed up.

**Prayed** (verse 10)—Hebrew: *palal* (paw-lal’): intreated; made supplication; intervened.

**Vow** (verse 11)—Hebrew: *neder* (neh’-der): a promise.

**Worshipped** (verse 19)—Hebrew: *shachab* (shaw-khaw’): bowed down; praised; “worshiped” (NIV).

---

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

**A. A God at Work to Bring about Good**

In 1 Samuel 1, the Lord gives barren and humiliated Hannah a son in answer to her prayer. The story of Hannah presents a sharp contrast with that of Deborah, another significant woman of Ephraim from the period of the Judges. Deborah’s career impacted Israelite society through political clout, judicial leadership, and prophetic activity; Hannah’s effect on Israelite society came through the gentle forces of faith and motherhood. Through Hannah the point is made that women of faith played a legitimate and even formative role in shaping Israel’s history. Hannah’s faith turned the tide of the period of the Judges by producing the transitional figure Samuel.
In this passage, Israelite faith expresses its supreme paradox and boldest affirmation—the Lord may create social and natural tragedies to accomplish His purposes that far outweigh the calamity. The Lord sometimes engineers social tragedies, yet He carries them out “that the work of God might be displayed” (John 9:3, NIV). Accordingly, human tragedy can be properly evaluated and appreciated only when viewed with a consideration of the end results and ultimate purposes brought about by God. This passage also teaches us that true power is to be found not in one’s position in society but in one’s posture before God. Accordingly, the motif of appearance versus reality is prominent in this passage. Eli, who possessed “spiritual competence” because of his office, was in fact a spiritual bumbler; the spiritual powerhouse in this story was a socially impotent woman from the rural regions of Ephraim. Hannah alone understood the true power of undivided faith in the Lord. Socially powerless individuals can transform social institutions through faith in the Lord and in the process can triumph over their own circumstances.

B. Biblical Background

Elkanah, Samuel’s father, is called a Zuphite, doubtless because of his descent from Zuph. Three times a year, all Israelite men were required to be at the central or most important sanctuary to offer sacrifices in observance of the main religious festivals. Elkanah, the father of Samuel, was no exception. For some time, Shiloh had been the location of the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. The festival in view here is probably the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrated in the fall. Festival celebrations were times of rejoicing in God’s blessings, especially that of a bountiful harvest. Elkanah distributed portions of sacrificial meat to both of his wives—in the first instance to Peninnah and her children, since family members shared in certain of the sacrificial offerings brought to the Lord. However, Elkanah provided Hannah with a double portion because of his love for her. He perhaps also knew that his wife’s barrenness was by divine providence.

Hannah’s sterility likely prompted Elkanah to take Peninnah as his second wife. Peninnah thus became Hannah’s “rival.” She kept provoking Hannah, which led to her grief. Peninnah continued to irritate Hannah, while the devout Hannah is content to allow the Lord to avenge the wrong committed against her. Elkanah’s family went up yearly to the house of the Lord. Hannah’s rival took special delight in using the annual pilgrimage to Shiloh as an occasion for continued provocation, badgering Hannah to the point of tears. Elkanah, mindful of Hannah’s grief, asked her, “Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?” (verse 8, NIV). The childless Hannah would not be consoled. Her misery peaked at Shiloh during an annual pilgrimage. Hannah’s sadness and bitterness of soul led her to pray and make a vow of separation to the Lord (see Numbers 6:2). The Nazarite vow included (1) abstaining from the use of grapes in any form, (2) not shaving the hair of one’s head, and (3) avoiding dead bodies. Hannah’s prayer reveals her conscious, intimate relationship with God. Hannah prayed silently and only her lips moved. So, Eli accused her of being drunk. Hannah justly protests and says she has merely been pouring out her soul to the Lord. Satisfied with her explanation, Eli tells her to go in peace.
The next day, Elkanah’s family worshipped the Lord, an experience with special meaning for Hannah this time. After their return from Shiloh to Ramah, Elkanah “lay with her,” a common Old Testament euphemism for sexual intimacy. This time, the Lord remembered Hannah just as He had remembered her ancestor Rachel (see Genesis 30:22)—enabling her to bear a son. Hannah called him Samuel because she said, “I have asked him of the Lord” (verse 20).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Hannah: A Woman Who Believed in the Power of Prayer

(1 Samuel 1:9-11)

So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

In 1 Samuel 1:9, Hannah takes the initiative in her plea for God to remove her barrenness and give her a child. Her initiative is marked by the double-duty word rose, which can express decisive action as well as mere physical movement. Hannah was deeply distressed over her barrenness. She wept and prayed to the Lord “in bitterness of soul” (verse 10), a phrase used elsewhere to characterize the psychological pain experienced by one who has been deprived of a child through death (see Ruth 1:13), or who is experiencing great personal physical suffering. Relief from this sort of pain is never pictured in the Hebrew Bible as coming from a human being; in each case, divine intervention was the only remedy. Wisely, Hannah also went to the Lord for help.

The reality of the world in which Hannah lived dictated that she would not have a bright future as a childless woman. Since men were usually considerably older than the young women they married, it is likely Hannah would have outlived Elkanah. At marriage, Hannah would have become part of Elkanah’s family and the responsibility of the men in her family. We do not know whether Elkanah had other male kin who would have supported Hannah upon his death, but if not, and if she had no children (particularly sons), she would have become kinless, a fringe member of society. Without a son to support her, she would have only a life of extreme poverty to look forward to.

Hannah’s prayer was specifically addressed to the omnipotent deliverer of those in distress—“the Lord almighty.” Her pain had made her a theologian—no character in Scripture prior to Hannah had ever used this term to address the Lord. In her prayer, she implicitly recognized that the Lord alone is the giver of life. She also understood that the proper position of a believer in relation to the Lord is that of absolute subjection: three times she referred to herself as “your servant,” a term used elsewhere to describe a female household slave. Furthermore, Hannah recognized that a relationship with the Lord involves giving, not just taking. She made a vow—an act without
parallel for women elsewhere in Hebrew narrative but conditionally permissible for a married woman—to give him to the Lord for all the days of his life (verse 11).

Hannah teaches us the importance of expressing our need before God. Hannah simply and straightforwardly expressed her need to God. In doing so, she recognized that wholeness in her life lay beyond those things she could control and rested in God as the larger reality of her life.

B. Persistence in the Face of Discouragement
(1 Samuel 1:12-14)

And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

Hannah’s lengthy silent prayer caught the watchful eye of Eli’s attention and led him to an incorrect conclusion. Eli thought Hannah was drunk and proceeded to chastise her for her lack of self-control in the use of the fermented grapes (verse 13). On the one hand, Eli appeared to be doing his job, vigilantly guarding the sanctuary from possible desecration by Hannah; on the other hand, he was demonstrating his incompetence. Hannah was not drunk at all but, rather, was in a mode of deep prayer and reflection on her life.

Eli can hardly be excused for his spiritual insensitivity. He should have realized that Hannah’s moving lips signified earnest prayer rather than intoxicated mumbling. He therefore mistakenly rebukes her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?” (verse 14, NRSV). Here, as elsewhere, Eli is portrayed as a man unable to distinguish appearance from reality, as a man who himself lacks substance. Though Eli was the high priest of Shiloh—and ostensibly a man of exceptional spiritual maturity—he is consistently depicted by the narrator as spiritually blind and inert. He was a man who watched lips instead of perceiving hearts, who judged profound spirituality to be profligate indulgence in spirits, who heard nothing when the Lord spoke (see 1 Samuel 3:4, 6), and who criticized his sons for abusing the sacrificial system yet grew fat from their take. Fittingly, in the end his powerful career was surpassed by those who were “nothing”—a socially powerful rural woman and child. Hannah, a woman of humble origin, shows that women were not so unimportant in Israel as to be considered incapable of communicating with Israel’s God. Significantly, Yahweh was also portrayed as a deity who listened to a woman and answered her prayer.

From Hannah we learn that trustful persistence is required to claim God’s grace. Hannah boldly asked that God remember her. She prayed passionately as a woman of stubborn spirit, and she trusted that God’s grace was available to her.

C. A Faith that Will Not Falter
(1 Samuel 1:15-18)

And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let
thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

Answering Eli’s charge of drunkenness, Hannah asked that Eli not take her for a “wicked woman.” The phrase suggests one who failed to give due respect to God or others and who therefore represented a threat to proper religious and societal order. Rather than showing disrespect for God, she was praying to Him in a state of “great anguish and grief” (verse 16, NIV), inflicted by Peninnah’s affronts. Hannah justly protests that she had been drinking neither wine nor beer. Far from pouring herself too many drinks, she had been “pouring out [her] soul to the Lord” (verse 15, NIV). She declares herself to be “deeply troubled,” burdened in spirit, and under no circumstances did she want Eli to mistake her for a “wicked woman” or a daughter of worthlessness.

Hannah’s deep respect for authority is affirmed by her self-deprecating use of “your servant” (verse 16, NIV) in her response to Eli. Eli proved quite capable of fulfilling his priestly role, even if he was spiritually dull. Learning the true nature of Hannah’s actions, he validated her prayer with a wish and a blessing. Hannah responded to Eli’s blessing with a winsome and gracious pun—the “woman of grace” (the meaning of Hannah’s name) expressed hope in finding grace.

In time, God responded to the stubborn insistence of Hannah. Elkanah’s love was not enough. She asked of God yet further expressions of grace, and God gave it. We will learn soon in 1 Samuel that the grace of God in the leaders of Israel past was not enough. In reading these stories, some might judge Hannah and Israel as audaciously ungrateful. Yet, Jesus spoke in praise of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8, and He urged His followers to persist in making their needs known to God in prayer. God has constantly created new possibilities of grace out of our stubborn insistence that God remember us yet again.

D. The Rewards of Enduring Trust in Almighty God (1 Samuel 1:19-20)

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

The succinct wording of verse 19 moves the story forward swiftly and significantly. Elkanah and his family worshipped the Lord and returned to their home in Ramah. Then Elkanah had relations with Hannah, and we are told that “the Lord remembered her” plea (verse 19). This is a response to her supplication when she had pleaded with the Lord to “remember” her and “give her a son” (verse 11, NIV). “Remember” in Hebrew usage is not limited to intellectual recall but often includes the idea of resultant action. Here it refers to God’s gracious intervention in Hannah’s life by answering her prayer. It was the Lord who closed her womb (verse 6), and it was the Lord who enabled her to conceive.

The birth of Samuel is the climax of chapter 1. His name expresses Hannah’s conviction that it was the Lord who gave her a son in response to her prayer.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In the first chapter of 1 Samuel, the focus is on Hannah, a woman distraught over the
limits faced by childless women in her world and taunted by a rival who has no compassion. By trusting her plight to God, Hannah claimed the new future God can make possible to those in barren, hopeless circumstances. Her story has roots in Israel’s past. God had remembered Rachel, and she had been given a child (see Genesis 30:22). God had remembered the Hebrews in bondage in Egypt (see Exodus 2:24) and delivered them into new life as a people. Hannah opens her misery and need to God and asks for God to remember her. If this is a story of God’s grace for Hannah and for Israel, it can also be the story of God’s grace for us. As persons of faith and as the church, we can learn from Hannah something of the dynamics of grace that might transform our futures and address the forms of hopelessness and pain that we face today.

We can also learn from Hannah that the proper response to the gift of God’s grace is to give it back. If we attempt to keep it as a possession, we will lose it. Hannah knew this from the beginning and vowed to give back of the grace God might grant. When the time came for her to be blessed with a child, Hannah’s response teaches us something about proper responses to the gifts of God in our lives. When the infant Samuel is weaned, Hannah returns to the sanctuary with offerings and sacrifices, and she dedicates the child to God.

**PRAYER**

_Dear Lord, help us ever to look unto Thee in good times and in difficult seasons. Give us the patience to wait on You in the full knowledge that You are a God who will answer prayer. Create in us that unfailing hope that nothing is too hard for You. We give You thanks for Your goodness and Your grace all along life’s journey. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen._

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

_(September 2-8, 2019)_

**God Answers Prayer**

**TUESDAY,** September 3: “_O Lord, Our God, You Answered_” (Psalm 99)
**WEDNESDAY,** September 4: “Hannah Is Childless and Suffering” (1 Samuel 1:1-8)
**THURSDAY,** September 5: “Elkanah Attends the Yearly Sacrifice” (1 Samuel 1:21-23)
**FRIDAY,** September 6: “Samuel Is Dedicated to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:24-28)
**SATURDAY,** September 7: “Hannah Is Rewarded for Her Faithfulness” (1 Samuel 2:18-21)
**SUNDAY,** September 8: “God Answers Hannah’s Prayer” (1 Samuel 1:9-20)
September 15, 2019

Lesson 3

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT Topic:** Where’s the Food?
**YOUTH Topic:** Receiving Food from an Unexpected Place

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL Lesson Title:** God Provides
**CHILDREN’S Topic:** Never Satisfied

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
2 Corinthians 8:9-15

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 16
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Exodus 16:15
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Exodus 16:13

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Exodus 16
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15
**KEY VERSE:** Exodus 16:15c

---

**Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15—KJV**

AND THEY took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.

2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt; when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. 5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day

---

**Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15—NIV**

THE WHOLE Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

5 “On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”
they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.
6 And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt:
7 And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us?
8 And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.

13 And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.
14 And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.
15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt,
7 “and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”
8 Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People are often unhappy with what they have in life. How can people be truly satisfied? Despite the complaining of the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, God provided meat and bread for them.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Contrast God’s provision in the wilderness with that of Israel’s former slave masters in Egypt.
2. Regret times they have complained of God’s seeming failure to provide.
3. Express thanks for the many ways that God takes care of His people.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The setting of this account is the trip from Egypt to Sinai. Numbers 11 records similar complaints from the Israelites after their departure from Sinai.
—The importance of the Sabbath (though the Law had not yet been given) was stressed in the giving of manna. The Israelites were not expected to do without on the Sabbath; rather, they were to
trust the Lord for His provisions on a day during which they did not work.

—A contrast between Pharaoh and the Lord is in the giving of manna. The Lord prohibited work on what would be a day of worship, whereas Pharaoh prohibited worship on what would be days of work (see Exodus 5:3-5).

—The unique nature of manna was stressed by its very name (man hu = “what is it?”).

—The giving of manna was only a temporary provision while the Israelites had no land of their own. It ceased as soon as they were able to eat the produce of the Promised Land (see Joshua 5:12).

—Jesus drew parallels between Himself as the bread from heaven and manna as bread from heaven (see John 6:47-51).

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Shortly after the Israelites’ exodus from slavery in Egypt, they were living in the Desert of Sin.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Biblical scholars suggest that the book of Exodus is the story of the birth of Israel as a nation. The person who is the central character is Moses, who led the people out of Egypt. The name *exodus* refers to the “exit” of the people from the land of their captivity. There was approximately a three-hundred-year gap between the death of Joseph and the end of Genesis. The period between Joseph and Exodus is referenced by Bible scholars as about 1800–1400 BC.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The book of Exodus concerns itself with how and why the Lord brings His people out of Egypt. The first answer, but not the most important answer, as to why God delivers His people from Egypt is to rescue them from the excruciating oppression to which Pharaoh and Egypt were subjecting them. There is, however, a second answer, and that is to fulfill the covenant God has made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That covenant includes Israel’s settlement in the land of Canaan. There is an emphasis on the “land” that God promises repeatedly throughout Genesis to the patriarchs. The Lord saved Israel not so that Israel may become God’s people but because Israel already is God’s people, and such a deliverance is essential for the realization of the plan and purpose that God has for His people down the road.

Following the Exodus and the first taste of freedom, Israel finds itself in a wilderness that is threatening enough to make life back in Egypt desirable, at least to some—as impossible as that sounds. God does not lead His people from carnage directly to Canaan. After the exit from suffocating
land, the way to the Promised Land is through unpromising land. God’s salvation does not guarantee life without hardship. The world outside of bondage is also a world with dangers and struggles. In the context of such struggle, even bondage can begin to look attractive if we do not continue to rely on the providential sustaining hand of God.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Aaron:** the brother of Moses and the first high priest of Israel. Aaron was a descendant of Levi’s and a son of Amram and Jochebed’s (see Exodus 6:20). Born eighty-three years before the Exodus, he was three years older than Moses (see Exodus 7:7) but younger than their sister, Miriam.

**Moses:** the first great leader of the Hebrew people, regarded by some as the author of the first five books of the Old Testament. Moses is revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims for his daring leadership and diplomacy as well as his promulgation of the divine law.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Egypt** (verse 3)—Hebrew: Mitsrayim (mits-rah’-yim): a country of the northeastern section of Africa, adjacent to Palestine, and through which the Nile flows.

**Grumbled** (verse 2)—Hebrew: tlunnah (tel-oon-naw’): murmur; “murmured” (KJV).

**Manna** (verse 15)—Hebrew: man (mawn): the bread from heaven that fed the Israelites during forty years of wilderness wanderings; it means, “What is it?”

**Quail(s)** (verse 13)—Hebrew: sèlav (sel-awv’): a game bird closely related to partridges.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. **INTRODUCTION**

A. The God Who Supplies Our Every Need

The wilderness continued to be a profoundly troubling place for Israel; this is especially true where the necessities for survival are not immediately supplied. This story of manna and quail in the wilderness demonstrates the crisis of faith that occurs between bondage and well-being. How does one hold on to his or her faith when even the daily provisions of sustenance are not guaranteed? The Israelites’ departure from Egypt portends the lack of adequate food, water, and life support. The crisis of the wilderness is a material crisis with great anxiety over what to eat and what to drink. It predictably becomes a crisis over leadership. The beginning point of the story is an assault upon the leadership of Moses and Aaron,
who have chosen for Israel trouble (liberation) instead of bondage.

It is surely significant that these events are reported to have occurred exactly one month after the Passover (Exodus 16:1). Once again, Israel was faced with death, and once again, Yahweh delivered them. Here, however, it was not an extraordinary plague that threatened them, but the ordinary issue of need and supply. Can God help in this matter? Does He want to? And can He be depended upon to help even if our attitudes and performance are not the best? The answer to all these questions is yes. And just as Passover was to be a memorial for all future generations of God’s power to defeat death, so the manna that fell from heaven was to be a reminder of God’s providential care.

The response of the people in this crisis was more hysterical and sarcastic than in their previous crisis at Marah with the bitter water (see Exodus 15:24). “If God was going to kill us anyway, why not do it in Egypt when we had full stomachs?” they asked (see verse 3). Another new feature is the idealization of the memory of Egypt. This is certainly a common human trait. Memory has a way of diminishing the troubles of the past and magnifying the good things. But in this case, it was a hindrance to the Israelites, making them ungrateful for the deliverance they had experienced and thus unable to apply the lessons of that deliverance to the subsequent crises of their lives.

Another unfortunate trait manifested here—one that would continue to dog Moses and the people through the coming years—was their failure to remind themselves that God, not Moses, had brought them into the wilderness. If they had kept that fact in view, they would have been able to remember that the same person who got them into the difficulties could certainly get them out. Moses recognized this problem and called on them to remember that their complaints were against God, not against himself and Aaron (Exodus 16:7-8). It was not Moses who would supply their needs—it was God alone.

B. Biblical Background

Exodus 16 describes a miracle of quails and manna that God provides for the people of Israel in the desert. When the chapter opens, the people are only recently departed from Egypt and are headed into the Sinai Peninsula. Although they had recently witnessed the miracle at the sea, they are now confronting the physical reality of starvation and their murmurings begin. “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt” (see verse 3). The literal sense of the Scriptures here is concerned with the authority of Moses and Aaron. God had liberated the people, but now He is going to prepare them for discipleship. To do so, He places them in an existentially threatening environment in which their dependence upon Him will be particularly acute. This invites the people of Israel to develop a deeper sense of their true priorities. They are to learn that the Lord has the power to do whatever is required to sustain them each day of their lives, but the Lord will do so only if they learn to place obedience to God before all else.
III. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Congregation of Grumblers
   (Exodus 16:1-3)

   AND THEY took their journey from Elim, and all the
   congregation of the children of Israel came unto the
   wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai,
   on the fifteenth day of the second month after their
   departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole
   congregation of the children of Israel murmured against
   Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of
   Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the
   hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by
   the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for
   ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this
   whole assembly with hunger.

   One month after their exodus from Egypt
   had begun, murmuring against Moses and
   those in leadership was underway in earnest.
   The murmuring against Moses and Aaron was
   not isolated but massive. We have moved from
   “the people” murmuring (Exodus 15:24) to
   the “entire congregation” murmuring. That
   is one of the unfortunate downsides of this
   kind of malaise. Once unleashed from isolated
   pockets, it spreads like wildfire—engulfing,
   consuming, and catching up everybody in its
   path. Nobody seems immune from it; no one
   challenges it or rises above it. The Israelites’
   mindset is not unlike that of criminals released
   from incarceration. Imprisonment—but with
   three meals a day and a place to lay one’s head
   at night—is more inviting than struggling
   with the challenges of liberty. Being told what
to do and when to do it and how to do it may
be easier than having to make one’s own (re-
sponsible) decisions. In a strange way, Egypt
   can become Eden. A ghetto can become a gar-
   den, or so it seems. Pharaoh can become a “nice
guy,” a life giver, while Moses can become a
   villain, a life taker.

   At Marah, the grumbling had been about
   water (see Exodus 15:23). Now, a little farther
   along and after getting plenty of water at Elim,
   the grumbling was about food. And, again,
   from a human point of view, the attitude
   of the Israelites is understandable. As they
   moved south toward Mount Sinai, they left
   one wilderness (Shur) for another (Sin), and
   an entire month had gone by. Buying or find-
ing food in either wilderness would have been
   extremely difficult, and the food supplies they
   had brought with them were surely depleted.
   It was, of course, another unannounced, unex-
plained test of their willingness to trust God.
   However, they did not know that. How can
   human beings accurately figure out what is a
test from God and what is just a circumstance
   they never should have gotten themselves into?
   In the case of the Israelites, they should have
   been able to say, “If God is visibly leading us
   in the form of the pillar of cloud, then we’re
   supposed to be here, and our experience so
   far tells us that He’ll provide for us in this
time too.” But the newness of being without
   food, in a new location, the pain of hunger in
   their stomachs, the bleating of their animals,
   and the natural tendency to be pessimistic
   when in pain all combined to cause them to
   grumble. A further factor may have been their
   success with grumbling at Marah. There, a
   little grumbling produced good water to drink
   (see Exodus 15:24-25). So now that food was
   needed, perhaps a little grumbling was again
in order. It was, however, a serious breach of
   faith to grumble against the living God, and
   that point Moses will eloquently make in verse
   8 by saying simply, “You are not grumbling
   against us, but against God.”
B. Yahweh Responds to the Grumblers and Their Lack of Faith
(Exodus 16:4)

Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

In verses 4-5, Yahweh responds to Moses concerning the Israelites’ grumbling by graciously giving them bread from heaven. In these verses, Yahweh gives Moses specific instructions for gathering, which will establish the seventh-day Sabbath for rest for Israel. God’s provision for the Israelites immediately addressed both their short-term and their long-term need for food. Knowing that they would be spending a long time in the wilderness, He had prepared for them not just a means of getting enough of the food they were used to but something far better: “bread from heaven.” Moreover, God was teaching them a concept: that He was their ultimate provider, the one who from heaven gave them not necessarily what they expected but what they really needed.

However, Yahweh’s instructions came with a test. They must trust Yahweh for daily and enough provision and obey Him by gathering only enough for each day. God wanted to test them to see whether they would walk by His law. In other words, the people’s willingness to obey the manna-gathering law would show God whether they would be inclined to keep His covenant law as revealed at Mount Sinai. It was not just a test to see if they could follow instructions but a test to see if their hearts were inclined to be His covenant people. The test itself required faith for an agricultural people. Farmers know that if one harvests only enough good in a day to meet the needs of that day, eventually one has not food because no crops or animals produce food every day. Now they were being asked to restrain their natural tendency to gather as much as was available in anticipation of the time when no gathering would be possible. God was teaching them to trust Him every day afresh, and they were challenged to think about His provision in a way that had never been a part of their planning pattern.

C. God’s Test of Our Faithfulness
(Exodus 16:5)

And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

Verse 5 instructed the people on how to collect manna on the sixth day when they were to gather twice as much in preparation for the Sabbath. This arrangement provided a weekly opportunity for the emerging Israelite community to be tested by God and to learn about His faithful provision. Every sixth day they would have to discipline themselves to gather twice the usual amount of manna—but only that much. Every Sabbath they had to trust that when they woke up, there would be enough manna left to eat and that it would not have spoiled overnight as it might on other days. Thus, each week they would see how God provided for them, in a manner counterintuitive to their normal sense of how to gather and store food; and God could see how they were doing in learning to obey Him in advance of His giving them His full covenant law over many months following the encampment at Sinai.

God is no Ebenezer Scrooge when it comes to meeting the needs of His people. He is not
miserly. He does not hoard. He does not dole out His blessings reluctantly in parsimonious pinches. The Lord will provide if we will trust Him. The God who here says He will rain down bread from heaven is the God who elsewhere promises to “pour out” His Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:33). He is the same God who has promised never to leave or forsake us. This God is too good to be unkind, and too wise to make a mistake. Our prayer should be “Lead me, O Lord, lead me.”

D. Delivery of the Divine Message
(Exodus 16:6-8)
And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that he heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord.

Moses and Aaron were prophesying here, not merely making a prediction based on human reasoning. As in earlier instances and as would be common among the writing prophets, they referred to the concept of being reminded by the fulfillment of the divine word that the people should “know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt” (verse 6, NIV). This is the sort of thing that people living in a thoroughly polytheistic, syncretistic society needed to hear often, and it is no surprise that the exodus Israelites heard it often. There is only one Yahweh; He is the only real God, and it is He—not any other god or force or factor—who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. This, His miraculous provision of food for them after they left Egypt, should have reminded them of who He is and how He continued to provide for them. He is the same, the only God who brought them out of Egypt and now continued to be their God.

As prophets, Moses and Aaron were representing God, speaking for Him and not serving their own authority; so they twice emphasized that the grumbling of the people represented the people’s concern with God, not with them. (“Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” [verse 7, NIV].) Despite their grumbling, God was faithful and lived up to His promises. He made a way out of no way for His covenant people, demonstrating once again that His promises are true and trustworthy.

E. Quail and Manna from Heaven: The Gifts of God
(Exodus 16:13-15)
And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat.

The only mention of “quail” in Exodus 16 comes in verse 13. It is brief and obviously of secondary importance to the manna—because the quail represented a one-evening supply of meat, whereas the manna was to be a daily occurrence for forty years and the more important food supply for that entire generation of Israelites. In ancient times, meat was cooked and eaten immediately upon slaughtering because there was virtually no means of preserving it after
the animal from which it came was killed. The quail would have provided a well-appreciated single evening meal for the people, relieving them of their hunger; but the manna was to be something that was always available for them and a food that, by contrast to any meat, could actually keep for two days when necessary (see verse 5) even though it normally melted away very fast if not collected (see verse 21).

Could God have provided the manna before they even grumbled, before their food brought from Egypt had run out? Yes! But how would that have taught them the special sort of patience that He knew they would need to exercise in the future as His people when things got hard? That the quail arrived in abundance can be inferred from the statement that the quail “covered the camp” (verse 13). Most people may well have been able to catch as many as they desired. After the people had eaten and gone to sleep, the regular nightly desert dew condensed on the ground, which remained the next morning. Once the dew evaporated, the Israelites saw something they had not seen before and were not expecting to find—manna! It was a thin, crisp substance like frost on the ground. It may have been “flaky” in the way that pie crust is called flaky (see verse 14). The manna was God’s bread (verse 15), a divine gift for sustenance of the people in the wilderness, not something that could be harvested at will in any quantity that happened to be desired. The manna could not be overgathered or overeaten without consequence. The Lord had provided for them but on His own terms, and those terms were violated at one’s own peril. A way would be made for the Israelites, but they had to obey the One who provided their daily bread.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The good news of this text is that God gives bread and nourishment for life as the sovereign ruler and governor of all creation. This affirmation of God’s good bread pertains precisely to the wilderness, those regions of life wherein Israel is peculiarly dependent and without resources of its own. God was testing His people throughout the Exodus events: leading them in odd directions without fully explaining why (see Exodus 14:1-4); surprising them with potentially destructive enemy attacks after they had left Egypt (see Exodus 14:10); requiring them to walk into and through deep ocean water (see Exodus 14:15); and taking them to locations that lacked the necessities of life (see Exodus 16:2-34). All these challenges were part of a plan to develop a people’s willingness to trust Him. Explaining everything in advance would have run counter to that plan. It was necessary for Israel to learn faith while confused, while afraid, while desperate—not just in theory but under pressure of actual conditions where survival was uncertain, and faith was tested to the limit.

The manna story represents yet another testing story: it is introduced as such (see Exodus 16:4) and features details that describe the way at least some Israelites failed the test at first. Because the schedule for gathering the manna seemed counterintuitive to ancient agrarians, it provided a way of testing Israel to see if they would obey not only those commandments that made perfect sense to them but also those
that did not. The same sort of challenge exists today. If people think God demands a behavior that runs against their intuitive sense of what is right or pleasurable or reasonable, or just “not so bad,” then it is easy for them not to take a commandment seriously, which is the same as not taking God seriously. Yet, God is faithful to His word.

It is a shame that such a wonderful divine provision should have come about because of faithless grumbling on the part of the people. How much better it would have been had the Israelites prayed patiently and trustingly for God’s answer to their lack of food a month into their exodus journey. Grumbling is hardly to be commended and is not in itself worthy of reward. God, however, still heard it and graciously responded—not in kind, that is, with a poor-quality provision suitable for grumblers, but with miraculous, tasty, nutritious, and enough food, exactly what He would have sent if they had prayed faithfully in the first place. His goodness to His people is not dependent on their willingness to respect Him as they ought. This is not to say that respect for God’s will is irrelevant to His rewards—only that His temporal rewards often do not correlate with our temporal behavior. God looks upon us with eyes of mercy and watches over us often despite us. Thanks be to God!

**PRAYER**

*Dear Lord, we give You thanks for the wonderful ways in which You continue to work miracles in our lives. Your mercies in our lives are new every morning. Help us to learn how to trust You and how not to grow weary along life’s way. We praise Your name for Your providential hand as it continues to lead us and guide us along life’s way. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(September 9-15, 2019)*

**Bread from Heaven**

**MONDAY,** September 9: “Striking a Fair Balance” (2 Corinthians 8:9-15)

**TUESDAY,** September 10: “Believers Depend on One Another” (1 Corinthians 12:18-26)

**WEDNESDAY,** September 11: “The Lord Responds to Complaints” (Exodus 16:9-12)

**THURSDAY,** September 12: “Conducting Daily Family Duties” (Exodus 16:16-21)

**FRIDAY,** September 13: “Observing the Sabbath Day” (Exodus 16:22-30)

**SATURDAY,** September 14: “Symbols of Remembrance” (Exodus 16:31-36)

**SUNDAY,** September 15: “God Provides for the People” (Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15)
GOD HEARS OUR CRY

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Numbers 13:1–14:10a
PRINT PASSAGE: Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a
KEY VERSE: Numbers 14:8

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** We Don’t Believe You!
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Hear Our Cry

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** God Hears Our Cries
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Help Is on the Way

**DEVOtIONAL READING**
Psalm 106:1-12, 48

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Numbers 13:1–14:10a
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a
**KEY VERSE:** Numbers 14:8

Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a—KJV
AND THE LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2 Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

17 And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan.

25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

9 And they came unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. 10 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

25 At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

26 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.

27 They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Numbers 13:1–14:10a
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a
**KEY VERSE:** Numbers 14:1

Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a—NIV
THE LORD said to Moses,
2 “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.”

17 When Moses sent them to explore Canaan.

25 At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

9 And they came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word to them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. 10 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

25 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land.

27 They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.
Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great.

AND ALL the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

THEN Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:

7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land: for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones.

28 “But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.”

THAT NIGHT all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.

2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!”

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there.

6 Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes

7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good.

8 “If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.

9 “Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: When life puts obstacles in our paths, we are tempted to abandon the promises the future holds. Why don’t we believe the promises made to us? Caleb and Joshua believed that God would lead Israel to possession of the Promised Land and tried to persuade the people to trust God’s faithfulness.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Evaluate the reasons for the Israelites’ refusal to listen to Joshua and Caleb.
2. Long for deeper trust in the promises God has made.
3. Face the future in confidence of God’s guidance and provision.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—One spy was chosen from each tribe. Caleb was from Judah; Joshua was from Ephraim (one of Joseph’s sons). Later, in the divided kingdom, Ephraim would be the key tribe of the north and Judah the key tribe of the south.
—In Joshua 2, Joshua sent only two spies to reconnoiter Canaan, reminding us that only two of the original twelve spies brought back a positive report.
—The word for “spying out” the land used in this text is from the Hebrew word tur. It denotes a detailed reconnaissance mission during which data is painstakingly collected and analyzed.
—In Joshua 2, the word for “spies” is related to the Hebrew word regel, meaning “foot.” The Joshua 2 mission was not a detailed analysis, but a “footing out” of the land, claiming it in response to the promise of Joshua 1:3.
—After hearing the report from the spies in Numbers 14:1-2, the Israelites again complained about divine leading as they reverted to the same complaint that they had presented in Exodus 16:2-3 and as they had presented during the Red Sea experience in Exodus 14:11-12 regarding wishing they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness.
—According to some scholars, the gesture of Moses and Aaron’s falling on their faces before the congregation could be considered as anger against the people or it could be considered as humility before God. Additionally, Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes as an act of mourning as they tried to persuade the people to go forward and accept this good land as God had promised them—but the people would not accept their persuasion (see Numbers 14:6-10a).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—God instructed Moses on how to scout out the land the Lord wanted them to occupy.
—Although each tribe had one leader, only two leaders, Joshua and Caleb, gave an accurate report of the land. They both reassured the people that God would give them the victory for the land.
—Distrust continued throughout the camp and the people turned against Moses and Aaron as they declared that they would rather die in Egypt than in the wilderness.
—God’s faithfulness to the Israelites was met with complaints, grumblings, and ungrateful hearts.
—God’s mighty miracles of deliverance and love for the Israelites were forgotten when the people were faced with a problem or challenge.
—The people’s anger and frustration with God was targeted against Joshua and Caleb because they allowed fear to rule their minds. Because the people did not believe Joshua and Caleb’s report, they decided to stone them.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Two titles are associated with the fourth book of Moses. The title “Numbers” comes from the vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible). A second title, “In the Wilderness,” comes from the Masoretic Text where the first five books of the Bible are named either by their opening word or by a significant word in the first sentence. The two titles provide different points of view concerning the central themes and structure of Numbers. The title “Numbers” focuses on the characters in the book. It underscores the census of Israel, which takes place twice over a forty-year period. The title “In the Wilderness” accentuates the setting of the book. The setting of Numbers is a journey in which Israel is to leave the wilderness and enter the...
Promised Land of Canaan. The interrelationship of characters continues to be important to the book when the focus is on the setting. Thus, it is their journey through the wilderness that provides the key to the plot structure.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Numbers 13 relays the story of the spying out of the land of Canaan. A leader of each ancestral tribe is sent out into the land for a period of forty days. Moses’ instructions to them reflect something of the anxiety of living in the desert. In verses 17-20, the guidelines for their scouting is laid out. They are to see what the land is like, to assess the strength of the people, to see if the land is good or bad, to check the fortifications of the cities, to see if the land was rich or poor, to look for trees, and to bring back some fruit. The overwhelming balance of responsibility is on assessing the quality of the land. Clearly, the suitability of the land is a major issue in Moses’ mind. He is right to be concerned, for the well-being of humanity relies on the fruitfulness of the land; and the well-being of the land is reliant upon a reasonable custodianship. However, even though the land they found was flowing with milk and honey as promised, it was promptly painted as a dangerous, devouring place, ready to chew up the Israelites.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Canaan (13:2)—Hebrew: Kna’an (ken-ah’-an): the land west of the Jordan peopled by the descendants of Canaan (a son of Ham) and subsequently conquered by the Israelites under Joshua.
Possess (13:30 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: yarash (yaw-rash’): to succeed, inherit, seize, occupy, “take possession” (NIV).
Stoning (14:10)—Hebrew: ragam (raw-gam’): to stone, slay, or kill by stoning; “stone” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Trusting God to See Us Through
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Spies Sent into Canaan (Numbers 13:1-2, 17a)
   C. Faltering Faith in a Land of Grapes and Giants (Numbers 13:28a)
   D. The People Rebel against Their Leaders (Numbers 14:1-2, 5-10a)

III. Concluding Reflection

To the Israelites they appeared to be giants and thus they struck the Israelites with terror.

Joshua: the son of Nun, a member of the tribe of Ephraim, and Moses’ lieutenant and successor. Originally he was named Hoshea.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Caleb: the son of Jephunneh of the tribe of Judah, and one of the twelve spies whom Moses commanded to observe the land of Canaan.
Descendants of Anak: a people who traced their ancestry to Anak the son of Arba. These pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan dwelled in the hill country west of Jordan, especially in the region of Hebron.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Trusting God to See Us Through

This dramatic narrative describing the sending of the spies and its consequent events, became engraved on the corporate memory of God’s people. Later writers referred to these incidents with a sense of painful disappointment. It records a time of decision-making, when the desert pilgrims made a catastrophic mistake. It is tragically easy to be influenced by unworthy attitudes, corrupted by impure motives, or manipulated by unsuitable people. Believers must always aim higher in their pursuit of the good and the right. The believing few in this story recognized the importance of waiting on God and trusting in His promises. Our dominant thought should not be on “What suits me best?” but “What honors God most?” Like Israel at this crucial time in her history, we too face an unknown future. We like to think we have things reasonably mapped out, but the months and years ahead are not revealed to us. One prominent poet has rightly noted that “It is the angel of mercy who hides the future from us.” Although we cannot know the future, we know who holds our future in His hands. As we navigate the changing circumstances of our lives, we must always remember that we must not only expect great things from God, but that we must attempt great things for God.

Millions of people long for some comforting assurance about life’s imminent events, turning (either seriously or playfully) to the horoscope pages of their daily paper, magazine, or iPhone. Many people search for assurance through more sinister occult activity, consulting clairvoyants or using tarot cards, Ouija boards, and the like. Christians, however, should take seriously the commands of Scripture that forbid the use of such practices, which “defile” us and, more seriously, are detestable to God. Christians recognize that God alone knows the future and holds our destinies in His strong and reliable hands. Life is more than a series of disconnected accidents, and believers are not to fret about the unknown. Our part is to live each day to God’s glory, discern His will in times of decision, and trust Him for the guidance He has promised to provide.

Out of the vast crowd of Israelites who fled from Egypt, only four people acknowledged the importance of seeking God’s mind and trusting His Word when the going gets tough. They and they alone remembered the promises of the God who brought them out of bondage. The rest—tortured by uncertainty, plagued with inadequacy, and paralyzed by fear—refused to press on with their journey. There are times in all our lives when we become genuinely fearful about the way forward. There are those times when someone has discovered that he or she is seriously not well, or has heard that someone he or she loves has a terminal illness. Security at work is threatened and unemployment looms as a real possibility. Church relationships may have become soured by the damaging example of an admired leader or the defection of valued friends. Family stability has been jeopardized
by a partner’s unfaithfulness, or parents may be deeply troubled about tensions in the lives of their married children. What seemed a reasonably tranquil and secure life is suddenly tossed into agonizing turmoil. How should believers react to such a dramatic and unwelcome change in their circumstances? We are called upon to respond with utter trust in almighty God, confident that He knows the way and that He will not give us more than we can bear.

B. Biblical Background

More than any other story in the book of Numbers, the spy narrative in chapters 13–14 lays the foundation for the unifying structure and theme of Numbers. These two chapters begin with Israel on the southern doorstep of Canaan in the “wilderness of Paran.” This becomes the staging area for Israel’s first official military foray into the Promised Land. God directs Moses to send twelve leaders, one from each tribe, to scout out the land. Moses instructs the twelve tribes to survey the land not only to deduce the military might of its inhabitants but also to observe the fertility of the land (13:17-21). The spies carefully check out the land for forty days and then return to report what they have seen. The initial spy report has some good news and some bad news. The land is indeed fruitful and “flow[s] with milk and honey!” (13:27, NIV). But the bad news is that the residents of the land are strong and live in large fortified cities (see 13:28-29, 31-33).

When the spies make their report, there begins to be some murmuring and mumbling among the Israelites until Caleb quiets the people. Caleb’s exhortation expresses faith in Israel’s ability to enter successfully into the land: “let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it” (13:30, NRSV). Caleb stands alone among the spies at this point. At this point in the story, the dispute is over two varied estimates of the human strength needed to conquer the armies of Canaan. Caleb says, “We are able,” and the other spies say, “We are not able.” The balance is tipped when all the spies except Caleb revise their description of Canaan, mythologizing both the land and the inhabitants into primordial monsters.

The lies of the spies have their intended effect. All the Israelites become afraid and complain against Aaron and Moses, refusing to go into the land promised to them by God. In a series of a few brief lines, the Israelites repudiate all that God has done for them. How are the gifts and promises of God repudiated? The Israelite rebels yearn for their own deaths: “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!” (14:2, NRSV). The joyous freedom from the suffering of slavery in Egypt, the careful provision of water and manna, and the guidance and protection all throughout the desert—all these gracious acts of God are forgotten and renounced.

Together, Moses and Aaron make one more plea to the people to move ahead and conquer the land in obedience to God. Caleb and Joshua counter the majority report of the spies that had mythologized the enemy into larger-than-life opponents. The two faithful spies reemphasize the natural goodness of the land, human frailty of the inhabitants, and the overwhelming power of God in their midst. They get to the theological heart of what is at
stake: “Do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, . . . the LORD is with us; do not fear them” (14:9, NRSV). In the end, the issue is not competing estimates about the human strength of the Israelite army versus the Canaanites. The question is not who is taller or who has larger fortifications or who has more weapons. Ultimately, all such reliance on human power and estimates is irrelevant. The issue lies in trusting in the power of Israel’s God. God was with the Israelites during their camp; God can be trusted to make good on His promises to bring the Israelites into the land. God’s promise and presence alone are more than an adequate basis for their confidence. However, the response of the Israelites to Caleb and Joshua is unanimous in its negative verdict: “the whole congregation threatened to stone them” (14:10, NRSV).

In the end, the congregation simply could not believe the minority report, even though God’s presence was in that report. God was indeed with them, but they had to have faith in God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Spies Sent into Canaan
   (Numbers 13:1-2, 17a)

AND THE LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. . . .

And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan.

Moses was told to send twelve men to explore the land of Canaan, which, God said, “I am giving to the Israelites” (verse 2, NIV). It is a recognized military maxim that time spent on reconnaissance is never wasted. Out of the vast numbers of Israel’s people, these twelve men were sent as representative scouts on a venture that was more a test of faith than a military expedition. The fact that these twelve individuals belonged to such a huge community ought to have been their first encouragement to trust God’s word. Those very words—“the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites” (NIV)—recalled the twofold promise of both people and land made centuries earlier to Abraham, the father of their race: “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth . . . .

Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you” (Genesis 13:16, 17, NRSV).

When the spies were appointed from those twelve tribes, that should have recalled that their huge numbers undeniably testified to God’s reliable word. The first part of the divine promise had been gloriously fulfilled. As this vast company of travellers stood on the threshold of the Promised Land, they were indeed “like the dust of the earth.” They had witnessed the first part of God’s promise in the massive increase in their numbers; surely, they could trust the second part about the guaranteed conquest. Yet, overcome by fear and terrorized by the possibility that their vast numbers would be decimated by the physically massive people who lived in Canaan, the pilgrims refused to accept God’s promise. Their unbelief in what God had plainly said is a somber warning. As we face the unknown future, we do so with a reliable Bible in our hands. God has given us His very great and precious promises, assuring us that as we encounter the unknown, everything we need will be unfailingly provided.
B. The Report of the Spies: A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey
(Numbers 13:25-27)

And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.

Not only were they told the route of their journey, but also they were asked to bring back, if possible, some visible proof that the land was rich and prosperous. As the spies drew to the close of their precarious mission, they looked for the best grapes they could find. The search ended in “Cluster Valley,” so called because of the huge bunches of grapes that covered its prosperous vineyards. They also brought pomegranates and figs. When they returned to the base camp they showed the waiting people the fruit of the land. The report of the spies confirmed Moses’ hope. Indeed, the land flowed with milk and honey (verse 27); the three different types of fruit they brought back was their proof.

The three fruits they brought back were significant indeed. Grapes could be made into wine and raisins. Symbolically, grapes are an image of faithfulness—sour grapes of unfaithfulness. Pomegranates represent fertility, given the abundant number of seeds they contain. They were fruits of unusual beauty and desirability. Figs were symbolic of fertility, bearing fruit for up to fifty years. While these fruits may appear to be straightforward, there is a point being made in their presentation. To those who had remembered the melons, leeks, and cucumbers of Egypt, this must have been a sight for sore eyes.

What God had said to Moses as he had stood by that blazing bush in the desert of Midian was true: God had indeed given them a land flowing with milk and honey. The spies repeated God’s words and produced visible evidence that it was exactly as the Lord had said. As we face our own uncertain futures, we should not simply look back for assurance, but we must also look around us for evidence in our lives of God’s sovereign guidance, unchanging presence, and providential care. God specializes in things that are impossible. Abundant clusters of fruit in our everyday lives encourage us to believe that the Lord who has brought us safely thus far will not disappoint us in the days to come, however difficult they may be. When threatened by imminent change we often feel hesitant, insecure, vulnerable, and even bewildered, but we must take a trip to our own “Cluster Valley” where we are likely to find abundant evidence of God’s unfailing generosity. The God who is meeting our present needs will not deny us His future provision.

C. Faltering Faith in a Land of Grapes and Giants
(Numbers 13:28a)

Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great.

That cluster of grapes symbolizes the prosperity of the land and the generosity of the God who gives abundantly to all His people. Yet, although two of the spies displayed the grapes, the rest described the giants. The description of abundant fruitfulness was dwarfed by the lurid details of colossal human monsters and their massive strongholds: “But the people who
live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large” (verse 28, NIV). In every challenging situation, there is always someone with an apprehensive But. The passage starkly portrays the dramatic contrasts between the radiant optimism of the trusting two and the despairing pessimism of the terrified ten. The despondent spies magnified the problems and minimized the resources.

Undoubtedly, there were tall and strong people, but, although daunting to the pilgrims, they were not superior to God. The despondent ten viewed the scene entirely from their limited human perspective, leaving God totally out of the equation. They had forgotten the God of the patriarchs as well as the God of the Exodus. They reported on the physical prowess and secure stronghold of the land’s inhabitants, but it was a huge mistake to forget about God. The powerful people were no worry to the Lord. He was not intimidated by giants and knew how to deal with fortified towns. Such communities may have been very large to the Israelites, but they were ridiculously small to an omnipotent God. Nobody in that frightened crowd of pilgrims could have doubted what God had done for them in the past. Egypt’s superior strength, military resources, and impressive chariots were nothing to God. He put them all under the water of the Red Sea. At the Exodus they felt powerless, but they had trusted His word and witnessed His power. The God who vanquished the tyrants of the old land would overcome their enemies in a new one. There is no telling what God can do if we will only believe.

D. The People Rebel against Their Leaders
(Numbers 14:1-2, 5-10a)

AND ALL the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! . . . Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones.

Caleb and Joshua’s optimistic votes counted for little while their ten companions spread a bad report about the land they had explored (Numbers 13:32). The terrified ten looked like they were winning the day, but the trusting two were determined not to give up so easily. With the adverse reporting of the ten still ringing in their ears, the distraught multitude continued through a long night (Numbers 14:1). Abandoning their hopes for better things, these defiant people rebelled first against their leaders and then against their Lord (verse 2).

Leadership is a costly privilege. If they were to save the situation, Moses and Aaron had a difficult task ahead. The raucous crowd displayed three troubling characteristics. First, they were united in their opposition. Verse 2 speaks of “the whole congregation” being involved in the insurrection. Second, they were
distraught in their opposition. Their raised voices and incessant weeping went on throughout the entire night. Sin reversed their destiny, turning this potentially brilliant new beginning into a tragically bitter ending. Third, they were defiant in their opposition. Terrified of their future, they disowned their past and debased their present: They wished they could reverse the Exodus: “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!” (verse 2, NIV).

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in front of the whole Israelite assembly, overcome with remorse that such awful things had been said by this blasphemous, ungrateful crowd. They pleaded with God. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes (verse 6) as a symbol of their intense grief. They pleaded with the heedless multitude. They presented their hearers with a majestic picture of God. The two messengers made an impassioned plea for the people’s repentance, a radical change of mind. But it was totally ignored. Far from responding to their appeal, the whole assembly talked about stoning them (verse 10a).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The story before us has been written to teach us that through God-given endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we too can have hope. Caleb and Joshua feature in this narrative as the confident encouragers of God’s people. Their heartening ministry was rejected by the Israelite community. It must not be lost on us. We must listen again to the buoyant plea of these two returning spies as they urged their incredulous contemporaries to trust in God.

Paralyzed by fears and plagued by inadequacy, they were totally deficient in self-worth. Self-doubt is a cruel and crippling emotion. It robs its victims of security, dignity, composure, and resourcefulness. If we are to be used by God, we must certainly begin with a realistic assessment of our limitations. Those who are convinced of God’s omnipotence never minimize the divine resources. Empowered by God, the smallest of grasshoppers can give giants a rough time.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, when times are tough and our way is not clear, help us to trust in You and Your holy words. Do not let us grow weary in well doing, for in due season we will reap if we faint not. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(September 16-22, 2019)

God Hears Our Cry
MONDAY, September 16: “Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 106:1-12, 48)
TUESDAY, September 17: “Spying Out the Land” (Numbers 13:17b-24)
WEDNESDAY, September 18: “Reporting Mixed Reviews” (Numbers 13:30-33)
THURSDAY, September 19: “Moses Resists God’s Proposal” (Exodus 32:7-14)
FRIDAY, September 20: “God Decides Who Will Enter Canaan” (Deuteronomy 1:34-40)
SATURDAY, September 21: “Moses Intercedes for God’s People” (Numbers 14:13-20)
SUNDAY, September 22: “Don’t Doubt; Trust God’s Promises” (Numbers 13:1-2, 17a, 25-28a; 14:1-2, 5-10a)
GOD FORGIVES

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: One More Chance
YOUTH TOPIC: Can I Be Forgiven?

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: God Always Forgives
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: A New Beginning

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 103:1-14

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Numbers 14:10b-23
PRINT PASSAGE: Numbers 14:10b-20
ADULT KEY VERSE: Numbers 14:19
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Numbers 14:20

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Numbers 14:10b-23
PRINT PASSAGE: Numbers 14:10b-20
KEY VERSE: Numbers 14:19a

Numbers 14:10b-20—KJV
10 And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.
11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?
12 I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.
13 And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou brougest up this people in thy might from among them;)
14 And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

Numbers 14:10b-20—NIV
10 Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.
11 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?
12 “I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.”
13 Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them.
14 “And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, LORD, are with these people and that you, LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
15 Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,
16 Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.
17 And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,
18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.
19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.
20 And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word.

15 “If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say,
16 “The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.’
17 “Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared:
18 “The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.’
19 “In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”
20 The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Everyone wrongs others, even those who love them and those whom they love. When we have done wrong, is forgiveness possible? According to the book of Numbers, God forgave the rebelling people of Israel and promised to lead their descendants forward to the Promised Land.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Comprehend the significance of Moses’ intercession for the people of Israel.
2. Repent of rebelling against God’s plans and refusing to trust in God’s strength.
3. Ask for forgiveness of their sins as well as those committed by others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—“The glory of the Lord” is associated with the appearance of the fiery cloud of the divine presence (see Exodus 16:10).
—The “Tent of Meeting,” known as the Tabernacle of the covenant, is composed of the portable sacred tent and was the divine presence in the midst of Israel’s camp, where Moses communicated with God (see Exodus 33:7-11).
—The gravity of this rebellion is underscored by the fact that God threatened to destroy and disinherit Israel from the promises that He had made to them. This had occurred only once before—during the golden calf incident (see Exodus 32:10).
—Moses’ affirmation of God’s gracious character is a quotation back to God of what God had revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 34:1-9).
—Moses was a mediator between God and the people. (See, for example, Exodus 12:3-4.)
—Moses reminded God that He promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (see Exodus 32:13).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—The Israelites complained because they thought that leaving Egypt, in hindsight, was less desirable than accepting the good news that Joshua and Caleb shared about the new land that God had promised them.
—Joshua and Caleb were very dedicated to God and were willing to trust God to move the Israelites into a new land.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Numbers, the fourth book of the Old Testament, derives its name from the census lists of the number of people in each of the twelve tribes of Israel in Numbers 1 and 26. It is one of the five books of the Pentateuch, which runs from Genesis through Deuteronomy. The Hebrew title for the book, “In the Wilderness,” comes out of the first verse of the book and accurately describes its setting. Numbers is the story of the people of Israel in the wilderness as they travel from the slavery of Egypt toward the freedom of Canaan. The book of Numbers was the product of the Jewish community’s struggle to understand the pain and punishment of exile and its implications for Israel’s relationship to God, Israel’s definition as a people, and Israel’s posture toward the Promised Land, which had been lost but was now about to be regained.

—Although God was with the Israelites, their fear of the unknown was a stumbling block in taking the land of Canaan as God had promised them.
—The “Tent of Meeting” was a tent that Moses pitched away from the camp. Moses would enter the tent to speak to and hear from the Lord. A pillar of cloud would cover the entrance of the tent as God spoke with Moses “face-to-face” (see Exodus 33:7-11).
—Moses pleaded to God on behalf of the Israelites not to kill them despite their complaining, grumbling, and mistrust of God.
—The Lord had forgiven the people, but only persons under the age of twenty would live in the Promised Land with Joshua and Caleb.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
In today’s lesson, Israel is on the edge of the Promised Land, ready to finally enter the blessings God has in store for her and to live out her calling to be a nation whose ways will be a light to all other nations. But instead of the glimpse of the Promised Land given to the spies being the prelude to a story of celebration, it instead leads to another rebellion of the people against God. Given the centrality of this rebellion in the story of God’s people, it is fascinating to realize that the thing that stops Israel from entering the Promised Land is not pride, sexual sin, envy, or greed. Rather, it is despair. Despair stemming from lies and fear leads the people to reject the whole Promised Land project. It is a rejection of the entire covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. The central rebellion, and thus the central sin, of Israel in Numbers is this anxious fear which leads them finally to reject God and His plan...
for them. Israel rejects God not because they want to be more but, rather, because they are willing to settle for less. To say the least, God is not happy with their rebellion, especially after all He has done for them. Thus, He announces a punishment on Israel. Even though the punishment is just and well deserved, God’s justice is tempered by His forgiveness. After Moses intervenes on behalf of the people, God’s response to Moses’ plea is an astounding word of grace: “I do forgive.”

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Egyptians:** the people of one of the great civilizations of the ancient world, centered along the Nile River in northeast Africa. Egypt was already an ancient civilization by the time of the biblical patriarchs. Its delta settlements reached within two hundred miles of Israel’s territory. Egypt’s influence on the people of Palestine involved serving as a refuge area or place of exile. The biblical patriarchs, from Abraham to Jacob and his sons, are described as going to Egypt for survival. The great exodus of Moses and the Hebrew people from Egypt continues to be a model of liberation for people throughout the world.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Contempt** (verse 11)—Hebrew: *naats* (naw-ats’): to spurn, treat with contempt.

**Pardon** (verse 19)—Hebrew: *calach* (saw-lakh’): to “forgive” (NIV).

**Tent** (verse 10)—Hebrew: *‘ohel* (o’-hel): tabernacle; the sacred tent of Jehovah.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. **Introduction**
   A. The God of Forgiveness
   B. Biblical Background

II. **Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
   A. God Intervenes: The Glory of the Lord Appears (Numbers 14:10b-12)
   B. Moses Intercedes on Behalf of the People (Numbers 14:13-16)
   C. Moses Reminds God of His Promises (Numbers 14:17-19)
   D. The Covenant-keeping God Who Forgives (Numbers 14:20)

III. **Concluding Reflection**

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. **The God of Forgiveness**

Upon hearing the evil report of the majority of the scouts, the Israelites weep, complain, imply that God has evil motives, and desire to change leadership or to go back to Egypt. The counter report of Caleb and later Joshua and the previous providential care and promises by God should have led to a different reaction; but, instead, Israel fails to trust in God’s good intentions for them; they do not remember God’s faithful care for them; nor do they trust that He will give them the Promised Land. Their fear leads to despair. In response to Israel’s rejection of God, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces before the congregation. The two faithful spies do their best to counter the negative portrayal of the land, the fear of the people of Canaan, and the rebellion against God. The people responded by threatening to stone them (Numbers 14:10a). Determined to go back to
Egypt, they reject even the suggestion of any other course of action and “set in stone” their verdict on the way proposed by Joshua and Caleb, a verdict also on God and His ways and covenant purposes for them.

The Lord’s appearance (Numbers 14:10b) interrupts the people’s intentions to stone their leaders. God first laments this action, which reveals the people’s “despising” Him and their ignoring “all the signs that I have done among them” (see Numbers 14:11, NRSV). Then God offers to Moses His plan to destroy the people and create a new nation from Moses alone. This in effect would be the end of God’s covenantal history with Israel. This drastic solution was once carried out by God in the story of Noah (see Genesis 6). God threatens such a drastic action only one other time—right after Israel’s apostasy in the golden calf incident. God dialogues with Moses and opens Himself to Moses’ response. It is as if God is testing Moses or opening the possibility for Moses to intercede, the latter of which he does. God’s threat, however, shows the seriousness of the people’s sin. As in the golden calf incident (see Exodus 32:10), they are rejecting God’s leadership, and God would be just also to reject them as a people.

But God’s justice is tempered by His forgiveness. After Moses intercedes for the people (see Numbers 14:13-19), God’s actual response involves both a poetic justice and forgiveness. God’s response is first a word of grace: “I do forgive” (verse 20). Rather than rejecting Israel as a nation, God forgives, “just as you [Moses] have asked.” This forgiveness requires the suffering patience of God and consists of the extension of God’s covenant with Israel even though Israel has rejected and despised God.

B. Biblical Background

In Numbers 14:10b, we read that the Lord Himself intervened. His glory appeared to all the people, but He no longer addressed them generally. That was finished. The two questions He put to Moses both began with “How long?” As a rule, questions in this form were brought by people to God; here, God directs the questions to humankind. God had reached a limit. He had done enough marvelous things to arouse Israel to faith and obedience. In His plea for the guilty, Moses did not refer to himself or to the grand promise made to him and his own. He was simply concerned for the preservation of the people. Verses 13-16 record a passionate speech in which he presented one side of the issue. He spoke of the Egyptians who knew that the liberation of the Israelites was accomplished by the power of God and how they would in turn relay that to the inhabitants of Canaan. Both peoples knew what the Lord had done for Israel during the journey in the wilderness. It had been clearly demonstrated that He was with His people day and night. If He now wiped out all of Israel in one stroke, the nations would say He had done so because He was not able to bring His people into Canaan. He was able to liberate them from Egypt and lead them through the wilderness, but for the entry into Canaan His resources fell short. So, said Moses, God’s name was at stake—His reputation as it relates to His omnipotence.

As verses 17-19 indicate, Moses went on to present another side of the issue: God’s patience, His covenant faithfulness, His readiness to forgive the sins of His people—such is His power. At the same time there is His retributive justice, which does not leave sin
unpunished but allows it to work itself out in its consequences for two, three, or four generations. That, too, is within His power. Having confessed God’s power both to forgive and to punish, Moses made an appeal to the former. Not only is this capacity to be gracious very real, Moses said, but it is also very great and had been demonstrated to the people over and over since the time of the Exodus. Moses was asking that it be exercised once more. God’s power need not be doubted, but was it possible—even now, in the tension between mercy and judgment—for the scales to dip to the side of forgiveness?

Verse 20 reports the miracle of forgiveness. There was a “but,” however: the people would not be wiped out, but neither would the transgressors enter the Promised Land. The Lord declared under oath that not one of the people who had experienced His power and mercy and then responded with rebellion again and again and had put Him to the test ten times (a round number) would enter Canaan. Only the small children who did not yet have a consciousness of good and evil would personally see the fulfillment of the promise. Of the adults living, only Caleb would be spared, for he alone remained faithful and openly expressed his faith. Verse 30 tells us that the Ephraimite Joshua also entered the Promised Land.

The orders for the next day were to turn around and go back into the wilderness. The journey that had taken them from the Red Sea to Canaan was now being reversed. The forty days of spying was not followed by the conquest of the land. That task would now be left to the next generation. God does in fact forgive, but forgiveness does not release us from consequences.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God Intervenes: The Glory of the Lord Appears (Numbers 14:10b-12)

And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

At crucial points in Scripture when humanity’s sinful rebellion created an uncontrollable crisis, God would intervene with mighty deeds to demonstrate His power and glory. God would also manifest His justice and grace by making every effort to draw humankind, His crowning creation, back to Himself. God’s intervention on behalf of humankind can be shown through Noah and Abraham, and Moses and Elijah, and finally in His only begotten Son, Jesus. The story of God’s redemptive power has been made manifest through His Word to challenge those whom He desires to call His own to faith and fulfillment. God’s redemption often preaced His judgment. Thus, from the cloud of the Lord’s presence came the revelation that God intended to ravage the Israelite nation with plague and destruction and rebuild a new and greater kingdom through Moses. God had already done plenty to arouse Israel to faith and obedience, but they had refused to respond in faith to God’s gracious actions on their behalf.
Now, through God’s permissive will, He would allow the devastation that killed the Egyptians to wipe out the Israelites: Even though God was going to unleash a plague, the ancient promise would remain in effect. The nation would be barred from entering the land, but a remnant composed of the descendants of Moses would be permitted to enter. That new people would be even larger and stronger than the existing one (verse 12; R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers: The New American Commentary*, p. 228).

B. Moses Intercedes on Behalf of the People  
(Numbers 14:13-16)

And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou art among this people, that thou art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

When the Lord threatened to strike the people with a pestilence and destroy the nation, Moses interceded on behalf of the people (verse 13). He based his appeal to God on the reputation of Yahweh among the nations if He destroyed the people, and more importantly, on Yahweh’s faithfulness as a forgiving God. According to Moses, God’s reputation was at stake (verse 14). The Egyptians would hear about it and gloat over the defeat of the Israelite people. Egyptian soldiers had not slain them at the Red Sea, but Israel’s God had done so on the borders of Canaan. The exultant Egyptians would pass the news on to the Canaanite nations, rejoicing with them that their potential opponents were vanquished and killed by their own God (verse 16). If the surrounding nations heard that this vast company had perished just as they were about to enter new territory, they would attribute the failure to God’s impotence rather than to His people’s iniquity. They would relish the idea that Israel’s Lord was not able to bring these people into the land He promised them on oath, so He slaughtered them in the desert. What a theme for pagan rejoicing if such were to happen to the Israelites on the border of Canaan.

C. Moses Reminds God of His Promises  
(Numbers 14:17-19)

And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

Instead of becoming involved in a most embarrassing situation if the nation was to be annihilated in the wilderness, Moses implored God to continue manifesting His power and greatness as revealed to His people in Exodus 34:6-8 (verse 17). With this foundation laid, Moses takes his entreaty to a second level now based upon God’s attributes of longsuffering, faithfulness, loyal love, and forgiveness, while still maintaining the balance with His justice and righteousness. Based on these revealed qualities of the divine nature, Moses appealed for God to forgive the rebellious Israelites,
not only because of His love that inspired the covenant relationship in the first place, but also because of the forgiveness that He extended to them because of their complaints and bitterness, even before He delivered them from the Egyptians.

Moses understood that God’s strength could be magnified through the balanced application of His attributes to their current situation. On one hand, he recalled the words of the Decalogue, which spoke of God’s judgment of idolatry lasting to the third and fourth generations of the rebellious, while His loyal love would endure to a thousand generations of the faithful (verse 18). The reference to the third and fourth generations was not intended as an assertion of divine vindictiveness but was merely a recognition of the fact that in Hebrew thought, the strength of family ties were such that both blessing and misfortune could be transferred from one generation to another. The reference to the third and fourth generations was intended to embrace all living members of a family.

Also, Moses remembered that Yahweh was a gracious God who, through His compassion, abundant love, and longsuffering, could forgive the sinful and rebellious (verse 19). So often the God of the Old Testament has been presented errantly and misguidedly as a God of wrath and destruction, while asserting that the God of the New Testament in Jesus was one of mercy and love. The present appeal of Moses demonstrates that the Lord our God is one. It furthermore evidences that Moses’ understanding of God and His nature had advanced to a level of keen discernment that can only come from having an intimate relationship with Him.

Moses then requested that God forgive this rebellious generation in the manner that He had pardoned them in the past. Moses had witnessed God’s grace in not bringing immediate judgment upon this rebellious generation. The term for “forgive” had not been used in responses of God to previous Israelite instances of discontent and rebellion, but Moses had intervened several times and seen the Lord relent from bringing destruction to the entire nation by punishing only the instigators of the insurrections.

D. The Covenant-keeping God Who Forgives (Numbers 14:20)

And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word.

Moses asks Yahweh to forgive this people based on Yahweh’s own covenant loyalty as exemplified in His bearing with the people from the time of the Exodus until the present moment. By forgiveness, neither Moses (verse 19) nor Yahweh (verse 20) means to indicate that Israel’s punishment will be avoided or cancelled, but only that the fundamental covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel will be maintained from Yahweh’s side. In this unit one sees that divine forgiveness does not cancel out divine punishment. The punishment postponed by God in Exodus 32:34 is put off no longer. God’s mercy is seen in that He does not wipe out the Israelites immediately.

However, the forgiveness in this case was not without consequences for the horrible sins of the Israelites. The people who had behaved so intolerably would not be put to death, but neither could things go back to the way they had been on the day before the rebellion. Delayed execution does not lead to the gift of the land. Instead, the people are instructed to travel back into the wilderness of the Red Sea.
road. The punishment is grave. None who had spurned God and rejected the divinely promised land would see that land. Only Joshua and Caleb, who encouraged the Israelites to go up and take the land, would get to do so. It is in the ongoing life of Israel and the opportunity for the next generation to inherit the land that we find divine mercy trumping divine judgment.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The spy story and the rebellion of the people in Numbers 13–14 gather a host of central themes in the theology of the Old and New Testaments. The story explores sin; the interplay of forgiveness and judgment; the death of the old and the birth of the new; and trusting in God’s power over “giants” versus God’s grace on “the little ones.” A major theme in the spy story is the forgiveness of God through the intercession of Moses. Moses’ appeal to God’s steadfast love (Hebrew: hesed) was an appeal to God’s steadfast loyalty and commitment to the promises God made to Israel. In the process, Moses denied himself and the possible glory of becoming a great nation. Instead, Moses used his uniquely intimate relationship to God to pray for forgiveness for the people. God’s forgiveness of Israel becomes a model for the ways in which we should behave with one another. It is only when we forgive that we can move on to healthier relationships that are strengthened and sustained through hard-won love and trust. There are consequences to our brokenness, but there are also the open arms of God which indicate His readiness to restore us to a right relationship with Himself. In like manner, we too should be willing to forgive each other with an eye toward living peacefully in God’s beloved community.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we give You thanks for Your tender mercies and kindness demonstrated toward us daily. Forgive us of our sins and restore us to a right relationship with You. Help us to learn how to forgive one another and to move forward with a renewed sense of trust and hope. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(September 23-29, 2019)

God Forgive
MONDAY, September 23: “Bless the Lord Who Forgives” (Psalm 103:1-14)
TUESDAY, September 24: “Jesus Forgives Our Sins” (Acts 10:34-43)
WEDNESDAY, September 25: “God’s Forgiveness Doesn’t Allay Suffering” (Numbers 14:21-25)
THURSDAY, September 26: “God’s Forgiveness May Involve Harsh Judgments” (Numbers 14:26-30)
FRIDAY, September 27: “Children Suffer for Adults’ Sins” (Numbers 14:31-35)
SATURDAY, September 28: “People Rebelled and Were Defeated” (Numbers 14:39-45)
SUNDAY, September 29: “The Lord Says, ‘I Do Forgive’” (Numbers 14:10b-20)
OBEDIENT FAITH

ADULT/YOUTH
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Faith Helps Us Obey
CHILDREN
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Do as You’re Told
YOUTH TOPIC: Be Obedient
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Following the Rules

DEVO TIONAL READING
Hebrews 8:1-12

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 4:1-14; 5:1-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12-13
ADULT KEY VERSE: Deuteronomy 4:2b
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Deuteronomy 4:2

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 4:1-14; 5:1-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 5:1, 6-8, 11-12, 16-21
KEY VERSES: Deuteronomy 5:6-7

Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12-13—KJV
NOW THEREFORE hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.
2 Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.
3 Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the LORD thy God hath destroyed them from among you.
4 But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.
5 Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.

Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12-13—NIV
NOW, ISRAEL, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.
2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.
3 You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did at Baal Peor. The LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor,
4 but all of you who held fast to the LORD your God are still alive today.
5 See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.
6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your
6 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.
7 For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the L ORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?
8 And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

…

12 And the L ORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.
13 And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the L ORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?
8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

…

12 Then the L ORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.
13 He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People desire and appreciate faithfulness in all their relationships. How are we to respond to the faithfulness of others? Deuteronomy 4–5 set forth obedience as God’s expectation of Israel in response to God’s faithful deliverance.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Summarize God’s reasons for why the people should obey the commandments.
2. Experience awe at the majesty of the God who gave these commandments.
3. Commit to showing faithfulness to God through the new covenant, just as the Israelites were to be faithful in the old covenant.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The mention of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) in Deuteronomy 4:13 is a precursor to their restatement in Deuteronomy 5. Since these had already been given at Sinai some forty years previously (see Exodus 20), the Israelites were not hearing new information. Rather, they were hearing information that needed to be restressed to a new generation as a change in leadership loomed (see Deuteronomy 4:21-22).
—The new generation of Israelites noted above were camped east of the Jordan River—preparing to take possession of the Promised Land—as they heard Moses speak (see Deuteronomy 1:1-5).
—The warning against adding to or subtracting from God’s commandments (Deuteronomy 4:2)

—The incident at Baal Peor referred to in Deuteronomy 4:3 is narrated in full in Numbers 25, where 24,000 Israelites are noted to have died because of unfaithfulness (compare Psalm 106:28; Hosea 9:10).

—Three times in this text Moses pairs the words statutes and ordinances. When Moses used those words, he was stressing that the people did not have an option; these were not mere suggestions.

—The example of obedience to God’s commands was supposed to be attractive to the peoples around Israel in the Promised Land (verse 6). Ironically, it seems that the practices of those peoples proved to be a greater attraction to Israel, as it repeatedly led to the worship of the Canaanite deities.

---

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Moses shared with the people God’s Ten Commandments that provided the spiritual and governing practices for their lives.

—God’s commandments required that the people listen, receive, and do what God had established.

—Before God instituted the commandments, the Israelites were not an established nation.

—Moses and the people entered a covenant relationship with God when they accepted the Ten Commandments.

—The Ten Commandments reminded the people that God is the sovereign leader, as well as that their responsibility is to love God, self, and neighbor.

—The Ten Commandments emphasize holy and righteous living that God expected from the Israelites.

---

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Old Testament and the last book in the Pentateuch. The title of Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Bible—“these are the words”—follows the custom of naming a book after the first few words in the text. The Hebrew title accurately reflects the fact that Deuteronomy is both the words of Moses (1:1) and the words of God that He told Moses to speak. It is not merely a copy of the law of Exodus but a restatement and expansion of the original covenant and covenant law. The new time and setting, forty years after the original reception of the law at Sinai (Exodus 20–24), required both updating of the law and a renewal of the covenant.

---

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Deuteronomy was written by Moses on the eve of the conquest of Canaan as a means of addressing several questions and concerns. First, it was important that the people understand who they were, where they originated, and what their God intended for them in the years to come. In Genesis, they were able to trace their roots back to the patriarchs. Exodus rehearsed the story of the growth of the Hebrew people. Leviticus outlined how the nation might have access to a holy God. Numbers provided instruction for the people in movement from covenant to conquest. Finally, Deuteronomy reiterates the covenant, but it does so in a greatly
expanded form and in terms appropriate to a new generation, one about to enter a new life experience and to engage in a new realm of responsibility. The Sinai generation of thirty-eight years earlier was largely off the scene; and the new generation, about to embark on conquest, stood in need of covenant reiteration and reaffirmation, a procedure in line with covenant relationships attested to throughout the ancient Near Eastern world.

Also, Moses was about to die; so it was essential that he commit to writing the whole collection of tradition and truth that he understood to be the very revelation of God. This was especially urgent in the case of Deuteronomy, for that composition would serve as the corpus of law and practice for the covenant community from that day forward. The covenant, required obedience from Israel. Through obedience she would reap all the blessings of the covenant, which included long life in the land. The simplicity of the demand is easily overlooked. Everything that God intends for His people is theirs if they would just obey the Law. Every law was for their benefit. Obedience would protect Israel from pagan influence, provide her with good leadership, assure that justice was done in the land, and produce a wide range of other benefits. These benefits are concrete proof of God’s love for Israel and His concern for her welfare.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Baal Peor (verse 3)—Hebrew: Baal Peor (bah’-al peh-ore’): the deity worshipped at Peor with probably licentious rites; “Baalpeor” (KJV).
Covenant (verse 13)—Hebrew: bēriyth (ber•ēth’): divine ordinance with signs or pledges.
Statutes (verse 1)—Hebrew: choq (khoke): ordinances; “laws” (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Blessings of Obedience
   B. Biblical Background
   
   II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
      A. Obedience Brings Life
         (Deuteronomy 4:1-2)
      B. The Perils of Disobedience
         (Deuteronomy 4:3-4)
      C. The Call for Obedient People to Become Great People
         (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)
      D. Entering into Covenant with the Unapproachable God
         (Deuteronomy 4:12-13)
   
   III. Concluding Reflection

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Moses: the first and preeminent leader of the Israel-ites, who led the people out of Egypt to the threshold of the Promised Land; he is also the law giver and first among the prophets. He is the dominant individual character in the Old Testament narrative from Exodus through Deuteronomy.
Israel: the collective name of the twelve tribes descended from Jacob, whose name was also “Israel” (see Genesis 32:28; 35:10). In the Bible, the people are called “the children of Israel” or simply “Israel.” As a political designation, “Israel” refers either to the nation or, during the period of the Divided Monarchy (924–721 BC), to the Northern Kingdom in particular, as distinct from Judah, the Southern Kingdom.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Blessings of Obedience

Deuteronomy is sometimes called “the theology book of the Old Testament” because it summarizes the teachings of Moses in the rest of the Pentateuch and lays the foundation for the messages of the poets and prophets who followed him. In content, it consists of Moses’ farewell address to the nation of Israel. In form, it is largely a covenant document reminding the people of God’s gracious act of calling them to be His special community and of their responsibility to fulfill that calling by representing Him before all the nations. When tempted in the desert, Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy, and the writers of the New Testament cite from Deuteronomy more than from any other Old Testament book, except for Isaiah and Psalms. Careful reading and study of its great theological themes will inevitably lead one to a fuller understanding of God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ.

Having recited God’s past dealings with Israel in the opening chapters of the book, in chapter 4, Moses urges actions and attitudes based on those past experiences. The focus of chapter 4 is primarily on the nature and uniqueness of God, the one who made a covenant with Israel in Horeb (see Deuteronomy 4:9-14) and who will bring judgment (verses 25-29) followed by blessing (verses 30-31) on those who obey these mandates. The exhortation begins with a direct address to Israel with the imperative verb “listen” (verse 1). This verb, which occurs regularly in Deuteronomy, expresses the urgency of the covenant requirements. In Hebrew, the meaning of this verb is not merely “to hear” but “to act upon what is heard,” that is, to obey. What is to be obeyed in this instance are the “decrees and regulations” that Yahweh was about to teach the assembly through Moses. Obedience to them would allow the people to live (as opposed to their parents who died in the desert; see Deuteronomy 1:34-36). Their survival would result in their successful entry into and conquest of the Promised Land.

The obedience, moreover, must be precisely according to Yahweh’s instructions—no more and no less. It must conform to His commands. Obedience to the covenant demands would result in Israel’s wisdom and understanding being manifest to the world (see Deuteronomy 4:6). Wisdom pertains to a knowledge of and relationship to God. Understanding is frequently synonymous, though its meaning usually has a more practical bent—wisdom applied. A defining mark of Yahweh’s intimacy with His people is His revelation to them of the body of laws He is about to share with them, laws described as righteous. Righteous law is law that sets a standard of behavior expectation, one commensurate with God’s own character. Yahweh had brought them from Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land; however, their obedience to the commands of God would determine their futures going forward. If they remained faithful to God, He promised to provide for them. He will indeed bestow His blessings upon an obedient people. They in turn
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Obedience Brings Life

(Deuteronomy 4:1-2)

NOW THEREFORE hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

“Hear now, O Israel” is a transition to the religious lesson that is to be learned from what follows. The lesson to be learned is based on Israel’s long history with Yahweh. The summons to Israel to hear is characteristic of didactic (instructive) address. They were to hear God’s instructions as given through Moses. This instruction was referred to in different ways. Here, it is decrees and laws (verse 1). These are common words in Deuteronomy for the covenant requirements. Moses’ task was to teach this law. Instruction was an important part of the purpose of Deuteronomy and of this chapter. In later Judaism, Moses was revered as the first great teacher and given the title of “Moses, our teacher.”

Teaching of and obedience to the Law were crucial to Israel’s future. Only by obedience could she be assured of advancing into the Promised Land and possessing it as God’s gift. To live for Israel was to live in the land. There

B. Biblical Background

The Hebrew people know the consequences of disobedience. By God’s grace, the current generation had made it to the edge of the Promised Land. The fate of those who disobeyed is very much present in the lives of the survivors. This beginning section of stipulations consists largely of words of encouragement and guidance for the faithful as they prepare to enter the land that God had promised to them. Moses is here emphasizing the importance and necessity of adhering to the codes the Lord had given the people. It is a restating of what God declares to be enough to guard their lives and to guarantee their possession of the land. Beyond what is stated here, they needed no additional rules or directives, and none of those given were superfluous; the people were not to add to them or subtract from them. The covenant-treaty stipulations are all enough. Whatever adulterates, contradicts, or makes these stipulations ineffective cannot be allowed. God’s word remains settled, if a satisfactory relationship with Him is to be maintained. Failure to follow the Lord results in death. On the other hand, obeying the Lord’s codes would make them known to the nations, who would esteem the Israelites as wise and understanding people.

It is almost as if Moses is saying, “You who remain have come through a time of turmoil and testing. As you prepare to enter the Promised Land, you know what the Lord requires of you. Make good on this new opportunity God has given to you and your generation. Obedience is better than sacrifice. Trust God and stay true to His laws and commands and you will be blessed beyond measure.”
was no life for her apart from the land. It was the Law that made this life possible because the Law was the revealed will of God graciously given to His people. The Law was complete as given, and it was Israel’s responsibility to obey it, not amend it at her whim. Such warnings appear also in ancient Near Eastern treaties between countries. The Word of God, when delivered, was not open to human manipulation (verse 2).

B. The Perils of Disobedience
(Deuteronomy 4:3-4)

Your eyes have seen what theLord did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto theLord your God are alive every one of you this day.

The historical recital of chapters 1–3 was important background for the exhortation to obedience that Moses now embarks upon. The warning which Moses gives was grounded in the historical facts of their past experiences, many of which were still fresh in Israel’s memory. Throughout their journey, their eyes saw what God had done for those who kept the faith. They also knew that the disobedient among them were dead. Moses put before them two competing ideas: Israel could either follow (walk after) other gods (a strong warning theme throughout Deuteronomy), or they could hold fast to the Lord (verses 3-4).

The call to “give heed” to God’s law is set against the grave disregard of them which some Israelites had displayed at a place called Baalpeor (verse 3). The story is told in Numbers 25. Baalpeor was a town dedicated to pagan worship; there was a shrine there to the Canaanite god Baal. Certain Israelites had indulged in sexual relationships with Moabite women; it is possible that this took place in the context of a religious ceremony in honor of the god Baal. The behavior was quite contrary to the law of the Israelites and, as a result, the offenders were executed. The penalty was harsh, but implicit in the offense was a denial of basic tenet of Hebrew faith. Those who survived the incident and judgment at Baalpeor were the ones who kept close to the Lord—and this was the lifestyle that Moses was encouraging in his address to the Israelites. The Israelites were poised to enter the land of Canaan, where Canaanite culture and religious customs would make a strong appeal to the less-sophisticated Israelites; thus, the importance of fidelity to Yahweh could not be emphasized too strongly.

C. The Call for Obedient People to Become Great People
(Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as theLord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as theLord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

The purpose underlying Moses’ teaching of the Law was directed toward the future life of the Israelites in the Promised Land. Moses looked to the day when the Israelites would become a great nation (verses 6-7), but his ideal of a great nation was not that of Egypt’s or the other nations’ of the ancient Near East.
It was not wealth or military power that provided the criteria of greatness; their greatness would lie in the wisdom and discernment that was the fruit of obedience to the Law, so that their neighbors would say, Surely, this great nation is a wise and discerning people. Thus, the greatness would not even lie in the forms of government, which were specified in the law of the covenant, for these too were similar in many ways to those of the nations of their time. Rather, the distinctiveness would lie in the intimate relationship the covenant created between God and His people. This distinctiveness in relationship is specified in Scripture: “For what great nation is there that has a god as close to it as is the LORD your God?” (see verse 7). The covenant would establish a relationship with the Lord which would distinguish Israel from her neighbors. The relationship was a moral and spiritual one, for the Lord was close to the Israelites. In the context of the covenant relationship, the Law itself was distinctive, for its source was the Lord and so its character was righteous. The covenant was upheld on humankind’s end through their obedience and fidelity to the laws of God. The primary intention of this section is not to fossilize religious customs for all time; rather, it is to urge that God’s laws should be taken with the utmost seriousness, and that we are not at liberty to adjust them to suit our own selfish, thoughtless, or misguided whims and schemes.

D. Entering into Covenant with the Unapproachable God
(Deuteronomy 4:12-13)

And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

The details of the experience of God at Horeb/Sinai are recalled very vividly. As the people stood at the foot of the mountain, the mountain itself glowed with the light of a fire, its brightness contrasted sharply by the surrounding darkness, cloud, and dense mist. This theophany had a very profound religious effect, and the memory of it was such that it became a common feature in many Hebrew hymns and poetic passages. From the fire came the voice of the Lord; you hear the sound of words, but you do not see a form—only the sound! (See verse 12.) God had no form, which distinguished Him from the pagan gods (verses 15-18). In Exodus, the people were warned not to look at the mountain. Here, they are reminded that there was nothing to see anyway. Therefore, an idol would not make sense, for what could it represent? Israel’s God spoke with them, but the visible gods of the nations could neither speak nor hear.

The phrasing of this sentence is made very dramatic in the Hebrew by the use of active participles. This experience the Hebrews were not to forget. If in their most profoundly moving encounter with their God there was no physical representation or form of Him, but only His voice, then any attempt to represent God in form would be totally inadequate and misleading. The voice of God communicated the Ten Words—that is, the Ten Commandments—which Moses was to set before the people once again (see Deuteronomy 5). He wrote them on two tablets of stone. It has been pointed out that the two tablets contained two
copies of the Law (not several commandments on each, as often supposed). Both the Israelites and the Lord had a copy of the covenant agreement. Both were kept in the ark of the covenant. This is the first explicit reference to the covenant in Deuteronomy (verse 13). The covenant defined the relationship between God and Israel. Here, it is explicitly limited to the Ten Commandments, though the concept of covenant is much broader than in the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments function as a summary or digest of the covenant law.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Moses commanded Israel to obey God’s law so that they would enjoy the Lord’s blessings and the surrounding pagan nations would recognize Israel’s wisdom and understanding. In the ultimate sense, whether Israel remained in the Land of Promise was determined by fidelity to the covenant made between them and God. The key observation to make from this interdependence is that “life” in the truest sense was only to be enjoyed when an Israelite lived in conformity with God’s expectations. Living in the land God gave them provided Israel with an international platform on which to demonstrate His character to the surrounding nations. This would only happen if they remained obedient to the statutes laid before them.

Although Moses was the great law giver, in this lesson he is teaching and explaining the laws God gave to Israel through him. As he affirmed in Deuteronomy 4:1, the immediate objective of his teaching is obedience. According to Moses, none of what God had in store for His chosen people would be possible unless they were obedient to His commands. In this case, though, Israel’s obedience would be a good example for the nations around them. Those nations would recognize Israel’s greatness by seeing Israel as a wise and understanding people, having a God who is near, and having righteous laws. Respect for Israel implies respect for Yahweh, the one from whom Israel had received the laws.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, teach us how to live in obedience to Your will. Grant unto us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in order that our lives might be a blessing to the world. Forgive us when we fall short of Your expectations for us, and continue to teach us how to walk in conformity to Your will for our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(September 30–October 6, 2019)

Obedient Faith

MONDAY, September 30: “Praise God’s Works” (Psalm 111)
TUESDAY, October 1: “Mediator of the New Covenant” (Hebrews 8:1-12)
WEDNESDAY, October 2: “God Made a Covenant with Us” (Deuteronomy 5:1-7)
THURSDAY, October 3: “Remember that You Were There” (Deuteronomy 4:9-11)
FRIDAY, October 4: “Make No Heavenly or Earthly Idols” (Deuteronomy 4:14-24)
SATURDAY, October 5: “God Will Not Abandon You” (Deuteronomy 4:25-31)
SUNDAY, October 6: “Commit to Covenant Obedience” (Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12-13)
BLESSED FOR FAITHFULNESS

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Doing Right Pays Off
YOUTH TOPIC: Wait! Help Is on the Way

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Blessed for Faithfulness
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Speak the Truth

DEVO TIONAL READING
Proverbs 3:1-10

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 17:1-24
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Kings 17:8-16
ADULT KEY VERSE: 1 Kings 17:16
YOUTH KEY VERSE: 1 Kings 17:13

1 Kings 17:8-16—KJV
8 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. 11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread, that I may eat, and die. 12 And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. 13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do

1 Kings 17:8-16—NIV
8 Then the word of the LORD came to him: 9 “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” 11 As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” 12 “As surely as the LORD your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” 13 Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me,
as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.
14 For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.
15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.
16 And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: When people are denied the necessities of life, they may give up hope. What is the reward for showing faithful obedience in times of hardship? The widow of Zarephath faithfully ministered to God’s prophet, and she was miraculously provided for throughout the time of famine.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Tell how the widow of Zarephath was blessed for her faithfulness to do as the prophet had instructed her.
2. Feel confident that God will reward sacrificial faithfulness today.
3. Plan to support some person or cause, either materially or in other ways, as an act of faithfulness to God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Elijah’s name means “My God is the Lord,” which expresses his mission.
—Zarephath was a city near Sidon on the Phoenician coast.
—Baal was worshipped as the god of rain and fertility and the vanquisher of death.
—God sent Elijah among the Phoenicians, the center of Baal worship, to demonstrate that even in the land of Baal, the Lord is sovereign.
—The widow believed the word of the Lord that was spoken by Elijah. It took a simple act of faith to produce a miracle.
—The two stories in this passage show Elijah’s status as a miracle-working man of God.
—When the woman says, “As the Lord (i.e., Yahweh) your God lives” (verse 12), she is making a play on Elijah’s name, which means “My God is Yahweh.”
—The drought was a judgment on the people’s worship of Baal, a Canaanite fertility deity believed to be responsible for bringing rain.
Teachers of CHILDREN
—Elijah was a prophet of God who prophesied a famine during the time of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.
—Elijah found himself alone, afraid, and ready to die at a brook in Kerith Ravine because he was afraid of Queen Jezebel’s wrath more than he trusted God.
—During the famine, Elijah was fed by God via unclean ravens—who brought him food—and later by a widow who was not part of the household of faith.
—After the brook dried up, Elijah was instructed by God to go to Zarephath to meet a widow who had a son and who would feed him.
—The widow was surprised that Elijah wanted her to make him something to eat, because she had only enough to feed her son and herself.
—Although the widow did not know Elijah, she trusted him. Her faith was greatly deepened after her son, who became sick and died, was brought back to life by Elijah.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The books of 1 and 2 Kings cover more than four hundred years of Israelite history, from the death of David and the accession of Solomon in the tenth century, to the release of Judah’s exiled king Jehoiachin in the sixth century BCE. From the start one discerns the inevitable interplay of divine will and human will in history. In the chaotic arena of history and amid the court intrigues, internecine warfare, and international conflicts, the story relentlessly conveys the confidence that God’s will is being worked out. The story of Kings testifies to divine purposefulness in the messiness of history. Despite the impression that the affairs of the world are determined by political maneuverings and military strivings of rogues and scoundrels, it is God who will have the final say when all is said and done. The books of Kings tell us that history moves according to the will of the sovereign God.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Kings tells of material prosperity, political maneuvering, power plays between nations, changing national fortunes and alliances, compromised worship, droughts and wars, mixed religious affiliations, injustice, violence, oppression, and children dying. All these situations are familiar in the world today. Kings also tells the story of the part played by God in all these events and happenings. Kings has God as subject in various ways. The most explicit is through His speaking to prophets who announce His word, with fulfillment through normal processes and at times through the wonder workings of God. Much of the action of Kings is about human decisions and actions, to which God responds through His prophets. During the challenges and vicissitudes of everyday life, it is God who stands above the flux and flow of human history ready to bless all who will believe on His name and respond to Him in faith.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Widow of Zarephath: a woman whose husband had died. The status of the widow in ancient Israelite society was precarious. Having no inheritance rights and often in want of life’s necessities, she was exposed to harsh treatment and exploitation. Widowhood was perceived by some to be a disgrace. Yet, God chose the widow of Zarephath to feed Elijah in a time of famine and she responded in faith and was blessed by God.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Lord Will Provide

In the opening verses of 1 Kings 17, the prophet Elijah appears before King Ahab unannounced and unexplained. The name Elijah means “Yahweh is my God.” Elijah’s presence embodies a summons to serve God alone and to dismiss all other deities. Through Elijah, Yahweh calls for a drought to demonstrate His power over all creation. Drought in the ancient world was widely understood as a divine curse. When God is displeased, rain is withheld. Yahweh calls for this drought, which also includes the territory of Baal, whom Ahab worships—because Baal, a “fertility god,” is supposed to be a rainmaker. However, Elijah’s prophetic assertion challenges that claim by insisting that rain and drought are completely in the governance of Yahweh, and certainly not in the power of the idol god Baal.

After Elijah’s pronouncement of an oath and a curse on Ahab, the Lord sends him to hide down by the brook Cherith, where he is fed by ravens in the morning and evening. However, after a while, the brook dried up and the ravens did not come anymore. The wadi dries up owing to a lack of rain, so Yahweh must make new provisions for His obedient servant. Thus, God instructs Elijah to go to Zarephath, a territory outside Israel, to be fed and cared for by an unnamed widow. This not only asserts Yahweh’s governance beyond the territory of Israel, but Sidon is the home territory of Jezebel.

Zarephath was a Phoenician town located between Sidon and Tyre on the Mediterranean coast. It was about nine miles south of Sidon. Elijah arrived there to discover that the widow woman was down to her last bit of food and had no more. God, however,
provided for them in a miraculous way. In these stories of the miraculous food supply (verses 13-16) and the miraculous restoration of life (verses 17-24), the readers are reminded that it is the one true God of the Hebrews, and not the pagan gods, who gives life and sustains life.

B. Biblical Background

Elijah, the northern prophet, confronts Ahab, the northern king. Ahab has given his public support to Baal, the storm god, the lord and giver of life who controls the rain in a dry and thirsty land. Elijah stands before him as the representative of the Lord and challenges Ahab and his god on this very point. The Lord, the true God of Israel, is the one who gives the life-giving rain, and to prove it there will be no more until the Lord says so. Elijah does not run and hide because he fears Ahab—that comes later. God commands him to go and hide himself in the Wadi Cherith. Although we do not know where that was, both places mentioned in this chapter are significant. It is a dangerous thing to camp out in a wadi. These seasonal water courses might contain a gentle stream in the dry season or they might dry up completely, but after a storm they would be subject to dangerous flash floods. Elijah could camp in the wadi in safety because there would be no storm to cause it to flood.

How does he survive? The ravens feed him night and morning, just as Moses and the Israelites had been fed in their desert wanderings (see Exodus 16:8). Why did the writers stress that ravens fed him daily? First, to emphasize the power of the Lord, the true God. The element of the miraculous in these stories is intended to dramatize the power of God through the prophets’ words and actions. Second, the writer wanted to show that Elijah and all God’s people and prophets with him can rely on God’s support and care. Elijah’s vocation as a prophet would be hard and demanding, but through all his trials and tribulations he could rely on God to sustain him.

The word of the Lord moves Elijah on to Zarephath, a town in Sidon (verses 8-9). Elijah travels to Jezebel’s father’s country. He is now in the land where Baal is the official god. The scene is set for another sign of the power of the Lord, and we are given two. The first is to do with Elijah and the widow. The Old Testament portrays God as being particularly concerned for “the widow, the orphan and the poor”—that is, the vulnerable and marginalized in society. Here, we see the Lord demonstrating care for a vulnerable foreigner whose own god is not a help to her and her son. God feeds them daily. The second sign is to do with her son (verse 17). The story does not suggest that God caused the son to die so that His power could be demonstrated. The boy’s death is a natural event. It is “one of these things,” one of the chances and changes of life; but the widow’s reaction is absolutely typical. She blames God’s representative and she blames God. She sees this premature death as some sort of punishment for sin. Elijah does not argue, but takes her son upstairs, lets God know exactly what he feels about all of this, and prays that her son may be restored to life. This second sign demonstrates the life-giving power of the Lord and authenticates Elijah as a genuine prophet. Even on his home ground, Baal is no match for the power and providence of the Lord.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God’s Providence in Baal’s Territory
(1 Kings 17:8-10)

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

After his announcement of a drought to Ahab, Elijah is instructed by God to go and hide by Wadi (“brook”) Cherith. However, when that brook dries up, Elijah must find a new source of sustenance. For a time, it seems that not only has the brook dried up, but maybe Yahweh’s ability to provide has dried up also. To the contrary, Yahweh gives an even more powerful sign of his life-sustaining sovereignty (verse 8). God rewards Elijah’s faithfulness. Elijah cannot stay by the brook, but surprisingly Yahweh sends him to a town near the Mediterranean coast—Zarephath in the region of Sidon. Elijah, who has confronted Ahab, is not sent to the king of that region but, rather, to a widow who has been instructed by God to supply him with food.

Elijah arrives at the city gates of Zarephath and sees a widow there gathering kindling. He initiated a dialogue with two polite requests. First, he asks for drink; then, as the widow prepares to comply, he adds a request for food. In each case, his words emphasize the modesty of the request: he seeks only “a little water”—a drinking-vessel full; and he wishes only “a morsel of bread”—a mere handful (verse 11). (The word translated as “morsel” may even mean “crumb.”)

B. A Widow Woman Puts Her Faith in God
(1 Kings 17:11-12)

And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

The widow’s instant readiness to fetch water for Elijah contrasts with her refusal of his request for food. Serious as the drought is, she can cope with it; but its more severe consequence, famine, is beyond her means. The widow’s response reveals her plight: she and her son are starving. Just as in the episode of the Wadi Cherith (verse 3), Yahweh has sent Elijah into a situation where only a miracle can supply him with sustenance. The widow’s words begin with an oath taken in the name of Elijah’s God (verse 12). The oath shows the widow to be observant, respectful of his foreign ways, and deferential toward Yahweh even though she is not a worshipper. The rest of her speech is graphic. She has “nothing baked.” What she has corresponds, ironically, with what Elijah requested. He asked for a morsel of bread in her hand; she has only a scant handful of meal (literally, a “palmful”). He asked for a bit of water in a vessel; she has only a bit of oil in a jug. She intends to use up her remaining provisions in a last meager meal for herself and her son: “We shall eat it, and we shall die.” Her speech moves from life—as the Lord your God lives—to death (her last word is “we shall die”), symbolizing the only destiny she can see foresee for herself.
C. The God of Israel Responds Positively to the Woman’s Faith

(1 Kings 17:13)

And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

Just as Yahweh issued Elijah a command followed by an explanation promising hope, he now issues a command and an explanation to the widow. The command begins with a reassurance but adds a challenging proviso. Elijah approves the widow’s proposed course of action but insists that before preparing anything for herself and her son, she must use some of her meal and oil to bake something for Elijah and bring it to him (verse 13). A widow in this foreign territory had enough faith to provide for Elijah. Usually widows were the poorest of all citizens, though the reference to her household may suggest she is a woman of means (verses 15, 17). She is herself preparing to die with her son because the drought has exhausted their entire food supply. Elijah tests her faith and self-renunciation by asking that she first provide a small loaf for him, then another for herself and her son. Yahweh would ensure that the flour in the jar and the oil in the jug would be enough until the rains again restored the fertility of the ground. The woman places her trust in the God of the prophet and does as he instructs.

Elijah has confidence in God and so he orders the widow to go ahead and use the little she had to make bread—and surprisingly to Western minds, he says that the first loaf is for me, and then for yourself and your son.

D. What Faith Will Do

(1 Kings 17:14-16)

For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

“Thus saith the Lord” (verse 14) is one of the standard ways in which a prophet introduced a divine message from God, whether of promise or of condemnation. In this case, the divine message is a short poem that promises the widow continuing sustenance if the drought lasts: the jar of meal will not empty and the jug of oil will not fail. Her faith is rewarded, the prophetic word is confirmed, and the God of Israel is shown to be the giver of life. The promised provision would come to her not through Baal, but through the foreign prophet of the foreign God who is also Lord in Sidon and of the widow. The widow responds, but she acts in response to Elijah’s word (verse 15). We are then told that it happened “in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah” (verse 16, NIV). The God of Elijah shows what faith can do by using a widow and her son outside the land. She was a person far away from the centers of power and wealth, living outside of what it meant to be a community of faith, yet she believed in God and He responded to her faith in kind.

Elijah is as good as God’s word, for it is God’s word that vetoes circumstances and guarantees abundant life. When all hope is gone, God can make a way out of no way.
This is true for all those who call upon Him in faith and respond positively to His initiatives in their lives.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Elijah is ordered by the Lord to go to the city of Zarephath, yet this city is in Baal’s territory and is equally stricken by drought. Just as the Lord ordered the ravens to feed Elijah, so also the Lord ordained a widow to feed him. Although she apparently did not know it, this woman would be used by the Lord for salvific purposes. The main point of the lesson is this: It is the Lord, the God of Israel, who brings about these miraculous wonders when people respond to Him in faith. In like manner, we are also encouraged to believe that things that seem impossible to human beings can be brought about by the Lord. When we put our trust in God, birds of prey may provide nourishment, the poor may have their victuals wondrously replenished, and even the dead may be resurrected. However, it is the Lord and no other god who performs such miracles—and it is this truth that we are called on to believe as well.

The wonder of these stories resides not merely in their supernatural character, however. One is equally amazed at the wondrous freedom and sovereignty of God. The one true God uses even creatures that are regarded as ritually unclean to fulfill the divine purpose. So, too, the sovereign God is free to act beyond the borders of Israel, even to act through Gentile worshippers of foreign gods. God’s universal love reaches beyond the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and even religious affiliation. People’s origin, backgrounds, and present circumstances notwithstanding, if we will but take God at His word, He has promised to bless our lives beyond anything we could have imagined. If we have the faith, God has the power.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, grant unto us faith enough to trust in Your promises and in Your word. Grant us the strength and courage to walk by faith and not by sight each day of our lives. We praise Your name for the miracles You continue to work among us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 7-13, 2019)

Blessed for Faithfulness
MONDAY, October 7: “Keep God’s Commandments” (Proverbs 3:1-10)
TUESDAY, October 8: “On the Mountain with Jesus” (Matthew 17:1-7)
WEDNESDAY, October 9: “Prophetic Examples of Faithfulness” (Luke 4:24-30)
THURSDAY, October 10: “Paul in Faithfulness Restores Life” (Acts 20:7-12)
FRIDAY, October 11: “God-sent Ravens Feed Elijah” (1 Kings 17:1-7)
SATURDAY, October 12: “Elijah Restores Life to Widow’s Son” (1 Kings 17:17-24)
SUNDAY, October 13: “The Widow’s Faithfulness Rewarded” (1 Kings 17:8-16)


**FAITH CAN HEAL**

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Just Say the Word  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Healing in an Unusual Manner

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Faith Can Heal  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** We Know You Can

**DEVOTIONAL READING**

James 5:13-18

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 7:1-10  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 7:1-10  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 7:7

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 7:1-10  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 7:1-10  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 7:9

---

**Luke 7:1-10—KJV**

NOW WHEN he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.  
2 And a certain centurion’s servant, whom was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.  
3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.  
4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:  
5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.  
6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

**Luke 7:1-10—NIV**

WHEN JESUS had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.  
2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.  
3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.  
4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this,  
5 “because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”  
6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.  
7 “That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.
7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.
8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

8 “For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”
9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”
10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often have faith in others based on their good reputation. How does one demonstrate that trust? The centurion in the book of Luke demonstrated his trust in Jesus’ ability to heal by telling Him just to speak a word.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Examine the faith expressed by the centurion as he told Jesus to “speak the word and his servant would be healed.”
2. Reflect on the power of Jesus as He acquiesced to the centurion’s request.
3. Become emboldened to share their own experiences with God’s showing His power in their own lives.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The incident of the text parallels that of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10—as the narratives in the two cases (1) involve Roman centurions and (2) witness expansion of the Gospel beyond Judaism.
—The parallel account in Matthew 8:5-13 is more condensed, resulting in no mention of the intermediaries. The event recorded in John 4:46-53 appears to be a similar but different incident.
—The healing incident occurs during Jesus’ first ministry tour of Galilee, making the centurion’s awareness of Jesus’ authority evermore amazing.
—The village of Capernaum, mentioned by name sixteen times in the Gospels, was something of a headquarters for Jesus while He ministered in Galilee (see Matthew 4:13). This may explain the centurion’s awareness in #3. Also, Jesus had demonstrated His spiritual “authority” at the synagogue in Capernaum with the casting out of an unclean spirit (see Luke 4:33). According to Luke 4:37, word got around.
—The centurions who appear in the New Testament are generally shown to be men of positive character. The centurion in Luke 7 is no exception.
—The nature of the illness is not stated in Luke’s account, but Matthew 8:6 notes that the servant was “lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.”
Teachers of CHILDREN
—Luke presents Jesus’ ministry as moving beyond the Jewish community into the Gentile community.
—Jesus travelled to Capernaum to see a centurion who wanted his servant healed.
—Because of his authority, the centurion sent others to ask Jesus to heal his servant.
—The centurion had power and authority, but he did not believe that he was worthy to meet Jesus and ask for his servant’s healing.
—Luke notes that the centurion’s faith was so strong that Jesus did not have to enter his house to heal the servant.
—Jesus praises the centurion’s faith and declares that He has not seen such faith before in all of Israel.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The first story in this section (Luke 7:1-50) sets forth themes that will be developed in the coming chapters. Here, Luke tells of a Gentile centurion’s response of faith in Jesus. Jesus’ authority is compared to that of the centurion, and Jesus heals the centurion’s slave. The emphasis given to the power of Jesus’ words forms a fitting transition from the sermon on discipleship in the previous chapter. The story implicitly promises that the Lord hears the prayers of faithful Gentiles and encourages us to believe that when we turn to the Lord in faith our requests will be heard. As is true of the gospel of Luke in general, this story is rhetorically crafted in that it uses literary means to persuade its audience. It offers the audience multiple opportunities to change their ways and overcome longstanding prejudices while exercising deep faith in the power of God to change our lives.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The story of the centurion’s extraordinary faith in Jesus reiterates a dominant theme in Luke’s writings: the inclusion of the Gentiles in the family of faith. One of Luke’s major purposes for writing was to demonstrate to Theophilus, a Gentile convert to Christianity (Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1), that Jesus had come to save both the Jews and the Gentiles. This theme can be seen in this gospel in the fact that Luke traced Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3:38), that he recorded the songs of Mary and Simeon—which both allude to the extension of salvation to the Gentiles (Luke 1:50; 2:32)—and that he emphasized Jesus’ association with the Samaritans (a group held in contempt by Jews because they were a “mixed race” contaminated by Gentile blood). This passage tells of Jesus’ extending His healing ministry to a Gentile and commending the centurion for his genuine faith (which rivaled the faith of Israelites). The faith of this centurion foreshadows the faith of another centurion, Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christianity (see Acts 10).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Centurion: the commander of a “century”—one hundred soldiers—the smallest unit of the Roman army. In New Testament times, there were ten centuries in a cohort and sixty centuries in a legion, making about six thousand soldiers per legion. The centurions, often called the backbone of the army, were responsible for keeping discipline, for inspection of arms, for commanding the century in both camp and field, and for the command of the auxiliaries. The centurion stationed at Capernaum
was praised by Jesus for his faith, and his servant was healed.

**Jewish Elders:** a term unique in the New Testament. Elsewhere, “the elders (of the people)” denotes prominent citizens as “lay” members of the Sanhedrin. Here, the reference is to local civic leaders and underlines the Jew-Gentile aspects of the story.

**Slave:** a person who is under obligation to render obedience to a master. Slaves in the New Testament period were not mistreated as a rule, and the slave in today’s lesson is considered a valuable member of the household.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

*Centurion (verse 6)—Greek: hekatontarchēs (hekā-ton-tār-khās): the captain of one hundred men.*

*Faith (verse 9)—Greek: pistis (pē’-stēs): assurance; belief.*

*Servant (verse 2)—Greek: doulos (dü’-los): a slave, servant, attendant.*

---

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. **Introduction**
   A. The Faith of a Centurion
   B. Biblical Background

II. **Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
   A. Breaking Down Barriers (Luke 7:1-3)
   B. An Act of Kindness Returned in an Hour of Need (Luke 7:4-5)
   D. Jesus’ Seal of Approval on the Centurion’s Faith (Luke 7:9-10)

III. **Concluding Reflection**

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Faith of a Centurion**

The healing of the Roman officer’s servant is told with real skill and warmth. After Jesus had returned to Capernaum, He was met by a delegation of Jewish leaders. They begged Him to rescue a centurion’s servant who was at the point of death. The centurion was a Roman officer normally in charge of a hundred men. The Jewish residents in the area respected the man, for he loved the Jewish people and had built a synagogue for them. Jesus accompanied them, but just before they reached the house, the officer sent some friends to plead his unworthiness and to ask directly for help. The man clearly acknowledged the authority of Jesus and believed He could intervene even in this crisis. Jesus commended the centurion for his faith, declaring that it outstripped anything He had seen in the land of Israel. This is one of two places in the gospels where Jesus is said to be amazed—here in Capernaum by faith and in Nazareth by unbelief (Luke 7:9; Mark 6:6).

The primary interest of the incident is in the positive response of the centurion that evoked such words of praise from Jesus. Jesus had been summoning His Jewish contemporaries to follow Him, and the response had been mixed. But here in a Gentile outsider, Jesus found
a man who had confidence that God was vitally at work in his ministry. The centurion’s military experience in the forces controlled by Herod Antipas served as a stepping stone to faith and taught him about the chain of command. He reasoned that, just as he gave order to those under his command, so Jesus could exercise authority in the spiritual sphere to the forces under His command. Just as the military man acknowledged that he was subject to his commanding officer, so he perceived that Jesus, in truth, was acting in true submission to His commander (that is, God) and could exercise his commission accordingly. The Gentile officer perceived that God was at work in Jesus, bringing in His divine kingdom and exercising powerful works of healing and benevolence. No wonder Jesus commended him.

B. Biblical Background

In Luke 7:1-10, we are told much about the centurion in a few verses, and he has the longest speech in the scene (verses 6-8). He is meant to be an impressive character. When a successful quester is praised by Jesus, as in verse 9, he or she tends to become a model for others. The centurion is a model of faith for all, but the fact that he is a Gentile and a centurion is also important in this scene.

After the introduction of the centurion and his slave’s need of healing, the scene is structured through the sending of two delegates to Jesus. The focus of the scene is on the centurion and on Jesus’ response to him. The healing is noted briefly in verse 10, its primary function being to reinforce Jesus’ favorable response and bring the centurion’s quest to a successful end. The scene is an interesting example of negotiation on the part of a centurion who is very sensitive to the social barrier between himself and a Jewish holy man. First, the centurion sends Jewish elders to Jesus. He apparently assumes that a recommendation from Jewish leaders is necessary for a Jewish healer to consider the case of a Gentile at all. The elders support their recommendation of the centurion by saying, “He loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us” (see verse 5). The centurion is a patron of the local Jews, and, according to current understanding of patron-client relations, his patronage establishes a lasting relationship with the beneficiaries, requiring reciprocal support from them. The elders are fulfilling their obligation to the centurion by speaking on his behalf to Jesus.

Apparently, Jesus sees no problem in healing the centurion’s slave, for He goes with the elders to the centurion’s house. Now, however, the centurion realizes that there may be another issue. It may be presumptuous of him to ask a Jewish holy man to defile himself by entering the dwelling of a Gentile. Hence, a second delegation is sent. The words the delegation speaks are the centurion’s, and they form the longest speech in this episode. Although the elders vouch for the centurion’s worthiness in verse 4, the centurion declares that he is not worthy either to have Jesus enter his house or to come directly to Jesus. For the sake of his slave and out of respect for Jesus, the centurion is laying his honor aside. Furthermore, it is not necessary for Jesus to come to his house. He can simply speak the word. Hearing this, Jesus “was amazed,” as the crowds were often amazed following a healing. He responds with strong words of praise: “I tell you, not even in
Israel have I found such faith” (verse 9, NRSV). Jesus is not denying that there is faith in Israel, but the centurion’s faith is extraordinary, and it is found where one would not expect it—in a Gentile soldier. His faith consists of his determination to surmount the social barrier between Jew and Gentile. He also shows faith by his willingness to lay aside his own honor, by his trust in Jesus’ healing power, and perhaps also by his insight into Jesus’ divine authority.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Breaking Down Barriers
   (Luke 7:1-3)

   NOW WHEN he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

   Capernaum had become Jesus’ “home base” while He was in Galilee (verse 1). Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was the largest of the many cities surrounding the lake. Far more than just a fishing village, it was the economic center of Galilee and sat near a major trade route, and thus was a wealthy city. The city housed a contingent of Roman soldiers even though Galilee was not under Roman occupation. Because Capernaum had the headquarters for Roman troops, the city was filled with heathen influences from all over the Roman Empire. The Gospels do not explain why Jesus chose this city, although it must have offered good possibilities for ministry as such. Three factors might have influenced Jesus’ decision to make Capernaum His home base: (1) it was farther away from the intense opposition of the Pharisees in Nazareth; (2) it was a busy place, so Jesus’ message could reach many people and spread quickly; and (3) it was home to several of the disciples and could provide extra resources and support for His ministry.

   Luke reports that a centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death (verse 2). A centurion was a Roman officer in charge of one hundred men. Often the sons of Roman senators or powerful figures would begin their careers at this level. This centurion desperately wanted his slave to be healed. Why so much concern about a slave? The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Roman soldiers had many slaves who trained and fought with them. This slave may have been the centurion’s personal attendant with whom he felt a close bond. Thus, this centurion made an appeal on behalf of his servant who was ill and close to death. The centurion had heard about Jesus, so he certainly knew of Jesus’ healing power (verse 3). Thus, he sent a request for healing to Jesus, apparently because he believed Jesus was sent from God. He may have known about the healing of the Roman official’s son (which probably occurred earlier; see John 4:46-54). He knew that Jesus had the power to heal his slave. The centurion sent messengers to Jesus asking Him to come and heal his servant. In those days, dealing with a person’s messengers was considered the same as dealing with the one who had sent them. Thus, in dealing with the messengers, Jesus was dealing with the centurion. For his Gentile audience, Luke highlighted the good relationship between the Jewish elders and the Roman centurion. As an army captain, he daily delegated work and sent
groups on missions, so this was how he chose to get his message to Jesus.

These opening verses mark a turning point in Luke’s account of Jesus’ ministry. Up until this point, Jesus had dealt exclusively with the Jews; here, He begins to include Gentiles. Notice who the main characters are in this short drama: the Jewish elders, a Roman centurion, and the centurion’s slave. The elders were part of God’s chosen nation. Centurions are generally regarded positively by the Gospel writers, but they were obviously not a part of the chosen people. And slaves were regarded at that time as human chattel, little more than mere property. Jesus broke through all those barriers to attend to the sick man’s needs.

B. An Act of Kindness Returned in an Hour of Need (Luke 7:4-5)

And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

The animosity between the Jews and the Romans was no secret. The Jews hated the occupation army; the Romans, in turn, hated the Jews. Yet in this story we find a different sort of Roman soldier—a man who seems to have been a God-fearing man. He loved the Jewish people, and he built their synagogue (meaning that he funded it and certainly had genuine interest in it and the God worshipped there). That this centurion could request a favor of these Jewish elders and have them respond so willingly would normally come as a surprise. That the elders appealed to Jesus earnestly on behalf of this centurion was even more out of character with normal Jewish/Roman relations. The elders appealed to Jesus, saying that this centurion was worthy.

The emissaries do not just bring the centurion’s request, but they also lobby on his behalf. They attempt to persuade Jesus to come and aid this soldier. The emissaries implore Jesus by offering a commendation. They describe the centurion as worthy of benefitting from Jesus’ power. The elders’ favorable treatment of the man raises the question of whether he was a Jewish proselyte. Most regard it as unlikely, since such an appeal could have made this status clear to justify the request. However, his affection for the Jewish people is clear because he provided the funds for a synagogue. Why would a foreign soldier do this? Possibly because Roman authorities believed that synagogues maintained order and morality. Moreover, the type of Jewish and Gentile cooperation that Luke will call for in Acts is previewed here. This story also highlights the fact that word about Jesus was reaching socially significant people of all races and was not just limited to the poor.


Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

Jesus accepts the elders’ invitation, a clear indication that His compassion has no racial limits. As word reached the centurion that Jesus was coming, he sent a second delegation to meet Jesus. The point of the second delegation
is not that Jesus should help a worthy, humble man, but that He need not come to the house to do so. Surely the centurion knew of the Jewish policy of not entering Gentile homes and may have realized, on second thought, his presumption in asking this Jewish teacher to come. Thus, when Jesus and the Jewish elders were not far from the house, the centurion sent another message by way of some friends: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof” (verse 6, NIV). He understood that since he was a Gentile, he was considered unclean by the Jews. He may also have felt himself unworthy to have Jesus enter his home, and he did not even consider himself worthy to come meet Jesus. The centurion showed that he had the true attitude of a disciple. He called Jesus “Lord,” indicating his respect for Jesus. This Gentile understood more than most of the Jews of Jesus’ day; he saw Jesus’ superiority. He saw that Jesus did not have to personally visit his home. The centurion understood that Jesus needed only to say the word to heal the servant (verse 7). Most of the people who came to Jesus sought to get close enough to touch Him to be healed, but this centurion knew that Jesus could also heal without touch. His word would be enough.

The centurion had authority by virtue of his position. He had soldiers under him who had been trained to respond unquestioningly. He was a man set under authority because final authority rested with the Roman emperor (verse 8). The emperor delegated responsibility to various officials such as this centurion. The centurion was accustomed both to obeying and to being obeyed. He may have understood that Jesus’ power and authority came from God. When Jesus spoke, God spoke. Jesus did not need rituals or medicines or even the man’s touch or presence to accomplish a healing. The centurion applied his understanding of authority to Jesus. Just as this officer did not need to be present to have his orders carried out, so Jesus did not need to be present to heal. The centurion had absolutely no doubt that Jesus could merely speak the word and heal the servant.

D. Jesus’ Seal of Approval on the Centurion’s Faith (Luke 7:9-10)

When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

This Roman centurion grasped the “big picture” about Jesus’ authority. The Jews who had been looking for Jesus could not see Him for who He was, yet this Gentile did. That’s why Jesus was amazed and exclaimed to the crowd that He had not seen faith like this in all the land of Israel (verse 9). This did not mean that no one in Israel had faith, but many did not accept the Good News. Without the benefit of growing up memorizing the Old Testament Scriptures and learning from esteemed Jewish leaders, this Gentile man understood the need to depend totally on Jesus’ power. He knew without a doubt that Jesus could do what seemed impossible. Such faith both astonished and pleased Jesus.

Luke did not even record another word spoken by Jesus but emphasized that the centurion’s faith had been well placed. The captain’s friends returned to his house and found the slave completely healed. Matthew wrote that “his servant was healed at that very hour” (see
Matthew 8:13), meaning he was healed immediately. The slave’s healing is reported without any indication of Jesus’ command to be healed. The focus is on the centurion’s faith, not the healing. Of course, the healing demonstrates Jesus’ authority, since the event reflects the authority that the centurion described in verse 8.

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

The healing of the centurion’s slave in Luke 7:1-10 foreshadows the expansion of Jesus’ ministry to the nations. The non-Jewish centurion had encountered the ministry of this Jewish teacher and had sought His aid. He had heard of Jesus’ work and understood the power and authority that the teacher possessed from God. He sensed that he was unworthy of receiving Jesus’ help. Jesus commends his insight as unique and offers the faith of this foreign soldier as an example to all. His combination of humility, dependent request, and trusting awareness of God’s power is the essence of faith.

The respect that this man received from Jews is a sub-motif in the account. Surely Jews and Gentiles can get along and share involvement with Jesus. Race makes no difference to God. This theme will receive more comprehensive treatment in Acts, but here the groundwork is laid to show that racial-religious distinctions are not part of the Gospel when one responds to Jesus. Above all, what is clear from this account is that Jesus has authority from God that extends over space, distance, and disease. He is gifted by God to a high degree. The healing He gives reveals the authority that He has to reverse the condition of those in need. He need not be physically present to respond. Anyone can share in the benefits that Jesus offers, if faith is exercised. The centurion’s faith is an example that should not stand alone. Luke is asking his readers to have the faith of the centurion.

**PRAYER**

_Eternal God, we pray that You would teach us daily how to trust in You and not doubt. Strengthen our resolve to say yes to Your will and to Your way in our lives. We give You thanks for Your faithfulness to us and Your promise never to leave us alone. We rest assured in the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen._

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(October 14-20, 2019)*

**Faith Can Heal**

October 27, 2019
Lesson 9

FAITH SAVES

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Extravagant Love
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Showing Love when You Are Forgiven

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Faith Saves
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** A Dinner to Remember

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
*John 13:3-11*

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 7:36-50
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 7:37-48
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Luke 7:38
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Luke 7:47

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 7:36-50
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 7:37-48
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 7:48

---

**Luke 7:37-48—KJV**
37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,
38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.
39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.
40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.
41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

**Luke 7:37-48—NIV**
37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.
38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.
39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”
40 Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.
41 “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.
42 “Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”
42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?
43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.
44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.
45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.
46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.
47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.
48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.
44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.
45 “You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.
46 “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.
47 “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”
48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often respond to forgiveness with loving acts. What can we do to show gratitude to those who forgive us? In the book of Luke, the sinful woman showed her gratitude to Jesus by washing His feet with her tears and anointing Him with expensive oil.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Examine how the sinful woman demonstrated her love and gratitude to Jesus.
2. Reflect on the love and devotion the woman must have felt to cross social barriers to anoint Jesus.
3. Become emboldened to resist any social pressures that would prevent expressions of love and gratitude for one’s salvation.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Despite some similarities, this event seems to be a different one from the anointing in Bethany recorded in Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8. Thus, Simon the Pharisee is not the same person as Simon the leper.

—The incident of the text is not the first time in Luke’s gospel that Jesus displays divine ability to know someone’s thoughts (compare Luke 5:22; 6:8), nor is it the last (compare 9:47; 11:17).
—A denarius was the daily wage of a laborer (see Matthew 20:2, footnote).
—Simon’s failure to extend the common courtesies of hospitality to Jesus (verses 44-46) suggests
that his motives for inviting Him were less than honorable. He was probably looking for an opportunity to discredit Jesus.
—This is the second time in Luke’s gospel that Jesus declared, “Your sins are forgiven.” (See Luke 5:20.)
—Jesus often interacted with “unlikely” people to bring them closer to God. (Examples: the demon-possessed man in Mark 5; Nicodemus in John 3; the Samaritan woman in John 4.)

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—Luke portrays the woman who washed Jesus’ feet against the disdain of the dinner host and his guests because they did not extend hospitality, as was the custom.
—Jesus did not allow the Pharisees’ jealousy or distrust of Him to keep Him from accepting Simon’s invitation to dinner.
—A woman, who was an uninvited guest, entered the dinner area with an expensive alabaster jar.
—Although her name is not given, she obviously was known by the other guests.
—The woman knelt behind Jesus, who was in a reclined position, wet His feet with her tears of pain, wiped His feet with her hair, and anointed His feet with oil from her expensive alabaster jar.
—Although Simon objected to what the woman did, Jesus reminded him that she had acted in faith and in love. Jesus then forgave the woman for her sins because of her faithfulness. The Pharisees questioned Jesus’ authority to forgive her sins.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
In a manner which distinguishes it from the other gospels, the third gospel depicts Jesus as the divine physician who came to seek and to save that which is lost. While Matthew places more emphasis on the fact that Jesus came as the fulfiller of the Old Testament prophecies, the gospel of Luke shows us in the first place how Jesus came as Redeemer. Time and time again the point is stressed in this gospel that Jesus offers forgiveness and redemption to all—freely and independently of the privileges of a particular race, generation, or merit. Admission into the kingdom is open to Samaritans and pagans, as well as to the Jews; to publicans, sinners, and outcasts. It is offered to respectable people, to the rich, and to the poor. It is offered to men as well as women. According to Luke’s gospel, the redeeming work of Christ is universal and all-embracing. Although He identified primarily with people in the lower levels of society, no person or home was off limits to Him. The seventh chapter of Luke shows that He was clearly not excluded from the home of Pharisees, which indicates that for at least a part of His ministry the Pharisaic hostility against Him was not total. The third gospel clearly chronicles that he came to redeem the whole of humanity.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
This wonderful story—with its encapsulated parable—is unique to Luke’s gospel. What distinguishes the story are the distinctive points of Lukan thematic interest: the language of possessions used to symbolize human relationships; the reading of hearts by the prophet; the forgiveness of sins; faith as saving; salvation leading to peace. Most of all, in the sinful woman we recognize again a member of the outcast poor, rejected by the religious elite as an untouchable, but like the poor throughout this gospel, showing by her acts of hospitality that she accepts the prophet Jesus. In contrast, the Pharisee invites Jesus to the table but violates all the rules.
of hospitality, and thereby shows (as he does also by his thoughts) that he does not accept Jesus as God’s prophet.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Simon the Pharisee:** a Pharisee in whose home Jesus attended a dinner and was anointed by another visitor.

**The Unnamed Woman:** encompasses one of the instances (more frequently in Luke) when Jesus has contact with women. In Luke 7, the name of the woman is never given. She is not Mary Magdalene, who introduces him in the next event. No evidence exists for supposing that this sinful woman was Mary Magdalene. Efforts to tie the two women together come later in biblical history.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Kissed** (verse 38)—Greek: *kataphileō* (kä-tä-fē-le’-ō): kissed much; kissed again and again; kissed tenderly.

**Pharisee** (verse 36 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *Pharisaios* (fä-rē-sī’-os): separatists (i.e., exclusively religious).

**Saved** (verse 50 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *sōzō* (sode’-zo): to save (in the technical biblical sense).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction

A. A Woman Who Knew How to Say “Thank You”

Throughout the Scriptures, sinners respond to Jesus in an open and trusting manner. The reasons for their response become clear in this passage, where Jesus’ approach to sinners strikingly contrasts that of the Pharisees’. This passage is also the first of two that commend the faith response of women to Jesus; thus, the issue of faith continues to take center stage in Luke’s account. The central themes of this account are linked to the main characters. The woman illustrates the gratitude, boldness, and humility of faith. The Pharisee pictures separatism confronted by Jesus. With His message, Jesus explains why sinners should be pursued. He also reveals how forgiveness possesses transforming power.

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. A Woman with a Sordid Past Anoints Jesus (Luke 7:37-38)


III. Concluding Reflection
Jesus is also asked to dinner and accepts the invitation. Even though the Pharisees opposed Him, He accepts the opportunity to visit with some of them. As was common in the ancient world, the guests recline on cushions beside the table. Since Jesus was a public figure, the door to this meal likely remained open, so that interested people could enter, sit at the edge of the room, and hear the discussion. The rebuke in Luke 7:39 is not because the woman has come to the meal, but because she did not stay on the sidelines.

The woman says nothing in this narrative, but her actions produce a wide range of discussion. Her sin is not identified. Perhaps she is a prostitute or has engaged in some other promiscuity to gain her reputation. But she boldly enters into the room and anoints Jesus’ feet with a jar of expensive perfume. The act reflects great sacrifice, for such perfume was very costly. The presence of this perfume indicates that the woman treats Jesus as an important visitor. Moved by the moment, she weeps as she anoints Jesus and kisses His feet. The action reflects her humility. But the action is shocking to Jesus’ hosts. Taken aback, the Pharisee begins to think to himself that Jesus must not be a prophet to allow such a woman to come into contact with Him.

The parable pictures two debtors: one with a fifty denarii debt and the other with a five hundred denarii debt (a two-month’s debt versus a twenty-month debt for a basic wage earner). The debt collector discovers that neither of them can pay. Now, Jesus asks, who would love the collector more? Simon gives an astute reply: the one who has been forgiven more. Here is the heart of Jesus’ relational ethic: unlike the Pharisee who can only dwell on the sinner’s past record, Jesus prefers to see the potential that love and forgiveness possess for changing a person’s heart. He points out how the woman cared for Him in a way His host has not. He mentions the washing of His feet, the greeting she gave in kissing His feet, and the anointing of His feet with perfume. None of these actions were required by the host, but the fact that the woman has engaged in them shows that she has taken extra steps to greet Him.

B. Biblical Background

The emphasis in this passage falls upon the question in Luke 7:49 (NIV): “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Luke intended that his readers would answer this question considering what preceded this and the previous chapters. This Jesus is one who has unusual power, for He can heal the sick (verses 1-10) and even raise the dead (verses 11-17). He is the coming one for whom Israel awaited and hoped (verses 18-35). He is indeed a prophet but more than a prophet, for He has the authority to forgive sins (verses 36-50). To this can be added earlier statements about His being the Son of the Most High, Lord, Christ, Son of David, Son of Man, and Savior of the world. Theophilus and Luke’s other readers could know the certainty of this because of the things Jesus did (verses 18, 22) and because of what this account reveals concerning Jesus’ unusual knowledge (of Simon’s thoughts and the woman’s status) and authority (to forgive sins). As elsewhere, an individual’s attitude toward Jesus revealed his or her relationship with God.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Woman with a Sordid Past Anoints Jesus
   (Luke 7:37-38)

   And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,
   when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s
   house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood
   at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his
   feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her
   head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the
   ointment.

   While Jesus did dine with tax collectors
   and others whom the religious elite thought to
   be “sinners,” He also would share a meal with
   a Pharisee. This Pharisee was named Simon.
   Jesus went to his house and reclined at the
   table. This was a customary position at a formal
   meal. Dinner guests would lie on couches with
   their heads near the table, propping themselves
   up on one elbow and stretching their feet out
   behind them. Generally, guests would remove
   their sandals; then their feet would be washed
   by servants before they reclined at the table. A
   woman, who may have been a prostitute, had
   learned that Jesus was eating at the home of a
   certain Pharisee. She enters the house, watch-
   ing the guests from the sidelines (verse 37).

   The woman brought an alabaster jar of
   perfume. Alabaster jars were carved, expen-
   sive, and beautiful. Such jars were made from
   a translucent, compact gypsum, carved with
   a long neck that was to be broken off when
   the contents were poured out. This jar held an
   expensive perfume. Many Jewish women wore
   a small perfume flask on a cord around their
   necks. This jar of perfume would have been
   valued very highly by this woman.

   Although the woman was not an invited
   guest, she entered the house anyway and knelt
   behind Jesus, at His feet. Because people were
   reclining as they ate (see 7:36), the woman
   could easily anoint Jesus’ feet without ap-
   proaching the table. She came intending to
   anoint Jesus with her perfume, but she began
   weeping, and as her tears fell onto His feet,
   she wiped them with her hair. This woman
   understood that Jesus was very special. Perhaps
   she, as a sinner, had come to Jesus with great
   sorrow for her sin. Or it could be that her sins
   were behind her and that though she had “lived
   a sinful life” (verse 37, NIV), she had found
   forgiveness. Despite this woman’s reputation,
   she came publicly to Jesus and kept kissing His
   feet and putting perfume on them. To wash
   Jesus’ feet was a sign of deep humility—it was
   the job of a slave.

B. An Act of Love Defended by Jesus
   (Luke 7:39-43)

   Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it,
   he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a
   prophet, would have known who and what manner of
   woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And
   Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat
   to say on thee. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed
   five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they
   had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell
   me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon
   answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he
   forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly
   judged.

   Simon the Pharisee looked over from his
   meal and saw the woman (with a notorious
   reputation) in his house, near his table, weep-
   ing and pouring perfume on the feet of his
guest. Any self-respecting rabbi would have realized this woman’s sinful nature and recoiled at being touched by her—for to be touched by a sinner would make Jesus unclean, and the Pharisees avoided any contact with “uncleanness.” This Pharisee concluded that if this man were a prophet, he would have known what kind of woman this is and would have told her to go away (verse 39). This religious leader had no concern for this woman’s plight, no desire to lift her from her sinful life or to help her become a better Jewish woman. Instead, he judged her as a sinner, shoved her aside, and presumed that any other rabbi would do the same.

While the words of Simon in verse 39 had not been spoken aloud, Jesus knew the Pharisee’s thoughts and so spoke up and answered them. He asked for Simon’s direct attention because He had something to say to him (verse 40). Simon had already made a judgment of Jesus and probably felt morally superior to Him as well. He probably was no longer interested in anything this self-styled prophet had to say. But Jesus had asked for his attention, so he acted like a good host. “All right, Teacher,” Simon replied, “go ahead.” As Jesus recounts this story, a creditor had one man who owed him five hundred denarii and another man who owed him fifty denarii. It would not be difficult for Simon to see which debtor would love the kind creditor more. So, Simon said, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt” (verse 43, NLT). Simon’s answer was grudging at best. Simon barely wanted to talk any longer to this guest who, Simon now believed, was some small-town, uninformed rabbi. Jesus had to show Simon his own sins—particularly the sins of ungraciousness and inhospitality—for him to understand his own need for forgiveness.


And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Jesus addresses the Pharisee and applies the parable to the current situation by contrasting Simon’s lack of courtesy to the woman’s devotion and courtesy. In doing so, the woman’s action as described in verse 38 is retold (the same verbs are used in both texts: weep, wipe, kiss, and anoint). In speaking to the Pharisee while turning to the woman, Jesus has the religious leader learn a lesson from the sinner as He draws attention to her (verse 44). The washing of the feet is the first of three acts that the woman performs that the Pharisee had not.

Jesus notes a second contrast: a kiss of greeting on the face versus a kiss of respect on the feet. An expression of respect and friendship, the kiss of greeting was customary, as the New Testament exhortations about the holy kiss show. Simon gave no such greeting, but the woman gave it in abundance, kissing Jesus’ feet from the point of His arrival. For the woman this was not a sign of friendship, but of humility, appreciation, awareness of Jesus’ approachableness, and maybe His forgiveness. Jesus makes a third contrast between the
Pharisee and the woman: the Pharisee did not anoint Jesus’ head with oil. Such an act was not required of a host but would be seen as a special courtesy. These are small acts of kindness that Simon might have thought he was too good to engage in. The sinful woman, by contrast, lavished tears, ointment, and kisses on Jesus. In this story, it is the grateful prostitute, and not the self-righteous leader, whose sins will be forgiven.

D. Jesus Forgives and Transforms Those Who Put Their Faith in Him
(Luke 7:47-48)

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

Jesus contrasts the result of the woman’s expression of love with the Pharisee’s. The woman’s actions cause Jesus to respond and make a point from His parable: two debtors—one with a great debt and the other with a small debt. Which one would be the most grateful? The parable explains why the woman acted, and her actions testify to the presence of forgiveness, which produced love. Because the woman was forgiven much, she loves much; her love is demonstrated by her actions, so that her great love reflects the presence of great forgiveness (verse 47). The forgiveness is not a result of the acts; rather, the acts testify to love’s presence in gratitude for the previous granting of forgiveness.

In addition, Jesus’ remarks make clear that He knows who the woman is. Simon had doubted that Jesus was a prophet because he had not discerned this about the woman. The reference to her many sins shows that Jesus knew all along. Simon should by now recognize that at least a prophet is present. Of course, Simon himself stands in contrast to the woman—for he represents the one who loves little and therefore is forgiven little (verse 47). Thus, Jesus said to her, “Thy sins are forgiven” (verse 48). This woman’s act of humility and love shows that she had been forgiven. Jesus did not overlook her sins. He did, in fact, know that this woman was a sinner (verse 39), and He knew that her sins were many. But the fact that her many sins were forgiven caused her to overflow with much love for Jesus.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In Luke 7:37-48, the actions of a silent, sinful woman speak a thousand words. Why does Jesus associate with sinners? It is because in forgiving sinners for a large debt of sin, God can transform them into people who display great love and gratitude for having been forgiven. Jesus understands this transformation, and it is at the heart of His mission. When this sinful woman displays an affection fueled by faith and thankfulness, Jesus, unlike the Pharisee, is not offended. The woman can know that God has seen her faith and forgiven her sin. In her response, the woman pictures and exemplifies the honorable actions of a forgiven sinner. Faith expresses itself in love, gratitude, humility, and devotion. Faith yields the fruit of forgiveness, which leads to the fruit of action.

The Pharisees’ response also comes into view, for their response is not commendable. Their distance from and hostility toward those who sin prevent the sinner from ever becoming
aware that God can be gracious, that God can transform the sinner. As will often be the case, the Pharisees are depicted as negative examples in Luke’s gospel. If one wants to see how not to respond, look to them. Such hostility toward sinners is to be avoided. Honesty about sin is important, but so is a clear message that God has graciously provided a solution to sin for the one who humbly approaches Him. The disciple is not special and is not to be like the proud Pharisee. Rather, the disciple is to reflect the same faith in Jesus, which is so commendable in this woman and which represents the starting point of her walk with God.

Finally, there is the question of Jesus. His discernment of the woman’s condition and the Pharisee’s thoughts indicate that He is clearly a prophet. But He also takes upon Himself the right to declare directly that a person’s sins are forgiven. This is the authority of God exercised in divine judgment. The fundamental theological and Christological question of the passage is asked by the Pharisees: “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49, NIV). Of course, the reader is aware that as far as Luke is concerned, the one who possesses such power is Jesus, the Christ.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for every way of life being as well with us as it is. We are mindful each day of Your kindness and tender-loving mercy. Help us to respond in like manner to all whom we meet. Keep ever before us that it is Your grace and forgiveness that have brought us safe thus far. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(October 21-27, 2019)*

**Faith Saves**

**MONDAY,** October 21: “God’s Salvation for All People” (Isaiah 52:7-10)  
**TUESDAY,** October 22: “Your Sins Are Forgiven” (Luke 5:20-26)  
**WEDNESDAY,** October 23: “Salvation Requires Enduring Witness” (Mark 13:9-13)  
**THURSDAY,** October 24: “All Who Call Will Be Saved” (Romans 10:5-13)  
**FRIDAY,** October 25: “Treat Each Other like Jesus Does” (John 13:12-20)  
**SATURDAY,** October 26: “Leaders Reject God’s Messenger” (Luke 7:24-30)  
**SUNDAY,** October 27: “Her Many Sins Have Been Forgiven” (Luke 7:37-48)
SELF-EXAMINATION

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YPUNG ADULT TOPIC: Look in the Mirror
YOUTH TOPIC: Check Yourself

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Examine Yourselves
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: High Standards

DEVOTIONAL READING
James 1:12-18

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11
KEY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 13:5

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11
KEY VERSE: 2 Corinthians 13:4b

2 Corinthians 13:1-11—KJV
THIS IS the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.
2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:
3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.
4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him by the power of God toward you.
5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

2 Corinthians 13:1-11—NIV
THIS WILL be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
2 I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others,
3 since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.
4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you.
5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?
6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.
6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.
7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.
8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.
9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.
10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.
11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

7 Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.
8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.
9 We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored.
10 This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.
11 Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often set goals to achieve personal growth. What can we do to gauge our personal development? Following previous difficulties, Paul then was forcibly reminding the Corinthians to examine themselves in comparison to God’s standards for faithful living.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Identify the standards of faithful living in Christ that guided the life of Paul.
2. Sense growth in faithful living by testing our lives in Christ.
3. Embrace faithful living as the basis for communal life in Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Paul’s call for self-examination in this text echoes what he said about the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:28-32.
—On Paul’s first trip to Corinth he planted the church (see Acts 18:1-18; 2 Corinthians 1:23-24).
—His second trip was very painful because of the open rebellion against him, causing him to suffer humiliation and leaving without retaliating (2:1, 5-8; 7:8-13; 11:4).
—Second Corinthians 12:14-15 confirms the third trip. (Evidence that two or three witnesses are required is found in Deuteronomy 19:15.)
—Paul indicated that he would not spare the Corinthians and he used the tone of a stern father (see 1 Corinthians 4:18-21).
—Christ’s weakness and humiliation displayed on the Cross resulted in God’s power being exhibited in His resurrection.

—Paul closes this letter by summarizing the central conclusion of the letter with five commands underlining the importance of Paul’s appeal to conversion. Three commands focus on the Corinthians’ relationship with Paul as their apostle. The last two focus on their life together as a family of believers reconciled to each other and to God.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Paul visited the Corinthian church on two other occasions. He sent a warning letter to the church regarding how they should live according to Christ.

—Paul admonished believers and unrepentant sinners who were not living in a Christlike manner that their behavior would not be tolerated.

—During that time, various types of punishments included public confrontation, church discipline, and removing the person from the church—excommunication.

—Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to mature in their faith so that they would become stronger in Christ and would be able to withstand cultural and social norms of their day.

—Paul was given authority by God to serve as a leader of the Gentiles to build up the church/the people.

---

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Corinth was one of the most illustrious city-states of ancient Greece. Its history stretches back to the eighth century BC and is marked by political, commercial, and cultural achievements. At the apex of Corinth’s influence, it became the leading city of the Achaian League, a federation of Greek cities aimed at securing greater political fortunes. When Paul first arrived in Corinth (AD 51) he walked into a flourishing metropolis of nearly one hundred thousand residents. In many respects, this city was different from its ancient counterpart as it existed some three hundred years prior. Since Corinth was a Roman colony, the ruling elite were largely Roman, and Latin was the dominant language among the power brokers of the city. Corinth was the seat of the Roman provincial governor and therefore had a military presence. Yet, the city also contained a large population of native Greeks, and so the designation “Greco-Roman” is truly applicable to the Corinth of the first century.

---

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

In recent years, a consensus has emerged in New Testament scholarship concerning a profile of Corinth and its citizens. This usually involved Corinth’s relative wealth, status consciousness, devotion to rhetoric, emphasis on physical appearance, upward mobility, and licentiousness. Paul confronts numerous manifestations of these cultural values throughout his letters to this church, and as a result we know more about the Christian community in Corinth than about any other New Testament assembly. We also know more about Paul’s turbulent relationship with this church more than with any other church he founded. Of the numerous letters that Paul wrote to Corinth, only two have survived—1 and 2 Corinthians.

The overarching purpose of 2 Corinthians can be described as reconciliation and restoration.
Paul’s chief prayer for the Corinthians is for their “restoration” (13:9). The restorative work that needs to take place relates to God and to Paul and relates to relationships among the Corinthians themselves. Paul’s hope is that this letter will prepare the ground for his impending visit, so that when he arrives he will not have to wield his authority in discipline but can use it for the edification of the saints in Corinth (13:10).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. A Call to Self-examination
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The “Testimony” of the Third Visit
      (2 Corinthians 13:1)
   B. Warning: Christ Will Deal with You Powerfully
      (2 Corinthians 13:2-4)
   C. A Plea for Self-examination
      (2 Corinthians 13:5-7)
   D. Edification: The Purpose of Paul’s Letter
      (2 Corinthians 13:8-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. A Call to Self-examination

The opening verses of chapter 13 provide a final warning to the Corinthians to change their ways or face a rod of discipline. This section of 2 Corinthians represents one of the most sobering passages in Paul’s letter. His tone is solemn, even stern, and his words have been carefully chosen. The matter under discussion is Paul’s judgment of sin on his next visit. He is sending a fair warning—a heads-up—that on the forthcoming visit he would be forced to show the Corinthians a side of himself which they would find to be unwelcome. Without laying out detailed plans and procedures, the apostle clearly indicates that he has given forethought to the process and protocols of judging sin and implementing harsh discipline. Paul intends this third trip to straighten matters out in the Corinthian church. Early in 2 Corinthians he defends his chosen travel plans (1:15-23). Now, as he moves toward the close of his letter, the apostle clearly anticipates being back with the church at...
Corinth. He has sent Titus and the brothers to make sure the Corinthians are prepared for his imminent return, and that they will also be ready with a generous donation for the collection he is taking up (9:3-4).

In anticipation of his third trip, the apostle speaks bluntly of his concerns about finding the community fragmented, dysfunctional, and harboring recalcitrant, unrepentant, immoral members. So, echoing through this lengthy letter we find notes of anticipation about the coming trip, as if Paul is poised, ready for the return but somewhat anxious about it as well. Among other things, 2 Corinthians 13:1-10 communicates a resounding note of accountability. Paul wants the Corinthians to examine themselves (verse 5), desiring them to be rightly related to God (verse 7). He is not looking forward to dealing with them harshly when he arrives (verse 10), but if that is what it takes for the truth to be advanced and for the Corinthians to become “fully qualified” (verses 8-9), he will not hesitate to use his authority, not to tear them down but to build them up (to edify). Paul communicates to the Corinthians that he understands himself to be in contention with them and that he intends to assert his apostolic authority over them in no uncertain terms. At the same time, he makes clear to them that this authority is nothing other than the power of God, which appears paradoxically in Paul’s weakness.

B. Biblical Background

In 2 Corinthians 13:1-10, Paul models for us several healthy practices that make for a loving, edifying form of accountability, one that is “for building up, not tearing down” (see verse 10). Notice that, playing off Deuteronomy 19:15, the apostle speaks of “validation of an accusation” in verse 1. Exercising accountability in the community has serious implications for a person’s life and therefore must not be approached lightly. Paul had worked with the unrepentant over time. Thus, the accountability he brings is not a rush job to resolve tension in the church. His repeated trips and encounters with believers in Corinth have served to validate that those who need to be confronted are in destructive patterns of behavior. Validation serves to slow the rush to judgment on matters of importance.

Second, in a related vein, Paul offers warnings and therefore opportunities for change. Warnings, in a sense, give a person caught in a pattern of sin the space to make a change of direction. Third, not depending merely on human strategies or abilities, Paul’s form of accountability is Christocentrically powerful. Whatever the manifestation of the power of Christ he has in mind, the apostle depends on Christ’s power to deal with the situation in Corinth.

Fourth, Paul challenges those caught in sin to assess their spiritual conditions. He does not assume that their association with the church equals their spiritual regeneration. Fifth, the apostle vies for what is right and true rather than the affirmation of his position. This is not about Paul; it is about the spiritual well-being of those in Corinth, and Paul rejoices in their spiritual well-being. Paul’s authentic ministry always keeps in clear view that the purpose of the ministry is to build up, not tear down the church.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The “Testimony” of the Third Visit
   (2 Corinthians 13:1)

   THIS IS the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of
   two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

   Paul begins 2 Corinthians 13 by speaking of the third visit he intends to make to Corinth. His first trip to Corinth, in AD 50, involved the founding of the church and an eighteen-month stint of ministry in the city (see Acts 18:1-11). The second, the “sorrowful visit” mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:1-2, was in the spring of AD 54, growing out of Timothy’s troublesome report on his recent visit to Corinth. Now, Paul will take a third trip to the Corinthians to receive the collection for Jerusalem, to address charges that have been made against him, and to confront those who are still living in blatant sin. Without any introductory formula, the apostle abruptly reinforces this third important purpose for the trip with a passage of Scripture from the Old Testament: “Every accusation must be validated on the testimony of two or three witnesses”; Paul takes the passage from Deuteronomy 19:15. Witnesses against a person must be neither too few nor false, harming a person by bearing false witness. The requirement that there be “two witnesses and three” means “at least two witnesses or more,” if possible, for conviction; and this legal demand was unique in the ancient world, found neither in Greek nor Roman law.

   Church discipline has always been a part of what it means to be a body committed to each other and to the teachings of Scripture. Discipline is not a hammer for crushing a wayward brother or sister. It is a redemptive intervention that calls people to turn back to the Lord, who loves them. God honors the prayerful, careful administering of loving church discipline.

B. Warning: Christ Will Deal with You Powerfully
   (2 Corinthians 13:2-4)

   I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present,
   the second time; and being absent now I write to them
   which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if
   I come again, I will not spare: Since ye seek a proof of
   Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak,
   but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified
   through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God.
   For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him
   by the power of God toward you.

   “Those who sinned earlier” (verse 2, NIV) are the immoral persons of 2 Corinthians 12:21b who did not repent during Paul’s “painful visit” and were evidently still indulging in their sexual sins. “And all the others” (see verse 2) are probably those Corinthians who had been adversely influenced by the false apostles and were arrogantly fomenting unrest within the church (12:20b). Both groups here receive their final warning. If they remained unrepentant, he would be harsh in his use of authority, perhaps handing the wrongdoers over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (see 1 Corinthians 5:5).

   In their immaturity the Corinthians were unimpressed by Christ-like gentleness and meekness but were overawed by arbitrary displays of power. In their misguided judgment, Paul’s gentle demeanor, so unlike the temperament of the intruding false apostles, raised doubts about his claim to apostolic authority (verse 3). He needed to give them some proof that Christ in His resurrection power
was speaking through him. His reply was that, though he had previously been “weak” in the Corinthian estimation, his impending severity would afford the proof they demanded that he was a spokesperson of Christ—Christ, who was not weak in dealing with them but was powerful among them. The Corinthians had in effect challenged Christ, who would not disappoint them as he exhibited his resurrection power through his apostle.

The relationship between Christ and Paul about weakness and power is now clarified. Jesus Christ was crucified “because of weakness” (see verse 4). This weakness was not, of course, physical frailty or moral impotence, but rather the “weakness” of nonretaliation or nonaggressiveness before humankind and the “weaknesses of obedience to God.” Christ’s “weakness” in assuming the poverty of earthly existence and in humbling Himself and becoming obedient even to the point of death on a cross (see Philippians 2:8) was, however, the most perfect evidence of strength. The person who is “weak” in humankind’s estimation because he or she seeks to do God’s will is in fact supremely strong. However, that “weakness” of Christ is past. Now, he or she lives a resurrection life sustained by the power of God.

Because of being in Christ, Paul shared in the weakness of his crucified Master. Because of his fellowship with Christ, he shared in the mighty power of his risen Lord, a power imparted by God. From a human standpoint, the nonretaliation and nonassertiveness that had marked Paul’s conduct on his second visit to Corinth (10:1) were simply weakness, but on his forthcoming visit, God’s power would be vigorously displayed through him in his dealings with the Corinthians.

C. A Plea for Self-examination
(2 Corinthians 13:5-7)

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

In verses 5-7, Paul argues that instead of the Corinthians demanding proof that Christ was speaking through him, the Corinthians ought to be examining and testing their own selves. He repeats “yourselves” twice to emphasize his request that they engage in self-examination before they begin criticizing others (verse 5). Paul further presses them with a question formed in the Greek language to expect a positive answer: “You are certain, aren’t you, that Jesus Christ is in/among you? Unless perhaps you fail to meet the test!” Once again, Paul takes their indictment of him to mean that they want proof that Christ is speaking in him (13:3) and turns that notion against them by urging that they test or show proof regarding themselves, and he even insinuates that they may fail the Jesus test.

Verse 6 implies that the Corinthians’ belief in the genuineness of their faith carried with it the proof of the genuineness of Paul’s apostleship and gospel, for he had become their father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (see 1 Corinthians 4:15). The Corinthians who were now complaining about him are the men and women in Christ who formed the verification of his credentials. Only if they doubted their own salvation should they doubt Paul’s claim to be a true “apostle of Christ Jesus” (1:1). If they did not fail the test then neither did Paul (verse
6). In verse 7, Paul anticipates and answers the objection that he had been commending or defending himself. His chief desire and his prayer to God were not for his vindication but for their avoidance of wrongdoing, both for the sake of their lives in Christ and to blunt the need for him to engage in severe punishment. The wrong they might do would certainly include a refusal to repent of sin and to repudiate the visitors from Palestine. It would be better that the Corinthians did what they knew to be good and right—even if this were to place Paul seemingly in the wrong—than that they should do something wrong. Paul did not expect to be shown up as counterfeit, but even such a price would be worth paying if it guaranteed that the Corinthians would do good.

D. Edification: The Purpose of Paul’s Letter
(2 Corinthians 13:8-11)

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

In verses 8-9, the apostle further explains his desire that the Corinthians would do what is “right” rather than what is “evil” (verse 8). Rather than taking this bold assertion as a lofty aphorism, our interpretation of Paul’s thought here must be guided by the immediate context, specifically by what he has been saying about the disciplinary action he will bring to bear if those who should repent do not. In short, Paul’s power-filled authority will be brought to bear against the Corinthians if they do not repent. But if they do repent, he will not act against them.

Paul’s primary concern was to further and consolidate the truth of the Gospel. So, he was happy whenever his converts gave evidence of robust and mature Christian character. If the Corinthians were strong in Christ, there would be no occasion for him to use his apostolic authority harshly. He would be able to come to them in the “weakness” of a “gentle spirit.” Such “weakness” on his part as a result of “strength” on their part would make him rejoice. In fact, his prayer was precisely for the restoration of the Corinthians to spiritual strength and wholeness (verse 9).

Was Paul’s final visit to Corinth an unpleasant one? Though direct evidence is lacking, there are several indications that it was not unsuccessful. First, during the visit (which lasted three months according to Acts 20:2-3, probably in the winter of AD 56–57) he wrote the epistle to the Romans. This letter seems to betray some apprehension for the future but none for the present. Second, Paul could hardly have planned to visit Rome and then do pioneer evangelism in the West if the church in the city he was writing from was in a state of disorder and disloyalty. Third, it is clear from Romans 15:26-27 that the Corinthians heeded Paul’s appeal in 2 Corinthians 8–9 and completed their collection for the saints in Jerusalem. Twice Paul notes that they “were pleased” to contribute, scarcely an appropriate description unless the church in Corinth was in harmony with the promoter of the collection. Fourth, the very preservation of 2 Corinthians (presumably at Corinth) argues in favor of the success of the visit promised in it.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Differences of opinion, different notions of what ought to be done, and even disputes may be inevitable. It is not wrong in church or among friends to have differences of opinion and to find ways to adjudicate them. The critical issue becomes how you live with those with whom you differ, and how you adjudicate differences. Though arrogance and disregard for others may lead us to think otherwise, virtue and truth seldom reside on one side alone.

Calling on one another to conduct a self-test is important, even basic, to the life of faith because self-testing can become the occasion not only for repentance—for a change of one’s ways—but also for improvement or growth. Worship services are a prime, regular time for such self-assessment, but nothing should prevent anyone from taking stock of oneself at any time. Believers have a responsibility to care for and about one another. The call for self-testing is not to be confused with sitting in judgment on someone else; that would be inappropriate poaching on God’s territory. A good rule of thumb might be to require self-scrutiny before you ask someone else to examine his or her own life. It is always self-testing that is to be done; the most you can do regarding another person is to request a self-test.

Self-sacrifice, the giving of oneself for another, is a deep-seated Christian notion. Paul employs self-sacrifice in today’s lesson. Love considers the other person and seeks the good for that person. When love for another causes self-harm, however, then love threatens to become self-hatred and, therefore, is not the love that truly loves the neighbor as oneself. Discernment must be employed to realize when proper giving way to others drifts over the line and becomes improper treatment of oneself.

PRAYER

Eternal God, teach us how to live and love in community. Help us to hold one another accountable to the good and the right that You desire in all our lives. When those times come when we have not lived up to all that You would have us to be, please imbue us with a spirit of forgiveness along with the spirit of accountability that Your righteousness requires. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(October 28–November 3, 2019)

Self-examination

MONDAY, October 28: “Weigh the Evidence Carefully” (Deuteronomy 19:15-20)
TUESDAY, October 29: “Building Up Your Faith Community” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)
WEDNESDAY, October 30: “Preparing for the Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:26-29)
THURSDAY, October 31: “Honor Your Elders” (1 Timothy 5:17-22)
FRIDAY, November 1: “Test the Spirits” (1 John 4:1-8)
SATURDAY, November 2: “Give Generously to Enrich Your Life” (2 Corinthians 9:10-15)
November 10, 2019

Lesson 11

BE EXAMPLES OF FAITH

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT TOPIC: Let It Shine

YOUTH TOPIC: Follow My Example

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Do the Right Thing

CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Choosing the Best

DEVOOTIONAL READING

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

ADULT KEY VERSES: 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8a

YOUTH KEY VERSES: 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

KEY VERSE: 1 Thessalonians 1:9b

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10—KJV

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;
3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;
4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.
5 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.
6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.
7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.
8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10—NIV

2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.
3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.
4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you,
5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.
6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.
7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
8 The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has
place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.
9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;
10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often look for positive examples to emulate. How can we be positive examples? The Thessalonians were praised because they were positive examples to others, exhibiting strong faith and committing loving acts even amid trials and persecution.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Comprehend the importance of the witness of the Thessalonian Christians despite their trials.
2. Appreciate the role of faithful imitators of Christ.
3. Become positive examples of faith and love to other believers in Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The founding of the church in Thessalonica, to whom Paul wrote this letter, is recorded in Acts 17:1-9.
—Thessalonica was located in Macedonia; Achaia was at the southern tip of the same peninsula as Macedonia.
—Paul’s time in Thessalonica was cut short, so he sent Timothy to assist the people there and then wrote this letter (and later a second) to further teach them and to clarify what he had already taught them.
—When Paul says, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord” (verse 6, NIV), he anticipates what he will later tell the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (see 1 Corinthians 11:1; see also 1 Corinthians 4:16).
—This text is one of several in which Paul links faith, hope, and love. (See 1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 1:4-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:8.)
—The church in Thessalonica had become a beacon for other house churches that were experiencing the same kinds of difficulties and troubles.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—The Thessalonian church was located in the largest city and was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Many religious beliefs, including idol worship, and cultural practices were a part of the life of the city.
—Paul praised the Thessalonian believers for their faithfulness and their courage to stay believers despite the persecutions they endured.
—Many of the Christians were young believers and Paul did not want their faith compromised by the various cultural and religious opinions that existed in the city.
—Paul reminded the Thessalonian church that they were chosen by God and had power through the Holy Spirit.
—The power of the Holy Spirit brought a change into their lives that fueled their convictions to grow deeper in Christ.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Thessalonica was named after the stepsister of Alexander the Great, wife of the general Cassander who founded the city in 316–315 BC. The poet Antipater called Thessalonica the mother city of Macedonia; it was personified by a city goddess with a crown of turrets. When Paul composed 1 Thessalonians around AD 50, he had been preaching about the resurrection of Jesus for more than a decade. Paul’s intellectual formation as a Pharisee had prepared him to explain in depth the profound traditions of Judaism. Building on that theological bedrock, Paul’s approach to Christian evangelism in the middle years of the first century AD would have been as a mature teacher who had come to understand his Jewish monotheism through the interpretive lens of the resurrected Jesus. While 1 Thessalonians may not be the first letter Paul wrote to the early churches, it is the earliest extant Christian document. It presents us with the first known written communication about the kerygma (the apostolic proclamation of salvation). One therefore approaches this letter recognizing that we are reading the experienced Paul who had carefully formulated in preaching, and probably in writing, for both Jewish and Gentile listeners, what he considered essential in his presentation of the Gospel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The city of Thessalonica had a long and colorful history before Paul’s arrival in AD 50 or 51. His arrival is believed to have occurred in the midst of his second missionary journey detailed in Acts 15:40–18:23. Though it fell under the dominion of the Roman Empire, by the time of Paul’s appearance the rule of the Empire was indirect. It did continue, however, as a senatorial province. The city had an excellent location at the head of the Thermaic Gulf. It was also situated on a major trade route running north and south. Thessalonica was considered by many to be the key to the whole of Macedonia (Witherington, 1 & 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary [2006], pp. 1-2). Timothy returned from his Thessalonica mission with a good report of the work of the Christians in that church. His report filled Paul’s heart with joy and prompted the writing of 1 Thessalonians.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Paul: the most effective missionary of early Christianity and the church’s first theologian. More than one-fourth of the writings of the New Testament are attributed to him.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Gospel (verse 5)—Greek: euaggelion (yü-ăn-ge’-lē-on): the glad tidings of salvation through Christ.
Imitators (verse 6)—Greek: mimētēs (mim-ay-tacē): “followers” (KJV).
Model (verse 7)—Greek: tupos (too’-pos): an example; “ensamples” (KJV).
Work (verse 3)—Greek: kopos (ko’-pos): intense labor united with trouble and toil.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Word of Thanksgiving and Hope to the Thessalonians

Many consider 1 Thessalonians to be the earliest of Paul’s letters. Many scholars hold to this belief because the first five chapters of the book reveal to us so much of the thinking of Paul as relates to his missionary activity. The book contains a number of his characteristic doctrinal emphases as well as displaying the depth of his feeling about the Christians of Thessalonica to whom he had ministered. They were clearly dear to Paul’s heart and his letter shows those deep feelings from pastor to people (Longman and Garland, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon [2006], p. 363).

There is much for us to learn about Christian living in these letters. The Thessalonian Christians lived together as a community called together by God, in obedience to God, while waiting for His Son, Jesus, to return. Jesus is the focus of the Thessalonians’ hope for the future. He gives authority to the life and practices of the church while causing their love for one another to grow. These letters of Paul can be boiled down to one theme: the ongoing need for the Thessalonians to put their hope in God. Living “in-between times” as they are requires them to put their unadulterated trust in the Almighty. Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, as with other letters in his corpus, are filled with hope. It is not a hope, however, that does not take into consideration the gravity of their plight. Paul keeps it real while at the same time encouraging them not to give up their hope in God to make their situations better in His own good time.

This message of hope is one we need to hear in our own day and time. We too, like the Thessalonians, are also living “in-between times” and often feel alienated from the world and the powers that be. It can at times appear that God almighty has abdicated the throne. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians can also be a source of encouragement to us to keep the faith and not grow weary in well-doing. We are not alone, and God is still on the throne. This letter offers hope to those who press on and live each and every day of their lives in the power of
the Spirit. The hope of which Paul speaks does not connote wishful thinking or uncertainty; rather, it speaks about trust in a future that God has promised and that we have not yet seen. This hope is oriented toward the future (Terence Paige, *1 & 2 Thessalonians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* [2017], p. 56).

**B. Biblical Background**

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy open the letter to the Thessalonians with an extended thanksgiving. They first thank God for the Thessalonians’ faith, love, and hope (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3). The Christian virtues of faith, love, and hope, along with their fruit in work, deeds, and continual anticipation of Christ’s return, characterized these believers (3:6, 8; 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4). The authors then recall how the Gospel was proclaimed to the Thessalonians (1:4-5) and how they received the divine message (1:6-10). The authors would return to these themes in the following chapters, highlighting the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel in 2:1-12, and the Thessalonians’ reception of the message in 2:13-16.

First Thessalonians 1 gives us more detail of what happened spiritually among the Thessalonian believers than what is described in Acts 17:1-11. The authors’ recollections of the Thessalonians’ spiritual conversion tell us that the proclamation of the Gospel came with miraculous power, with the Holy Spirit, and with great fullness. The awesome power and living presence of the Holy Spirit, which is none other than the spiritual presence of Christ, is what really convinced the pagans in Thessalonica to turn to the living God and abandon idols.

These were the signs that the Thessalonian believers were chosen by God. God’s elect are a privileged people. They constitute a royal priesthood, and they, collectively, are God’s habitation. Membership among God’s people, the church, is due to God’s initiative, prior to all human response, made before time began. It is God who has called men and women to be His people, and those who respond are elect. God’s call does not depend on any virtues or merits of humankind. Indeed, He chooses the foolish things by worldly standard to shame the wise; the weak to confound the strong; and the low and insignificant to bring to nothing those who think that they are something (see 1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Because of election there are no grounds whatever for human boasting in achievement or position. Whoever the elect are they owe it entirely to God, and they cannot boast or compare themselves with other people.

Belief in dogma alone would not have sustained the Thessalonians through the immediate onslaught of persecution against them. They received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit despite the severe suffering it brought them (see 1 Thessalonians 1:6). The writers of 1 Thessalonians, relieved to hear that the spiritual joy was still sustaining them, wanted to remind them that suffering was part and parcel of following Jesus. The Lord Jesus suffered, the apostles of Jesus suffered, and believers in Jesus would suffer. Christians should expect to suffer, at least in part, some of the things Jesus suffered. As the Thessalonians followed the example set by Jesus and the apostles, they became examples to others. As those empowered by the Spirit, they endured persecution with joy, and maintained their faith in God; consequently, they became an exemplary church in the surrounding regions of Macedonia and Achaia. This is the only place
in the entire New Testament where a church is called an exemplary model for all other believers (verse 7). The Thessalonians modeled a living faith in the face of persecution. Not only were their lives exemplary and influential to those around them, but the Thessalonians may have also proclaimed the Gospel to the surrounding region.

The Thessalonians had heard the Gospel message empowered by the Spirit and had believed that Jesus was the Son of God raised from the dead. Belief in the risen Christ is the core of the Christian faith. However, they had not yet seen Jesus and were therefore looking forward to His coming, which from their perspective was imminent. This coming is the sudden return of Jesus Christ to gather together His believers and to execute God’s judgment. At this point, they would experience their ultimate salvation—salvation from God’s wrath. For the most part, salvation was an imminent, future event, one that would happen when Jesus returned from heaven to deliver the believers from their enemies. The early Christians hoped the Lord’s return would occur at any moment. The infinitive “to wait for” (1:10) pictures an eager and expectant looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus, whose arrival was anticipated at any time. When He came, Jesus would rescue them from the terrors of the coming judgment.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Giving Thanks to God for the Thessalonian Christians

(1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.

It was Paul’s practice to begin his letters by thanking God for his readers. The only exception is the letter to the Galatians, where indignation and disappointment overruled gratitude. The Thessalonians, however, did not disappoint him. Paul found much in their lives for which to be grateful. Paul was not alone in gratitude. The pronoun “we” includes Silvanus and Timothy as sharing in his appreciation (verse 2). By thanking God at the beginning of the epistle, Paul lifts the thought above the human level and rises above the conventional opening of letters for his time. He is not trying to win over the Thessalonians by rhetorical flattery. On the contrary, he is sincerely trying to give the ultimate credit to the One from whom spiritual progress comes. When Christians realize their complete dependence on God and keep this in clear focus, then and only then are they capable of moving on to greater spiritual exploits. “All of you” expresses Paul’s desire not to exclude any of the Thessalonian believers. Every single one of them, no matter how obscure, had certain qualities worth thanking God for. Making mention of his readers at prayer times enabled him not only to thank God for their progress, but also to intercede for their advancement in the Gospel.

If the occasion of thanksgiving to God for the believers in Thessalonica were the times of prayer (verse 2), then the motivation for the thanksgiving was the memory of the Christian virtues that were clearly evidenced in these believers’ lives. “We remember” (verse 3) does
not introduce a petition but indicates that they recalled and even mentioned in their prayers the faith, love, and hope of the Thessalonians as the grounds of their thanksgiving to God. The memory of the church was recent and was refreshed by the news Timothy brought of their faith and love and their steadfastness that sprang from their hope in God. Paul had feared for their faith and constancy because of the persecutions they were enduring, and for this reason the report from Timothy was received with abundant thanksgiving.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy remembered their “work produced by faith, . . . labor prompted by love, and . . . endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (verse 3, NIV). They found in these believers the trinity of classic Christian virtues: faith, love, and hope. Far from being passive or hidden, these virtues could be witnessed in the Thessalonians’ conduct. Paul and the others remembered their work produced by faith. Although the object of their faith was God, this faith was given active expression in their work. Paul states categorically that salvation is by faith and not by human works, but he also interjects that faith has its fruit in good works. The source of their perseverance was not some inner resolve or personal strength but their hope in the Lord, Jesus Christ. The hope they held was not some vague expectation about a better future but, rather, solid confidence rooted in the expectation of Christ’s return.

B. Assurance of the Thessalonians’ Salvation
(1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Paul declared that he and his companions offered thanks to God for the Thessalonians in their times of prayer (verse 2) and indicated that the grounds for their gratitude was the authentic Christian character of these believers (verse 3). Now he presents the second and most profound reason for their thankfulness to God: “For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you” (verse 4, NIV). Paul was convinced that God had chosen the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica because of the way the Gospel had come to them. God had spoken to them in the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel, and they had received the message as God’s Word. Paul and his associates saw in all this clear evidence of their election. Paul mentions the root cause of the Thessalonians’ election as he calls them those who are loved by God. Frequently, biblical authors affirm that God chose His people Israel and now the church, because of His own love for them. In other words, God’s election is not based on human merits or virtue; instead, His decision and initiative are rooted solely in His love. In the Greek world, the election or recruitment of political and military leaders had to do with the merits and the character of the persons chosen. But in God’s community, nothing less than the love of God is the cause of election, regardless of the positive or negative character or achievements of a person.

Paul refers to the message about Jesus Christ as “our gospel” (verse 5). This does not mean that the apostle claimed to be the originator of the doctrines he taught, nor did he think that the Gospel’s success depended on his own strength or ability. He will refer to it
in this letter as “the gospel of God” (2:2) and “the gospel of Christ” (3:2). The Gospel Paul touted was not about himself but about God and His Son, Jesus, and the salvation they offer by grace through faith. It was Paul’s gospel, however, in the sense that Paul had embraced it for his own salvation. He was relying on this Gospel for his own soul’s destiny. It was also a message that had been entrusted to him.

Christians today have not received the apostolic office like Paul, but we have all been inducted as participants in Jesus’ Great Commission: “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . .” (see Matthew 28:19-20). The Gospel has thus been committed to us in a way similar to how it was entrusted to the apostles. We will be effective in spreading the Gospel to the extent that we embrace this calling and rely on the Good News of Jesus for our own salvation. Paul makes it clear that the Gospel message requires an authentic messenger to the world. He writes, “You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (1 Thessalonians 1:5, NASB). It is obvious that Paul became personally involved in the lives of the Thessalonians, since he can state that they have personal knowledge of his character and spirit. He had ministered “among” them, so that they could assess in his life the credibility of his message.

Today, increasing percentages of Christians attend churches that are so large that few attendees have personal contact with their pastors. Many other Christians depend on media personalities whom they may never meet in the flesh. When such preachers are faithfully proclaiming God’s Word, some real good will be done. But the biblical model involves heralds of the Gospel whose lives are personally known by those to whom they preach. Such people are never going to be perfect, of course, but there should be a strong relationship between their message and the pattern of their lives. Paul’s emphasis on the credibility of human witnesses applies not only to pastors and elders but also to every other Christian. The evidence of the Gospel in our lives provides and important commendation of our witness.

C. A Word Received in Affliction
(1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul notes that in receiving God’s Word, the Thessalonians “became imitators of us and of the Lord” (verse 6, NIV). Discipleship is learned by imitating the example of those who have gone before us. Paul does not hesitate to tell new believers, “Be imitators of Me”; he can urge this humbly because he goes on to say, “as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NASB). If as mature Christians we can sincerely tell new believers, “Watch what I do and how I live,” then we will be greatly used by God in helping fellow believers to walk in faith. As we become more conformed to the image of Christ, we are to live in such a way that others would be influenced by our lives and so become conformed also to Christ’s image. Likewise, those who have believed in Jesus are then called to replace sinful and worldly patterns in their lives by imitating biblical patterns that they see being lived out in the church around them.

In urging readers to follow him, Paul is not claiming spiritual perfection. His example, rather, is in receiving God’s Word, as he has
urged them to do as well. Those who teach the Bible should be the most eager students of the Bible. We should be able to urge others to believe all that is taught in Scripture by receiving ourselves the whole counsel of God in obedient faith. We should lead lives that are growing in the truth and delight in God’s Word so that others will do the same. This calling is just as important for parents as it is for pastors. It should be evident to those who are following our example that we believe the Bible to be the holy, inerrant, and life-giving Word of God as we revere it, study it, and obey it in sincere faith.

Paul emphasizes that his readers followed his example not only in receiving the Word but also in believing in the context of “much affliction” (verse 6). The Thessalonians had suffered violent persecution with the possibility of imprisonment and death. The word Paul uses for “affliction” refers to severe pressure being applied to an object. Therefore, Paul is speaking of great trouble that results in serious and harmful difficulty. What particularly distinguished the early Christians, as well as the apostles whose example they followed, was the joy they experienced during tribulation. The Holy Spirit is the key to knowing joy during trials, which is why Paul observes that his readers exhibited the “joy of the Holy Spirit.” This is not to say that Christians never grieve or walk in spiritual shadows. Instead, even with tears on our cheeks we can access a joy that comes from above. It is God’s design that our afflictions would bring out a spiritual joy from our lives as we draw closer to Christ, who suffered for us and who has given the Spirit to His suffering people.

D. A Gospel-spreading Reputation
(1 Thessalonians 1:8-10)

For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Paul had heard, first, about the Thessalonians’ “Gospel-spreading” reputation in Macedonia and Achaia (verse 8). Apparently, even before Timothy had returned with his report from Thessalonica, news had come to Paul down the main east-west corridor of the Roman empire—a corridor that ran straight through the city of Thessalonica. Paul had met travelling Christians (such as Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth) who brought reports of the wider world. Many such travellers would have passed on the Gospel-spreading reputation of this church. Paul says that “the word of the Lord sounded forth” from the Thessalonians. This means that their witness to the person and work of Christ was being heralded throughout the ancient world. The apostle compares their Gospel proclamation to a trumpet blast that summons people to attention.

As Paul preached the Scriptures in Thessalonica, many who heard his message were converted to faith in Christ. Verse 9 (NIV) sets forth in clear language what this conversion entailed: “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Notice how the early Christians understood that becoming a Christian requires a definite and radical break with one’s former life. Paul’s statement
indicates that many Thessalonian believers had been converted out of pagan idolatry rather than from Judaism. They realized that they could not place Christ alongside the idols of their former lives.

The Thessalonians’ conversion had also given them an attitude of expectancy concerning the future. While devoted to the service of God, they had set themselves “to wait for his Son from heaven” (verse 10). This anticipation of Christ’s return characterized the Christian church from its very beginning. This eschatological (end-time) hope is the keynote of these epistles. It had taken a firm hold on the Thessalonian believers. If their serving a living and true God distinguished them from the Gentiles, this expectant hope for Christ’s return distinguished them from the Jews. Much of modern Christendom has lost this expectant waiting for the return of Christ, much to its own impoverishment. This expectancy is an essential part of a mature Christian life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Few accolades are more meaningful than to be told “well done” by a trusted and admired leader. Such praise was given by the apostle Paul to the fledgling church in the northern Greek city of Thessalonica. Paul was delighted to learn that his labor among the Thessalonians had borne such strong fruit. Paul’s praise of the Thessalonians is also heartening to readers of this letter today. Many Christians in America and in the West in general sense that the church has lost touch with the Spirit that animated the early believers. The New Testament enables us to access their experience—an example that can still instruct and inspire us. Paul’s praise for the Thessalonians is especially important, since he sees this church as a model for all others. So fully did Paul approve of their reputation that he could respond, “We need not say anything” (see verse 8), since their actions said enough.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Jesus Christ and what He has done in our lives. We pray that we would be faithful witnesses to Your redeeming work among us. Help us to so live before the world that men and women will know that there is a reality in serving a true and living God. Above all, do not let us grow weary in well doing. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(November 4-10, 2019)

Be Examples of Faith
MONDAY, November 4: “Suffering Leads to Endurance, Character, Hope” (Romans 5:1-5)
TUESDAY, November 5: “Reconciliation through Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:6-11)
WEDNESDAY, November 6: “Be Ready for Christ’s Coming” (Matthew 24:36-44)
THURSDAY, November 7: “Live Christ’s Mind and Character Daily” (Philippians 2:5-11)
FRIDAY, November 8: “Under Persecution, Proclaim Jesus the Christ” (Acts 17:1-9)
SATURDAY, November 9: “In Facing Temptation, Stay Loyal to Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)
SUNDAY, November 10: “Examples of Faith to All Believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:1-10)
LIVE HOLY LIVES

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Dare to Be Different!
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Living with Good Conduct

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 1
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Peter 1:13-25
**ADULT KEY VERSES:** 1 Peter 1:14-15
**YOUTH KEY VERSES:** 1 Peter 1:15-16

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 1
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Peter 1:13-25
**ADULT KEY VERSES:** 1 Peter 1:14-15
**YOUTH KEY VERSES:** 1 Peter 1:15-16

1 Peter 1:13-25—KJV
13 Wherefore 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;
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.
17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:
18 Forasmuch as ye know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that ye were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors;
19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

1 Peter 1:13-25—NIV
13 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.
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.”
17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.
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.
20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,
21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.
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.
24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:
25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.
21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.
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.
24 For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,
25 “but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People admire and emulate those who live in accord with what they say. How can we put our beliefs into action? The book of 1 Peter teaches believers that they must live holy lives and do good, loving deeds for others, thus demonstrating that they trust in God and have been born anew.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand the meaning and power of holy living that Peter commends to the exiled community.
2. Affirm rebirth in Christ through obedience to God.
3. Live holy lives in imitation of God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Peter’s command to “prepare . . . for action” (verse 13) is a word picture in the original language, picturing the tucking of one’s robe into his belt so as to be unhindered or untangled. Applied to “your minds,” this may suggest the idea of thinking clearly or eliminating ideas, concepts, or teaching that hinders understanding.
—Peter’s warning about being “conformed” echoes Paul’s warning in Romans 12:2, except Paul’s warning is about being conformed to “this [present] world” while Peter warns about conforming to the readers’ past “desires” (verse 14).
—Peter again echoes Paul in verse 21 when he says...
“so that your faith and hope are set on God”; see 1 Corinthians 2:5.

—When Peter writes, “As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (see verses 15-16), he draws on the Mosaic Law, particularly Leviticus 11:44-45 and 19:2.

—This holiness to which Christians are called (verse 15) involves the total lifestyle, not just certain religious rituals.

—Most scholars believe that the reference “the futile ways inherited from your ancestors” (see verse 18) suggests a pagan past that would not fit with Jewish readers.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—The apostle Peter was critical in spreading the Gospel message to the Jews and the Gentiles. He reminded believers of how and why they were to continue in their faith.

—Peter emphasized why holiness among believers is critical to their understanding of the faith and dealing with persecution at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero.

—Peter admonished believers to have a reverent fear of God.

—Peter focused on the issues of redemption and obedience, reminding believers of what Christ had done for them and how they should respond.

—The salvation of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit are intentional gifts from God that give believers victory over sin and temptation.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is believed that Peter wrote this letter around AD 66. First Peter presupposes a biblical worldview based on God’s sovereignty. This is God’s world; yet, the devil “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8, NIV). People who live in this world are subject to evil desires, ignorance, false gods, and all forms of sinful living. God allows people time to repent of their sins, but the time for repentance is limited. He is gracious, but He is also righteous and the holy judge who will visit all people, living and dead, with their just desserts. In common with the rest of the New Testament, 1 Peter presents a new eschatological (end-time) perspective. With the coming of Jesus as Messiah, the age-old plan of God is on the way to its consummation (1:20). Thus, 1 Peter emphasizes the godly life of submission and good deeds during suffering. By their noble deeds, Christians may glorify in difficulties. The sovereign Lord sustains them in adversity and has all power. Thus, faith, submission, and trust provide the basis for Christian living.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The tone of 1 Peter is a warm pastoral one, full of encouragement. The exhortations are addressed to Christians who are scattered over a wide area in northern Asia Minor. They share a common faith with Christians everywhere and face common problems. Their basic problem is how to live for God during a society ignorant of the true God. Because they are Christians, they are misunderstood and subjected to cruel treatment. Peter’s pastoral purpose is to help these early believers see their temporary sufferings in the full light of the coming eternal glory. During all their discouragements, the sovereign God will keep them and enable them by faith to have joy. Jesus Christ, by His patient suffering and glorious future destiny, has given them the pattern to follow, and He is also their living hope. Life in a pagan society is difficult and requires humility and submission. The immediate
future for the church is an increase in the conflict with the world. But God will provide the grace to enable the community of the faithful to grow into maturity. They must help one another and show loving concern lest the members of God’s flock become discouraged and begin to fall away.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Peter:** one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. Originally named Simon, Peter was a Galilean fisherman, the son of John and brother of Andrew. According to a tradition preserved in John 1:35-43, the brothers came from the village of Bethsaida and had been disciples of John the Baptist before they became disciples of Jesus.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

Holy (verse 15)—Greek: *hagios* (hā’-gē-os): saint; pure; morally blameless.

Sober/Alert (verse 13)—Greek: *néphalios* (nay-fal’-eh-ōs): to watch.

Word of God (verse 23)—Greek: *logos* (lo’-gos): the sayings of God.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction

   A. God’s Call for His People to Be Different
   
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

   A. The Command to Hope
      (1 Peter 1:13)
   
   B. Be Holy as God Is Holy
      (1 Peter 1:14-16)
   
   C. Justification and Motivation for Holiness
      (1 Peter 1:17-21)
   
   D. Demonstrate Holiness by Loving One Another
      (1 Peter 1:22-25)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. God’s Call for His People to Be Different

   Peter’s central concern for his readers at this point in his letter is that they have a lifestyle characterized by holiness. Holy living is the appropriate response of believers who have received a new birth (1:3), a living hope (1:3), joy (1:8), and salvation (1:9). The standard for the believer’s holiness is God’s holiness—a defining characteristic of God. It is the bodily return of Jesus Christ that musters hope, which in turn provides motivation for a life of holiness. As people who live in visible contrast to the broader society, believers have an intimate relationship with God: He is Father to His people. This relationship is possible because of the redeeming work of Christ, whose sacrificial death, resurrection, and glorification engender faith and hope in God.

   This section begins and ends with hope. The opening exhortation of verse 13 is for the communities of believers to have hope that is anchored in the second coming of Christ (the *Parousia*). Hope in the New Testament is not an abstract feeling of optimism but, rather, is a confident expectation of a good outcome based upon the work of God. Hope is what can sustain Christians in the here and now while they await their inheritance at the end time.
B. Biblical Background

Peter began this letter by singing the praises of the God who had given such a great salvation to the Christians of Asia Minor. Reflection on this salvation now leads him to the heart of his letter: an exhortation on how to live in society as Christians who are oppressed and excluded. His order follows a pattern throughout the whole Bible: theology prompts ethics. Which is to say, beliefs about God and experiences with God undergird beliefs about what is right and what is wrong. The theme of today’s passage is the difference that salvation brings to the life of a Christian.

This unit (1:13-25) is not a tightly woven unit of logic but, rather, a series of ethical reflections on the difference that salvation should make in a believer’s life. Peter exhorts his readers in four areas, each of which is grounded in a reflection about salvation. (1) He exhorts them to hope (verse 13), which he grounds in salvation. (2) He exhorts them to holiness (verses 14-16), which he grounds in the assumption that they are obedient children who desire to emulate the character of God. (3) He exhorts them to fear God (verses 17-21), which he grounds in their new relationship to God—they can address the very Judge of the universe as their Father. (4) He exhorts them to love one another, grounding this exhortation in their purification (verse 22) and in their regeneration (verses 23-25).

The section then contains a series of reflections about Christian ethics for believers living within an unbelieving society. This reflective stance of Peter is not some doctrinal speculation, nor is it groundless advice that Peter hopes his readers will like. Rather, this is theological ethics. That is, his arguments concern themselves with how Christians ought to live and behave in a fallen world that, for the most part, no longer believes God to be at the center of the created order. Christians are called upon to think, act, and live differently. Our lives are to be sacrifices of praise.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Command to Hope

(1 Peter 1:13)

Wherefore 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.

Verse 13 encourages the faithful to prepare their minds for action. It literally means to “gird up the loins of your mind,” which is a reference to the stance of the Israelites as they ate the first Passover “with their loins girded”—that is, were ready to travel (see Exodus 12:11). The flowing garments common in the ancient Mediterranean world were tightened about the waist in preparation for work or travel. The initial command is something like “roll up your (mental) sleeves,” to prepare for disciplined intellectual work. In this case, believers were to ready their minds for the task of living for Christ, of enduring the vicissitudes of life while considering the promised prize. The mental framework for the Christian life is essential. The beginning of their historical pilgrimage is a matter of hard thinking, but not something they are to figure out for themselves; it is a response to the Word of God that comes through preaching—that is, through the church’s communication of the Gospel.
The second command is “discipline yourselves.” The three occurrences of this word in the Pauline tradition are usually translated “be sober,” which is the opposite of confused intoxication. The idea is “stay sober, be well balanced and self-controlled.” What is the mindset behind too many of our contemporary decisions? Too often it is preoccupation with temporary benefits or profit for us as opposed to a concern for service to God and others. To focus our minds and hearts on things that truly matter, we need “self-control,” a disciplined mind that places its attention squarely on the goal. The hard thinking the author calls for, the hard, ethical decisions he will call on them to make, cannot be handled by those who equate religious thinking with the bland fuzziness of a confused mind. Can a person command another to hope? Is hope something that one can do in response to a command? Christian hope is not a bland optimism. In this context, the imperative “hope” means to live out fully the life of hope you have been given between Christ’s resurrection and the eschaton (end-time); to live in this meaningful history as a journey into God’s future, the God who is the creator and redeemer.

B. Be Holy as God Is Holy
(1 Peter 1:14-16)

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

In 1 Peter 1:15, we find yet another imperative: be holy in your whole way of life. The author presses the point that the new birth given by God the Father (verse 3) necessarily implies a decisively altered way of life that is characterized by the new knowledge of God and Christ, so he instructs the people of God to “be holy as the obedient children of God you now are” (see verse 14). What is holiness as Peter enjoins it upon his readers? Their holiness is to correspond to the holiness of the one who has called them, whom Peter has already identified as God Himself. To be holy means that Christians must conform their thinking and behavior to God’s character. The character of God was first revealed through the covenant God made with the people He had chosen for Himself.

God’s revelation of His character in the old covenant paled in comparison with the revelation of His character as a living human being in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Peter’s command in 1:15 that his Christian readers be holy was a call to live in obedient relationship to Christ that would set them apart from the customs and values of unbelieving, pagan society. The Christian’s morality would be defined by, and derived from, the character of God their Father as first revealed in Scripture and then ultimately in the life of Jesus Christ. In these verses, Peter initially defines the call to be holy by specifying the opposite of what he means: “Do not be conformed as previously to the desires of your ignorance” (see verse 14). In other words, to be holy requires a change in one’s way of life from before, when one’s behavior was determined by unrestrained impulses to sin, even in ways accepted by society. The call of God that has brought Christians to Christ is also a call to deny those sinful impulses and abstain from certain social customs and practices, making one a stranger within one’s own society.

In verse 16, the author claims that his readers must be holy in their whole way of life because God has said to His people, “Be holy because I am holy.” Peter assumes that the
Old Testament writings are authoritative and normative for his Christian readers, regardless of their previous ethnic origin. He makes no distinction between the Jewish and the Gentile Christian in his application, nor does the span of time between Leviticus and his letter mitigate the relevance of God’s ancient revelation of Himself. By quoting from Leviticus (Leviticus 19:2), Peter establishes the principle that the holiness to which the Christian is called in Christ is consistent with God’s character as revealed in the ancient covenant with Israel. However, Peter does not enjoin on his Christian readers the specifics of the Levitical religion of ancient Israel. In terms of moral transformation, the goal of both the old and the new covenants is the same—to create a people who morally conform to God’s character.

C. Justification and Motivation for Holiness
(1 Peter 1:17-21)

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: 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; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

In verse 17, believers are urged to live a life different from non-Christians—as strangers—because they call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially. The word *impartially* is found only here in the New Testament, but the idea that God does not show favoritism in His judgment is found often (see Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6). Peter is careful to balance the perception of God as Father with the reality that He is also judge. Although God was their Father, believers were not to presume that disobedience and sin would go unnoticed or undisciplined. Their behavior is not inconsequential. If Christians call God Father, they should remember His character and not allow familiarity to be an excuse for evil. Christians should also live in fear. Fear, in this context, has the force of reverence or respect. Quickened by a reverential respect for their heavenly Father, who is also their impartial judge, believers are urged to live in a manner consistent with the holy nature of God Himself.

In verses 18-19, Peter again reminds us of the blessings of salvation. Another reason why we should fear displeasing God is that He paid the enormous price to buy us back from sin. The word *redeemed* was used when someone paid money to buy back a slave’s freedom. In Old Testament times, a person’s debts could result in that person’s being sold as a slave. The next-of-kin could redeem the slave (buy his or her freedom), a transaction involving money or valuables of some kind. Yet, all valuables are perishable—even silver and gold are susceptible to corruption. However, the transaction God made to buy us back from sin is not refundable; it is permanent (verse 18). Silver and gold can do nothing to change anyone’s spiritual condition. It had to be done God’s way—not with money, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without defect or blemish (verse...
19). That Christ redeemed us means that He paid the price to set sinners free from slavery to sin. Christ purchased our freedom, and it cost Him His life. The word *precious* means “flawless, unblemished.” Jesus had moral integrity and perfection. He did not have to die for His own sin; thus, He could take ours. Christ has provided all that we need to stand in God’s presence as though we had never done wrong.

Christ’s sacrifice for the world’s sin was not an afterthought, not something God decided to do when the world spun out of control. This plan was set in motion by the all-knowing, eternal God before the creation of the world (verse 20). In eternity past, God chose His people and planned that Christ would redeem them. Christ has always existed with God but was revealed in these last times to the world in His incarnation. The redemption God accomplished for believers through Christ should cause us to be even more concerned to live according to His high moral standards. Only through the death of Christ on the cross could sinful humanity approach the holy God. The fact that God raised Him from the dead and glorified Him is the foundation of our faith. The power that resurrected and glorified Christ is the same power that enables us to believe.

**D. Demonstrate Holiness by Loving One Another**  
(1 Peter 1:22-25)

*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: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*

In verses 22-25, Peter continues his call to holy living. Believers ought to be holy because of who God is and what He has done on our behalf. However, human beings cannot, on their own, be holy in all their conduct, because the struggle between the new nature and the old, sinful nature continues throughout our lifetimes. But with the Holy Spirit’s help, believers can grow toward holiness because their souls have been purified by their obedience and love.

Peter expected that growth in purity and holiness would result in deeper love among Christians (verse 22). Not merely outward appearance or profession, *genuine mutual love* for our Christian brothers and sisters comes from the heart. To do this, we must be willing to let go of evil thoughts and feelings toward fellow believers. Despite our differences and disagreements, we can have genuine affection for one another, and as we grow in holiness, we can learn to love one another deeply because of the Holy Spirit within us. Such love is not possible in the world at-large, for it does not understand the love that results when people’s sins are forgiven, and their souls are purified.

In verse 23, Peter gives the second reason to love others: Believers have a common ground in Christ. We have all been *born again*; we are sinners saved by grace. Because we have all received new life in Christ, we should be motivated to live to please God, obey the truth, keep ourselves pure, and love our Christian brothers and sisters. The change that took place in our lives is eternal. As we move toward purity and holiness, we will eventually reach the end goal. Our new birth was not of perishable seed—meaning of human origin—so that we will one day wither and die; rather, our
new birth originates from imperishable seed, described as the living and enduring word of God (verse 23).

Quoting from Isaiah 40:6-8, Peter reminded believers that everything in this life—possessions, accomplishments, people—will eventually fade away and disappear. All flesh refers to every person, all human existence. As the grasses and flowers bloom for a season then wither and fall, so all this life is transitory in nature; it will pass away (verse 24). “Glory” refers to all earthly attainments. Only God’s will, word, and work are permanent. We are mortal, but God’s Word is eternal and unfailling. Peter’s readers would face suffering and persecution, but that would be only temporary. As the Word endures forever, so their salvation and subsequent eternal glory would endure forever. Why did the people of Peter’s day have hope? Because they believed the Good News that had been announced to them through the apostles and other believers (verse 25).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Drawing on the themes of the holiness codes of Leviticus, 1 Peter encourages the faithful to imitate God, to be holy as God is holy. Here as throughout 1 Peter, there is a contrast between two ways of living, two directions of the self. The self can be directed toward perishable things—like silver and gold—or toward the imperishable realities—Christ redeeming act on the Cross and the Word that proclaims that act. Those who set their hearts on the perishable will perish; those who set their hearts on what endures will endure. The holiness of God’s holy people is not centered in God alone or in one’s own devotional life. Holiness builds community, the community of mutual love and support. Just as the holiness code of Leviticus sets a people apart from the unholy nations around them, so also the holiness code of 1 Peter builds a community of brotherly and sisterly love. Love for God, purity of self, and love for the brother and sister in Christ are all essential ingredients of the community of living hope that 1 Peter seeks to build.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, give us the strength and courage to live differently in the world. Help us to recognize that You have called us to be a countercultural, obedient people. We seek to imitate You in all our ways and actions. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 11-17, 2019)

Live Holy Lives

MONDAY, November 11: “God’s Word Is True and Reliable” (Isaiah 40:6-9)
TUESDAY, November 12: “Jesus Enables Victory over Sin” (Romans 7:14-25)
WEDNESDAY, November 13: “Love One Another” (Romans 13:8-10)
THURSDAY, November 14: “New Life through the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-11)
FRIDAY, November 15: “Live by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-26)
SATURDAY, November 16: “Rejoice in God’s Actions in Christ” (1 Peter 1:3-12)
SUNDAY, November 17: “Call to Holy Living” (1 Peter 1:13-25)
STICK TO YOUR FAITH

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Believing Promises
YOUTH TOPIC: Be Participants of Doing What Is Right

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Stick to Your Faith
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: I Won’t Change

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 90

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 1
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Peter 1:1-15
KEY VERSE: 2 Peter 1:4

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 1
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Peter 1:1-15
KEY VERSE: 2 Peter 1:3a

2 Peter 1:1-15—KJV
SIMON PETER, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:
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 goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;
6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

2 Peter 1:1-15—NIV
SIMON PETER, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:
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 brotherly kindness; and to brothe-
7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual 
larly kindness charity.
affection, love.
8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make
8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing 
you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in 
measure, they will keep you from being ineffective 
the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord 
9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and 
Jesus Christ.
cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was 
9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted 
purged from his old sins.
and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed 

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence 
10 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you 
to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do 
always in remembrance of these things, though ye 
these things, ye shall never fall;
know them, and be established in the present truth.
11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you 
11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the 
abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord 
everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
and Saviour Jesus Christ.
12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you 
12 So I will always remind you of these things, even 
always in remembrance, to stir you up by putting you in 
though you know them and are firmly established in 
remembrance;
the truth you now have.
13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this 
13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long 
tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in 
as I live in the tent of this body,
remembrance;
14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my 
14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as 
tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath 
our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.
shewed me.
15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able 
15 And I will make every effort to see that after my 
after my decease to have these things always in 
departure you will always be able to remember these 
remembrance.
things.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People can be harmed by the corruption in the world. How can we guard against those negative influences? The book of 2 Peter stresses the importance of supporting one’s faith with goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, and love.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Discern the importance of faith and the call of God for authentic life and godliness.
2. Appreciate a life of faith in Christ after redemption from sinfulness.
3. Practice the virtues of goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, and love.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

— Even though it is impossible to identify with certainty the churches Peter was addressing, it is believed that they were the same churches of Asia Minor addressed in the first letter (see 1 Peter 1:1-2).
— “Simeon Peter” is a rare Semitic variation of “Simon Peter” or simply Peter. Peter is the name given by Jesus (see Matthew 16:18).
— As servant and apostle, Peter claimed high status for great Israelite figures who were often called “servant of the Lord” (Moses, Deuteronomy 34:5) and David (2 Samuel 7:5). He is both a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.
— The list of virtues (verses 5-7) has much in common with lists from other writings of that era, such as Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:2-3, 32; Philippians 4:8.
— It is believed that 2 Peter was written to combat false teachers or an incipient Gnosticism, even though it is impossible to substantiate this.
— False teachers are often subtly deceitful, which indicates that we should be vigilant about falling into false doctrines, heresy, and cult activity.

Teachers of CHILDREN

— Peter wanted believers to know that they are responsible for building and maintaining the church.
— Peter provided the assurance that Christ had left them with the resources that they needed to continue developing their faith and strengthening their internal resolve to advance the kingdom of God.
— Peter encouraged believers to focus on faith actions such as goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love so that they would learn more about God and be active participants of God’s Word.
— Peter assured believers that these faith actions are pleasing to God and would be rewarded in God’s eternal kingdom.
— Believers are to hear and follow after Christ and not the false teachers who believed that salvation is based solely on good works.
— Peter reminded the believers that his time with them was limited, but he would make sure that they continued growing in their relationships with Christ.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Second Peter begins with the assertion that it was written by Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ’s (1:1). The author claims to have been an eyewitness of Jesus’ transfiguration. He refers to Paul as his dear brother in such a way that he appears to put his own authority on the same level as that of the apostle to the Gentiles. As a result, this letter had traditionally been identified as the second Petrine Epistle, with the apostle Peter as its author. It is believed to have been written around AD 67. The letter’s place of origin is unknown. Many favor Rome, since Peter is known to have been there. But the letter offers no information as to Peter’s situation or location at the time of writing. Since Peter travelled widely, the letter could have been written from anywhere in the Mediterranean world. The letter was written to establish the true teachings of the Christian faith, the depravity of false teachers, as well as the teachings of the end-time (eschaton), especially as they relate to the promised return of Christ.
One of the primary differences between 1 Peter and 2 Peter is that the first epistle centers on persecution from outside the church, while the second epistle addresses schism from inside the church caused by false teachers. We know little about these heretics apart from the twofold nature of their teaching: (1) Morally, they were propagating a licentious lifestyle, centering mainly on shameful immortality but also on greed. Their twisted sexual desire made them little more than “unthinking animals” (2:12). They loved to indulge in evil pleasure and commit adultery, so much so that they had become slaves of sin and corruption. (2) Theologically, they were justifying that lifestyle by stating there would be no return of Christ in judgment. They taught destructive heresies that denied the Lord, slandered the truth, and scoffed at supernatural beings.

Peter: the most prominent of Jesus’ disciples. Peter’s original name was Simon. Jesus gave him the Aramaic name “rock” (Matthew 16:18). After the ascension of Jesus, Peter was the main leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Election (verse 10)—Greek: eklogē (ek-log-ay’): the act of God’s free will by which before the foundation of the world He decreed His blessings to certain persons.

Everything (verse 3)—Greek: pas (pa’s): all things collectively; “all things” (KJV).

Promises (verse 4)—Greek: epaggelma (ep-ang’-el-mah): self-committal by assurance of conferring some good.

Unfruitful (verse 8)—Greek: akarpos (ak’-ar-pos): barren; not yielding what it ought to yield; “unproductive” (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Need for True Knowledge
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application
    of the Scripture
   A. Salutation and Blessing
      (2 Peter 1:1-2)
   B. The Gift of God’s Promises for Living
      (2 Peter 1:3-4)
   C. Pursue a Godly Life Diligently
      (2 Peter 1:5-7)
   D. The Efforts of Christian Fruitfulness
      (2 Peter 1:8-9)
   E. The Confirmation of Election
      (2 Peter 1:10-11)
   F. The Need for Reminders
      (2 Peter 1:12-15)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
   A. The Need for True Knowledge

      The letter’s theme—a proper knowledge of God—is incredibly relevant in our age today. After all, the church is wrestling with significant questions, and Christians need answers that enable them to know God in accordance with truth. At least three such contemporary questions are taken up in 2 Peter: (1) Can someone know God without knowledge of Jesus
as God’s Son? (2) Can someone know God and yet abandon the rigorous life that the apostles required of those who profess Christ? (3) Can you know God and reject the notion that Jesus will return to claim His own? In an insecure world where contradictory views on the Gospel and its demands persist, we need reliable footing, a sure foundation to keep us from stumbling. Peter’s aim in writing this second letter is simply to provide that foundation, to establish the feet of the church on higher ground, solid ground.

The letter has three distinct aims. First, this letter is written to establish, strengthen, and stabilize Christians in the true knowledge of God. Peter is trying to ensure that we do not lose our own stability but will find strength and sure footing in a true knowledge of God. Only then can we speak with conviction about what the Lord requires of us in our day. Second, the letter intends to rebuke, warn, and correct those among us who teach and revel in any other knowledge of God. Finally, the letter aims to rescue and reclaim the faithful who have tripped and fallen along the way. Put simply, it not only proves to the stumbling church throughout all ages what it means to know God—it intends to pick us up and put us back on the way. This letter is a warning that keeps us from losing our faith and a reminder to all to hold fast to the faith that was once delivered to the saints. In a word, Peter is telling the church, “Stick to your faith!”

B. Biblical Background

The letter begins by identifying the author as Simon Peter, who identified himself as a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ and who wrote to those who shared his faith. He acknowledged that Jesus Christ is both God and Savior and that His righteousness makes faith possible (1:1). Peter wished his readers grace and peace; he knew these blessings came only through God, who is identified as Jesus (1:2). By His divine power, God has given believers all the resources pertaining to life and godliness that they need; these resources are available to those who know the God who calls them to glory and virtue (1:3). Based on the great and precious promises of God, believers partake of the divine nature; they have escaped the corruption of worldly lust.

Peter’s chief concern was with the rise of false teachers from within the believing community (see 2:1). These teachers would be persuasive, but their motives would be wrong (see 2:2-3). It was certain that the judgment of God would come upon them, just as it did on rebellious angels, on the sinful population in Noah’s day, and on the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2:4-6). These false teachers had an agenda: they sought to allure; they used persuasive but deceptive words, appealing to base desires (see 2:18). Although they themselves were slaves to corruption, they promised liberty to those who would follow them. Throughout the letter Peter forewarned his readers to be alert to the possibility of falling by following the error of the false teachers. The antidote to falling is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, to whom the glory belongs now and throughout eternity.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPITURE

A. Salutation and Blessing
(2 Peter 1:1-2)

SIMON PETER, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

This letter begins in the normal Greco-Roman style, moving from the author to the recipients to the greeting itself. The author combines his familial name “Simeon” with the nickname “Peter,” given him by Jesus when they first met (see John 1:42). This was a prophecy of the rocklike strength Simon would demonstrate as the first leader of the church after Pentecost. This introduction would set the stage for his appeals to them to be stable in their faith (see 1:10-12). Peter called himself a “slave and apostle.” New Testament writers often labeled themselves as “slaves” of God and of Christ (see Romans 1:1), a term denoting not only servitude but also the privilege of being “God’s very own possession” (see 1 Peter 2:9).

Peter was commissioned by Christ to proclaim his kingdom truths with authority and to counter the false teachers plaguing his readers.

B. The Gift of God’s Promises for Living
(2 Peter 1:3-4)

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: 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.

It is through Christ’s power—power that He shares with God—that Christians have everything needed to live a godly life (verse 3). “Godliness” means having the proper attitude of piety toward God, expressed in obedience to the will of God, and walking according to God’s moral standards. It is a mark of Christian maturity that confirms being called by Jesus. The eschatological reality that in the new heaven and earth only righteousness will be found makes godliness essential for a share in it and necessitates being “without spot or blemish (godly)” at the Parousia. The gift of possessing everything necessary for a godly life comes with the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ obtained at conversion, when the Christian responds to Christ’s call through his glory and goodness.

Through His divine power and knowledge of Him, Christ has given us precious and very great promises (verse 4). The promises are also eschatological in 2 Peter. The promise of Christ is that Christians will escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust and may become participants of the divine nature. Thus, Christians are saved from the destruction reserved for the corrupted world and its corrupted inhabitants, including the false teachers who misuse their freedom and become prey to worldly corruption through lust.

C. Pursue a Godly Life Diligently
(2 Peter 1:5-7)

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

Believers are not passive recipients of salvation. They are called on by Peter to add seven virtues to their faith: goodness, knowledge,
self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Peter’s list contains two different strands of virtues, some of which are specifically Christian (faith, hope, love) and some more properly Greco-Roman (self-control, piety, kinship affection). Significantly, Peter’s list begins with faith and ends in love. The virtues begin with the fundamental requirement of Christianity and culminate in its highest achievement.

“Goodness” is a classic term from Greek ethics. Goodness involves doing what is right, even when it is difficult. Knowledge depicts the wisdom and discernment that the Christian needs for a virtuous life. Saving knowledge is an immediate gift of God to those who repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ for salvation. In contrast, the knowledge that Peter speaks of in this chapter depicts the knowledge of Christ that is gradually acquired throughout the Christian walk (verse 6).

Self-control was a popular term in Greek moral codes. It depicts the Greek ideal of being able to exercise restraint against excessive indulgence in physical desires. Believers must exercise self-control to resist the false teachers who indulge their lusts, become corrupt, and entice others to do the same. Perseverance refers to courageous and steadfast endurance in the face of suffering or evil. To show perseverance is to trust God and to hope for the fulfillment of His promises. Godliness describes a respectful attitude toward God, acknowledging His authority and obeying His will. Brotherly kindness (mutual affection) is affection for other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. The last virtue is love. It is difficult to distinguish the meaning of love from affection. Love of the brethren is that Spirit-given act by which we treat other people with active benevolence (verse 7).

D. The Efforts of Christian Fruitfulness
(2 Peter 1:8-9)

For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

The seven aforementioned virtues ought to be part of every believer’s life, but they are not static. Believers don’t merely “have” these qualities; instead, they are increasing in these qualities. To grow in these qualities, we must practice them in the rough-and-tumble of daily life. As these characteristics increase, they keep believers from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ (verse 8). Ineffective means “idle and slothful,” literally “out of work.” Unfruitful means “barren, unproductive, and refers to the life crowded with pleasures and cares.” The false teachers exemplified these qualities. Believers “know” the Lord Jesus, but their knowledge must bear fruit in such qualities as those mentioned above.

In contrast to the believer who is increasing in the positive qualities Peter just mentioned, a believer who lacks these things, who is not growing in these qualities, is nearsighted and blind (verse 9). Peter had harsh words for believers who refused to grow. The word nearsighted is also translated “shortsighted.” Peter may have meant that believers who were not growing could see only as far as the world around them. The shortsightedness left them blind to the big picture—the promise of eternity and the glory of becoming more like
Christ. Thus, they remained tied to earthly possessions and transient promises. A believer who is “forgetful” of this and refuses to grow becomes unfruitful to God.

E. The Confirmation of Election
(2 Peter 1:10-11)

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The word wherefore ties this verse with the preceding passage (verses 3-9). Here, Peter argues that believers must be more eager to confirm themselves as children of God (verse 10). Peter urgently called upon these believers to determine to live for God, no matter how difficult it might become, and to be growing in the virtues previously mentioned. To confirm your call and election is also translated “make your calling and election sure.” On the one hand, the calling and election were already sure and confirmed because they were God’s initiative. However, the believers’ behavior would confirm that call by their good qualities and good works. They were confirming their call and election not for God, but for themselves. The believers to whom Peter wrote were in danger of turning to the doctrine of false teachers who were teaching that immoral living incurred no judgment. These false teachers said that once people were “saved,” they could live any way they pleased. Peter countered this teaching, explaining that Christians must match their calling and election with holy living. If they did this, they would never stumble.

He further argues that those who live fruitful and productive lives for God, who do not disastrously stumble along the path to the eternal kingdom (heaven), will receive a rich welcome (verse 11). This verse amplifies verses 3-10. It is a climax that holds out the ultimate hope of every Christian: entrance into the eternal kingdom. To the Christians who provide their faith with virtues, Christ will richly provide “entrance” or “welcome” into His kingdom, the reign and rule of God upon the earth.

F. The Need for Reminders
(2 Peter 1:12-15)

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. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

Because of the glories awaiting the believers, Peter intended to keep on reminding them not to allow their salvation to become a license for immoral living, not to rest content in knowledge of the Gospel without obeying it and applying it to their lives (verse 12). The times were difficult—persecution was increasing from without; false teachers were spewing evil doctrine from within. He encouraged the believers to continue to stand firm on the basics of their faith, to continue to remind themselves of these truths, and to reestablish themselves in the truth they had been taught. He would continue to remind them of these things as long as he lived (verse 13). Peter knew that he would die soon. Many years before, Christ had prepared Peter for the kind of death Peter would face. At the writing of this letter, Peter
knew his death was at hand. He thought he would die because of the intense persecution in Rome and his being a prominent Christian figure in the church. In any case, Peter was martyred for the faith in about AD 68. According to some traditions, he was crucified upside down, because he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Master. As an old man, knowing that he would die soon, Peter wrote of his coming departure calmly and fearlessly. It would be a mere departure, a moving on to another place.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Knowledge of Christ is gained at conversion and through the communion with and service to Him that follow. Knowing Christ places one in a relationship and gives a new perspective that demands a whole new way of living conducted according to Christ’s nature. Gaining knowledge of Christ is a lifelong process, learned through living the godly life in relationship with Him. To be a Christian and live a godly life through the knowledge and power of Christ is to be the recipient of great promises. These promises include becoming immortal and incorruptible like God, escaping judgment at the Parousia (the second coming of Christ), and having life in the new heavens and new earth. To be a Christian is to escape the world corrupted by sin and lust. All the Christian life is a gift. The initial gift of everything needed for living the Christian life and godliness comes through knowledge of Christ and His power, gained at conversion. Escape from corruption of sin and confirmation of our calling through godly living are made possible through the exercise of the gifts He had given us. Entrance into the eternal kingdom can be richly provided because His powers are available to allow us to be fruitful and effective in our Christian lives and not to return to sin and corruption.

PRAYER

Eternal God, we give You thanks for Jesus Christ and what He has done for us and for our salvation. Help us to trust Your promises and to strive to attain the virtues in life that have been made possible through the sacrifice of Your Son. Keep us from the path of sin and hide us in Your redeeming love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 18-24, 2019)

Stick to Your Faith

TUESDAY, November 19: “Our Dwelling Place” (Psalm 90)
WEDNESDAY, November 20: “One Day like One Thousand Years” (2 Peter 3:8-10)
FRIDAY, November 22: “This Is My Son; Listen to Him!” (Luke 9:28-36)
SATURDAY, November 23: “Solid Reasons for Hope” (2 Peter 1:16-21)
SUNDAY, November 24: “Always Keep the Faith” (2 Peter 1:1-15)
Honoring God

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter explores ways of honoring God through worship. The Old Testament lessons recall how David and Solomon honored God by establishing the center of worship in Jerusalem and building the Temple. The New Testament lessons focus on Jesus’ teachings about right attitudes that honor God through worship.

Unit I, “David Honors God,” has five lessons, four from the book of 1 Chronicles and one from the book of Luke. The first three lessons are from 1 Chronicles and tell about David’s bringing the ark to Jerusalem, leading the people in offering a psalm of thanksgiving, and planning to build a house for God. Lesson 4, the Christmas lesson, considers Mary’s visit to Elizabeth as found in Luke. Lesson 5 returns to 1 Chronicles and David’s prayer of gratitude for God’s promise of a dynasty.

Unit II, “Dedicating the Temple of God,” has four lessons that explore Solomon’s dedication of the Temple in the book of 1 Kings. Solomon honors God by providing a place for the ark, by offering blessings to God for fulfilling the promise to David, by praying that God would hear prayers offered in the Temple, by calling the people to keep God’s commandments, and by offering sacrifices to God.

Unit III, “Jesus Teaches about True Worship,” has four lessons that explore what Jesus says about one’s honoring God through his or her spiritual practices. Matthew points to right attitudes in obeying God only and in honoring God in almsgiving and in prayer. The prayer of Jesus provides a comprehensive life approach for honoring God. Luke teaches about perseverance in prayer as a way to honor God.
But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 
(Matthew 6:33, NIV)
DAVID WORSHIPS GOD IN JERUSALEM

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/ YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Celebrate!
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Celebrate

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** David Dances with Joy
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Celebrating a Good Time

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
1 Chronicles 16:7-13, 28-33

---

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 15
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Chronicles 15:28

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 15
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Chronicles 15:28

---

1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a—KJV
AND DAVID made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent.

2 Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

3 And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the LORD unto his place, which he had prepared for it.

14 So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel.

15 And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD.

16 And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with

---

1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 14-16, 25-29a—NIV
AFTER DAVID had constructed buildings for himself in the City of David, he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it.

2 Then David said, “No one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, because the LORD chose them to carry the ark of the LORD and to minister before him forever.”

3 David assembled all Israel in Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the LORD to the place he had prepared for it.

14 So the priests and Levites consecrated themselves in order to bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel.

15 And the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the LORD.

16 David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their fellow Levites as musicians to make a joyful
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people are joyful and excited when they move into a new building. What is the appropriate way to celebrate? David commanded the priests to invite all the musicians and all the people to join in shouting, singing, and dancing as they rejoiced in what God had done for them.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Examine the ceremony by which the ark was brought to Jerusalem.
2. Appreciate the diversity of emotional responses that flow from authentic worship.
3. Embrace physical activity and sensory input as important aspects of worship.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—While David undertook several major building projects in Jerusalem, including constructing his own houses and the city’s foundations (see 1 Chronicles 11:8), the installation of the ark of the covenant was the high point.
—In contrast to the first attempt to move the ark to Jerusalem, David took complete charge of the successful second attempt, personally enforcing
the Torah regulations specifying that only Levites could carry the ark (see 1 Chronicles 15:2).
— While only the Levites could carry the Ark, David involved the entire nation in the celebration of the event, which was typical of Jewish festivals (see Leviticus 23).
— The events of this passage take place during the reign of King David, when he is recognized as the king of all of Israel.
— The “ark of God” (verse 1), which is also called “the ark of the covenant,” contained, among other sacred artifacts, the two tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments) received by Moses and represented the presence of God.
— The celebration after bringing the ark to Jerusalem, the political (not geographic) center of a united Israel, stands in contrast to an earlier failed attempt by David, recorded in an earlier passage by the Chronicler.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Bible scholars refer to the author of 1 Chronicles as “the Chronicler.” The key figures here are King David and Solomon, centering on events taking place between 1000 and 960 BC. This book was written to encourage the remaining Israelites living in Babylonian captivity after the Exile. First Chronicles serves to encourage those in need of spiritual guidance and encouragement. Jabez asked God to grant him protection from harm and to enlarge his borders, which was granted to him (see 1 Chronicles 4:10). This book is history-oriented in describing mostly King David’s escapades. This first book of Chronicles covers the genealogical history of Abraham and spans to King David’s era. It traces Israel from her origins to the fall of Jerusalem, and the narrative begins with names that give prominence to the Davidic line. The genealogies are finalized with a consideration of the house of Saul during his life and after his death. The rest of the book deals with Israel’s greatest king, David (chapters 11–29). The time period extends to the early part of the tenth century BC.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events of this book occur in the City of David, which was originally known as Zion or Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 11:4-9). It was renamed the City of David because this was where David was crowned king of Israel. The site is currently located in the Arab neighborhood in Wadi Hilweh, which extends from the southern city walls of Jerusalem’s Old City. The site has the remains of some
water tunnels which were constructed by King Hezekiah, and they still carry water. The Pool of Siloam referenced in the Old and New Testaments and the remains of the Acra—a fortress which was constructed by Antiochus Epiphanes to overcome Jerusalemites who were against Hellenization—are also referenced.

The ark of the covenant was to be moved from the house of Obed-Edom to Zion (City of David). This is the house where the ark of the covenant had been left by David for three months. The Ark was transported to the City of David after he conquered and built his city. David instructed the Levites to transport the Ark (1 Chronicles 15:2), and it was to be conveyed by Levites and accompanied by musicians and dancers as it was brought to the place David had prepared.

**Prominent Character(s) in the Lesson**

**King David:** David acts as the central figure as he conquers the City of Jerusalem and builds a place to keep the ark of the covenant. He also prepares the transportation and ceremony to bring the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David.

**Levites:** the Israelite tribe anointed by God to discharge priestly duties for Israel and to bring the ark of the covenant to the City of David.

**Obed-Edom:** His name means “servant of Edom.” His home is where the ark of the covenant was kept before it was moved to the City of David.

**Key Terms in the Lesson**

**Appoint (verse 16)**—Hebrew: *amad* (aw-mad’): to take one’s stand; stand.

**Ark (verse 2)**—Hebrew: *arone* (aw-rone’): ark; chest.

**Gathered (verse 3)**—Hebrew: *qahal* (‘kaw-hal’): to have gathered as an assembly or congregation; “assembled” (NIV).

**Pitched (verse 1)**—Hebrew: *natah* (naw-taw’): stretched out; spread out; extended; inclined; bent.

**Place (verse 1)**—Hebrew: *maqom* (maw-kome’): a place; a standing place.

**Poles (verse 15)**—Hebrew: *motah* (mo-taw’): poles; bars (of a yoke); “staves” (KJV).

**Priests (verse 14)**—Hebrew: *kohen* (ko-hane’): persons assigned the task of building altars and offering sacrifices.

**Topical Outline of the Lesson**

I. Introduction
   A. David and the Ark
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Priority of Worship (1 Chronicles 15:1-2)
   B. Preparation for Worship (1 Chronicles 15:3, 14-16)
   C. The Price of Worship (1 Chronicles 15:25-26)
   D. Perspectives of Worship (1 Chronicles 15:27-29a)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. David and the Ark

David was made the king in Hebron when the Israelites came to him, and the process was overseen by the prophet Samuel (see 1 Chronicles 11:3). At a very young age, David showed his ability to lead the Israelites in war when he killed Goliath. David was already chosen by God to be king, and many years later he would lead the Israelites and bring the ark of the covenant back to where it belonged. While the Levites were transporting this sacred chest, a man named Uzzah reached out to stabilize it when the oxen pulling it stumbled. This made God angry with him because Uzzah was not authorized to touch the ark, and God struck him to death because of this act. That place was then named Perez-Uzzah because David stopped the celebration. The Philistines were also involved in incorrectly transporting the Ark on a cart in 1 Samuel 6:10-11. However, they were not punished as severely and got away with the act because they were ignorant of the Ark’s significance. But God expected more from His people, the Israelites. David took the ark to the home of Obed-Edom (1 Chronicles 13). Obed-Edom was a Levite from the family of Koath (1 Chronicles 26:4), which was one of the families within the tribe of Levi that God had commanded to transport and take care of the Ark.

B. Biblical Background

In 1 Chronicles 11, after being made the king of Israel David wanted to fulfill God’s will to bring the ark of the covenant to His people. He organized the Israelites to bring the Ark from Baalah of Judah. The ark of God represented the presence of God in Israel. David, therefore, considered it a high priority to bring the Ark out from obscurity back to prominence. David’s objective was for Israel to be alive with a sense of God’s presence and nearness.

Later in his reign, King David wanted to build a permanent place of worship. It would be his son King Solomon who would construct the Temple of God, some sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. This was located in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to Solomon’s father, David. The Temple became the final resting place of the ark of the covenant. According to 1 Chronicles 10:29, King David’s reign includes the preparation for the building of the new Temple, which Solomon would build. King David tells his son Solomon not to be afraid of anything but to continue doing God’s work—as it is what God wants — and He will continue to be with him.
A. Priority of Worship  
(1 Chronicles 15:1-2)

AND DAVID made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

David was a warrior and a worshipper. Not often do we see these two characteristics coexisting and complementing each other. Another one of David’s characteristics was that of being a good planner and builder, which his son Solomon took to the next level. David was fond of family, and consequently the construction of buildings for himself in verse 1 included a series of apartments for his wives and children. The surrounding accommodations quite possibly housed the servants and their families.

Several questions arise as to the reasoning behind David’s constructing buildings for himself first and then just pitching a tent for the ark of God. Is not a place for the ark more important than a place for oneself? Why does David get a spacious dwelling and God only gets a tent? A tent was the customary dwelling of God since the pilgrimage of the children of Israel away from slavery to the Promised Land of Canaan. Perhaps one of the reasons why David permitted the tent to be prepared was because he already had plans to construct a grand and glorious Temple in the future in order to properly house the ark of the Lord (see 1 Chronicles 12).

If you had to choose one, would you rather have a beautiful location for worship or to have a beautiful experience in worship? Does a conducive worshipful atmosphere have any impact on your ability to worship? If you were in a physically uncomfortable or dangerous location, could you still freely worship God (see Acts 16:23-25)?

According to 1 Chronicles 13:14, the ark of God “remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house for three months, and the Lord blessed his household and everything he had” (NIV). The presence of the Ark was somewhat synonymous with peace and prosperity. It had a positive and productive effect on any place on which it rested.

Levites are the descendants of Levi who headed one of the twelve tribes of Israel (see Genesis 29:34). The term “Levite” is generally used to identify the part of the tribe that was set apart for the secondary duties of the sanctuary service (see 1 Kings 8:4; Ezra 2:70). Levites were assistants to the priests, who were also Levites. Although all priests were Levites, not every Levite was a priest.

Leading worship is not a task that can or should be done by just anybody. The ministry of worship is so holy and so seriously important that it would be a mistake to be approached by anyone sanctified for that purpose. Contrary to popular opinion, being sanctified does not refer to a denomination or a particular worship style. To be sanctified is a description of the heart and the character. It means to be set apart for special and specific usage.

Who has the right and the authority to lead the congregation in worship in our churches today? What does it mean, and what does it take to be specifically anointed to lead worship? There are several character traits of an effective worship leader, including the following: A worship leader is prayerful (Luke 5:16; Matthew 6:6); attentive to the Spirit of God (1 Samuel 3:10; Numbers 9:7-9); humble (1 Peter 5:5;
1 Timothy 5:17); skillful (1 Chronicles 25:7; 2 Chronicles 34:12); and dedicated (1 Corinthians 14:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 1 Corinthians 9:24). A worship leader should look to God for the end result of the worship experience, knowing all along that unless the Holy Spirit of God is present and active, even the most impressive of efforts will still be in vain.

B. Preparation for Worship
(1 Chronicles 15:3, 14-16)
And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place, which he had prepared for it. . . . So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy.

How do you typically prepare for worship? What does it take to effectively prepare oneself for worship? Is preparation for worship even necessary? The Old Testament is replete with examples of elaborate measures taken to get ready to encounter almighty God. Exodus 19:14 (NASB) records, “So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.” The New Testament style of preparation for worship is seen in Romans 12:1-2: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (NIV).

Through time and change we have lost much of our sense of the importance of consecration for worship. Many of us typically just show up and expect the worship leader to make it all happen. But every worshipper has a personal responsibility to prepare for an encounter with the holy God who created the universe. If we had an appointment to meet our favorite celebrity or some governmental official we would certainly take extra measures to prepare for the special occasion. It is that much more important that we prepare ourselves to encounter the living God.

Who would be the modern-day Levites? Should some people who serve in special roles be expected to be holier than the regular worshippers? Identify some realistic expectations and some unrealistic expectations that we sometimes place on certain church leaders.

The Levitical priesthood began with Aaron, the older brother of Moses (see Exodus 28:1-3). Imagine what church and worship would be like if all those who worshipped took their jobs seriously enough to prepare for the experience of worship. Worship should be entered into with a heart, mind, and spirit that is prepared for the process rather than depending on a worship leader to professionally perform the task. Simple tasks such as preparing for worship through prayer, confession, and having an attitude of expectation for God to move would place the heart of the worshipper in a posture to readily receive from God.

What kind of music serves the purpose of helping to prepare your heart for worship? Some prefer quiet meditational instrumental music, whereas others enjoy upbeat gospel praise. Whatever your preference, music can play an important part in getting the soil of the heart ready for the deposit of the Word through
worship, teaching, and preaching. When music is well-written, well-chosen, well-placed, and well-related, it can serve as a tremendously valuable resource in allowing the Spirit of God to speak to the hearts of those who participate in worship.

C. The Price of Worship
(1 Chronicles 15:25-26)

So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obededom with joy. And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.

Worship and sacrifice are complementary companions. In 2 Samuel 24:24b, David, who was a man after God’s own heart, makes the statement: “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (NIV). Throughout the Old Testament, any time worshippers came to the tabernacle or Temple they brought an animal sacrifice as an expected part of the worship process. They did not come to worship emptyhanded or emptyhearted. This mindset is in stark contrast to that of some contemporary worshippers who come to worship expecting to be catered to rather than to give. When Jesus came on the scene He became the perfect sacrifice, which eliminated the need to bring animal offerings to worship. Today, we still have a need to bring a sacrifice, but the sacrifice is in the form of ourselves (see Romans 12:1). Of course, the problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar as soon as the fire gets too hot. What sacrifice do you bring to worship that is reluctant to die? Identify some practical ways that you could effectively prepare for dynamic worship.

D. Perspectives of Worship
(1 Chronicles 15:27-29a)

And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bare the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the master of the song with the singers: David also had upon him an ephod of linen. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps. And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the city of David, that Michal, the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing.

David highly anticipated the worship experience. David readied himself to worship through exterior preparation. His clothing was in sync with worship. Likewise, David was ready for worship through interior preparation. His heart was right and his spirit was prepared for praise. When worshippers arrive with this type of advance preparation, they are ready before they get to the door and so they are able to “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name” (Psalm 100:4).

From the harps to the lyres, cymbals, trumpets, rams’ horns, and the human shouts, every available instrument got in on the act of joyfully welcoming the ark of the covenant into the City of David. This scene brings to mind Psalm 150:6: “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.” There is power in the kind of unified praise that is untainted by human ego. When God’s people get on one accord and with one purpose and lift their voices and play their instruments to glorify God, the walls of distraction, division, and destruction will come down.
There is a wide range of parameters that people deem as appropriate actions in worship, including shouting, dancing, running in worship, speaking in tongues, holy laughter, walking pews, and extended periods of total silence and reflection. God can get glory out of silence as well as sound. Before David was a king, he was first a musician and a worshipper. Sometimes people allow the sophistication of a title and position to supersede the free expression of praise and worship. But no position on earth is worth choosing above the posture of praise to God, who is more than worthy. The occasion of the Ark’s arrival in the city sparked the music. The music was accompanied by rhythmical movement. The movement was naturally embellished by ecstatic shouts of joy. If people can demonstrate extreme excitement over something as mundane as a football or basketball game, then surely the Lord of life is worth raising of a praise. Different people may have various opinions about what expression of praise is appropriate and what expression is inappropriate. Michal, daughter of Saul, felt that David’s expression of worship was too extreme and certainly undignified for a man serving in the office of king. Certainly, she had probably never seen her own father behave in such a manner when he was king. But the human customs of our past should never dictate the holy homage of our present. We can never praise God too much as long as our praise is authentic and gives glory and attention to God rather than to ourselves.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

As people of faith, we express our love for God through the media of music and singing in worship. Music can be a powerful tool to translate our internal feelings of faith into a powerful external manifestation of meaning. There is a place for structure in worship, and there is also a place for spontaneity in worship. God can use silence as well as sound to convey spiritual substance. Music can comfort us when we are discouraged as well as inspire us enough to break out in dance. Worship can be very personal and occur in the privacy of our homes, but it can also be a powerful corporate happening when we experience the move of God together.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the gift of worship and praise. Let us never be guilty of passing up an opportunity to give You what You are worth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
A HEART FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Showing Gratitude  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Expressing Thanks

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** David Tells God “Thanks!”  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** How to Say “Thanks”

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Deuteronomy 26:1-11

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 16:7-36  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 19-27  
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Chronicles 16:8

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 16:7-36  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 28-36  
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Chronicles 16:8

### 1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 19-27—KJV
8 Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people.  
9 Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works.  
10 Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD.  
11 Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually.  
12 Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.

19 When ye were but few, even a few, and strangers in it.  
20 And when they went from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people;  
21 He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes,  
22 Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.

### 1 Chronicles 16:8-12, 19-27—NIV
8 Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done.  
9 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.  
10 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.  
11 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.  
12 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.

19 When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it,  
20 they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another.  
21 He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings:  
22 “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.”
23 Sing unto the **Lord**, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation.
24 Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations.
25 For great is the **Lord**, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods.
26 For all the gods of the people are idols: but the **Lord** made the heavens.
27 Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place.

**UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE:** People easily get discouraged when looking at turbulent conditions in the world. How can we find courage to face these problems? David’s people sang a psalm of thanksgiving and a psalm of worship to God for all the great things God had done for them and for the greatness of God’s being.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

*Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:*

1. Analyze the psalm sung when David brought the ark to Jerusalem.
2. Rejoice in the wonderful things God has done on behalf of His people.
3. Express thanks for God’s greatness and provision.

**AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED**

**Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH**

—David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 draws from Psalms 96 and 105–106. It is also echoed in the prophesies of Isaiah.
—The Hebrew term translated “strength” in verse 11 is associated with the ark of the covenant in Psalms 78:61 and 132:8 (see 2 Chronicles 6:41).
—The call to “remember” (verse 12) figures prominently in the Psalms, often before a recitation of the people’s history and God’s faithful involvement with them.
—David recognized that remembering God’s past faithfulness on their behalf would encourage the people both to praise God and to trust God with their future.
—The Scripture passage is the narrative about the conclusion of the celebration for transferring the ark of the covenant from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem.
—The account of God’s past faithfulness to the Israelites—as in verses 19-22 (where they remembered the Exodus)—would encourage the perseverance of the people.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—David composed a psalm of thanksgiving and encouraged others to join in.
—David encouraged others to tell of God’s wonderful acts.
—David urged others to look to the Lord for strength and to seek God always.
—God’s people should always remember the wonders He has done.
—God’s people are to have an attitude of thankfulness and express that thankfulness by offering sacrifices to God.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The date of the writing of the book of 1 Chronicles is not precisely known; however, the last two verses of 2 Chronicles suggest that the time perspective of the whole book (1 and 2 Chronicles) was that of a time later than the Babylonian Exile (after 539 BC). This book was written to help the people understand how to worship God and to know the good plans God had for them. The history is primarily on the tribes of Benjamin, Judah, and Levi—who were more faithful to God. David’s ascension to power and his actions during his reign are the most common events described. The book also emphasizes that the Israelites were expected to act as a chosen nation by worshipping and giving thanks to the Lord.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

First Chronicles is chronologically one of the last books of the Hebrew Bible, as it is believed to have been written after 539 BC. The author of this book is not specifically named and is referred to as the Chronicler. The book draws some of its materials from the earlier books of the Bible—such as 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Samuel—which implies that this book was written later. This scriptural text focuses on the life of the children of Israel after the Babylonian Exile.

The covenant made between God and David is highlighted, and the book describes David and those who came after him as sitting on the throne (1 Chronicle 29:23). David’s reign is described in the book in glorious terms. God chose Solomon to be David’s successor and the builder of the Temple. David gave the Temple’s plan publicly to Solomon along with detailed descriptions such as the amount of gold that was to be used (1 Chronicles 28:19).

According to the books of Chronicles, David and Solomon were to be held responsible for the assignments among the Levites who worked in the Temple. The genealogies of the people who worked in the Temple are described at length. The book focuses on the connections that exist between monarchy, land, Temple, and genealogy within the society in the land of Israel during the period of return to Zion. The book of 1 Chronicles describes in detail the glorious moments that the people of Israel had in the earlier historical days by looking into the main concerns of the Jews at the time. The history of the Israelites is described in the book through a priestly perspective. The Chronicler paid attention to proper worship of God and the adherence to rules.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

David: He was a shepherd from Bethlehem who rose and became the strongest king that Israel has ever had. He was a God-given king that helped establish the children of Israel as a worshipping nation.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Seek the Lord for Guidance

In the books of Chronicles, “God’s people” refers to the children of Israel who had been delivered from Egypt by God. The book begins with the genealogies of Israel beginning with Adam and going through the twelve tribes (see 1 Chronicles 1). It details how King Saul lost his position of leadership because of his disobedience to the Lord. He did not keep God’s command—as he consulted a medium and did not seek guidance from the Lord (see 1 Chronicles 10:13). He was replaced by David, who is referred to as a man after God’s heart. Many of the mighty men who shared the exile period with David became strong leaders in his kingdom.

In 1 Chronicles 16:8, David prays for his people always to seek the Lord in all their circumstances. He recalls the promises that had been made to the previous leaders of the people and assures them that if they serve the Lord faithfully, they will have a fulfilling life. David led the children of Israel by being a good example and showing them how to serve the Lord faithfully. He constantly prayed for the Lord’s guidance and for those whom they were placed on the throne to lead.

B. Biblical Background

This assigned passage of Scripture provides the context of praise to God given by David. David starts his prayer in 1 Chronicles 16:8 by giving thanks to the Lord and appreciating...
Him for His many wondrous deeds. David urges the people of Israel to sing songs of praise to Him and make His deeds known among all the people. David, as a good leader, tells the people how they should worship and pray to the Lord. He urges them to seek the Lord’s strength and power continuously so that His presence can be witnessed among them. The miracles and wondrous works that the Lord had done were never to be forgotten.

In his prayer, David reminded the people always to remember God’s covenant. He asked the people never to forget the covenant in all their generations. God had made a covenant with Abraham to give the Israelites the land of Canaan as their inheritance. He then confirmed it to Isaac as a statute and an everlasting covenant. David describes the Lord as a promise keeper who will deliver to the Israelites what He had promised their forefathers.

The Lord is a protector and will not allow harm to come to those who are loyal and trust in Him. He assures the people that even in their weaknesses and in their small numbers—wandering from one nation to another—they should fear nothing. The Lord declares, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (1 Chronicles 16:22) to the other kings who would want to oppress His loyal children. The Lord is glorious among the nations, and His marvelous works should be declared to the whole world.

David compares the powerful Lord who made the heavens with the gods of other people, gods he describes as worthless. The children of the Almighty should always declare His glory among all the nations and His marvelous deeds that He has done for His people. The Lord does not fail those who are faithful to Him (see Psalm 12:1). His might and power should be feared among all people. The Lord cannot be compared to any other god created by people, for all those who believe in Him will have access to all His strength and be joyful because of it.

**II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

**A. What God Is Worth**

(1 Chronicles 16:8-11)

*Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually.*

This passage introduces an excerpt from Psalm 105:1-5. It uses the same Hebrew verb as in 1 Chronicles 16—“to thank.” Psalm 105 employs a *yadah* praise of thanksgiving to God. Yadah literally means “to cast out [the hand], make confession, praise” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*). By way of application, it is apparent in the Psalms and elsewhere that *yadah* praise is used to thank God for “things not yet received” as well as things already at hand.

To call upon God’s name is to confess the need for and request God’s assistance, intervention, and guidance in the affairs of our everyday lives. We request His help by earnestly appealing to God’s revealed name of Jehovah (see Psalms 3:1-7; 5:1; 7:6). To proclaim the Lord’s name is to make it known everywhere and to give God proper credit for everything that He has done. Throughout the Old Testament, the children of Israel identified the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by God’s feats,
exploits, and deeds of wonder—such as making a pathway through the Red Sea, making the sun stand still, and causing the Jericho walls to fall.

Notice the order of the words in verse 9 and in all biblical references to giving proper praise to God. The instructions are not to sing for the Lord but to sing to the Lord. The difference is that singing for the Lord can be construed as a type of performance where the success is dependent on the talent and ability of the singer. However, singing to the Lord is more so an act of worship in which the full attention of the singer is on spotlighting God’s exploits and attributes without concern for acceptance by other people.

God is to be glorified through our praises as we give glory to His name and show forth from day to day His promised salvation through Christ (verse 10). “We have reason to celebrate that from day to day; for we daily receive the benefit, and it is a subject that can never be exhausted. In the midst of praises, we must not forget to pray for the servants of God in distress” (Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary).

A powerful phrase and concept included in verse 11 is the admonition to seek God’s face. Seeking God’s face is different from only seeking God’s hand. Looking to God’s hand means to expect a blessing from the storehouse of God. But seeking God’s face involves one’s openness to God’s instruction, direction, and connection. The wise ones understand that those whose hearts belong to God have no trouble receiving whatever may be needed from God’s figurative hand.

B. What God Has Done
(1 Chronicles 16:12, 19-21)

Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; . . . When ye were but few, even a few, and strangers in it. And when they went from nation to nation, and from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved kings for their sakes.

One need only to think about God’s works in order to thank God for those works. This verse utilizes three interrelated words to describe the mighty works of God: wonders, miracles, and judgments. For example, God’s wonders and miracles can come in the form of supernatural miracles; God’s natural creation or wonders can be reflected in the simple complexity of childbirth or the changing of the seasons.

Psalm 19:7-10 further informs us,

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

The word judgment usually has a negative connotation in today’s culture. A common refrain among many contemporary people is, “Who are you to judge?” The difference between human judgment and holy judgment is that God’s judgments are always accurate. Jesus taught that God’s judgment is a sign of God’s love. True ministry creates encounters with the Spirit of God that reveal the truth about God and about God’s people.
Verse 19 gives testimony to the fact that from God’s perspective, true strength does not lie in mere numbers or notoriety. The quest for power through numbers is a carnal pursuit. Psalm 33:16 (NIV) tells us, “No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength.” This is a valuable lesson for the church to learn. While it is a blessing to have a large number of people who participate in a church ministry, the power of the church must not ultimately depend on the number of the people but on the obedience and faithfulness of that congregation’s believers. It is better to have a few people who love God a lot than to have a lot of people who love God a little.

The heart of God seems to be soft and especially sensitive toward those who are less fortunate. Hear the words of Matthew 25:35: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in” (NIV). God’s own people were strangers in a foreign land, and they experienced all the sentiments of a displaced people when raising the question seen in Psalm 137:4 (NIV): “How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” God calls for sensitivity to the less fortunate to be reflected in the words and ways of those who worship the God who brought the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land of Canaan. God is a protector and an avenger of His people (verse 21). Just as any good father would protect and provide for his children, so God protects and provides for us. The following are examples of God’s many promises to keep us from harm, from evil, and from our enemies:

- Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)—“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
- Isaiah 59:1 (NIV)—“Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.”
- Matthew 10:29-31 (NIV)—“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

Psalm 23 contains several references to God’s careful dedication to His people, comparing them to sheep. As a watchful shepherd whose main job is to protect and provide for the sheep, God responsibly oversees the flock even though they have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. There is no need to fear evil, because God is present.

C. What God Desires
(1 Chronicles 16:22-24)

Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. Sing unto the Lord, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations.

Verse 22 is a favorite for those Christians who wish to give a warning to anyone who may pose a threat to them. The term “anointed one” is used several times throughout the Bible, and in several different situations. There is not a single “anointed one” in the Scriptures. Rather, the term applies to different people depending on how it is used. In most cases, the “anointed one” being described is a regular person who has been specially set apart for God’s special plan and purposes. Anointed people in the Bible are those who have received a special calling.
from God to serve in a particular spiritual role, leadership role, or artistic role. For example, many illustrated Bible storybooks depict Samson as a man with big muscles. But the Bible does not corroborate that notion. Although he could have had large physical muscles, it was not the muscles that enabled him to accomplish so many great exploits. Samson’s great ability came from his empowerment by the Spirit of God upon him. The church today would be so much more powerful and effective if the majority of its constituents were true disciples of Jesus Christ, were keenly aware of their particular gifts, and were committed to flowing in those gifts.

The construction of “my prophets” in the original Hebrew is not found anywhere else throughout Scripture, although Psalm 105 does contain the expression translated “to my prophets.” Genesis 12, 20, 26 feature passages of patriarchal history that relate to this passage.

Our sacrifice of worship toward almighty God is not intended to be done only on special occasions (verse 23). Even once per week is an insufficient amount of time to glorify God. Consequently, we must prepare ourselves to express all-purpose praise. All-purpose praise can be given at home, in the grocery store, or anywhere else. It has been said that there are only two times to praise the Lord: when we feel like it, and when we don’t. Everyone who has had an encounter with God and who has a right relationship with God should not hesitate to express all-purpose praise. This includes people from “all the earth,” from both inside and outside of Israel. The proclamation of “his salvation” concerns deliverance from exile.

What is the glory of God (verse 24)? This is a term that may sound simple but is difficult to define. It has been said that God is in a class by Himself. Dr. John Piper said, “God has infinite perfections, infinite greatness, and infinite worth. The glory of God is the infinite beauty and greatness of God’s manifold perfections. God’s glory reflects God’s infinite beauty, character, worth, attributes, perfections, greatness and beauty.”

D. What God Deserves
(1 Chronicles 16:25-27)

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the Lord made the heavens. Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place.

Our praise to God should reflect our perception of God and our estimation of God (verse 25). If God were small, He would be worthy of small praise. If God were medium-sized, God would be worthy of medium-sized praise. But since God is a big God, God is so worthy of big praise. Below are seven classic biblical ways to worship God in Spirit and in truth: (1) **Yadah** (yaw-daw’) means “to show reverence or praise with extended hands” (Psalm 42:5). (2) **Todah** (tow-daw’) is very similar to **yadah** but means “to show agreement by extending the right hand” (Psalm 50:23). (3) **Barak** (baw-rak’) means “to kneel down” (Psalm 95:6). (4) **Tehillah** (tel-hil-law’) is spontaneous, authentic singing that is straight from the heart to God (Psalm 22:3). (5) **Zamar** (zaw-mar’) literally means “to pluck the strings and to celebrate in song and music” (Psalm 150). (6) **Halal** (haw-lal’) means to be clamorously foolish; to boast and to shine in reflecting the glory of God” (1 Chronicles 16:4; Nehemiah
(7) Shabach (shaw-bakh’) means “to address in a loud tone” and is usually related to freedom or victory (Psalm 63:3-4).

A casual reading of verse 26 may cause one to dismiss this warning about idols as an outdated anachronism from a bygone era. But idolatry can be defined as worship of anything that disproportionately consumes our thoughts, actions, or resources. Idols distract us from God and make us so preoccupied that we consciously or subconsciously prefer the idol more than God. Some contemporary idols might include the following list compiled by Gene S. Whitehead: people, church/ministry, lifestyle, rights and freedom, life challenges, and social media.

One of the marks of the presence of God is an overriding sense of power, splendor, strength, and joy (verse 27). The Duke of Wellington once remarked about Napoleon, “I used to say of him that his presence on the field made the difference of forty thousand men.” The presence of a strong leader has a powerful effect. How much greater is the impact of the awesome power of the presence of God? There is a spiritual vacuum in every heart that can only be satisfied by God’s presence. This presence satisfies our deepest longings. This power is holy, and we cannot take God’s presence for granted. It is through the cross of Christ and the miraculous resurrection of Jesus that a way into His presence is made possible.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Remembering God’s faithfulness in the past helps to encourage the praise of God in the present and trust in God for the future. It is a privilege to praise God and to allow the power of praise and worship to transform us into people who are prepared for spiritual warfare and for the fulfillment of our ultimate purpose in life.

PRAYER

Lord, let us always embrace every opportunity to give You praise because only You are worthy. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 2-8, 2019)

A Heart Filled with Gratitude

MONDAY, December 2: “All Nations Invited to Worship God” (Isaiah 45:20-25)
TUESDAY, December 3: “Response to God’s Generosity” (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)
WEDNESDAY, December 4: “God’s Saving Deeds” (Psalm 105:1-15)
THURSDAY, December 5: “God’s Gracious Compassion” (Psalm 106:40-48)
FRIDAY, December 6: “God’s Forever Covenant” (1 Chronicles 16:14-18)
SATURDAY, December 7: “God’s Forever Steadfast Love” (1 Chronicles 16:28-36)
SUNDAY, December 8: “God’s Wondrous Deeds for All People” (1 Chronicles 16:8-13, 19-27)
December 15, 2019  Lesson 3

BUILDING GOD’S HOUSE

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **ADULT TOPIC:** Negotiating Obedience
- **YOUTH TOPIC:** Continuing the Legacy

**CHILDREN**
- **GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** David’s Plans for God’s House
- **CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Future Plans

**DEVO TIONAL READING**
*Psalm 138*

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 17:1-15; 21:18-30
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14; 21:18, 21-27
- **KEY VERSES:** 1 Chronicles 17:11-12

**CHILDREN**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Chronicles 17:1-15; 21:18-30
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14
- **KEY VERSE:** 1 Chronicles 17:12

---

**1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14; 21:18, 21-27 —KJV**

NOW IT came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the L ORD remaineth under curtains.

3 And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying,

4 Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the L ORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in.

11 And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom.

12 He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever.

---

**1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14; 21:18, 21-27 —NIV**

AFTER DAVID was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the L ORD is under a tent.”

3 But that night the word of God came to Nathan, saying:

4 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the L ORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in.’”

11 “When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom.”
12 “He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever.
13 “I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor.
14 “I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.”

18 Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

21 And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshing floor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground.
22 Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build an altar therein unto the Lord; thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people.
23 And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.
24 And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.
25 So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.
26 And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.
27 And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People are not always able to accomplish what they desire to do for others. Is it possible to see a positive result even when our goals are not accomplished? Although God did not agree for David to build a temple, God promised that David’s son would build it.
**AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED**

**Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH**

— The Chronicler used 2 Samuel 7:1-29 as the source for 1 Chronicles 17:1-27.

— David’s desire was to build God a physical house (1 Chronicles 17:1). The “house” God promised to establish for David was a dynasty (verse 10). God further promised that one of David’s descendants in this dynasty would build a “house” for God (verse 12).

— Even though God did not accept David’s idea to build a temple, God reassured David of his favored status by referring to him as “my servant David” (see verse 7).

— God’s response to David’s idea recalled David’s past (“I took you from the pasture,” verse 7), looked to David’s future (I will “cut off all your enemies before you,” verse 8), and looked even further to the future of his son (“I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons,” verse 11).

— God responded to David’s purchase of the land, the altar, and his sacrifices with “fire from heaven,” reminiscent of the meeting tent with Moses (see Leviticus 9:24) and foreshadowing the dedication of Solomon’s Temple (see 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Chronicles 7:1).

— God rejected David’s idea to build a house for the ark of the covenant, but God responded that not David but one of his descendants would build the Temple.

— Although God did not allow David to build the Temple, David purchased the site where the Temple would be built (see 21:18, 21-27).

— David’s offering at the site where the Temple would be built and God’s acceptance represent David’s repentance, God’s forgiveness, and David’s reconciliation with God.

— God’s forgiveness of David is evident in God’s ending the plague among the Israelites.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

— David compared where he lived with where the ark of the Lord was being kept.

— David made the decision to build a house for the ark of the Lord.

— The prophet Nathan saw no sin in David’s intent to build such a house for the ark.

— God informed the prophet Nathan to tell David that he would not be the one to build the house for the Ark.

— God made a promise that David’s offspring would be the one to build a house for the Lord.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

*Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:*

1. Contrast the “house” David wanted to build for God with the “house” God promised to David.

2. Reflect on how God’s plans are greater and more satisfying than the plans we make for ourselves.

3. Seek God’s wisdom in planning for the future.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING
OF THE LESSON

The writer of the book of 1 Chronicles is unknown and is referred to by biblical scholars as the Chronicler. It is believed to have been written sometime after 539 BC. Similar events are also described in 2 Samuel, with details concerning life among those who were survivors after the Babylonian Exile. First Chronicles is not written in chronological order but is a narrative intended to describe the events of David’s covenant with God and God’s eternal covenant with the Israelites. Chapter 17 outlines the events that take place after the termination of war, which is highlighted in chapter 18.

First Chronicles describes God’s wrath toward David after David sinned. The recounting of the events serves to remind Israel about the justice of God and the mercy of God. God will not tolerate blatant disregard for His commandments, no matter how close the individual may be to the heart of God.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND
CULTURAL SETTING OF
THE LESSON

The events in today’s text occur in the City of David, which is also known as Zion or Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 11:4-9). It was called the City of David because this was where David was crowned king of Israel. The site is currently located in the Arab neighborhoods in Wadi Hilweh, which extends from the southern city walls of Jerusalem’s Old City.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S)
IN THE LESSON

King David: David was involved in making a covenant with God, and he promised to build a Temple as a way of thanking God.

Prophet Nathan: the prophet sent by God to communicate in building the Temple and instructing King David.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Build (verse 4)—Hebrew: banah (baw-naw’): to rebuild, cause to continue.

Established (verse 14)—Hebrew: kuwn (koon): to be stable, secure, enduring, firm.

Go (verse 4)—Hebrew: halakh (haw-lak’): to pass from one place to another; to be in motion; to be in a state not motionless or at rest; to proceed; to advance; to make progress.

House (verse 1)—Hebrew: bayith (bah’-yith): a house; refers either to the building or the persons occupying it.

Kingdom (verse 11)—Hebrew: malkuth (mal-kooth’): the territory subject to the rule of a king.

Prophet (verse 1)—Hebrew: nabi (naw-bee’): a spokesman for God; he spoke in God’s name and by His authority.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. David’s Plans versus God’s Plans
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application
    of the Scripture
   A. Called to Build the Temple
      (1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4)
   B. The Assignment to Build the Temple
      (1 Chronicles 17:11-14)
   C. Constructing the Altar
      (1 Chronicles 21:18, 21-23)
   D. The High Price of Sacrifice
      (1 Chronicles 21:24-27)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. David’s Plans versus God’s Plans

After King David settled in Zion he did not want the ark of the covenant to remain outside Jerusalem, and he was motivated to build a temple for it. By bringing the Ark to the center of Israel, he was able to make God’s presence known and to enable God’s glory to prevail among the Israelites. However, David’s plan to build the Temple was later altered by the prophet Nathan after God instructed him against the plan. This was because God willed for the Temple to be built by King Solomon.

God promised a hereditary monarchy through the house of David, and this was manifested by the succession of his son King Solomon—and ultimately Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. It was important for God to repeat this promise, specifically because there had never yet been a king succeeded by his son in Israel. Although David was denied the honor of building the Temple for God, David’s son fulfilled this vision. Building the Temple was an act of obedience by humans, and God’s covenant promise was an act of acceptance and confirmation from God.

B. Biblical Background

God was not happy with some of David’s acts prior to the moving of the ark to Jerusalem. David’s sin and the resulting chastisement revealed David’s heart. Since all sin has consequences, God presented David with three choices of retribution for the bad judgments David had perpetuated. The following three choices given to David were in themselves somewhat of a test for David. David was instructed to select one of the following three choices as God’s response to sin: (1) three years of famine, which would result in the death of some of the Israelites where only the fortunate ones would survive; Israel would be forced to depend on neighboring nations for food; (2) three months to be defeated by his foes, which would result in the deaths of many of Israel’s soldiers and a weakened army (Israel would have to contend with enemies among neighboring nations in order to survive); (3) three days of the plague in the land—with the results of the plague being equally distributed among the poor and the rich. This choice could decimate anybody of any class of people and could potentially result in the deaths of many people.

After considering the options, David chose the shorter duration of the penalty. His reasoning was that he would rather be placed in the hands of a loving, forgiving God than the nation’s fate be left to the discretion of a savage army that probably would not care about or spare lives in Israel.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Called to Build the Temple
(1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4)

NOW IT came to pass, as David sat in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD remaineth under curtains. . . . And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Go and tell David my servant, Thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not build me an house to dwell in.

Once David established his comfortable and impressive living quarters, he turned his attention to a physical dwelling for the ark of the covenant which had been housed in a tent. David’s sensitivity to the discrepancy between the living spaces speaks to his desire to elevate the divine above the human. He did not think it was right to place more emphasis on his own wants and needs than on God’s elevation. Prioritizing God in our everyday lives is an important component in the process of spiritual maturity. Nothing should become more important to us than our relationship with God and our allegiance to God.

From time to time God may test our allegiance to see if it is on par and pleasing in God’s sight. Some persons, places, or things that could possibly become significant rivals to our total allegiance to God might include spouses, family members, boyfriends/girlfriends, jobs, possessions, money, physical appearance, popularity, power, and pride.

David had a good idea, and it was based on the pure motive of glorifying God. However, his idea had to be tweaked by God in terms of the timing and the specific leadership involved in the execution of the vision (verse 4). This is an example of why it is so important to stay in tune with God so we can correctly discern God’s will and ways. Sometimes, we receive only part of the vision, yet we sometimes operate as if the delivery was complete. Daily check-ins with God are essential in order to stay on track spiritually. There are times when God chooses to speak to us directly, and there are other times when God speaks through someone else. Such was the case with David. God used the prophet Nathan to communicate His desires regarding the building of the Temple. God can speak to us through the Word of God—which is the most accurate source of hearing from God. God can also speak through the inner voice of the Holy Spirit, through prayer, through nature, through circumstantial confirmations, or through any other means. However, with all these forms of communication, it is important for all of them to line up with the principles found in the written Word of God.

B. The Assignment to Build the Temple
(1 Chronicles 17:11-14)

And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore.

There were things about David that made him unsuited to lead the construction of the Temple. Consequently, that job was reserved for David’s son. Every good father should want his son or daughter to go higher and to do better. Every generation should invest in the younger, next generation in order to groom someone to successfully and effectively
step into their roles once they have moved off the scene.

It seems like a harsh statement that God would take His love away from Saul, David’s predecessor (verse 13). This is especially so because David seems to have behaved in a worse manner than Saul and yet David was declared to be a man after God’s own heart. Saul’s sin was that when Samuel the prophet did not arrive when expected, Saul offered the sacrifices himself, assuming the authority of a priest. Second, when God told Saul to completely destroy the enemy’s camp, Saul and his army instead spared “the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good.” They only destroyed what they thought was undesirable and spared King Agag because he was viewed as a prized trophy of war.

The word that is translated “love” in verse 13 in the NIV Bible is translated “mercy” in other versions, but the bottom line is that what God took from King Saul through God’s love or mercy was the kingship. This concept is seen much more clearly in 1 Samuel 16:1 (NIV): “The Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.’” Saul was relieved of his office graciously given to him by God, but Saul stayed in the position long after God had removed His hand of mercy from him. It is a heavy judgment from God to be in an anointed position and no longer be an anointed person.

In verse 14, God establishes the right of supreme sovereignty in Israel with the throne being established forever in David’s lineage. The line of David occupied the throne in a long succession—but not without interruption. God’s promise was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Christ as the son of David who is our King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

**C. Constructing the Altar**

(1 Chronicles 21:18, 21-23)

Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. . . . And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the Lord: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.

The threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite became a significant geographical location because it continued the patriarchal practice of building an altar to the Lord. It was the concept of the sacrificial altar built by Abraham—when he was willing to sacrifice his son on an altar—that elevated the altar to prominence.

The act of threshing is separating the grain from the plant by flailing, beating, or some other process. Usually the grain is spread out on a large, flat space and the oxen are harnessed to rollers, sledges, and spikes which are driven across the plant. This movement distresses the wheat so that the chaff is chopped and the grain threshed out; the husks of corn or other seed separated by winnowing or threshing is called chaff. Some refer to the chaff as husks, hulls, pods, shells, and shucks. It is often used as fodder and is considered worthless.

In verses 22 and 23, we see two sides of love and sacrificial commitment expressed toward God. Perhaps David was already aware of the
generous heart of Araunah and that he would possibly respond in the spiritually sensitive way in which he did. David seeks to get in front of the debate and establish that the transfer of land between them would be at full price. One thing that David did not believe in was discount worship and bargain-basement praise. Worship involves giving to God that which God is worth. From the time he was a young boy tending his father’s sheep, David had demonstrated a great passion for developing an intimate relationship with God. This passion is permanently confirmed through the body of literature that we call the book of Psalms. Whenever we take shortcuts regarding worship, we fail to give God all that He deserves.

Araunah’s perspective is to freely give, generously give, and sacrificially give to God from the storehouse of his possessions (verse 23). Once Araunah heard that David wanted his property to construct an altar, he was more than willing to freely donate not only the land free of charge, but also the oxen for the sacrifice, the sledges, and the grain offering. Araunah understood that there is great value in great sacrifice when it comes from a pure heart that only desires to please God.

D. The High Price of Sacrifice
(1 Chronicles 21:24-27)

And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the Lord; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.

King David’s persuasive opinion prevailed in the negotiations with Araunah about sacrificial giving for the building of the altar. Sacrificial giving requires something from the giver that is above and beyond the normal, regular, and expected. Sometimes sacrificial giving has to hurt a little and be inconvenient in order to truly be sacrificial. Costless sacrifice is not genuine sacrifice. We see true sacrifice personified on the Cross when Jesus went against His own human will in order to become the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

Throughout the Bible, fire is used as a representation of God (verse 26). Fire also symbolizes other things, based on its various properties. Some of the properties of fire are that it can provide heat for a person or a group of people; it provides illumination to help people to see; it helps in food preparation; and it also consumes most of the things that happen to be in its path. Fire can also bring about pain and death. Subsequently, the symbolic meaning of fire varies depending on the context of its usage.

A good question to ask ourselves is, Which one of the above-described functions of fire most closely describes how we see God operating in our lives? Sometimes, we need illumination to help us see ourselves, our purpose, and people and situations around us. When our vision is impaired, we are prone to stumble and to make costly mistakes that sometimes require generations to correct. At other times, we need God’s fire to help us prepare to become the people God wants us to become. When our lives are presented to God for approval, we will want Him to say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Finally, the fire of God can sometimes be used to burn away things in our lives that are distracting and unproductive. When we are
relieved of our extra baggage of unproductivity, we can move toward our destiny with courage and confidence knowing that we will eventually accomplish our goal.

A memorable biblical example of a prophet’s calling fire down from heaven involves Elijah in 1 Kings 18:37-38 (NIV) when Elijah said, “‘Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.”

The being described in verse 27 was not a vision or an apparition but a real and literal being that was seen and experienced by David and the elders as reported in 1 Chronicles 21:16 (see also 2 Samuel 24:16-17). When angels take out their swords it is not a good idea to be anywhere near them. Sometimes, God makes a personal statement by the natural elements of lightning, wind, and rain. Other times, God speaks by floods and famine. God can even speak by using a still, small voice and even silence. Regardless of how God chooses to speak to us, the most important thing is to be sensitive in terms of discerning the content and intent of God’s call. In addition, it is very necessary to completely obey whatever we hear God saying to us—because even partial obedience is still disobedience.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The desire of David to build a physical house for God was a noble notion accompanied by pure motives. Just as David had to be sensitive to the specific nuances of God’s desires and instructions, so today we also must take the time to correctly discern God’s delicate divine directions for our lives. Even though God did not allow David to build a temple, God reassured David of his favored status by referring to him as “my servant David.” God acknowledged David’s acquisition of the land for the altar and his sacrifices with “fire from heaven,” which resembled a similar encounter with Moses in Leviticus 9:24. It is immensely important always to listen to the God who sometimes answers with fire.

PRAYER

Lord, we are grateful for every opportunity to honor You through acts of worship. Let us never take that privilege for granted, and let us give to You in ways that reflect Your worth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 9-15, 2019)

Building God’s House
MONDAY, December 9: “David Cannot Build the Temple” (1 Chronicles 22:6-13)
TUESDAY, December 10: “Solomon to Build the Temple” (1 Chronicles 28:2-10)
THURSDAY, December 12: “God Needs No House” (2 Samuel 7:1-11a)
FRIDAY, December 13: “God Makes a House for David” (1 Chronicles 17:7b-10)
SATURDAY, December 14: “The Lord Regards the Lowly” (Psalm 138)
SUNDAY, December 15: “Two Houses Firmly Settled” (1 Chronicles 17:1, 3-4, 11-14; 21:18, 21-27)
December 22, 2019

Lesson 4

THE LORD IS WITH YOU

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/ YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Graciously Accepting Praise

YOUTH TOPIC: We Are Not in This by Ourselves

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: The Lord Is with You

CHILDREN’S TOPIC: You Are Special

DEVO TIONAL READING

1 Samuel 2:1-10

ADULT/YOUTH


PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 1:39-56

KEY VERSES: Luke 1:46-47

CHILDREN


PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 1:39-56

KEY VERSE: Luke 1:42

Luke 1:39-56—KJV

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;
40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.
41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:
42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.
45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.
46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Luke 1:39-56—NIV

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 
40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.
41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 
43 “But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 
44 “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.
45 “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her?”
46 And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord
47 “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.
54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.
56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

48 “for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 “for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.
50 “His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
51 “He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
53 “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
54 “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful
55 “to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”
56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often wonder if they truly deserve the praise that others give them. How can we be gracious about the honors we receive? When Elizabeth called her “blessed,” Mary humbly praised God, confessing that all that had happened to her was in fulfillment of God’s great plan of redemption.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Survey the themes present in Mary’s song of praise.
2. Value Mary’s place in the unfolding story of God’s saving work.
3. Commit to their own roles in furthering God’s kingdom.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—By leaping in Elizabeth’s womb at the sound of Mary’s greeting to his mother, John began fulfilling his role as one who would declare

and prepare for the Lord’s coming. Luke 1:15 predicts that John will be filled with the Holy Spirit before his birth.
—The note that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that what she said next was the word of God, a prophetic utterance (verses 41-42).
—Elizabeth’s reference to Mary’s child as “Lord” (verse 43) marks the first time a human called Jesus “Lord.”

—Mary’s Magnificat introduces many of the themes prevalent in Luke’s gospel, including God’s concern for the poor, lowly, disadvantaged, and powerless, and God’s judgment on those who are arrogant, proud, and self-absorbed. It is a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

—Mary’s song of praise recalls Hannah’s prayer (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10) and many of the psalms that praise God and extol God’s attributes.

—The Magnificat juxtaposes two themes descriptive of God’s character: the warring (warrior) God, who engages in battle for the deliverance of God’s people; and the merciful God, who has compassion for the marginalized in society.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—After receiving the angel’s message, Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth.

—When Elizabeth greeted Mary, Elizabeth’s baby leaped in her womb.

—Elizabeth recognized Mary as being highly favored by God.

—Elizabeth questioned why Mary would visit her.

—Elizabeth also pronounced Mary as being blessed for believing what the Lord had said to her.

—Mary said/sung the words that have come to be known as the Magnificat.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

John the Baptist’s presentation in the book of Luke at the beginning of his ministry is notable because Luke also recounts a political history of leadership. The gospel writer began with the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar and ended with the introduction of religious leaders like Annas and Caiaphas (see Luke 3:1-2). This backdrop of John’s ministry is some thirty years after his birth, the content of today’s lesson. Luke gives less, though important, detail of the political climate around that time. Herod was king of Judea, and his leadership was problematic. Israel was under Roman rule and Herod, though a Jew, had the backing of Rome. In fact, it was the Roman Senate that assigned him the post and title of King of the Jews. This would prove to be unnerving for the client of his people’s oppressors and lead to his ordering a massacre in an attempt to get rid of the one God had appointed the true “King of the Jews.”

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The setting for the events of this passage is the city of Jerusalem. The story begins with the angel Gabriel appearing to Zechariah in the Temple (Luke 1:8-20); this is the same Temple where the disciples worshipped continually after Jesus had risen and ascended to heaven (see Luke 24:52-53). Jerusalem is seen as a sacred city for the Jews and is also the place where Jesus’ fated death was to occur. Jesus Himself notes that all the prophets of long ago predicted that His suffering, death, and resurrection would take place in the city of Jerusalem (see Luke 18:31-34).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Elizabeth: John the Baptist’s mother and Zechariah’s wife. She was also Mary’s relative.

Jesus Christ: He is the main focus of John the Baptist’s ministry. John’s biggest role was to prepare
the way for Jesus, who was the promised Messiah. Jesus is the Son of God through whom the salvation of the world and forgiveness of sin are attained via His suffering, death, and resurrection.

**John the Baptist:** the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. His purpose was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Jesus). This connection is seen when Mary mother of Jesus greets Elizabeth and the baby leaps in Elizabeth’s womb.

**Mary, Mother of Jesus:** a highly favored woman marked by humility and devotion whom God chose to be the mother of Jesus Christ. She was from a poor and insignificant background in the town of Nazareth, but she became the favored of God when the angel Gabriel appeared to her with the good news that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

Blessed (verse 45)—Greek: *makarios* (mä-kä’-rē-os): happy; blessed; to be envied.

Imagination (verse 51)—Greek: *dianoia* (dee-an’-oy-ah): the mind; disposition; thought; “inmost thoughts” (NIV).

Magnify (verse 46)—Greek: *megalunó* (meg-al-ooy-ah): to make or declare great; “glorifies” (NIV).

Saluted (verse 40)—Greek: *aspazomai* (as-pad’-zom-ahhee): welcomed; “greeted” (NIV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Elizabeth’s Joyful Surprise (Luke 1:39-45)
   B. Mary’s Song (Luke 1:46-56)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah

In preparation for John’s ministry, the angel Gabriel announced John’s forthcoming birth (see Luke 1:13-19) by appearing to Zechariah (John’s father) while he served in the Temple. He tells Zechariah that he will be blessed with a son and to call him John. The same angel also appears to Mary mother of Jesus and tells her the good news of a conception through the Holy Spirit. Through the angel Gabriel, the good news/preparation of the coming of Jesus Christ is foretold.

Through Mary’s song, known as “The Magnificat,” she praises the Lord for choosing her and goes further to explain that the world will call her blessed because the Lord hears the prayers of those who fear Him (see Luke 1:46-55). These words are witnessed in her magnificent song that she sang to Elizabeth after she greeted her. When Elizabeth mentions the “Lord,” this is an indication that the child being carried by Mary was special (Luke 1:42). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months before returning to her home, and soon after Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist.
Zechariah prophesied on the day of John’s naming and circumcision (see Luke 1:67-79). He praised God, saying that the Lord had heard His people’s prayers and that He had chosen to deliver the people from their sins. Zechariah goes on to proclaim that God was always fulfilling promises to His people since the time of Abraham, and that He was also bringing salvation to the world through His servants. This was to show that through John the Baptist, God had brought him to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. The Light and Salvation—as Zechariah refers to Jesus—was to bring people from the darkness of their sins.

B. Biblical Background

In Luke 1:51-53, Luke makes use of the past tense to imply Jesus’ conception by the Holy Spirit as a fulfillment of God’s promise. Furthermore, the verse speaks of the downfall of the proud and rich and favor for the poor and lowly, the latter a general statement used to refer to Israel. Mary then mentions Abraham and links this with God’s original covenant to show the fulfillment of salvation through Abraham’s descendants. Mary stays with her relative Elizabeth for three months and leaves shortly before John’s birth.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Elizabeth’s Joyful Surprise

(Luke 1:39-45)

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Have you ever been surprised by joy? Since there was no telephoning, e-mailing, or texting in existence at the time, there was no way for Mary to alert Elizabeth in advance about her
intended trip to visit her. But Mary had news that simply could not wait. She made the journey in her expectant state to visit her relative Elizabeth. Mary must have had mixed feelings as she finally accepted the reality that she was a virgin pregnant out of wedlock. She did not understand how that could be so, and surely Joseph, her family, and the community at-large would also be doubtful. The social state of being pregnant and unmarried carried with it a serious social stigma and a distinct economic disadvantage. Despite the risks and hardship of participating in this plan, Mary said yes to God, and Jesus was born. Mary’s walk was a walk of faith, and she was eventually rewarded for her efforts by having the singular privilege of giving birth to the Savior of the world.

It is extraordinary that Elizabeth’s baby, John, leaps in her womb at the exact time that Mary greets her (verse 41). This sympathetic and familiar reaction of an unborn babe gives credence to the notion that babies can sense external stimuli even prior to birth. Not only is this evidence of a connection between the unborn babies but also the powerful personal, spiritual, and familial connection between Mary and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth unashamedly unleashes her passionate pronouncement (verse 42), which mirrored the message of the angel. Elizabeth had to be divinely inspired and spiritually connected in order to be so accurate in her assessment of Mary’s status and position. Mary is highly honored among all women in all of history to have the distinction of being the bearer of the baby who is destined to become the Savior of the world. There is no carnal competition between these two women but only honest adulation and mutual inspiration. Greatness recognizes greatness, and holiness recognizes holiness.

The word favor (verse 43) in the biblical context is defined as the approval, acceptance, or special benefits of God extended toward one person (as in the case of Mary) or toward a group of people (as in the case of Israel). Those who tend to receive God’s favor walk in God’s ways and obey God’s commands. Righteous living and a blameless walk get God’s attention.

The content in verse 44 is a retelling of Elizabeth’s statement to Mary found in verse 41. When Mary spoke, the unborn John the Baptist leaped in the womb of Elizabeth, which served as a confirmation to both women that neither one of the babies being carried by the women were ordinary and both would grow up to be special and to stand out among their peers in the present and for eternity.

Elizabeth ends this part of the dialogue with a powerful statement of faith in verse 45. Four key words used here are the words blessed, believed, fulfill, and promises. To be “blessed” is to be selected and treated favorably by a source with the power and ability to do so. To believe, in this context, is to take God at His word and not to second-guess the truth. Faith that is living and practical usually comes from a deep sense of abiding trust and personal experience developed over time. Fulfilled promises are promises that have been made, remembered, waited upon, and manifested. As we wait for the seed of the promise to mature below the surface, we do our part to water and nurture the promise until it breaks forth from the soil and bears good fruit in due season.

B. Mary’s Song

(Luke 1:46-56)

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And
my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

This marvelous piece of poetic prowess points to one of the likely reasons for why Mary was chosen by God to be the human bearer of Jesus. Mary’s instant conclusion from hearing Elizabeth’s excited revelation of the babe leaping is sincere praise and glorification of the God who made all this possible. For Mary, this is just another reason to glorify God and to express praise for such a great Savior.

Mary’s humble attitude is placed on display in verse 48 as she articulates her unworthiness to serve as the mother of the Messiah. Even though Mary’s most-recent lineage was not impressive, God saw fit to celebrate her and to elevate her to a level that was well beyond the potential of her present social standing. Unlike the latest popular-culture celebrity who may occupy the headlines for a brief season, Mary’s acclaim extends beyond her own contemporary times and remains relevant forever throughout every generation.

Mary uses the obscure and unique term “Mighty One” when referring to God in verse 49. This comes from the Greek word dunatos, which means “powerful, able, or possible.” Notice that the definite article is used here to identify God, which distinguishes and sets this God apart from all possible contenders.

The phrase translated “fear” here in verse 50 and elsewhere in relationship to God can be somewhat confusing. The Bible uses the word fear at least three hundred times in reference to God, so this phrase must be important. Some Scriptures regarding fear seem to contradict others, as when we read the 1 John 4:18 statement that “perfect love casts out all fear.” One type of fear seems necessary, while the other kind of fear seems negative. The positive kind of fear is to be understood as being more like respect. Fearing God or respecting God is good because it drives us away from our old sinful nature.

The negative side of fear is when we elevate our fright of anything above our faith in God. Negative fear is actually reverse respect. When we positively fear God, we are motivated to follow God, to trust God, and to obey God. When we negatively fear other things, we are motivated to run away.

The reference to God’s “arm” in verse 51 is a term used in personification of God’s strength. Mary enlarges and expands upon her personal gratitude to God for choosing her, and she waxes eloquent regarding the goodness and power of God in the lives of people in general. A mature, holistic, accurate view of God goes beyond mere concern about God’s relationship to one’s self.

The “rulers” referenced in verse 52 is a general term which includes all human rulers. No matter how great one’s human authority may be, no power is greater than God’s power. Human authority figures who submit to God are elevated. But rulers who fail to acknowledge God are brought down. This same principle is also reflected in Matthew 23:12 (NIV): “For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
In verse 53, we see a familiar refrain reflecting God’s care and concern for those who are poor. This verse can be interpreted from a literal and a spiritual perspective. People who trust in material and/or financial wealth are sent away empty. Similarly, those who trust in their spiritual wealth and heritage are also disappointed when God is not impressed and does not bless. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6:19-20).

Mary culminates her magnificent song (verses 54-55) by contextualizing her heritage as a descendant of Abraham from the people of Israel. Israel was singled out to be blessed, and God promised that they would never be forgotten because they were His children. God’s selection of Mary to give birth to the Messiah simply undergirds the promise to bless Israel.

In the three months that Mary stayed with Elizabeth (verse 56), there must have been a tremendous time of bonding and speculation about the future. Perhaps they imagined and discussed how their children might eventually work together to impact the kingdom of God. Three months is the amount of time established by Jewish doctors to know whether or not a woman is pregnant. Mary’s journey back home provided an adequate amount of time for her to sufficiently savor all of the sights and sounds that she had experienced while sharing precious time with her relative Elizabeth.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The Good News that was experienced by Mary and Elizabeth is also the Good News for everyone who is humble enough to receive the Savior to be Lord of their lives. The greater our humility, the greater our spiritual ability to become whatever God has created us to become. God blessed Mary to carry the Christ-child, and Elizabeth and her unborn child recognized the presence of Christ within Mary. Likewise, when we receive Christ we are also blessed, and people recognize the power of God that is within us.

PRAYER

Lord, let us receive Your presence in our lives, and let us carry Your power to impact our world for Your glory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 16-22, 2019)

The Lord Is with You

**MONDAY**, December 16: “John the Baptist Is Born to Elizabeth” (Luke 1:57-66)
**WEDNESDAY**, December 18: “Young Woman’s Pregnancy Is Sign of Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:10-17)
**THURSDAY**, December 19: “Virgin Conception Announced to Mary” (Luke 1:26-33)
**FRIDAY**, December 20: “Mary Accepts the Miracle of Pregnancy” (Luke 1:34-38)
**SATURDAY**, December 21: “Joseph Obediently Honors Mary’s Role” (Matthew 1:18-25)
December 29, 2019
Lesson 5

DAVID’S PRAYER

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A Greater Plan
YOUTH TOPIC: Sincere Expressions

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: David’s Prayer
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: I Show Gratitude

DEVOATIONAL READING
Psalm 89:19-37

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Chronicles 17:16-27
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Chronicles 17:16-27
ADULT KEY VERSE: 1 Chronicles 17:20
YOUTH KEY VERSE: 1 Chronicles 17:16

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Chronicles 17:16-27
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Chronicles 17:16-27
KEY VERSES: 1 Chronicles 17:16b, 18a

1 Chronicles 17:16-27—KJV
16 And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who am I, O LORD God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?
17 And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast also spoken of thy servant’s house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD God.
18 What can David speak more to thee for the honour of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant.
19 O LORD, for thy servant’s sake, and according to thy will, hast thou done this great thing and made known all these great things.
20 O LORD, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.
21 And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and

1 Chronicles 17:16-27—NIV
16 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: “Who am I, LORD God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?
17 “And as if this were not enough in your sight, my God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You, LORD God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men.
18 “What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant,
19 “LORD. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises.
20 “There is no one like you, LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.
21 “And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth whose God went out to redeem a people for himself, and to make a name for yourself,
terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt?
22 For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, LORD, becamest their God.
23 Therefore now, LORD, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house be established for ever, and do as thou hast said.
24 Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel: and let the house of David thy servant be established before thee.
25 For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house: therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray before thee.
26 And now, LORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant:
27 Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O LORD, and it shall be blessed for ever.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Research the significance of David’s prayer in its historical context.
2. Aspire to emulate the faithfulness of David as expressed in his prayer.
3. Embrace David’s prayer as a model and write a prayer of gratitude and praise to God.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: When a person receives a great promise, he or she may feel honored. How does one respond when one has been so honored? When God promised to make him the head of a great dynasty, King David prayed a prayer of gratitude, praise, and petition.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The Chronicler’s account of David’s prayer draws from 2 Samuel 7:1-29.
—David’s prayer came as the result of God’s promise to build for him a dynasty. His prayer includes two parts: thanksgiving for God’s promise (verses 16-22), and a petition for God to confirm His promise (verses 23-27).
—David acknowledged his subordinate role in
God’s plan by referring to himself as God’s “servant,” echoing God’s title for him (verse 4). David used the term “servant” ten times in this prayer.
—Interestingly, David’s prayer makes no mention of the Temple, focusing instead on David’s gratitude and praise to God for God’s establishment of David’s “house.”
—David’s prayer is in response to God’s promise that one of David’s sons would build the Lord’s Temple, and that David’s throne would be established forever through his descendants.
—David’s prayer has elements of thanksgiving, praise, and petition.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—David’s response to God’s rejection of his plan to build a house for God was one of humility and gratitude.
—David expressed amazement that God would honor him by keeping his family in God’s presence.
—David acknowledged and expressed God’s uniqueness as the one and only omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God of Israel.
—David expressed his understanding of the special relationship that Israel had with God.
—David wanted God’s commitment to be established to show that God is Israel’s God.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
Most of the information contained in 1 and 2 Chronicles is also reflected in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. In 1 and 2 Chronicles, there is a greater degree of focus on the priestly aspect of that particular era. The book of 1 Chronicles was written following the time of the Exile with the intention of assisting those who were returning to Israel in understanding how to rightly worship God. Other perspectives in 1 Chronicles include a retelling of history regarding the tribes from the Southern Kingdom—the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Benjamin, and the tribe of Levi.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
The Jews had begun to make their way back to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles outline and describe the lives of God’s people in post-exilic Israel. In this chapter, the people of Israel come back to Jerusalem, the city that David built. Many of the pivotal events that serve as historical turning points in Israel’s history are connected to God’s covenant with David and the Temple. David makes plans for the Temple, Solomon builds the Temple, kings are crowned in the Temple, prophets are killed in the Temple, and the Law is rediscovered in the Temple. The Temple serves as the center stage for the unfolding of the events in the books of Chronicles.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**
**King David:** the king of Israel in this era, who built the city of Jerusalem.
**Nathan:** the prophet of God during the reign of King David.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**
Established (verse 23)—Hebrew: *aman* (aw-man’): to confirm; to support.
Greatness (verse 19)—Hebrew: *gedullah* (ghed-oo-law’): greatness; majesty; dignity; “great thing” (NIV).
Nation (verse 21)—Hebrew: *goy* (go’-ee): a nation; people.
Redeem (verse 21)—Hebrew: *padah* (paw-daw’): to ransom.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. David’s Prayer of Acceptance

David had set his mind on building a temple for God. This decision was not approved by God when David approached Nathan with the idea. It had been more than four hundred years since the events in the wilderness had occurred where God had commanded Moses to build a tent to God’s specifications.

When Nathan brought the issue to God about David’s building a temple, God rejected the plan. Despite the ark of the covenant being housed in the wilderness for such a long time, God did not desire a temple at the time but rather preferred the tent (verses 3-6)—because God had a plan for the building of the Temple.

David acknowledged himself as God’s servant who was willing and ready to serve God. In his prayer, King David used the term “servant” ten times in order to profoundly express his undying loyalty and dedication to serving the living God (verse 4). God promised David that a house would be built eventually (verses 11-15). The building of the Temple was an act of human obedience by which God’s covenant promise was accepted and confirmed.

Important in 1 Chronicles is the emphasis upon continuity with the past. David served as the designer of the Temple, and Solomon served as the builder of the Temple. This connection illustrates the way in which one generation feeds the success of another and the next generation secures the legacy of the former.

B. Biblical Background

David’s prayer of gratitude is drawn from 2 Samuel 7:1-29. He uses this prayer to express his thankfulness to God and his expectations of God. This prayer is a testament to the fact that God is a God who makes promises and who keeps promises. David’s gratitude comes in response to God’s promising to reserve a special place in history for the descendants of David. David’s prayer consists of two parts. One part is an expression of gratitude to God
for all He has done for him and for the Israelites as a whole. David recounts to God the promises that have been made, and David is pleased that God decides to retain honor and position in David’s lineage as He promised leadership in Abraham’s covenant—and now He chooses David’s lineage to build Him a temple (verses 23-27). The continuation of this sense of legacy is further underscored by God’s promise to forever bless the line of David.

The Law and the Prophets served as a major part of Israel’s covenant life under the rulership of David. David prioritized national compliance with the Law. The kings who were faithful such as David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, Rehoboam (2 Chronicles 11:4; 12:6), and Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25:7-10) all honored God’s Law. But the kings who were unfaithful disregarded God’s law—Jehoram, Joash, Amaziah, and Manasseh. As a result of their disobedience, they were destroyed.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God’s Great Promises
(1 Chronicles 17:16-19)

And David the king came and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God; for thou hast also spoken of thy servant’s house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O Lord God. What can David speak more to thee for the honour of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant. O Lord, for thy servant’s sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all these great things.

To “sit before the Lord” is to wait patiently in God’s presence with a mindset of humility and expectation, lovingly listening for the leadership of the Lord (verse 16a). Sitting before the Lord is simply being content to commune in quiet reverence in unity with the Holy One. In this posture of peace and reflection, the mind of the believer is made ready to receive instruction, insight, direction, and correction. Daily sitting before the Lord is a mandatory component in the process of spiritual maturity. Spiritual warfare is real, and just as soldiers are briefed regarding the necessary strategy before entering combat, likewise every disciple should listen for God’s specific marching orders each day before plunging into battle. Sitting before the Lord might include times of reading God’s Word, songs of praise, prayer, and meditation/reflection. A journal is also a helpful tool to record thoughts and revelations from time spent together with God.

David raises a rhetorical question (verse 16b) that showcases his personal humility and his high regard for the sovereign Lord when he asks, “Who am I?” The factual, practical response to David’s question is, “You are the king.” But David distances himself from his own earthly royalty while standing in the powerful presence of the King of Kings.

David acknowledges the great distance from which God has brought him when he uses the phrase “this far.” No doubt, David was thinking of his selection to be the future monarch while as the youngest of his father’s sons he spent long hours in solitude tending smelly sheep out in the countryside. It was God who enabled him to become a great warrior,
to kill the Philistine Goliath, and eventually to be elevated to the royal throne of Israel. This is the value of personal testimony. Those who forget from whence they have come tend to sink into the low tide of pride. But those who never forget that God has brought them “a mighty long way” are enabled to ride on the high tide of humility.

David acknowledges the fact that not only has God blessed him in the past and in the present, but God has even gone on record to promise a blessing to the house of David in the future (verse 17). This three-tier beneficial blessing from God is almost too much for David to comprehend and accept. His appreciation is palpable, and his gratitude moves into overflow mode. The sentiment expressed in this passage is echoed in Psalm 103:2 (NIV): “Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” The landscape of life and Scripture are both littered with the likes of those who made the tragic mistake of forgetting God’s benefits.

Two of life’s greatest privileges are to know God and to be known by God (verse 18). To know God is to take deliberate steps toward seeking the face of God in order to do the will of God. We accomplish this through the practical spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, reading the Word, studying the Word, and meditating on the Word. Most of all, we are called to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, so that we will not be guilty of deceiving ourselves (see James 1:22).

David articulates a profound spiritual principle in verse 19 when he correctly connects God’s will with what is best for his own life. When separation is made between these principles, confusion occurs and despair begins to dominate. But when we accept the fact that all good things come from God—even when something happens that seems to be unfavorable—we can depend on Scriptures such as James 1:17 (NIV): “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” Since God completely and comprehensively knows the past, present, and future, nothing takes God by surprise. When we embrace a relationship with God we are indwelt with the presence of God, and consequently there is no need to be intimidated by the challenging, unsettling, and unforeseen circumstances of life. David’s awareness of God’s sovereignty allowed him to be settled and confident regarding the future. There is no point in worrying since God’s power prevails over every contender, and this superiority is what makes God worthy of our worship.

B. Who Is like the Lord?
(1 Chronicles 17:20-24)

O Lord, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt? For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God. Therefore now, Lord, let the thing that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house be established for ever, and do as thou hast said. Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel: and let the house of David thy servant be established before thee.

David is careful to distinguish the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from all other
contender gods (verse 21). This concept of divine otherness is also seen in Jeremiah 10:6 (NIV): “No one is like you, Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power.” The unique nature of God’s attributes is seen in God’s perfect character and God’s mighty works. Matthew 6:13 also affirms this (through the Disciples’ Prayer): “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.”

Momentarily the focus is shifted from the uniqueness of God to the uniqueness of God’s chosen people, the Jews (verses 21-22). The descendants of Abraham are referred to in Scripture as God’s chosen people and even referred to as the wife of almighty God: “For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the Lord of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth” (Isaiah 54:5, NASB). God did not choose Israel because they were inherently better than any other race of people on earth. James 2:23 (NIV) established that because Abraham believed God, “it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. Israel’s status as God’s chosen people was not based on merit but based on God’s grace. Israel’s special status also came with great responsibilities, such as guarding the Law and serving in the tabernacle. The family line leading to the Messiah was also to come through Judah. Fortunately, those who are not born Jews can be “grafted into the family of God” through faith in the blood of Jesus. Ephesians 2:13 verifies this: “But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ” (NLT; see also Romans 11:17-24; Ephesians 2:19; 3:6).

Here in verse 23, the word promise means “to be upheld, maintained, or assured.” We see this principle affirmed in Isaiah 55:11 (NIV): “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.” Two of the twin attributes of God are God’s faithfulness and God’s inability to lie. Since the very essence of God is truth, whenever God promises something, that promise will invariably be fulfilled. Numbers 23:19 (NIV) corroborates this point: “God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” Some human promises are temporary. We may promise to help someone, but circumstances may prevent us from following through. We may even promise to remain married until death parts us, but this vow is not always kept. Unlike human vows, God’s holy promises are forever. No matter how many promises God has made to us, they are “yes” in Christ and the “amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God (see 2 Corinthians 1:20).

Our prayer life would be more powerful if we consistently believed the promises of God and acted upon them through faith. One of the reasons why people fail to take God at His word is that perhaps a prayer was prayed to God, but the desired answer to that prayer was not given by God. People might pray for personal favors, protection, healings, success, guidance, miracles, family, forgiveness, or finances. Some people consider a yes to their specific request as the only legitimate answer to their prayer. However, instead of a “yes,” God may respond with an unequivocal “no,”
a patience-building “wait,” or with the potentially frustrating sound of absolute silence. God sometimes answers in a manner that we never even imagined. That is part of what makes God sovereign.

A sense of continuity and eternity is the thread throughout verse 24. The perpetual establishment of God’s name and the consistent connection of God’s people is the predominant theme. The concept of “forever” is sometimes used in Scripture as a figure of speech and other times it may be intended in a literal manner. In this reference to the name of the God of Israel, history has shown that God’s name has stood the test of time.

When it comes to humanity, the term forever can mean “lasting many generations.” The duration of a human construct may also have to do with the degree of loyalty, purity, or obedience that is exhibited by the person or the group. It is possible for people to cut blessings short by refusing to abide by God’s guidelines. But the throne being established in David’s lineage forever was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the King of Kings.

God has hand-selected Israel and has given her privileges balanced by responsibilities. God’s great expectations of the people should be balanced by their efforts to obey God and to fulfill God’s expectations.

C. Bless This House

(1 Chronicles 17:25-27)

For thou, O my God, hast told thy servant that thou wilt build him an house: therefore thy servant hath found in his heart to pray before thee. And now, L ORD, thou art God, and hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: Now therefore let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may be before thee for ever: for thou blessest, O L ORD, and it shall be blessed for ever.

Divine revelation is a spiritual concept that is consistently present throughout Scripture but is conspicuously absent in the lives of typical church members. Even the New Testament book of Revelation is typically avoided because many believers fear or lack understanding of Revelation. A similar word that would perhaps be more palatable is the word inspiration. This term is generally defined as “a divine influence or action on a person believed to qualify him or her to receive and communicate sacred revelation.” The concept communicates the basic act of drawing in, especially of the inhalation of air into the lungs. The word is also used to indicate enhanced mental or emotional stimulation. But none of these definitions accurately captures the concept of biblical inspiration.

Revelation is supernatural communication originating from God and received by humanity. This communication can manifest itself through the written Word of God or through the spoken word rooted in and verified by the written Word. Sometimes revelation occurs internally through the Spirit of God and can also manifest through the created universe. Revelation is not only possible but actually necessary in order for humanity to move past the limited present and reach toward the unlimited future. Although revelation can occur through miracles, this is not the standard because signs (miracles) are basically for unbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 14:22), and mature disciples are called to walk by faith and not by sight.

The revelations from God delivered to David elicited in David at least two identifiable reactions: (1) David found courage; (2) David began to pray. When we have a sense that God
is speaking to us and sharing divine revelations, our inclination should be to pray, take courage, and act or obey. David was prepared to follow God’s guidelines even when God’s way did not necessarily concur with David’s own plans and desires. David originally wanted to build the Temple, but God had other plans. Once David heard from God, David realigned his plans to God’s will, and he did it with an exceedingly joyful attitude. The only reason he needed was that God said it, and he already knew that all of God’s promises are true.

David culminates his tribute in verse 27 by requesting a special blessing from the God from whom all blessings flow. David’s desire for God’s favor was not just for him personally and presently, but also for his people perpetually. David was completely convinced that there is no god able to bless like the Lord God. The blessings given by God are not temporary but permanent. When Jesus raised the dead, He also healed them from whatever condition killed them in the first place. God’s power is perfect, and His grace is complete. When God gives blessings, the blessings are forever.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

When we approach God in a spirit of faith and humility we have a much better chance of having our prayers answered than if we had approached God with an attitude of entitlement or doubt. The prayer of David was unselfish, and it was also based on the powerful promises of God. David prayed in faith and confidence because he knew that his request was in line with God’s established will. This pattern of unselfish, faith-filled prayers that reflect God’s already-established will can be helpful in instructing us how to pray in a way that is pleasing to the heart of God.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us not to pray selfish prayers that only concern our own wishes and desires. Let our prayers reflect Your heart so that the answers to them will accomplish Your will. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 23-29, 2019)

David’s Prayer
MONDAY, December 23: “God’s Forever Covenant with David” (Psalm 89:19-37)
TUESDAY, December 24: “The Lord Will Build David’s House” (2 Samuel 7:11b-17)
WEDNESDAY, December 25: “No God like Our God” (2 Samuel 7:18-22)
THURSDAY, December 26: “No People like Our People” (2 Samuel 7:23-29)
FRIDAY, December 27: “David Selects Materials for the Temple” (1 Chronicles 22:2-5)
SATURDAY, December 28: “David Orients Builders about Temple Construction”
(1 Chronicles 22:14-19)
SUNDAY, December 29: “David’s Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving” (1 Chronicles 17:16-27)
A PLACE FOR THE ARK

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: A Long-anticipated Celebration
YOUTH TOPIC: Celebration!

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: A Place for the Ark
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Dedicating an Important Building

DEVOTIONAL READING
Deuteronomy 31:7-13

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 8:1-13; 2 Chronicles 5:1-14
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Kings 8:1-13
ADULT KEY VERSE: 1 Kings 8:13
YOUTH KEY VERSE: 1 Kings 8:11

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 8:1-13; 2 Chronicles 5:1-14
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 5:1-7, 11-14
KEY VERSE: 2 Chronicles 5:7

1 Kings 8:1-13—KJV
THEN SOLOMON assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.
2 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.
3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.
4 And they brought up the ark of the LORD, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up.
5 And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with

1 Kings 8:1-13—NIV
THEN KING Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Zion, the City of David.
2 All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.
3 When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark,
4 and they brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it.
The priests and Levites carried them up,
5 and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.
him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that
could not be told nor numbered for multitude.
6 And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant
of the LORD unto his place, into the oracle of the
house, to the most holy place, even under the wings
of the cherubims.
7 For the cherubims spread forth their two wings
over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered
the ark and the staves thereof above.
8 And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the
staves were seen out in the holy place before the
oracle, and they were not seen without: and there
they are unto this day.
9 There was nothing in the ark save the two tables
of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when
the LORD made a covenant with the children of
Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.
10 And it came to pass, when the priests were come
out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house
of the LORD,
11 So that the priests could not stand to minister
because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had
filled the house of the LORD.
12 Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he
would dwell in the thick darkness.
13 I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a
settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

6 The priests then brought the ark of the LORD’s
covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the
temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the
wings of the cherubims.
7 The cherubim spread their wings over the place of
the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying
poles.
8 These poles were so long that their ends could
be seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner
sanctuary, but not from outside the Holy Place; and
they are still there today.
9 There was nothing in the ark except the two stone
tables that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where
the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites after
they came out of Egypt.
10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place,
the cloud filled the temple of the LORD.
11 And the priests could not perform their service
because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled
his temple.
12 Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he
would dwell in a dark cloud;
13 “I have indeed built a magnificent temple for
you, a place for you to dwell forever.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People have dedication ceremonies or grand
openings for many different things. How are these ceremonies or grand openings celebrated?
When King Solomon called an assembly to celebrate the dedication of the Temple, the glory
of the Lord filled the house of God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand the significance of Solomon’s Temple dedication.
2. Intuit how the people of Jerusalem felt as the glory of God filled the Temple.
3. Celebrate God’s presence among those who gather in God’s name today.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
— The festival celebrated in the seventh month (verse 2) was the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:33-43), a weeklong celebration remembering the journey from Egypt to a permanent home in Canaan.
— The ark had long been a great symbol of God’s presence with the Israelites. The moving of it here represented the long-awaited provision of a permanent residence for God among His people.
— God had provided very specific instructions for the moving of the ark (see Exodus 25:12-14) and took them very seriously, as evidenced by the story of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6.
— The Temple that Solomon had built would house the ark of the covenant, which symbolized God’s presence and had previously been housed in a tent that David constructed to serve as a temporary sanctuary.
— The Scripture notes the special role of the “elders of Israel,” the priests, and the Levites in the procession to the Temple: carrying the ark, the tent, and all the holy vessels.

— The cloud (verses 10-11) was a visible manifestation of God’s presence.
— Solomon’s prayer (verses 12-13) linked the God of Exodus and the God of Sinai (see Exodus 20:21; Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:22) to this Temple.
— The “thick darkness,” also known as the Holy of Holies, was the innermost chamber in the Temple where the ark of the covenant was to be housed.

Teachers of CHILDREN
— When the building of the Temple was finished, Solomon stored in it treasures that had been gathered by his father, David.
— Solomon brought the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God’s presence, into the new Temple.
— Solomon called the leaders of Israel, including priests and Levites, to gather for the dedication of the Temple.
— A cloud, the sign of God’s presence, filled the Temple as the dedication ceremony began.
— Children feel special when invited to perform at festive events.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Following the reign of his father, David, Solomon was chosen by God as the next leader of Israel. His throne was established after a struggle for power among his brothers. After Solomon was anointed king, God gave Solomon the promise of divine presence and Solomon’s throne was established. Solomon offered many sacrifices to God in Gibeon, and God rewarded him. When Solomon unselfishly asked God for wisdom, God provided Solomon with more wisdom than all his predecessors and successors. Solomon went on to build the Temple of the Lord, as God had told David that his son would build the Temple of the Lord.

After the Temple had been built and well furnished according to God’s instructions, it was time for the ark of the Lord to be brought into the Temple for the grand opening. There was no other appropriate place for the Ark to dwell in other than inside the magnificent Temple that had been constructed by King Solomon. The events in these verses happened in the seventh month, the month of Ethanim. The dedication of the Temple took place during the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the seven feasts of the Jewish economy.
I. INTRODUCTION
   A. Mission Accomplished

   David was a man after God’s own heart and sought to build a temple for the Lord. The Lord told him that due to his hands’ having shed so much blood, it would not be David but David’s son who would build the Temple. The Lord commissioned Solomon as the successor to the throne and placed in his heart a passion to build a temple for the Lord. Solomon’s magnificent Temple was constructed with the best imported materials and the most skilled labor available.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events in these verses took place in Jerusalem, which served as the center of Jewish life. God had decided to establish His presence in Jerusalem, and the representatives of all the tribes of Israel gathered at this center of their religious life for the dedication of the Temple, which was preceded by the restoration of the ark of the covenant to its proper place.

The Israeli economy consisted of many different kinds of sacrifices. There were burnt offerings, sin offerings, and grain offerings, among others. The offerings and sacrifices were integral parts of their worship. These offerings and sacrifices were a means of forgiveness, thanksgiving, and showing total commitment of one’s life to the God of Israel.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Elders of Israel: the leaders and representatives of each of the tribes of Israel.

King Solomon: the king of Israel, the son of David.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Cherubim(s) (verse 7)—Hebrew: kerub (ker-oob’): an order of angelic beings.

Cloud (verse 10)—Hebrew: anan (aw-nawn’): a cloud mass; cloud.

Holy (verse 4)—Hebrew: qodesh (ko’-desh): apartness; set apart; sacredness.

Sacrificing (verse 4)—Hebrew: zabach (zaw-bakh’): to slaughter for sacrifice.

Tablets (verse 9)—Hebrew: luach (loo’-akh): “tables” (KJV), boards, or planks; plates.

Tent (verse 4)—Hebrew: obel (o’-hel): a tent; a dwelling or habitation; “tabernacle” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Mission Accomplished
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Grand Gathering (1 Kings 8:1-5)
   B. A Powerful Preparation (1 Kings 8:6-9)
   C. An Overwhelming Presence (1 Kings 8:10-13)

III. Concluding Reflection

172 | TOWNSEND PRESS COMMENTARY–Winter 2019/2020
When the ark of the covenant was brought into the Temple, it signaled the completion of the Temple. The Temple was dedicated with an almost uncountable number of animal sacrifices. God acknowledged the building and dedication of the Temple with a display of His glory in a cloud.

B. Biblical Background

God had chosen to dwell among the people in a movable tabernacle during the wilderness period. The Temple would now become the center of religious life in Israel. Therefore, in this theocratic culture, the Temple was the hub of everything that happened. It was there that they had communion with God. The Temple was the place where they found atonement for their sins and reconciliation with God. It was also the place for the revelation of the will of God to the people of Israel. The Temple was built with the best materials. But Solomon knew that all their efforts would be in vain if the presence of the Lord was not there. The ark was therefore brought and the Temple dedicated to the service of God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Grand Gathering

(1 Kings 8:1-5)

THEN SOLOMON assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. And they brought up the ark of the Lord, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, even those did the priests and the Levites bring up. And king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude.

One of the developments that signaled the importance of the bringing up of the ark of the covenant from Zion was the assembly of all the senators, judges, rulers, and governors. Each of the great tribes of Israel had a leader who was responsible for the tribe. This once-in-a-lifetime occasion required an elaborate ceremony filled with solemn pomp. Everyone who was anyone gathered to witness the bringing up of the ark to the top of Mount Moriah where the Temple was located. Undoubtedly, the processional route must have been lined with every strata of society—from dignitaries to paupers—in order to get an extremely rare glimpse of the ark of the covenant.

A strong spirit of jubilation and expectation was in the air. A similar spirit would benefit us today as we prepare for our times of corporate worship when we will encounter the presence of the living God. It is important not to get so used to coming to worship that we begin to take that experience for granted. It is always a privilege to be in the company of the divine.

The dedication of the Temple did not occur until approximately eleven months after the physical completion of its construction (verse 2). This intentional delay allowed for adequate time to focus attention and preparation on the dedication ceremony itself. Solomon reasoned
that waiting until the next year would allow for an already-scheduled pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as seen in 1 Kings 8:2. This would be the Year of Jubilee and the dedication of the Temple would be held a few days prior to the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated the time when the Israelites used to dwell in portable booths while journeying through the wilderness because they had to be ready to pick up and move out on short notice.

A great deal of planning and intentionality went into the Temple dedication. That sense of intentionality should continue when it comes to corporate worship today. Worship should not be an afterthought or be approached in a lackluster manner. Expectation is the atmosphere for miracles to happen—and when we come to worship expecting to encounter God, that is exactly what tends to occur. God always does His part, but we are also called to do our part in the process of praise.

The sacred furnishings that accompanied the Ark (verses 3-4) included the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the candlestick. It was important for all the articles that were deemed sacred to be brought into the new Temple rather than to be left in Edom and risk their being turned into instruments of idolatry. The placement of everything in the new Temple assured that all those who desired to worship in the Temple would make the journey to Jerusalem.

A magnificently momentous occasion called for a correspondingly extravagant sacrificial demonstration (verse 5). The number of sheep and cattle sacrificed was innumerable. If we are unable to effectively count our everyday blessings, then we should not be able to place a limit on the amount of sacrifice we are willing to give to the worship and service of God. King Solomon was operating under the rationale that it was impossible to love God too much, and consequently he could not make too grand of a sacrifice in order to physically express that sentiment. Today, one might raise the question, “When it comes to worshipping God, who sacrificed His only Son so that we can inherit eternal life, how much praise is too much praise?”

B. A Powerful Preparation
(1 Kings 8:6-9)

And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. For the cherubims spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. And they drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place before the oracle, and they were not seen without: and there they are unto this day. There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

The length of the Ark was two cubits and a half. Finally, the ark of the covenant had found a permanent resting place—as it was situated between the cherubim with the poles placed lengthwise (verse 6). Prior to this time, the poles, which were made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, always remained in place so that the Ark could be easily transported at any given time (see Exodus 25:13-15). This day of dedication marked a new period in the history of the Ark and in the tradition of worship.

Progress in life is generally viewed to be a positive phenomenon. We desire progress in our education, in our careers, in our social
lives, and even in our material possessions. But what about progress in our worship lives? If we are still worshipping the same way that we did ten or twenty years ago, then it is time for a worship checkup to see if our worship life is still alive. Everything that is living has a tendency to grow, and the same is true for our maturity in worship.

Prior to this time, it was forbidden to totally remove the golden carrying poles from the rings. But now that the Ark was in a permanent location, they were withdrawn but remained in the Holy Place (verse 8). Perhaps the poles were left as a guide to the high priest who entered the Holy Place once per year to offer sacrifices for the people. The priest would need some type of direction as he navigated his way in the dark toward the Ark which was surrounded by the wings of the cherubim.

Care is taken to emphasize that the contents of the Ark included the stone tablets of Moses (verse 9) upon which the Ten Commandments of God were written. Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 list these commandments in short form as follows: (1) You shall have no other gods before Me; (2) You shall not make idols; (3) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; (4) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; (5) Honor your father and your mother; (6) You shall not murder; (7) You shall not commit adultery; (8) You shall not steal; (9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor; and (10) You shall not covet. These commandments still serve as the foundation for our morality and our spirituality, and even for our judicial system. Although there were other objects near the Ark, these tablets of stone containing the Israelites’ foundational truths were important enough to be the only contents of the Ark, which was the epicenter of the Holy of Holies. Today, we have access to this treasure of knowledge and instruction, and we can apply it to our daily lives. Although we do not have access to the original tablets of stone, we are to have them written on the tablets of our hearts and minds (see Jeremiah 31:33).

C. An Overwhelming Presence
(1 Kings 8:10-13)

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord. Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

After carefully arranging and situating the various objects in the Holy Place, the priests exited and the cloud of God entered (verse 10). This cloud represented God’s divine presence, which is reminiscent of God’s presence on Sinai (see Exodus 24:15-18). This cloud descended upon the Temple as a testament to God’s supernatural, spiritual seal of approval. This revelation of God’s glory was overwhelming and was a visible manifestation of the Almighty.

Although we may never see such a spectacular demonstration of God’s glorious presence, as Christians we should have some instances in which we experience the unmistakable presence of God. This could occur in the form of an answered prayer, an act of nature, or even the birth of a child. God is absolutely unlimited in the variety of ways that His power can be illustrated or manifested.

Overwhelming, astounding, magnificent, electrifying, breathtaking, and overpowering are...
just a few of the adjectives that can be used to describe the experience of the glory of the Lord filling the Temple. The priests were so overwhelmed by the glory of God that they were unable to perform their ceremonial duties (verse 11). This is not the only time in Scripture when God’s glory overwhelmed those who were ministering. “Moses was not able to enter into the Tabernacle; for the cloud rested thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle” (see Exodus 40:35). Elsewhere in Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah said he was “undone” when he saw the glory of God in the Temple. In Luke 9:33-34, the disciples trembled when they entered “the bright cloud which overshadowed them” on the Mount of Transfiguration. There was a general sense of awe and reverence that pervaded the premises when the glory of the Lord came down.

Although many have attempted to manufacture God’s glory, it cannot be re-created by human sources. Even though God’s glory is beyond the control of people, there are certain factors that can be put into place in order to prepare for God’s presence and to encourage and welcome the Spirit of God to inhabit the atmosphere, including the following: (1) cultivate an atmosphere of healthy and genuine confession, repentance, and brokenness; (2) detach from the restraints of custom, culture, and clock; (3) be generous with an ample supply of unbridled praise; (4) prepare the atmosphere with prayer and fasting; (5) invite God’s presence and expect God’s response in faith; (6) get on one accord and richly worship God in Spirit, truth, and humility; (7) move forward in faith and victory.

In a moment of awe and wonder, Solomon makes an awkward attempt to express his thoughts regarding the phenomenon of witnessing the majesty of almighty God (verse 12). Perhaps he had in mind the manifestations of God’s presence from the past in which a cloud symbolized God’s presence, such as in Exodus 19:9 and Leviticus 16:2. The cloud of God is usually described as being blindingly bright, but Solomon alludes to a dark cloud. Perhaps he had in mind Deuteronomy 4:11, which states, “You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness” (NIV). Whether the cloud was bright or dark is of little ultimate consequence when the primary development is the mystery surrounding the veiled presence of God—which is infinitely glorious, unexplainable, and incomprehensible. Have you ever had an instance in which you were left speechless by the presence and power of God?

A settled sense of peace, rest, and accomplishment seems to wash over the psyche of Solomon as he reflects on the effort to construct the Temple and the tangible evidence of God’s occupying the magnificent edifice that has been constructed and dedicated to His honor (verse 13). If God was pleased enough to inhabit the Temple, then Solomon most likely believed that all the planning and expense that went into constructing and dedicating the Temple were well worth the effort. Finally, this dwelling place for God was not to be a temporary abode that would be transported from place to place. This abode was a permanent structure designed to stand the test of time.

The first phase of a place to worship God was a portable structure that was transported along with the multitude throughout the wilderness. The second stage was the Temple,
a beautiful permanent structure situated in Jerusalem. Now that the Jerusalem structure no longer exists, where is God’s Temple now? First Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV) provides an apt response to this query: “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; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.” The same care and attention that were accorded to the tabernacle and Temple of the past are also due to be given to our physical temples in the present. Some of the ways that we can honor our bodies as temples of God include (1) thinking godly thoughts and protecting our minds from spiritual pollution; (2) blocking our physical intake from harmful and destructive substances and feeding them healthy and helpful content; (3) disciplining our eyes, our ears, and our mouths to see, hear, and say only those things that build us up spiritually (see Psalms 141:3; 119:37); (4) abstaining from sexual immorality and embracing healthy marital sexual relations; (5) eating healthy food and drink; and (6) getting regular exercise and keeping current on medical checkups. Our bodies are on loan from God and should be handled with tender-loving care in order for us to glorify God with our bodies.

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

The Ark and the Temple are important parts of the Israelite spiritual heritage. By extension, the current-day Christian also has roots in the rich history of the Old Testament. The celebration of the Temple was extravagant because God is worthy of all our praise. Our rejoicing in God can be done in a private manner, but it can and should also be exhibited publicly. Our worship of God may not be a mirror image of Old Testament believers’, but the most important thing is that our hearts are openly willing and our minds are aligned with the divine will of God, who wants to be worshipped in Spirit and in truth.

**PRAYER**

Dear Lord, thank You for living inside of us. Help us to prepare our temples, to protect our temples, and to provide our temples with everything that is needed to please the One who is the ultimate owner of our temples. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(December 30, 2019–January 5, 2020)*

**A Place for the Ark**


**TUESDAY**, December 31: “An Orderly Worship Service” (1 Corinthians 14:26-33a)

**WEDNESDAY**, January 1: “The Law Is Read at Booths Festival” (Deuteronomy 31:9-13)

**THURSDAY**, January 2: “The Ark Is Brought to the Temple” (2 Chronicles 5:2-7)

**FRIDAY**, January 3: “Priests Praise God with Music” (2 Chronicles 5:11-14)

**SATURDAY**, January 4: “All Temple Furnishings Are Completed” (2 Chronicles 4:19–5:1)

**SUNDAY**, January 5: “Preparing to Dedicate the Temple” (1 Kings 8:1-13)
SOLOMON’S SPEECH

ADULT/YOUTH

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** I Promise!

**YOUTH TOPIC:** Acknowledging God’s Faithfulness

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 8:14-21; 2 Chronicles 6

**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 8:14-21

**KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 8:15

**ADULT/YOUTH

PRINT PASSAGE:** 2 Chronicles 6:1-11

**KEY VERSE:** 2 Chronicles 6:10

---

**CHILDREN

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Solomon Speaks to God’s People

**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Listening to Our Leaders

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 2 Chronicles 6:1-11

**PRINT PASSAGE:** 2 Chronicles 6:1-11

**KEY VERSE:** 2 Chronicles 6:10

---

1 Kings 8:14-21—KJV

14 And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood;)

15 And he said, Blessed be the L ORD God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it, saying,

16 Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel.

17 And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the Name of the L ORD God of Israel.

18 But the L ORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.

19 Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name.

20 And the L ORD hath performed his word that

1 Kings 8:14-21—NIV

14 While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them.

15 Then he said: “Praise be to the L ORD, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David. For he said,

16 “‘Since the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my Name might be there, but I have chosen David to rule my people Israel.’

17 “My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the L ORD, the God of Israel.

18 “But the L ORD said to my father David, ‘You did well to have it in your heart to build a temple for my Name.

19 “‘Nevertheless, you are not the one to build the temple, but your son, your own flesh and blood—he is the one who will build the temple for my Name.’
he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel.

21 And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

20 “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.

21 “I have provided a place there for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Many people make promises they are unable to fulfill because of unforeseen circumstances. How should people respond when they do succeed in fulfilling their promise? Solomon thanked God for fulfilling the promise made to his father, King David, when God enabled Solomon to build the Temple in which the Ark could be placed.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Examine how Solomon's building of the Temple fulfills a promise God made to Solomon's father, David.
2. Appreciate that God keeps promises, even if the fulfillment takes many years.
3. Rejoice wholeheartedly when God’s promises come to pass.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Solomon’s “blessing” of the people is a loose use of the word (verse 14; see also verse 55), since it was typically priests, not kings, who were authorized to pronounce a blessing on the people (see Numbers 6:23; Leviticus 9:22). Solomon was really expressing a blessing to the Lord.

—Solomon uses “name of the LORD” (both here in his speech, verse 17, and later in his prayer) to mean the very real presence of God. He was likely trying to avoid the interpretation that God literally resided in the Temple in any physical way.

—Other items that were once in the ark were the golden urn holding manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded (see Hebrews 9:4).

—Solomon emphasized in his speech that when the Temple was completed, God’s promise to David was fulfilled.

—Early in the speech (verse 15), Solomon expressed recognition that the Temple was the fulfillment of God’s plan and that David and Solomon were human instruments.

—In verse 21, Solomon connects the placement of the Ark in the Temple with the history of the Israelite people since the Exodus from Egypt five hundred years prior.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—As the dedication of the Temple began, Solomon recalled the promises God made to David.
—Solomon recognized that God used him to make the promise to David of a house for God’s name a reality.
—Solomon pointed out that the Ark, containing the tablets of the Law, had been placed in the Temple.
—God’s promise was with the entire nation of Israel, not just one king or another ruler.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Solomon had succeeded his father, David, as the king of Israel. God had put it in Solomon’s heart to build a Temple for Him. Solomon built a great Temple in Jerusalem to serve as the meeting place of God with the Israelites. The Temple was furnished with all the equipment necessary for the worship of God.

Solomon went on to build his own palace after the Temple of God had been built. Solomon instructed that the ark of the covenant be brought to officially mark the beginning of the use of the Temple for the sacrificial system.

The ark of the covenant was delivered into the Temple by the elders of Israel. Afterwards, the Temple was dedicated by the offering of numerous sacrifices as offerings to the Lord after which theark of the covenant was placed in the Most Holy Place of the Temple. The Lord came into the Temple and manifested His presence with the cloud. The presence of the cloud was the token of God’s acceptance of the Temple and His decision to dwell in the Temple as the meeting place with His elect people.

It was in this context that Solomon offered the prayer of thanksgiving in these verses. The prayer of thanksgiving was a reaction to the grace of God in accepting the Temple that was built as His abiding place. Solomon recognized that the Temple itself was meaningless apart from God’s presence and God’s designation of it as the official place of worship.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events in these verses took place during the reign of Solomon, the son of David. Particularly, the events transpired at the site of the newly constructed Temple. The priests withdrew from the Most Holy Place after they had placed the ark of the covenant there. At that instant, the presence of the Lord filled the Temple. Solomon and the elders of Israel were situated in the outer court, together with the priests, when the events of these verses took place.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

David: the second king of Israel; the successor of Saul and the predecessor of Solomon. He wanted to build a temple for the Lord.

Solomon: the third king of Israel. He was the son of David whom God commissioned to build a temple for Him.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Blessed (verse 14)—Hebrew: barak (baw-rak’): kneeled; blessed.
Heart (verse 17)—Hebrew: lebab (lay-bawb’): inner man; mind; will; heart.
House (verse 16)—Hebrew: bayith (bah’-yith): a dwelling place; house; “temple” (NIV).
Place (verse 21)—Hebrew: maqom (maw-kome’): a standing place; place.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Chosen and Used by God

God had chosen Solomon to build the Temple as promised to Solomon’s father, David. Solomon rejoiced in the Lord and gave Him praise for the great privilege which he saw as the fulfillment of the promise of God to his father and a confirmation of his kingship. One of the things that builds trust and confidence in any relationship, whether vertical or horizontal, is making good on promises made. When people say they will do a thing and they do it, the relationship is bolstered. The opposite is also true. When promises are made and broken, disappointment usually ensues, and the relationship is weakened. One of the ways for one to grow in his or her relationship with God is to step out on the promises in God’s Word and to experience the reality of God’s making good on His part of the promise. The more we personally experience God rather than just read about God or just hear about God, the better we will be able to trust God and to grow in Him.

B. Biblical Background

In 2 Samuel 7, David, a man after God’s own heart, had a plan to build a temple for the Lord. When God had given him rest from all his enemies, David was saddened that the ark of the covenant was dwelling in a tent while he had a lavish palace in which to dwell. He desired to build a temple for the Lord, and the prophet Nathan initially gave him the permission to go ahead. But God corrected Nathan and instructed him to deliver a message to David about God’s decision that David would not be the one to build God’s house.

God informed David that he was not the one to undertake and complete construction of the Temple. It is God that commissions the building of His own house. Instead of David building a house for God, it would be God who would establish David’s household and keep the throne in David’s family forever. David’s rule would be perpetual, and there would
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Blessed by Leadership

(1 Kings 8:14-15)

And the king turned his face about, and blessed all the congregation of Israel: (and all the congregation of Israel stood;) and he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which spake with his mouth unto David my father, and hath with his hand fulfilled it, saying.

What does it mean to be blessed by someone who is an authority figure in one’s life? A blessing is an expression of intention, direction, appropriation, and expectation. When the king blessed the entire assembly of Israel, he was invoking the power of God to encourage and enable the people for prosperity and for them to grow toward their destiny and purpose. The blessing of the father figure was important then and is still important now. As is stated in Proverbs 18:21, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” There is an aspect of every human being that longs for affirmation from a father. When the father obliges this need, the recipient is released to activate abilities and to move toward fulfilling his or her destiny.

God is the owner of a faithful track record for making good on the promises made to His people (verse 15). When God makes a promise, that promise is fulfilled from God’s perspective. Problems sometimes arise when we as people do not complete our portion of the promise. Many of the promises of God are conditional. For example, notice the conditional promise found in 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.” God’s part of the promise is to hear from heaven, forgive sin, and heal the land. The people’s part of the promise is to be humble, pray, seek God’s face, and turn from sin. When this is done, God will fulfill the promise. That is why it is so important to know God’s promises and to give God back His Word through prayer.

B. Good Intentions

(1 Kings 8:16-18)

Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I
chose David to be over my people Israel. And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.

Some may wonder why God would dare to single out a chosen city, a chosen nation, and a chosen leader. It may initially appear to be an act of unfair favoritism to select just one city, just one nation, or just one leader out of so many possibilities. This perspective can become even more seemingly complicated in view of Romans 2:11, which makes it clear that “God does not show favoritism” (NIV). In Matthew 5:45b (NIV), we see even more rejection of favoritism: “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Perhaps this can be better understood through realizing that there were initially temporary resting places for the Ark in Gilgal, Shiloh, and Kiriath-Jearim. There were also rulers who were appointed for a time and then removed. Those temporary appointments were for a reason and for a season. While the truth of God remains constant for all times, the seasons of God are altered to comply with God’s will and ways. This season in the life of worship in Israel called for one fixed place for the sanctuary of God.

Do we as Christians get credit for good motives? Since David was a man after God’s own heart, we know that his heart must have been in the right place to want to build a temple dedicated to the name of the Lord (verses 17-18). However, regardless of how pure our motives may be or how noble our intentions, the will of God always supersedes the intentions of humanity. Humanity is limited in perspective, and we are only able to see the small picture of the present. God the Creator is able to see the end before creating the beginning and therefore knows what is best for the creation. Isaiah 55:8-9 expresses this truth: “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (NIV).

C. Promise Made, Promise Kept
(1 Kings 8:19-21)

Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name. And the LORD hath performed his word that he spake, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.

It was in the heart and mind of God for a man of peace to construct the Temple which was to be called “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7c, NIV). Even though God dearly loved David, God also was demonstrating being a God of order—because David was a man of war and bloodshed and thus was deemed unsuitable to lead in the construction of such a holy place. Since David was not permitted to lead in the construction of the Temple, perhaps David’s consolation came through assisting in the acquisition of the materials that would be necessary for the construction of such a magnificent structure. David said to Solomon, “I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred
thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workers: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron—craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you” (1 Chronicles 22:14-16, NIV).

Whenever God’s plans conflict with our plans, we can safely be assured that our way was wrong or at least inadequate or inappropriate in that season. Rather than resisting God’s plan or regretting that the outcome was not exactly as we had planned, the best approach is to thank God for knowing best and cooperating with the God who is too wise to make a mistake.

One of the central, predominant characteristics used to accurately describe God is that God is a promise keeper (verse 20). God’s faithfulness in keeping promises is important because this quality of reliability in God triggers a response of trust and security in the ones to whom the promises have been made.

Whenever promises are made to us and not kept, this causes feelings of hurt and disappointment. Even when it comes to God, there have undoubtedly been instances in which we have somehow thought that God promised us something and when we did not receive it as we expected, as a result we became angry with God. Whenever such instances occur, it is important to remember always to trust the heart of God, even when we cannot trace the hand of God.

Charles Albert Tindley (1851–1933) was an African-American pastor, orator, poet, writer, theologian, social activist, and great hymn writer. He was born in Maryland, and his mother died when he was only two years old. His father raised him, but life was hard and his father had to hire him out in order to make ends meet. Tindley moved to Philadelphia as a youth and attended school at night, vowing each day to learn at least one new thing that day which he did not know before that day. He acquired and read more than eight thousand books and worked his way up from serving as janitor of the Bainbridge Street Methodist Church to eventually become its pastor. In 1906, the congregation was going through difficult negotiations to purchase a worship facility. “We’ll Understand It Better By and By” was one of eight hymns written during this difficult period in Tindley’s life when negotiations were underway for the purchase of Westminster Presbyterian Church. The lyrics were aimed at lifting the spirits of turn-of-the-century urban, African-American Christians, but they are still relevant today for anyone who has ever not understood what God was doing or seemed to be failing to perform. The third stanza of the hymn reflects a deep-seated trust and confidence in the unquestionable reliability of almighty God: “Trials dark on ev’ry hand, and we cannot understand, all the ways that God would lead us to that blessed Promised Land; but He guides us with His eye, and we’ll follow till we die. For we’ll understand it better by and by.”

The Ark represented the physical manifestation of God’s presence (verse 21). On the tablets of the covenant were written the conditions of God’s “covenant” with the people. The concept of “covenant” represents God’s will as manifested through His requirements, as well as God’s promises when those requirements are met.
Mount Sinai was the site for the confirmation of the covenant between God and Israel. The process of covenant confirmation involved the following stages: (1) God’s love for the people was established and God was made known as the deliverer who would guide and protect Israel (see Exodus 19:3-4). (2) God made it known that the promises of deliverance were based on obedience to the covenant with consequences for noncompliance. (3) Moses was confirmed as God’s mediator, between God and the people. Currently, pastors and prophets serve as a type of mediator, interceding to God on behalf of the people even though the barrier has been torn and the people can now access the presence of God for themselves. (4) The people were expected to consecrate themselves in anticipation of God’s response to them (see Exodus 19:10-15).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The fact that God is a covenant-keeping God stands out in our contemporary society today if for no other reason than the fact that so many promises are so often broken these days with seemingly little regret or repercussions. When we see couples who have upheld their marriage vows for twenty, forty, or sixty years, it seems like an unusual feat and such couples are often asked, “What is the secret of your marital longevity?” Some typical answers to this question from long-term couples might be as follows: practice good, open communication; insist on unyielding commitment; prioritize your partner; give yourself good self-care; have healthy similarities and differences; learn how to manage conflict; and put God first in the marriage. Disappointments are inevitable in life. What really matters is how we handle our disappointments. Whether we are in a relationship with another person or in a relationship with God, our keeping up our end of the covenant is extremely important for the overall health of the relationship.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for the precious promises that You have made to us and kept toward us. Grant us the strength to keep the promises we have made so that we can be more like You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 6-12, 2019)

Solomon’s Speech
MONDAY, January 6: “A House of Prayer” (2 Chronicles 6:12-21)
TUESDAY, January 7: “Forgive and Restore Broken Relationships” (2 Chronicles 6:22-25)
WEDNESDAY, January 8: “Send the Rain” (2 Chronicles 6:26-31)
THURSDAY, January 9: “Welcome the Stranger” (2 Chronicles 6:32-33)
FRIDAY, January 10: “Forgive and Restore the Captive” (2 Chronicles 6:34-39)
SATURDAY, January 11: “A Plea for God’s Steadfast Love” (2 Chronicles 6:40-42)
SUNDAY, January 12: “Solomon Reviews the Temple Developments” (1 Kings 8:14-21)
**SOLOMON’S DEDICATION PRAYER**

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **ADULT/YOUTH TOPIC:** A Bright Future
- **YOUTH TOPIC:** Remembrances and Petitions

**CHILDREN**
- **GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Solomon’s Dedication Prayer
- **CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Remembering Our Dependence

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
1 Timothy 2:1-6

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 8:22-53; 2 Chronicles 6:12-42
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53
- **ADULT KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 8:30
- **YOUTH KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 8:23

**CHILDREN**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 8:22-53; 2 Chronicles 6:12-42
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53
- **KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 8:27

**1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53—KJV**
22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:
23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:
24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.
25 Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take

**1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53—NIV**
22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven
23 and said: “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.
24 “You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.
25 “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if
heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me.

26 And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father.
27 But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?
28 Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day:
29 That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.
30 And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.

31 That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee.
32 For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O LORD God. only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’
36 “And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.
37 “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!
38 “Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day.
39 “May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.
40 “Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.”
41 …..
42 “May your eyes be open to your servant’s plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you.
43 “For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, Sovereign LORD, brought our ancestors out of Egypt.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People begin new undertakings with anticipation of a better future. How can we mark such important times? Solomon presided at the dedication of the Temple by calling upon God to receive Israel’s worship and to continue to be their God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Understand the importance of having a national temple for Israel.
2. Be grateful for God’s faithfulness in covenant relationships.
3. Embrace a worshipful lifestyle considering God’s continuing goodness.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

— Though Solomon emphasizes in his prayer the importance of the Temple’s being God’s dwelling place, Scripture makes it clear that God cannot be contained to a single location (see Acts 17:24).

— God’s choosing of Israel as His people is mentioned in Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 9:26; 9:29; and 14:2.

— Part of the Background Scripture (1 Kings 8:22-53) encompasses the second prayer, the primary component in the dedication of the Temple.

— The prayer includes remembrance of two covenants: the Davidic covenant and the covenant at Mount Sinai.

— Seven times the prayer declares that God does not dwell in the Temple but in heaven (see verses 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49).


— Solomon states seven different occasions for prayer: sin of an individual (verses 31-32); defeat in battle (verses 33-34); drought (verses 35-36); famine and plagues (verses 37-40); a foreigner comes to pray (verses 41-43); war (verses 44-45); sin of the people (verses 46-51).

— Solomon concludes this second part of the prayer (verse 53) by connecting the completion of the Temple to the history of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, just as he did in the first part of the prayer.

Teachers of CHILDREN

— First Kings 8 is echoed in 2 Chronicles 6.

— After addressing the people gathered for the dedication of the Temple, Solomon offered a prayer of dedication.

— Solomon acknowledged that God could not be confined to the Temple or limited to the earth.

— Solomon pled with God to accept the Temple as a gift that would help Israel be faithful.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prayer of dedication in today’s lesson took place in 1003 BC. The events in these verses occurred after Solomon had praised the Lord for all His goodness and grace in keeping His promises to Solomon’s father, David. God had made a promise to David that his heir would be the one to build the Temple for Him. He also promised the continuation of the Davidic kingdom forever.

Solomon recognized God’s faithfulness to His promises and made it an occasion of thanksgiving. Also, he made it an occasion of prayer. God’s promise regarding the Temple had just been fulfilled, and Solomon with the confidence of that fulfillment prayed that God would keep His promise of preserving the throne of David forever.

— Solomon states seven different occasions for prayer: sin of an individual (verses 31-32); defeat in battle (verses 33-34); drought (verses 35-36); famine and plagues (verses 37-40); a foreigner comes to pray (verses 41-43); war (verses 44-45); sin of the people (verses 46-51).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prayer of dedication was made at the Temple in Jerusalem. It was done in the outer court around the altar of sacrifice. Solomon and the people of Israel gathered in the outer court of the Temple to praise God and delight themselves in what He had done. They sacrificed animals to the Lord as an act of worship, and after that Solomon made this remarkable prayer of dedication.

The Temple was the meeting place of the Jews. It was a place of prayer and forgiveness. The Temple was the center of their religious life where the people found forgiveness through the sacrificial system given through Moses. It was also there that they offered their prayers to God. The whole
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Petition for God’s Presence

Solomon, upon the occasion of the dedication of the Temple, prayed a series of prayers to God. Solomon recognized that the whole edifice of the Temple was useless if God did not dwell amongst them and make His presence known in the Temple. Therefore, Solomon prayed (both in general and specific terms) for God to manifest Himself. Though God is omnipresent and could not be contained within a building, Solomon prayed that God would be gracious to the Israelites and allow His presence to abide with them. Even though the entire universe is not sufficient to accommodate God, in mercy Solomon prayed that God would make His abode with them. The presence of the Lord in the Temple was made known in specific ways that would be seen as answers to prayer. Therefore, Solomon prayed for God to manifest His presence with answers to prayers in various contexts. He pleaded that when individuals came to pray in the Temple, the

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Solomon: the king of Israel; successor of his father, David.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Altar (verse 22)—Hebrew: mizbeach (miz-bay’-akh): a structure used in worship as the place for presenting sacrifices to God.
Congregation (verse 22)—Hebrew: qahal (kaw-hawl’): “assembly” (NIV); convocation; congregation.
Covenant (verse 23)—Hebrew: berith (ber-eeth’): an alliance, agreement, treaty; a covenant.

Heart (verse 23 [KJV only])—Hebrew: leb (labe): inner man; mind; will; heart.
Verified (verse 26)—Hebrew: aman (aw-man’): confirmed; supported; believed; “promised” (NIV).
Walk(ed) (verse 25)—Hebrew: halak (haw-lak’): to go (went), come (came), walk (walked).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
A. Petition for God’s Presence
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. Solomon’s Preparation (1 Kings 8:22-24)
B. Solomon’s Petition (1 Kings 8:25-30)
C. Solomon’s Plea (1 Kings 8:52-53)

III. Concluding Reflection
prayers would be answered. He also prayed that when the people came to confess their sins, they would be forgiven. Likewise, when two individuals came to swear an oath, Solomon prayed that God would demonstrate justice.

Corporately, when they come to plead with God after being defeated by enemy armies, and following various judgments of God upon them, Solomon prayed that God would be merciful and forgive them. In the same manner, Solomon prayed that when they were exiled and they came back with repentance that God would give restoration. He pleaded that God would hear the prayers of strangers when they prayed in the Temple. Likewise, he pleaded that they would be victorious when they fought against their enemies. These verses were the outpouring of the soul of a leader on behalf of his people for God’s favor and grace.

B. Biblical Background

God had committed to dwell among the Israelites through the Temple. He commanded the building of the Tent of Meeting during the wilderness journeying of Israel. He manifested Himself among them in the Tent of Meeting as well as in pillars of cloud and fire. When the people found rest in the Promised Land, they had a place for a permanent sanctuary structure. Now, God had moved the heart of Solomon to build the Temple for God instead of Solomon’s father, David.

The God that designed this as His dwelling place must now come to the Temple and dwell there. His presence was the only thing that mattered. Apart from this, the Temple was a mere waste of resources. Therefore, Solomon prayed that God would dwell in this Temple and make His presence known by granting their individual and corporate requests.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Solomon’s Preparation

(1 Kings 8:22-24)

And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart: who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

Solomon built a scaffold that was 7.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet high (see 2 Chronicles 6:13). As he stood upon this structure, he blessed the people and offered a heartfelt holy prayer toward God in appreciation for and dedication of a building that had been designed to facilitate worship to almighty God. This prayer of dedication was accentuated by the raising of his hands in a physical gesture of surrender to God and blessing of the people.

As Solomon prayed, he first addressed the absolute uniqueness of God (verse 23). Although there are many entities that people view as gods, there is no god to be compared to Jehovah God. There are many different things that make God uniquely different from all others. Some of these characteristics include the following: (1) God is all-wise (God makes no mistakes); (2) God is sovereign (God is in control and free to do whatever He knows and
sees as best); (3) God is holy; He is perfectly pure and there is absolutely no sin or evil in God at all; (4) He is omnipresent (God is everywhere all the time); (5) God is faithful (He is absolutely reliable); (6) God is love (He wills good for others and makes them of high priority and His primary concern); (7) God is self-existent and self-sufficient (He has no beginning or end. Only God relies exclusively on Himself for His existence and needs nothing or no one else to survive); (8) God is just (He is perfect and without favoritism when executing justice and has never done evil); (9) God is merciful (He thrives when extending chances to those who are not deserving); (10) God is eternal (He always has been and will be because God dwells in eternity).

Solomon’s relationship with God was real, and in his prayer he made the important connection between that which God promises and that which God performs (verse 24). There is no gap or disconnection between these two entities. This reality creates a sacred sense of confidence in God’s care for His people and God’s ability to follow through on the plans and promises that have been presented. If God made a promise but had no power to bring it into reality, then He would not be God.

B. Solomon’s Petition
(1 Kings 8:25-30)

Therefore now, Lord God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me. And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee day: that thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.

The promises of God are valid and effective only when we comply with the parameters and responsibilities that are set forth by God. Although God is a great giver of grace, God also expects us to do our part, as is illustrated in Ephesians 2:8-10. Verses 8-9 highlight the gifts and benefits of God: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (NIV). Then verse 10 (NIV) highlights the responsibilities of the recipients of God’s gifts of grace: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God’s promises should guide our desires and should also serve as the foundation and direction for all our hopes and expectations in prayer.

Although he uses different words, a similar request is made in verse 26 by Solomon for God to fulfill the promise He made to Solomon’s father, David, regarding the perpetuation of the kingship within the ranks of the family. This request is repeated in order to place additional emphasis on Solomon’s strong desire to continue the family tradition of a king coming from the family lineage.

In verse 27, Solomon poses the hypothetical question of how God could actually live on
earth. How could God, who is so big, be the creator of the earth and then actually live inside the creation? The book of Genesis begins by establishing God as the creator of heaven and earth. God is the supporter of everything that exists and thus cannot be held in the world He created or the man-made containers in it. If God is too big to fit into the entire world, then God surely could never fit inside of a temple.

Although Solomon was a king among the people, when it came to his relationship to God, Solomon considered himself and positioned himself as only a servant (verse 28). It was, and still is, customary in many cultures to speak and act in a humble and respectful manner when in the presence of royalty. This is especially true when desiring a favor from the person of royal status. The tone of humility assumed by Solomon is reflected throughout this verse in phrases such as “plea for mercy” and “hear the cry.”

Personification is used by Solomon in verse 29 as he makes known his desire for God’s favor and compassion to be directed toward the new Temple. This phrase can be compared to similar expressions found in Psalm 33:18 and Psalm 34:15. Solomon’s request is that the Temple would be under God’s constant oversight like a fortified city is under a sentry posted on a watchtower. In addition, Solomon reminds God of the promise to place His name in the Temple. God’s name refers to His endorsement and His power present in a place. This phrase also appears in 2 Chronicles 7:16 (NIV): “I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.” God’s name is the embodiment of His presence, His glory, and His grace (1 Kings 8:16).

Solomon proposes a kind of spiritual contractual agreement in verse 30 by proposing that when God’s people on earth begin to pray, that God who is in heaven will hear those prayers and forgive their sins. This is reminiscent of 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV): “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 will forgive their sin and heal their land.” Confidence in praying to God is gained through realizing that God has a rich history of divine answers to prayers.

C. Solomon’s Plea
(1 Kings 8:52-53)

That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee. For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God.

In an effort to effectively express his strong desire for God’s blessing upon Israel, Solomon attributes human senses to the Holy God (verse 52). The central request is for God’s grace and mercy to be poured out on the people when they come to God and cry out to Him in their time of need. A New Testament equivalent to this found in James 5:16b: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

Verse 53 makes reference to Exodus 19:5-6, in which God promises that Israel shall be to Him a unique treasure: “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, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (NIV). Here again is a promise from God that comes with the condition of obedience by God’s people. When obedience by the people is absent, the full benefits of God’s promises cannot be expected.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Although in the present times God does not dwell in a physical building, it is still a blessing to have a physical place in which to worship God in Spirit and in truth. In some countries today, it is against the law to publicly worship God. As we are faithful to fulfill the requests associated with God’s covenant, God is faithful to grant the benefits associated with that covenant. The true temple in the lives of believers today is the dwelling of God in every believing heart. A clean heart is a good place for the Spirit of God to dwell in and to empower a person who is obedient and available to be used by God without reservation.

One of the important truths that twenty-first-century Christians need to be cognizant of is that God never requested that His people build a Temple for Him. God’s emphasis has always been upon the relationship that He has with His people. His presence among His people and the need for the kind of spiritual leadership that would foster that strong relationship was and is a priority for God. A church building is never a guarantee of God’s presence and power. God can use us more than He can use a building made of wood, stone, or steel.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for Your covenant love. Help us to live our lives of faithfulness by Your power, giving light to all those around us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 13-19, 2020)

Solomon’s Dedication Prayer

MONDAY, January 13: “Pray for All Secular Leaders” (1 Timothy 2:1-6)
TUESDAY, January 14: “Forgiveness of Sin against Another” (1 Kings 8:31-32, 41-44)
WEDNESDAY, January 15: “Forgive Each Other Generously” (Colossians 3:8-13)
THURSDAY, January 16: “Encourage Each Other in Facing Difficulties” (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)
FRIDAY, January 17: “A House of Prayer for All Peoples” (Isaiah 56:3-8)
SATURDAY, January 18: “ Captives Receive God’s Gifts” (Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16)
SUNDAY, January 19: “God’s Promises Are Kept” (1 Kings 8:22-30, 52-53)
SOLOMON’S BLESSING

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Commitment to Success  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Affirming the Covenant

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 8:54-66  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 8:54-61  
**ADULT KEY VERSES:** 1 Kings 8:57-58  
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 8:61

---

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** A Time to Praise God  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Filled with Joy

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 2 Chronicles 7  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 2 Chronicles 7:1-6, 8-11  
**KEY VERSE:** 2 Chronicles 7:10

---

1 Kings 8:54-61—KJV

54 And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.

55 And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying,

56 Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.

57 The L ORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us:

58 That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.

---

1 Kings 8:54-61—NIV

54 When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the L ORD, he rose from before the altar of the L ORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven.

55 He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

56 “Praise be to the L ORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.

57 “May the L ORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us.

58 “May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors.
And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require:

That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else.

Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

“And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need,

so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.

“And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often mark the start of new ventures with special ceremonies or observances because they have high hopes for success. How can we know that what we propose to do will succeed? After dedicating the Temple, Solomon prayed for God’s continued faithfulness toward Israel while calling on his people to renew their commitment to God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Study Solomon’s prayer of dedication.
2. Affirm God’s continued faithfulness to His people.
3. Commit themselves to obeying all of God’s commands.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—This is the first mention in Scripture of kneeling in prayer. Solomon’s posture is described in more detail in 2 Chronicles 6:13.
—Previously, Solomon spoke of God’s promise to David that his son would build a temple. Here in verse 56, Solomon speaks of the broader promise of God to bring rest to His people by establishing them in the land of Canaan.
—“To bless the people” was the exclusive privilege of the priests (see Numbers 6:23-27). However, Solomon’s “blessing” here was actually a prayer of blessing and praise to God.
—“That all the people(s) of the earth may know” (verse 60) confirms the ultimate purpose of the Jews to make God’s glory known among the nations: Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 49:6.
—This prayer repeats that God had fulfilled all His promises and exhorted the people to respond by observing His commandments.
—Solomon asserted that the presence of the Lord (verse 57) affirms the relationship between God and the people.
—Solomon indicated an understanding that God is the God of all peoples when he said that the Israelites’ commitment to God’s commandments may demonstrate to other nations that their God is the one true God (verse 60).

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—The end of the ceremony dedicating the Temple was marked by the giving of sacrificial gifts to God.
—Extended feasting and celebrating followed the dedication of the Temple.
—The king sent the people home with assurances of the goodness of God, shown to them in the past and promised in the future.
—Solomon was successful in all he planned to do, for God was with him as He had been with Solomon’s father, David.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
Having recognized the importance of God’s presence and blessings, Solomon prayed for God to meet with His people whenever they come into the Temple. He knew that the whole purpose of the Temple was tied to God’s generosity and sheer grace. The edifice would have meaning only when God saw fit to answer their prayers there, grant their requests, and forgive their sins. David had prayed earnestly for God’s favor and grace. He had pleaded for the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. After the prayer of dedication, he prayed for all the waiting people of Israel, made sacrifices of dedication that lasted for the fourteen days of the feast, and finally dismissed the people with blessings to their respective homes.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
The events in these verses occurred at the outer court of the Temple. The outer court of the Temple was the meeting place between the people and the priests where the sacrifices were made to God. It was there that Solomon stood to pray to God and then to bless the people. It was also there that he offered the sacrifices of dedication and officially opened the Temple for the sacrificial system with a fourteen-day feast.

The blessing from the leader was an integral part of the Jewish economy. The leader was meant to declare his blessings upon the waiting people. Moses performed such acts to the waiting Israelites outside the Tent of Meeting.

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the key festivals of the Jewish calendar that was duly observed by the people. It was an occasion of reflection, rejoicing, and great fellowship for all that God had done to protect and provide for Israel in the wilderness. It was during this festival that the Temple was concluded and dedicated.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**
**Solomon:** the appointed king of Israel. He was chosen by God to build the Temple for God.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**
Approach (verse 59)—Hebrew: ṣanāb (kaw-rab’): to come near, approach; to offer; “be nigh” (KJV); “be near” (NIV).
I. INTRODUCTION
A. A Prayer and a Blessing

In the verses that comprise this lesson, Solomon made a prayer request to God that God would equip Israel to obey Him constantly so that His blessings would abide with them. Solomon offered lots of sacrifices to God at the dedication of the Temple. There were burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings at the altar of sacrifice. When the altar of sacrifice could no longer contain the sacrifices, the middle of the courtyard was used. After the offering of the sacrifices, King Solomon pronounced blessings on the people and dismissed them to their various homes. The sacrifices of the animals marked the beginning of a fourteen-day festival of dedication that was observed by all Jews, including those of the Diaspora.

B. Biblical Background

The welfare of the Jews was always bound to their obedience to God and His commands. When they rebelled against Him, His presence was taken away from them. God’s dwelling with them was conditional upon their continued obedience. In like manner, the blessing or curse, wealth or lack for the Jews was dependent on whether God was dwelling with them. They won or lost battles not necessarily because of the sophistication of their weapons but depending on whether God was favorable toward them.

It was for this reason that Solomon prayed that God would help them and would give them hearts to obey Him and do all His commandments. Also, he charged them to be fully committed to fulfilling God’s commandments. It was this second prayer that
would make the first prayer (prayer for God to abide with them, grant their requests, and forgive their sins) effectual.

Solomon dedicated the Temple by offering a vast number of animals to designate the beginning of the sacrificial system. It was a time of prayer, admonition, and great rejoicing. There was prayer for continued faithfulness, an admonition to obedience, and a rejoicing in the God who fulfills His promises.

A close scrutiny of the background to the events detailed in today’s lesson shows us how King Solomon went through an elaborate process to build the house of God—the Temple. He secured the best timber, the finest gold, and the most skilled laborers in the land (see 1 Kings 5). No doubt King Solomon wanted to make certain that the completion of the Temple would ensure that it would be among the world’s greatest wonders. In the planning of the building, King Solomon took the time to ensure that the details of the building were accurate, and its appearance was extravagant, both inside and out. He made certain that the interior and exterior design included elaborate furnishings to augment the splendor of the house (see 1 Kings 7).

Within the context of building God’s house, King Solomon also engaged in building his own personal house (see 1 Kings 7:1-12). At the completion of the building, the king involved the congregation in witnessing the placing of the ark of the covenant in witnessing the Temple (see 1 Kings 8:1-9). In response to the act of worship, in an elaborate fashion, God showed up and filled the Temple with His presence (see 1 Kings 8:10-11). Solomon then delivered a message to the people, reminding them of God’s plan in building the Temple along with the purpose of building the Temple (see 1 Kings 8:12-21).

It was after the message King Solomon delivered that he gave a prayer of supplication whereby he petitioned God on behalf of the people for seven specific interventions by God on their behalf for His name’s sake (see 1 Kings 8:22-53). At the conclusion of his thoughtful and sincere prayer in which he engaged/requested God’s intervention, Solomon then issued the benediction (refer to 1 Kings 8:54-61—today’s text). After Solomon concluded the benediction, the people engaged in a peace-offering celebration. (Refer to 1 Kings 8:62-66 [Background Scripture].)

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Preparation for the Blessing
   (1 Kings 8:54-56)

And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.

God’s presence was the true dedication, and was manifested by the bright cloud that
filled the sanctuary as soon as the Ark was placed there. After waiting so long for the Temple to be built and after witnessing the manifest presence of the Lord, Solomon was overcome and kneeled before the altar with his hands spread upward (verse 54). This is a position of submission, honor, and exaltation.

The function of blessing the congregation was usually the responsibility and privilege of the priests (see Numbers 6:23-27). Although Solomon issued a blessing, it is also an act of praise and prayer to God on behalf of the people (verse 55). In this instance, Solomon blurred the lines between civil leadership and spiritual leadership. Solomon spoke as one having authority, yet also as one who was under authority.

Solomon’s words were spoken in his present but were optimistically projecting into the future (verse 56). Especially then, and even now, any “rest” that a country might be experiencing is tentative at best due to the constant possibility of internal conflict or external attack. In addition, a state of national peace was also contingent upon the nation’s obedience to the laws of God.

B. Articulation of the Blessing
(1 Kings 8:57-61)

The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.

In his moment of spiritual euphoria, Solomon moves from purely blessing the assembly and transitions into a hybrid utterance that is part prayer to God and part blessing of the people. The first petition is a prayer for God’s perpetual presence as opposed to God’s periodic presence. Of course, in order to receive the full benefits of a full-time God, there needs to be full-time obedience as opposed to partial obedience. Partial obedience is still disobedience.

In verse 57, Solomon shifted from his praise of God for keeping His word to requesting God to be with the congregation as the Lord had been with the previous generation, and never “leave” nor “forsake” them (verse 57). Solomon expresses, in this congregational blessing, an earnest appeal for a hopeful future—even with what many would call a prophetic prayer in 1 Kings 8:47, whereby he prays that if they sin and are taken captive that God be with them—and when they repent allow them to return. Solomon in this verse asks for a special blessing and calls upon the Lord for an everlasting presence and for His unquenchable power to be with them. We all need God’s presence and power in our lives, both of which are blessings we can all use upon our lives and therefore should gladly receive.

The second petition (verse 58) is a prayer for heartfelt walking in obedience toward the Lord. Here, Solomon gets at the heart of what it takes to truly follow God. When our hearts are tender and sensitive toward the things of God, it becomes much easier to readily obey in whatever manner God instructs us. Luke 6:46
(NIV) captures the essence of God’s uncompromising and indispensable requirement of obedience in question form: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

The third petition (verse 59) is that Solomon’s prayer request to God would be constantly remembered and attended to by God. It is clear that Solomon’s prayer to God for the people was the same prayer that Solomon prayed on his own behalf. An effective leader is one who holds himself or herself to the same standards and expectations to which the people are held.

Solomon makes it clear in verse 60 that the motive behind his petition of prayer to God is not purely selfish but is also for the purpose of elevating the eternal God so that all may be fully aware of the Lord God’s power and presence. The word Lord is a title of respect, whereas the term God is more of a description. In some versions of the Bible, “Lord” is usually a translation of Adonai, which means “ruler” or “master.” The fully capitalized “LORD” is usually a translation of Yahweh (Jehovah), which is the sacred covenant name of God. The name “God” is usually a translation of Elohim, which means “the mighty one.”

The fourth petition (verse 61) reiterates Solomon’s desire for the people of Israel to possess and to exhibit fully committed hearts that perpetually obey the commands of God. A fully committed heart might display the following characteristics: (1) spiritual communion with God that prompts a desire to reflect God’s character; (2) spiritual competency in the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit; (3) spiritual consistency that produces a balanced walk of faith; (4) spiritual connection through accountable relationships that nurture both parties; (5) spiritual commission for ministry that serves the body of Christ; (6) spiritual commitment to people who are without God. The opposite of a fully committed heart is one that beats according to its own dictates rather than according to the spiritual mandate of God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

To hold a fourteen-day party seems to be extreme by any cultural standards (verse 65, Background Scripture). Second Chronicles 7:9-10 tells us that the people were dismissed on “the three and twentieth day” of the month, which was at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles. The festival week of the Temple dedication must have preceded the regular week of feasting, thus stretching the massive celebration into two weeks.

The people blessed King Solomon through praying to God that their leader might be blessed (verse 66). This is a demonstration that the spiritual leader is not the only one to petition God on behalf of the people, but the people can and should also petition God on behalf of their spiritual leader. They celebrated Solomon for all the time, planning, and excellent work put in to construct and complete the Temple. This concluding verse appropriately references David as the true founder of the Temple, but it was Solomon who served as the leader and completer of the construction process. This is reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 3:6 (NIV)—“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.”

Every day of our lives has the potential for new beginnings or completions. Therefore, one need not wait for a special occasion to have a celebration. However, special occasions remind us
that something extra significant has occurred. Celebrating diligence and hard work serves as motivation to continue pressing toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God. Although it is common to celebrate human milestones, it is also important for believers to celebrate the great things that God has done through us as His people. Our celebration of God should be exuberant and full of joyfulness. We should never hold back or be stingy with our gratitude for God’s abundant faithfulness in our lives.

The celebration led by King Solomon in today’s lesson is noteworthy, particularly in reference to how Solomon blessed the Lord and prayed for the people. The Life Application Bible’s comments on verses 56-60 of the biblical text suggest that Solomon’s prayer can be a pattern for our prayers. In his prayer, Solomon had five basic requests: (1) for God’s presence; (2) for the desire to do God’s will; (3) for help with daily needs; (4) for the desire and ability to obey God’s commandments; (5) for the spread of God’s Kingdom.

While today’s lesson dealt with the dedication of the Temple of God that was built by King Solomon, it closes with a blessing upon the people by King Solomon, reminding them of God’s commitment to them and seeking to encourage the people to experience total commitment to God. It is clear throughout Israel’s history that God has proven Himself faithful in all of His ways over and over again. As a contemporary people, too often we forget God’s faithfulness when things get hard or do not go our way or as we planned for or hoped for. To this end, King Solomon’s challenge reigns true even today. May his blessing encourage us to grow to be better in our service and not bitter over disappointments that are merely temporary pauses.

**PRAYER**

*Lord, thank You for dwelling in us and making a home for Your Holy Spirit inside of our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(January 20-26, 2020)*

**Solomon’s Blessing**

**MONDAY, January 20:** “Hezekiah Restores the Temple” (2 Chronicles 29:3-11)

**TUESDAY, January 21:** “Solomon Seeks Wisdom to Govern” (1 Kings 3:5-14)

**WEDNESDAY, January 22:** “Solomon’s Success Is Based on His Obedience” (1 Kings 9:1-9)

**THURSDAY, January 23:** “Solomon and God’s Glory Compared” (Matthew 6:25-30)

**FRIDAY, January 24:** “The Temple Is Completed and Dedicated” (2 Chronicles 7:1-6)

**SATURDAY, January 25:** “Festivities End; People Return Home” (2 Chronicles 7:8-11)

**SUNDAY, January 26:** “Solomon Blesses the People, Urges Faithfulness” (1 Kings 8:54-61)
February 2, 2020
Lesson 10

SINGLE-MINDED OBEDIENCE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Passing the Tests
YOUTH TOPIC: Yield Not to Temptation

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Whom Do You Worship?
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Learning Whom to Worship

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 91

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 4:1-11
KEY VERSE: Matthew 4:10

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 4:1-11
KEY VERSE: Matthew 4:10

Matthew 4:1-11—KJV
THEN WAS Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.
3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.
4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,
6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Matthew 4:1-11—NIV
THEN JESUS was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.
3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”
4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.
6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”
7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”
8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain
8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;
9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.
10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People are tempted in many ways to turn aside from what they know is right. How can we resist such temptations? Jesus resisted the devil’s temptations by quoting the Scriptures, thus demonstrating His single-minded obedience to God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Explore the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness.
2. Aspire to show the same single-minded obedience to God that Jesus demonstrated.
3. Develop spiritual habits that can strengthen them in times of temptation.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The three temptations/tests were opportunities for Jesus to assert His messianic role. The tests go to the core of Jesus’ identity and mission. His individual temptations also carry systemic/global ramifications.
—Priorities test (verses 3-4)—Jesus will not act independently of God to take care of Himself.
—Confidence test (verses 5-7)—an invitation to self-destruct (false confidence) and/or make an appeal for public acclaim.
—Allegiance test (verses 8-10)—The devil, as the present world ruler (cf. John 12:31; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12), offers everything a conventional messiah would want.

—“Worship God alone” is a major tenet of the Jewish faith.
—In this passage, “The Temptation of Jesus,” encompassing the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, recalls the forty years that the Israelites stayed in the wilderness after the Exodus and Elijah’s forty-day journey into the Sinai wilderness (see 1 Kings 19).
—The central issue in the temptation is whether Jesus will choose to do right or wrong.
—The tempter in this passage is also called (in Hebrew) the “adversary” or “enemy.”
—The symbolism of the three temptations has been variously interpreted: one is that the first represents the sin of gratification of the flesh; the second, the sin of presumption that God is a servant of human desires; and the third, the sin of greed.
Teachers of CHILDREN

—After His baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan (see Matthew 3:16–4:1).
—Jesus modeled how we are to resist temptation.
—Knowing that Jesus had fasted for forty days, Satan tempted Jesus by offering food to Him.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Tradition, various theories, and modern scholars agree that the apostle known as Matthew the tax collector wrote the gospel of Matthew. He was one of the Twelve called by Jesus Himself, but there is nothing to show that he was as prominent as Peter, James, and John were. However, it is widely acknowledged, even by the early church, that he wrote the first of the four gospels. Several things point to that, and they include his interest in coins and his ability to keep proper records within the book (since he was a tax collector who would have interest in coins and record keeping).

It is difficult to pinpoint the specific year the gospel of Matthew was written, and scholars are generally divided on the issue. Conservative scholars have suggested various dates. C. I. Scofield, in the original Scofield Reference Bible, suggested AD 37 as a possible date. Very few scholars give a date after AD 70, since Matthew’s only reference to the destruction of Jerusalem is Jesus’ prediction in chapter 24. Some scholars also suggest AD 50 to be the year the book was written.

In the gospel of Matthew, the tax collector-turned-apostle aimed to show the Jews that Jesus whom they had crucified was the messiah and king. Matthew had found salvation, and he wanted to bring the Jews to that light, too. He also aimed to encourage them, telling them that there was hope for them even though they had crucified the Christ.

His aim was to bring people to Christ after convincing them that Christ was the Savior.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus was led into the desert (which was traditionally near Jericho) to be tempted by the devil. The desert is a hot, dry place with limited if any human contact. Fasting was an important part of Jewish customs. The idea of fasting was one in which the flesh was chastised or underemphasized and was customary to the Jews. They sometimes fasted, tearing their garments and sprinkling ashes on their bodies. Fasting usually involved practices that signified the individual’s humbling himself or herself before God. Such acts usually included wearing sackcloth or rags and walking barefoot.

It was in this cultural setting of fasting and the geographical setting of the desert that Jesus was tempted by the devil. The cultural and geographical settings promoted Jesus’ discomfort, and it is when we are uncomfortable that our faith is best tested.

PROLENTIC CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jesus: He is the Messiah. He had just been baptized and recognized by John the Baptist as the Savior. He is also referred to as the Son of God in this passage.
The Devil: Lucifer, or Satan. He is the archenemy of Christians and all humanity who seeks to lure people from God and mislead them. He is also referred to in this passage as “the tempter” and “Satan.”

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Angels (verse 6)—Greek: ἄγγελος (ang’-el-os): angels; messengers from God.
Bread (verse 4)—Greek: ἄρτος (ar’-tos): bread; a loaf; food.
Forty (verse 2)—Greek: τεσσάρακοντα (tes-sar-ak’-on-tah): forty; the number “40” generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial, or probation.
Speak (verse 3)—Greek: λέγω (leg’-o): to say, speak; “command” (KJV); “tell” (NIV).
Tempted (verse 1)—Greek: πείραζω (pi-rad’-zo): to make proof of; to attempt, test, tempt.
Word (verse 4)—Greek: ρήμα (hray’-mah): a thing spoken; a word or saying of any kind, as command, report, promise.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Tempted and Tried
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Temptation of Physical Need
      (Matthew 4:1-4)
   B. Temptation of Pride
      (Matthew 4:5-7)
   C. Temptation of Greed
      (Matthew 4:8-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Tempted and Tried

   The narrative of the temptation of Christ is one of the most mysterious in the New Testament. Since Jesus was alone in the desert, it would have been difficult for anyone to have been an eyewitness to the event and to write about it from that perspective. Consequently, there are at least three different arguments regarding the source and significance of this account. The first perspective sees the story as a mythical, imaginative conjecture. Another view considers it to be a supernatural revelation of facts that could not otherwise be known. Finally, some see this account as having initially been shared in the first person by Jesus and later reported by Matthew.

   After Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist and His heavenly confirmation at the Jordan River, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert (a location near Jericho) to prepare for His ministry, which He does by fasting for forty days and afterward being tempted by Satan. The devil came to Him to exploit His hunger and discomfort (Matthew 4:3). He also tried to tempt Jesus using Jesus’ heavenly status (Matthew 4:5). When none of this worked, the devil tried to appeal to Jesus’ human vanity (Matthew 4:8-9).
Through all of this, Jesus stayed strong and would not be deceived by the devil. Each time, Jesus responded with deep knowledge of the Scripture, and so the devil left Him. He had passed the test, and He was ministered to by angels (Matthew 4:11).

**II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

**A. Temptation of Physical Need**

(Matthew 4:1-4)

THEN WAS Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Jesus was driven by a power that was above His human self (verse 1). This same power was operative throughout His entire life and was necessary in order to propel Him through times of conflict and to sustain Him through the times of need. This time of need was highlighted during this temptation, which was necessary in the grand scheme of God’s master plan.

Jesus remained in touch with His natural human condition and participated in a physical fast (verse 2). The phrase “forty days and forty nights” is used a few times in the Bible. Moses and Elijah fasted for forty days (see Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8), and Noah’s flood was the result of a forty-day rainfall (see Genesis 7:12). This extraordinary fast to which Jesus submitted
interrupted the ordinary flow of His life and allowed Him to focus His energies, senses, and perceptions on spiritual things rather than being dulled by the distractions of the present. Although there are many spiritual benefits of fasting, the physical body still experiences pains and cravings from the intense hunger.

The tempter uses an age-old tactic in an attempt to weaken Jesus (verse 3). He sows seeds of doubt in the conversation in a vain attempt to cause Jesus to question God or to question Himself. This same tactic is utilized today on believers who can unknowingly fall into this trap if we are not careful.

In Jesus’ season of vulnerability during an extended fast, the tempter tries to take advantage of the situation. He approaches Jesus with an option that seems viable and necessary on the surface. However, these suggestions are only distractions to separate Jesus from His purpose. In every single proposal offered to Jesus by the tempter, Jesus begins His response with the three words “It is written” (e.g., verse 4). This phrase is based on the belief reflected in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “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” (NIV). Just as in the case with Jesus, the power and reliability of God’s Word provides the boldness necessary for the believer to stand strong against any kind of temptation. The Word of God, also called the sword of the Spirit, is the offensive piece of the armor of God. For a soldier during that time to go into military conflict without the sword was unthinkable. The phrase “Man shall not live by bread alone” is derived from Deuteronomy 8:3. Bread was a staple in the contemporary diet in that region. But as important as bread and food are to the physical diet, God’s Word is what is ultimately needed to stay spiritually and psychologically alive.

B. Temptation of Pride
(Matthew 4:5-7)

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

In verse 5, the tempter appeals to the ego of Jesus by issuing a dare. Jerusalem was probably the highest elevation of all the capitals in the ancient world and could have provided a view of the Kedron Valley below.

In verse 6, the tempter here attempts to raise doubts about a matter that is central to faith in order for the Gospel to effectively operate. The identity of Jesus as an active component of the Godhead is an essential fact that parallels with the claims and actions of His life. Since the tempter begins with a false premise, it is therefore difficult to arrive at a correct conclusion. Since Jesus is indeed the Son of God, there is therefore no need for Him to do anything in order to prove it, and it is morally useless to flaunt it. People who are insecure are moved and intrigued by dares and challenges because they are not so sure of who they are and are looking for approval and affirmation.

In a bold display of demonic audacity, the tempter hijacks Psalm 91:11-12 and incorrectly and inappropriately tries to use it for his own evil ends. Anyone can use any Scripture to support any point by using the Scripture out
of context. In seeking to understand the Bible, one must check the context whenever he or she does not understand the text. The context provides important clues to the accurate meaning and intended purpose of the text. Misusing “proof texts” purposefully contorts the intended purpose of the Scripture. As an aside to this point, if Satan can memorize Scripture and quote it for nefarious reasons, surely the people of God can memorize Scripture and apply it accurately.

Drawn from Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus responds to the tempter’s deceptive proposal with Scripture of His own: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” (verse 7, NIV). It has been said that the best way to fight fire is with fire. In this case, Jesus quotes a verse of Scripture from Deuteronomy 6:16—“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus did not have to find a scroll in order to quote this verse because He had already hidden it in His heart, and this underscores the supreme value in memorizing Scripture.

C. Temptation of Greed
(Matthew 4:8-11)

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Verse 8 utilizes what is probably a hyperbolic expression designed to express the height of the mountain as well as the panoramic view that was available at the top. This mountain-top experience would pale in comparison to the later occurrence that would take place on the Mount of Transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:1-13. The tempter displays the characteristics of a con artist as he makes a vain attempt to offer to Jesus something that Jesus already possesses by virtue of His relationship and connection with Father God, who already owns everything (see Psalm 50:10).

The tempter quotes no Scripture in verse 9 and makes no attempt to disguise his motive or to spiritually dignify this preposterous offer. He offers to give Jesus something that he does not even possess (the kingdoms of the world) in exchange for something that Jesus could never give to anyone else but His Father (worship). However, some Bible passages suggest that the devil may have some authority over some earthly kingdoms (Ephesians 2:2—“ruler of the kingdom of the air”; Daniel 10:13a—“prince of the Persian kingdom” [NIV]). The exercise of worship is exclusively reserved for almighty God. Exodus 20:3-5 (NIV) makes it clear: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 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.” To bow before or worship anything or anyone is to attribute deity to that person or thing. It is for that reason that God wholesale rebukes all forms of idolatry.

While Jesus had tolerated the foolish offers of the tempter in the first two offers, Jesus went into shutdown mode when the tempter tried to take over worship (verse 10). Some conversations are not even worth having, and
it is in those moments that we just have to tell the tempter where to go. Jesus realized He was engaging in a dead-end conversation and that nothing good could possibly come from such a vile source.

What does it take for the devil to leave you (verse 11)? In the case of Jesus, the first reason for the devil’s departure was due to Jesus’ consistently meeting temptation with the Word of God. The Word of God is an offensive weapon which should be used to combat any demonic encroachment.

Once the tempter left, angels attended to whatever needs Jesus had at the time. The angels’ sudden presence was not a matter of their not being able to intervene while the tempter was present. Rather, it was necessary for Jesus to face and defeat this temptation in order to set an example of perseverance and for God’s people to identify with a Savior who understands what it is like to be human and vulnerable. Consequently, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15, NIV).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The Word of God is a powerful and reliable resource to be used in guiding our decisions in life and our responses to temptation. The more Scripture we commit to memory, the more we will be able to draw from it in those unforeseen times of need. As we diligently study the Word we will become increasingly skillful in accurately determining what is wrong and what is right. It is important to understand the context in order to accurately interpret the text. Temptation is real and can become a challenge in our decision-making process. But as we pattern our lives after Jesus’ and follow the principles of God’s Word, no temptations will overtake us that God will not give us strength to overcome (see 1 Corinthians 10:13).

PRAYER

God, our Father, thank You for Your Word that gives us power in times of weakness. Help us commit ourselves to taking in Your Word and allowing it to dwell in us richly. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 27-February 2, 2020)

Single-minded Obedience

MONDAY, January 27: “Don’t Test the Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:16-25)
TUESDAY, January 28: “Angels Guard Tempted Believers” (Psalm 91)
WEDNESDAY, January 29: “Do Not Forget the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:11-20)
THURSDAY, January 30: “Jesus’ Priestly Ministry” (Hebrews 4:14-5:10)
FRIDAY, January 31: “Jesus, God’s Beloved Son” (Matthew 3:13-17)
SATURDAY, February 1: “The Kingdom of Heaven Is Here” (Matthew 4:12-17)
SUNDAY, February 2: “Jesus Rejects Satan’s Temptations” (Matthew 4:1-11)
February 9, 2020 Lesson 11

PIETY THAT HONORS GOD

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YPUNG ADULT TOPIC: The Pitfalls of Showing Off
YOUTH TOPIC: Being Real

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Worship Means . . .
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: The Meaning of Worship

DEVOTIONAL READING

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 5:1-6; Matthew 6:1-8
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 6:1-8
KEY VERSE: Matthew 6:1

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:3-26
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 5:3-11
KEY VERSE: Matthew 5:8

Matthew 6:1-8—KJV
TAKE HEED that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
4 So that thy alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.
5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Matthew 6:1-8—NIV
“BE CAREFUL not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.
2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.
3 “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.
6 “But when you pray, go into your room, close the
6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

doctor and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

8 “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Eager to be well thought of, people are pulled in a multitude of contradictory directions. How can we be true to the highest principles that we have been taught? In Matthew 5, Jesus taught the disciples the Beatitudes; and in Matthew 6, He warned them against practicing their piety in order to be praised by others.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Understand Jesus’ teachings about not practicing piety in order to be noticed by others.
2. Repent of making a show of religiosity in order to receive praise from others.
3. Practice simplicity and humility in their devotional lives.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Prayer and sharing resources were customary practices in Judaism.
—Jesus distinguishes between old and new ways to worship God. Praying and giving to those in need are acts of worship when done to honor God.
—Public rewards for (false) piety do not enhance one’s relationship with God. Quiet acts of piety result in rewards that only God can give.
—Jesus was not criticizing the practice of public prayer in the synagogue but, rather, the improper motivation for prayer—“so that they may be seen by others” (see verse 5).

—The mention of “trumpets” in verse 2 to announce acts of charitable giving is hyperbole or sarcasm.
—The passage focuses on the difference in religious practice that is inconspicuous and reflective of true righteousness, and that which is ostentatious (showy) and motivated by one’s desire to be perceived as righteous.
—Matthew 6:1-8 identifies three acts of practicing piety before others: giving alms so that others can see one; praying to be seen and using “empty words”; and being obvious when fasting.
—Giving alms (verses 2-4) involved not only the donation of money, but also acts of mercy and charity.
—“Hypocrites” could mean “actors,” “posers,” “fakers,” and “frauds.”
—Jesus’ instruction on praying (verses 5-8) references Jewish traditions of praying in the morning, noon, and evening; and standing and facing toward Jerusalem.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Matthew records the teaching of Jesus called the Sermon on the Mount.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Tradition, various theories, and modern scholars agree that the apostle known as Matthew “the tax collector” wrote the book of Matthew. He was one of the twelve called by Jesus Himself, but he was not placed as prominently in the inner circle as were Peter, James, and John. However, it is widely acknowledged even by the early church that he wrote the first of the four gospels. Several elements point to this conclusion, such as the emphasis placed on coins in the book of Matthew as well as the author’s ability to meticulously organize the content of the book itself.

It is difficult to pinpoint the specific year that the gospel of Matthew was written; scholars are somewhat divided on the issue. Conservative scholars have suggested AD 37 as a possible date. Some scholars give a date after AD 70, since Matthew did not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in the gospel of Matthew. Still other scholars suggest AD 50 to be the year the book was written.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The contemporary Jewish community of Matthew 6 stressed a legalistic Old Testament standard of holiness and righteousness. The people were instructed to live a holy life, and that life had to be to the standards of the community’s religious leaders to be considered pleasing to God. However, there were certain misunderstandings of God’s standards, and some people such as the Pharisees were in the habit of trying to gain recognition for being righteous. This means that their “righteousness” was focused upon pleasing people rather than God.

For example, the Pharisees outwardly demonstrated their generosity in hopes of getting the recognition that people would accord to them. They hoped to be referred to as “holy.” Jesus taught that those who did these self-righteous acts were getting their rewards from men and would not get it from God. This was the setting in which Jesus ministered, and part of His calling was to correct these unrighteous acts.

People used to stand at various street corners, praying loudly and publicly so that others would see them and consider them to be holy men. In this era, they also had a fasting pattern that was like mourning: they would purposely look unkempt and display an appearance that announced the fact that they were sacrificing for God. It was all a public show that sought men’s recognition more than it sought God’s favor.

From the Old Testament perspective in Ecclesiastes 5:1-6, the author gives guidance on worship. He is essentially teaching the right way to behave.
He advises not to be rash when making promises and to make good on all the vows and promises that are made.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Hypocrites:** This refers to the pretenders (usually the Pharisees) who performed many of their actions with questionable motives. They wanted people to see them as spiritual and righteous and that is why they did the good deeds. It was not done out of a heart of righteousness but from a disposition of vanity.

**The Teacher:** Little reference is made to the teacher in this Scripture, but the teacher is the one who serves in a position of the instructor. He is the one who says, “I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full” (see Matthew 6:5b). He is Jesus Christ, the Lord.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Hypocrites (verse 2)—Greek: hypokrites (hoop-ok-ree-tace’):** persons who answer; actors; hypocrites; pretenders.

**Pagans (verse 7)—Greek: ethnikes (eth-nee-kos’):** national; foreigners; Gentiles; non-Jews; “heathen” (KJV).

**Reward (verse 2)—Greek: misthos (mis-thos’):** wages; hire; reward; recompense.

**Righteousness (verse 1 [KJV only])—Greek: dikaiosuné (dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay):** righteousness; justice; justness.

**Secret (verse 4)—Greek: kruptos (kroop-tos’):** hidden; secret.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. The Practice and Power of Prayer

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. Jesus Warns about Wrong Righteousness (Matthew 6:1-4)

B. Jesus Teaches about Prayer (Matthew 6:5-8)

**III. Concluding Reflection**

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Practice and Power of Prayer**

In Ecclesiastes 5 and Matthew 6, we see that the authors of the books and Jesus showed the people the proper way to worship and to reflect good behavior. Throughout these passages commentary is made on a wide variety of life issues and spiritual issues, ranging from public speaking to vows to prayers.

Without prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, the church of God is essentially powerless and merely going through the motions. As we offer our prayer to God, our true motives are weighed and the motives of our hearts are examined to see if they align with the will of God.

The purposes of prayer may be varied but some of the primary reasons include the following: (1) to build our relationship with God; (2) to shape and mold our desires and character; (3) to change things and people; (4) to show God our desperation; and
(5) to release our burdens to God. When we focus in on the specific purposes of prayer, our exercise of communicating with God becomes more meaningful and so much more can be accomplished in the process. The length and eloquence of our prayers is not as important as the right motive and sincerity of our prayers.

B. Biblical Background

The background to the book of Ecclesiastes was a setting in which the people suffered. Some believe that this was in the era in which King Solomon had left God in his old age. Whatever it may be, one thing that is certain is that there was corruption in government leadership (see Ecclesiastes 5:8) and it was important for people to be safe from it. So, the author tries to guide people on how to avoid offending God, the king, or any other person.

In Matthew, the people are eager to be saved. This is a period in which people believed in holiness teachings and struggled to follow them. People who were seen as holy were revered and this prompted hypocrisy from many who wanted recognition. Jesus shows them the error of their ways and teaches them the right path of righteousness.

An indispensable aspect of true righteousness involves the practice of prayer. The power of prayer involves an accurate knowledge of the person to whom we pray. In Psalm 103:3-13, we see several characteristics of God that are important to understanding the true nature of God and the acceptable ways to pray.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jesus Warns about Wrong Righteousness

(Matthew 6:1-4)

TAKE HEED that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

Jesus gives a warning in verse 1 regarding a common human tendency. It is natural for one to seek affirmation from or to want to impress his or her peers. That is also a developmental trait of adolescents. When individuals—especially adults—practice outwardly righteous acts in order to be esteemed and glorified before people, it suggests immaturity or that their spiritual development has been somehow arrested. These kinds of attitudes and actions also reveal the true motives of the heart, which stem from impurity and insincerity. The admonition to “be careful” suggests that it is easy for the human heart to subtly become prideful. When more attention and higher priority is given to pleasing people than is given to pleasing God, a person is well on the way to doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. There is also danger in doing the right things but for the wrong reasons. Motive makes a major difference.

The meaning of the word hypocrite (verse 2) comes from the theater world. It describes actors who adopt a character different from their true personality. They skillfully mask their true selves in order to portray someone else through various kinds of expressions. The better they are at portraying whom they are not,
the more applause they receive for their efforts. This attitude of announcing one’s generosity was unacceptable to Jesus then, and the same holds true today.

Not letting the left hand know what the right one is doing (verse 3) is a contextual proverbial expression used to encourage the use of secrecy during the process of helping those in need. When our giving to the poor is done publicly, there is a possibility for pride to creep in and to negatively tarnish our motive for helping. Whenever we help someone it should be done from a pure heart without the expectation of accolades or publicity because of our efforts. As long as we are pleasing God and our motives are pure, then our giving to the needy will continue to move in the right direction.

The spiritual formula for righteous material or financial assistance is this: Secret giving results in open rewards (verse 4). Our blessings do not come through publicly advertising our generosity. Whenever we give of our financial resources we give a part of ourselves, because money is associated with work and work is associated with time. When we give to others with the goal of garnering attention and high esteem from others, we have already received our vain reward and should not expect spiritual rewards from God. The incorrect motive invalidates the gift, but the correct motive increases the value of the gift.

B. Jesus Teaches about Prayer

(Matthew 6:5-8)

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

In verse 5, it is assumed that those who are disciples of Christ will have an active, robust prayer life. Without prayer, there can be no spiritual power for effective, life-changing, society-impacting ministry. But prayer for the wrong purpose results in a problem. The scribes and Pharisees presented two primary problems in their approach to prayer: the first was vain-glory and the second was vain repetitions. People who pray for the wrong purpose settle for so much less than God’s best. The purpose and motive of the prayer has a direct impact on the outcome of the prayer.

When prayer emanates from a clean heart with sincere motives, the results are positive and powerful. As James 5:16b observes, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Since prayer is so important, we should not depend on our own abilities to make prayer successful.

Public admiration of a spiritual action is the payment for ostentatious religious outward displays. This is certainly not a general condemnation of all public prayer (verse 6). The problem here is not in the activity of prayer, but in the improper motive and execution of prayer. Since there seemed to have been such a big temptation to sin through impure motives during public prayer, Jesus offered a solution of simply praying in one’s private room. This practical guideline would remove the temptation to cater to the public rather than focusing entirely upon God in times of prayer.
Have you ever seen someone whose prayer in church seemed more for the benefit of others than for the glory of God? Have you ever observed someone who seemed to place more emphasis on being publicly credited and congratulated for their financial assistance than for the purpose of the help? Two prominent problems in the Pharisaic prayer life were vain-glory and vain repetition (verse 7). These two problems were connected to each other because the more the Pharisees babbled, the more impressive they thought they were, even though they were not saying anything of true substance. The important aspect of prayer is not the number of words that we use but is about the alignment of our will and hearts with the will and heart of God. We pray well when we pray for God’s kingdom to come and for God’s will to be done just as Jesus taught His disciples.

Verse 8 is a reassurance that we need not waste time in meaningless activity that yields no results. God is already aware of our needs even before we make a request.

Jesus gives His listeners a blunt directive: “Do not be like them.” Sincere disciples of Christ are not to pattern their lives after hypocrites. We will do well to examine ourselves when we are impressed or entertained by or attracted to their flash and flair. To like their ways and to be like them is an insult to God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is important to place our focus on pleasing God rather than on being esteemed and congratulated by others. Our prayers and shared resources should be offered without unnecessary ostentatiousness. Not all prayers and praises should be loud and in the public. Conversely, not all prayers and praises should be done quietly and in private. One who gives from the heart does not expect something specific in return.

Humility is a lifelong art and discipline that we all need to develop more. A daily private time with God can elevate our walk with God in ways that are powerful and astounding. Out of our private time with God can emerge a public worship that is powerful and empowering to others.

PRAYER

*Lord, thank You for the privilege of prayer and fasting. Help us never to misuse it but to harness it to edify us and to glorify You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

*(February 3-9, 2020)*

**Piety that Honors God**

**MONDAY,** February 3: “Listen and Act with Integrity” (Ecclesiastes 5:1-6)

**TUESDAY,** February 4: “Work and Play Are God’s Gifts” (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)

**WEDNESDAY,** February 5: “Express Your Faith through Actions” (Isaiah 1:11-17)

**THURSDAY,** February 6: “A Doxology of Praise to God” (1 Chronicles 29:10-13)

**FRIDAY,** February 7: “Forgive from the Heart” (Matthew 18:21-35)

**SATURDAY,** February 8: “God’s Will and Our Needs” (Matthew 6:16-21)

**SUNDAY,** February 9: “Piety that God Expects of Us” (Matthew 6:1-8)
February 16, 2020  Lesson 12

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** Ask for What Really Matters
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Special Instructions

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Teach Us How to Pray
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** A Model for Prayer

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Psalm 40:1-10, 16-17

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 6:9-15
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 6:9-15
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Matthew 6:10
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Matthew 6:9

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 6:9-15
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 6:9-15
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 6:8

---

**Matthew 6:9-15—KJV**
9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

**Matthew 6:9-15—NIV**
9 “This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
10 ‘your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
11 ‘Give us today our daily bread.
12 ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 ‘And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’
14 “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
15 “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”
LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the place of the Lord’s Prayer in the life of the church.
2. Long for the kingdom the Lord’s Prayer describes to be manifested in their lives.
3. Pray the Lord’s Prayer with deeper appreciation for its meaning.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Matthew gives special attention to the manner, context, and language of prayer, which was practiced privately by individuals and as a community in synagogues and the Temple.
—The prayer consists of three petitions that focus on God (verses 9-10) and four petitions that focus on human needs (verses 11-13).
—The Lord’s Prayer is part of the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7).
—The additional words about forgiveness (verses 14-15) are provided to reinforce its reciprocal nature. God not only forgives the sin of someone but also then expects that person to forgive others. This transforms relationships.
—Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer is considerably longer than Luke’s (11:2-4).
—The Lord’s Prayer is a component of Jesus’ discourse about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-18).
—The first part of the prayer (verses 9-10) focuses on honoring God’s name, the coming of God’s empire, and doing God’s will.
—The prayer asks for the complete transformation of the world (verse 10), then for subsistence provisions which were not taken for granted in the biblical setting.
—The first part of verse 13 can be interpreted two ways: that the disciples will pray either for strength to survive the harsh present times; or for God to complete His purposes despite the world’s being dominated by the evil Roman empire.
—The second part of verse 13 asks for guidance for us as we seek to avoid temptation.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Learning to pray helps people understand who God is.
—The disciples recognized their need to learn to pray.
—Jesus provided a model prayer to help His disciples and us learn how to pray.
—The Scriptures tell us about Jesus’ prayer life.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We are often discouraged in the face of negative circumstances over which we seem to have no control. How can we experience the positive transformations we long for? Jesus taught the disciples to pray for God’s kingdom to be manifested in their lives and in all creation.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is commonly agreed by scholars and historians that the apostle known as Matthew the tax collector is the writer of the gospel that bears his name. He was one of the disciples but not quite as prominent as Peter, James, or John. However, it is widely acknowledged, even by the early church, that he wrote the first of the four gospels. Several things point to that and they include his interest in coins and his ability to keep proper records, since he was a tax collector who would have had a keen interest in coins and record keeping.

It is difficult to pinpoint the specific year that the gospel of Matthew was written and biblical scholars are generally divided on the issue. Conservative scholars have suggested various dates. C. I. Scofield in the original Scofield Reference Bible suggested AD 37 as a possible date. Some scholars give a date after AD 70, since Matthew did not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in the gospel of Matthew. Some scholars also suggest AD 50 to be the year the book was written.

In the book of Matthew, the tax collector-turned-apostle aimed to show the Jews that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the Messiah and King. He had found salvation and he wanted to bring the Jews to that light too. He also aimed to encourage them, telling them that there was hope for them even though they had crucified the Christ. His aim was to bring people to Christ after convincing them that Christ was the Savior.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In Matthew 6:9-15, the cultural setting shows a Jewish community with a great deal of emphasis on holiness and righteousness. The people were instructed and they were expected to live their lives in a way that pleased God. However, there were certain misdirections. Some people, such as the Pharisees, were in the habit of trying to gain recognition for being righteous. This means that their “righteousness” was meant to please mankind and not to please God—as it was merely a show.

People used to stand at various street corners, praying loudly so that others would see them and consider them to be holy men. In this era, they also had a fasting pattern that was like mourning. They would purposely look unkempt and display an appearance that announced the fact that they were sacrificing for God. It was all a public show that sought people’s recognition more than it sought God’s favor.

As part of Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation and restoration, He endeavored to lead them toward the right path and condemned anything that did not glorify God in its totality. He explained that it was important to receive rewards from God for their secret acts of righteousness rather than to receive rewards and recognition from people for their public displays.

Jesus taught people to forgive. He explained that if they forgave one another, God would also forgive them (Matthew 6:14-15). This was in an era when people lived by the Old Testament mantra that declared, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” However, Jesus brought a message that directed followers to forgive one another. Yet, it was difficult for them to be genuinely merciful and forgiving. This unusual teaching prompted Peter to ask how many times he would have to forgive someone and stay in compliance with God’s will (see Matthew 18:21-22). Constant forgiveness was a foreign idea, but it was in this cultural setting that Jesus preached this message of forgiveness. He explained to them that forgiveness was key to having prayers for personal forgiveness to be answered.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Our Debtors (Matthew 6:12): This refers to those
who sin against us and are not necessarily just the ones who owe us money. This term also refers to those who owe us apologies. It refers to those who have wronged us in some way. We are to forgive them so that God will forgive us. This is necessary in order for us to receive our requests from God when we pray.

**Our Father in Heaven (Matthew 6:9):** God is the creator who is also the object and recipient of our prayers. Jesus taught that if we forgive others, our Father in heaven would forgive us. God is merciful and calls on His children to display mercy toward others.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Debtors (verse 12)**—Greek: *opheiletés* (of-i-le’t-ace): debtors; sinners; those who owe.

**Earth (verse 10)**—Greek: *gé* (ghay): the earth; land.

**Forgive (verse 12)**—Greek: *aphiémi* (af-e’-ay-mee): to remit; to release; to send away; leave alone; permit.

**Give (verse 11)**—Greek: *didómi* (did’-o-mee): to give, offer, put, or place.

**Glory (verse 13 [KJV only])**—Greek: *doxa* (dox’-ah): honor; renown; glory; splendor.

**Heaven (verse 10)**—Greek: *ouranos* (oo-ran-os’): heaven; the spiritual heavens.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. A Model for Praying

Let us consider and evaluate the place of the Model Prayer in the life of the church. Most people learn this prayer as children at home or in church and Sunday school. But what does it really mean, and how can we avoid regarding it as only a collection of words and phrases from past history that has little to do with our current daily lives? It is easy to simply verbalize the Model Prayer without engaging the mind, and we end up robotically repeating the words as if on automatic pilot. A deeper look into the Model Prayer reveals a prayer pattern that helps us to understand the important elements that should be included in a conversation with God. Some of these elements will be examined in the “Exposition and Application” section beginning on the next page.

The concept of the kingdom that is mentioned twice in this prayer is extremely important in clearly understanding the heartbeat and priorities of Jesus. The kingdom of God is the will, rule, and reign of God—which is the ultimate goal of the disciple’s life. When the Spirit of God influences our thoughts, words, and actions, it is at that point
that we are truly living as children of God and as disciples of Jesus Christ. When we understand this, we will begin to approach this prayer from a vastly different perspective. Rather than merely saying the prayer through habit, we will begin truly praying the prayer with a deeper appreciation for its true meaning.

**B. Biblical Background**

In previous years, the Jews had followed the Old Testament code of “an eye for an eye.” They had followed several other Mosaic and Levitical precepts that they believed were righteous. Jesus came to clarify what it means to follow God, and as He preached He showed them the errors in their ways and beliefs. He showed them that forgiving others was key for anyone who wanted to receive God’s forgiveness. It is important that we forgive others and unburden our hearts so our prayers will be answered (Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus presented a picture of holiness as something that believers should display in service to God and not in service to ourselves as we seek recognition from people. In Matthew 6:9-15, Jesus teaches the people how to pray and shows them that how God responds to us depends heavily on how we relate and respond to others (Matthew 6:12-15).

**II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

**A. The Way to Pray**

*Matthew 6:9-10*

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

Matthew focuses on the process and phraseology of prayer which was privately practiced by individuals and as a group in synagogues and in the Temple. There are three primary divisions in the Model Prayer: the introduction, the supplications, and the conclusion. The introduction provides a basic foundation for conversation with God, including who God is, where God is, and how God is. Our faith, love, and humility are all components in the preamble to this prayer.

When God is addressed as “Father” (verse 9), this term embodies a sense of deep kinship and intimate relationship between the petitioner and the object of the petition. The concept of God as Father extends beyond God’s being merely the creator of all people. God as Father takes an active interest in the needs and personal interests of His children, and the children are dependent upon the Father to protect and to provide the needs of everyday life. An essential aspect of every effective relationship is the presence and practice of open communication. When it comes to a relationship with God the same holds true, and the primary way that we communicate with God is through prayer. Although God the Father is characterized as being in heaven, this designation is incomplete because of the omnipresence of God and His ability to be everywhere at once. God’s name is holy, which means it is dedicated and consecrated for a divine purpose (see 1 Peter 3:15; Isaiah 8:13). The very name of God alone is saturated with majesty, dominion, power, and glory and is thus distinguished from the names and personhoods of ordinary human fathers.

The petition for God’s kingdom to come (verse 10) is a bold declaration for radical alteration and a spiritual revolution to occur on
a universal scale. This desire is undergirded by the firm belief that there is one Lord, one faith, and one power strong enough to overwhelm anything that might possibly come against it. Although God has ultimately always been on the throne and will ultimately always be on the throne, there are still quadrants of the culture and of individual hearts that are still rebellious and are not completely sold out to the Savior. That means there is still work to be done. Once when the Pharisees asked Jesus about the kingdom, His response was, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21).

The idea of God’s will being done is an extension or explanation of God’s kingdom coming. The prayer for God’s will to be manifested is an act of obedience and is like giving God permission to overrule anything that we may personally prefer. There is nothing wrong with making personal requests of God. However, in the midst of such requests we must also understand that if our requests come into conflict with God’s desires, it is God’s will that shall ultimately prevail. This scenario was demonstrated by Jesus Himself when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39, NIV). The subtraction of our selfishness from the equation allows the opportunity for God’s superior will to prevail as we submit to the will of God.

B. Special Requests
(Matthew 6:11-13)

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

In a general sense, the word bread is used to indicate life’s basic necessities. We are ultimately dependent upon God to sustain us on a daily basis (verse 11). Since there is not a day of our lives when we are not in need of God’s sustenance and grace, our prayer, communication, and contact must be day by day, moment by moment. This includes corporate prayer as a congregation, group prayer as a family, and personal prayer as an individual. When the children of Israel were crossing through the wilderness headed toward the Promised Land, their need and their prayer was also for daily nourishment. God responded to this need through the daily supply of manna. After an extended period of time eating manna, the people became weary of that diet and began to complain. They wanted to order meat from the menu and their request was finally granted with too much quail. Eventually, they resumed their God-given diet of manna, and Exodus 16:35 (NIV) records that “the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.” We can learn a lesson from the children of Israel and decide to accept the daily bread offered by God—since the Creator knows our needs better than we know our needs.

In verse 12, the figurative usage of the word debts is another way to describe our
sins, which may be seen as a form of spiritual indebtedness due to a violation of God’s guidelines. If forgiveness of debts is to be granted it must be given by the creditor. The unconditional offering of forgiveness is central in the Christian understanding of discipleship. The debtor and creditor in human interactions can be compared to the one who sins and God’s response to the repentant. This concept is seen elsewhere in Scripture (see Matthew 5:25-26; 18:23; Luke 7:41-42).

If we expect God to forgive us, we must also be forgiving toward others. God desires to see His own image, nature, and tendencies reflected in His children just as human parents rejoice in seeing the positive tendencies and characteristics that they have modeled become apparent in their children. When we ask for forgiveness from others and when we forgive people who have offended us, we are modeling the grace of God toward us. Once, Peter came to Jesus for some extra tutoring on the subject of forgiveness. He wanted to know specifically how many times he was expected to forgive others, and Peter started with what he thought was a generous number of seven times for forgiveness to be extended to an offender before the statute of forgiveness limitations expired. Jesus replied with an answer that was undoubtedly unexpected. He said that the number of times to forgive the offender is seventy times seven. In other words, the number of times is endless because God’s capacity for compassion never runs dry.

The idea that God would lead any of His children into temptation seems understandably foreign and confusing (verse 13). The intention behind the utilization of the word temptation has more to do with trials and suffering than with falling into a trap of sin. James 1:13-15 further clarifies the relationship between God and temptation: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (NIV).

Disciples of Jesus Christ are not called to avoid persecution, conflicts, pain, and difficulty. Jesus Himself dealt with this natural struggle on the night before His crucifixion when in the garden He prayed that the lot of suffering set for Him would be removed (see Matthew 26:39). God does not promise us a way to escape suffering, as He does with sin in 1 Corinthians 10:13, but what God does provide is the courage to face our difficulties and the strength to endure. Our deliverance comes through our perseverance and our dependence on the power of God, as is seen in Ephesians 6:13: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (NIV).

The doxology for the prayer “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” is not present in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of Matthew. It was possibly added later, which was a common practice in some Jewish prayers. One possible source of this addition may be 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.

C. Forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15)

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men
their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

When we forgive people of their offenses against us, that forgiveness alone is not what qualifies us to be forgiven by God (verse 14). There are several other factors in operation in the process of grace-drenched divine forgiveness. Some of these factors include faith, love, and humility. One other important element involved in completing the process of forgiveness is the often-overlooked characteristic of repentance, which is the turning away from the initial offense or sin that caused the need for forgiveness in the first place. John the Baptist’s guidance in Matthew 3:8 is to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. In other words, we need to display evidence that a change has indeed taken place or at least some degree of transformation is in the process of occurring.

In His closing argument in verse 15, Jesus once again raises the question, How can we expect to receive the necessary forgiveness from God if we withhold the necessary forgiveness from others? People who desire mercy and grace should also be willing to extend their own share of mercy and grace. The mission of Jesus was to fulfill His role as the Prince of Peace. Just as Jesus came to reconcile the world to God, Jesus has also given to us the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Corinthians 5:18).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

We honor God the most when we exhibit the qualities found in the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23). Just as God is holy, we are also called to a life of holiness (see 1 Peter 1:16). Disciples of Jesus Christ cannot afford to wait until the afterlife to begin experiencing God’s kingdom at work in the world. One of the ways to remind ourselves of God’s goals for effective living is to pray the pattern of the prayer taught by Jesus to His disciples. Not only are we called to speak the prayer taught by Jesus, but we are also called to live out the practical principles of this prayer in the events of our everyday lives.

PRAYER

Lord, make us instruments of Your peace, and play us like You want to play us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(February 10-16, 2020)

The Prayer of Jesus
MONDAY, February 10: “God’s Name Is ‘Our Father’” (Isaiah 63:15-16; 64:8-9)
TUESDAY, February 11: “The Adopted Children of God” (Romans 8:12-17)
WEDNESDAY, February 12: “Enticed by Temptation” (James 1:12-15)
FRIDAY, February 14: “Forgive the Offender” (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)
SATURDAY, February 15: “Forgive like God in Christ Forgive” (Ephesians 4:25–5:2)
SUNDAY, February 16: “Praying and Living the Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-15)
PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Making the Request  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Be Persistent

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Always Pray  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Pray without Ceasing

**DEVOTIONAL READING**

**Psalm 13**

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 11:1-13  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 11:5-13  
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Luke 11:9  
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Luke 11:13

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Daniel 6; Luke 11:1-13  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Daniel 6:10-22  
**KEY VERSE:** Daniel 6:10b, 22

---

**Luke 11:5-13—KJV**

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

**Luke 11:5-13—NIV**

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.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: It is hard to press on with a task or routine when doing so does not seem to produce any positive changes. How can we persevere in the absence of tangible progress? Jesus taught the disciples to continue to ask, seek, and knock—confident that God would graciously provide; and Daniel’s preservation in the lions’ den provides an example of God’s loving protection in response to constancy in prayer.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Explore the meaning of Jesus’ exhortation to “ask, seek, and knock.”
2. Long for God to give the Holy Spirit, the greatest possible gift.
3. Commit to make daily prayer a vital aspect of their lives.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The Greek word translated as “persistence” in verse 8 means “shamelessness” or “avoiding shame.”
—Hospitality was an important cultural practice. Also, the suggestion that the sleeping man would deny his friend’s request was unthinkable in their culture.
—The central figure in this parable may be the sleeping man who, like God, responds to the requests of one in need.
—God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is “over the top”—a supreme gift that had only been given to a few in special circumstances prior to Jesus’ coming.

—The argument of the parable is from the lesser to the greater. If a sleepy villager will help his neighbor and respond to a midnight request, then how much more will God hear our prayers and respond to them? If a parent will give good gifts to a child, then how much more will God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask of Him?
—The focus of prayer in the two parables is on someone else’s need for bread as well as our own needs for spiritual nourishment.
—Jesus emphasizes that the goodness of God as a parent far exceeds that of human parents.
—The promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 13) focuses on the substance of petitions to which God will respond. Thus, this verse clarifies that Jesus is not portraying God as a “dial up” servant for human wants.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The gospel of Luke is widely accepted to have been written by Luke, a physician, an historian, and an associate of Paul the apostle. In Colossians 4:10-14, Paul referred to him as being different from the Jews. Consequently, some believe that Luke was most likely a Gentile. According to tradition, Luke was from Antioch.

Scholars do not agree as to the sources Luke used to write the book of Luke, but it is generally accepted that he carefully researched his information through interviews and information from eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry. Some also believe that he may have reworked various source materials that were available to him in order to create a single piece that would fit his purpose and was written in his style. All this was by inspiration.

Luke had two reasons for writing this book. First, he wanted to confirm to Theophilus that the latter’s faith in Jesus was solid. He wanted to prove that the faith was founded on strong historical facts. Second, he was also attempting to portray Jesus as the Son of Man who had been rejected by the Jews. It is believed that Luke was trying to show that the Jews rejected Jesus, whereas the Gentiles accepted Him.

The gospel of Luke is believed to date back sometime between AD 58 and 60. Luke did not give any indication as to the location in which he wrote his gospel, and for that reason biblical scholars can only speculate.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In Luke’s day, there were arguments from various quarters. These were arguments that had been believed as facts since before Jesus came. For generations, the Jews had believed that the Messiah would come for Israel alone. Luke and some Gentiles believed differently. They tried to show and prove that Jesus belonged to all. This was most likely why Luke traced Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam instead of stopping at Abraham as Matthew had done.

It is noteworthy that Jesus Himself did say that He had come for the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). However, the Gentile woman was able to sway Him to perform a miracle because of her faith. This shows that, by faith, Gentiles could access that which was supposed to be only for the “lost sheep of Israel.”

As Christianity spread more Gentiles have been saved by faith. In Luke 3:8, Luke shows that Jesus did also say that God could raise children from stones for Abraham if He wanted to. Matthew recorded the same thing in Matthew 3:9.

In Luke 11:1-13, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. This was important in the trying times, as God is the person to whom we should turn when we have issues. He taught them to address God as “Father.” Since this book was to prove that Jesus was for Gentiles and Jews alike, it would be safe to say that God is Father to Gentiles and Jews alike.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Proper Way to Pray

In Luke 11:1-13, Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. A lot of Christians pray amiss. We sometimes pray and do not get answers because we pray wrongly and do not pray in line with God’s will. When His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, Jesus taught them to see God as their father. He also taught them to be conscious of the kingdom of God and of God’s glory.

Whatever we do as Christians should be to promote God’s kingdom. Whatever we do, it should align with God’s will. These were some of the lessons Jesus taught His disciples when He taught them to pray. In His prayers, Jesus was not transfixed on material things and we can see from verses 2-4 that He was more concerned about spiritual rather than physical wealth.

He explained to them that when we make requests in the proper manner, God our Father will grant all our desires. He made a point of showing that God is our Father and cares about us even more than the best earthly fathers could possibly care (verses 11-13).
verses 5-8, He encouraged us to be persistent in asking (while asking in faith). This means that prayer is an excellent way of getting answers from the Father.

B. Biblical Background

Jesus taught this lesson at a time in Israel when people were trying to come to oneness with God. John the Baptist’s message calling for repentance and threatening condemnation had been heavy upon the people. Many came to Jesus for Him to show them the way to God. He showed the people the right way to behave, the right way to worship God, and the right way to pray to God.

He made them see that God was not just a punisher like a lot of people thought God simply was. Jesus also showed them that God was a loving father (see Luke 11:11-13). He gave them a different view on approaching God in prayer, since they could now see God as Father. It makes all the difference when we see someone from a different angle or perspective.

Luke 11:1-4 (Background Scripture) contains perhaps the most well-known prayer in the world, commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” A more accurate term for this prayer would be the “Disciples’ Prayer,” because it came in response to the disciples’ request for Jesus to teach them how to pray. This model prayer is not intended to totally replace personalized prayers, but it does serve as a stellar example of the various elements and perspectives that can and should be incorporated into our communication with God.

At the beginning of the prayer (verse 2), Jesus addresses God using the word *Abba* (“Father”), a term also found in Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; and Galatians 4:6. The phrase “Our Father” is not intended to always replace the more personal “My Father” used in private prayer, but it does remind us that our great God does not belong to any one person but is shared by every member of the great family of God. The Father who is in heaven is distinguished from any false and ineffective god created on earth through human imagination.

After initially acknowledging God, the next order of business is to acknowledge and savor the holiness of God. The phrase “Hallowed be thy name” expresses how this name is a consecrated name not to be minimized but to be held in the highest honor and the greatest sense of esteem.

Verse 2 also contains the first of two instances when the concept of the kingdom of God is mentioned in this prayer. Understanding Jesus’ high regard for the kingdom is a key to understanding Jesus’ concept of ministry and life. The word *kingdom* begins with “king,” which indicates a sovereign ruler. A king is not democratically elected or deposed, and a king does not consult the followers in order to make decisions. The king is the ruler. The second part of the word, “dom,” is related to the concept of “domain” or “dominion,” which suggests an organized locale with a level of order or control. Joined together, these terms define a kingdom as a state in which a king has sovereign powers.

The desire of Jesus reflected in this prayer was for the practical manifestation of God’s will to be in effect on earth in the same way that the practical manifestation of God’s will is in effect in heaven. In heaven, there are no angels who do their own thing. In heaven, obedience is the norm and there are no pockets of resistance to the will of God. In order to pray and to mean
this caliber of prayer the desire must stem from the heart and must be rooted in a deep desire to be obedient to the will and rule of God. Even in the midst of obeying God’s will, we must admit to the mystery of the need to pray for the will of God to be done when God is sovereign. Although God is capable of doing whatever He desires to do, God still seeks our love and relationship, which are reflected through our prayers and our desire to show obedience.

The request for “daily bread” (verse 3) acknowledges our need for God to supply the basic needs of our lives. Bread was a staple in the Jewish diet and is used here as a metaphor for the basic needs of life. Daily bread represents our requirements that should not be taken for granted as a right, but they should be seen as a gift made possible in part by our own labor. This idea is further augmented and articulated by 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NIV)—“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’” Despite all our gainful employment, our 401K plans, our health insurance, and any other inside connections, we are still utterly unable to absolutely guarantee all our daily needs to be consistently met. That is why God is God and we are not.

Our offenses against God (verse 4) cannot be resolved through works, money, or empty acts of absolution. Our sins are forgiven by the application of the blood of Jesus to the bill of our sin, resulting in forgiveness and the cancellation of the penalty. In recognition of that reality, we gladly and freely forgive offenders who have wronged us.

The phrase “lead us not into temptation” (verse 4) does not suggest that leading people into temptation is a habit that God needs to correct. Rather, the phrase first presents a negative polarity to avoid, and then contrasts it with a positive concept to embrace. David uses a similar approach in Psalm 141:4—“Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity.” Although God may test us, God does not tempt us.

Deliverance from evil can be seen in three different stages: (1) deliverance from the penalty of evil, which was made possible through the power of the cross of Christ; (2) deliverance from the power of evil, which is made possible through obedience to God and dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit; and (3) deliverance from the presence of evil, which is made possible in the life after death.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Persistence of Prayer
   (Luke 11:5-10)

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; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? 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. I say unto you,
to the common understanding of every person who might happen to listen. The choice of words draws the listener into a warm blanket of familiarity and understanding. Everybody has a neighbor, and everybody has run out of food at some point in life. The midnight request is not for some unreasonable, unnecessary ingredients but is for a basic, staple food need: bread. This request seems normal so far, except for the lateness of the hour which would have required the homeowner to possibly wake up from sleep, get out of bed, put on a robe, retrieve the bread, and deliver it to the door. These actions alone are enough to put a friendship to the test.

The response by the friend in verse 7 seems somewhat harsh and dismissive. Although he is a friend, he obviously does not want to be disturbed—as his words indicate a disposition of irritation due to the lateness of the hour. This example given by Jesus is only for the purposes of illustrating the importance of persistence in prayer. Thus, we must be careful not to glean meaning from it that is not intended.

Friendship is important, but even neighborly companionship has its limits when stretched beyond normal boundaries. In this case, one thing that supersedes the loyalty of the friendship is the audacity of shameless persistence (verse 8). The central call of this passage is for unfettered persistence in prayer. We are encouraged to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16, NIV). This is a clarion call for disciples to display a “go hard or go home” attitude when it comes to prayer.

The timeless words in verses 9-10 encourage believers to be steadfast and unmoving in the approach to our prayer lives. Persistence may pay off in the form of external answered prayers regarding the request, but persistence may also pay off in the form of internal changes in the life and heart of the one who is praying. It must be understood that in order to be answered, our prayers must also divinely align with the will of God. There is no implicit or explicit guarantee as to the timing of God’s response to our requests.

Prayer is a matter of trusting in God as expressed through the three-pronged approach of asking, seeking, and knocking. Asking is a verbalized request to fulfill an expected desire. But when we ask of God, our request does not automatically dictate the outcome. An ask is just that—an ask with a hope that it will be granted. Seeking involves actively investigating pathways of progress toward the intended goal. Seeking is one’s putting legs to the prayer and doing his or her own part to help the dream to come true. Knocking can be seen as similar to seeking but is a bit more focused in nature. The act of knocking usually targets a specific door that stands as a barrier to successful entry. Even after asking, seeking, and knocking, there is still no absolute guarantee of success, and that is why perseverance within the will of God is so important.

B. The Provision of Prayer
(Luke 11:11-13)

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? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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?

Christ’s words in verses 11-12 appeal to the innate sense of parenthood and provision.
that is possessed and expressed by a loving father and mother. It is natural and expected for parents to desire the best for their children. Both of the items mentioned in these verses identify a request that would have been a normal snack for that time period. A child could have asked for a fish or for an egg. It would have been unthinkable for a parent to respond to a child’s request for something good by giving something that would be dangerous for them. Likewise, God knows exactly what we need and when we need it. As obedient children, we are called to trust God’s response to our requests. Moreover, we are also called to trust God’s lack of response to our requests because we believe God’s will is best.

In verse 13, the rendering of the word evil may seem extreme when used to describe human parents. But the hyperbolic usage of the word is only for means of comparison, and the exaggeration accentuates the vast distance between the morality of humanity and the morality of God. If human parents know how to bless their children, then how much more will a holy God bless obedient children. The Holy Spirit is that good gift that God gives to those who make the request. The reward of the Spirit comes in the form of being empowered by the Holy Spirit and by being gifted to accomplish that which is far beyond one’s own natural, normal capacity to achieve.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Just as parents provide good things for their children, so God responds to our requests with the right reward at the right time. But the key to unlocking the door and receiving the right reward from God is made possible through the power of persistent prayer. Persistent prayer properly aligns our priorities and helps us to mold our character traits to be more like Christ. When we exchange our selfishness for God’s gifts, we are able to rise above the inconsequential things that do not matter and focus on the things that do matter.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for being such a good Father who gives such good gifts to Your children. Your grace is amazing, Your mercy is everlasting, and Your truth endures to all generations. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 17-23, 2020)

**Perseverance in Prayer**

**MONDAY**, February 17: “Daniel Prays despite Legal Prohibition” (Daniel 6:6-13)

**TUESDAY**, February 18: “God Forms the Holy Nation” (Ezekiel 36:22-28)

**WEDNESDAY**, February 19: “Jesus Prays for Future Believers” (John 17:20-26)


**SATURDAY**, February 22: “Ask and It Is Yours!” (Matthew 7:7-11)

Justice and the Prophets

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The study this quarter focuses on justice as presented in Scriptures from the prophets and in the reading for Easter Sunday, which is taken from the book of 1 Corinthians. The prophets communicated God’s will to the people; they called for repentance and justice.

Unit I, “God Requires Justice,” is a five-lesson study from four of the minor prophets. The prophets issue God’s call for justice in the conduct of human affairs. Amos, Habakkuk, Micah, and Malachi convey that the laws of God require justice for the poor and the oppressed. In lesson 3 (for children), an alternative Scripture passage from the Psalms is used to emphasize the reward for those who practice justice, rather than the punishment for those who do not (which is the emphasis in the lessons for youth and adults). The last two lessons from Micah and Malachi are a study of the responsibilities of leaders for practicing justice.

Unit II, “God Promises a Just Kingdom” (for youth and adults) and “God’s Just Kingdom” (for children) continues a study of God’s justice. The lessons for Palm Sunday and Easter examine the promised Messiah as the defender of justice. In lesson 8, Esther’s triumph is reviewed as demonstrating the prevailing of God’s justice. For children, the unit concludes with the narrative from Solomon as an example of God’s justice, while adults and youth study the Lord’s proclamation of the redeemed nation where justice and righteousness are restored.

Unit III, “Called to God’s Work of Justice,” has five lessons that explore ways that people are called to participate in God’s work of justice. Zephaniah presents both a judgment against the wickedness and injustice of Jerusalem and a vision of restoration. Zechariah calls for a return to God’s ways of justice. In Jeremiah, God’s rigorous standards for justice are defined and God’s people are given a choice of either to repent from injustices by executing justice or to face destruction. Hosea uses early history to call the people to love and justice.
Justice in the Prophets
Amos 5:18-24—KJV
18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.
19 As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.
20 Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?
21 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.
22 Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.
23 Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.
24 But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Amos 5:18-24—NIV
18 Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.
19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him.
20 Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?
21 “I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.
22 “Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.
23 “Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24 “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Often, people ignore or disregard the plight of the disenfranchised. How will the cause of the disadvantaged be addressed? The prophet Amos affirms that the justice and righteousness of God always champion the poor and oppressed.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

2. Reflect on their own tendencies to seek honor and praise for selfish reasons.
3. Identify ways to give honor and respect to people who might be considered “unworthy” by popular standards.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Amos was standing against the social and economic elite, as well as the religious establishment of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
—Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah but was called to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see Amos 7:12-15).
—The “day of the Lord” is a day of judgment when the Israelites will be vindicated (pardoned, released, declared not guilty).
—Additionally, the Day of the Lord is a day when the Israelites will be judged by God.
—The Day of the Lord is also mentioned in Joel 1:15.
—The Lord does not delight in festivals and sacrifices. He delights in justice (being fair) and in righteousness (doing right).
—“Festivals” refer to the three pilgrimage feasts (see Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18, 22-23; Deuteronomy 16:16).

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah but was called to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see Amos 7:12-15).
—The “day of the Lord” refers to the destruction of the Assyrian army and God’s future judgment, punishment, and destruction against the people and the nations for their sins. (See Isaiah 13:6-9; Joel 1:15; 2:28-32; 2 Peter 3:1-13.)
—Chapter 5 is a lament that Amos sang to the people about how God had already destroyed the Israelites.
—Justice is what God expected from His people, but they refused to live just and holy lives.
—The Israelites put their trust and faith in their wealth and religious practices.
—God detests (hates) false worship and rejects the Israelites’ religious rituals and traditions because they do not glorify the Lord.

—An ever-flowing stream is a riverbed that never fails.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Amos is the earliest of the prophets of Israel whose words have been preserved for us. He appears during the long and apparently glorious reign of Jeroboam II (around 786–746 BC). His name means “to lift up, carry, or take away.” Amos belonged originally to the south, to the township of Tekoa in Judah. Although he describes himself as a shepherder, he was not merely a simple shepherd, but probably the manager (or even the owner) of a small flock. Thus, he was no mere impoverished employee but, rather, a socially and economically independent man. He appeared in the kingdom of Jeroboam II in a period of great ostentation.

Of course, no one imagined that they were living in a period immediately preceding a military and political disaster marked by the appearance on the scene of the great Assyrian conqueror Tiglath Pileser III. It was during this period that Amos was called to be the bearer of the Word to Israel. The catastrophe that he had been called by God to announce to a blind and insensitive generation surpassed what anyone could have imagined. Samaria was taken by the Assyrians in 721 BC, its population massacred or deported, and the Northern Kingdom wiped completely off the map.

Amos is not satisfied with merely proclaiming the judgment that God is pronouncing against the Northern Kingdom. He goes on to justify it by an indictment that unmasks the hypocrisy of its inhabitants, the venality of its judges, and the appetite of the privileged classes for the pursuit of pleasure. Amos calls attention to the extent of social oppression in Israel that brought about the humiliation of the needy, the trampling down of the poor, and the cheating of the hapless.

The book of Amos is thus one long accusation against the Israelites—against the greed of the merchants, the indifference of the authorities, and the hypocrisy of their public prayers. In short, the Northern Kingdom is condemned for having repeatedly violated justice in contempt for the rights of the most deprived.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Amos: the book of one of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament (Hosea through Malachi). The Hebrew prophet of the eighth century BC, Amos, to whom it is attributed, was a native of Tekoa in Judah and was active in the Northern kingdom of Israel. He identifies himself as a shepherder and “dresser of sycamore trees” (Amos 7:14, NRSV). He was called to prophesy against Israel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Amos concentrates on the announcement of the end of the northern state. Amos is called to proclaim that night is about to fall on the people of Yahweh. Soon, an atmosphere of panic will seize the cities and the countryside. Throughout the book of Amos, the images the prophet keeps constantly returning to are those of flight, ruin, and death. Despite some appeals to return to Yahweh, Amos appears quite clearly as the witness of a God who pronounces a radical no to the very existence, both present and future, of his people.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Deprive (verse 12 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: tsarar (tsaw-rar’): bring distress; bind up; shut up; “turn aside” (KJV).

Festivals (verse 21)—Hebrew: chag (khag): “feast days” (KJV); pilgrim-feasts.

Justice (verse 24)—Hebrew: mishpat (mish-pawt’): “judgment” (KJV); right; due (legal).

Righteousness (verse 24)—Hebrew: tsedeq (tshe-dek): what is right, just, or normal; justice; a righteous act.
I. INTRODUCTION
   A. God’s Call for Justice

   Amos, like Jesus, was, until the sudden beginning of his prophetic ministry, a layman with no professional training for a religious office. He was a shepherd and pincher of sycamore fruit in the regions of Tekoa, some five miles south of Bethlehem and ten miles south of Jerusalem. The sycamore fruit, which had to be pinched so that it would ripen to an edible state, was used only by the poor. The imagery of Amos’s oracles (divine utterances) reflects the shepherd’s life—the sound at night of the lion roaring over its prey, a bear coming in from the wild, and a snake hiding in the corner of a house. But it is equally evident that the shepherd is familiar with the sights of the city—the overfed, callous plutocrats at ease in their expensive houses, thinking only of how to amuse themselves, the peasant burdened with debts and sold into slavery for the price of a pair of shoes, the sanctuaries crowded with confident worshippers exulting in their good fortune, and prophets and priests with no word to speak to a swiftly decaying society.

   With eyes sharpened by the frugal, austere life of his desert regions, by the insights of faith that came to him from earlier prophets, and by his own intense consciousness of God’s justice, Amos examines the life of urban Israel and can form no other conclusion than that it is ripe for judgment. He believed that a holy and just God could be served only by a nation that reflected in its life the holiness and justice of God. Thus, Amos had eyes where others were blind to see the peril in which Israel was placed by the dishonesty of its courts, the maltreatment of its poor, and the wild, extravagant spending of its upper classes.

   At the heart of Amos’s faith was the conviction that only a nation in which the dealings of men with one another are just can be in any true sense a people in covenant with God. It is the justice, holiness, and purity of God that calls for justice, holiness, and purity in the common life of Israel. Amos heard and obeyed God’s call for justice. In him the prophetic faith of Israel came to a new focus and found expression in a way that was to inaugurate a new era.
In similar fashion, the great need of our time is for those who are willing to do so to step forward in the name of God and speak truth to power. America, a nation supposedly founded on Christian principles, finds itself at a crucial juncture in its history. All too many have rightly noted that the church has lost its prophetic edge. Too often, the church seems to “go along to get along.” Our speech is often muted when it comes to the interests of the powerful and mighty. Our convictions are more political than they are religious. That notwithstanding, it is still the case that prophetic speech, at its best, has the tendency to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. Prophetic speech brings a word of judgment upon all who walk contrary to the will of God, without fear or favor.

B. Biblical Background

It was the silence of the professional prophets and their failure to speak into the critical situation of the time the word from God (which was most needed) that forced the layman Amos to become a prophet. In his own account of his call, he refuses to let his name be associated in any way with the prophetic guilds in which the office was passed down from father to son. It was Amos’s knowledge of God’s will concerning Israel, his knowledge of God’s mind concerning the kind of things that were happening in Israel, that compelled him to say what no one else had the vision or courage to say. God took him from following the flock and sent him as a prophet to his people.

The form and style of the prophet’s speeches reveal his understanding of the prophetic role and message. Virtually all of the speeches are announcements of judgment or prophecies of punishment. They are very brief addresses in which Amos speaks in the name of God to announce that Israel’s God is about to intervene to punish the people, an individual, or a group for their sins. His message is a simple one: God will soon bring disaster in the form of military defeat and exile upon Israel. The sins that had led to this judgment are social injustice—such as depriving the poor of their rights—and religious arrogance.

The setting for today’s lesson was probably Bethel, at the royal sanctuary. Amos may have interrupted a cultic festival there. These verses illustrate clearly that Israel was not judged for lack of religion. They were celebrating religious holidays with “feasts” and “assemblies”; they were bringing “burnt offerings,” and “choice fellowship offerings,” and they were filling the air with “songs” of worship and with instrumental “music.” However, the Lord’s rejection of this religious activity could not have been expressed more strongly. God rejected every aspect of Israel’s worship. They were inundating Him with rivers of religiosity when He wanted rivers of righteousness and justice.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Desiring the Day of the Lord
   (Amos 5:18)

Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.

This opening “woe” oracle (divine utterance) is addressed surprisingly to those “who long for the day of the Lord” (NIV). Apparently, the concept of the “day of the Lord” was well-known to Amos’s audience, though
this is the earliest reference to it in the Old Testament. It is generally recognized that it would involve an appearance of the Lord and sometimes was associated with covenant curses and holy war. It can be safely concluded that the term does not refer literally to a day but, rather, to a time or period when, according to a time or period the Lord would appear in order to render judgment and destroy His enemies.

The prophet, with this opening woe, was concerned to correct theological error that gave Israel false hopes and contributed to Israel’s sinful behavior. Thus, the prophet’s announcement of woe for those desiring the days of the Lord must have shocked his audience. They expected the Day of the Lord to bring victory, blessing, and brightness. They considered themselves to be God’s people and worthy of God’s rescue. However, Amos rebuked and warned them that it would be rather a day of “darkness not light.” Darkness implies defeat, calamity, and evil. Contrary to their expectations for the day, no victory, no blessing, and no brightness would come for them.

Amos refuses to go along with their false hopes but rather sends them a wakeup call with his message of woe. A woe has been defined as “a misery without a remedy.” Their only hope is to turn from their sins and worship God in Spirit and in truth. Their lives should reflect what they lay claim to in their worship (i.e., that they are an obedient people of God who involve themselves in acts of justice, mercy, and kindness to all they meet in their everyday walks of life). God is more than a “Sunday morning” God. He requires us to live out our faith each and every day of our lives. Actions speak louder than words!

B. No Escape from the Day of Judgment (Amos 5:19-20)

As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?

To illustrate how dark the day would be for Israel, the prophet used two comparisons, both showing the inescapability of disaster. The first comparison is one who flees from a lion only to run headlong into a bear. Whichever direction he goes, he is doomed. The second comparison is with the one who enters into a house thinking he is safe, only to be bitten by a snake. The Day of the Lord—in all of its darkness—will be that inescapable for Israel. Amos concludes his woe with a fine rhetorical question aimed at challenging the popular understanding of what the Day of the Lord would mean to them. He asks, “Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” (verse 20, NRSV). The prophet let it be known in no uncertain terms that only a dismal future awaited those whose false sense of security was encouraging them to engage in sinful behavior. “Pitch-dark, without a ray of [any] brightness” (NIV) describes a gloomy, hopeless future.

In a sense, the error of the prophet’s audience was not so much in their understanding of the general characteristics of the Day of the Lord. They rightly understood that the defeat of God’s enemies and blessings for God’s people were the two crucial elements of that day. But God’s people failed to understand the nature of their relationship with the Lord. By their corrupt lives, they had become God’s enemy, and as such they would experience defeat and destruction. A constant danger for
God’s people is having a false assumption of how God’s revelation relates to them. This is true in Amos’s day as well as ours. Enthusiastic proclaimers of the Lord’s return must be careful to identify correctly their relationship to God. That relationship is not determined by mere lip-service, religious rituals, and empty ceremony.

**C. The Righteous God Rejects Israel’s Worship (Amos 5:21-23)**

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.

A style shift to first-person divine speech begins this section (Amos 5:21-24). Amos, acting as God’s representative, methodically considered each element in Israel’s worship and rejected each one. One function of a cultic priest was to announce to the worshipper God’s acceptance of and delight in the sacrifices. To be greeted by a barrage of words of rejection from God’s prophet must have been shocking to the prophet’s audience.

The first-person verbs in verses 21-23 carry an extremely powerful renunciation of the nation’s most significant expressions of love and devotion to God. In very harsh and forthright terms, God announces, “I hate, I despise . . . I do not delight.” Hate and despise are strong words. Rather than hating evil, Israel hated advocates of righteousness. Therefore, God hated their presumptuous worship (verse 21). In the original language, despise also means “to reject.” Thus, God’s words contain images of divine rejection and repudiation. “I will not delight” reverses God’s normally positive response to worship. The expectations of the worshippers are false; God takes no pleasure in these rituals.

The next element of Israel’s worship that God rejected was the offering of sacrifices (verse 22). The three sacrifices mentioned here are the first three of the five main Levitical offerings presented in Leviticus 1–7. These are the pleasing-aroma offerings because they are the ones that in particular represent consecration and worship. But in this instance, they clearly represented the false worship in Israel that the Lord despised. “Burnt offerings” were sacrifices in which the entire animal was consumed on the altar and arose to God in smoke. “Grain offerings” could also be used of various sacrifices brought as a gift. “Fellowship offerings” were those in which part of the animal was consumed on the altar and part of it was eaten by the worshipper, thus symbolizing communion between the worshipper and God. But God says of these offerings that He will not look upon them. The idea here is that God is not pleased to see them.

Their worshipful music is also rejected by God (verse 23). Singing and playing the harp were forms of rendering cultic praise. God evaluated the sound of their songs as “noise” and ordered that it be taken elsewhere. He refused to listen to their instruments. The passage pictures God’s rejection of Israel’s worship in terms of body language: shut nostrils, closed eyes, and stopped-up ears. While Israel met the technical requirements of worship, that was not the problem that Amos faced. Then as now, God’s acceptance or rejection of human expressions of worship is based on His assessment of the motives of the heart. If our hearts are not right, then our outward praise falls flat in the eyes of God.
D. God’s People Lacking Justice and Righteousness (Amos 5:24)

But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Only words of rejection greeted the prophet’s audience as he spoke of element after element of their worship. The missing ingredient in their worship was authenticity manifested in a lifestyle of obedience. Israel’s rejection of justice and righteousness in the social order made inevitable God’s rejection of their worship activities. Verse 24 begins with a third-person command that expresses the will of the speaker (Amos speaking for God) and expects a response from the audience: “But let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”

God’s will was for justice and righteousness to prevail in Israel’s social order as an outward sign of their religious devotion. Here, justice would mean reparation for the defrauded, fairness for the less fortunate, and dignity and compassion for the needy. Righteousness would entail attitudes of mercy and generosity, and honest dealings that imitate the character of God as revealed in the Law of Moses. While these are always God’s demands for an obedient lifestyle, they are not His only requirements. If Amos were evaluating worship activities today, he might point to other aspects of lifestyle that are signs of a lack of genuineness, thus making worship displeasing and unacceptable to God. Amos’s point was that the way people behave in the marketplace or how they judge in the gate is as much a part of worship as singing and sacrifice. Religious activity is no substitute for national or personal righteousness. It may even sometimes be a hindrance. Insincere worship on Sundays can actually become a crutch to doing God’s work in the world throughout the week.

The Lord wants social justice—it is, after all, the Lord who brings social justice to the earth. The verb roll (verse 24) only occurs here and in Amos 2:13. In the passive voice it has the active sense of “roll.” The verb suggests that “judgment” and “righteousness” will be abundant and consistent in Israel. Judgment will “roll as water,” picturing a continual stream of it. Second, and even more suggestive, righteousness will roll as an impassable wadi (stream). A wadi is by definition a temporary stream that usually runs dry. But this imagery in Amos suggests a raging stream that tumbles down a hill and is impossible to pass over. Such imagery leaves no doubt that the Lord desires a perpetual practice of social justice.

What does all of our celebrating in worship mean if we do not put our faith into action Monday through Saturday? God works through human agency, which is to say He has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet, no voice but our voice. God’s truth marches on through us. Thus, while God is worthy of our thanks and praise in worship, the way we live out our lives each and every day also matters to God. Our pursuit for equal treatment of all peoples of the earth must be consistent and perpetual as a rolling stream and an impassable brook in the rainy season.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In this lesson, Amos addresses Israel’s fundamental hope in God’s grace toward them on the Day of the Lord. God chose them to be His people from all the families on the earth (see Amos 3:2). He delivered Israel from the
bondage of Egypt (see Amos 2:10) and gave them the land of the Amorites. They in turn worshipped God with sacrifices, sang His glory, and knew that God was with them. The Day of the Lord was a great tradition about how God would miraculously intervene on behalf of His people when He passed through their midst. However, Amos concludes that owing to their past sins and failures, especially with respect to justice and righteousness, the Day of the Lord will not bring salvation, but darkness. Israel, through its own sinful actions, had become the enemy of God.

Although Israel had traditionally counted on its worship to put them in a right frame of mind with God, even that became suspect in the eyes of God. The problem with their worship is that the people had not amended their ways and turned to God. They were worshipping God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. Their lives were full of injustices that were contrary to the will of God. They were not seeking God but seeking His approval. His promises and blessings were more important than His presence in their daily lives and worship. God hated what they paraded as religion and would not accept it. False worship engenders false security. Only lives dedicated to God and lived in total submission to His will and His way can be pleasing in His sight. God wills to see justice and righteousness lived out in the lives of His people on a consistent basis. It is only then that our worship rings true to Him.

PRAYER
Dear Lord, in each and every day of our lives, help us to allow justice to roll down like water and righteousness as a mighty stream. Keep ever in our hearts the prophetic impulse that encourages us to live lives of justice and righteousness as a way of being in the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(February 24–March 1, 2020)

Called to Accountability

MONDAY, February 24: “The Coming Day of the Lord” (Zephaniah 1:14-18)
TUESDAY, February 25: “Judgment Coming to the Nation” (Amos 5:1-3, 16-17)
WEDNESDAY, February 26: “Seek the Lord; Establish Justice” (Amos 5:4-5, 14-15)
THURSDAY, February 27: “Injustice Leads to Ruin” (Amos 5:6-7, 10-13)
FRIDAY, February 28: “Lord of Creation and Judgment” (Genesis 1:4-9; Amos 5:8-9)
SATURDAY, February 29: “God Loves All Peoples” (Hosea 2:14-23)
SUNDAY, March 1: “Justice for the Poor and Distressed” (Amos 5:18-24)
A PRAYER FOR JUSTICE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUTH TOPIC: Ending Injustice
YOUTH TOPIC: Do the Right Thing

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: “Make Things Right, God”
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Make a Change Now!

DEVOOTIONAL READING
Psalm 73:1-3, 21-28

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-14—KJV
THE BURDEN which Habakkuk the prophet did see.
2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!
3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.
4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked do compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

12 Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-14—NIV
THE PROPHECY that Habakkuk the prophet received.
2 How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save?
3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.
4 Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

12 LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish.
13 Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?
14 And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?

13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?
14 You have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People wonder about the seeming prevalence of injustice. How will justice and fairness be established for all? Habakkuk appeals to God to end wickedness and injustice.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain the justice of God in contrast to present human injustice.
2. Aspire to establish justice and fairness for all.
3. Celebrate God as the source and model of justice.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Habakkuk 1 is written in the form of a prophetic complaint, a style used in Scripture in which the prophet complains to and even argues with God. See Genesis 18:16-33; Numbers 11:11-17; Jeremiah 12:1-4; 20:7-18. Verses 5-11 are God’s response to Habakkuk’s first complaint (verses 1-4). Habakkuk continues to complain in verses 12-17.
—Habakkuk’s argument was based in part on the idea of comparative righteousness—that Judah was righteous because Judah was more righteous than Babylon (see 1:13). The Bible teaches that all humankind is unrighteous, failing to meet God’s absolute standards (see Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23).
—Habakkuk’s cry for justice is phrased with the impatient cry, “How long?” (1:2). This echoes the same cry found elsewhere in Scripture (see Psalms 13:1-2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 94:3; etc.).
—Most prophets speak for God; Habakkuk opens with the prophet’s speaking to God.
—Habakkuk is speaking for the community as a whole.
—Habakkuk has two complaints: (1) he complains about injustice; (2) he complains about how long God is taking to vindicate them.
—By verse 12, the prophet still has not received an answer from God; he then appeals to God’s goodness and constancy.
—If God is good, then why does He not act?
—Humanity had been given dominion over the fish of the sea and crawling things; now they had become fish in the net of the oppressor or enemy.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Habakkuk 1 is written in the form of a prophetic complaint. The prophet complains and seems to
argue with God. See Genesis 18:16-33; Numbers 11:11-17; Jeremiah 12:1-4; 20:7-18. Verses 5-11 are God’s response to Habakkuk’s first complaint (verses 1-4). Habakkuk continues to complain in verses 12-17.

—Habakkuk’s cry for justice is phrased with the impatient cry, “How long?” (1:2). This echoes the same cry found elsewhere in Scripture (see Psalms 13:1-2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 94:3; etc.).

—The prophet Habakkuk was upset that God would choose Babylon to destroy Judah because Babylon’s evil was greater than Judah’s.

—Habakkuk did not understand why God tolerated injustice and did not quickly destroy the evil and wickedness of the people.

—God is sovereign and is victorious over sin in the world.

—Habakkuk did not initially see God as triumphant, but he prayed for God’s justice to prevail.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah’s. Each prophet served during a pivotal era in Judah’s history: 625 BC to 575 BC. In this fateful moment, Judah lost her national life and her religious center. Habakkuk’s ministry probably revolved around the most significant events in the last quarter of the seventh century BC—the fall of Nineveh and the establishment of Babylon as the greatest power of the region.

Habakkuk stands unique among the prophetic books of the Old Testament in form and content. In his era of prophecy, Habakkuk focused on the problem of injustice in God’s world. He saw that evil never seemed to be punished and asked what God’s response to such evil and suffering was going to be. In his dialogue with God, Habakkuk wanted an answer from God as to why the wicked seemed to go unpunished. God answered Habakkuk by saying, “You must wait to see the work I am about to do on the stage of world history.” Next, the prophet asked how God could use an evil instrument like Babylon to punish His own poor people, who were surely more righteous than Babylon. The prophet’s questions prompted God’s revelation about His purposive will for His people. The revelation centered in words that have repeatedly transformed the world: The righteous shall live by their faithfulness. Without a doubt, Habakkuk’s message is set within a backdrop of real people facing real questions about real human suffering. While they did not always get the answers they expected, they did count God as being faithful to His Word.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Habakkuk differs from other books of prophecy in one special aspect. Instead of taking Jehovah’s message directly to the people, Habakkuk takes the complaint of the people to Jehovah, representing them in the complaint. The lawlessness and injustice in Judah and Jerusalem and the rising power of Babylon, as it was ruthlessly conquering everything in its path, sent the prophet to Jehovah with his problem of faith.

The book opens with a cry to Jehovah because of the wickedness, injustice, and disregard for law in Judah. In response, Jehovah points to the rising Chaldean power as His instrument of judgment against Judah’s sins. This only heightens the prophet’s perplexity. How could Jehovah punish Judah by using a nation even more wicked than Judah? Jehovah points out that righteous people live by their faith; and as Habakkuk and the few righteous live by their faith, they must wait for Jehovah. Jehovah then observes that notwithstanding what the people must
suffer, the doom of the wicked is certain. Through harsh and bitter experiences, the prophet must learn the principle that God will speak through him. The message God will speak through him is simple and to the point: the righteous shall live by their faith.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. The Prophet Speaks to God about Injustice in the Land
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Habakkuk’s Prophetic Message in a Time of Despair
      (Habakkuk 1:1)
   B. Words of Protest to a God Who Still Matters
      (Habakkuk 1:2-3)
   C. When Justice Is Perverted
      (Habakkuk 1:4)
   D. The Prophet Makes His Case to God
      (Habakkuk 1:12-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Prophet Speaks to God about Injustice in the Land

The book of Habakkuk is unique among the prophetic books in that it begins with laments of protest directed against God and ends with an overwhelming vision of God’s saving presence. Habakkuk is a prophet who, like Job, anguishes over the seeming injustice of God’s ways and demands explanation concerning the course that history has taken at God’s hand. Like Amos and Jeremiah, Habakkuk is a prophet who considers God big enough to handle complaints and probing questions. He exhibits a faith that dares God to be God.

The man of God has been crying unto the Lord concerning the wickedness and violence in the land, yet the Lord has done nothing about it. Habakkuk is jealous for God’s glory. This is not merely a personal complaint, but Habakkuk voices the desires and longings of the godly in the nation. He feels everything is awry and God is apparently not interested in the situation. Since the prophet was powerless to alter conditions in the land and the Lord apparently would not, Habakkuk asks why he is permitted to see such iniquity on every hand. He also wants to know why God continues to let violence and strife go unchecked.
What troubles the prophet is that the Lord seems to look on these heartbreaking conditions with indifference.

The silence of God in human affairs, then as now, has always been difficult to understand. However, this does not mean that there is not an answer and that divine wisdom is incapable of coping with the situation. Simply because there is presently no answer does not mean there is no answerer. In time, Habakkuk would come to understand that all is under God’s seeing eye and everything is under the control of God’s mighty hand. Without a doubt, it is very difficult not to complain to God when we see black men repeatedly shot and killed at the hands of police. When we witness massive redistributions of wealth in our country that allow the rich to get richer and the poor to become poorer, it is difficult to wait for an answer. It is difficult to see the hard-won gains of social justice in this country being taken away by those who have a different understanding of what is good and right for the country. Yet, God is still on the throne and His justice, while slow, is nonetheless certain.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Habakkuk is said by scholars to belong to the latter part of the seventh century BC. Some scholars place the book before and some after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. One of the age-old issues humanity has faced since the beginning of time is that of the existence of evil and its diabolical effect on those who belong to God. The prophet Habakkuk is confronted in a real way with dilemma. Apparently, while God’s people are suffering, the wicked seem to have free reign in their activities and relationships. The events that Habakkuk and his people faced were particularly severe and serious. Here is the dilemma: God had announced to the prophet that He would use the Babylonians—a nation that was clearly more wicked than God’s own people—to punish His own people. What? Did the prophet hear God correctly? Habakkuk had to raise an important question with God. How can God, who is holy, just, kind, merciful, and good, send an evil nation against His own people?

The clearing up of Habakkuk does not come in the form of an answer per se, but at the point when Habakkuk issues his strong acclamation of faith. The prophet will wait for the day when God deals with the wicked. In the meantime, he will rejoice in God even though he may be stripped of all that gives him human satisfaction.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Habakkuk’s Prophetic Message in a Time of Despair

(Habakkuk 1:1)

THE BURDEN which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

The first verse identifies the book and its author in an unusually terse form. Unlike the titles of many other prophetic books, no information concerning the prophet’s family or historical location is given. Even the prophet’s name appears to belong to no particular class or kind. All that we know is that Habakkuk is a bona fide prophet who has an oracle or prophetic message to impart. The word for “oracle” in Hebrew can also mean “burden,”
which may indicate the judgmental nature of the message the prophet received. Although the prophet’s background is shrouded in obscurity, his message is not. Habakkuk sees his message; it is visually revealed to him.

The first words we read from the prophet are words of bitter protest directed toward God. There is no introductory “thus says the Lord,” so typical of many biblical prophets. Rather, Habakkuk starts off with a bitter complaint. Disturbing and uncertain times can cause many to lash out at God—not out of indifference or irreverence but, rather, out of perplexity and confusion about the unfolding purposes of God in our lives and in His world.

B. Words of Protest to a God Who Still Matters
   (Habakkuk 1:2-3)

O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

The prophet’s question “O Lord, how long . . . ?” (verse 1) introduces the language of lament. It is the language of utter anguish over a seemingly hopeless situation. Habakkuk had cried for help in the past and is continuing to do so in the present. Yahweh is the covenant God of Israel. He should hear those who call upon Him and visit in judgment those opposed to Him and His purposes. Yet, He had done nothing in response to the prophet’s persistent appeals. Habakkuk wanted to know why. It seems as if Yahweh has not heard. Or, if He has heard, He pays no attention.

The second question in verse 2 is closely related to the first one. It gives the specific reason for the complaint: a cry of violence. The Hebrew term for “violence” denotes wrong and harm, both physical and ethical. It pertains to those actions which result in violence—falsehood, idolatry, oppression, thievery, and injustice. How could wrongdoing be allowed to affect the lives of the covenant people? How could Yahweh do nothing about it? The prophet is posing these questions when he asks, “And thou will not save, or deliver?” (see verse 2b).

Indeed, Habakkuk does not mince words in accusing God of rubbing his nose in the wrongdoings of the prophet’s society (verse 3). The prophet finds himself mired in a situation of hopelessness and injustice. The wicked prevail over the righteous, justice is perverted, and violence carries the day. Habakkuk sees his hometown, Jerusalem, on the verge of collapse. Peace and justice, the two pillars that hold any community together, were quickly crumbling in Habakkuk’s day.

C. When Justice Is Perverted
   (Habakkuk 1:4)

Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

One effect of the anarchy that Habakkuk is sensing in his day is that the Law becomes slack and justice never prevails (verse 4). Yahweh’s instructions (the law) governing the social, moral, and religious conditions of life are slacked. The word represented by “slack” means “to be cold or numb.” The idea here is that the Law has lost its effectiveness because it is no longer being observed by the nation. That justice never goes forth is the consequence. This lack of justice permeated every aspect of society in Habakkuk’s day—legal, social, ethical, moral, and religious.
A second effect of this state of anarchy is that the wicked surround the righteous. The wicked hem in, encompass, hedge about, or lay snares for the righteous. Those who would live by the Law are thereby denied the just reward of righteous living. The result is that justice, which is the right decision or action, goes forth perverted. If justice is turned the wrong way, righteousness is lost from life.

The prophet’s predicament is perhaps not unlike what some feel is happening in many American urban areas today: rampant violence perpetrated on people of color and flagrant disregard for law and order, often at the hands of those who are charged with upholding the law. Like the prophet, we too can cry “How long, O Lord!” The question does not imply a lack of faith; to the contrary, it is a faith that is bold enough to charge God to take notice and be God. The faithful continually cry out to God because we believe that God still cares for His world and the people who inhabit it. God has not abdicated His responsibilities. He still sits high and looks down low. In the dark days of slavery, it was none other than Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of this country and a slave owner himself, who said, “Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and that his justice cannot sleep forever.” Habbakuk would discover in time that God does indeed watch over His own. However, even God’s own must learn how to wait.

D. The Prophet Makes His Case to God
(Habakkuk 1:12-14)

Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?

Habbakuk did not have to wait long for an answer from God about what He intended to do with the injustices that were rampant in the land. Having been told in verses 5-11 that God would use a heathen king and a heathen nation to bring judgment upon His wayward people, Habbakuk expresses shock and dismay in verses 12-14. How can God be involved with such evil people? God would indeed use the Chaldeans to chastise Israel. Thus, instead of God’s being inactive and indifferent, He is emphatically at work in a way in which men will scarcely believe—in a way that even the prophet finds difficult to accept. For Habakkuk, the answer he receives is not becoming of God and he tells why in this passage.

With God’s response about the manner in which justice will be administered, Habbakuk seems to suggest that the plight of His people has gotten worse, not better. The messenger of God is in greater perplexity now as he openly argues with God concerning His plan to inflict punishment on Judah by a nation less righteous than they.

In his response to God’s answer, the prophet begins with provisional praise to God, phrased as a leading question (verse 12). The God whom Habbakuk addresses is the same one whose intentions are everlasting, established from eternity. Even if the people perish, God remains everlasting and sovereign. The prophet directs his appeal to God, whom the enemy has treated contempitously. He speaks
representatively for His people and uses the well-known names for God such as Jehovah, Holy One, and Rock. In addressing the everlasting God, he declares by faith that God’s people will not die. He knows the nature of the covenant-keeping God who will not allow His people to be wiped out. The ground of his confidence is twofold: (1) God has been Israel’s God from ancient times; and (2) He is so holy that He must punish ungodliness whether in His own nation or in the enemy.

In a figurative manner, the prophet shows how the Chaldean callously takes captives as a fisherman plies his trade (verses 14). The angle, net, and drag represent the armies and weapons whereby the Chaldean carried on his military ambitions. His great success gladdened and rejoiced his heart. But to whom did he give glory? He worshipped his own military prowess. In his distress and perplexity of soul, the prophet asks the Lord whether this cruelty and idolatry of the Chaldean will go on without interruption. Will God not bring such rapacity to an end by His power? On this tense note chapter 1 concludes, but the answer of God will appear in the next chapter. There, we shall see that the Lord has set a bound to all which displeases Him. All is taken into account and the remedy is provided.

In today’s lesson, the prophet saw that God works in history to accomplish His purpose, even using godless nations to perform his designs. God used Assyria as the “rod of his anger,” to chastise Judah in Isaiah’s day (see Isaiah 10:5-15) and worked through the designs of Cyrus the Persian to deliver those exiled to Babylon (see Isaiah 44:28–45:7). Those who see only the short term always miss the significance of the work of God. Habakkuk, focusing on the short term, questioned how God could do such a thing. God appeared to be doing the opposite of what Habakkuk believed of God. The God who is too pure to look on evil in fact tolerated the treacherous and stood silent while the wicked swallowed up the righteous.

Sometimes, the silence of God can be explained by the people’s sins and their failure to repent. At other times, the Sovereign God is simply working His redemptive purposes in ways unknown to us at the time.

In our own days of confusion and despair, we would do well to bring our doubts and perplexities to the Lord, as did Habakkuk, and leave them with Him for final disposition and solution, trusting that He has promised not to give us more than we can bear.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Habakkuk is, above all else, a book about the purposes of God and about the realization of His will for the world. It is a book that teaches us that the Lord wills justice, peace, and hope for all of His created order. It is a book about a God whose will for humankind is that they have life and have it more abundantly. Habakkuk is also a book about God’s desire that human beings live together in joy and security and righteousness, in a community ordered by His divine will and faithful to His divine lordship. The prophet Habakkuk’s book is one long cry for help to a God who does not seem to be listening. It is a long description of enemies whom God seems, at best, to ignore and, at worst, to use as His instruments of sovereignty in His world. The prophet and the faithful people who support him expect God to destroy such wickedness. The God they
worship cannot tolerate such. Yet, for a time God is silent. However, He does not remain silent forever.

All that Habakkuk does in his fight with God points us to the burning issue of our own day: where is God in a history drowning in human violence, human selfishness, and human sin? Is God’s working in history only a thing of Bible times? Is our history self-determined by its human inhabitants? Habakkuk would have us to know that God is always at work, always involved, always pressing forward toward His kingdom. But the means by which He chooses to pursue that goal may be as astounding as the destruction of a nation or as incomprehensible as the blood dripping from the figure of a man on a cross. The faithful must live and work in a state of expectation that God’s will will ultimately prevail. The old gospel song is true: God is still on the throne.

PRAYER
Heavenly Father, we are grateful to You for all the blessings You bestow upon us. Help us to know that this is Your world and that one day it will conform to Your will and Your way, even in those times when we feel that events are raging beyond our control. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 2-8, 2020)

A Prayer for Justice

MONDAY, March 2: “Job’s Cry for Justice Frustrated” (Job 19:1-7)
WEDNESDAY, March 4: “God’s People Ravaged for Sin” (Jeremiah 5:14-19)
THURSDAY, March 5: “Chaldeans to Ravage the Nations” (Habakkuk 1:5-11)
FRIDAY, March 6: “The Destructive Character of the Enemy” (Habakkuk 1:15-17)
SATURDAY, March 7: “Assyrians Punished for Arrogance” (Isaiah 10:12-14)
SUNDAY, March 8: “Why, Lord, Does Injustice Prevail?” (Habakkuk 1:1-4, 12-14)
CONSEQUENCES FOR INJUSTICE

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/Young Adult Topic:** Getting What They Deserve

**Youth Topic:** Justice Wins!

**CHILDREN**

**General Lesson Title:** Rewards for the Just

**Children’s Topic:** Rewarding Patience (and Trust)?

**Devotional Reading**

*Psalm 130*

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**Background Scripture:** Habakkuk 2

**Print Passage:** Habakkuk 2:6-14

**Adult Key Verse:** Habakkuk 2:12

**Youth Key Verse:** Habakkuk 2:14

**CHILDREN**

**Background Scripture:** Psalm 37

**Print Passage:** Psalm 37:1-6, 12-13, 27-28, 34

**Key Verse:** Psalm 37:3

**Habakkuk 2:6-14—KJV**

6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

7 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?

8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

9 Woe to him that builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin!

10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

**Habakkuk 2:6-14—NIV**

6 “Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, ‘Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?’

7 “Will not your creditors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey.

8 “Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

9 “Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin!

10 “You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.

11 “The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.
12 Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity!
13 Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?
14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

12 “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice!
13 “Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?
14 “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Many people seem not to suffer for their unjust actions. When will acts of the unjust be punished? The psalmist affirms that God will reward the just, and Habakkuk declares that the unjust will be punished for wickedness.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recognize why injustice will be punished.
2. Appreciate the fairness of divine punishment of injustice.
3. Commit to following God’s commandment to act with justice.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Habakkuk echoes other prophets who proclaimed that Babylon’s arrogance and ruthlessness would lead to that nation’s downfall (see Isaiah 14:4-17; Jeremiah 51).
—Habakkuk’s ministry overlapped a part of Jeremiah’s ministry. Common themes are found in both prophetic books.
—Overlapping themes are common in the writing of prophets who were contemporaries. These overlapping themes are consistent with the demand of the Law that testimony be confirmed by multiple witnesses (see Deuteronomy 19:15).
—The central message appears in verse 4 that states that the life of the arrogant is not upright and therefore is in jeopardy.
—The author discusses the five “woes” that list the crimes for which the oppressor is to be punished.
—There are three taunts or rebukes or warnings for those who achieve wealth by taking from others or withholding money through illegal methods: Taunt #1: The Babylonians had a voracious appetite for wealth at the expense of the Israelites; one day, what they did to others will also happen to them (see Habakkuk 2:6-7); Taunt #2: The Babylonians were proud, which is depicted as if they were birds sitting in a high nest above everyone else. But they were not too high for God; their own houses would rise up against them (verses 9-11); Taunt #3: Those who build a town through bloodshed or hurting other people and sin (iniquity) are working for nothing; the entire earth will be filled with the knowledge and glory of God (verses 12-14).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Psalm 37 identifies why evil is completely void of God’s righteousness.
—The author of Psalm 37, David, encourages believers to do well and follow the Lord’s commandments.
—Evil is often elevated over good, but God is sovereign over all.
—Obeying God rather than the wicked will result in receiving a lifetime reward of living with God.
—David admonishes believers to delight in the Lord and experience the joy of receiving the desires of our hearts.
—Trusting God requires us to deepen our relationship with Him.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In the first chapter of Habakkuk, the prophet is profoundly disturbed by the answer he has received to his initial questions about how God intends to carry out His punishment on His own people. While he understands the essential substance of the divine response, he cannot fit it easily into his theological perspectives. He has a view of how he thinks God ought to act, but God’s intimation of coming action is not in harmony with his presuppositions. Habakkuk discovered in the previous chapter that the divine response to His initial questions had raised more difficulty than it had solved. Thus, the new problem must be resolved, yet the approach of the prophet must be delicate.

Habakkuk recognized that God may certainly ordain a foreign nation to act as an instrument of judgment and chastisement on His own people because of their evil. However, the fundamental characteristic of God raises a serious difficulty for Habakkuk. God’s very essence is such that surely He cannot observe evil and wrongdoing and allow it to flourish unchecked. Hence, how can He permit the Babylonians to act, with license as it were, in the oppression of the chosen people? There seemed to be neither consistency nor moral integrity in the use of an extremely evil nation to punish a moderately evil nation. Habakkuk makes his best argument about this conundrum in chapter 1 and then waits for an answer in chapter 2.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

At the close of the first chapter, we found the prophet distressed at the inscrutable dealings of God with His people, Israel. The prophet complained at first of the widespread iniquity in Judah, to which the Lord replied that He was aware of it all and that He would use the Chaldeans to correct His own people. When the prophet learns of the rod of God’s anger—the Chaldeans—he is bowed down in greater mental agony, that God should use a nation less righteous to afflict and chasten His people. With the problem still unsolved, we come to the solution in chapter 2.

In a vision, Habakkuk comes to understand that the delivery of the Israelites was not to come immediately but that it would surely come. Delay is only in the heart of humankind; God is actively working out the details according to his own plan. Habakkuk now has his answer: God will use the Chaldeans to punish Israel, but in His own time He will also punish the Chaldeans for their unjust and sinful ways. Habakkuk is not to doubt that the pride of the Chaldeans will be their destruction, while the godly, repentant Israelites should continue looking unto the Lord of life.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Habakkuk: a pre-Exilic prophet of Judah whose
prophecy is recorded in the book of Habakkuk. The name may derive from the Hebrew word for “embrace.” Very little can be obtained concerning the identification and provenience of this prophet. Historical references suggest that he ministered in Judah around 600 BCE.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Knowledge (verse 14)—Hebrew: daath (dah’-ath):** knowing; being aware; truth; skill.

**Taunt (verse 6)—Hebrew: melitsah (mel-ee-tsaw’):** satire; a mocking poem; “taunting” (KJV).

**Wait (verse 3)—Hebrew: chakah (khaw-kaw’):** to wait, await, long for.

**Woe (verse 6)—Hebrew: hoy (hoh’ee):** Ah! Alas! Ha!

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. The Sovereign Ways of God
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Confirmation of God’s Coming Justice (Habakkuk 2:6a)
   B. Woe to the Greedy! (Habakkuk 2:6b-8)
   C. Woe to Those Who Commit Acts of Injustice (Habakkuk 2:9-11)
   D. Woe to Those Who Profit from Acts of Violence (Habakkuk 2:12-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Sovereign Ways of God**

The prophet found himself faced with two problems. First, believing as he did in the justice of God, he could not understand why the righteous must suffer; and second, he was troubled by the prosperity of the wicked. Both of these problems had to do with the justice of God; and the prophet was trying to understand, or at least find a suitable explanation for, the fact that God had done nothing in response to the widespread injustice of His own people which Habakkuk saw in the land.

God’s response reflected two basic facts in human experience. First, God’s time is not always humankind’s time. Habakkuk would have provoked God to a precipitous action, but God did not then, nor does He now, demonstrate His great power except in keeping with His own purpose and plan. Second, as far as God’s purpose and plan were concerned, the picture presented by Habakkuk involved His sovereignty. The prophecy, by reflecting God’s purpose in raising up the Chaldeans, reiterates what other prophets before had reflected, and that is that God’s sovereignty is universal.

In the present case, if one accepts the unity of the book, the purpose of God was to bring judgment upon Judah for its oppression and injustice by sending an oppressor upon her. Even so, the choice was not to suggest any divine favor for the Chaldeans, because, after they had been used by God to chastise Judah, Yahweh would then bring judgment...
upon them for having permitted themselves to be used in this way.

Quite the opposite would be the case with those for whom Habakkuk had manifest concern—the righteous who had suffered injustice and oppression. While the state of the Chaldeans would result in their deaths and destruction, the righteous would live by their faith—that is, they would live because of their steadfastness and fidelity to the revealed will of God.

In light of these things, the prophecy in our lesson serves a deeper purpose than simply raising the issues concerning the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. Habakkuk teaches that the righteous will live and the wicked will perish. That is still true—ultimately if not immediately. It may appear at times that wickedness has the upper hand or that God is too slow to act, but it must be remembered that His sovereign knowledge and will have predetermined judgment for the wicked and life for the righteous. All sin and injustice must be punished, but those who turn to God will ultimately find favor in Him, while those who persist in their wrongdoing will ultimately be destroyed.

B. Biblical Background

Far from solving Habakkuk’s problem, the Lord’s revelation of His impending judgment upon Judah for their sins had raised only new questions, new doubts, and new fears. Yet, Habakkuk did not permit his perplexity to turn him away in unbelief from the Lord, even though His ways and judgments were incomprehensible to him and seemed to be in conflict with God’s revelation of Himself. The very fact that the high and lofty God had graciously descended to speak to him, a sinner, encouraged Habakkuk to approach this Lord for the third time in the hope that he will finally receive a satisfying answer. Habakkuk does not insist on an immediate answer. Rather, he says he will stand at his watch and wait until God’s time to answer him has arrived (see Habakkuk 2:1).

Habakkuk’s desire for more information sprang not from idle curiosity nor from vain endeavor to pry into the secret counsels of God. He desired a further clarifying word, because God’s previous answer had not silenced his doubts, nor answered his “Why?” Although he knew Judah’s wrong would be punished, he simply could not believe that God would use the ungodly Chaldeans to mete out the punishment.

In answer to Habakkuk’s prayer, the Lord speaks to him, telling him to write something not originating in himself, but coming from without; not from any human source, but from the Lord Himself in the form of a divine vision (verse 2). A vision is defined as a divine communication by means of the eye, or ear, or both. The vision was granted not only for the prophet’s own information and comfort, but also so that he could write down God’s message so that others may read it. God assured him that the vision was set for an appointed time. Although Habakkuk had to wait for it, it would surely come (verse 3). Though the Chaldeans may conquer and deport you, they cannot stop, not even delay, the coming of the Redeemer and your salvation. This vision cannot fail. It will surely come at its appointed time, and the nation will not and cannot die before the advent of Him of whom the vision speaks.
Though God will use the Chaldeans to bring judgment on His own people, the sins of the Chaldeans will not escape the notice or the righteous judgments of God. God knows the sins of the Babylonians—His chosen instrument of correction for Judah—and in due season they would be punished. Their bloated pride and demonic lust for power would eventually lead to their ruin. It is with this understanding in mind that the Lord pronounces three woes on the Chaldeans in today’s lesson.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Confirmation of God’s Coming Justice
   (Habakkuk 2:6a)

   Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!

   In Habakkuk 2:6-14, we find what scholars call a “taunt song.” It is the kind of song that a once-oppressed people might direct against its former oppressor. Often, taunt songs begin with the word woe or alas. In this lesson, there are three occurrences of the word woe, each of which marks a stanza within the song. The first “woe” is in verse 6; the stanza it introduces is in verses 6-8. The second “woe” introduces verses 9-11. The third “woe” introduces verses 12-14.

B. Woe to the Greedy!
   (Habbakuk 2:6b-8)

   how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

   The first stanza begins, “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion” (verses 2, NIV). The problem here is greed, as the preceding verse indicates. Greed is a natural but destructive characteristic of the one who will not trust God. If a person trusts God, then he does not need to be covetous of more and more material possessions. The Lord is the portion of the righteous. Besides, the Lord amply supplies his need. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of God’s provision for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field and asked, “If that is how God clothe the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? . . . Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:30, 33, NIV). If a person trusts God, then he does not need to acquire more and more possessions, since he knows God will provide what he needs. If he does not trust God, then the need for things becomes a burden. This world is an insecure place, and the individual is insecure within it, so he works to get more and more in the hope that if he only has a little more land or stocks or capital, he may get by.

   It does not work. This is what the verses clearly say. For one thing, they talk about “stolen goods” and things acquired by “extortion” (NIV). In the beginning, the person who is trying to build security with things probably intends to be quite honest in doing it. But, somehow, what is acquired is never enough, and he therefore finds himself resorting to questionable and eventually dishonest
practices in a quest for more. The verses also talk about this person’s “debtors,” suggesting that a person like this easily overextends himself and eventually falls prey to the collectors. This is quite contemporary. The people of the Western world are more in debt than they have ever been, and many are losing houses or other tangibles to the collectors. Many are going into personal bankruptcy. These facts are testimonies to the truthfulness of God’s Word and proof of what happens when a person or nation rejects God and lives without him.

Those tyrants who have oppressed their subjects and their captives with heavy debts and taxation will find their debtors rising up against them to plunder their wealth. The booty taken by violence and war and oppression will become spoils in the revolt of the peoples against their captors.

C. Woe to Those Who Commit Acts of Injustice (Habakkuk 2:9-11)

Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

Verse 9 begins, “Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin!” (NIV). The problem here is injustice. Here is a person who has tried to accumulate as much as he can by more or less honest means, but, when he finds he cannot get enough, resorts to unjust means to enlarge his portfolio and place himself beyond the possibility of ruin. However, ruin comes. The text says that even what one has accumulated will cry out against him in these words: “You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life” (verse 10).

Picture a man in the Babylonian army. He wants to rise to a high position and enjoy its rewards—to have an opulent house and to be secure in it—so he cuts down a forest that belongs to somebody else and from the trees of that forest makes great beams for his home. Then he destroys someone else’s home and takes the beautiful stone blocks it was made of for himself. When he finishes he has a beautiful house, a “nest on high” (verse 9). However, everyone who looks at it knows where the stones and beams came from, and his pride and joy become a cause for shame. When the opportunity arises, they will see that the nobleman is treated as he treated others.

In like manner, according to Habakkuk, that family or dynasty or national government which has gained power for itself by robbing and deceiving and oppressing its populace, and which has thought itself safe from every challenge to its power and propriety, has not understood the limits set by God on its sovereignty. In a stunning figure, Habakkuk says that the very stones of such a “house” will be the plaintiff against it, and the very beams the witnesses who will judge the “house” guilty and sentence it to death.

D. Woe to Those Who Profit from Acts of Violence (Habakkuk 2:12-14)

Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.
Verse 12 introduces violence: “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice!” (verse 12, NIV). This was a vice particularly observable among the Babylonians, but it is characteristic of our time as well. Here are people who have gone from greed to injustice to violence. Not content with what their injustices can procure, they are now adding crimes of violence to their vices, so great is their desire to have things.

The specific setting of this stanza concerns building—in this case, building a city. Building is not wrong in itself, though the desires that motivate it may be. There is nothing wrong with building a city, or a company, or a church, or a house—if the motives and means are right. However, here is an example of building by wrong means, and the decreed result is that the work will not endure. That which exalts humankind will pass away: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (verse 14, NIV).

The government which thinks to glorify itself by its own achievements—by establishing a city or putting up public buildings or instituting new laws or providing services—and which does so by forced and unjust measures—is making its subjects labor for that which cannot last, for that which is “nought,” and which will be burned up by the fire of God’s wrath. The attempts of human beings to gain glory for themselves by public works built on injustice are empty and vain endeavors that will fall before God’s universal sovereignty.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The controlling themes of these speeches as a whole is the fall of tyranny. In them, imperial power is described as a system that has within it the seeds of its own destruction. The fall of tyranny results from forces set in motion by the ruthlessness of tyranny itself. Tyranny is intolerable. In the nature of things, it cannot endure, but works out its own penalties. By oppressing so many nations, the tyrant is preparing the instruments of his own destruction. Placed in the book of Habakkuk after the dialogue between God and the prophet and, in particular, immediately following God’s final response to the prophet’s questions, this collection of sayings about the suicidal nature of tyranny adds another dimension to the resolution of Habakkuk’s distress over injustice in the world.

By designating these speeches as proverbs of universal wisdom, by placing them in the mouths of the nations of the world, and by describing in them the forces that inevitably undermine imperial power, Habakkuk claims that there exists—in the common fund of human experience and wisdom—evidence for a principle of justice operative in the world that in the end destroys all tyrannical power and pretension.

The book of Habakkuk thus sets forward two resources for coping with the problem of injustice in the world and for maintaining confidence in God’s just rule. One is the personal, prophetic vision of the reliability of God’s rule and the ultimate power of justice (verses 2-4). The other is the record of history itself, which shows that the most blatant kinds of injustice, described here in terms of imperial power, do not endure (verses 5-20). The juxtaposition of these two sections of the book allows Habakkuk to contrast the trustworthiness of the vision of God’s just rule with the transitoriness of the reign of the unjust tyrant.
Such are the lessons of these sayings on the national and international scenes today. But one might also consider the wisdom of these sayings at a personal, individual level as well. The main pursuits of the tyrant ridiculed in these sayings—wealth, security, fame—are by no means unique to dictators. They might be described as the elemental drives of much human endeavor. Thus, the tyrant cannot be viewed as a strange and distant character but as an image of ordinary humanity and the desires that consume its energy and dictate its actions. For all obsessed with these values, these sayings have two cautionary points. In the first place, wealth, security, and fame are, in the end, transitory phenomena, conditions that cannot be ensured. In the second place, when gained at the expense of others they carry with them the seeds of their ruin.

In the rise and fall of rulers and nations, these woes in Habakkuk are telling us that the Lord of history is actively at work, sustaining the faithful and returning the evil of the wicked on their own heads. That work is not postponed until some final judgment but also takes place now, in this “meantime” in which we live out our earthly existence.

The answer to our perplexities about the ambiguities of human history is the Word of God—His promise that He rules in every age and evil receives its just due. This is the illuminating word to which we are to cling, and it is a promise that can instill in us a quiet heart and confidence, as we struggle with injustice and wickedness. The prophet now has a better understanding of the ways of God. Habakkuk has bitterly complained to God about the irony of using an evil power to correct the sins of His own people. The Lord has answered his complaints. Habakkuk now understands that Judah and Jerusalem must be punished for their sins, that God is going to use the Chaldeans for His work of judgment, but that God will also punish the wicked Chaldean nation who deified its power, going beyond the bounds of all restraint.

PRAYER

Dear God, we know You to be loving, just, and kind. We also know that although You are long-suffering, there is an end to Your patience. We pray for Your mercy in those seasons when Your corrective hand moves into our lives. Make us better people through Your discipline in justice and help us to see the error of our ways. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 9-15, 2020)

Consequences for Injustice
MONDAY, March 9: “Wait for Divine Intervention” (Psalm 130)
TUESDAY, March 10: “Pay Attention to the Sentinel” (Ezekiel 33:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, March 11: “The Risk of Ignoring the Needy” (Matthew 25:41-46)
THURSDAY, March 12: “The Righteous Live by Faith” (Habakkuk 2:1-5)
FRIDAY, March 13: “Violence Leads to Destruction” (Habakkuk 2:15-17)
SATURDAY, March 14: “Compare an Idol with the Lord” (Habakkuk 2:18-20)
SUNDAY, March 15: “You Reap What You Sow” (Habakkuk 2:6-14)
March 22, 2020

Lesson 4

CORRUPT LEADERS

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: Doing Justice
YOUTH TOPIC: Live Right!

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: What God Wants
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Loyal and Obedient

DEVOOTIONAL READING
Zechariah 7:8-10; Deuteronomy 24:17-22

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Micah 3–6
ADULT PRINT PASSAGE: Micah 3:1-2, 9-12; 6:6-8
YOUTH PRINT PASSAGE: Micah 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8
KEY VERSE: Micah 6:8

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Micah 6
PRINT PASSAGE: Micah 6:1-8
KEY VERSE: Micah 6:8

Micah 3:1-2, 9-12; 6:6-8—KJV
AND I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment?
2 Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones.

Micah 3:1-2, 9-12; 6:6-8—NIV
THEN I said, “Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel. Should you not embrace justice,
2 “you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones . . . ?”

9 Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity.
10 They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.
11 The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.
12 Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and

9 Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right;
10 who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness.
11 Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD’S support and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.”
12 Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.
6 Where with shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Leaders often struggle with expectations of being examples of justice. How can leaders become models of justice worthy of emulation? Micah confronted the leaders of Israel for their failure to pursue justice and suggested that demonstrating justice should be the basis of their lives.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Understand God’s requirements for people and leaders.
2. Value justice, kindness, and humility as cardinal human virtues.
3. Become just, kind, humble persons and leaders.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Micah uses violent word pictures to show that Judah’s leaders were not right, just, and good (see 3:1-3). This hyperbole is typical of prophetic literature (see Ezekiel 34:1-6; Zephaniah 3:1-5).

—The point of Micah 6:6-8 is that God desires obedience over sacrifice—a key teaching also brought out in 1 Samuel 15:20-23; Psalms 50:8-15; 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6; and Matthew 9:13; 12:7.

—God speaks to leaders to determine if they understand what justice requires.

—Corrupt leaders are called out by God for their injustices toward God’s people.

—Leaders are reminded that God knows specifically how corrupt and unjust they have been.

—God informs the corrupt leaders of His requirements that will bring about justice for all.

—Justice requires love, kindness, and the desire to walk humbly before God.

—Leaders and rulers are told that demonstrating injustice yet saying that God is with them will lead to destruction.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Micah’s proclamation is called a divine covenant lawsuit.
—God does not allow Judah to blame the Lord for their sin and willingness to practice religious sacrifices that are not acceptable to the Lord.
—The Israelites had forgotten the history and the love that God had shown them through their deliverance from the Egyptians, the blessing instead of a curse they received from Balaam, and their journey from Shittim to Gilgal.
—Verses 6-8 describe how God desires loyalty and obedience and not placating sacrifices. The Lord’s expectation of loyalty and obedience is also underscored in 1 Samuel 15:20-23; Psalms 50:8-15; 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:11-17; and Hosea 6:6.
—Micah 6:8 is a reminder that no one can buy or earn God’s love through ritual or sacrifice or any other means.
—God’s love is a gift of grace. In return, God asked that the Israelites act with justice, kindness, and humility.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Micah, attributed to an eighth-century Judean prophet, numbers sixth among the twelve minor prophets. Like some other brief biblical books, it is sometimes overlooked. Many Christians are familiar with certain verses from Micah, yet they may not be aware of their source. The promise of a time of peace when nations would “beat their swords into plowshares” (Micah 4:3b, NIV), the prophecy about a new ruler to come from the town of Bethlehem (see 5:2), and the response to the question of what the Lord requires of them signal Micah’s importance. However, the book also contains other riches worthy of serious study by those wishing to grow in knowledge of Micah’s world and of the God whose words the prophet claims to proclaim.

All the Old Testament books with the exception of Haggai and Zechariah begin with a superscription. A superscription is a statement prefixed to a written work which usually gives the historical setting of the book. The superscription of Micah is a phrase: “The word of Yahweh which came to Micah.” The word of Yahweh is described as one which “came.” Came, as in “happened,” points to the fact that it had its origin outside of the prophet. This word of the God came to a particular man—Micah, the Moreshite, at a specific time, “in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.” It also came for a specific purpose, “concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.”

The name Micah means “who is like Yahweh?” This was a common name in Israel. It was an expression of praise and wonder at the incomparable God of Israel. Of all the Micahs in the Old Testament there was only one who lived in Moresheth, and he was a prophet. Moresheth probably is to be identified with the modern village of Tell el Judeideh about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Although Micah grew up in a small village and lived there long enough to be identified with it, he probably spent much of his life in Jerusalem. Like Nahum the Elkoshite and Amos from Tekoa, Micah was known by his place of origin. The time of Micah’s ministry is indicated by the names of the three kings (Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah) who occupied the throne in Jerusalem. A maximum period of fifty-five years is covered by the kings’ reigns. According to Jeremiah 26:18-19, Micah preached the oracle concerning the destruction of Zion during the reign of Hezekiah (probably about 701 BC). However, the word of Yahweh in Micah is directed to all ages in the sense that the conditions that called for an announcement of judgment then must all the more call for judgment today. Moreover, the basis of hope that Micah and his editors saw must serve as the basis of hope for us.
THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The situation of ordinary citizens was of great concern to Micah in his day. He felt compassion for the poor and dispossessed, and held the leaders responsible for their suffering. We can learn something about the people’s social and economic situation from Micah’s condemnation of their rulers, merchants, and prophets. Similar words from Micah’s contemporary, Isaiah, add to our picture of a society where the rich and powerful used their influence to exploit the vulnerable and to create even greater inequalities of wealth and influence (see Isaiah 5:8-10; 10:1-2).

Micah rails against his listeners for their apostate lifestyle. The transgressions of the people in Micah’s day involved two primary aspects: perversion of worship practices and injustice toward others. Our lesson focuses on the latter iniquity. The sin of abusing one’s fellow man was a primary target of Micah’s rebuke. As Israel’s society shifted to a merchant economy and the use of money replaced barter as the basis for transactions, the separation between rich and poor broadened. Unethical merchants were able to increase their profits by using a light weight to balance the amount of a product they sold, and a heavy weight to balance the gold they charged for the product. The laws of the Jubilee year and the provisions for the helpless—the poor, the widow, the orphan, the sojourner—were all but forgotten. Because no effective system of justice was enforced, the strong were able to oppress the weak. Micah came to understand better than most that the real god of the existing society was money. Mammon and everything else paid homage to the god of money. And the poor were the main sacrificial victims. All those who had power in Micah’s day—whether political, judicial, economic, or religious—used it for their own advantage. Thus, the eventual ruin of the country was all but inevitable.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Micah: Micah was a prophet from Moresheth during the reigns of Judahite kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Other than his hometown, no specifics are known concerning the prophet. He is regarded as a contemporary of Isaiah of Jerusalem. His ministry witnessed the increasing might of the Assyrian Empire and the inevitable doom of the chosen people.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Despise (3:9)—Hebrew: taab (taw-ab’): to “abhor” (KJV), detest, reject.

Embrace (3:1)—Hebrew: yada (yaw-dah’): to “know” (KJV); understand.

Humbly (6:8)—Hebrew: tsana (tsaw-nah’): modestly; lowly.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Micah Speaks Truth to Power
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. When Injustice Rules the Day (Micah 3:1-2)
   B. When Leadership Is Lacking in Justice (Micah 3:9-10)
   C. When the Priests and Prophets Turn Their Backs on the Poor (Micah 3:11)
   D. Micah Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Rulers (Micah 3:12)
   E. What Does the Lord Require? (Micah 6:6-8)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Micah Speaks Truth to Power

This was the situation that confronted Micah as he entered the capital city of Jerusalem to bring the Word of God to the corrupt leadership of Judah. Though there was sin in the outlying areas of the country and among the common people in the capital, it was nothing compared to the evil among the ruling classes. What troubled Micah (and God far more) was the sin in the courts, palaces, and temple. All three branches of government were corrupt. Worse yet, they worked hand in hand. The politicians got their way in the courts, and the judges were paid for their destruction to justice. The prophets also benefited from this arrangement and supported the government in turn. “Is not the Lord among us?” they said. “No disaster will come among us” (Micah 3:11c, NIV)

This is not a new theme; it was already hinted at in Micah 2. There, Micah describes people who seize property belonging to others because it is in their power to do it. Later, Micah mentions prophets who speak what the leaders want to hear rather than what God wants them to hear. This suggests the interlocking corruption of the nation’s upper classes. Still, it is not until chapter 3 that we see the full picture. Chapter 3 has three sections. Section 1 (verses 1-4) concerns judges and the corruption of their courts. Section 2 (verses 5-8) concerns prophets who speak well for those who pay them. Section 3 (verses 9-12) concerns politicians who gain support from the others for money.

The word that ties the chapter together is justice. Justice had departed from Judah. That accusation dominates the chapter. But the word itself is also prominent throughout the book. Micah wanted to see justice triumph in Judah, but instead he saw each branch of government supporting the others in overturning justice and pulling the highest standards down.

B. Biblical Background

The first three chapters of Micah present God’s case against the very people whom God had chosen for a special covenantal relationship. Disaster was on the way. Although prophets, priests, and rulers fed the people a false optimism, reality would soon befall them. Micah’s task is to alert the people to the danger and to challenge their reliance on the hope that God will always protect them, no matter how flagrant their disobedience. God was well aware of their sin and would soon respond with appropriate anger. God does not act unfairly without good reason. However, the same God who must punish such sin also promises to deliver, restore, and bless His people again. He hates idolatry, injustice, rebellion, breach of covenant, empty ritualism, and sin of any kind. Yet, He delights to pardon the penitent when they turn from their sin.
The book of Micah is a rich resource for the theological task of the preacher, the teacher, and the pastoral caregiver. Sometimes troubling and sometimes comforting, Micah provides insights into the nature of God and to the way humans relate to God and to each other. Some passages from Micah may strike us as “answers” to our deepest questions of meaning. Other texts disturb us and raise hard questions about what we are doing with our lives. In some cases, Micah may drive us to other biblical texts for words of assurance and a renewed sense of acceptance by God. Through all of these texts, Micah constantly examines the nature of disaster and suffering as judgment for sins.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. When Injustice Rules the Day

(Micah 3:1-2)

AND I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones.

The addressees of this oracle (divine message) are the “heads” and “leaders” of Israel. These heads and leaders were not kings or priests but officials who functioned as judges within the city gates. They were most likely professional judges or rulers who served to decide legal matters on a local level. In the early stages of Israel’s history, the judges were merely heads of extended families who met to resolve disputes between people not of the same clan. With the rise of the monarchy this responsibility was passed on to the king. Unfortunately, the king often did not or could not devote enough time to judicial matters. Finally, in the ninth century BC, Jehoshaphat instituted judicial reform that gave rise to paid regional judges.

It was the responsibility of these paid judges to know justice. “Know” includes the administration of justice as well as an intellectual understanding that justice is good. But these judges were always hating the good and continuously loving evil. The word pair good/evil was important and common among eighth-century prophets. It is very difficult for those in power politically and even religiously to resist using that power for their own personal advantage and abusing the rights and persons of others. Those who held the reins of political and judicial power in Micah’s day had cast aside all pretense for justice and were openly using their power to consume the poor and powerless. Their sole aim was to satisfy the desires of their own sinful, depraved flesh—to obtain and enjoy riches, luxury, and power. Their tyrannical rule was directed particularly against “my people,” the God-fearing Israelites, whom they hated for their very uprightness (verse 2). In scathing language, Micah describes their heartless cruelty in terms of cannibalism. They treated their own flesh and blood like beasts brought to slaughter. Having stripped them, they flayed them, broke their bones, and were ready to feast on the very flesh of their brethren.

But Micah knew of a greater power than that of the heads and leaders of Israel. God was sovereign over all earthly powers. Ironically, Micah saw a time in the not-too-distant
future when these very powerful men would cry out to God for help, but God would not answer them. Yahweh would hide his face from them in their time of crisis just as they had not turned a friendly face toward their victims. God’s negative actions toward these oppressive rulers and judges are the results of the evil deeds they had done to the poor. They had not been just in their dealings. They had reneged on their responsibility to be just and fair with all the people—especially the poor and the oppressed. God requires more of those in authority, and thus their punishment would be swift and sure.

B. When Leadership Is Lacking in Justice (Micah 3:9-10)

Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.

Verse 9 indicates that all the leaders had lost their sense of fairness. Their ability to keep their priorities in proper perspective had been dulled, deadened, and finally lost. They abhorred justice (verse 9). So much was this true that they actually hated and rejected justice. This is tragic indeed, since justice in the Old Testament means right, straight, fair. Not only did they hate fairness, but also they deliberately perverted it, turned it backward. How could good men ever come to such a state? Their desire for the other man’s possessions was so great that it blinded them to the moral issues involved.

This could only lead to one result. The consequence seen in verse 10 was that they had built their whole society on blood and wrong. Zion and Jerusalem are synonymous in this verse and stand not only for the great believed and revered capital city but also for the whole of Judah. In other words, Micah is saying that the whole substructure of the national life is built on the misery, suffering, hardship, and exploitation of the needy and helpless. This means that the very foundations of the society are rotten and corrupt. No such structure can stand the tests of God’s judgment. The greater tragedy is that not only will the wicked perpetrators of these evils be brought to judgment, but also the whole society, the entire warp and woof of the national life, will pay the price for the decadence and moral decay that gnaws at the very heart of the nation.

C. When the Priests and Prophets Turn Their Backs on the Poor (Micah 3:11)

The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us.

Verse 11 specifies the sins and wrongs that are mentioned in general terms in verses 9-10. One judges from the strong language that Micah had personal knowledge of—perhaps had experienced—the abuses of which he speaks. The wise old men who congregated at the gate and were the patriarchs of the city had become so money-mad that they would trim and shape their judgments to suit the man willing to pay for it. Thus did the poor and indigent suffer at the hands of those with money. The practice of bribery did not die, unfortunately, with the destruction of Jerusalem. Every age and every culture have their battles against the evil of bribery.

Micah speaks in a full-throated voice against the wiles of the functionary priests. He
says that they were no more than cheap hired hands. When particularly difficult cases were brought to them and they had to resort to the oracle, they manipulated it in such a way as to favor the rich and influential, thereby ensuring their own advantage, no matter the result for the defenseless poor. The prophets were no better. They frequently used various mechanical means to secure a divine judgment. It would be too simple to dismiss these wise old men, priests, and prophets as fakes. They were not pagan men who had usurped the divine offices and gone about deliberately perverting them. These were basically “good men,” worthy of public trust, but they had compromised with greed for gain and lust for power. They were outwardly religious and inwardly empty. They had even fooled themselves into believing that they were religious. They went through their routines in the proper manner—lean upon the Lord. The word lean indicates that they thought everything they did had the stamp of Yahweh’s approval. They were so hardened and corrupt in their inner-man that they believed this themselves, in spite of what they had done to the poor and needy.

D. Micah Pronounces Judgment on the Unjust Rulers
(Micah 3:12)

Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

The true prophet, Micah, could not suffer this kind of insult to the living God. The abuses have piled up so that by verse 12 there is nothing to do but deliver the judgment. In one crushing blow Micah breaks with all tradition, even of the preaching prophets, and pronounces the utter doom of Jerusalem. Zion shall be plowed as a field; it will become a heap of ruins (verse 12). Micah was the very first prophet to predict doom for Jerusalem. Doubtless the bitterest words of all for Judah’s rulers were those of the first phrase: because of you (or on account of you). The total and utter destruction of Jerusalem—with everything that means—is to be charged against them. The waste, plunder, carnage, death, shame, and exile which are to follow is all because of them; and they must bear it. Doubtless they did not believe it, but when destruction finally came surely they saw the justice of Micah’s words and felt the weight of guilt’s burden. We see from Jeremiah 26:19 that, though Micah’s prophecy was fulfilled a century after he uttered it, those who suffered the judgment realized that God had kept His Word.

E. What Does the Lord Require?
(Micah 6:6-8)

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

In Micah 6:6, the people ask what they should bring to the Lord to please Him when they come to worship Him. They then make some specific suggestions in reply to their opening question. Shall they bring burnt offerings? They think ritual alone is a solution when in reality it is part of the problem. No mere worshipful ceremony is ever sufficient. False worshippers think God’s favor, like theirs, can be bought or earned. They offer the Lord everything but what He asks for—their loving
and obedient hearts. Offerings are no substitute for obedience to God’s will. The burnt offering was wholly consumed and was intended to express one’s devotion, commitment, and complete surrender to God. Yet, such total commitment is the one thing the offerors were still withholding from the Lord.

In verse 7, the worshippers up the ante, so to speak, by wondering whether a greater quantity of offerings would please the Lord. Thousands and ten thousands are examples of hyperbole. Rams were common sacrificial animals, and olive oil was a common sacrificial substance. Finally, the worshippers hypothetically wonder whether sacrificing their firstborn children would atone for their sins. For God’s people to engage in child sacrifice would only increase their sins, because God expressly prohibited it. What the Lord really wanted most of all was not the offerings but the hearts, allegiance, and obedience of those making the offering. They would offer everything (even what God forbade) excepting only what alone He asked for: their heart, its love, and its obedience. The Lord desires clean hands and a pure heart. He does not desire outward performances intended to impress a mean and unfriendly world.

In Micah 6:8, the Lord through Micah announces to Israel what He does require (“man/mortal” represents corporate Israel). God does not desire ritual sacrifice divorced from a changed life—a life given over completely to the covenant Lord. Rather, His people must change their ways and actions. Three requirements are specified in verse 8. First, they must “act justly.” To act justly is important, for it does not mean merely to talk about justice or to get other people to act justly. It means to do the just thing yourself. Second, “love mercy.” The Hebrew word for “mercy” is hesed, which essentially and primarily means “faithful covenant love.” Third, they must “walk humbly” with their God. “Walk” means to live in a certain way, but the Hebrew word for “humbly” is difficult because it is not the usual word for humility. It most certainly does not mean “humbly” in the sense that we have come to understand that word—meek and lowly. An accurate rendering of the entire verse will read something on this order: People of Israel, the Lord has shown you what is good. He has told you what He requires of you. You must treat people fairly. You must love others faithfully. And you must be careful to live the way your God wants you to live. So “walk humbly” would be better rendered “walk carefully with your God,” which ultimately means “be careful to live the way your God wants you to.”

The essence of this great text is this: Micah is repelled by sacrifices and worship which are not matched by just dealings and real spirituality. His central concerns are for social justice and true religion. Worship and morality cannot be divorced from one another. They are two sides of the same coin. Micah is saying that the piety that God approves of consists of three elements: a strict adherence to that which is equitable in all dealings with our fellowman; a heart determined to do them good; and diligent care to live in close and intimate fellowship with God.

Thus, this saying is not an invitation, in lieu of the Gospel, to save oneself by fulfilling kind acts of equity and fairness. Nor is it an attack on the forms of sacrifices and cultic acts mentioned in the tabernacle and temple instructions. It was instead a call for the natural consequence of truly forgiven men and women
to demonstrate the reality of their faith by living it out in the marketplace. Such living would be accompanied by acts and deeds of mercy, justice, and giving of oneself for the orphan, the widow, and the poor.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Although Micah lived in a small town twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem, he displayed a surprising knowledge of the social abuses and civic corruption in the capital city. As a champion of the poor, he denounced the unscrupulous officials who oppressed poor farmers. It has been said by some scholars that the faces of poor peasants peer out from between the words of this prophet. Micah’s message might almost be summed up in this one sentence: Those who live selfish and luxurious lives, even though they offer costly sacrifices, are vampires in the sight of God, sucking the life-blood out of the poor. His words fairly quiver with feeling. Because of Micah’s condemnation of social injustice and religious apostasy, he has been dubbed the “Amos of the southern kingdom.”

This book has a vital, much-needed message for today, and it applies to people in any age and of every generation—for God always requires justice, faithful covenant love, and humble obedience to Him. Indeed, His most famous rhetorical question and reply probably is Micah 6:8 (NIV)—“What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Throughout Micah there is a constant tension between justice and mercy. God is a righteous God and will not tolerate evil. Punishment is inevitable if sinful behavior persists. God cannot abandon His own standards of justice. God wants to forgive and move on to better things if people will show at least some hint of repentance, some opening into which God can move to relax the rigid standards of absolute justice.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we know You require of us that we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with You each day of our lives. Keep ever before us that justice is an attribute of Your being and, therefore, is required of those who love and believe in Your holy name. Teach us Your way of loving, doing, and being in the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 16-22, 2020)

Corrupt Leaders
MONDAY, March 16: “The Lord Acts Justly” (Psalm 146)
TUESDAY, March 17: “The Results of Social Injustice” (Isaiah 5:18-24)
WEDNESDAY, March 18: “Justice Actions by the Expected Messiah” (Isaiah 11:1-5)
THURSDAY, March 19: “Prophets Fail on Their Watch” (Micah 3:5-8)
FRIDAY, March 20: “Remember God’s Righteous Actions” (Micah 6:1-5)
SATURDAY, March 21: “Cheating and Violence Will Be Punished” (Micah 6:9-16)
SUNDAY, March 22: “God Requires Justice for All” (Micah 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:6-8)
March 29, 2020

Lesson 5

LEADING JUSTLY

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** Justice for All  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Follow the Right Leader

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Leading with Fairness  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Challenging the Leader

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Psalm 50:1-15

**Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6—KJV**
AND NOW, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.
2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.
3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.
4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.
5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.
6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity

**Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6—NIV**
“AND NOW, you priests, this warning is for you.
2 “If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.
3 “Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.
4 “And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue,” says the LORD Almighty.
5 “My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.
6 “True instruction was in his mouth and nothing
was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

7 For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.

9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hirpling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Just leaders act honorably toward constituents. How do just leaders act toward others? Malachi admonished the priests to turn from their wickedness, revere God, and reap a rich harvest for promoting godly justice.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Understand the significance of justice for spiritual leadership.
2. Affirm the value of covenanted reverence for God for leadership.
3. Practice just spiritual leadership.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Malachi voices an argument between God and the people. The people of Judah had returned from exile about a century earlier but were committing the same sins that had sent them into exile!

—The book of Malachi can be viewed as a cliff-hanger. God puts Judah on trial through this last prophet of the Old Testament. The verdict would not be pronounced until the next
prophet—John the Baptist—would come onto the scene four centuries later.
—Malachi accuses the priests of being disrespectful and threatens them (see 2:1-9). God contrasts them with Levi, an example of reverence and awe. This would have reminded the priests of the fate of Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, who were unfaithful priests (see Leviticus 10).
—God threatens to bring swift judgment upon those who ignore His covenant and oppress vulnerable people (see Malachi 3:5). The Levitical theme continues in these commands that are summarized from the book of Leviticus (see 19:11-13, 33-34).
—The priestly failure that is described in Malachi is summarized as the priests’ failure to honor God and their profaning God’s name. The beginning of Malachi introduces this concept, implying that disobedience by the priests is tantamount to rejecting God as Father and Master of the nation (see 1:6).

—God’s immutability (see 3:6) provides a foundation for the faith and hope of those who believe. God does not change, remaining faithful even when subjects of the kingdom of God do not (see 2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—God declared that a messenger of the covenant will be sent to prepare the people for God’s coming.
—God is still in the business of purifying and refining the leaders so that the people’s offerings would be acceptable by God.
—God is seeking for the people to return to Him.
—God accused the people of breaking covenant by withholding their tithes and offerings.
—God will pour out abundant blessings to those who are faithful in their giving to God’s house.
—Faithful giving will result in all nations’ calling the people “blessed” because of their relationship with God.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Malachi is the final book in the collection of the Twelve Prophets. Although the order of these books may have varied when the Bible was copied in manuscript form, in present-day Christian Bibles, Malachi concludes the entire prophetic section and is the final book of the whole of the Old Testament. As such, many readers have seen it as a transition to the New Testament. Malachi is a relatively short collection of fifty-five verses. As expected in a book that belongs to the literature of the Prophets, in it we find words from God delivered through a human agent, words of both judgment and salvation, directed to Israel (Malachi 1:1). But we also hear the voices of the people and the priests in response. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of the book is the way that priests and people articulate their questions and state their complaints in a way that sets up the dynamic of an ongoing dialogue between God and humankind.

Within these four short chapters, we find a particularly rich and creative reworking and integration of the major covenant themes that inspired the earlier prophets. The passion for justice and the concern for the widow and orphan and laborer of the eighth-century prophets is combined with a focus on Temple, cult, and priesthood that both reflect and address the centrality of these institutions for the post-exilic community. Scholars have long debated whether “Malachi” is to be taken as the personal name of a specific prophet or as a title, “my messenger.” Today’s lesson follows convention and uses Malachi as a name.
THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Indifference to both the moral and ceremonial aspects of the divine law characterized the people of God in Malachi’s day. The exiles had been back in Judea from Babylon for more than one hundred years; but instead of becoming better, they had become worse. The people were saying that the promises of Jehovah to His people before and since the Captivity were not being fulfilled. Why? The answer is that the promises had been conditional, and the people were not living up to the conditions stipulated. God had fulfilled His part of the promises; He had done all He could. He had chastised them with the Captivity. He had brought back a remnant and had settled them in their land. He had graciously forgiven their sins. He had shown His ability and disposition to keep His glorious promises to them. There was nothing more to be done or said by the Lord until they would show a different disposition toward Him. Therefore, with the close of the book of Malachi, no word more could be said until the coming of Him whom God promised and through whom God’s final word would be spoken.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Malachi: It is translated “my messenger” or “angel.” This is the last of the Minor Prophets. No personal information is recorded about this prophet, and even his name is uncertain. Although Malachi could well be a proper name, most scholars agree that it is a title or symbolic name. Rabbinic tradition suggests identifying him with Ezra.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Covenant (2:4)—Hebrew: bərīyth (ber-ēth’): league; treaty; alliance; agreement; pledge.
Oppress (3:5)—Hebrew: ashaq (aw-shak’): to wrong or extort; defraud; get deceitfully.
Priests (2:1)—Hebrew: kohen (ko-hane’): chief ministers; principal officers.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Malachi Challenges Abusive Power and Corrupt Worship
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Failure to Serve as True Priests (Malachi 2:1-3)
   B. A Priest Worthy of His Calling (Malachi 2:4-6)
   C. The Priest as Carrier of True Instruction (Malachi 2:7)
   D. The Failure of the Priests to Act with Wisdom and with Justice (Malachi 2:8-9)
   E. God’s Judgment on His Wayward People and Priests (Malachi 3:5-6)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Malachi Challenges Abusive Power and Corrupt Worship

As the last book in the collection known as the Twelve Prophets in the Hebrew canon, Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament Christian canon. Given the dominant themes of sin, judgment, repentance, and the Day of the Lord in the book, Malachi has traditionally been considered a prophet. Whatever Malachi’s vocation precisely might have been, there is no doubt that his book is essentially about the integrity of the priestly office and what it means to serve God in worship and daily life. Malachi aligns himself with a particular priestly circle—the Levitical priesthood (Malachi 2:4-6)—over and against a rival priesthood that had gained control over the Temple after it was rebuilt in 516/515 BC. While condemning the abuse of priestly power and corrupt worship, Malachi considers himself no less than a reformer, calling his priestly colleagues and the larger community to renewed fidelity to Yahweh’s covenant. Malachi accuses his people of committing worship offenses, entering into mixed marriages, divorcing, and failing to tithe—all violations of God’s covenant with Israel.

How far God’s chosen people had fallen! Israel was the people called to be the special instrument through which God would realize His universal kingship, and her priests were those who were especially responsible for mediating the knowledge of her great God to her. They were to preserve all the traditions of God’s mighty acts in Israel’s past and recount them in the cultic festivals that Israel might know the power and love of the God she worshipped. They were to instruct the people in proper reverence and awe before such a King of Glory to insist on the worthy worship of Him. They were to mediate God’s instructions concerning ethics and morals and ritual when persons came to them for torah, teaching out of a knowledge of God gained in intimate prophetic-like communion with Him (Malachi 2:7). They were to “walk with God” (see Malachi 2:6) in such a privileged fellowship that the King of Glory was reflected in their lives and words and cultic ministrations. From the priests Israel would learn how to walk in the ways of her God and to render unto Him the glory due His holy name. No higher estimation of the priesthood is found in the Old Testament than this one given in Malachi 2:4-7.

Corruption of the priesthood leads to corruption of the people and thus this whole section in Malachi concerns the failure of the priests. Malachi’s central charge against the priesthood is that they have despised the Lord’s name (see Malachi 1:6) and not listened to Him (Malachi 2:1). Therefore, God’s judgment is leveled against the priests in 2:1-9, and the verdict fits the crime. Because the priests have polluted the worship of God (see Malachi 1:7) by considering it of no importance, they themselves will be cursed and polluted (Malachi 2:2-3), making them unfit for service at the altar. The “dung” mentioned in Malachi 2:3 is that taken from the sacrificial animals, and it was supposed to be removed
from the sanctuary and burned. Because the priests would be contaminated by it, they too would be ejected from the sanctuary. The Lord will make them “despised and abased” among the people (Malachi 2:9), for they have not guarded God’s way and respected *torah*.

We might well ask, “Are these the words of a God of love?” Yes, they are. It is only when God leaves us alone that He no longer loves us. It is only when He abandons us to our sin that we have fallen from His mercy. Our highest good is fellowship with God and obedience to His will, for His loving purpose is that we have life and have it more abundantly. His goal is that all shall know that life in His kingdom is good. If God ever gives up on that purpose, if He decides to accept our sin as of no importance and to leave us as we are, then He has abandoned us to our evil and death and He no longer cares about us. However, God does care and He speaks through Malachi to let us know that He still loves us. Israel’s priests in today’s lesson are condemned because the God of love will not allow their sin to destroy either them or His beloved people.

**B. Biblical Background**

It is almost universally recognized that the prophecy of Malachi belongs to the period after the Exile, when the Jews were under a governor (see Malachi 1:8) and the Edomites had been driven from their old home. It is also generally agreed that the date of Malachi is later than the time of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The Temple had been rebuilt, and the sacrificial system and its services were an integral part of the life of the people. As a matter of fact, sufficient time had elapsed since the ministry of the two prophets for the enthusiasm aroused by them to wane, and for worship in the Temple to become corrupted. Furthermore, the moral and religious offenses condemned by Malachi are different from those condemned by Haggai and Zechariah.

By the time Malachi comes on the scene, a spirit of dull depression had settled over the inhabitants of Jerusalem; skepticism and spiritual indifference held the people in their grasp. The word of the prophet was challenged everywhere, as people counted it unprofitable to serve God (see Malachi 3:14). These challenges were not uttered by blasphemers but by good and pious people who, failing to see the hand of God in the government of the world, cried out in the anguish of their doubts, “Where is the God of justice?” and “What evidence is there that God loves us?”

This flood of skepticism abroad in the land affected both the people and their religious leaders. Religion became largely a matter of ritual. Apathy and stinginess toward God prevailed. This attitude was shown in the lives of the laypeople by their failure to keep vows made to God and by their offering of blemished and imperfect animals for sacrifice (see Malachi 1:14). Many of them also withheld their tithes and offerings. The appointed spiritual leaders of the land, the priests, were similarly affected by the cynical mood of the day. They performed the duties of their office in a perfunctory manner and offered blind, lame, and sick animals of which they would be ashamed to offer the Persian governor (see Malachi 1:8). Characterized by a dry professionalism, they complained in the very discharge of duty, “What a weariness this is” (see Malachi 1:13). Both by example and precept they caused the people to err, until all alike failed to render unto Yahweh the honor due His name.
This decline in religious fervor and integrity was accompanied by a corresponding decline in morals. Immorality prevailed. Every person dealt treacherously with his brother and sister (Malachi 2:10). Oppression of the poor, sorcery, adultery, divorce, perjury, and fraud were practiced without restraint. To such a situation the prophet Malachi boldly addressed himself. It was a situation which demanded a courageous spokesperson. Malachi was God’s messenger for this crucial era in the history of His chosen people.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Failure to Serve as True Priests
   (Malachi 2:1-3)

   AND NOW, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

   The prophecy contained in this lesson is addressed particularly to the priests as a special divine commandment (verse 1). Besides the prophets and kings, the priests were divinely appointed leaders of the people, the teachers of Israel, and a court of appeals. Their honorable position demanded a corresponding faithfulness in the performance of their varied duties. The Lord urged them to hear, to give wholehearted attention to His words, so that they might, in the execution of their duties, give proper honor and glory to His name. They had failed to do that. The Lord had promised the priests that their blessing would be God’s blessings. Since they refused to obey Him, He would also change their blessings into a curse (verse 2).

   He had already begun to curse them and every one of their blessings, whether they were repetitions of God’s benediction or blessings of their own invention. Intended to impart divine favor and well-being upon the people, the benediction blessing was undoubtedly a standard blessing used in the Jerusalem Temple at the conclusion of worship. Like the pastor of a church, the priests in ancient Israel had the privilege of giving the blessing. For Malachi, however, God’s judgment against the priests twists this solemn blessing into a curse.

   The Lord would “corrupt” their seed, which literally means the Lord would rebuke, scold, and threaten their seed. The KJV rendering—“I will corrupt your seed”—gives the sense that the curse is to affect the productivity of the land so that the revenue of the priest will be reduced. In addition, God would subject them to the most contemptuous and humiliating treatment—I will “spread dung upon your faces” (verse 3). This is the filth from the intestines of the sacrificed animals. This is a strong expression indicating the humiliation and shame awaiting the priests. As they had defiled the altar of God with their blemished sacrifices, they themselves would be defiled. Furthermore, God would put them out of His presence. The defiled priests, unfit for the demands of duty, would be carried off and deposited with the dung on the city’s dumping grounds.

B. A Priest Worthy of His Calling
   (Malachi 2:4-6)

   And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment
unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

In order to portray the gross imperfections of the present priests, the prophet paints a vivid picture, perhaps somewhat idealized, of a more perfect priesthood initiated by God’s covenant with Levi (verses 4-5). Levi, the third son of Jacob (Genesis 29:34), became the tribe that was never allocated territory because it was singularly chosen to serve God as priests (see Joshua 18:7). Jeremiah 34:21-22 mentions a covenant with Levi and the covenant with Aaron’s grandson Phineas (see Numbers 25:12), in which God promises an enduring priesthood for his descendants. By tradition, Levites were known for their zeal for God, having aligned themselves with Moses against their kin after the golden calf episode (see Exodus 32:25-29). Indeed, it was over such loyalty that Moses pronounced the ordination of the sons of Levi “for the service of the Lord.” This tradition serves as background and testimony to the Levites’ reverence before God’s name.

The covenant to which Malachi refers includes the blessing of life and well-being, as well as the call for reverence (verse 5). The teaching role of the Levitical priest echoes the job description of Levitical functions listed in Deuteronomy 33:9b-10, in which the priesthood was regarded as the repository of the knowledge of God. Imparting right instruction or Torah was the essential mark of the priestly office. According to Malachi, the priest is no less than the messenger of the Lord of Hosts, a high calling indeed. In addition to the abuse of sacrificial practice described in Malachi 1:7-10, Malachi accuses his colleagues of imparting false instructions, in particular of showing partiality, in strict violation of the covenant.

C. The Priest as Carrier of True Instruction (Malachi 2:7)

For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

Malachi emphasizes the role of the priest as teacher (see Malachi 2:5-7), as both repository and the hander-on of the traditions of the community. The priest speaks, not on the basis of charismatic inspiration, as does the prophet, but from the knowledge of accumulated tradition and professional learning. Priests in the Old Testament and throughout the ancient Near East were not innovators and revealers of new knowledge but were “faithful custodians” who transmitted the accumulated lore and rules of behavior. In this way, the priesthood functioned as a conservative force in Israel’s life. In our day, we need our elders to pass on to us the accumulated wisdom of our Christian witness. This allows a community to reflect carefully and discriminatingly on what knowledge from the past deserves to be preserved and handed on. In praising the institution of the priesthood, Malachi invites us to look anew at the institutions in our church and our society that can function as the carriers of “true instruction.”

D. The Failure of the Priests to Act with Wisdom and with Justice (Malachi 2:8-9)

But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the
covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

Malachi thought that the primary role of the priest was to “guard,” “treasure,” “conserve,” or “keep” the knowledge of God. The priest was the messenger of God in the sense that he was the guardian and teacher of a body of religious knowledge. But the priests of Malachi’s day no longer walked with God. They had turned aside from the way (verse 8). They no longer turned many from iniquity. They did not measure up to this high standard. They had deliberately turned away from the way of salvation. Instead, they had caused many to stumble by their instruction or the lack of it. They had corrupted their covenant with Yahweh. Since the priests had despised Yahweh, He would make them despised and abased before all the people (verse 9). The priests had not kept or guarded the “way” of Yahweh, and they had not treated the people the same way.

E. God’s Judgment on His Wayward People and Priests

(Malachi 3:5-6)

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Malachi warns God’s people against the fatal mistake of offering gifts to God without first offering themselves as a living sacrifice to Him. The cleanser and purifier of sinners comes also as judge. Every believer needs this warning: God does not desire false worship filled with empty ritual and cold ceremony. Not just the priests, but all of society will be judged and transformed by the sovereign God. The list of sins, ranging from the religious to the social, incorporates the whole of community life, whose center is the Temple. The effects of insincere and false worship against which Malachi railed in Malachi 1:7-14 had spread over the entire community. Malachi, like his prophetic predecessors, sees worship and justice inseparably bound up together. Worship is not true worship unless it seeks justice for the widow, orphan, and alien.

The moral force behind Malachi’s indictment against the nation is founded upon the Lord’s unchangeable character (verse 6). The call to moral integrity and right worship is a call to unwavering constancy in practice. The fact that the people had not been consumed for violating the covenant is sufficient testimony to God’s faithfulness and forbearance. Though Israel will not perish, the people of God are nonetheless called to change in order to effect a reciprocal return between God and the people. Obedience to God marks nothing less than a radical reorienting of the life and character of the community, a redirection that God promises to meet halfway.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Passages like Malachi 2:1-9 and 3:5-6 make a prophet like Malachi seem so different, even inferior to, the so-called classic prophets of the exilic era. The prophet seems concerned only about the minutiae of legal regulations concerning animals’ fur for sacrifice, and judgments rendered by priests regarding what
is acceptable. What has happened to justice rolling down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24)? Modern understanding of prophecy has tended to be much more sympathetic to the voice of Amos and finds it very difficult to incorporate Malachi into a “working definition” of prophecy.

But this is precisely where the book of Malachi can offer a salutary note of caution against the temptation to dichotomize and divide—between religion as worship and religion as action; between the obligations to God and obligations to neighbor; between service and praise. These fundamental conflicts manifest themselves and are played out in very different ways in the concrete life of a community. The facile solution is always to separate, so the “smells and bells” (things we do that make us stand out) people do their thing and the social activists do theirs. But Malachi offers a glimpse of another path. Totally at home in the prophetic tradition, he speaks from the center of that tradition “against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan” (see Malachi 3:5). Yet, the world of the priest and the Temple and meticulous observance of cultic norms are treated with equal gravity. Perhaps most important is that the two poles of social justice and cult are brought together, not just by an intellectual exposition of their complementarity, but also in the lived experience of the prophet.

To be sure, Malachi’s message extends far beyond his own historical situation. Though addressing himself specifically to the bitter conflicts of his day (like the “church fights” of today), Malachi was able to apprehend the larger picture of God’s redemption for all. Indeed, the New Testament interprets Malachi as pointing straight to the advent of Jesus, particularly as it was announced by John the Baptist. It is no wonder, then, that Malachi concludes the Old Testament as a preface to the New Testament in the Protestant Christian canon.

PRAYER

Dear God, help those of us in leadership who are charged with the responsibility of passing Your Word on to others. Help us to rightly divide the Word of truth as we impart this knowledge to oncoming generations. Give us the strength to live what we teach and to honor Your name each day of our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 23-29, 2020)

Leading Justly
MONDAY, March 23: “Offer a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving to God” (Psalm 50:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, March 25: “God’s Name Is Great among Nations” (Malachi 1:11-14)
THURSDAY, March 26: “Be Faithful to One Another” (Malachi 2:10-16)
FRIDAY, March 27: “Messenger of Judgment Coming” (Malachi 2:17–3:4)
SATURDAY, March 28: “God’s Blessings and Delights Await” (Malachi 3:7-12)
SUNDAY, March 29: “Leading in Troubled Times” (Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6)
GOD’S JUST SERVANT

Adult/Youth

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Seeking a Champion of Justice

Youth Topic: Are You the Right One to Lead?

Children

General Lesson Title: God’s Just Servant

Children’s Topic: Doing What Is Just!

Devotional Reading

Psalm 98

Adult/Youth

Background Scripture: Isaiah 42

Print Passage: Isaiah 42:1-9

Key Verse: Isaiah 42:1

Children

Background Scripture: Matthew 21

Print Passage: Matthew 21:1-2, 6-8, 12-17

Key Verse: Matthew 21:6

Isaiah 42:1-9—KJV

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

5 Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

6 I the Lord have called thee in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles;

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners

Isaiah 42:1-9—NIV

“HERE IS my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

2 “He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.

3 “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

4 “he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

5 This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:

6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

7 “to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from
from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.
8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.
9 Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.

8 “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.
9 “See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People seek a champion of justice. Who can and will defend and uphold the cause of justice? In Matthew 21, Jesus upholds God’s justice in the Temple, fulfilling Isaiah 42’s vision of the Messiah.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the concept of “Messiah.”
2. Sense the wonder of Jesus’ role as servant to the nations.
3. Emulate Jesus as a servant of God who executes justice.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Isaiah 42:1-4 constitutes the first of several Servant Songs in Isaiah (see Isaiah 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12). There are differing views of the identity of the Servant in the passages. In some cases, the Servant is seen as the nation of Israel; in others, the Servant signifies a special person; and in still others, both are signified.
—As do his contemporary prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah, Isaiah attacks social injustices among the people and encourages them to exercise righteousness and justice in their private and public lives, noting divine blessings for the faithful and punishment for the unfaithful.
—God provides a servant to bring forth justice for everyone.

—God’s Spirit upon the Messiah ushers in justice.
—Justice will come through gentleness and faithfulness instead of violence.
—The Messiah will not be discouraged or grow weary as justice prevails.
—God’s new covenant leads the way for justice.
—Old things will pass away and become new when justice prevails.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Preparation for Jesus’ triumphal entry began with two disciples’ being instructed to obtain a donkey and colt for Jesus’ use.
—The two disciples followed Jesus’ instructions and brought the donkey and colt to Jesus.
—The crowd of people spread branches and their cloaks on the road in front of Jesus.
—As Jesus entered the city on the colt, He was given recognition as a king or dignitary.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Isaiah is the first of the three “major prophets,” that is, the three longest prophetic books. Its position as the first reflects the fact that Isaiah himself lived in the eighth century, whereas Jeremiah and Ezekiel lived approximately one hundred years later. It thus has its scale in common with those two books, but it also deserves setting alongside Micah, who like Isaiah prophesied in Judah. The book as a whole reflects several different periods, but it is not merely an anthology of unrelated prophecies. In all three parts of the book, Yahweh is “the Holy One of Israel.” The entire book is a message from the Holy One.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Isaiah of Jerusalem lived in the second half of the eighth century BC and addressed himself to the conditions existing at the time. He began to prophesy in 739 BC and continued to be a voice for God until well into the reign of Manasseh. At the writing of Isaiah, Judah and Israel were still in existence as independent kingdoms. Their kings are referred to by name (Uzziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Pekah), and the prophet’s encounters with them are described in simple narrative discourse. Assyria was the oppressing power. However, in Isaiah chapters 40–55, the background for these Scriptures is not the eighth century but, rather, the middle of the sixth century BC. Thus, modern scholarship assumes that chapters 40–66 of the book of Isaiah have a uniquely different theological focus than chapters 1–39. It is suggested by many biblical scholars that the Isaiah chapters 1–39 and chapters 40–66 were authored by different persons. This in no way takes away or questions the divine inspiration that undergirds this book. The unique feature of the prophecy of the second part of Isaiah (chapters 40–66) relates to the critical time of exile, which summoned him to the task of proclaiming salvation, and nothing but salvation to his people.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Messiah: God’s anointed king; in the Old Testament, specifically the expected Jewish Messiah, in the New Testament Jesus Christ. In its basic sense, the term “messiah” refers to a person who has been consecrated to a high-office ceremonial anointing with oil. The anointing to an office gave a person high and sacred status and assured authority, reverence, and respect.

Yahweh: the most important name for God in the Old Testament. YHWH occurs about 6,800 times and is usually pronounced “Yahweh.” In the ancient Near East, great significance was attached to personal names, for they revealed character, identity, and signified existence. The revelation of a divine name and its continued use were of substantial importance for the Hebrew people.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Light (verse 6)—Hebrew: or (ore): bright; clear; illumination.

Servant (verse 1)—Hebrew: Ebed (eh’-bed): slave.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Here Is My Servant!
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Servant of the Lord Chosen by Yahweh
      (Isaiah 42:1a)
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Here Is My Servant!

In Isaiah 42:1-9, God introduces a servant who is charged with a specific task and whose style of carrying it out is described. The longstanding scholarly debate over this text has been preoccupied with a basic question—namely, the identity of the servant.

Two principal themes emerge as the central foci of Isaiah 42:1-9: the description of who the servant is in relation to God, and the task to which the servant is appointed. One cannot mistake the servant’s mission, since it is repeated in verses 1, 3, and 4: he will bring justice to the nations. It is well known that the Hebrew word for “justice” (mispat) connotes much more than judicial equity. In its broadest sense, it involves societal order in which the concerns of all are addressed. A society in which there is no justice is one in which the only rule is brute force used to aggrandize the few. Thus, the divine justice that the servant will establish is nothing less than the salvation of God defined in its broadest sense. Isaiah is not merely speaking of a privatistic forgiveness of sins, or of the imposition of a humanly designed system for redistribution of goods. He speaks rather of that life-giving order which exists when the creation is functioning in accordance with the design of its Lord.

B. Biblical Background

Isaiah 42:1-9 provides the introduction to God’s Servant and what God intends to do. Isaiah 42:1 opens with Yahweh’s introducing His servant and it closes (42:8-9) with a statement on Yahweh’s name, honor, and praise. The middle part of the passage contains a doxology on Yahweh as the creator. Yahweh is praised as the one and only God, known by the name of Yahweh, creator of heaven and earth and of all humanity. He is both creator and sustainer and in control of history. He has made things known in the past and will make new things known—even before they happen.

Yahweh is indeed the one and only universal God, a message that would have been particularly comforting to the people of Judah, who had to face the harsh reality of exile as well as the confrontation with foreign gods. Yahweh is not only the universal God; He is also the God who performed wonderful acts in the history of His people. Yahweh (as the one who has been active in the history of His people) will continue to act in times to
come. This time, His acts will become known through somebody new—His servant. The Servant will not do His work in a spectacular way for anyone to hear (verse 2). He will also not crush the downhearted exiles who have lost all hope of a reversal of their fortunes. What He will do is said emphatically: His task is to bring forth justice to the nations in a way that will be visible and real for anybody to see. He will endure until His mission is accomplished. What exactly the mission of the Servant entails is stated in verse 7: He will open the eyes of the blind and release captives from prison. When this happens, Yahweh’s justice will be seen by the nations.

It is therefore not the wishes of the exiled people that are primarily attended to in this passage; rather, Yahweh’s name, honor, and praise are at stake. This is the ultimate reason why He demonstrates His power by making known events yet to happen. This was the case in the past, but it is also true for the Exile.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Servant of the Lord Chosen by Yahweh (Isaiah 42:1a)

BEHOLD MY servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.

The first words of 42:1—“Behold my servant”—plainly describe a designation. This means that someone—the Lord, God—with the right to do so designates or appoints someone else to perform a task or to hold an office. It was chiefly in connection with the charismatic leaders of her early days that Israel knew of such designations. “Whom I uphold”: The one who upholds gives his own strength to the one upheld. “My chosen” simply means that out of many who might have performed this task, this is the one whom God chooses for it, and the designation makes the choice public and known. The reason for the choice of this servant, and no other, is God’s alone. God has found pleasure in this servant and that is all that is needed.

Here, it is enough to assume that “my servant” is the people of Israel. The designation servant draws upon the entire memory of ancient Israel that affirms that Israel is related to Yahweh as servant to master (king), and that the life of Israel consists of obedience to the will and command and purpose of the king. Although the designation “servant” is traditional, it is anything but “natural” in the midst of exilic despair. It is a remarkable theme that Israel, in exile, is freshly reminded of its relation to Yahweh and its consequent role with duties to perform and obligations to fulfill. In exile, Israel tended to be more self-preoccupied and self-absorbed with its own destiny. In this utterance, however, Yahweh changes the subject and summons grieving Israel out beyond its own self-preoccupation to other work.

The Spirit of the Lord is placed upon the servant in order to equip him for his ministry. The Spirit (ruach) was given to certain people in the Old Testament in order that they may fulfill assigned responsibilities. Through the gift of the Spirit, for example, artisans become more proficient (see Exodus 31:1-5), prophets are inspired (see Numbers 11:29), leaders are equipped for office (see Numbers 11:29), kings
are prepared to rule (see 1 Samuel 11:6), and the Lord’s servant is prepared to minister (see Isaiah 42:1). In a number of Old Testament passages the hope is expressed that in the eschatological age, God’s Spirit will be poured out upon all His people (see Joel 2:28-29).

B. The Mission of the Servant: The One Who Brings Justice
(Isaiah 42:1b)

I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

The mission of the Servant is to bring justice to the nations (42:1b). Even in exile, in the midst of oppression, there is work to be done and Israel had to do it. In these verses, the term “justice” is sounded three times (verses 1, 3, 4, NIV). The characteristic notion of justice rooted in the Mosaic tradition and explicated in prophetic utterance is the reordering of social life and social power so that the weak (widows and orphans) may live a life of dignity, security, and well-being. If we assume such a substantive notion of justice, then the exilic community as servant is dispatched by Yahweh to reorder social relations for the sake of the vulnerable. Indeed, the mode of work proposed in verses 2-3 suggests such a content for servanthood. Israel itself was to practice vulnerability and to be attentive to others who are vulnerable, “bruised reeds and dim wicks.” Israel’s way of relationship is drastically contrasted with the way of Babylon (or any other worldly power), which is to break such reeds and snuff out such wicks. Israel was to pursue a different way in the world—to refuse the modes of power mostly taken for granted. A servant for justice was now at the center of imagination in the exilic community.

C. A Compassionate, Caring Servant
(Isaiah 42:2-4)

He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

According to verse 2, the Servant did not cry or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street. The Servant would rather bear witness with quiet, patient gentleness, confident that the nations would be drawn to God’s reign of justice—not by dint of human force but by attraction to embodied compassion and righteousness. The usual interpretation placed upon these words is that the Servant is not loud and condemnatory, like earlier prophets—or tyrannical and fierce, like earlier conquerors; but the Servant will work peaceably and gently to accomplish His mission. This chosen servant of God who brings justice will not be like the vainglorious worldly conquerors, who shout out who they are and make great announcements of their exploits. He will not be like the crusaders who thought they could do God’s work by fighting, nor would He be like some in the radicalized Muslim communities of our day who think holy war (jihad) is God’s will. This Servant/Messiah will not provoke bloodshed or hatred. He will bring wonderful relief that the Lord will provide for Him, thus forever banishing from His lips the cry of distress.

Verses 3-4 complete the prophet’s description of the Servant’s mission. He will not destroy or discourage those who are striving after righteousness, however feeble they may be. Neither would He fail or be discouraged until He has succeeded in establishing justice.
on earth. The breaking of reeds and snuffing out of wicks is imagery of warfare and death on a national scale. In the past, Yahweh recruited Israel to engage in holy war to defeat the Egyptians and wipe out the native Canaanites. However, this Servant is called to a completely different kind of ministry. When He encounters oppressed people, He is not to oppress them further but, rather, is to help them get back on their feet. He is to wield His God-given authority to care for those living on the margins of society. His will be a ministry of tenderness and love. Oh, that the world could see in our churches these kinds of servants when they reach out to us for help.

D. Yahweh’s Power and the Mandate of the Servant (Isaiah 42:5-9)

Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.

God is presented in verse 5 as the one who created the earth and who gives life to those who dwell upon it. Isaiah’s emphasis on the Creation motif was designed to strengthen Israel’s faith. If God, by His power, had created the heavens and the earth, then surely He could be trusted to sustain His people in every crisis. At the center of this unit, the Servant is called (verses 6-7). God had appointed her to be “a covenant to the people” and “a light to the nations.” People and nations are to be regarded as parallel expressions. Israel would be instrumental in bringing sight to the blind and liberty to the prisoners. Verse 8 suggests that those to whom she ministers are Gentiles who still worship and serve graven images. By means of her witness, however, they will turn from idolatry to the worship of Yahweh, thus experiencing true vision and true liberty.

Verse 8 declares God’s unwillingness to share His glory and praise with graven images. He is absolutely intolerable of all rivals. One indication of His superiority over idols is His ability to make predictions, to declare new things before they spring forth (verse 9). “New” is one of the key words in the second part of the book of Isaiah. Its meaning includes more than a simple renewal of the old and the familiar; it describes the emergence of that which was previously unknown and totally unexpected. The “new things” anticipated by the prophet included Cyrus’s conquest of Babylon, Israel’s release from bondage, and the inauguration of the eschatological age.

In this new pronouncement, Isaiah 42:5-9, is not directed to an audience with the Servant as its subject; rather, it is spoken to the Servant Himself. After God is identified as the universal creator, He gives assurance of His steadfast support of the Servant and then designates Him with two unique phrases that are worthy of belonging to the Isaianic body of literature: I have given you as a covenant to the people, and light to the nations (see verse 6).

The referent of people is most plausibly the same as that found in the preceding verse—namely, all the inhabitants of the earth.
When we recall the universal dimension to the servant’s task in the preceding unit, the phrase strikes us as entirely befitting the spirit of Second Isaiah’s vision. The community called and upheld by God, by discharging the patient faithful witness assigned to the servant, becomes the instrument through which the nations are drawn into the covenant relationship marked by God’s reign of justice. The parallel phrase “a light to the nations” amplifies this vision—that is, Israel was to become the instrument through which nations come to share the light of God’s salvation.

Moreover, this section makes clear that the order of God’s justice involves healing of human illness and the reform of an oppressive political structure. As God’s covenant with Israel took shape in the form of God’s actively getting involved in the plight of slaves in Egypt, so too the task of the servant people involves advocacy for those who suffer and are oppressed.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The later chapters of Isaiah contain a series of beautiful prophecies about a Servant who will bless the world. The Servant Song that opens Isaiah 42 is given in the context of demonstrating the omniscience and omnipotence of God. In the song, we learn about the promised Servant’s election, relationship to God, and ministry (see 42:1-17). After describing the wonderful things the Servant will do, the Lord testifies in stirring poetic language of His power, agency, and benevolence.

The identity of the Servant has been much debated. Some speculate that the servant is Isaiah himself. Others suggest that perhaps the servant is Cyrus, the great king who allowed the captive Jews to return to Judah. Still others view the servant as the house of Israel as a whole. In our day, we recognize how Jesus Christ fulfilled what was promised in the Servant Song in Isaiah 42. For example, as prophesied in the opening verse, we understand that the relationship between the Father and the Son is one of unity, love, trust, and support. We know that Christ did indeed serve the Father and that the Father upheld and supported the Son. We understand that God elected, or chose, the Son for the work and delighted in Him. We can see in Christ’s ministry how the Spirit of God truly was upon Him as He served. We know that His ministry blessed not only Israel but also the Gentiles.

We further understand how Christ’s moral ministry conformed to the description given in Isaiah 42. His ministry was relatively quiet and gentle: He did “not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street,” and his actions were so tender and quiet that even a delicate, bruised, or damaged reed was not broken thereby, nor was a feeble “smoking flax” or smoldering wick of a lamp quenched by His passing. Christ’s earthly coming was largely unnoticed by most of contemporary humankind. He was born to a humble woman in simple surroundings and raised in modest and quiet circumstances in an obscure village in a relatively unremarkable part of the ancient world. During His life, His teaching was mostly unknown beyond His own people and land, and His death drew little notice in the Roman Empire.

Likewise, we know that though His mortal ministry was relatively quiet and unnoticed, He did indeed establish truth and justice on
the earth and fulfilled His mission. We can confidently testify that He is our creator and the giver of life in fulfillment of God’s plan and covenant. Thus, in Jesus Christ, who is God’s perfect servant, one sees the type of ministry foretold by Isaiah. Compassion for bruised reeds and dim wicks marked our Lord’s ministry. He talked publicly with immoral women, socialized with sinners and tax collectors, exorcized demons, healed the lame, and gave sight to the blind. He was indeed a bringer of justice to the nations.

Matthew 9:36 (NIV) describes Him in these words: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.” Jesus, our perfect Servant, fulfilled what servant Israel was unable to do. It was not by human might or power that He completed His Father’s mission, but by the Holy Spirit. Unlike the nation of Israel, Jesus completes what He begins. He was able to announce, “It is finished” (John 19:30a). He succeeds! Mission accomplished.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, our prophet, priest, and king, enable us to be people of justice who bring balance, order, and fair treatment to all in the world. Give us the strength to live out our days pursuing peace, love, justice, and kindness to all. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(March 30–April 5, 2020)*

**God’s Just Servant**

**MONDAY,** March 30: “Faith Heroes Acted Justly” (Hebrews 11:29-35)

**TUESDAY,** March 31: “Your King Comes Humbly” (Matthew 21:1-11)

**WEDNESDAY,** April 1: “A House of Prayer for All Nations” (Mark 11:15-19)

**THURSDAY,** April 2: “Neglect Justice at Your Peril” (Luke 11:42-44)

**FRIDAY,** April 3: “Jesus, God’s Servant Messiah” (Matthew 12:15-21)

**SATURDAY,** April 4: “God Will Not Forsake the People” (Isaiah 42:10-17)

**SUNDAY,** April 5: “God’s Servant to Establish Justice Everywhere” (Isaiah 42:1-9)
RESURRECTION HOPE

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT TOPIC: Hope for a Better Life

YOUTH TOPIC: He Is Not Here

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Resurrection Hope

CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Alive!

DEVOTIONAL READING

Isaiah 53:4-12

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 16; 1 Corinthians 15

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45

ADULT KEY VERSES: 1 Corinthians 15:19-20

YOUTH KEY VERSE: Mark 16:6

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 16; 1 Corinthians 15

PRINT PASSAGE: Mark 16:1-9

KEY VERSE: Mark 16:6

1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45

—KJV

MOREOVER, BRETHREN, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 that he was buried, that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45

—NIV

NOW, BROTHERS and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?
13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
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.
21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:
43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:
44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.
45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People struggle with the probability and possibility of life after death. How can resurrection from death provide life that is different from what is experienced before death? In the books of 1 Corinthians and Mark, only life through the resurrection of Christ engenders hope for authentic justice.
LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Contrast the love of the woman with the disciples’ response to her actions.
2. Appreciate the woman’s preparation of Jesus for His coming death and burial.
3. Embrace the call to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ despite ridicule or resistance.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—In explaining the nature of the Resurrection, Paul faced the conflicting views among the Greeks, who readily embraced the immortality of the soul but had trouble with the notion of the body being raised (see Acts 17:32).
—In 15:35-44, Paul makes the point that there are many kinds of “bodies,” in which case the Resurrection body is a new, nonperishable body specially gifted from God (verses 45-48).
—In 1 Corinthians and Mark, only life through the resurrection of Christ engenders hope for authentic justice.
—Paul’s theology in verses 12-58 is based on the historical facts and eyewitnesses in verses 3-8.
—Paul reminds the church of the “good news” that is the foundation of their faith (see 15:1).
—Jesus Christ died and was buried and raised from the grave to give us a second chance (see 15:3-4).
—Paul realized that some believers’ faith was challenged when they said there is no resurrection of the dead. If one believes there is no resurrection of the dead, then this means that Jesus Christ could not have been raised from the dead at all.
—Death’s power over a sinful humanity has been destroyed by Jesus Christ, who gives all that believe on Him, whether living or dead, the victory over death (see 15:12).
—As Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, the same will happen to those who have died believing in Him (see 15:20).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—At the end of the Sabbath, three women came to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus’ body.
—While on their way to the tomb, the women wondered who would roll away the stone at the entrance.
—Arriving at the tomb, the women were surprised to find the stone rolled away.
—The women were further surprised by a young man dressed in white who told them that Jesus had risen.
—The women were shown the place where Jesus had lain and were told to go and tell Jesus’ disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Written around AD 55, Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians plunges readers into a conversation well underway. The apostle has apparently spent considerable time with the community, and the letter refers to various word-of-mouth reports about their conduct, as well as previous correspondence from both Paul and the congregation itself (see 1 Corinthians 7:1). First Corinthians, then, presents Paul’s side of a lively, ongoing exchange about a range of topical concerns—from sexuality
to meal practices to worship life—all of which he addresses in light of his message about the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Reestablished as a Roman colony in 44 BC, the city had emerged as a thriving melting pot where social mobility and economic opportunity fostered vigorous competition in the marketplace of goods, ideas, and even physical prowess. Within such a culture, the Corinthian Christians quite naturally found themselves divided along lines of apostolic loyalty (1:12), human erudition (8:1), economic status (11:19-21), and religious expression (chapters 12–14). Paul attempts to situate the Corinthian Christians, including many former Gentiles, within the story of Israel, which for Paul culminates in the Christ event—the inbreaking activity of God that finds its culmination in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Most of the sections of this epistle have begun with a clear reference to the reasons that had led Paul to write them—news, for example, received from Chloe’s household, or questions asked in a Corinthian letter. No such reference is made in chapter 15, and it is not until we get to verse 12 that we learn that there were some in Corinth who held the view that there was no resurrection of the dead. Such thoughts were no doubt coming from some of the Corinthian Christians who thought they were more enlightened or Spirit-filled than others. Characterized as the “spiritual ones,” they began to argue that there was no resurrection of the dead. In his argument for the resurrection of the dead, Paul attempts to pull the Corinthian spiritual people into his own eschatological orientation, to fix their eyes on the same goal toward which his whole mission is driven. His argument unfolds with a definite rhetorical strategy. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, he tries to establish a common ground with the Corinthians as a reference point for the rest of his argument. In verses 12-14ff, he argues the reality of the resurrection of the dead, and then in verses 20-23, he argues that Jesus Christ Himself, with His victory over the grave, is the first fruits of those who have died.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Cephas: a surname equivalent to the Greek name “Peter.” Originally named Simon, Peter was a Galilean fisherman who was one of the original twelve disciples. The name “Peter” is the Greek word for “rock.”

Paul: Paul the apostle was the most effective missionary of early Christianity. He is also regarded as the Christian church’s first theologian. Known as “Saul” within the Aramaic-speaking community, the apostle was usually called “Paul,” the Roman form of his name.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Crucified (Mark 16:6 [Background Scripture])—Greek: stauroo (stow-ro’-o): fixed to the cross; drove down stakes; destroyed; mortified.

Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12)—Greek: anastasis (an-as’-tas-is): a raising to life again.

Vain (1 Corinthians 15:2)—Greek: eiké (i-kay’): without just cause, reason, purpose; empty.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Basis of Christian Hope—the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Resurrection of the Dead
      (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Basis of Christian Hope—the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The importance of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians can hardly be overemphasized. It contains the earliest extended written account of the resurrection of Jesus and the earliest preserved Christian testimony concerning the Resurrection. Apparently, there were some Corinthian Christians who denied both the resurrection of the body and the Resurrection as a future event. In reply to them, Paul insists upon the past resurrection of Christ in a transformed (new) body and the future resurrection of believers in transformed (new) bodies.

Paul fears that the Corinthians who deny the resurrection of the dead have abandoned the most fundamental conviction of the Christian faith and that their believing is therefore in vain (verse 2). Because it deals with this life-and-death issue, 1 Corinthians 15 is a profound witness to the content of the Gospel. What the Corinthians who were calling the Resurrection into question found most objectionable about Paul’s teaching was, in fact, the bodily resurrection. Paul’s talk of a future resurrection of the dead bodies sounded to them like superstitious foolishness of popular legends.

That notwithstanding, Paul insists that the fundamental logic of Christian proclamation demands belief in the resurrection of the dead; therefore, Christian hope necessarily affirms rather than rejects the body. It is of great importance to remember that the Corinthians were denying not the resurrection of Jesus Christ but the resurrection of the body. What Paul was insistent upon was that if the Corinthian Christians denied the resurrection of the body, they thereby denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ and therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality. To proclaim the resurrection of Christ is to declare God’s triumph over death and, therefore, the meaningfulness of embodied life. That is why, according to Paul, our future hope must be for a transformed body in the resurrection, not an escape from the embodied state. Paul believed that Jesus Himself was raised from the dead by an act of God. Both faith and history are at the heart of Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ.
B. Biblical Background

Paul has left some of his best wine till last. His discourse on the Resurrection is one of the church’s great treasures. But as the pearl in the oyster grows because of an irritant, this chapter owes its origin to a serious heresy embraced by some members of the Corinthian church: the denial of the bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12). Apparently, some had become so self-satisfied with their spiritual riches that they thought there was no longer anything more worth waiting for. As early as 1 Corinthians 1:7, Paul had reminded them that they still lived in the tension between the now and the not yet—that they should still be eagerly looking forward to “the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This deficient eschatology on the part of “some” (verse 12) in Corinth may have been taken from the views of some in the Graeco-Roman world who claimed that the Resurrection had already occurred. Puffed up with their spiritual riches in Christ, such people failed to appreciate “the meaningfulness of the embodied life” here and now. Confident that they were already replete, rich, and royal in the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 4:8), they had lost their Christian hope, a hope that does not center on the spirit’s sloughing off the shackles of the body (as in traditional Greek thought) but on its being clothed with the glorious resurrection body. Their loss of this hope did not mean that they had already lost their Christian faith and salvation, but it certainly posed that threat. The false doctrine, like pernicious leaven, could infect them to the extent that Paul would have to say, “You believed in vain” (see verse 14).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Resurrection of the Dead

(1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.

Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians of the form in which he had originally proclaimed the Gospel to them. The language of “handing on” and “receiving” that he uses in verses 1 and 3 is the same terminology employed earlier in describing the transmission of the Lord’s Supper tradition. The repetition of this language indicates that Paul is quoting an early confessional formula probably dating to the time surrounding Paul’s own call to apostleship. He goes back to this bedrock confession in order to make the point that “the resurrection of the dead” is not merely some idiosyncratic speculation that can be set aside by those who claim more sophisticated knowledge; rather, it is a matter “of first importance” (verse 3, NIV). It is an integral part of the “good news” (euaggelion) on which those who believe take their stand.

The resurrection of Jesus and His subsequent appearance to a long list of witnesses is at the heart of the Gospel proclaimed in the church; without this foundational truth, there
would be no church—because there would be no Gospel. Those who hold fast to this truth are saved by it. Without this belief, says Paul, the whole of their proclamation is a sham and their faith is in vain.

B. The Eyewitnesses to the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus
(1 Corinthians 15:6-8)

After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

The traditional confessional formula ends with verse 5. In verse 6, Paul adds additional witnesses in support of the claim that Christ was raised from the dead, which is the major point that he wants to emphasize in the confessional formula. Not only did Cephas (Peter) and the Twelve see the risen Lord, but also, so did more than five hundred others. Paul’s note that most of them are still alive (verse 6) is clearly calculated to provide further evidential support for the resurrection of Jesus; and anyone who was disposed to be skeptical would find a formidable gallery of witnesses waiting to testify that they had seen Him alive. This shows that Paul did not think of the resurrection of Jesus as some sort of ineffable truth beyond history; rather, it was an event that had occurred in the immediate past, an event for which historical eyewitness testimony was readily available. The inclusion of James (the brother of Jesus who became a leader of the Jerusalem church) and of “all the apostles” extends the range of witnesses even further. Paul culminates his list of eyewitnesses with his own personal testimony that he himself had seen the risen Lord. Here, he is claiming to have come face-to-face with Jesus, the Messiah, whom God had raised up. To cap off the list of eyewitnesses, Paul adds his own name to the list of those who attest to the truth of the news that Christ was raised from the dead.

C. The Denial of the Resurrection of the Dead Negates the Gospel
(1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

The problem that evoked Paul’s recitation of the kerygma is at last disclosed specifically in verse 12 (NRSV): “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” Paul now explains why he has set forth the fundamentals of the faith in such detail. While he and his coworkers were preaching Christ as risen from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:4), some of the Corinthians were promoting an idea that runs directly counter to the apostles’ message. Their skepticism about the Resurrection was typical of Greek culture. Those on the Athenian Areopagus had mocked Paul for preaching the Resurrection (Acts 17:32). Traditionally, their Greek poets, philosophers, and historians had taught that there was no hope of a resurrection. Commonly, the Greeks believed that at death, only a person’s soul was taken by the ferryman across the River Styx to the gloomy world of the shades. This animistic idea that only the soul survives death in a shadowy,
unhappy existence has been common to most non-Christian cultures, even highly advanced cultures like those of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece. Only Christianity has been brightened by the hope of the resurrection of the body.

D. Jesus Christ, the First Fruits of Those Who Have Died

(1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.

Christ has been raised from the dead (verse 20). This is a ringing affirmation of all that Paul has been trying to say in this chapter. The Corinthians should never doubt this basic tenet of their creed, nor should they doubt its implications for their own resurrection—for the risen Christ is not the only one who would rise; He is the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (verse 20). Just as the Israelites brought the sheaf of first fruits to the Lord on the “Sunday” after Passover as a sign that the whole harvest belonged to Him, so Christ’s resurrection was the pledge that all who had fallen asleep in Him would be physically raised as He was. Although the term “firstfruits” has a rich Old Testament history, Paul’s interest is not in its biblical overtones—which have to do with consecrating the first fruits of the harvest to God—but in its function as a metaphor for the first of the harvest serving as a kind of guarantee for the full harvest. Thus, the metaphor functions as a down payment or earnest money of the Spirit. Both serve as a present pledge on the part of God for the final eschatological (end-time) harvest or payment. Christ is God’s first fruits, which is to say He is God’s own pledge that there will be a full harvest of those who will be raised from the dead. By calling Christ “firstfruits,” Paul is asserting by way of metaphor that the resurrection of the believing dead is absolutely inevitable; it has been guaranteed by God Himself.

Through one man’s disobedience, the tragedy of human suffering and death had become the common lot of all (verses 21-22). It was fitting, then, that it would be through the obedience of another man, Jesus, our second Adam, that resurrection and life would come to all people. Later, Paul would spell this out more fully in this epistle to the Romans (5:15-21). Here, he sketches the Adam–Christ typology in the briefest terms. Just as Adam’s sin and death affected not just himself but all humanity, so the Corinthians needed to appreciate that Christ’s resurrection was not only for His own benefit; through this Man (Jesus) the resurrection from the dead had become the destiny of all believers—for just as Adam was the head of the old humanity, so that his fall left a legacy of sin and death to all, so Christ stands as head of the new humanity to be made alive in Him.

This latter clause in 1 Corinthians 15:22 (“so in Christ all will be made alive”) must not be understood in a universalistic sense. Only those who belong to Christ through baptism and by faith will receive the gift of resurrection to eternal life. Paul goes on to encourage Christians to be patient (verse 23). The end is not yet; their loved ones must still rest in the grave for a time. But everything will surely happen in its proper order. Christ’s resurrection is
the great first step, the first fruits holding the promise of everything else.

E. The Glories that Await Our Resurrected Bodies
(1 Corinthians 15:42-45)

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

In this section, Paul produces an impressive piece of visionary preaching, extolling the glories that await us. He is seeking to make the resurrection of the dead seem appealing rather than appalling. This section is dominated by these questions: “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what bodies do they come?’” “‘Foolish man,’ Paul declares, ‘the only way a seed that you plant can live is for it to die. Death precedes life’” (see 15:35-36). Paul is not speaking as a modern botanist who is aware of the power of germination in a seed. He means that a seed is buried, and something different—a plant—comes from it. A human body is buried and in the resurrection, it becomes another kind of body. Paul is not emphasizing continuity at this point but difference. You plant one thing and something else comes up. The body that is buried is at best only a bare kernel when compared with the body that is raised from the dead.

Paul sets forth four antitheses to show the difference between the body that dies and the body that is raised from the dead. First, the body that dies is perishable, or subject to decay, because it is part of a world that is subject to corruption (verse 42). Second, the body that is buried is characterized by dishonor or humiliation and wretchedness—while the body that is raised is marked by glory and splendor (verse 43). Third, the body that dies is stamped by weakness, physical and spiritual, and is the victim of death—while the body that is raised is marked by power or strength, because it will be given by Him who has the might to raise the dead.

Fourth, the body that dies is a physical body—subject to the limitations of the mortal creature—while the body that is raised is a spiritual body animated by the Spirit of God, and supernatural because it is fit for life with God, who is Spirit. In verse 44a, Paul explicitly calls what is sown a “body” and contrasts the “natural body” that is sown with all its limitations to the supernatural body with which we will be vested in the resurrection. The risen body will no longer be subject to the earthly limitations and mortality that result from the Fall, not to the tug-of-war with the sinful flesh, but will be wholly enlivened and pervaded by the Holy Spirit.

Whereas some in Corinth were denying the resurrection of the body, Paul now assures them that just as surely as there is a natural body, so surely will there be a spiritual body (verse 44). Scriptural proof for this statement he finds in Genesis 2:7, where the Lord God breathes into humankind’s nostrils the breath of life, thus animating the body He had formed from the ground—and man “became a living being.” After the Genesis citation, Paul balances the sentence with words of his own composition, referring to Christ as “the last Adam” and the “life-giving Spirit” (verse
45b). No other human being will appear after Jesus with the same significance for the whole human race. He stands as the second and last Adam, the Head of the new humanity, as the first Adam headed the old humanity. Whereas the first Adam was merely a “life-receiving” human, the last Adam is the “life-giving” Son of God. As His risen and ascended body is enlivened by the Spirit, so He will pour out the life-giving Spirit on the bodies of believers.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In today’s lesson, we are rehearing the faith of the church from the lips of St. Paul. We hear of the redemptive death, of the resurrection of Jesus, and of the appearances of Jesus which created a community of believers. This community in turn proclaimed this death and resurrection to other believers, just as Paul here is proclaiming it to the Christians. This is the Gospel through which we also, some two thousand years later, are being saved. The very meaning of our lives and our destiny lies in this proclamation.

On this great and wonderful day, something happened. We hold this in faith. Jesus is alive, body and soul. As risen, He draws us to one another so that as a community we can give meaning in language to the resurrection event.

Although death will one day come to all, Jesus gives us the hope and the courage to face death. Paul tells us to hold firm to the future hope of God’s ultimate triumph.

In the risen body, Paul wants us to see the power of the glory of the kingdom. This is what Jesus’ death and resurrection are all about. It happened to Jesus first. It will happen to all of us. In the risen body we see God’s victory over sin. This risen body are nothing less than “a new creation,” as the apocalyptic writers would write. Only God can bring this about.

PRAYER

Eternal God, we give You thanks on this day for raising from the dead our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our hope and trust is that Jesus is indeed the first fruits of them that sleep and that one day You will lift our bodies from the grave to life anew. Help us to live faithfully each day into that eschatological reality of a new body in Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(April 6-12, 2020)

Resurrection Hope
MONDAY, April 6: “Women Find Jesus’ Tomb Empty” (Mark 16:1-8)
TUESDAY, April 7: “Saul Meets Jesus on the Damascus Road” (Acts 9:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, April 8: “The Free Gift of Grace and Hope” (Romans 5:12-17)
THURSDAY, April 9: “The Dead in Christ Will Rise” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
FRIDAY, April 10: “All Things Are under God’s Control” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)
SATURDAY, April 11: “Victory through Our Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)
SUNDAY, April 12: “All Are Made Alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45)
April 19, 2020

INJUSTICE WILL BE PUNISHED

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/Young Adult Topic: Justice Prevails
Youth Topic: Justice Always Wins!

CHILDREN

General Lesson Title: Injustice Will Be Punished
Children’s Topic: Punished for Doing Wrong

DEVOOTIONAL READNG

Luke 19:11-26

ADULT/YOUTH

Background Scripture: Esther 3; 5; 7
Print Passage: Esther 7:1-10
Adult Key Verse: Esther 7:10
Youth Key Verse: Esther 7:3

CHILDREN

Background Scripture: Esther 3; 5; 7
Print Passage: Esther 7:1-10
Key Verse: Esther 7:5

Esther 7:1-10—KJV
SO THE king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.
2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.
3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please thee, let me live for my petition, and spare me, and my people, at my request:
4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king’s damage.

Esther 7:1-10—NIV
SO THE king and Haman went to Queen Esther’s banquet,
2 and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, “Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”
3 Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request.
4 “For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.”
5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?
6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.
7 And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.
8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.
9 And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.
10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?”
6 Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.
7 The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.
8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, “Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?” As soon as the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.
9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, “A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman’s house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.” The king said, “Impale him on it!”
10 So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Ignoble people often seem to attain great power and wealth. What evidence is there that people will receive the recompense their evil deeds deserve? The story of Esther’s triumph over Haman provides assurance that evil does not prevail.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explicate the story of Esther as a triumph of justice.
2. Sense that treachery will not win.
3. Commit to acting justly in every situation with the assurance that good triumphs over evil.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Claim has been made that Esther is a religious book, for even though the name of God is not mentioned, God’s divine presence and providence are evident. And since the religious practice of fasting is used, the practice of prayer is presumed from this—among other things. The role of God is spelled out more specifically in deuterocanonical literature written later.
—Haman boasts before his friends, which makes
his eventual downfall more ironic (see Esther 5:9-14).

—King Ahasuerus (verse 5) was the Persian king Xerxes I (486–464 BC).

—Harbona (verse 9) is one of the seven eunuchs sent by the king to summon Queen Vashti to his banquet (in 1:10).

—Haman plotted to destroy a whole group of people and deceive the king out of ego and hatred for Mordecai (see 3:8-9).

—Esther never responded to the king’s offer without preparation. Esther’s preparation was essential for dealing with Haman’s threat against her and her people (see 5:8).

—Esther realized the importance of having favor with the king in order to protect herself and her people (see 7:3).

—We must be careful not to set traps for others.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Queen Esther arranged a dinner with the king (Xerxes) and Haman.

—King Xerxes invited Esther to voice her request and it would be granted.

—Esther’s request was for her people to be spared from destruction and annihilation.

—When the king asked Esther who was responsible for putting her people in such a predicament, she identified Haman as the culprit.

—Harbona revealed Haman’s plan to hang Mordecai.

—The same gallows Haman had prepared to hang Mordecai was used to hang Haman.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The book of Esther is set in the Jewish diaspora of the Persian Empire, during the reign of Ahasuerus, who is to be identified with Emperor Xerxes (486–465 BCE). It is probable that the book, set in the Persian diaspora, was written there as well. The characters in the book evince no interest in the Judean homeland—not even, most strikingly, in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Rather, the plot centers around the court in Susa, where Esther and Mordecai have made their lives. The author is knowledgeable about the court of Susa and its immediate surroundings, as well as Persian court customs; but his knowledge about outlying provinces is quite hazy. Hence, the book of Esther was most likely composed in the eastern diaspora of the Persian Empire for the Jews who resided there.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The setting of the book is the Persian Empire, with most of the action occurring in the city of Susa. Susa served as the administrative capital of the empire and the winter residence of the king. On the deposition of Queen Vashti, Esther—kin of Mordecai—was chosen from all of the beautiful maidens of the empire to become the new queen. In her favored position she used her charms upon the king—though not without personal risk—to frustrate the plot of the grand vizier Haman, who out of hatred for Mordecai had determined to exterminate all Jews of the empire on a single day, the thirteenth of Adar. On account of Esther’s intervention, as well as of a series of singular coincidences, the king ordered the execution of Haman on the very gallows prepared for Mordecai, and elevated Mordecai, the Jew, to the rank of grand vizier. In this capacity, Mordecai sent out a new royal edict which counteracted Haman’s previous though irrevocable decree, and allowed the Jews to slaughter their enemies on the very day Haman had determined by “lot” for their destruction. To commemorate Jewish deliverance, the feast of Purim (“lots”) was instituted as an annual, two-day festival on the authority of letters sent out by Mordecai and Esther.
PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ahasuerus: king, generally identified as Xerxes and described in the book of Esther as ruling from India to Ethiopia. After banishing his queen, Vashti, he sought a replacement—selecting Esther.

Esther: the name of both the biblical book and its heroine. The book serves as a festal legend for the Feast of Purim, the celebration of the deliverance of Jews of the eastern Diaspora from persecution.

Haman: the villain in the book of Esther, who was appointed prime minister by the Persian ruler Ahasuerus. He plotted to destroy all Jews when Mordecai, the Jew, refused to prostrate before him.

Harbona: a eunuch of Ahasuerus, king of Persia. He suggested that Haman be hanged on the very gallows he had made for Mordecai. A eunuch is a castrated male, often accorded a high governmental position such as chamberlain of a sovereign or royal harem.

Mordecai: one of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. He is the hero of the book of Esther.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Eunuchs (verse 9)—Hebrew: saris (sa-reese’): “chamberlains” (KJV); court officers.

Gallows (verse 9)—Hebrew: ets (ats): planks; sticks; wood; it is a structure on which to hang a criminal; “pole” (NIV).

Petition (verse 2)—Hebrew: sheelah or shelab (sheh-ay-law’): request; a thing asked for.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Justice in the Face of Persecution
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Unfair Treatment and a Convincing Argument
      (Esther 7:1-4)
   B. God’s Justice Is Slow but Sure
      (Esther 7:5-6)
   C. The Demands of Justice
      (Esther 7:7)
   D. Haman’s Fall and God’s Justice
      (Esther 7:8-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Justice in the Face of Persecution

   The Hebrew book of Esther is an exciting, fast-paced story that has captured the imaginations of Jews over the centuries, although it has been less well-received by the Christian church. It contains all the elements of a popular romance novel: a young and beautiful heroine; a wicked, scheming villain; a wise, older father figure; and an inept and laughable ruler. In the story, good triumphs, evil is destroyed, and all ends happily. It is no surprise, then, that the book of Esther was so popular that it made its way into the Jewish canon by popular acclaim. Beneath its lighthearted surface, however, the book of Esther explores darker themes: racial hatred, the threat of genocide, and the evil of overweening pride and vanity. These layers of meaning make this book a worthwhile object of study.

   Although enjoying unwavering popularity among Jews throughout most of its existence, the book of Esther has come into its share of theological criticism. The reasons for this are
the absence of religious elements in the book. The book does not mention God even once. In addition, there is no prayer, no mention of the Temple, and no clear indication of religious activity on the part of Esther or Mordecai. While it is true that the book does not mention the name of God, it has a definite theology of its own—for throughout the book there is an arrow pointing to justice, indicating that the faithfulness of the covenant people is a duty whether it pays or not. Mordecai does not permit Esther to rest in peace when the very existence of her people is threatened, nor to enjoy her life in luxury when her kin await extinction. Mordecai himself shows almost a Daniel-like courage in refusing to pay homage to Haman. The obvious reason is that a good Jew can worship the covenant God only. To be faithful to Him means to be faithful to His people.

Despite the absence of the divine name, however, many scholars do find the book of Esther to reflect the presence of God. God is viewed as a character in the story, though one who evidently prefers to remain anonymous. Yet, whether one finds in the story an active deity or not, an active humanity is certainly present. Whether God is perceived to be present or not, what is clear is that human beings are called to oppose the evil they see around them and that they can be assured that the unseen hand of God will be involved in their affairs.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Esther reflects the situation of the Diaspora, and one of the reasons it was produced was certainly to address the needs of the Jewish community living outside of Palestine. The story is set after the Exile (see 2:6) and is part of the post-Exilic period of Israelite history, when many Jews were living away from their homeland of Judah. Unlike the roughly contemporaneous works of Ezra and Nehemiah, the book of Esther does not suggest that the goal of proper Jewish living is to return to Judah; instead, it promotes the idea that Jews can live personally fulfilling, and even socially successful, lives in exile from Palestine. It addresses a post-exilic crisis of identity: who are we, if we do not live in Judah, but also do not even want to? In this way, the Esther story resembles other biblical stories concerned with Diaspora living. The message is that when living in a foreign environment, one need not totally separate from the dominant culture but become involved in it. With such involvement, it is possible even to become politically well-placed and economically prosperous in a foreign society. Furthermore, from the foreign perspective, Jews are shown to be not detrimental to that regime but beneficial to it. The story provides an example, especially in the figure Esther, of how Jews can succeed: rather than standing against a foreign system, they should choose to work within it. Yet, the story also reflects the unpredictability that post-exilic Jews experienced as a minority culture, constantly in a position of vulnerability.

The first three chapters of Esther provide the setting for today’s lesson. They open with a party at King Ahasuerus’s court in Persia that goes on for months (Esther 1:1-9). This first party is the largest and most ostentatious and it ends in the banishment of Queen Vashti when she refuses to come into the king’s presence. The second chapter introduces a search for a
new queen and brings on the scene Mordecai and Esther, his cousin. Esther becomes a candidate as a replacement for Queen Vashti and, by luck and skill, finds favor with the king, so that he makes her queen. Directly following Esther’s triumph and the party given in her favor is an account of Mordecai’s discovery of a plot against the king’s life. This becomes known to the king via Esther, and the villains are hanged. The second party in the book thus goes accompanied by an execution (Esther 2:23). Chapter 3 introduces the fourth main character of the book in the person of Haman. Haman is elevated to a powerful position at the court. Mordecai immediately crosses him, and Haman is thus provoked to plan the annihilation not just of Mordecai but of all his people (Esther 3:1-6). This plot is set in motion by Haman’s skillful manipulation of his royal master, and the decree of the impending destruction is announced in all the provinces (Esther 3:7-15). The scene concludes with the city in turmoil (Esther 3:15).

In chapters 4–7, Esther is persuaded by Mordecai to plead with the king for her people, and she makes her intercession successfully. At her next dinner (chapter 7), Esther reveals her concern and points an accusing finger at Haman, who meets his end on the gallows he had set up for Mordecai. Esther and Mordecai are given Haman’s former position and property. The truth had finally come home to the king of Persia that Haman, his prime minister, was a dreadful man. When it was pointed out that Haman had built gallows seventy-five-feet high, to murder the man who had saved the king’s life, Xerxes needed no time to deliberate. The king said, “Hang him on it!” (see verse 9). So justice was dispensed immediately.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Unfair Treatment and a Convincing Argument (Esther 7:1-4)

SO THE king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king’s damage.

On the second day of their banquet, the king invites Esther once again to make known to him any petition she has. This time she does not hold back but lays her request before the king. She begs for her life and for those of her people (verse 3). Her speech is relatively long—the longest speech Esther has made so far. The moment for which she had been preparing had arrived, and Esther must be as succinct, as clear, and as polite as possible. It is at this banquet on the second day that Esther has promised to tell the king what has been bothering her. It was not an easy situation for her. Just how do you tell a king that his handpicked prime minister is rotten to the core? But we have seen how Esther was a woman of faith and courage, and how she had shown wisdom and humility in preparing an opportunity.
Esther’s petition follows an interesting Near Eastern tradition of bargaining. If Esther and the other Jews had been merely sold away as slaves, she would not have complained (verse 4). But since they are slated to be annihilated, she must be permitted to beg for her life.

B. God’s Justice Is Slow but Sure
(Esther 7:5-6)

Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

The king is taken aback by Esther’s petition, unaware of the ethnic identity of his beloved queen. The story does not indicate that he recognized the connection between her petition and the royal edict machinated by Haman, for he asked, “Who is he that would presume to do this to you?” (see verse 5). Esther only had to point across the table, for it was none other than wicked Haman who was the perpetrator of this scheme. The judgment on Haman was obvious before it was pronounced. In fact, there was no need for the guilty verdict to be pronounced. There was no inquiry; the king did not ask Haman if he had anything to say. And there was no protest from Haman. He knew he was finished as soon as Esther named him. Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. That moment was a steep learning curve for Haman. Only then, when Esther stood up for her people and pointed him out, did he realize that Esther was a Jew (verse 6). Only then did it dawn on him what he had done to Xerxes. Now all his lies and malice returned to haunt him. Haman was terrified, and what terror it must have been.

C. The Demands of Justice
(Esther 7:7)

And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

The king got up in a rage, left his wine, and went out into the palace garden. He had become so overwhelmed by anger that he needed to take a stroll—time to cool off. Why did he leave the room and go into the garden? Is it because he was presented with an unhappy choice between Haman, his favorite, and Esther, his queen? Or, was he bewildered about what to do? This king, remember, never acted without advice, and now his advisors were pitted against each other. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life (verse 7).

The one who so callously plotted the deaths of thousands was now a sniveling coward begging a woman for mercy. He, who resented Mordecai for not bowing before him, was now crawling before a Jew. He was begging for his life from one of the many whose lives he would have taken. In doing so, there was no indication of any apology, no confession of criminality, and no recognition of the truth of the charges against him and of the penalty demanded by justice. There is nothing that even resembled the traitor Judas Iscariot’s “I have sinned.” All we see from Haman is a fawning, sniveling coward who wants to avoid justice, afraid to die. Haman had no dignity, not even in death.

D. Haman’s Fall and God’s Justice
(Esther 7:8-10)

Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen
Upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

The supreme irony is that Haman’s impassioned plea for mercy actually signed his death warrant. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, he saw Haman falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, “Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?” (verse 8, NIV). The point is that protocols for a harem were very strict in the ancient Near East. It was improper for Haman to remain in the room alone with the queen when the king had departed. No one knew that better than Haman, and he surely would have left with the king had he not been so desperate. By approaching her as she reclined on her couch, this opportunist had gone too far. The phrase “thrown himself on the couch” presumably means that he flung himself on her mercy; he collapsed facedown at her feet. But from where the king stood on his way back from the garden, it looked like a sexual assault. The minute the king makes the accusation, it is all over; the face of Haman is covered, gesturing humiliation and mourning. Who the “they” are is unclear; it was probably the ever-present silent servants. Those servants were again ready to move matters along by providing useful information.

By covering Haman’s face, the king’s servants did not just anticipate the capital punishment about to come, but one of them even anticipated the method. Harbona, a eunuch, told the king about the new high-rise structure in town. “Then Harbona, . . . said, A gallows seventy-five-feet high stands by Haman’s house. He had it made for Mordecai who spoke up to help the king” (see verse 9). So, Xerxes took the hint as good advice. The king said, “Hang him on it.” So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided. What poetic justice. What a good illustration of the truth of Proverbs 26:27: “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it” (NIV).

“Hang him!” And with those words, justice was done. But it is more than justice here. Remember, this is a covenant issue. It is a vindication of Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman: “When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25:19, NIV). Mordecai did not forget, and though he had no authority to execute any kind of punishment on his enemies, Xerxes did, and God arranged the circumstances so that it was carried out. All praise to God for His faithfulness, His justice, and His governing over all history.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is likely to seem at first sight an anomaly to seek for the theology of a book which does not even mention the name of God. This fact has long caused offense. The only other Old Testament book of which this is true is the Song of Songs. The lack of the mention
of God’s name notwithstanding, it is easy to see why the book of Esther is valued by Jews and Christians alike. People who have known suffering throughout the ages can find in this book the hope that they do indeed have a future. Although God was not overtly mentioned, His word was not direct, and His face not revealed, still behind the veil of activity in this book God’s providence toward His people upheld them against any and all adversaries they encountered.

There are two conflicting worldviews in the book of Esther. One view is represented by Haman, who believes in chance-fate and thinks that on this basis he can annihilate God’s people. The other worldview lays stress on human initiative. Mordecai urged Esther to approach the king; if she failed to make this move, dangerous as it was, her own life and the lives of her people could be wiped out. Thus, human responsibility continues to be prominent, but it is not isolated from the conviction that events are part of a pattern for which only the Lord God could be responsible. True, God is not named. But when Mordecai says to Esther, “And who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” he is revealing his belief in an overruling of history by a force more powerful than human history and machinations. Esther’s choice as queen had been no random chance, but the work of the director of world affairs so that through her a great act of deliverance could be carried out. As for the Jews, for whom Esther sought protection, despite the laws intended for their downfall, they were permitted to live and put to death their foes. The tables were turned on Haman’s plot; retributive justice was seen to be done. Human agents were the unwitting instruments of one who was the unseen ruler of the universe. In the end, God is going to win.

PRAYER
Heavenly Father, we thank You this day for watching over us. We are confident that Your guiding hand has protected us from dangers seen and unseen. Even when we have walked in the shadow of death, You have been present to keep hurt and harm away from us. Help us love those who would do us harm, and forgive those who go out of their way to hurt us. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(April 13-19, 2020)

Injustice Will Be Punished
MONDAY, April 13: “Mordecai Refuses to Bow to Haman” (Esther 3:1-6)
TUESDAY, April 14: “Haman Sets a Decree to Destroy the Jews” (Esther 3:7-11)
WEDNESDAY, April 15: “Haman Builds Gallows to Hang Mordecai” (Esther 5:9-14)
THURSDAY, April 16: “The Decree against the Jews Is Struck Down” (Esther 8:3-8, 16-17)
FRIDAY, April 17: “Festival of Purim Established” (Esther 9:18-23, 29-32)
SATURDAY, April 18: “Mordecai Advances Welfare of the Jews” (Esther 10:1-3)
SUNDAY, April 19: “Esther’s Plea and Haman’s Punishment” (Esther 7:1-10)
THE LORD LOVES JUSTICE

**Adult/Youth**

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** What Goes Around Comes Around

**Youth Topic:** He’s Given Me a New Name!

**Devotional Reading**

Isaiah 42:1-9

**Background Scripture:** Isaiah 61:8–62:12

**Print Passage:** Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a

**Adult Key Verse:** Isaiah 61:8

**Youth Key Verse:** Isaiah 62:2

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** A Just King

**Children’s Topic:** Justice Is Done!

**Background Scripture:** 1 Kings 3:1-28

**Print Passage:** 1 Kings 3:16-28

**Key Verse:** 1 Kings 3:28

Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a —KJV

8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

11 For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a —NIV

8 “For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 “Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed.”

10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.
2 And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.
3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.
4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate.

2 The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
3 You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
4 No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: When people feel helpless and angry, they seek help from others. What hope is there that the conditions of the powerless will be addressed? Solomon’s wise decision confirms that God loves justice, and Isaiah affirms that the righteous will be vindicated.

Lesson Objectives
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explicate the hope of vindication for the righteous and faithful.
2. Long for salvation and restoration for God’s people.
3. Commit to making just decisions in everyday life.

Age-Level Points to be Emphasized
Teachers of Adults and Youth
—Many times in Isaiah (as here in 61:8), God backs up His promises by pointing to His character (see Isaiah 41:13; 42:6-8; 43:3, 15; 44:6, 24-28; 46:8-11; 48:17; 49:26).
—The speaker in 61:10-11 is likely intended to be the Messiah but could also be interpreted as either Isaiah or Zion.
—Zion had first considered herself “forsaken” (Isaiah 49:14), then God calls her forsaken (see Isaiah 60:15), though only for a “brief moment” (Isaiah 54:7). Here (see 62:4), God completely reverses the situation for Zion.

—New Testament uses of the bridegroom-bride imagery for the relationship between God (or Christ) and the church include Ephesians 5:25-27 and Revelation 21:2, 9.
—The “sentinels” of 62:6 were some sort of prophetic guardians who interceded for Zion while on the lookout for the fulfillment of God’s promises. These have been interpreted to be either priests, prophets, or some kind of angelic beings.
—Isaiah 62:10-12 once again emphasizes Israel’s role as a light to the nations and God’s invitation to all nations to become part of God’s people.

Teachers of Children
—Two women claiming the same baby came to King Solomon for justice.
—One of the women accused the other of switching her dead baby for the other woman’s living baby.
—King Solomon was faced with what seemed to be a “no-win” situation.

—At face value, the king’s solution seemed to also be a “no-win” solution.
—The effect of the king’s solution resulted in revealing the truth.
—King Solomon was widely known for his wisdom.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Chapter 42, which is part of the last part of this book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66), was believed to have been written near the end of Isaiah’s life around 681 BC. This chapter is a part of the book that is filled with consolation and hope as the writer unfolds God’s promise of future blessings through the Messiah.

Across the years Isaiah has come to be known as “the prince of the prophets.” A part of the reason for this title is the possibility that the prophet was a member of the royal family. While there is no indisputable evidence of this, the easy access to the kings that he seemed to enjoy may point in this direction. But the real basis of the claim is the nature of the book known by Isaiah’s name. There is a majesty in the book that sets it off from almost any other in the Bible. It contains an unparalleled sweep of theology, all the way from creation to the new heavens and new earth and from utter destruction to glorious redemption. The book’s view of God is equally comprehensive: He is the austere judge who decrees destruction on a rebellious people, but He is also the compassionate redeemer who will not cast off a hopeless and despairing people.

In many ways the book of Isaiah is the Bible in miniature. It has two major divisions: the main theme of the first part is judgment, and the main theme of the second is hope. Beyond this, all the main themes of the Bible can be found in Isaiah. Although the Sinai covenant is not mentioned explicitly, it is everywhere assumed. It is the basis of the charges of rebellion, and it is the essential ground of the supposed relationship between God and Israel. The Davidic covenant is mentioned, and it is the foundation of the promises of the Messiah. If the house of David has failed, God’s promises have not. In Isaiah, the glory of the Davidic Messiah and the shame of the Suffering Servant are brought together in a way that helps the New Testament picture of Christ make sense.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The one anointed by God is the dominant speaker in chapter 61. This passage describes how God has anointed him with the Spirit and has tasked him with several responsibilities (61:1-3) that are similar to some of the duties of the Servant in chapters 42 and 49. His work will benefit the brokenhearted, involve the rebuilding of ruined cities, cause the nations to bring their riches, and result in a double blessing (61:4-7). This will happen because God hates injustice and will reward His people with an everlasting covenant (61:8-9). God’s great salvation will bring a great outpouring of joy and praise from His people (61:10-11).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: the first book of the Latter Prophets, which contain the utterances of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is a common name which appears especially in the post-exilic period. In Hebrew, it means “God is salvation.”
I. INTRODUCTION

A. God’s People and Their Lives of Righteousness

The message of today’s lesson is above all else a word of comfort and good news. It offers hope for both the person who is weary because of the trials of life and for the person who may think that God has forgotten about him or her. This oracle of salvation offers God’s strength because God is near to help and able to deliver His people from danger. Although God may seem to be far away at times, He never forgets His children and always is attentive to hear and answer their prayers. He is a God who is powerful because He has a strong arm and can overcome any obstacle. The major political and economic problems of this world amount to nothing in His eyes because He is able to direct the course of history. Thus, the challenge is for every believer to gain an authentic understanding of just how great God really is. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the one who knows the name of every star, the one who controls the rise and fall of nations and their leaders, the compassionate redeemer of His people, the holy one, and the King of this universe. Once a person begins to catch Isaiah’s vision of God’s incomparable power, and how wonderful His plans for this world are, he or she can begin to rest in the knowledge that God can give each person who trusts in Him the ability to overcome every threat and victoriously endure every challenge.

God has revealed in this prophecy the good news that His chosen Servant will bring into existence a new world of justice for all people in every nation and make possible a new covenant relationship with God. This Servant will suffer for the sins of others, bear the
guilt for their sins, and take upon Himself the punishment that these sinners deserved. This servant will be exalted for His work and will exalt all those who confess their sins and follow the path of the suffering Servant. Another part of this good news is found in a series of salvation proclamations about God’s preparation of a glorious city in Zion where He will dwell in all His glory. He will bring all His servants to this wonderful place so that they can glorify God for the rest of eternity. People from all the nations of the earth will flock to Zion to join the millions of others praising God and glorifying His name. This will be a wonderful time when all the people on earth will be holy; there will be no sorrow or shame, and there will be peace in all the earth.

B. Biblical Background

In this chapter, we are introduced once again to the means whereby God’s people will be enabled to live righteous lives, which will in turn draw the nations to God. That means is the Anointed One, the Messiah (Isaiah 61:1-3a). Then what follows is a list of the benefits that the Messiah’s people will receive (Isaiah 61:3b-7). In Isaiah 61:8-9, God speaks, making it explicit that covenant righteousness is what He desires and that He is the one who makes that righteousness possible. Finally, the servant breaks forth into a psalm of praise to God, who makes them a righteous people in the sight of the nations.

Scholars have long debated the identity of the person in Isaiah 61:1-3. Of more significance than identifying the speaker is the calling given to him. He has been anointed by the Spirit of God, both to “preach good news” (see 61:1) and to provide beauty instead of ashes, gladness instead of mourning, praise instead of despair (see 61:3)—so that God’s people will be “oaks of righteousness.” This is not the work of a human prophet; rather, it is the work of the Messiah, the Anointed One who is prophesied throughout the book. He will make of His people what they cannot make of themselves.

The results of the Messiah’s work are detailed in Isaiah 61:3b-7, beginning with God’s people becoming “oaks of righteousness.” This is the opposite of what was said of them in Isaiah 1:27-31, where they were an “oak of fading leaves” because of the unrighteousness and injustice practiced among them. But even there, God promised that Jerusalem would one day be called “The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:26). Now he reveals the means whereby that will become a reality. The Servant/Messiah’s work will not only deliver but also transform.

The words of God in Isaiah 61:8-9 underline again the central point in this final section of the book. Why will the people of God enjoy the inheritance of the firstborn son? Because “I, the Lord, love justice.” What is the logic there? Is it merely that oppression of the Israelites by the nations is unjust and God is not going to permit it to continue indefinitely? “Robbery and iniquity” suggest that is not the case. Rather, it is that God loves justice and hates robbery and iniquity in His people, and one of the effects of the “everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 61:8) that He will make with them is that they will be able to live the life of God’s true children. “All that see them” (verse 9) will recognize this fact.

As has happened before when the work of the Servant/Messiah is presented, the response
is a paean of praise. Israel sees herself as a bride whom the Groom has dressed in beautiful wedding garments. What are the garments? They are salvation and righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). The figure changes in Isaiah 61:11. Now Israel sees herself as a fruitful field in which God has planted the seeds of flowers—namely, righteousness and praise. In the overall context of Isaiah 56–66, there can be no doubt of the import of these words. God will give His people the righteous behavior they have been unable to produce in themselves. He will do this for His own praise and glory before the nations as a witness to His almighty power.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God’s Faithfulness and Covenant with His People (Isaiah 61:8)

For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

The speaker in this passage of Scripture is Yahweh. He immediately declares that not only is He a God who loves justice but also that His actions are characterized by justice. Love is a choice of the will that God makes; it is His choice to be emotionally involved by displaying His deep commitment to His people and to show His approval of a specific kind of favored action. God’s choice to love actions that are just is evident in all His behavior; it is central to His command that the Israelites should “maintain justice” (56:1) and His advice to avoid injustice (58:6; 59:4, 8, 14, 15). When justice refers to human acts of justice, it refers to moral behavior that treats other people with equity and fairness. In order to emphasize the point, God states that He hates (the opposite of love) human actions that involve unjust taking of things that belong to others as well as all other acts of iniquity (verse 8a).

Those who are fully committed to God’s moral standards of justice will receive from God an appropriate response—compensation (verse 8b). Elsewhere, God promises to bring His “recompense, reward, what is due” with Him when He comes to earth (see 40:10; 49:4; 62:11). God can be counted on to do this because He acts in “faithfulness, truthfulness” with those He loves. The essence of what God is talking about is a covenant agreement that He has with His righteous followers. This will be an eternal covenant relationship with His people (verse 8b). God is here guaranteeing the everlasting Davidic covenant described in Isaiah 55:3. It is probably the same covenant relationship that the “Anointed One” who has the Spirit will implement (see Isaiah 61:1-3).

B. A People Whom the Lord Has Blessed (Isaiah 61:9)

And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.

In Isaiah 61:9, God describes how the implications of this covenant will impact the life and reputation of the “seed, offspring” of the Israelites. The Anointed One who possesses the Spirit (59:21) has a strong impact on the repentant seed (59:20-21). God will make His covenant with these people and His presence will be with them (Isaiah 60:1-3). The Anointed One will work on God’s behalf
and God’s blessing on them (see Isaiah 61:6-8) will mark these people as unique. The other nations will recognize this unique relationship that God has and will have with His people.

The second half of the verse reemphasizes the special relationship between the Israelites and God. It will be seen, recognized, and acknowledged as a direct result of the blessings of God. Two points are implied by these facts. First, God’s marvelous work among the righteous, holy, and repentant Israelites will serve as a witness to other peoples. Second, the eyes of the blind nations that formerly despised and attacked the Israelites will be opened so that they can appreciate the great work of God among His people. Even when life seems hard to bear, the faithful must always remember that God is mighty to save, and He alone has the power to change our situations. He turns sadness into joy and hopelessness into renewed vigor and vitality for life.

C. Freedom to Celebrate What God Has Promised (Isaiah 61:10-11)

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord” (verse 10). Isaiah makes this confession for himself as well as for the remnant community. In Isaiah 61:1-3, the Anointed Servant speaks in the first person as He proclaims the gifts He brings, while here, Isaiah celebrates those Gospel gifts. And just like in the case of Peter, “flesh and blood” did not reveal this to Isaiah (Matthew 16:17). It was not human insight or imagination; rather, it was Yahweh’s self-disclosure through His Anointed Servant (Isaiah 61:1-3) that let the prophet see the beauty of salvation.

Envision a woman dressed for a funeral who receives word that a mistake has been made. She is told that “instead of a funeral there will be a wedding with the love of your life!” What does she do? At breathtaking speed, she washes the ashes from her face, dons her wedding garments, and crowns her head with a garland of flowers. It is time to celebrate! In like manner, Zion’s wailing has been turned into celebration; her sackcloth is gone, and she is girded with joy (verse 10). Zion’s beauty comes from Yahweh and it is everlasting.

The response of joy ends with a second reason that explains why the Anointed One rejoices. This reason is expressed by making a comparison between the earth’s ability to cause plants to spring up and the Lord’s ability to cause righteousness to spring up. Everybody in an agricultural economy would know that when the rain falls on the soil, shoots will spring up out of the dormant roots of grass; seeds that were sown in a garden or field will start to grow. These undeniable facts of nature are compared to what the Lord will do to cause His seeds of righteousness and praise to spring up. It is a great joy to know that God has the power to produce these unstoppable results. The comparison presents a guarantee or promise that the Spirit’s empowerment of the Anointed One is sure to bring about the results of salvation and righteousness.

The exuberant praise that will spring up from Zion will be the people’s joyful response
to God’s great gift of salvation. The final comment in this hymn is that this human praise of God will be heard by all the nations. This partially explains why the nations will come to Zion and will join in this praise of God.

It is a crippling weakness of Christians that we do not think often enough of God and His goodness to us to be overwhelmed by His greatness and grace, and moved to ecstasy. Such rejoicing in God alters the spiritual climate, clears the atmosphere so that He is more plainly seen, and restores morale. The metaphor of the bridegroom and bride illustrates the mutual delight of God and His redeemed people. God’s gracious presence shines upon His people as the spring sunlight on a garden, and righteousness and praise bloom like flowers. God’s garden is lovely—not only for the delight of His people, but also as a witness to humankind. The church’s supreme attraction is her people’s lives, especially when those lives are lived in keeping with God’s will.

D. The Lord Promises to Bless the Redeemed (Isaiah 62:2-4a)

And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate.

Speaking directly to Zion (second-person “your”), the speaker declares that the nations of the earth will see the marvelous transformation that will happen to Zion (verse 2). Their rulers will observe the glory of God that arises over and rests upon His people. When these foreigners observe these changes and see how God has honored Zion with great splendor, they will refer to Zion by a new name, which God will give to Zion. The giving of a new name is usually associated with a new status, a radically new situation, or a new characteristic or association. This is not a name that the foreigners will invent, nor will the people of Zion do some self-promotion by putting out a new sign at the city gate. God is the one who will identify some new characteristic, such as “city of the Lord” (Isaiah 60:14), and will designate a new name based on some unique feature.

Before any name is mentioned, the new conditions, character, and association of Zion are expressed by comparing the city to some expensive and precious jewelry (verse 3). This does not refer to a crown that Zion or God will wear; it is merely an analogy of something extremely expensive and unique, something guarded and precious, something having great dignity and royal prestige. The significance of God’s carrying this royal crown in His “palm” is left unexplained, but certainly when God holds something so special in His hand, it belongs to Him and is protected from harm. This imagery would also convey that what was being held is very precious, and others would recognize God’s love for this very precious jewel. What a change from the days when God had to turn away from His people because of their sins.

Now Zion’s old names are rejected and new names are introduced (verse 4). The reason why “it will no longer be said” is that there will be a total transformation of Zion from what it used to be. When an enemy army defeated God’s people it would be natural to assume that this happened because God had “for­saken” their land. Thus, it is not surprising that
someone might use derogatory nicknames like “the one who is abandoned” or “desolation” to describe the land of Israel. The new names to be given to Israel are not just meaningless or perfunctory new labels to be carelessly thrown about; they accurately describe the new state of the nation in the future when God has marvelously transformed His people and their land. The old way of life will be over, and this new reality will involve a complete transformation of God’s people.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The New Testament uses the same wedding-symbol language as Isaiah—the wedding dress. In his famous comparison of the church as the bride of Christ, Paul says that the church will appear before Christ “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27, NIV). In Revelation 19:7a-8, the same point is made: “For the wedding of the lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear” (NIV).

With these images and statements, the New Testament is saying what Isaiah says: God wants us to share an intimate relation with Himself in which He will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves—that is, to make us like Himself, to make us behave as He does.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Your redeeming grace and for Your Son, Jesus Christ, who makes it possible. Help us never to lose hope even in the direst situation. Enable us to see that change and transformation are always possible when we put our trust in You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(April 20-26, 2020)

The Lord Loves Justice

MONDAY, April 20: “Solomon Makes a Just Decision” (1 Kings 3:16-28)
TUESDAY, April 21: “Jesus Issues His Platform for Justice” (Luke 4:14-21)
WEDNESDAY, April 22: “The Year of Jubilee Established” (Leviticus 25:8-17)
THURSDAY, April 23: “A Light to the Nations” (Isaiah 49:1-7)
FRIDAY, April 24: “A New Vision for the People” (Isaiah 61:1-7)
SATURDAY, April 25: “Zion Welcomes the Redeemed Home” (Isaiah 62:5-12)
SUNDAY, April 26: “The Lord Brings the People Justice” (Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a)
A VISION OF RESTORATION

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: The Return of Joy
YOUTH TOPIC: In the End, You Win!

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: God Promises Justice
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Justice Wins the Day

DEVOATIONAL READING
Psalm 47

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 47

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zephaniah 3
PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 3:14-20
ADULT KEY VERSE: Zephaniah 3:19
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Zephaniah 3:20

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zephaniah 3
PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 5, 12-13
KEY VERSE: Zephaniah 3:5

Zephaniah 3:14-20—KJV
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.
16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.
17 The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.
18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.
19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

Zephaniah 3:14-20—NIV
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.
16 On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.
17 “The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”
18 “I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.
19 “At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.
20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the
time that I gather you: for I will make you a name
and a praise among all people of the earth, when
I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith
the Lord.

20 “At that time I will gather you; at that time
I will bring you home. I will give you honor and
praise among all the peoples of the earth when I
restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says
the Lord.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Oppression of the poor and powerless seems pervasive
in our world. Is there any hope for a reversal of this condition? The prophet Zephaniah proclaims
the day of restoration when God’s people shall be returned to righteousness, justice, and peace.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Discern the need for the just restoration of God’s people.
2. Aspire to trust God for victory, hope, and renewal.
3. Celebrate the return of joy and God’s glory in salvation.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The book’s opening verse dates the ministry of
the pre-exilic prophet Zephaniah to about 630
BC, during the reign of King Josiah (see 2 Kings
—The words “Do not fear” in verse 16 signal an
assurance of God’s presence to save.
—As seen in verse 17, salvation in the OT has a
connotation of victory.
—A number of psalms praise God for salvation,
for stopping the enemy; examples are Psalms
18; 35; 63.
—Verse 17 in some translations suggests that the
“warrior” does not refer to God.
—The city of Jerusalem is presented as if it were a
daughter who is vulnerable and needs protec-
tion; Jerusalem is totally dependent upon God
(verse 14).
—God is presented as King and warrior who
protects and rescues the daughter, Jerusalem
(verse 15).
—God is strong, so there is no need to fear or to
be afraid or feel weak (verse 16).
—Singing and rejoicing are the responses to God’s
help; God, the warrior, will also sing and rejoice
(verse 17).
—God will remove disaster and anything that is
harmful or negative from the city of Jerusalem
(verse 18).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Jerusalem—that is, all Israel—had failed to
trust God.
—The righteous judgment of God is guaranteed.
—God’s mercy will prevail in the end and Israel
will be restored.
—The day will come when justice will reign.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The superscription (Zephaniah 1:1) asserts that Zephaniah’s ministry occurred during the reign of Josiah (640–609 BC). Traditional dating has assumed the prophet’s ministry to precede the reform of 621. The personality and certain identity of the prophet Zephaniah are concealed beneath his message. Within the book bearing his name there is but one specific reference to the prophet. Most commentators have concluded that Zephaniah was an inhabitant of Jerusalem. Furthermore, the superscription identifies him as a descendant of Hezekiah. If it be accurate that the Hezekiah referred to was indeed the king, then Zephaniah was of royal descent. This supposition gathers support in the book when we recognize that although the royal household (1:8) was criticized, the king per se was not. Furthermore, one gathers an air of aristocracy about Zephaniah. Unlike his eighth-century predecessors, especially Amos, he was concerned about but not obsessed with ethical concerns as they affect the common people.

The initiation of Zephaniah’s ministry is often associated with the threat of a Palestinian attack by the Scythians. Unfortunately, the book of Zephaniah never names specifically the Scythians (or any other people) as Judah’s potential oppressor and our historical records fall short of clarity. Characteristic of the prophetic voice, he recognized that the Lord of history would act to chastise His covenant people via the unnamed oppressor. Thus, from Zephaniah’s perspective, Judah had but one hope in this perilous situation—repentance.

Zephaniah spoke neither softly nor particularly gracefully; rather, his was a voice of emphatic force which demanded an audience, a forceful voice which sounded with conviction and clarity. Assuming the traditional dating to be correct, this prophet probably influenced significantly King Josiah during those important years immediately preceding the initiation of the Deuteronomic reform.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

A discussion of the controlling purposes of Zephaniah’s message coalesces with the unifying theme of the book—the imminent arrival of the Day of Yahweh. The Day of Yahweh was a concept that reached into Israel’s early history. In the eighth century, the Day of Yahweh was reckoned popularly as a day of judgment and destruction directed toward Israel’s (and therefore Yahweh’s) enemies, while Yahweh’s people would be vindicated and exalted. Obviously, the concept conveyed intense nationalistic overtones.

With the proclamation of Amos (5:18-20), this popular conception was questioned: “Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” Amos emphasized that Israel’s covenant alignment with Yahweh did not preclude judgment upon her. Israel’s special relationship with Yahweh only increased her responsibility and therefore her culpability. It was this emphasis of Amos upon which Zephaniah focused. According to Zephaniah, the Day of Yahweh was a day of battle which would result in devastation both for Judah and her neighbors. The prophet emphasized in chapter 1 that Judah would experience the wrath of Yahweh, and in chapter 2 he clarified that this awesome judgment would also be experienced by other nations.

Zephaniah also drew upon the message of Isaiah, another eighth-century prophet. Whereas the recorded message of Amos gave little indication of hope, Isaiah’s message was infused with the assurance that a remnant of Yahweh’s people would be preserved. Zephaniah also emphasized this hope, although commentators debate the degree to which he envisioned this eschatological era incorporating Judah’s enemies.

Zephaniah recognized that religious indifference and eclecticism were accompanied by an inclination toward materialism and a lack of concern
for justice. Only the affirmation that Yahweh was the God of justice caused the individual to sense himself obligated to emulate this justice. Religious indifference and eclecticism served to blunt the divine demand for justice.

Thus, we recognize that there was little that was new in the message of Zephaniah. Primarily, he built upon the prophetic mentality developed before his time—particularly by his eighth-century predecessors—Amos's message of judgment, and Isaiah's hope in the future.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. A Song of Joy for Jerusalem
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Called to Celebrate on the Day of the Lord (Zephaniah 3:14-15)
   B. Called to Lives of Joy without Fear (Zephaniah 3:16-17)
   C. God's Promise of a Better Day Ahead (Zephaniah 3:18)
   D. God's Promise of Retribution and Restoration (Zephaniah 3:19-20)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. A Song of Joy for Jerusalem**

The central motif in the book of Zephaniah is the coming of the Day of the Lord as a time of terrifying judgment against Judah and all the earth. The Day of the Lord is the central referent around which the final canonical shape of the collected oracles is formed. But in today's lesson, the prophet moves from the universal to the particular and announces that the sentence of judgment against Jerusalem will be reversed for the humble remnant (Zephaniah 3:11-13). The concluding victory song of joy (verses 14-20) echoes these notes of changed circumstances. A temple choir is invoked to sing that Yahweh is King (verse 14). Moreover, one hears a priestly oracle of blessing: “Do not fear” (verse 16, NIV).

This last divine speech in the book of Zephaniah consists of a call to Jerusalem. The city is to rejoice that its sentence of destruction has been lifted and that God, proclaimed as the King of Israel, is now in their midst (verses 14-17). Then, God directly addresses the joyous
assembly, making similar statements of reassurance (verses 18–20). All of the main characters in the oracles of Zephaniah are present in this closing segment of the book—God, Judah/Jerusalem, the nations—but with a dramatic difference. Here, joy is the key to unlocking the message of God to Israel, to the nations, and to all of us today. The promise expressed here is that all nations, along with God’s elect, will with one voice call on the divine name. The real reversal of fortune is not located solely in getting back what was lost in the meting out of divine justice, but in changed relationships between the main protagonists. The heavy sentence has been commuted, thereby making way for a future that is different from the past. For some of the privileged few today, this is shocking and not the way the justice system is supposed to work. Nevertheless, the word that ultimately came to this prophet of doom was more about the future than about the past, and more about those who will inherit the future than about those who will be punished. It is the faithful who rejoice and—perhaps most shocking—it is the God who commutes judgment sentences who also rejoices among those who have been released to live another day and in another way.

B. Biblical Background

Zephaniah spoke with a sense of urgency that was to be matched later by Jesus’ proclamation that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” “The great Day of Yahweh is near and hastening fast,” he said (see Zephaniah 1:14). Events were hastening toward catastrophe; the clock was nearing midnight. Therefore, he summoned people to decision and repentance while they still had a chance. In scathing language, he denounced the pagan practices which, under the influence of Manasseh, had defiled Judah and Jerusalem. Zephaniah also condemned Baal worship in the city of Jerusalem. He addressed the people’s easygoing complacency, based on the preposterous notion that Yahweh has no sway over history and is impotent to do either good or evil (1:12). In one breath, Zephaniah condemned the whole leadership of the nation: politicians and judges, priests and prophets, whom he likened to predatory “roaring lions” and “evening wolves” (3:3–4). Jerusalem, said Zephaniah, is a “rebellious city,” impervious to Yahweh’s word and lacking in faith. His prophetic task was to interpret the world crisis as God’s action in history.

The prophet held out no hope that “the shameless nation,” so deeply stained with paganism and so firmly entrenched in rebellion, would reform. Rather, Judah along with other nations of the world would be consumed by “the fire of Yahweh’s jealous wrath.” But like Isaiah, he appealed for a remnant to repent and to seek refuge in Yahweh. Since Yahweh’s purpose was not utter destruction but the cleansing and renewal of the people, Zephaniah announced that a remnant would be saved from the catastrophe—“a people humble and lowly” who would live in sincerity and security (see 3:8–13). Zephaniah, though a strong advocate for God’s justice, does not leave the people without hope.

Nowhere better than in Zephaniah appears the pattern of the editors of the prophetic books, the three parts of which are (1) woe to Judah, (2) an extension of judgment to other nations, and (3) comfort to Judah after the world catastrophe. In Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel the pattern is present, but to some
extent obscured by the bulk of the material. When the editors of the prophets felt that the message of the Lord to their day was not condemnation but comfort, they fortunately did not destroy the threats of the early prophets, but supplemented them first by broadening the scope of God’s wrath and then by promising that a righteous remnant of Judah would escape from the universal verdict. Zephaniah addresses himself to that righteous remnant in today’s lesson.

In Zephaniah 3:14-20, Judah had been scattered but would be gathered home again. Disaster was past; victory, peace, and rejoicing lay ahead. The Lord is wholly favorable toward Judah, with scarcely a hint of displeasure. In short, the whole tone of this passage is like that of Isaiah 40–66 rather than Zephaniah 1. Prophecy has passed over into eschatological prediction. Concern with historical events of the past have vanished into the generalities of the golden age. Israel is now bidden to celebrate the absence of enemies and the presence of the Lord.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Called to Celebrate on the Day of the Lord (Zephaniah 3:14-15)

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

The Day of Yahweh has been a terrifying one up to this point. Now it is a day of comfort and consolation. The thrust of this passage is in marked contrast to the judgmental tone of chapter 1. In this chapter, the prophet proclaims that the day of basking in God’s glory is at hand. After the punishments and destruction have passed, the time to celebrate will have come. Yahweh will have fought successfully against Judah’s enemies. The restoration of fortunes and the removal of all shame will be at the point of actualization. Jerusalem, the very hub of the universe, will then assume her rightful place among the nations.

Verses 14-15 form a unit reminiscent of the enthronement in Psalms (see Psalms 47; 93; 95–99). In this passage, Yahweh’s enthronement is suggested. Israel has abundant reason to rejoice. The motivation for such joy? Judah’s judgments in every sense of the term will in time be removed; her condemnations and punishments will be canceled, her guilt pardoned, and her indictment quashed. All her enemies, as many and varied as they may be, will be cast out as rubbish is cast out of a home. And all this will happen not by the edict of a mere person nor the commands of a mere individual. It will be because of what the Lord has done. The King of Israel/Jehovah will once again be in the midst of His people.

No evil, no real harm shall come to those who are the Lord’s elect. After her season of punishment, Israel is instructed to sing for joy, to shout aloud, and to be glad and rejoice. The immediate reason for that renewed felicity is revealed. It is twofold: (1) externally, God will have ended the period of Jerusalem’s judgment by defeating all her enemies; (2) internally, God Himself will be in their midst as the everlasting king. The Lord, Israel’s righteous judge, will deem her punishment completed and
Jerusalem’s correction accomplished. Cleansed by long ages of corrective judgment, Jerusalem would now be made holy by the presence of the Holy One of Israel.

By piling up every available expression for joy, the prophet leaps across the vale of gloom into the realm of “grace beyond devastation.” In his confidence about this future glory, he summons people now—right now—to sing this song of celebration. Corrective judgment must come upon Israel and also her enemies, but Zephaniah urges Israel to look beyond the sadness and depression that would seem to be the order of the day to a future time of unrestrained joy and happiness. It was not all gloom and doom; they were still loved by God. A day of joy and happiness was on the way. So rejoice and be glad!

B. Called to Lives of Joy without Fear (Zephaniah 3:16-17)

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

In verses 16-18, we see once again the usage of “on that day” to indicate the time when Yahweh had fought successfully for His people to establish their victory and security. Also, on that day Israel is not to fear. The day of the believer is often dimmed and in danger of being destroyed by fear. Fear and joy are opposites. Therefore, God tells the people of Israel not to fear. The words “do not fear” represent an injection of hope into an impossible situation. The one injecting the hope is none other than God Himself. Fear also seriously interferes with a believer’s joyous service to God. Therefore, the Lord tells His people, “Let not thine hands be slack”—which is to say, let nothing keep you from doing My will. The phrase literally means “do not let your hands drop or sink.” The idea behind this is paralysis by fear or despair. Why not be fearful? Why not be overcome by despair? Because the Lord God is in their midst (verse 17).

C. God’s Promise of a Better Day Ahead (Zephaniah 3:18)

I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

In this final section, the prophet turns to the first-person form of address. The voice of God speaks directly to His people. The opening words are particularly difficult. But the major thrust seems clear. Zephaniah envisions a day in which all the sorrows associated with God’s judgment on His people shall be removed. The Lord’s opening assurance (verse 18) stands in stark contrast to His pronouncements at the beginning of the book. Unlike that earlier announcement of God’s gathering of the nations together so as to sweep them off the face of the earth (see Zephaniah 1:2-4), in chapter 3 the Lord is portrayed as gathering up those who have been driven away from Jerusalem and therefore from the opportunity to partake of Israel’s periods of festivity. In God’s providence, His sinning people had been punished by being carried away into exile as booty to their conquerors. This had been a shameful reproach to God’s name and to that of the Holy City’s. Now, however, judgment has given way to hope. God will regather His chastised and cleansed people in order to lead them home.
D. God’s Promise of Retribution and Restoration (Zephaniah 3:19-20)

Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

In Zephaniah 3:19, God promises retribution to all those who have oppressed Judah and Jerusalem. The proclamation soars, promising restoration to the people of Israel. God will gather all the dispersed exiles, referred to as “lame” and “outcast” (verse 19, NIV). Their lameness is parallel to their forcible exile, which suggests an image of exile as disabling. The next step in restoration is the transformation of their shame (from occupation and deportation) to praise. The restoration is complete in verse 20 when God restores Israel to its land. In verse 20, a final change in address occurs: using first-person, God speaks to Zion/Jerusalem/Israel as a collective in the second-person plural:

I will bring you all home
I will gather you all
I will make you all renowned
I will restore the fortunes of you all
Before the eyes of you all

Zephaniah ends on a note of triumph, which is the inverse of its beginning. In the opening chapter, Yahweh says, “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth” (Zephaniah 1:2, NRSV). He then promises that there will be punishment, wailing, bitter cries, wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, and devastation. On top of all this there will be wrath and more wrath, says Yahweh (see Zephaniah 2:2-3). Wrath, however, is not the last word and therein lies the hopes of the Israelites in their day as well as in ours. God never leaves Himself without a witness. Before Zephaniah closes his prophecy, he promises in today’s passage that there will come a day when God’s people will be restored to righteousness, justice, and peace. From the crucible of God’s wrath, He will transform those who have been spared. God will change their language so that they may call on the most holy name. He will welcome supplicants from the uttermost parts of the earth (verses 19-20). The Day of Yahweh will become a day of restoration.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The book of Zephaniah contains only three chapters; yet, these encompass many of the features that we find in the prophetic books as a whole. We hear echoes of prophets like Amos, Micah, and Isaiah in their indictments of Israel for the injustice and oppression of its ruling classes—although, as with Hosea and Ezekiel, there is greater emphasis on Israel’s sins of religious apostasy and unfaithfulness. Such indictments are followed by the threat of God’s judgment on His own people in the form of invasion and battle, associated especially with “the Day of the Lord,” which is, again, described in terms reminiscent especially of Amos and Isaiah. As with some other prophets, there is a call for repentance in the hope that such judgment might be averted. As in all the major prophetic books there is a group of divine sayings (oracles) threatening God’s judgment against foreign nations. Equally, as in most of the other prophetic books, there are hopes held out for salvation for Israel at a time when God will intervene on their behalf.
He will avenge Israel against their enemies and again rule as king in His holy city, Jerusalem, defending it against all comers. He will bring back those of its citizens who have been taken away as captives to foreign lands and establish a rule of justice which will make for righteousness among His own people.

Zephaniah is best remembered for his presentation of God as the sovereign judge of all. It is He who punished the wickedness of human-kind and nations, particularly those who have opposed His people. Zephaniah focuses on the spirit of wickedness in people. Such individuals reason that God does not intervene in human affairs and so they continue in their violence and deceit. Further, their greed occasions the oppression of those around them. Nevertheless, Zephaniah holds out the hope that God will be receptive to everyone who repentantly surrenders to Him. Such spiritual virtues as righteousness, humility, faith, and truth receive commendation and reward from Zephaniah.

The Lord has a plan for the humble and faithful remnant of His people. He will purify them, regather and restore them to their land, and give them victory over their enemies. Jerusalem will be a blissful place, for Israel’s saving God will bless His people and in turn make them a channel of blessing to all.

God never gives up on His own. Even though He hates sin and wrongdoing, all those who turn to Him in repentance and faith will be blessed by Him. Not only will individuals be blessed, but also, even nations will be blessed when they seek to do the just and fair things for their people. God watches over His own; and in His own time He makes things right. God has the power to reprove, but He also has the power to restore.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, we are thankful to You for the many blessings that You continue to bestow upon us. We give You thanks that, even in the midst of seasons of pain and suffering brought on by our actions as well as the actions of others, You have promised to restore and to renew us. You have promised to bring us once again into a season of peace, justice, and righteousness. For these promises we give You thanks. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**
*(April 27–May 3, 2020)*

**A Vision of Restoration**

**MONDAY,** April 27: “God Promises Restoration of Israel’s Fortunes” (Deuteronomy 30:1-6)

**TUESDAY,** April 28: “God Will Shepherd the People” (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

**WEDNESDAY,** April 29: “God Will Strengthen the People” (Zechariah 10:6-12)

**THURSDAY,** April 30: “Christ’s Forgiveness of Israel’s Sins” (Acts 5:27-32)

**FRIDAY,** May 1: “Leaders, Priests, and Prophets Don’t Listen” (Zephaniah 3:1-7)

**SATURDAY,** May 2: “God Will Preserve a Remnant” (Zephaniah 3:8-13)

**SUNDAY,** May 3: “Rejoice in God’s Glory and Salvation” (Zephaniah 3:14-20)
May 10, 2020

Lesson 11

PEACE AND JUSTICE REIGN

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A New Day
Is Coming!
YOUTH TOPIC: Do Good

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Peace and Justice Reign
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Better Days Are Coming

DEVOTIONAL READING
Zechariah 8:18-23

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zechariah 8
PRINT PASSAGE: Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17
ADULT KEY VERSE: Zechariah 8:15
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Zechariah 8:16

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Zechariah 8
PRINT PASSAGE: Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17
KEY VERSES: Zechariah 8:7, 8a

Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17—KJV
AGAIN THE word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying,
2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.
3 Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.
4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.
5 And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.
6 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17—NIV
THE WORD of the LORD Almighty came to me. 2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.” 3 This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.” 4 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. 5 “The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.” 6 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the LORD Almighty.
7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

8 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

11 But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the Lord Almighty.

12 “The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people.

13 Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.

14 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the Lord Almighty,

15 “so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.

16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the Lord.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Sometimes people respond to evil conditions in the world with a sense of hopelessness, regret, and doom. Where can they find motivation for continuing? The prophet Zechariah delivers God’s promise of a new world of peace and prosperity for God’s people.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Comprehend the impact of God’s presence in a community.
2. Yearn for God’s perpetual presence and the promise of justice it brings.
3. Pray for God’s presence to result in a communal sense of justice, prosperity, and unity.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai’s; the two prophets encouraged reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem following their return from exile (see Ezra 5:1; 6:14).
—The reference to God’s jealousy is one of zeal—strong emotion in this case seen as the wrath of a warrior.
—In prophesying future peace for Israel, Zechariah repeatedly uses the title “Yahweh Sabaoth” (Lord of hosts/armies).
—The Lord promised Abram that his ancestors would be a blessing to the world (see Genesis 12:3). Disobedience turned that to a curse, but Zechariah promised that the ability to bless the world would be restored.
—God’s jealousy is not the kind of jealousy that people have. God wants us to do what is right and to make right choices. God’s jealousy is to protect believers.
—God’s passion is expressed in verse 1; it mirrors or is an example of God’s great love.
—The city of Jerusalem was given a new name—the Holy City.
—The boys and girls playing in the streets is a picture of prosperity in an urban setting (verse 5).
—Instead of fasting, there will be feasting when God brings peace or “shalom” to Jerusalem.
—God’s people shall speak truth to one another and show justice and peace at all times.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Zechariah 8 tells how God’s mercy will lead to the restoration of Israel.
—The faithful, wherever they are, will be saved from suffering and loss.
—God is clear about what the people must do and not do.
—Nations from afar will hear of God’s forgiveness and be drawn to seek God’s favor.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophet Zechariah is known outside his book for the key role he played, along with Haggai, in rebuilding the Temple. His genealogy places him in a priestly family. If he is the “Zechariah son of Berekiah” of Matthew 23:35 (NIV), then he was later murdered between the Temple and the altar. The first eight chapters of Zechariah are a collection of divine speeches and visions. Each of them carefully names the prophet and the date of the prophetic experience. These dates are correlated with those in the book of Haggai. The last prophecy in Haggai and the first in Zechariah overlap by a month; their total ministry reflected in these dates covered a little more than two years.

The second part of the book of Zechariah (chapters 9–14) shows none of these characteristics—nor is it related to historical persons or events in the way the first chapters are. There is no hint of who their author might be. It reflects a very complicated process of prophetic tradition in which old oracles are reused in new connections and new forms. Emphases have changed, and the basic theological foundation has shifted. A totally new work has emerged built on fragments of older prophecy. It also contains longer compositions which have broken the bonds of traditional prophetic motifs to combine features of hymnody, prophecy, and preaching like Isaiah 40–48 does.

Headings over chapters 9 and 12 parallel that over the book of Malachi. The tone and contents of these chapters have much in common with Malachi. So, the book of Malachi is the middle member of a trilogy of prophets, dividing its relationships
with its neighbors evenly. Chapters 1–8 are related to Haggai in form, contents, and historical background, while chapters 9–14 reflect similar kinship to Malachi. It is no wonder that scholars think the book is not a unity and often refer to chapters 1–8 as “First Zechariah,” while chapters 9–14 are called “Second Zechariah” by some scholars. Yet, the chapters of Zechariah demonstrate a unity that justifies their being grouped together in one book.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Like Haggai, Zechariah’s prophetic ministry began in 520 BC, some twenty years after the first Jews returned from exile in Babylon. Earlier prophets had promised a glorious restoration, highlighted in the Book of the Twelve, with Zephaniah’s promise of the return and restoration of Israel’s fortunes after exile. For the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem in Zechariah’s day, the reality fell far short of these expectations. It was a time of disappointment, disillusionment, despondency, and guilt. Into this situation, Zechariah calls the people to trust and obey God’s word. Zechariah deals in the first instance with the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. The high priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel have important roles to play in this project, along with the prophets. The book also looks beyond this reconstruction to the return of God, so that a cleansed Jerusalem will become the center of worship for all nations. Central to this latter project is a future Davidic king. In proclaiming this message, Zechariah maintains that the restoration hopes of the earlier prophets still stand, thus he calls His people to live in the light of His promises.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Zechariah: a son of Berekiah (NIV) and descendant of Iddo; a post-exilic contemporary of Haggai’s. Zechariah’s ministry focuses largely on the plight of the recently returned exiles and the necessity of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Blessing (verse 13)—Hebrew: berakah (ber-aw-kaw’): a blessing; gift; to be generous.
Dwell (verse 3)—Hebrew: yashab (yä•shav’): to abide, sit, remain, establish.
Remnant (verse 6)—Hebrew: sheerith (sheh-ay-reeth’): rest; residue; remainder.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Yahweh Flips the Script in Order to Bless Israel
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Jealous God Who Redeems Israel (Zechariah 8:1-5)
   B. The Wonder-working God Who Is Mighty to Save (Zechariah 8:6-8)
   C. A Change for the Better from a Merciful God (Zechariah 8:11-13)
   D. God’s New Purpose (Zechariah 8:14-17)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Yahweh Flips the Script in Order to Bless Israel

A key theme of Zechariah is Yahweh’s return to His people after the judgment of exile. God, in effect, flips the script and comes to His people in a new and hopeful way. Ezekiel depicts the glory of Yahweh departing from the Temple and Jerusalem on account of sin. This was a death sentence for Jerusalem, and destruction came to Babylon shortly thereafter. But Ezekiel also anticipated Yahweh’s return to a new temple after the Exile. The presence of Yahweh among His people would be accompanied by covenant restoration and blessing.

In today’s lesson, almost seventy years after the destruction of Jerusalem and some twenty years after the first group of Jewish people returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, Zechariah says that Yahweh has now turned from judgment to mercy (Zechariah 8:3). The punishment that the nation has experienced in exile has been served and God offers mercy to His people. Furthermore, Zechariah reiterates Ezekiel’s promise that Yahweh will return to dwell among His people. In view of God’s promise to return, His people are to build the Temple and obey His covenant requirements.

Although the Israelites suffered immensely during the Exile and even in the post-exilic period, Zechariah remained a prophet of hope. There are several strands to his hope. The return of Yahweh to Jerusalem to fill it with glory is central to his hope. But another aspect of his hope concerned itself with the manner in which Yahweh would gather His people from among the nations, remove their sin, reunite the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and establish a new covenant relationship with them. He was also hopeful that one day the city itself would overflow with people and animals, ushering in a period of agricultural abundance. Moreover, Zechariah maintained a hope that some would come from the other nations to worship Yahweh with His people.

B. Biblical Background

Following Zechariah’s recital of Israel’s past in chapter 7, he now prophesies in chapter 8 that the future will bring Jerusalem’s repopulation. Not only will Jerusalem be full of people, but conditions will be peaceful as well. People will grow old there, and children will play in the squares. These conditions will follow from Yahweh’s return to Zion to dwell in Jerusalem. What Zechariah here announces echoes the divine sayings in chapters 1 and 2 and expands on them. Jerusalem will be called “faithful city” and Yahweh’s mountain, Zion, will be called “holy mountain.” Some late prophetic texts expect Zion/Jerusalem to be given a new name. In each case, the new name expresses the restoration of God’s relationship to the city and, consequently, of the city’s restoration as well. Zechariah does not give Zion/Jerusalem a new name, but his designations signal the same kinds of restoration. Just
as the Lord is returning to dwell in Jerusalem, so also Yahweh will bring “my people” back to dwell there. Just as the restored city will be “faithful” and the mountain “holy,” so also God’s relationship with them will be restored, in faithfulness and righteousness. The full covenant formula appears here: “they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (verse 8).

In the course of describing this very different future, Zechariah counters a possible reservation: What Yahweh announces through Zechariah will seem too hard—so hard as to be impossible (verse 6). This reservation is attributed to “the remnant of this people,” a term that appears again in verses 11-12, but nowhere else in Zechariah. In each case, it appears in a reference to the future, contrasted with the past. Zechariah makes clear his reference to the future by adding “in those days.” According to verse 11, the future is beginning “now.” By referring to the people as a remnant, Zechariah again signals a change from the adversity produced by the past and still affecting the present. That change will include God saving “my people” from countries east and west (verse 7). Those who witness this and see Jerusalem restored (verses 4-5) may consider it too hard—impossible. How much more impossible would it seem in prospect? Zechariah counters the reservation theologically, or God does, by posing a rhetorical question: “Shall it also seem impossible to me?” (see verse 6). A similar question occurs twice in the Old Testament. In Genesis 18:14, announcing that Sarah will bear a son, Yahweh asks, “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” In Jeremiah 32:27, after promising that the land will again flourish, Yahweh asks, “Is anything too hard for me?” In that same chapter, Jeremiah confesses that the Lord “made the heavens and the earth” and that clearly “nothing is too hard for [Him]” (Jeremiah 32:17, NIV).

Nothing is impossible with God. Thus, the God who is sovereign in His own right declares a new season of peace and blessings upon His people. Jerusalem shall once again be called the faithful city and the mountain of the Lord. The Lord of Hosts will not deal with Israel as in the former days but, instead, will usher in a season of peace and justice for all those who are determined to live according to His will and His way.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Jealous God Who Redeems Israel
   (Zechariah 8:1-5)

AGAIN THE word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

In verse 1, Zechariah says, “The word of the Lord of hosts came to me.” The phrase “to me” highlights his status as a prophet and the divine authority of his word. The description “Lord of hosts” occurs eighteen times in this chapter. It speaks of God’s might, especially relevant for a people facing hardship and oppression. It also underlines why the reader ought to pay
attention to Zechariah. The phrase assures the people that it is the ruler of the universe who is speaking. Thus, if God be for us, who can be against us?

“I am jealous for Zion” (verse 2). God’s great jealousy for Zion refers to His concern for what is rightly His and His willingness to overthrow all opposition to defend it. God is jealous with great zeal and great warmth, but also with great wrath. The Lord of Hosts had been a bit displeased with His people. They had been exiled and their land devastated. Now He will return to Zion in the fullness of His grace (verse 3). He will once more establish His dwelling place, His temple in their midst, as a symbol of His spiritual dwelling within their hearts. Jerusalem, the unfaithful city, shall be a city of truth and faithfulness in consequence of His justifying and sanctifying presence. The mountain of the Lord, which had been a heap of ruins, shall again be the holy mountain, where the Holy One will sit in the majesty of His unchanging justice and mercy. In fulfillment of His promise, the city shall be rebuilt and repopulated. No longer shall death in the form of war and pestilence slay the old people and young children, usually the first to fall victim to the ravages of war (verse 4).

In the streets of the city, in its open, park-like spaces—where in times of war the soldiers camped—old men and women shall again, supported by their staffs, walk in peace and safety, while the parks will resound with joyous laughter of young boys and girls playing their happy games undisturbed by the shouts of foreign warriors.

B. The Wonder-working God Who Is Mighty to Save (Zechariah 8:6-8)

Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.

The “remnant” refers to God’s elect. The phrase “in these days” refers to the days of fulfillment (verse 6). So great will be the change that even those who shall live to see it shall not be able to understand how so great a change is possible. Their fondest expectations shall be far, far surpassed. Yet, it is not too marvelous in the eyes of Jehovah, the world ruler, the omnipotent Lord. It is He that will do the seemingly impossible. This fourth divine saying (oracle) forms a transition between the picture of a renewed and prosperous Jerusalem in verses 2-5 and what God promises to do to bring it about in verses 7-8. The word translated “it will be incredible” has the sense of wonder or miracle as well as impossibility. The promised prosperity of Jerusalem and Israel may seem incredible to the remnant in those days, but it is certainly not beyond God’s power.

In verse 7, God promises to save the faithful remnant. The grammatical form of the verb denotes the continuous performance of the act. Throughout the ages, He will save (deliver) His people from the east and the west. They shall return to Jerusalem (verse 8), many of them to physical Jerusalem, along with the old covenant.

C. A Change for the Better from a Merciful God (Zechariah 8:11-13)

But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and...
the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

Verse 11 turns to the theme of all Zechariah’s prophecies: the times have changed. Specifically, God’s attitude had changed toward the people. His resolve and purpose for the people are now different. This is the age of grace. This is the good news of the prophecy. A contrast has now come in the way in which God will deal with Israel. “For there shall be a sowing of peace” (verse 12, NRSV) indicates the positive results of God’s turning toward His people with compassion. There will be agricultural plenty. The “vine” is used as a symbol of peace and prosperity in Zechariah 3:10 (along with the fig tree). It took four to five years from planting before the vine would begin to produce a usable crop of fruit, and warfare often saw vineyards destroyed. Hence, connecting the vine with a “sowing of peace” is very appropriate. The promise of “peace” is later promoted in 8:16 and 8:19. Peace is also one of the fruits of the coming Davidic king.

Verse 13 sketches the contrast in terms of cursing and blessing. Israel’s fate in judgment and exile had made her a synonym for cursing. Now, God was moving to save her and speaking to her the gracious words “you shall be a blessing.” In these words ring a reminder of the call of Abraham and the promise made to him (see Genesis 12:2-3). God’s saving act toward Israel would make it possible for her to fulfill the imperative in Abraham’s promise of blessing.

The message closes with the exhortation “Fear not!” This is a cry which is found in ancient exhortations to soldiers preparing to move out at the Lord’s command to fight the Lord’s enemies. The cry had been heard from Joshua as Israel moved against Canaanite cities. Gideon cried these words to the tiny company that was to put the hosts of the enemy to rout without even a weapon in their hands. Wherever this cry is heard it is a reminder of those wars of the Lord and the call to join in His conquests.

D. God’s New Purpose
(Zechariah 8:14-17)

For thus saith the Lord of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the Lord of hosts, and I repented not: so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. These are the things that ye shall do; speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.

The Lord now confirms the change in His attitude toward the people. He invites them to make a new covenant, to establish a new relation. This always begins with God’s initiative, with the announcement of His purpose in grace. It goes on to announce His requirement for the people who will enter into covenant with Him. Verse 14 is a reminder that God’s attitude toward Israel was one of judgment. He had determined destruction and ruin for the people who had rebelled against Him. Until that sentence was fulfilled, He did not relent. The Hebrew word translated “relent” is the same one which means “repent.” God did not change His mind but carried through with the full intention of judgment.
Verse 15 announces that with the same determination of purpose the Lord comes in these days to do good. It was to be an age of grace of Jerusalem and the house of Judah. Under the announcement of this love the remnant of the people should gather, take courage, and do the will of God. He would make it possible for them to fulfill His will and to receive the fulfillment of His promise.

Verses 16-17 contain four injunctions—two positive and two negative. The first positive and first negative injunctions deal with honesty in personal relationships: “Speak truth with each other . . . do not devise evil in your hearts” (see verse 16). The second positive and the second negative injunctions concern the administration of justice in the community: “truth and a judgment of peace render in your gates . . . do not love a false oath” (see verse 17). The “gates” were the location where the city elders gathered to administer justice. The “false oath” refers to giving false testimony, or perjury, and connects with “the one who swears falsely” in the sixth vision in Zechariah 5:3-4. The two negative injunctions involve actions God hates and they are contrary to the two attributes that God loves—truth and peace.

The requirements of the covenant are simple: truth in everyday conversation, judgment which is both factual and makes for peace, an end to mutual personal conspiracies among the people, and a renewed appreciation for honesty and faithfulness in worship and in every other phase of life. These are the simple requirements of the Lord in covenant. The presence of the Lord among His people calls for bringing all of life into line with what pleases Him. What He hates must be eliminated.

In times past, the Lord had severely punished Israel. He had sent hard times upon them. Their enemies had oppressed them from without and within—creating dissension and strife, which to led to cruelty, oppression, and other outrages. But now God has declared that He will no longer deal with Israel as in the former days. A new day was coming, a day made possible through the grace of God. Israel was called upon to remember the one who brought to them peace, love, and justice for all. The ethical transformation of God’s people is essential to their well-being as they move into their new future. As God loves peace and justice for all His people, so too should those who are called by His name.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In today’s lesson, we have a vivid portrayal of what Jerusalem will be like when city and temple are restored, and the exiles have returned home. It shall come to pass that if the ethical commands are observed, then God’s favor will be manifest in their midst, and seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts will be their common lot. The prophet establishes for us what a just, peaceful, and loving city will look like. It is one in which old people and children are obviously happy and contented. Too often, people are apt to measure a city’s significance by its business, professions, and industry; its buildings, its wealth, and its art and culture. Zechariah suggests that we measure the significance of our cities by their effect upon two groups easily overlooked—the old and the young.

There was a practical reason for this observation in his thought of Jerusalem after the Exile. The Babylonians had all but swept the city clean of people when they conquered it seventy years before. The first to return would necessarily come from that age group, which
could stand the strain of primitive conditions devoid of all comforts and would be capable of enduring long hours of hard manual labor. This meant that the old and the very young would be among the last to return, when the work of reconstruction had progressed to the point where they could enjoy some safety and comfort.

Nevertheless, the prophet establishes the welfare and contentment of old people and children as the mark of a city functioning as a city is meant to function. In the hurry and bustle of city life, the very old and the very young, who cannot look out for themselves and who—in the opinion of some—serve no productive social or economic function, are too apt to be considered a nuisance, to be brushed out of the way. It is to be assumed that the church would not share this feeling but would reverence the value of all people, regardless of age. Unfortunately, it must be admitted that such an assumption cannot always be made. Not all churches gauge their programs to meet the needs and make use of the particular talents of older people. The increasing size of the group of older people in modern communities must rectify this error, sooner rather than later.

More attention in recent years has been given to the needs of children in our cities. Yet, even here the church in too many city communities is organized around adults, with the interests, needs, and the very great potential contributions of children lost to view. The prophet’s ideal of a city full of boys and girls playing in the streets does not get a lot of traction in too many of our churches. In a community bent on justice, these vulnerable groups will not go unnoticed. They matter to God and, therefore, they should matter to us. Also, children can benefit from the spiritual experiences that the aged among us have had with God and usually are more than willing to share with others.

**PRAYER**

Dear God, as You come to us with new beginnings, help us to repent of our old ways and to open our hearts to the newness of life that Your presence brings. Give us a sense of community and help us to always remember those who are the most vulnerable among us. Never let us forget that the hope, peace, and justice that we are called upon to live out in our daily lives is made possible through You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(May 4-10, 2020)*

**Peace and Justice Reign**

**MONDAY,** May 4: “God’s Worldwide Covenant with Abraham” (Genesis 12:1-8)  
**TUESDAY,** May 5: “A New Covenant of the Heart” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)  
**WEDNESDAY,** May 6: “Divided Peoples to Become One” (Ezekiel 37:15-23)  
**THURSDAY,** May 7: “Just Living in Church and the World” (Romans 12:9-21)  
**FRIDAY,** May 8: “Cultivate Peaceful and Just Relations” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22)  
**SATURDAY,** May 9: “Joyful Feasts Draw Newcomers” (Zechariah 8:18-23)  
**SUNDAY,** May 10: “Enjoy Fruits of Peace and Justice” (Zechariah 8:1-8, 11-17)
Lesson 12

PRACTICE JUSTICE

ADULT/YOUTH

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Just Rewards

**Youth Topic:** Bad Fruit

— Devotional Reading

**Psalm 86:1-13**

— Practice Justice

**Adult/Youth**

**Background Scripture:** Jeremiah 21

**Print Passage:** Jeremiah 21:8-14

**Adult Key Verse:** Jeremiah 21:12

**Youth Key Verse:** Jeremiah 21:14a

---

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** Practice Justice

**Children’s Topic:** Choosing Life

---

**Jeremiah 21:8-14—KJV**

8 And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the **LORD**; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death.

9 He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.

10 For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the **LORD**; it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

11 And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, **Hear ye the word of the **LORD**;**

12 O house of David, thus saith the **LORD**; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

---

**Jeremiah 21:8-14—NIV**

8 “Furthermore, tell the people, ‘This is what the **LORD** says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.

9 “Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives.

10 “I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the **LORD**. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.’

11 “Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, ‘Hear the word of the **LORD**.

12 “This is what the **LORD** says to you, house of David: Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it.
13 Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?
14 But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the LORD; and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it.

13 “I am against you, Jerusalem you who live above this valley on the rocky plateau, declares the LORD—you who say, “Who can come against us? Who can enter our refuge?”
14 “I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the LORD. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Evil is pervasive throughout human society. Can people continue to do evil without consequence? Jeremiah tells us that God is a God of justice and will recompense evil.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand divine justice described by Jeremiah.
2. Appreciate that God is a God of justice.
3. Make a personal commitment to demonstrate justice and advocate for justice.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The words of Jeremiah would have been seen as seditious to the king. Zedekiah was hoping for a message of deliverance. Jeremiah gave a message of surrender!
—To have one’s own life as “a prize of war” in Jeremiah 21:9 is also reflected in 38:2; 39:18; and 45:5.
—The prophet gives the people the option to choose life or choose death, which is an echo of Deuteronomy 30:15-20; decisions that are made today may lead to life or death.
—It was too late for Jerusalem; the city would be destroyed by the Babylonians.
—Jerusalem was protected from the west, south, and east, but not the north, from which the enemy would attack; God, the protector at the north side, would allow Jerusalem to be destroyed because of the people’s disobedience and idol worship.
—When seeds are planted, fruit results. The fruit of the people’s wrongdoing is rotten and the result is destruction.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Jeremiah reminded the people of Jerusalem that they could still choose to serve God.
—God tells the people how to regain His favor.
—Because of Israel’s disobedience to God, they brought punishment to themselves.
—God gives His people an opportunity to repent.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Jeremiah is one of the longest books in the Bible, surpassed in number of pages of text only by the book of Psalms. While not all of the book is necessarily from the prophet Jeremiah himself, the vast extent of his prophetic career and its setting in one of the most critical times in the history of Israel—from the reform of Josiah through the downfall of Judah and into the time of exile—suggests why this book looms so large in Scripture. The great crisis of Israel’s history in the Old Testament period involved the destruction of the temple, the dwelling place of the Lord of Israel, and the exile of God’s people. Much of the biblical literature either deals with those matters or comes from that time in Israel’s history. No other biblical book so enables readers to comprehend theologically what was going on at that time—to hear both what happened and why it happened—as does the book of Jeremiah.

According to an editor of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet was called in the thirteenth year of Josiah (627 BC). It is quite probable that Jeremiah was young. The divine command to be celibate (see Jeremiah 16:2), which was no doubt associated with his call, suggests that he may well have been younger than twenty, adding force to his resistance to God’s call: “I am only a youth” (Jeremiah 1:6, RSV). Apparently, he came from a priestly family. Anathoth, his hometown, is about two miles northeast of Jerusalem. Later on, Jeremiah encountered hostility from his family (12:6) which owned land (32:6ff) and probably did not take easily to his criticism of the establishment of which they were a part. Jeremiah’s call was in the prophetic tradition and the account of it takes a familiar pattern. A unique feature was his strong sense of predestination—“before you were born I consecrated you.” All those who were thus called shrank from the commission. Jeremiah’s special reason is immaturity and unreadiness. But as always, the Lord overcomes the objection by means of a sign and a renewal of the commission. The account of Jeremiah’s call proceeds to describe the total opposition that the prophet would encounter in carrying out his ministry. Its main theme is the sovereignty of the Word of God over all nations, causes, and persons.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Jeremiah addresses itself to a nation under massive assault and a people whose lives are wracked with pain. With disturbing images and raw emotion, the book bears witness to a disaster that represents nothing less than the collapse of the world, cosmic crumbling, and the need of a culture: the tragedy in mind is the defeat of Judah by Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. According to the biblical narrative, three Babylonian offensives (597, 587, 582) shattered Judah’s social and political order and left survivors beaten and disillusioned. The siege of Jerusalem in 587 was presumably the costliest. It resulted in death, displacement, and widespread destruction. The imposing Neo-Babylonian military machine burned to the ground the great Temple of Jerusalem and the royal palace complex. With the infrastructure in disarray and many leading citizens already in exile, the remnant in the land faced a bleak future. Indeed, a world had fallen. Long-standing institutions associated with God’s blessing, cherished belief systems, and social structures that appeared invincible had come to a cataclysmic end.

From survival literature, ancient and contemporary, we know that such upheaval not only causes physical and emotional devastation, but also evokes probing questions about ultimate reality. Where is God? How can such random and obscene acts of violence occur? Is it possible to live through the darkness and embrace life again? Jeremiah is a penetrating response to the multifaceted configurations of evil and the apparent silence of God. It is a “survival manual” for people living on the brink of despair. First, the book faces the disaster head-on and dares to speak of an experience that is too painful to utter. Against widespread
opposition, Jeremiah embraces the devastation as a reality that the people of Judah would have to endure. This brutal honesty eventually leads to Judah’s healing and restoration. Second, Jeremiah organizes the chaos in ways that provide avenues out of the abyss. Although Babylon looms larger than life, the text claims that God is the one who is “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow” (Jeremiah 1:10, NRSV), in some measure as a consequence of Judah’s unfaithfulness to God and mistreatment of its poor. In this way, the book testifies to Judah’s responsibility in the ordeal and to God’s involvement in it. Third, Jeremiah announces hope for newness after the nightmare. The hope that Jeremiah holds is not for a return to the old world, which is gone forever, but for a new start as survivors in a faraway place. Exile, thus, was not the end but the beginning of a new life and a new community.

When considering setting and context, it is essential to make a distinction between Jeremiah the prophet and Jeremiah the book. Although the two are clearly interdependent, they represent separate stages in the history of the tradition. When Jeremiah’s prophecies were preserved in written form, certain transformations occurred. The most germane of these was a shift in social setting and audience. According to the superscription (Jeremiah 1:1-3), Jeremiah’s “career” as God’s spokesperson spanned forty years: from the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign (627) to the captivity of Jerusalem (587). Based on virtually all these prose narratives in the book, it is safe to assume that his most active period extended from the inauguration of Jehoiakim (609) to the fall of Jerusalem (785).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Babylonians (verse 9)—Hebrew: Kasdi or Kasdimah (kas-dee’): inhabitants of Chaldea; “Chaldeans” (KJV).
Falleth (verse 9)—Hebrew: naphal (naw-fal’): to desert; “surrenders” (NIV).
Fruit (verse 14)—Hebrew: peri (per-ee’): actions (fruit used metaphorically); “deeds” (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. When God Refuses to Help His Own
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Fate of Judah and the End of the Monarchy
      (Jeremiah 21:8-10)
   B. A Word of Justice for the House of David
      (Jeremiah 21:11-12)
   C. The Unjust and Their False Sense of Security
      (Jeremiah 21:13)
   D. When God Turns on His Own
      (Jeremiah 21:14)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. When God Refuses to Help His Own

In Jeremiah 21, we read of the word of the Lord’s coming to Jeremiah during the reign of King Zedekiah while Babylonian forces are blockading Jerusalem. With the king of Babylon breathing down his neck, Zedekiah sends a delegation to Jeremiah to inquire of Yahweh. His envoys Pashhur and the priest Zephaniah plead that God will lift the Babylonian siege by performing “a wonderful deed for us” (Jeremiah 21:2, NRSV). As we have already seen, petitions for divine intervention are common in the Bible, and God usually responds favorably to them. God delights in defying the odds and rescuing people in times of great need. However, on this occasion, Yahweh refuses to help. The request for a hearing is granted, but the petition for divine intervention on Zedekiah’s behalf is denied. Jeremiah declares in stern resolution that nothing will abort the Babylonian invasion since Yahweh is the one waging war against Zedekiah and the royal city (see Jeremiah 21:3-7).

The ill-fated oracle against Zedekiah is followed by a short alternative prophetic message that addresses the people of Judah (see Jeremiah 21:8-10). Life and death relate to the land that Yahweh promises Israel. Life involves living peaceably in the land, even as death implies exile from the land. In Jeremiah 21:8-10, these Deuteronomic options are inverted. “The way of life” no longer means living in the land of Judah but rather in the land of Babylon. Yahweh promises life for surrender to Babylonian rule and exile to a faraway place. Moreover, continued resident in “this city” (Jeremiah 21:9) is tantamount to “the way of death.” By reconfiguring traditional categories, Jeremiah dashes all expectations for deliverance. In order to “live,” the people of Judah must “die” to any hope of perpetuating social policies that support the power structures of the state. To survive, they must relinquish their privileged place for displacement in a foreign country. To do this is no doubt daunting, but it is the only way to escape with “their lives as a prize of war” (verse 9, NRSV).

Jeremiah 21:11-14 may be read as the third response to Zedekiah’s petition for divine assistance (the first two appearing in verses 3-10). Jeremiah has already delivered two distressing oracles (divine speeches) to Zedekiah’s envoys. Now, he adds fuel to the fire by lecturing the king on the fundamental responsibility of the monarchy. The most important work of the king is to maintain justice in the community (verse 12). The power and policy of the king are to protect and defend citizens from exploitation. The phrase “in the morning” may refer literally to the time when legal cases are settled, or it may point to the priority and urgency of judicial decisions in the affairs of the king. A serious warning accompanies the admonition. If Torah justice is neglected, then disaster, envisioned as a consuming fire, will ensue (verse 12). Unlike kings who avert their eyes from the practice of oppression and thus become co-conspirators, God will not disregard the politics of injustice. God holds
leaders responsible for their silence in the face of extortion. There is no excuse for abdicating fundamental moral duties. Although Judah’s kings think that they are insulated from harm, Yahweh will penetrate their fortresses (verse 13). Like the Jerusalem Temple, the royal palace is no bulwark from the blast of Yahweh’s anger. When the demands of justice are ignored, even kings find no refuge from “[fire that enflames] all that is around it” (verse 14).

B. Biblical Background

The content of chapters 21–25 echoes many of the themes that have been heard before: judgment at the hands of Babylon, the call to repentance, the possibility of hope beyond judgment, and the indictment of false prophets. Particularly noticeable in this section are the focus on the leadership of Judah, specifically kings and prophets, and the proximity of the judgment. In fact, this whole chapter is dominated by the relationship between kingship and justice. That the two are mutually interdependent so that one cannot survive without the other is a central claim of these oracles. It is set forth so insistently that one must take the whole matter very seriously. Visions of the kingdom of God can function on a very spiritual plane, remote from the realities of human community. The Old Testament, however, persistently insists on that any vision of the kingdom must have justice at its center, and it regularly sets the criterion for determining whether justice is present in the way one treats the weakest members of the community, the powerless and the marginalized, the economically depressed, and the vulnerable.

There is a claim here that the leaders of the people are responsible for the care of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan; their role in this matter is so fundamental that their own survival depends on how well they have carried it out. The normal structural procedures and guarantees for determining who rules and governs go out the door when the rulers do not do justice, when they do not ensure the well-being of the people by attending to the needs of the poor and the weak. The whole system falls when the ruling power is self-aggrandizing and inattentive to the needs of the weak.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Fate of Judah and the End of the Monarchy
   (Jeremiah 21:8-10)

And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

King Zedekiah sent a man named Pashhur and the priest Zephaniah to ask Jeremiah, in the conventional way, for an oracle concerning the Babylonian invasion now in progress. Was there any hope of divine deliverance on behalf of Judah? Jeremiah gave the required oracle, predicting that there would be total defeat, and that those who survived the siege, including Zedekiah, would be delivered into the utterly uncompassionate hands of Nebuchadnezzar. In Deuteronomic terms, he set before the people the way of life and the way of death declared
the way of life to be unreserved capitulation to the foreign enemy. Zedekiah is told that the Lord’s holy war will be against rather than for his people, and that the curse, promised in the Deuteronomistic law upon disobedience, is about to be implemented upon Judah.

Having addressed King Zedekiah about his fate in Jeremiah 21:1-7, the prophet now addresses the people with the word of the Lord about their fate. The people are now offered a chance for survival, but only if they surrender. The passage draws on language and themes from the great covenantal and climactic text of Deuteronomy 30:15-19. As in that decisive moment, the people are given the alternative of life or death (verse 8). In Deuteronomy, the choice was a matter of obedience to the Lord’s instruction. In today’s lesson, that option is no longer open for the people of Judah. Or, rather, the people have chosen the way of death by failing to obey the Lord’s commands. Yet, there is still a way out. It is in accepting the Lord’s punishment administered by the Chaldeans who are besieging them (see Jeremiah 21:9). The prophetic word thus joins with other words in Jeremiah to identify a new kind of obedience to the Lord. It is found in acceptance of the Lord’s judgment for the people’s sins. Deuteronomy 30:15 indicates that the life-and-death choice is also a choice between good and evil, between blessing and curse. The word of the Lord is that the people have made that choice, and thus God’s face is set against the city for evil rather than for good. Those who acknowledge the Lord’s hand at work through the Babylonian army and thus surrender can save their lives.

B. A Word of Justice for the House of David
(Jeremiah 21:11-12)

And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, Hear ye the word of the Lord; O house of David, thus saith the Lord; execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

This passage identifies the maintenance of justice as a particular responsibility of the ruler, a notion that belonged to royal ideology throughout the ancient Near East. The king was the primary guardian of justice in the kingdom, the one to whom those who had been dealt with unfairly or robbed in some fashion could appeal for help and justice. That responsibility is a theme of this section. It assumes that the king is both the guarantor of the right and of the social order that justice and righteousness effect as well as the court of last resort in specific instances of injustice and oppression. The concern for the execution of this royal responsibility is such a large one in these passages that it serves to identify for the reader both the primary task of the king and the basis for the Lord’s judgment against the king. The two things that stand out in the passage are the insistence on the execution of justice as a regular, constant enterprise on the part of the king, to be carried out each morning (verse 12a), and the clear indication that the fate of the king and the kingdom depend on such continuing attention to the cause of justice and the oppressed.

The call to execute justice in the morning may refer generally to the haste or regularity with which justice is pursued and, by implication, to the pursuit of this charge as the focus for a typical royal day. Justice is not something
to be handled on the side or only late in the day. This text is not satisfied with a statement of principle, but moves quickly to the particular—namely, to see to justice for those who have been oppressed and are the victims of economic injustice. Stability and continuity are dependent upon a faithful discharge of this responsibility. Since there has been delinquency in this area, the royal house is under the judgment of God to correct it or face God’s wrath (verse 12b). The maintenance of justice was a major duty attached to sacral kingship in the Near East. In Judah, the obligation was intrinsic to both the Mosaic and the Davidic covenants. Such is our responsibility today. Those who provide leadership and stand in authority over others have a special responsibility to treat everyone in a just and fair manner. Where just treatment is lacking, moral leadership requires that corrective measures be put in place to protect those who are most vulnerable among us. This is indeed what the Lord loves and what the Lord requires of all who have entered into covenant with Him.

C. The Unjust and Their False Sense of Security (Jeremiah 21:13)

 Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, saith the Lord; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?

Verse 13 is a proverb-like image and refers to the sense of security belonging to those who live in pleasant, civilized places. The “plain” is also used in the Psalms as a place of safety and prosperity (see Psalm 26:12). Such is the complacency and confidence of those whom Jeremiah addresses that they believe they can never be disturbed. The kings thought that no enemy could be successful against them and enter their place of refuge. However, such a misplaced confidence forgets that the threat may come from a God who is “against” them. Thus, Jeremiah says, they will be disturbed by a punishing fire. The teaching that the divine judgment is inescapable is in line with one of his most persistent and dominant themes. This brief oracle is a condemnation of Jerusalem and its inhabitants for their belief in the impregnable of the city because of its location on easily defended hills.

D. When God Turns on His Own (Jeremiah 21:14)

But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the Lord: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it.

In the midst of the foregoing words to the kings is set a judgment speech against a city, surely Jerusalem. No specific reason is given for the judgment except the general reference to punishing “according to the fruit of your doings” (verse 14). One has to read the earlier chapters to find out what those “doings” are. The text, however, does characterize the city as a place of arrogance and complacency, assuming it is invulnerable to attack and secure from any threat. It is not dissimilar to the attitude Jeremiah condemns in chapter 7, when the people assume that the presence of the Temple of the Lord makes them impervious to any danger. In the face of such misplaced arrogance, the Lord says “The fire next time!” The forest in which the Lord’s fire will be kindled is the royal palace and the Temple, both built of cedars from the forests of Lebanon. The phrase is indicative of an image of judgment. The Lord’s judgment will start at the heart of the city at
those places that embodied royal and religious misconduct but were assumed to be citadels of the city’s security. The punishment by fire, which echoes the judgment in verse 12, may be the reason why this small oracle has been attached to Jeremiah 21:11-12.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

While justice can often pertain to fairness in the legal sphere, its more general sense is to act with uprightnes and integrity in all dealings with others, especially the less advantaged (e.g., strangers, widows, orphans). As Judah discovered, the practice of justice will often mean going beyond the Law (Torah). The call to care for the less advantaged, for example, will often mean acting toward others in compassionate ways that find no specification in any body of law (even Israel’s).

Among all the commandments that might have been cited in these oracles against the kings, repeatedly choosing those that have to do with the exercise of abusive power against the weak and needy is remarkable. We know all too well how easy it is for people in power to focus on other concerns and other commandments, and to neglect the needs of the less fortunate among us. These people are of particular concern to God, as is especially evident in the Exodus events, but certainly not only in that context. Because the needs of the less fortunate are God’s concern they are a prophetic concern and should also be that of the people of God in any age. But in order to do justice to these specific concerns we need to be imaginative in our words and deeds and not be narrowly focused on particular laws. We must do right by others whether or not it is spelled out in any kind of law. There is the law of love that should dictate how we treat one another, especially how we treat the least among us.

PRAYER

Eternal God, give us the strength to accept Your answers to our prayers even when those answers are not what we had hoped for. Help us to show justice to all whom we meet, but especially to the poor, the needy, and the downtrodden. Help us to see them as You see them—people who are loved and cared for by God. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(May 11-17, 2020)

Practice Justice
WEDNESDAY, May 13: “Choose to Love and Obey the Lord” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)
THURSDAY, May 14: “Surrender and the People Will Live” (Jeremiah 38:14-18)
FRIDAY, May 15: “Jerusalem Will Fall” (Jeremiah 21:1-7)
SUNDAY, May 17: “Choose the Life of Justice” (Jeremiah 21:8-14)
May 24, 2020
Lesson 13

REPENT OF INJUSTICE

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT TOPIC:** Do the Right Thing  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Repent

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 22  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Jeremiah 22:1-10  
**KEY VERSE:** Jeremiah 22:3b

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Repent of Injustice  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Changing Our Ways

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Jeremiah 22  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Jeremiah 22:1-10  
**KEY VERSE:** Jeremiah 22:3

---

**DEVOTIONAL READING**

Psalm 72:1-17

---

**Jeremiah 22:1-10—KJV**

THUS SAITH the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word,  
2 And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates:  
3 Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.  
4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.  
5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.  
6 For thus saith the LORD unto the king’s house of

**Jeremiah 22:1-10—NIV**

THIS IS what the LORD says: “Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there:  
2 “Hear the word of the LORD to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David’s throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.  
3 “This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.  
4 “For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people.  
5 “But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.”
Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.
7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.
8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city?
9 Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.
10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

6 For this is what the LORD says about the palace of the king of Judah: “Though you are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon, I will surely make you like a wasteland, like towns not inhabited.
7 “I will send destroyers against you, each man with his weapons, and they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire.
8 “People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?’
9 “And the answer will be: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.”’
10 Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss; rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Society often ignores and even condones the oppression of the vulnerable. Will righteousness be rewarded, and will evil face retribution? Through the prophet Jeremiah, God exhorts the people either to repent of injustice and deliver those who are oppressed or to face destruction.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand that the covenant relationship between God and God’s people requires justice.
2. Repent for injustice and seek to deliver the oppressed.
3. Become active agents of deliverance for the oppressed.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The physical desolation predicted against Jerusalem in Jeremiah 22 parallels the city’s spiritual desolation decried by Jesus in Matthew 23:37-39.
—The dead king for whom the people were not to weep in Jeremiah 22:10 was godly King Josiah, who had been killed in battle in 609 BC; rather, the people were to weep for his evil son, Jehoahaz (also known as Shallum, per Jeremiah 22:11) in exile (see 2 Kings 23:29-34).
—The successor to Jehoahaz was Jehoiakim, the king who occupied the palace discussed in Jeremiah 22:1.
—Other places where the Lord swears by Himself include Jeremiah 49:13; 51:14. There is no stronger affirmation than this.
—The house of the king of Judah is the palace (verse 1).
—God protects the aliens, orphans, and widows; He forbids shedding innocent blood (verse 3).
—Jeremiah 22:1-5 depicts a prose passage on the obligations of the kings to exact justice for the afflicted.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—Jeremiah tells the king of Judah that God was giving the nation one more chance.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The book of Jeremiah is known by the name of the prophet whose words and actions provide its content. In both the English and the Hebrew order of books, it occurs with the other prophetic books, after Isaiah and before Ezekiel and the Twelve. The order of the three major prophets is according to their putative historical settings. Isaiah son of Amoz was a figure of the eighth century BC, whereas Jeremiah and Ezekiel reside closer to the events of 586 BC. Jeremiah’s life and work begin before those of Ezekiel’s, though the latter is contemporary with the last part of Jeremiah’s prophetic work. The Twelve are grouped together because of their length and have a rough chronological order between them. The appeal of the book of Jeremiah has to do not only with the content of his prophecies or the intriguing nature of his life, but also with his personality as it shines through the book. Jeremiah broods, worries, mourns, and lashes out. It is no wonder that he is often considered the “weeping prophet.”

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The book of Jeremiah is introduced by a brief description of the historical context in which Jeremiah’s words were spoken (see Jeremiah 1:1-3)—namely, the period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 BC, and its aftermath.

This event was a watershed moment in Israel’s history and the book of Jeremiah centers on that event with all of its complex social, political, economic, military, and religious dimensions. Generally speaking, the book portrays Jeremiah as a prophet who has personally received a word from God regarding the divine purposes with respect to Israel and its larger world. Jeremiah has been called to speak that world in a public way and he obediently, though reluctantly, takes up that task.

That God is made such a prominent actor in Jeremiah is not an inference drawn from the historical data but is reflective of long-held theological convictions about the presence and activity of God in Israel’s life story. The prophet and those who gathered and edited these texts believed themselves to have the God-given capacity to see the “something more” in these events. And so God’s word in Jeremiah catches up to all dimensions of life, both those of Israel and those of other peoples with whom Israel has to do.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Zedekiah:** the last king of Judah (597–586 BC); a son of King Josiah’s and brother of Jehoahaz. Originally called Mattaniah, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon changed his name to Zedekiah when he installed him as king of Judah in place of his nephew Jehoiachin.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Forsaken (verse 9)**—Hebrew: ‘azab (ä•zav’): had left, refused, departed from, left behind.
Gilead (verse 6)—Hebrew: *Gilad* (ghil-awd’): a region east of the Jordan (in Palestine); also, the name of several Israelites.

Judah (verse 1)—Hebrew: *Yehudah* (yeh-hood-daw’): a son of Jacob’s; also, his descendants; the Southern Kingdom.

Orphan (verse 3)—Hebrew: *yathom* (yaw-thome’): someone who is without parents (or is “fatherless” [KJV/NIV]).

### TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. God’s Measuring Rod for Leadership: Justice for the Less Fortunate
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Message for the King
      (Jeremiah 22:1-3)
   B. God’s Promise of Protection for Righteous Kings
      (Jeremiah 22:4-5)
   C. God’s Holy War on the Unjust
      (Jeremiah 22:6-7)
   D. Why God Will Destroy Jerusalem
      (Jeremiah 22:8-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

A. God’s Measuring Rod for Leadership: Justice for the Less Fortunate

In chapter 21, Jeremiah offers an overall judgment on the recent kings of the Davidic line by the measuring rod he has established. That measuring rod is that kings are to act with justice and righteousness to deliver the oppressed from the oppressor and to do no wrong to the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. As we apply this measuring stick to our governments today, what stands out is the poor treatment given to the strangers and immigrants among us. The U.S. border with Mexico is heavily militarized, precisely to keep out the Mexican stranger who seeks to escape poverty and violence. The United States calls itself “the land of the free” but has no intention of extending its freedoms to the illegal immigrants it so zealously ferrets out. Only a handful of churches show any awareness that the Bible might call for protection of such strangers.

Widows and orphans are more cared for today in America than in years past, yet we can never rest on our laurels confident that such protection will remain in place. Their care and protection are always under threat from those who feel the country has no obligation to take care of the poor and less fortunate among us. The case with the strangers and immigrants among us is more dire. They continue to be on the receiving end of hostility and hateful speech on the part of many in our population. But in the Hebrew Bible, the resident stranger (immigrant) gets privileged treatment, along with the widow and the orphan. According to Jeremiah, kings have the special duty to give that privilege—even at times against general opinion and, we might add, at a time when strangers are feared as potential terrorists even before they give any indication that they might be so.
The reference to abandoning the Lord their God for other gods in Jeremiah 22:8-9 may surprise us, since previous verses have emphasized injustices to the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. It reintroduces themes we saw in Jeremiah 10 and 11. But there is a logic to the juxtaposition of injustice as an element of worship of false gods. Israel’s Lord demands justice as an element of worship, whereas the other gods have other demands. Because of the connection in the Exodus experience between loyalty to the Lord their God and the redemption of slaves, it is perfectly understandable that here, and in many other places in the Hebrew Bible, there is an equivalence between worshipping Yahweh exclusively and caring for the poor.

Jeremiah argues that the worship of God can be distinguished but not separated from the concern for the poor and needy. To claim a right relationship with God and then turn around and abuse and neglect the needy is a sign that the relationship with God is not in good order. To care for the less fortunate is to do justice to the relationship, and it also indicates that one truly knows God and knows the work of God (opus dei) in the world.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Message for the King
   (Jeremiah 22:1-3)

THUS SAITH the Lord; Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: thus saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Some scholars want to identify the “king of Judah” (verse 1) as either Jehoiakim or Zedekiah, although most believe that the Davidic Dynasty is intended. Jeremiah was told to “go down” to the king’s palace to proclaim his message. His message was directed to the king, his “officials,” and those who came through the
gates. The gates named here probably were the gates leading into the palace rather than the city gates. The Lord reminded the rulers of their obligation to do what is just and right. Because of his position and influence, the king was supposed to be an example to the people in his observance of God’s laws. He was expected to be a protector of the weak and defenseless—the robbed, alien, fatherless, and widow (see Jeremiah 2:3).

The demand on the king was to administer “justice” and “fair dealing.” These were significant terms in ancient Israelite thinking and are often linked together in the Old Testament. The king as well as the whole nation were required always to act in justice and in fairness, giving consideration to all the facts. Part of the total task was to establish justice and fair play for others, particularly for those who could not defend themselves against the oppressor. The resident alien, the orphan, and the widow were not to be ill-treated or treated violently, nor was innocent blood to be shed. The protection of these three classes is part of the covenant stipulation.

B. God’s Promise of Protection for Righteous Kings
(22:4-5)

For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

God presents two options to any member of the Davidic Dynasty, their officials, and the people. The focus on kings recognizes that they have often led the way in idolatrous practices and the shedding of innocent blood. The options are sharply stated. On the one hand, if they obey this charge from God, then kings will continue to pass through the gates of this “house” (palace), accompanied by chariots, horses, officials, and people (verse 4). Perhaps coronation processions are in mind. On the other hand, if they do not heed these words, then this “house” shall become a ruin. These options do not speak to the future of the Davidic line as such—though that will be deeply affected—but to the future of the palace.

If the kings kept the laws and enforced them in the land, then the continuation of their dynasty was assured. If they did not, then even the “palace” (house) would be destroyed. In order to impress the rulers with the gravity of his threat, the Lord said “I swear by myself” to carry out this warning (verse 5). There was none higher by whom the Lord could swear. No oath could be uttered that was more solemn than that one. The palace would literally be destroyed, but this warning stood for the entire royal dynasty and its destruction.

C. God’s Holy War on the Unjust
(22:6-7)

For thus saith the Lord unto the king’s house of Judah; Thou art Gilead unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited. And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.

Though God thinks highly of the palace and, by extension, the city of Jerusalem, God swears (again) that it will become a desert, if the king and people did not heed the charge to do justice. Gilead and Lebanon were noted for their forests—Lebanon especially for its cedar, which was used in construction. Gilead and especially Lebanon had breathtakingly
beautiful landscapes in their heavily forested areas. David described his palace as a house of cedar (see 2 Samuel 7:2). One part of Solomon’s palace complex was called the House of the Forest of Lebanon (see 1 Kings 7:2-5), so named for its rows of cedar pillars and beams. The Lord warned that invaders would come and cut down and burn the buildings, as a woodsman would cut down trees. Their beauty would not save them from destruction. So thorough would be the destruction that Jerusalem would be like a desert or an uninhabited town. “Uninhabited cities” (see verse 6) may be a hyperbolic expression for total devastation. The invaders are called “destroyers” whom God “will send” (NIV). This is the language of holy war. Soldiers were prepared beforehand for battle against the enemy via certain rituals. This was another reminder that God was going to fight against His own people.

**D. Why God Will Destroy Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:8-10)**

And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them. Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

Jerusalem’s devastation was going to be of such magnitude that people from other nations, upon seeing the ruins, would know that only an angry deity could be responsible for such destruction. They would want to know why He had destroyed such a great city. The modern reader cannot appreciate the shock waves that must have reverberated throughout Judah and its surrounding neighbors when the ancient city lay in smoldering ruins. There was only one explanation for the calamity—the people had forsaken the covenant they had made with the Lord and served other gods.

From the perspective of exilic readers, it is clear why the city and its buildings have been destroyed: Israel has been unfaithful to its God. Even the nations know this. Abandoning “covenant” occurs only here; usually the reference is to abandoning God, and hence one might interpret the phrase as abandoning the relationship with God.

Verse 10 is a fragment of a divine oracle addressed to the people of Israel regarding two unidentified male individuals: one dead and the other in exile. Verses 11-12 (Background Scripture) identify the exiled person as King Shallum; he succeeded his father, Josiah, who is implicitly identified as the individual who had died. The people were admonished not to lament for Josiah, who died tragically in battle with the Egyptians in Megiddo in 609 BC. Such an admonition was given to those who were in fact lamenting for Josiah; 2 Chronicles 35:24-25 reports that both the people and the prophet Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and that this mourning became a custom in Israel. Josiah’s death was particularly traumatic, for it brought an end to dreams regarding freedom from foreign domination and the reunification of the people of Israel. But such dreams would not be realized; that was irrecoverable past history.

Instead, the people were to lament for King Shallum. The oracle states that he would die in exile—never to return to Israel—and so he did (see 2 Kings 23:30-34). The people were to lament for him because his passing was a sign of dashed hopes for the future of Israel. This king, chosen by the people, would not return as king.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The sayings in this section may come from different times in Jeremiah’s long ministry, but by being combined and placed here they gain significant power and relevance. There is some tension in that some of the words imply an element of conditionality and hope (see Jeremiah 22:3-4), whereas others speak of punishment that has now become irreversible because the conditions have been flagrantly flouted. Basically, what the text is saying is that successive governments of Judah knew perfectly well the demands and standards to which God held them accountable—this is especially the case with respect to the widows, orphans, poor, and strangers among them. And, if the God-ordained leadership had sought to honor their commitments to these most vulnerable citizens, they could have continued to prosper. But since generation after generation in the royal line of David had failed to do so, they must not meet their judgment. The passage highlights the priorities that God holds before any government.

What are the primary duties of government? Jeremiah puts justice at the top of the list and argues that if the state would concentrate on defending the rights of the needy, then God would look after the defense of the nation. It is remarkable how this emphasis on showing justice and defending the needy as the chief role of government is found throughout the strata of the Old Testament. It features in the book of Psalms (far more than in any book of Christian hymns). One of the repeated themes in Israel’s Wisdom Literature is the giving of advice to those in government. It colors several narratives: David began this way but departed from it in later life. Tragically, Solomon followed suit. Only a few notable kings are recorded as striving after this ideal—such as Jehoshaphat and Josiah. Yet, God’s promise to the rulers of the house of David had been explicit on this point. If they remained obedient to God, they would prosper. If they did not, then God would punish them. Their obedience would largely be measured in terms of how they treated the left out and the looked over. God requires justice for the least among us, then and now.

PRAYER

Eternal God, help us always to be mindful of the common good in our dealings with others. As You have loved the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the strangers, help us bring that love and concern to those children of God in our day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 18-24, 2020)

Repent of Injustice

MONDAY, May 18: “Justice for Aliens, Orphans, and Widows” (Deuteronomy 24:17-22)
TUESDAY, May 19: “God Requires Godly Rule by Kings” (Deuteronomy 17:18-20)
WEDNESDAY, May 20: “Who May Enter God’s Holy Presence?” (Psalm 15)
THURSDAY, May 21: “God’s Justice for the Unjust King” (Jeremiah 22:11-19)
SATURDAY, May 23: “Injustice Ends the Line of David” (Jeremiah 22:24-30)
SUNDAY, May 24: “Repent of Misdeeds and Unjust Actions” (Jeremiah 22:1-10)
Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14—KJV

WHEN ISRAEL was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.
2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.
8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.
9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not come against their cities.
10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like

Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14—NIV

“WHEN ISRAEL was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
2 “But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.”

7 “My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them.
8 “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.
9 “I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.
10 “They will follow the LORD; he will roar like
a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

... 

EPHRAIM FEEDETH on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The L ORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

... 

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.
7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.
8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.
9 And I that am the L ORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.
10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.
11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.
12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.
13 And by a prophet the L ORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.
14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his L ORD return unto him.

a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.”

... 

EPHRAIM FEEDS on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.

2 The L ORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.

... 

6 But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.
7 The merchant uses dishonest scales and loves to defraud.
8 Ephraim boasts, “I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin.”
9 “I have been the L ORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed festivals.
10 “I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them.”
11 Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field.
12 Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her he tended sheep.
13 The L ORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.
14 But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger; his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.

**UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE:** People often equate prosperity with righteousness. Is prosperity the standard by which people and society should be judged? Hosea reminds us that love and justice are God’s standards.
**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

*Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:*

1. Compare prosperity as a worldly goal with the godly virtues of love and justice.
2. Regret occasions when they have adopted prosperity as a key goal.
3. Practice love and justice as key virtues.

**AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED**

**Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH**

—God’s heartbreak is felt in verse 1 similar to that of a father who is heartbroken over the child’s disobedient actions; Israel is God’s son, whom God called out of Egypt (see Exodus 4:22); God’s love and disappointment are expressed.

—God had been rejected by Israel, who preferred idol gods; they have many names, but here the prophet groups them together and calls them all “Baals.”

—Israel offered incense and sacrificed to these idol gods, which were handmade statues that could neither speak nor hear nor act (see Isaiah 40:18-20; Habakkuk 2:18-20).

—Incense was lawfully used for Israel’s worship of the true and living God, but the Israelites used incense to worship false gods (verse 2).

—Divine compassion becomes divine anger (verses 8-9).

—God’s love is unconditional—a love that is healing and corrective to bring wholeness to God’s child as a loving parent.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Hosea tells of God’s compassionate care despite Israel’s rebellion.

—Israel had forgotten the goodness of God as revealed in the stories of Jacob.

—There is a contrast between what God expects from the people and their decision to choose idolatry.

—The Scripture provides a contrast between the hope found in Hosea 11 and the judgment found in Hosea 12.

---

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

In common with other prophetic books, the title “Hosea” derives from the name of the prophet. The English “Hosea” occurs but four times in the Bible. The name means “salvation.” It is appropriate for both the deliverance motif in Hosea’s family and the need for national salvation which was so apparent during the time in which he ministered. Placing the ministry of Hosea in the days of “Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” (1:1) creates a chronological range of approximately a century (783–687 BC). It was probably the intention of the writer to suggest no more by this than that Hosea was a contemporary of Isaiah’s, and this he did by using the same kings of Judah to date the book of Hosea as were used to date Isaiah (see Isaiah 1:1).

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

In Hosea’s day, he emphasized Israel’s unfaithfulness toward the Lord, not only as it was exemplified in her service of the Baals but also as
represented by her political intrigues and dynastic instability, and by the quest for security through reliance upon foreign alliances. Doubtless many of the political leaders of that time were acutely aware that Israel could not hope to stand in her own strength against the aggressive might of Assyria or Egypt, and it seemed to them that the policy dictated by responsible statesmanship was to seek a protective alliance with one another of these great powers. But the religious implications of such alliances were seriously menacing for a people trained by her prophets for a standard of life and conduct spiritually purer and morally more austere than that of the surrounding nations. Help from Assyria or Egypt might meet the needs of a temporary emergency; in the long run it would be pernicious, for neither of these powers had the least interest in Israel and her welfare. If, however, the people remained faithful to their Lord, He would supply their need and be their protector—for He was bound to them by the cords of covenant love. Whatever threats Israel faced from other nations, Hosea desired God-chosen leaders whose way of action would be in accordance with God’s will and whose conduct would be praiseworthy.

It should next be noted that whereas Amos spoke of the people’s sinfulness in terms of failure to fulfill God’s demand for righteousness, Hosea spoke of it in terms of the breaking of a bond or covenant. For Hosea, the fundamental fact was that Israel was bound to God by hesed (covenant love). But the Israelites walked away from that love; they failed to honor their obligations with respect to justice and righteousness, peace and love. They cast off the covenant yoke and broke the covenant. They had lost their trust in Yahweh and had become yoked to idols. Some might have continued to serve Him formally, but they had ceased to serve Him from the heart. But, in the end, God would demand righteousness from His chosen ones, and He would take corrective measures to bring them back into a right relationship with Himself.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Ephraim**: the second son of Joseph and the ancestor of a tribe by the same name. Ephraim represented Israel’s religious apostasy.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

- **Burned Incense** (11:2) — Hebrew: *Qatar* (kaw-tar’): made sacrifices upon; turned into a fragrance by fire, especially as an act of worship.
- **Ephraim** (11:8) — Hebrew: *Ephrayim* (ef-rah’-yim): a son of Joseph’s; also, his descendants and their territory.
- **Return** (11:5 [Background Scripture]) — Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to turn back; “repent” (NIV).
- **Wealth** (12:8) — Hebrew: *hon* (hone): sufficiency; “substance” (KJV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

1. **Introduction**
   A. Israel’s Unfaithfulness toward God
   B. Biblical Background

2. **Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
   A. The Consequences of God’s Unrequited Love
      (Hosea 11:1-2)
   B. Love and Inevitable Conflict
      (Hosea 11:7-10)
   C. A Study in the Futility of Betrayal
      (Hosea 12:1-2, 6)
   D. Deception and False Security
      (Hosea 12:7-14)

3. **Concluding Reflection**
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Israel’s Unfaithfulness toward God

Hosea was called to his prophetic office in those stirring times that ushered in the final catastrophe which swept away the Northern Kingdom into political extermination. At the time that Hosea began to prophesy, there appeared at least to the superficial observer no indication on the political horizon that the end was so near, so rapidly approaching. After much tribal warfare, there came for the two kingdoms an almost unprecedented era of prosperity. At the time of Hosea and his earlier contemporary Amos, a generation had therefore grown up in Israel which knew not the bitterness of oppression by the enemy nor the shame of defeat. Peace had ruled for many years and consequently prosperity had returned to the poverty-stricken land. There was immense wealth in the land, but side by side with this wealth was poverty, need, and want. The poverty was so great that people were sold into slavery because they could not pay a ransom large enough to buy a pair of sandals.

The immense wealth of the rich was not amassed by fair means. Thus, Hosea refers to Israel as a merchant, a Canaanite, with the balance of deceit in his hands. He described Israel as one who loves to oppress, deceive, and force to the wall every competitor. There was no law and justice in the land. The poor and needy were helpless in those days, but they did not escape the notice of the loving God who was determined to exact revenge on those who had so terribly mistreated them. Although the poor were vulnerable to the strong they were also under the divine care and protection of almighty God. He promised to set things right in His own good time. Hosea called upon the Israelites to return to a time of love and justice in their dealings with one another.

B. Biblical Background

Seldom is the revelation of God mediated through such depth of personal anguish and suffering as one finds in Hosea’s agony. Only the later suffering of Jesus transcends the personal sorrow of Hosea as a medium of divine revelation. Jesus and Hosea shared a name in common—meaning “savior, salvation.” But more than this they shared the bond of a common identification with sorrow as the vehicle of ministry. In the crucible of their anguish and suffering, they witnessed the conception and eventual birth of that divine purpose which accredited their vocations. Heartache and alienation were all too often the accompaniments of both Hosea and Jesus. The entirety of the prophet’s grief constituted what one scholar referred to as a “valley of tears.” Yet, through such a valley walked in loneliness and desolation—Hosea ultimately found the “door of hope.” Through the avenue of a love conceived in the heart of God but shared in the bonds of the covenant community, Hosea witnessed the transformation of his crisis into a vehicle of divine revelation.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Consequences of God’s Unrequited Love  
(Hosea 11:1-2)

WHEN ISRAEL was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

The love of God is the controlling motif of chapter 11. The metaphor applied to God is that of the caring parent rather than the loving husband in the earlier chapters of Hosea. The love manifested in the father-son relationship originated in the Exodus experience and continued in the providential care exercised over Israel throughout her corporate existence. The covenant ratified in the wilderness is phrased in the language of kinship. Hosea 11 does not call God “mother,” but it does not call God “father,” either. However, it does highlight parental love. Such a love is creative, bringing the child into existence to share in the love between parents. It is an instructive love that teaches a child to become a better person and to strive for the common good. It is a tolerant and patient love that allows a child to make mistakes and accepts that child back in forgiveness. It is an unconditional love in spite of the child’s rebelliousness. It is a corrective love that intervenes when a child strays too far off the path. Finally, it is a healing love that helps bring a wayward child to wholeness.

The verb “to call” can mean both “to summon” and “to name.” Thus, when God summons Israel from Egypt, He also names Israel as an adopted son (verse 1). “Called” is an election term and suggests that creative experience when the Lord called a people out of bondage into freedom—called them into the bonds of a covenant relationship which was ultimately interpreted from the family perspectives of sonship, love, and fidelity. From the beginning of Israel’s corporate existence, however, God’s matchless love was received with an ingratitude that defies description. The comparative emphasis of verse 2—“the more I called . . . the more they went”—underscores not only the rebellion of Israel but an attendant ingratitude. Hosea suggests, “as I called thus they walked from me.” The picture is that of an ungrateful, rebellious child who walks away from his father, being not only inattentive but also deliberately unresponsive to the concern and overture of his father. The verbal construction is such as to suggest that the walking away from the Lord consisted of two specific but clearly parallel actions: sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols.

The incredulous nature of Israel’s ingratitude is reflected in the picture of the Lord’s loving care and Israel’s ignoble response. Hosea’s form of divine speech appeals to the history of Israel as a means of illustrating both the love and mercy of the Lord and the manner in which Israel flaunted that grace and loving concern. Hosea claims that the repudiation of love and grace began in Egypt and continues to the present day.

B. Love and Inevitable Conflict  
(Hosea 11:7-10)

And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man;
the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after the Lord; he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

A responsible father cannot ignore the need for discipline—nor can the sovereign Lord of history. Therefore, verses 5-7 present a graphic picture of the inevitable conflict which awaits those who respond to God’s love with ingratitude and rebellion. The discipline of the rebellious son was an area of concern for Israel (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21), and Isaiah used that motif in his description of Judah in the same general era as Hosea (see Isaiah 1:3).

In view of the severity of discipline in the Old Testament, the possibility of abandoning Israel (which emerges in verses 5-7) should not be surprising. If God’s own Israel responds with ingratitude and rebellion, then let the son go his own way. Let Israel return to Egypt; let Assyria be their king. Hosea’s play on words and ideas is deliberate: Because (if) they have refused to return to Me, then they shall return to Egypt (see verse 5). If they want Egypt, then Egypt they shall have. But it shall not be the old, literal Egypt but rather another bondage in which Assyria shall be their king. The raging battles of war will come (verse 6), and the people bent on turning away from the Lord will be handed over to the yoke of slavery and bondage (verse 7).

Although God may give a person up to follow his or her own ways, God never gives up on any of His children. With the fidelity that a father feels toward a son, God continues to care, for the simple reason that He continues to love—because He is love. There is a sense in which God cannot abandon humankind without denying the essence of His own nature. The thought of abandoning His son whom He had cared for from infancy to manhood creates an unspeakable anguish in the heart of God. At the thought of God’s giving up His people, making them like those cities of Admah and Zeboim which were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah, the heart of God recoils: “my compassion grows warm and tender” (verse 8, NRSV). Such anthropomorphic (human-centered) language may be questionable for some, but how else may humans describe God other than through human analogies?

How are the demands for discipline and love reconciled? Reconciliation is possible through the manifestation of a restrained judgment which is redemptive rather than retributive. Both the character and purpose of discipline should be underscored: (1) I will not execute my fierce anger, and (2) I will not come to destroy (verse 9). There is a wrath in God’s love and a love in God’s wrath, both of which should be kept in proper tension. From the human perspective, many people would have abandoned ungrateful children who repudiated every parental effort to develop in them those qualities designed to produce the “good life.” When one considers the checkered history of the people of God, crisscrossed with varied expressions of ingratitude and rebellion, one wonders why God does not give up on them. The answer is simple, stated by God Himself: “I am God, and not man” (verse 9). There is that quality of patience created through the union of God’s love and grace which is able not only to forgive but also to discipline and re-create. God has shown and continues to manifest such patience as He seeks to make of His people the family He knows they can be—and all will become.
C. A Study in the Futility of Betrayal

(Hosea 12:1-2, 6)

EPHRAIM FEEDETH on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him. . . . Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.

Speaking through the prophet, God begins an indictment of Ephraim/Israel by accusing it of lies and deceit. The futility of Ephraim’s deeds becomes evident in Hosea 12:1, where Ephraim “herds the wind” and “pursues” the east wind (NRSV). The invective mood characterizes the language of this divine address. The object of the invective is twofold: (1) Israel’s unfaithfulness to the Lord (see 11:12a), as manifested through (2) her false trust in foreign power (see 12:1b). Lies, deceit, and falsehood characterized the relationship which Israel sustained with the Lord. Such falsity and betrayal reveal the essential character of Israel’s sin. In Hosea 12:1b, Israel makes a bargain with Assyria and oil is carried off to Egypt. This action on the part of Israel is usually interpreted as either a gift or a tribute. But this verse suggests far more than either a tribute or a gift for the purpose of inducing national support. The real problem here is that Israel had entered into covenant with forces other than the national deity, Yahweh. This action constituted the epitome of betrayal.

Such betrayal as characterizes the people of God is graphically described by Hosea as herding (pasturing) the wind or pursuing the east wind. The winds that the Israelites try to control will lash back and ravage them. Every effort of humans to deliver themselves without relationship to the God of the covenant is as futile as seeking to herd the wind or catch the storm.

Verses 4-6 are linked to the Genesis tradition not only by subject matter but also through the repetition of significant words. These verses exploit various levels of meaning through their ambiguous subjects and suffixes. On one level, God encounters Jacob at Bethel, speaks with him, reveals the divine name, and enjoins him to repent and return to God and cherish love and justice (verse 6). On another level, God encounters “us” and is revealed to “us,” exhorting “us” to repent and adhere to the covenant. On still another level, the repentant Jacob speaks to “us,” confesses God’s name, and enjoins “us”/“you” to repent, return to God, and keep God’s covenant.

The experience of Jacob is both a warning and an exhortation. It is a warning against the self-will which leads one to the role of a supplanter, even to strive with God. Yet, it is an exhortation to repentance and to renewal. That the focus of Hosea’s emphasis is not altogether directed toward the negative aspects of Jacob’s life is clear in the statement “he met [God] at Bethel, and there [God] spoke with him” (verse 4, NRSV). Self-will and alienation give way to tears and the beseeching of God, the attitude of the penitent which effects a new relationship epitomized in the giving of a new name, Israel, for Jacob. There are no better words of advice for an alienated, estranged people than these: “But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God” (verse 6, NRSV). Within the grace of the Lord, supplanter (Jacob) can be renamed as those who strive with God (Israel).
The ignomy and shame of wasted days can be forgiven and life redeemed. This is the wonder of being a Jacob-people.

Although the prophet indicts Jacob/Israel for his ways (verse 2), he manages through historical references to the Jacob story to communicate hope for the nation and a means by which it can change (verses 3-6). Jacob, ancestor of Israel, who is also a notorious cheat and liar to whom all of Israel’s present sins can be traced, becomes, through his world-changing struggle with God, the nation’s paradigm for repentance. He urges his descendant to undergo a similar transformative confrontation with God. The shift from “him” to “us,” from the patriarch to the nation, is part of the text’s overall design to ground the present sinful generation in its own history and to disclose possibilities for a new future.

D. Deception and False Security
(Hosea 12:7-14)

He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin. And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast. I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets. Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields. And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved. Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.

In verse 7, a “trader” (NRSV) is a derisive and scornful characterization of Israel by the name Canaan. The word Canaan means “trader” and was used of the Canaanites because of their reputation as travelling merchants. Israel had lost her identity as the people of God and may now be addressed by the name of the people who inhabit the land: Canaanite or trader. She holds false balances in her hand and loves to oppress—probably an indictment of Israel for social oppression akin to that condemned in the denunciatory tirades of prophets such as Amos (see 2:6; 8:4).

Almost as serious as the social oppression which characterized Israel (verse 8) was the blatant manner in which she exonerated herself, confident that her wealth justified the means by which she had obtained it—confident also that the iniquity of her sin would never be found. Hosea and John of the book of Revelation echo the continuing voice of those who have grown rich at the expense of their integrity. The blatant arrogance of such oppressors is clear. While the translation of 12:8b is admittedly difficult, it is probably best rendered as this: In all my wealth they will not find in me iniquity or crookedness which is sin. This is the constant, self-confident cry of people who believe that they are beyond either discovery or condemnation. Their name is “legion” today who share this conviction.

The continued use of the first person as subject of the action in verses 9-11 suggests that one confronts a unified divine speech at this juncture. In response to the self-confident assertion that no one will know the social sins described in 12:7-8—and that certainly no one will bring to judgment—there is the assertion that the Lord cannot be deceived. He not only knows but also will act within history to rectify the wrongs. The passage affirms the righteousness of God in its insistence upon the action of the Lord (verse 9), validates the ministry of the
prophets as men sent by the Lord (verse 10), and insists that judgment shall come upon the iniquity of Israel (verse 11).

We are so inclined in our day to judge people by their material success, worldly gain, and creature comforts. We also tend to look up to the rich, famous, and wealthy as if they have found favor in God’s sight. These things matter little to God in the grand scheme of things.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Hosea continually speaks of the people’s “return to Egypt” if they continue in their sinful ways. It is difficult to picture why his hearers would not transform their behavior to avoid such a fate. A return to Egypt means an actual uprooting from the land and captivity in a foreign and hostile country. It means the return to physical slavery, enduring the whips inflicted on one’s back by cruel overseers. It means the struggle to exist in squalid living and working conditions. It means seeing one’s children grow up without a childhood, bent over by toil. It means the loss of one’s dignity and even one’s humanity. Ultimately, it means a regressing, a return to a life of hopelessness and despair, a life without freedom and without the ability to make choices.

Throughout chapters 9–12, Hosea summons people to “remember” their history: how God freed them from slavery in Egypt (11:1); how God chose and protected them in the wilderness (11:3–4). Israel, however, refuses to learn from its history and change its course. In very real ways, Hosea’s prophecy is fulfilled: symbolically, Ephraim did “return to Egypt” in its exile by the Assyrians from its beloved land. The Hosean text challenges us to reckon seriously with the religious and political choices before us and to learn the lesson of our own history.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help us ever to look to You for all the good and perfect gifts that come down to us. Help us to keep a perspective on the things that truly matter in life. Do not let us confuse material success with spiritual depth. Keep before us a sense of right and wrong in our dealings with one another. And help us ever to look to You for the model of what truly constitutes justice and righteousness. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 25-31, 2020)

Return to Love and Justice

MONDAY, May 25: “Receiving a New Vision of God” (Genesis 28:10-17)
TUESDAY, May 26: “Justice for Gentile Believers” (Acts 15:10-17)
WEDNESDAY, May 27: “The Up or Down Choice” (Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19)
THURSDAY, May 28: “Jesus, a Migrant from Egypt” (Matthew 2:13-15)
FRIDAY, May 29: “Ephraim Spurns God’s Love and Suffers” (Hosea 11:3-6)
SATURDAY, May 30: “Once a Slave; Now a Brother” (Philemon 8-21)
SUNDAY, May 31: “Respond with Love and Justice Daily” (Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14)
Many Faces of Wisdom

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter of study will explore how God is experienced as Wisdom in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. During this quarter, we explore the many facets of wisdom as recorded in the book of Proverbs, in the Gospels, and in the letter written by James.

Unit I, “Wisdom in Proverbs,” comprised of four lessons, explores the nature of God’s wisdom as found in the book of Proverbs. These lessons describe how Wisdom calls to us; and the value of Wisdom and the gifts she offers. The unit ends by exploring the metaphor of the Feast of Wisdom.

Unit II, “Wisdom in the Gospels,” offers four lessons—one lesson from each of the four Gospels. This unit examines the wisdom of God as seen in the teachings and life of Jesus.

Unit III, “Faith and Wisdom in James,” offers a five-lesson study of wisdom as seen in the letter of James. These lessons explore the interaction of faith and wisdom, including practical advice regarding faith in action and the taming of the tongue. The study ends by contrasting two kinds of wisdom.
Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Romans 11:33, NIV)
THE CALL OF WISDOM

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Listen Up!
YOUTH TOPIC: Learning about Wisdom

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Listen to God’s Wisdom
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Wise Up!

DEVOTIONAL READING

Psalm 34:11-18

Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10-11, 20-22, 32-33

—KJV

THE PROVERBS of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;
2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;
3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;
4 To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.

Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10-11, 20-22, 32-33

—NIV

THE PROVERBS of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
2 for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight;
3 for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair;
4 for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young.

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
8 Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.

Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10-11, 20-22, 32-33
blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause.

20 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:
21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying,
22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.
33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

wait for innocent blood, let’s ambush some harmless soul.”

20 Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;
21 on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:
22 “How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?”

32 “For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People feel compelled by something greater than themselves to act wisely when confronting feelings of inadequacy to complete a task. How can they overcome these feelings of inadequacy and move forward? The wisdom of God instructs us to discern the direction in which we should go and gives us the insight we need to understand life.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Recognize the value of godly wisdom for discerning the direction in which one should go.
2. Value godly wisdom in the choices they make.
3. Make a conscious effort to apply the standards of wisdom to a specific choice that needs to be made.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The prologue to the book of Proverbs clearly indicates the collection’s intended audience: inexperienced young men about to enter adulthood.

—Proverbs 1:7 is considered the motto for the entire collection and firmly connects human wisdom and knowledge to service of God. (See also 8:13; 9:10; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23.)

—Though Wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs (see 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6), women are noticeably absent from it, appearing primarily in relation to the young men the book addresses.

—Proverbs admonishes us to know or acknowledge the sound instructions of the Word of God.

—Proverbs tells us that there will be corrective measures taken for not obeying instructions.

—It is not enough to simply know right from wrong; it is essential to understand and adhere to instructions.
—Proverbs seeks to provide the naïve with knowledge and insights to lead them to wisdom.
—Proverbs establishes that reverent fear of God is foundational to knowing wisdom.
—Wisdom is a gift from God.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—Solomon, who was King David’s son and the third king of Israel, is the author of the book of Proverbs.
—Solomon directs his words of guidance and encouragement to young people.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

It is generally accepted that King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs. King Solomon was a wise king who was known to have more than three thousand proverbs and sayings (see 1 Kings 4:32). However, not all of the proverbs in the book of Proverbs were written by King Solomon as the book itself lets us know. There were others who contributed to the infinite wisdom in the book. Agur, son of Jakeh, contributed (see Proverbs 30:1-33). King Lemuel also wrote a part of it. It is speculated that he may have been a non-Israelite who lived in a place called Uz, where people still believed in Yahweh (see Proverbs 31).

Some parts from Proverbs 22–24 are believed to have been written by a group of people referred to as “wise men,” who are believed to have been attached to King Solomon (1 Kings 4:31; 12:6). The passages in Proverbs 25:1 through Proverbs 29:27 are believed to be the work of a committee appointed under King Hezekiah (726–698 BC).

No one is certain about the date of the writing, but it is widely believed that the book of Proverbs was written and compiled sometime between the tenth and sixth century BC.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The cultural setting of the book of Proverbs is a very rich one. Some of the proverbs in the book are thought to emanate from ancient Egyptian wisdom. These proverbs or instructions emanated from wise men of Egypt. There have been arguments that these were probably copied and attributed to King Solomon. Some were said to have been copied from Greek and Persian periods during the post-exilic era. This may be true as it is often the trend that people sometimes attribute more to great men than they actually achieved. However, this does not take anything away from the fact that King Solomon was the wisest man alive.

Since Solomon is said to have spoken those three thousand proverbs, some of which are recorded in the book of Proverbs, it is not strange that people would accord anything “wise” to him. Also, all wisdom comes from God almighty whether it be revealed to children of God, or to those who are yet to come to the light. God is all-wise and so, there is no humanly emanated wisdom that compares to His own.
The book of Proverbs has God at its center, telling people to live their lives in a way as not to offend God and not to offend other people. It advises people to trust in God and to live their lives in a way that pleases God. It speaks against idolatry and gratification of the flesh which may hinder one from being right with God. It is not just a book that teaches morals; it is a book that hinges life and living on God, guiding people on how to live smartly and safely without offending God or the king. It has a focus on Israel before Christ, teaching people to follow the law, and to make sure that even though they may not break the law, they do not err against God in their hearts.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Israel:** This refers to the people who inhabited the location that was known as Israel. They were descendants of Abraham, and they were God’s chosen people. The book of Proverbs was for them, to guide them in living right.

**King David:** the father of King Solomon who is, perhaps, the most famous king who ruled Israel. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, came as a descendant of King David’s.

**King Solomon:** the generally accepted author of the book of Proverbs, and Proverbs 1 is attributed to him. He was king in Israel and he is said to be the richest and wisest king ever.

**The Lord:** The term Lord in the Bible is used to refer to Yahweh. The book of Proverbs teaches and guides people to live right according to Yahweh.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Come (verse 11)**—Hebrew: *balak* (haw-lak’): to go, come, walk.

**Delight (verse 22)**—Hebrew: *chamad* (khaw-mad’): to desire, take pleasure in; covet.

**Fear (verse 7)**—Hebrew: *yirah* (yir-aw’): a fear; reverence.

**Instruction (verse 2)**—Hebrew: *musar* (moo-sawr’): discipline; chastening; correction.

**Prudence (verse 4)**—Hebrew: *ormah* (or-maw’): craftiness; cautiousness; “subtilty” (KJV).

**Sinful Men (verse 10)**—Hebrew: *chatta* (khat-taw’): sinful; “sinners” (KJV); those who have “missed the mark.”

**Wisdom (verse 2)**—Hebrew: *chakam* (khaw-kawn’): to be wise.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**
- The Way Knowledge Begins
- Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
- The Purpose of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-4)
- The Foundation of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:7-8)
- The Situations for Wisdom (Proverbs 1:10-11, 20-22)
- The Result of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:32-33)

**III. Concluding Reflection**
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Way Knowledge Begins

A proverb is a short, pithy sentence in the form of a similitude or comparison. The book of Proverbs was written for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young (Proverbs 1:2-4). This Scripture clearly shows the theme and purpose of the book of Proverbs. Although it was written for guidance, it should not be confused with being concerned with morals alone. The author clearly states that it is important, even crucial, to have the fear of God. He contends that fools do not fear God, thus operating in rebellion and displeasing Him on purpose. Proverbs enables men, and especially young men, to obtain wisdom and to get understanding.

Proverbs 1:7 reads, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” This is another way to articulate and to remember that we should not give in to sinners when they try to take our hearts and eyes from God. This outlines the focus on God, which the book of Proverbs discusses and admonishes. Proverbs encourages us to highly value wisdom and understanding.

B. Biblical Background

Proverbs 1:7 hammers on the fact that the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. One cannot gain knowledge of spiritual things if he or she does not believe in God in the first place. One must honor God by following God’s commandments. True knowledge is fearing God.

Proverbs 1:7 is repeated in Proverbs 9:10, near the end of the first section. It can also be found in Job 28:28 and Psalm 111:10. This all shows that the foundation of these proverbs and admonitions are all rooted in the fear of God. It is largely about God and not about morals. There is an emphasis on knowledge in Proverbs along with commentary on happenings within the general human society. Proverbs also focuses on the Jewish culture and laws about being right with God. However, the primary focus is the knowledge of God. The book of Proverbs outlines the many benefits that can be obtained from following God’s laws, including the benefits of knowledge and understanding.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Purpose of Wisdom
(Proverbs 1:1-4)

THE PROVERBS of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

In many ways, the book of Proverbs can be used as a practical tutorial for men. In many
ways, the life of Solomon represented the apex of what many common men view as living the life: Solomon had great wisdom, he had great wealth, he had great respect through his position/power, and he had great resources for sex through his 700 wives and 300 concubines. Since Solomon had achieved the apex of what some men seek after, he was in a credible and unique position to dispense sound advice. Solomon had been there, done that, and survived to tell the story.

The proverbs of Solomon impart wise and helpful instruction to those who are open and willing to receive it. The wisdom of these writings offers prudent and practical guidance about how to act and react in a variety of different life situations. Life poses such a wide variety of options that it is sometimes difficult to know the difference between what is right and what is wrong. In such situations, we need a reliable tutor and a trustworthy standard upon which to stand. The reliable tutor that has been provided for us is the Holy Spirit and the trustworthy standard is the written Word of God.

Those who are deemed “simple” are those who are unwise and who lack good common sense. The biblical perspective of prudence is the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason. It involves shrewdness in the management of one’s affairs and good judgment in the use of resources. Some younger people who have not experienced a great deal of life have a tendency to approach life in a naïve fashion. These are the ones who could greatly profit from a more mature perspective and from a mentor who could help one to avoid being deceived, hoodwinked, and bamboozled by false advisers. Everybody needs somebody to help them be better in some way.

B. The Foundation of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:7-8)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.

This Scripture presents a picture of the finite creation in the presence of the infinite Creator. To fear the Lord is not to be literally afraid of God in the sense of dread and fright, but it is more of a sense of reverence, respect, awe, and honor. This attitude enables us to better fulfill our obedience to God. Without this foundation of reverent respect for God, all other human knowledge is rendered of little significance in the broad scheme of things. When we focus on the little picture, we get little results. But when we focus on the big picture, we are able to get big results and to build our hope on things eternal. One way to evaluate the significance of a particular so-called wise perspective is to place it within the context of life-defining parameters such as sickness and impending death. If it doesn’t matter at the cemetery, it probably doesn’t really matter that much.

Fools are people who lack wisdom and demonstrate as much by their words and actions. Foolish people can be detected by their rejection of godly principles which are replaced by their own weak ideas and designs. This willful rejection of God’s holy ways eventually leads to their downfall and destruction.

When we speak, we can only say that which we already know. But when we listen, we have the opportunity of learning something new. On a human level, good listening helps with developing fresh insights and ideas that fuel success. But on a spiritual level, good listening leads to eternal life. The speaker in this passage
addresses the listeners with paternal authority yet with affectionate relationship.

C. The Situations for Wisdom
(Proverbs 1:10-11, 20-22)

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause. . . . Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

This is a warning against a common practice at the time known as Brigandage, which is the life and practice of highway robbery and plunder. Although it may seem like an easy way to acquire money and things, it is the pathway toward destruction and that lifestyle will eventually come back to bite the participant. Easy money may come quick, but it usually leaves fast. Easy money comes in many forms other than that which is illegal. The lure of easy money also comes in the forms of playing the lottery, high-interest loan shops, and pyramid schemes. The Bible has much to say about the management of money and one source of financial advice is found in Ecclesiastes 7:12 (NRSV)—“For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.”

The literary device of personification is utilized to emphasize the passionate voice of wisdom who desires to impart life-saving instructions to those who will take the time to listen. Wisdom is personified as an elegant woman who stands in the public square as a town crier with worthwhile advice to share. This wise woman called Wisdom will not break into anyone’s house and force that person to follow the truth. But much like in Revelation 3:20, Wisdom stands at the door to figuratively knock and hope that someone hears her voice and invites her in.

In order for the foolish to begin the process of deliverance and transformation, they must first admit the error of their ways and their need for help and change. When this state of humility and brokenness occurs, the Spirit of God is then able to impart correction and wisdom in order for growth and maturity to begin. Sometimes this process can be painful, but it is necessary pain and a pain that heals rather than a pain that kills.

Wisdom makes no attempts at being coy, shy, or reserved when it comes to widely delivering her crucially important message. Instead, she aggressively climbs on top of the city wall to warn and compel those who are headed to a certain destruction. Accepting or rejecting her message could mean the difference between life and death. Reading this passage should be convicting and motivating for us.

Three categories of people are addressed in this verse: the simple, the scorners, and the fools. The simple are the naive ones who are spiritually immature and unguarded in their minds. Thus, they are easily influenced and led astray by those who do not have their best interest at heart. The mockers or scorners reject and despise what is holy; and, in their pride and arrogance, they deem themselves above spiritual critique and wise advice. Finally, there are the fools who hate knowledge because both true knowledge and godly wisdom expose corruption. Fools devalue wisdom because it is antithetical to the ways of the flesh.
D. The Result of Wisdom  
(Proverbs 1:32-33)

For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Those who are simple turn away from obedience to God or from the call of wisdom; this action results in death and destruction (see Jeremiah 2:19). Turning away from God is the opposite of listening to God and submitting to God. This is the original sin committed in the Garden of Eden when humanity presumed to know more and be wiser than the Creator. *Complacency* is defined as a feeling of contentment, self-satisfaction, quiet pleasure, and security often combined with a lack of awareness of pending trouble, controversy, or potential danger. Those who are foolish or who act foolishly make themselves into sitting ducks for destruction.

Whoever heeds the instructions of wisdom will be rewarded with the gift of safety and peace of mind. There is no amount of money that can purchase peace of mind, and that is one of the reasons why peace is so valuable. Some of the alternatives to peace and faith include fear and worry. We are called to walk by faith (see 2 Corinthians 5:7), and whatever is not of faith is sin (see Romans 14:23). Living free from fear and worry is a tremendously underrated bonus of walking by faith.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Life is full of daily decisions and choices that have the capacity to shape our destiny. If we are to live lives of power and confidence, we would do well to heed the instructions of wisdom found in the book of Proverbs. Although it was written so many years ago, it still has relevant advice that can be practically applied in contemporary settings. Knowledge can be obtained through reading books and taking classes. But wisdom comes from heeding the will of God as personified by Lady Wisdom. Wisdom is a gift of God that can be of supreme value if we acknowledge God in all our ways (see Proverbs 3:5-6). There is no true profit in gaining the whole world if in the process we lose our souls (see Mark 8:36).

**PRAYER**

*Lord, please give us the grace to seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, knowing that all the other things that we need will eventually be added. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**  
*(June 1-7, 2020)*

**The Call of Wisdom**

**MONDAY,** June 1: “Faith Community Discerns Path of Wisdom” (Acts 6:1-7)
**TUESDAY,** June 2: “Parents Joyfully Pass On the Faith” (2 Timothy 1:3-9a)
**WEDNESDAY,** June 3: “Learning the Fear of the Lord” (Psalm 34:11-18)
**THURSDAY,** June 4: “Violence Is Not a Wise Choice” (Matthew 26:47-52)
**FRIDAY,** June 5: “The Vast Scope of Solomon’s Wisdom” (1 Kings 4:29-34)
**SATURDAY,** June 6: “Prize Wisdom and Insight” (Proverbs 4:1-9)
**SUNDAY,** June 7: “Godly Wisdom for Life’s Decisions” (Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10-11, 20-22, 32-33)
THE VALUE OF WISDOM

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Seeking Meaning
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Seeking Wisdom as a Special Treasure

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Godly Wisdom Pays Off
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** A Special Treasure

**DEVOATIONAL READING**
Proverbs 2:12-22

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 39; Proverbs 2
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Proverbs 2:1-11
**KEY VERSE:** Proverbs 2:6

**Proverbs 2:1-11—KJV**
MY SON, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;
2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;
3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;
4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;
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.
7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.
8 He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.
9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

**Proverbs 2:1-11—NIV**
MY SON, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—
3 indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
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.
7 He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
8 for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.
9 Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path.
10 When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;
11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People search for life’s meaning through wealth, wisdom, or other worldly things. What is the best method to use to search for meaning in life? Wisdom’s treasure is more valuable than riches because it can center a person’s heart, will, and thoughts toward a knowledge of God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand that the search for the wisdom that comes from God is more important than striving for wealth or any other temporal gain.
2. Yearn for the wisdom that comes from God more than they desire wealth or fame.
3. Make a consistent effort to center their hearts, wills, and thoughts in the wisdom that comes from God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Like other Old Testament Wisdom books, Proverbs defines wisdom, explains how to find it, and describes the benefits of living by it. Unlike the books of Ecclesiastes and Job, Proverbs keeps the reality of unjust suffering in the background and presents a more optimistic view.
—Proverbs affirms that “the fear of the Lord” will lead to relative security, a good reputation, and meaning in life.
—In Hebrew, Proverbs 2:1-22 is one elaborate sentence of twenty-two lines, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.
—Although the parent speaks (see Proverbs 2:1), he points beyond himself and advises the son to listen to “wisdom” and “understanding,” which come from the Lord.
—Proverbs 1 and 2 affirm the reciprocal relationship between humans and wisdom. Whereas Wisdom “cries out” and “raises her voice” (1:20-21), the parent urges the son to do the same in his search for insight and understanding (2:3).
—The long “if” condition beginning in 2:1 offers the son two “then” outcomes resulting from wisdom: relationship with God (verses 5-8) and positive relationship to humans (verses 9-11).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Wisdom is viewed as a gift from God given to God’s people.
—People need to seek wisdom throughout their lives.
—Wisdom can be elusive if persons fail to learn from the knowledge and guidance that God offers.
—Allowing the senses to embrace wisdom fully creates the environment for which wisdom will thrive and grow from within.
—Desiring to follow God’s plan and actions instead of our own is critical in practicing wisdom.
—God provides a way for the just and the faithful to remain focused on God’s purpose rather than on pride and greed.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is generally accepted that King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs. This is the traditional view. King Solomon was a wise king who was known to have more than three thousand proverbs and sayings, according to 1 Kings 4:32. Proverbs 2 is one of such attributed to the wise king.

No one is certain about the date of the writing, but it is widely believed that the book of proverbs was written and compiled sometime between the tenth and sixth century BC. Scholars also agree generally that Moses was the author of the book of Genesis. The accounts in Genesis 39 take place in Mesopotamia around the period when the Israelites lived in small communities and were relatively new in the region. This precedes Moses entirely. If there was anyone qualified to write the history of the Israelites it was Moses, who was instructed in Egyptian education and was also called by God to lead His people. Moses would have put his learning, historical knowledge, and his ability to commune with God to work, just as he did.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

King Solomon was said to have been the wisest man to have ever lived. He is said to have spoken three thousand proverbs. The cultural setting of the book of Proverbs is a very rich one. Some of the proverbs in the book emanated from various cultures, which include ancient Greek and early Egyptian. Some were said to have been copied from Greek and Persian periods during the post-exilic era. This may be true, as it is often the trend that people sometimes attribute more to great men than they actually achieved. Some of them were recorded in the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs has God at its center, and it tells people to live their lives in a way as not to offend God. It advises people to trust in God and live their lives right so as to please God.

Proverbs 2 in particular speaks on human infidelity and admonishes that we follow wisdom and understanding. It speaks about the protection and other benefits that wisdom brings us as we see in Proverbs 2:9.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Joseph: one of Jacob’s sons. He was sold into slavery by his brothers and got into Egypt; and thrown into prison after he stuck to his belief in God and came out to be prime minister in all of Egypt.

Lord: The term Lord in the Bible is used to refer to Yahweh; the book of Proverbs teaches and guides people to live right according to Yahweh.

Potiphar: the master of the house Joseph was a servant in. It was his wife who lied against Joseph after Joseph refused to sleep with her.

Potiphar’s wife: a powerful seductress who was married to Potiphar.

Solomon: the generally accepted author of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1 is attributed to him. He was king in Israel, and he is said to be the richest and wisest king ever.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Ear (verse 2)—Hebrew: ozen (o'-zen): a part of the body; of human beings, a channel through which to hear words; hearing.

Fear (verse 5)—Hebrew: yirah (yir-aw’): reverence; dread; a fear.

Heart (verse 2)—Hebrew: leb (labe): inner man; mind; will; heart.

Knowledge (verse 6)—Hebrew: daath (dah’-ath): premeditation; skill; truth; knowledge.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Benefits of Wisdom

Proverbs 2 focuses on the benefits of following wisdom. The author seeks to admonish people to follow God’s laws. The whole theme of Proverbs centers around godly wisdom. Here, we are exposed to the benefits that come from following godly wisdom and doing God’s will, such as is found in Proverbs 2:7-8—“He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones” (NIV).

In Genesis 39, Joseph had to choose between gratifying his flesh and following God’s wisdom. He chose to follow God’s wisdom despite the power he knew Potiphar’s wife could wield against him. But the benefits of following God’s wisdom always come; so, his experience in prison was the beginning of a glorious chapter in the life of Joseph, who later on became the second most powerful man in all of Egypt.

B. Biblical Background

Proverbs 2 has its background in the cultural Jewish belief system that saw knowledge as knowledge that comes from God. The Israelites had a tradition of seeking God’s face in everything and anything. There was the Urim and Thummim, which were often used, and people could also consult prophets. We can see this in Genesis 28:1-12, in which King Saul went to a medium to help him consult the prophet Samuel just so he could know God’s mind. The idea of wisdom’s being the best guidance as seen in Proverbs 2 is not far-fetched.

In Genesis 39, Joseph chose to follow this wisdom, knowing that sleeping with Potiphar’s wife was against the will of God. It did have consequences, but God is always the eternal shield and protection. Joseph was elevated later on.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Three Conditions
(Proverbs 2:1-4)

MY SON, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures.

The first verse of chapter 2 begins in the same manner that Proverbs 1:10 begins—with the warm and familiar salutation of a father to a son, or of a mentor to a mentee. These words may be from Solomon directed toward his son Rehoboam, or they could be taken as generic instructions for anyone who desires wisdom. Unfortunately, not everyone is willing to accept wisdom—often because they feel they already have enough knowledge. The acceptance of knowledge is a matter of the will. Retaining knowledge is accomplished through concentration, memorization, practice, and perseverance. In order to retain or “store up” wisdom we must become doers of the Word and not hearers only who deceive themselves (see James 1:22).

Exactly what does it mean to turn one’s ear to wisdom and to apply one’s heart to understanding? It means taking the time to listen to the truth that comes from a tried and trusted source. The first step is to listen. When we speak, we can only share what we supposedly already know. But when we listen, there is at least a possibility that we may learn something new. Wisdom is often personified in the Proverbs and is presented in the feminine gender as a relationship to be desired: “Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee” (Proverbs 4:5-6).

It has been said that “everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” A thorough understanding of ourselves can lead to a better understanding of others. Some common reasons for miscommunication and misunderstandings include the presence of the following: assumptions, speaking without completely listening or thinking, anger, hurt, fear, frustration, or outside distractions. True insight will not happen automatically. It must be called out and sought out and applied to the everyday situations of life.

The act of mining for silver was then, and still is now, a process that requires a great deal of patience and perseverance in order to be successful. Anything that is of significant value requires a commitment of time and energy in order to obtain. This includes educational astuteness, athletic skill, financial wealth, and mature spiritual insight. Surface knowledge is common and readily available, but godly wisdom is below the surface and must be pursued with great purpose and intentionality in order to be realized.

B. Seven Promises
(Proverbs 2:5-9)

Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.
The Bible uses the word *fear* at least three hundred times in reference to God. A healthy fear of God is a positive kind of reverence because it enables us to resist the temptation of so easily giving in to our own sinful nature. Martin Luther distinguished between what he called a servile fear and a filial fear. *Servile fear* is the kind of fear displayed by a prisoner for his tormentor in a torture chamber. *Filial fear* comes from the Latin concept in which we get the idea of family. It refers to the healthy fear and respect that a child would have for his or her father.

The value of knowledge and wisdom depends on the source and origin of the knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs 16:25 (NIV) declares that “there is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.” Human, self-made knowledge is undependable and may only be applicable in certain situations. God’s Word is “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (NIV); God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Success is not always immediately distributed to those who are worthy. Working toward success is the price that is paid for the eventual reward of success. Preparation prepares the successful person to not only have success but to maintain and sustain the success. Obedience to God and dependence on God allow us to walk in and live in the particular level of wisdom that we have obtained. Living a blameless life keeps us from having to be concerned about telling the truth because we are living the truth.

God is responsible for protecting those who walk in the ways of righteousness. God provides protection to the upright and offers an alternative to temptations and snares which would seduce them from or deter them from the paths of judgment. The focus is often on goodness and mercy’s following us, but the word picture used here is of a lead soldier who gets out in front of a caravan or entourage in order to be the first to warn of, encounter, and engage a potential enemy.

The saints, or the faithful ones, mentioned in this verse are God’s faithful worshippers (*chasídím*), a term used in the Pentateuch (see Deuteronomy 33:8) for their zeal in God’s service (see Exodus 32). The word *saint* implies dedication to God, just as Israel was a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). A saint is not one who is perfect, but one who is faithful, devout, and God-fearing.

Three similar terms are used here to emphasize the point of one of the rewards for the faithful. The three related terms that serve as a reward for the just is the understanding of what is right, just, and fair. The opposites of these terms are that which is wrong, unjust, and unfair. A righteous perspective is needed in order to correctly understand the difference between these. To be just is to think, speak, and act in conformity with what is morally upright or good.

C. Byproducts of Obedience
(Proverbs 2:10-11)

*When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.*

Yet another picture is offered here of the reward for living a life that is pleasing to the Lord. Psalm 119:11 (NIV) records what happens when wisdom enters the heart: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not
sin against you.” This is one of the best passages of Scripture to highlight the importance of memorizing the Word of God. When the Word enters our hearts, it does a powerful work internally and it does not return void, but accomplishes the purpose for which it was created. Memorizing the Word of God helps us to be ready for the Holy Spirit to recall that word at the appropriate time. Joshua 1:8 further enlightens us regarding the powerful advantages available when we internalize the Word of God: “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” (NASB).

Discretion is defined as the quality of having or showing discernment or good judgment. This involves but is not limited to caution and reserve in speech and the ability to make responsible decisions. Our using discretion can help to preserve us and to keep us away from life’s various traps and distractions. Understanding and applying this characteristic can be extremely helpful in business settings, in social settings, and in family life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are some types of clothing that can only be worn during certain seasons of the year. However, there are other types of clothing that are considered “all-season” and can be worn year-round. Wisdom is one of those all-season types of garments that can and should be worn all throughout the year. The type of wisdom that we need for living comes only from God. An ounce of wisdom is worth more than a pound of wealth or fame. One need not grow old in order to appreciate and utilize the power of wisdom in life.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the gift of wisdom. May this powerful trait permeate our thoughts, our speech, and our actions for as long as we shall live. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 8-14, 2020)

The Value of Wisdom

MONDAY, June 8: “Work for the Good of All” (Galatians 6:1-10)
TUESDAY, June 9: “Live Together in Harmony” (Romans 15:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, June 10: “Wisdom Is Walking Together in Love” (2 John 4-11)
THURSDAY, June 11: “Joseph Resists Temptation” (Genesis 39:6b-18)
FRIDAY, June 12: “Wisdom Saves from Temptation” (Proverbs 2:12-19)
SUNDAY, June 14: “Following Godly Wisdom Pays Off” (Proverbs 2:1-11)
THE GIFTS OF WISDOM

**Adult/Youth**

**Adult Topic:** Wisdom’s Rewards  
**Youth Topic:** Rich in Wisdom

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** God Gives Great Gifts  
**Children’s Topic:** A Great Gift

**Devotional Reading**

*Job 28:12-28*

**Adult/Youth**

**Background Scripture:** Job 1; 42; Proverbs 8  
**Print Passage:** Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21  
**Key Verses:** Proverbs 8:10-11

**Children**

**Background Scripture:** Job 1; 42; Proverbs 8  
**Print Passage:** Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21  
**Key Verse:** Proverbs 8:10

---

**Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21—KJV**

8 All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them.  
9 They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.  
10 Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.  
11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.  
12 I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.  
13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.  
14 Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.  
17 I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.  
18 Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.

---

**Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21—NIV**

8 “All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.  
9 “To the discerning all of them are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge.  
10 “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold,  
11 “for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
12 “I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.  
13 “To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.  
14 “Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power.”  
17 “I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.  
18 “With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People desire wisdom and hope to be rewarded when they search for it. Why is wisdom so desirable? Wisdom’s value is more than tangible gain; it gives knowledge and courage and leads toward God’s path of justice and righteousness.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Recognize the incomparable value of godly wisdom in producing wealth, righteousness, and justice.
2. Appreciate the difference between Wisdom’s rewards and those of mere wealth.
3. Analyze their life’s pursuit to ensure that godly wisdom, with its attendant rewards, is in view and is not some cheap substitute.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Proverbs 8 is the Bible’s most detailed personification of wisdom.
—Proverbs 8 provides background for Christians’ understanding of Christ as the Wisdom and Word of God.
—The prologue to the gospel of John (John 1:1-14) and its understanding of Jesus’ identity are informed by Proverbs 8.
—Adhere to instructions in order to gain wisdom.
—Good instructions and knowledge are more valuable than silver and gold.
—Wisdom, knowledge, and instructions cannot be compared to material possessions.

—Good counsel and sound wisdom are foundational to understanding.
—Wisdom and justice form the pathway to a righteous life.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Wisdom is personified; she has been a gift of God since Creation.
—Wisdom is profitable and makes the one who embraces her acceptable to God and man.
—Wisdom is received through listening, making right choices, and obeying God.
—Job is an example of someone who used wisdom because he trusted in God, carefully listened to God and people, guarded his speech, and was fair in his treatment of his children and people.
—True wisdom is attained through Christ.
—Wisdom is greater than riches.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING
OF THE LESSON

It is difficult to be sure about the exact time
that the book of Job (Background Scripture) was
written or who wrote it. Many biblical scholars
disagree about the timeline. Some believe it may
have been written by Moses, and others say Eliphaz,
a friend of Job’s, may have written it. Still, others
believe the story is legend.

There are evidences that suggest that Job
lived in the time of the patriarchs or before Moses
because he sacrifices to God as head of his family.
Job’s wealth is determined by flocks and not in
money as is consistent with patriarchal times. Job
lived long enough to give birth to two families
of ten children and still lived another 140 years.
He may have lived longer than 200 years; this is
consistent with patriarchal times. However, some
evidences point to the contrary. One of which is
the fact that Eliphaz, in Job 22:16, refers to the
Flood as being in the past.

Still, some say he was not an Israelite in any
way since he lived in the land of Uz. Uz was a
poetic name for Edom and referred to a place that
had many wise men and was known for wisdom.
The wise King Lemuel was also allegedly from Uz.

It is generally accepted that the wise king,
Solomon, wrote the book of Proverbs. This is the
traditional view. King Solomon was a wise king
who was known to have more than three thousand
proverbs and sayings, according to 1 Kings 4:32.
Proverbs 8 is one of such attributed to the wise king.

However, the proverbs written in the book of
Proverbs were not all by King Solomon as the book
itself asserts. There were others who contributed
to the infinite wisdom in the book. Agur, son of
Jakeh, contributed (see Proverbs 30). King Lem-
uel also wrote a part of it. It is speculated that he
may have been a non-Israelite who lived in a place
called Uz, where people still believed in Yahweh
(see Proverbs 31).

Some parts from Proverbs 22–24 are believed
to have been written by a group of people referred
to as “wise men.” They are believed to be wise men
who were attached to King Solomon as seen in 1
to have been the work of a committee appointed
under King Hezekiah (726–698 BC). No one is
certain about the date of the writing, but it is widely
believed that the book of proverbs was written and
compiled sometime between the tenth century and
sixth century BC.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND
CULTURAL SETTING OF
THE LESSON

The cultural setting of the book of Proverbs is a
very rich one. Some of the proverbs in the book are
thought to emanate from ancient Egyptian wisdom,
proverbs, or instructions laid down by wise men of
Egypt. For instance, The Instruction of Amen-em-
Het (ca. 2000 BC), which were basically a father’s
instructions to his son about how people he had
favored disappointed him. The Instruction of Amen-
em-Ope (ca. 1300 BC–900 BC) is another one of
such. It is a king’s teachings to his son about life.

It is noteworthy that the wisdom in the book
of Proverbs speaks largely about wisdom from
God and not moral knowledge as is the idea with
ancient Greek and ancient Egyptian proverbs. King
Lemuel, who was also said to have been the source
of some of these proverbs, was from Uz, a place
where people feared God and were known to be
wise. Uz boasted people like King Lemuel and Job.

There have been arguments that these were
probably copied and attributed to King Solo-
mon. Some were said to have been copied from
Greek and Persian periods during the post-exilic
era. This may be true, as it is often the trend that
people sometimes attribute more to great men than
they actually achieved. Still, King Solomon was
largely regarded as the wisest man of his time and
it is believed that he spoke about three thousand proverbs, some of which are recorded in the book of Proverbs. Generally, culture and scholars agree that he wrote a larger part of the book of Proverbs, namely chapters 1–10.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

**Eliphaz:** one of Job’s friends who argued with Job.

**Job:** He was referred to as “the greatest man among all the people of the East” (Job 1:3b, NIV). He was said to be blameless and upright. He stood his ground, refusing to curse God. God Himself boasted about Job’s righteousness to Satan.

**King Solomon:** the generally accepted author of the book of Proverbs; Proverbs 1 is attributed to him. He was king in Israel and he is said to be the richest and wisest king ever.

**Lord:** The term Lord is used in the Bible to refer to Yahweh. It is the same thing we see here. The book of Proverbs and the book of Job teach and guide people to live right according to Yahweh.

**Satan:** the tempter. He afflicted Job with severe suffering.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Arrogance (verse 13)—**Hebrew: ga’own (gaw-ohn’): “arrogancy” (KJV); exaltation; pride.

**Crooked (verse 8)—**Hebrew: pathal (paw-thal’): twisted; cunning.

**Instruction (verse 10)—**Hebrew: musar (moo-sawr’): discipline; chastening; correction.

**Pride (verse 13)—**Hebrew: geah (gay-aw’): arrogance.

**Prudence (verse 12)—**Hebrew: ormah (ormaw’): craftiness; cautiousness.

**Right (verse 9)—**Hebrew: yashar (yaw-shawr’): straight; right; upright.

**Words (verse 8)—**Hebrew: emer (ay’-mer): speech; utterances; sayings.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. The Value of Wisdom

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. The Value of Wise Instruction (Proverbs 8:8-11)

B. When Wisdom Speaks (Proverbs 8:12-14)

C. The Fruit of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:17-21)

**III. Concluding Reflection**

---

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Value of Wisdom**

Proverbs 8 and the book of Job teach about God’s wisdom. They both admonish us to follow God’s wisdom, no matter what. In Proverbs 8:17, there is an assurance of benefits for those who choose God’s wisdom. The book of Job offers a practical look into the life of someone to whom the devil brought hell. Job still stood with godly wisdom and at the end, he was rewarded.

Proverbs is designed to school young men in the path of wise and moral living. Such a lesson is sorely needed in our times, when morality has become relative and wisdom is
no longer considered an essential possession. Wisdom makes an open appeal to all persons as they go about their daily activities. The value of wisdom cannot be measured in dollars and cents. It is beyond the calculation of finite accounting.

The book of Proverbs aims to show and teach that godly wisdom is the way to go. As the Bible says in Proverbs 1, the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge.

B. Biblical Background

Proverbs 8 has its background in the cultural Jewish belief system that saw knowledge as knowledge that comes from God. The Israelites never failed to seek God’s face in any circumstance. They often consulted God through the Urim and Thummim, as well as through dreams and visions. In Genesis 28:1-12, King Saul went to consult a medium to help him consult the prophet Samuel just so he could know God’s mind.

So, the idea of wisdom’s being the best guidance as seen in Proverbs 2 is not far-fetched. It has little to do with the study of the environment. The wisdom is all about God.

Job is a practical example. We see his troubles in the latter parts of Job 1 and we see that he stuck with God throughout. At the end in Job 42, we see that despite the efforts of the devil, his end was better than his beginning.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Value of Wise Instruction

(Proverbs 8:8-11)

All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

This is the ideal voice of Wisdom speaking to all who will hear and issuing a word of assurance that the hearers can be confident in receiving and applying truth and reliability to the discourse. It is quite a claim to make that every word one speaks is right and just. This is one reason why we know that the source of true wisdom does not come from humanity but comes from divinity. Righteous words emanate from a heart, mind, and soul that is righteous. Because a righteous mind starts with thinking right thoughts and speaking right words, the end result is righteous actions. This scenario is in contrast to a completely evil mind which thinks evil thoughts and speaks evil words, eventually resulting in evil actions. Crooked and perverse words represent truth that has been twisted. They are partially believable because they have a semblance of the truth but with distinct distortion when compared to the undiluted truth. That is why it is so important to be thoroughly familiar with the truth in order to clearly recognize what is a lie.

Discernment is the ability to judge well. It is the development of an accurate perception with a view to obtaining a spiritually inclined perspective and understanding. Those who possess clear discernment understand words of wisdom because their understanding is enlightened by the Spirit of God. “The person
without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments” (1 Corinthians 2:14-15, NIV).

The Word of God is sometimes confusing and confounding to those without spiritual discernment. Jesus often spoke in ways that those without the knowledge of God could not understand, and those with the knowledge of God could understand. In Mark 4:11-12 (NIV), Jesus places this principle on display when He tells the disciples, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’” The Word of God is not just for the intellectually elite or for the financially endowed; it is available to all who submit to God’s will and are willing to learn from the instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Two substances that are universally recognized as valuable throughout the world are silver and gold. Historically, they have been widely used as a standard for trade and commerce. As desirable as these may be, godly wisdom is even more valuable and is thus more highly preferred (see Psalm 19:10). Those who spend their lives chasing after silver and gold may seem to prosper for a season, but eventually the quest for wealth above the godly pursuit of wisdom ends in utter disappointment.

Another physical commodity of precious stones is introduced to compare with lady wisdom. But as was the result with silver and gold, the same is true with rubies which lose their sparkle and appeal when in competition with wisdom. When a heart of compassion and understanding are present along with a willingness to receive the truth in love, wisdom is valued above silver and gold. Scripture gives New Testament credence to the value of a wise and godly perspective: “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (see Ephesians 1:17-18).

B. When Wisdom Speaks
(Proverbs 8:12-14)

I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.

The personification of wisdom continues here with a reference to the residential dwelling mate of wisdom. This mate is identified as prudence, which means care, caution, and good judgment, as well as wisdom in looking ahead. Prudence is the ability to govern and discipline oneself through reason, skill, and good judgment of one’s available resources even though those resources may be small. When evil joins with laziness, chaos ensues and additional trouble is created. But when wisdom teams up with prudence, amazing things take place and virtuous excellence is multiplied. When two holy forces unite, this harmonious union results in ingenious designs that flow from a
place of goodness, health, creativity, and positive power, which can be used for the glory of God and for the good of humanity.

In verse 13, five additional characters and concepts are introduced to the literary landscape—including evil, pride, arrogance, evil actions, and perverse speech. Wisdom has no dealings, friendship, or kinship with any who belong to this terrible tribe. This is because there can never be a truce called between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light (see Matthew 6:24). It is impossible to love God and not hate evil, just as it is impossible to simultaneously dwell in the darkness as well as in the light.

Some people naively view participation in counseling to be an action by those who are weak. However, this flawed perspective is problematic and is the opposite of the truth. To pursue counseling is an act of strength and wisdom because the strength and insight of another is applied to one’s areas of weakness and questions are replaced with answers. This point is verified in Proverbs 15:22—“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (NIV). Another Old Testament text similar in nature and meaning is found in Job 12:13. Sound wisdom is solid and substantial, real and true, and in stark opposition to the so-called wisdom of the world.

C. The Fruit of Wisdom

(Proverbs 8:17-21)

I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.

A reciprocal exchange of love is accentuated in verse 17. The love of wisdom and the embracing of all that it has to offer come along with valuable benefits of wisdom loving back in response. To truly love God and the wisdom that comes from God involves more than a mere head knowledge of God or a mere academic exposure to the truth. A genuine love for God involves a personal, passionate, intimate, experiential relationship with the God of the universe. Matthew 6:33 encourages this kind of intentional seeking of God: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (NIV). Seeking God can be accomplished through the following ways: reading and studying God’s Word; admitting and repenting of personal areas of sin; maintaining a sense of God-consciousness throughout the day; two-way prayer; extending grace to others; and asking good, open-ended questions.

Benefits of wisdom are on abundant display in verse 18. God has no lack of material benefits, because everything belongs to Him. Furthermore, God is not opposed to material prosperity but so often the presence of prosperity results in the absence of God as top priority. Jesus echoes this sentiment in Matthew 19:24—“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (NIV). In Luke 16:11, “true riches” are mentioned along with the consciousness of possessing God’s honor and favor, called the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” These are the durable riches of righteousness rather than the temporary riches of material wealth that eventually pass away. The best way to retain riches is to invest in the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God. The rest will be added.
Verse 19 returns to the metallurgical imagery previously introduced in verse 11 to describe the advantages of possessing wisdom. This time, the imagery of silver and gold is mixed with the imagery of the produce from fruit trees. God’s fruit includes such spiritual benefits as redemption, reconciliation, pardon, justification, adoption, and eternal life.

The imagery of walking in the ways of wisdom is reminiscent of Psalm 23:3-4—“he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (NIV). The pathway of righteousness leads to justice and abundance on a variety of different levels. The pathway of righteousness is certainly accompanied by illumination, which enables the traveller to make forward progress and to avoid any obstacles that might block one’s path.

The work of wisdom produces a valuable inheritance to those whose lives are reflective of wisdom’s relationship. Whomever we walk with, talk with, or work, play, and live with eventually influence the person that we will eventually become for better or for worse. The good that comes from God is a blessing that is not temporary but one that endures forever. This kind of inheritance is one that is guaranteed for those who are part of the family of God. When our lifestyles are shaped by wisdom, the benefits flow from those wise practices and this habit of continuously wise living contributes to a life of value and worth.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Immediate gratification may satisfy for the moment, but deferred gratification can satisfy for a lifetime. The quest for material acquisition should not be pursued at the expense of putting God first. Walking in God’s ways of wisdom produces fruit that will not spoil—fruit that will remain. The pathway of justice is made possible through walking in wisdom. True wealth is obtained through communing with God, walking with God, and being obedient to God. When we are clothed with the wisdom of God, we can boldly walk by faith without fear of our future. There are no substitutes or shortcuts to the pathway paved by faith and wisdom.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to walk in the ways of wisdom so that our living will not be in vain. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 15-21, 2020)

The Gifts of Wisdom

MONDAY, June 15: “Christ, the Wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)
TUESDAY, June 16: “God Abundantly Rewards Job’s Faithfulness” (Job 1:1-5)
WEDNESDAY, June 17: “God Restores Job’s Family and Wealth” (Job 42:10-17)
THURSDAY, June 18: “Wisdom Calls the People to Respond” (Proverbs 8:1-7)
FRIDAY, June 19: “Wisdom: Present and Active during Creation” (Proverbs 8:22-31)
SATURDAY, June 20: “Choose Wisdom and Live” (Proverbs 8:32-36)
SUNDAY, June 21: “Wisdom Affects All of Life” (Proverbs 8:8-14, 17-21)
Proverbs 9:1-6, 8-10, 13-18—KJV
WISDOM HATH builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:
2 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.
3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city,
4 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,
5 Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.
6 Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.

8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.
9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

Proverbs 9:1-6, 8-10, 13-18—NIV
WISDOM HAS built her house; she has set up its seven pillars.
2 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.
3 She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city,
4 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” To those who have no sense she says,
5 “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.
6 “Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight.”

8 Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you.
9 Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:
and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and
knoweth nothing.
For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat
in the high places of the city,
To call passengers who go right on their ways:
Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as
for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to
him,
Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret
is pleasant.
But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and
that her guests are in the depths of hell.

Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and
knows nothing.
She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the
highest point of the city,
calling out to those who pass by, who go straight
on their way,
“Let all who are simple come to my house!” To
those who have no sense she says,
“Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is
delicious!”
But little do they know that the dead are
there, that her guests are deep in the realm of the
dead.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Two competing voices call to us on life’s journey:
Wisdom and Folly. Why should we heed the call of Wisdom? Wisdom gives instruction to
the wise, yet the foolish suffer their own downfall.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Compare and contrast the call and promise of wisdom with those of folly.
2. Desire to walk the path of wisdom and receive its benefits, avoiding the peril of foolishness.
3. Grow in the fear and knowledge of the Lord as the first step in walking in the way of wisdom.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Proverbs 9 marks the conclusion of the first
major section of the book.
—Wisdom’s activity of building, preparing for a
feast, and efforts at inviting people to the feast
contrast sharply with the activity of the foolish
woman, who simply “sits at the door of her
house . . . calling out to those who pass by”
(verses 14-15, NIV) and offers them “stolen
water” and bread (verse 17).
—Wisdom and the foolish woman use identical
language (verses 4, 16), but while Wisdom’s feast
leads to maturity, insight, and life, the foolish
woman’s deceptive offer leads to death.
—The Scripture text lays out an in-depth view of wis-
dom. Proverbs declares that the wise love wisdom.
—The Scripture text defines the scope of wisdom.
—The Scripture text creates a picturesque analogy
of the strength and beauty of wisdom.
—Proverbs declares that the wise love wisdom.
—Scripture teaches to build relationships with
the wise.
Teachers of CHILDREN

—Wisdom is personified as a generous host who throws a banquet.
—Wisdom’s house is described as having seven pillars—like the temple of a cultic shrine or a large domestic house—big enough to accommodate many guests.
—There is enough room for everyone who chooses to enjoy Wisdom’s provisions.
—Wisdom provides a healthy, balanced diet that leads to life, while Folly presents that which is stolen and leads to death.
—Both Wisdom and Folly invite passersby to feast, and everyone must choose where to “dine.”
—True wisdom begins with putting God first and learning from Him.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

A large part of the book of Proverbs was written by Solomon the son of David (the king of Israel) along with other authors including Hezekiah, Agur, and Lemuel. The book of Proverbs is best understood as a library of Israelite wisdom. Many of the proverbs in the book come from King Solomon, who reigned in the tenth century BC. Other proverbs were written by the scribes of King Hezekiah, who reigned from 715 to 686 BC. The book itself mentions Solomon—who reigned during 971–931 BC—as author or collector of its contents (see Proverbs 1:1; 10:1). It mentions that the proverbs were copied by Hezekiah’s men (see Proverb 25:1). Agur (Proverbs 30:1-33) and Lemuel (Proverbs 31:1-9) are also credited for certain sayings called “the wise” and “oracles.” Proverbs were also found in the Septuagint which dates to approximately 200 BC. Based on this range of dates, the writing of this book is between 1000 BC and 200 BC.

The book of Proverbs was begun during the time of Solomon, prior to the Babylonian exile, and it was written with the intention of teaching wisdom to all. This book of the Bible personifies wisdom as an idealistic woman. There is an ordered flow of thought in the first nine chapters of the book, but this is not the case in the remaining sections. From Proverbs 10:1–22:6, there are 375 proverbs of Solomon, each of which points in some way to the choice which is to be made between Wisdom and Folly. The remaining 284 verses are divided among the other authors, with the content carrying on the same theme of wisdom and folly. The latter part of this book is best studied on a topic basis.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Proverbs dates back to the time of Solomon before the Babylonian exile. This book outlines and catalogues the lives of God’s people in a pre-exilic Israel. The predominantly masculine language used in the Proverbs points to the different cultural spheres of men and women and the different child-rearing practices employed with boys and girls. In the predominant culture of this era, married couples were rarely in close daily contact. The cultural setting of this book is not based on emotion but rather on an understanding, recognition of, and reverence for God demonstrated by obeying God’s laws and performing the required rituals.

The historical books trace the development of the kingdom of God through covenants with Israel. Biblical Wisdom Literature like Proverbs never explicitly mentions Israel’s election or covenants and contains a few acknowledgments of the historical details of Israel’s faith. However,
the common appeal to the central theme of “the fear of the Lord” can be easily integrated with Israel’s historic faith. While the book of Proverbs is practical, it is not superficial or external because it contains moral and ethical elements that stress upright living which emanates from a right relationship with God. This book is both a model for the tender impartation of truth from one generation to the other and a vast resource for the content of the truth to be imparted.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

*King Solomon:* the generally accepted author of the book of Proverbs; Proverbs 1 is attributed to him. He was king in Israel and he is said to be the richest and wisest king ever.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

*Built (verse 1)—Hebrew: banah (baw-naw’):* constructed; fashioned; fortified; fortifying to build; “builted” (KJV).

*Come (verse 5)—Hebrew: halak (haw-lak’):* to go, come, walk.

*Highest (verse 3)—Hebrew: tabbur (tab-boor’):* highest part; center; height.

*Rebuke (verse 8)—Hebrew: yakach (yaw-kahh’):* to decide, adjudge, prove; to reprove.

*Simple (verse 4)—Hebrew: pthiy (peth-ee’):* one; simple; perhaps open-minded.

*Teach (verse 9)—Hebrew: yada (yaw-dah’):* to become familiar with; to accustom oneself to; to befriend; to know.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. The Feast Is Set!
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Wise Invitation
      (Proverbs 9:1-5)
   B. The Source of Understanding
      (Proverbs 9:6, 8-10)
   C. The Foolishness of Folly
      (Proverbs 9:13-18)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
   A. The Feast Is Set!

   Proverbs 9 teaches about divine wisdom. This chapter of the book of Proverbs reveals that real insight comes from an understanding and knowledge of who God is and it advises that fearing God is the beginning of wisdom which brings with it an extended lifespan. This chapter practically discusses the attributes of a wise person, a wicked person, a scoffer, and “the foolish woman.” In this chapter, a feast is arranged, and man is invited. Wisdom places before him life in all its fullness. Folly’s menu is death. The question is what man will choose: life or death. A wise person will choose life. A foolish person will choose death.

   We can conclude from the book of Proverbs that the scoffer seldom takes to correction—that rebuking a wicked person is a futile effort while correcting a wise person is welcoming.
B. Biblical Background

The book of Proverbs has its background in the cultural Jewish belief system. In the foremost verses of chapter 9, Wisdom is introduced as a magnificent and beneficent queen. Wisdom here is constantly in search of guests to fill her house and has hewn out her seven pillars to build a very firm and great-looking house capacious enough for all her guests. Heaven may be the house that is being referenced in the text.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Wise Invitation

(Proverbs 9:1-5)

**WISDOM HATH builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.**

This chapter allegorically presents a royal invitation to attend a sumptuous banquet with two different hosts for two different banquets. The first host is Wisdom and the second host is Folly. Wisdom has constructed a sturdy, well-built structure to host the great banquet. The seven pillars that support this figurative house of wisdom are harmonious with other references to the number “7,” such as sevenfold gifts of the Spirit (see Isaiah 11:2; Revelation 1:4), or the seven-branched candlestick of the Tabernacle (see Exodus 25:37). Wisdom is presented as a queen, sitting in her royal palace and inviting mortals to a splendid banquet. The number “seven” is seen as the symbol of perfection and stability as contrasted with the harlot’s house, mentioned Proverbs 7:8, which is a dangerous and unstable dwelling.

The figurative preparation for Wisdom’s banquet includes preparing the entree, mixing the wine, and setting the table. This could represent the ordinances, gifts, and blessings prepared for the people of God who walk in faithful obedience. In countries with hot climates, wine was often used to purify and to refresh. Here, the reference to wine can symbolize the influence of God’s Spirit and the power which enables us to make wise, godly decisions.

Both Wisdom and Folly are personified as a woman and both invite their simple, undecided, wavering guests to dine at their tables and to be influenced by their fare. These two women can only prepare the meal and extend the invitation—but the response to the invitation is totally up to the guests. Likewise, we are not faced with temptations that we cannot endure, because God has promised not to allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to withstand but will, with the temptation, provide a way of escape so that we may be able to bear it.

Those who are called simple are those who are silly, immature, weak, and likely to be deceived, but are still willing to learn. Interestingly, this invitation to wisdom excludes those who are outwardly knowledgeable but inwardly prideful and conceited (see Jeremiah 5:21; Hosea 7:11). It is not enough to just avoid those who are foolish. We must also embrace and connect with the company of the wise and learn from their ways. The simple as well as the learned are both in need of instruction from Lady Wisdom.

To “eat of one’s bread” is an indication of the nutritious spiritual provisions available in the house of Wisdom. This parallels with the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper, which includes the
bread and the drink that the believer is invited
to partake in with gladness and with singleness
of heart, in remembrance of Christ’s sacrificial
atonement.

B. The Source of Understanding
(Proverbs 9:6, 8-10)
Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of under-
standing. . . . Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee:
rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction
to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man,
and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the
beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is
understanding.

Foolish or simple people are those who
lack good sense, good judgment, or reason-
able discretion. One’s simple ways are often
reflected in decision making and in other unwise actions or words. First Corinthians
15:33 (NIV) informs us that simple ways can
be contagious; leaving one’s simple or foolish
ways may also involve leaving one’s simple or foolish companions: “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

Words of wisdom and advice are good but
not when they are directed toward someone
who will most likely not receive them. This
perspective is reminiscent of the guidelines
given to lifeguards who are told to wait to
rescue swimmers who are wildly flailing in the
water—because if they are helped while flail-
ing, they may cause the rescuer to also drown.
Likewise, it is not wise to waste wisdom on
those who are not ready to receive it. Even
twelve-step programs only accept those who
are willing to acknowledge that they have a
problem and that they need the help.

When wise people are taught, they re-
tain that wisdom and add to their existing
accumulation of knowledge. But when the
unwise receive instruction, that instruction
leaks out like water poured into a container
filled with holes.

The fear of the Lord is the respect, honor,
and esteem of the Lord. When we fear God we
put God’s will first so that all the other less-
significant things can be added. People who
are wise reveal their status through esteeming
the law of the Lord as more important than
one’s own desires. Wise individuals live lives
that reflect holy obedience to the God who is
above all human knowledge (see Job 28:28;
Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7).

C. The Foolishness of Folly
(Proverbs 9:13-18)
A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and
knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her
house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call
passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple,
let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth
understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are
sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he
knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her
guests are in the depths of hell.

Here, Folly is personified as a sultry, carnal,
sensual temptress who is outwardly attractive
and enchanting, but inwardly empty. She
knows nothing and ultimately leaves a trail
of tears and disappointment in her wake. Her
loud and boisterous demeanor attracts much
attention—but when one listens closely, there
is no substance. The senior saints used to say
that one can always tell when a wagon is empty
because it makes a lot of noise. This imagery
can be contrasted with the wise Proverbs 13
woman who acts in ways that are godly.
Folly is characterized by idleness, laziness, and the wasting of time. She is not just content with wasting her own life, but she negatively influences the lives and habits of others as well. Although the voice of Folly is the loudest and although there have been many examples of failure, masses of people still decide to follow her. Carnal pleasure excites and stimulates, while the one involved turns a deaf ear to holiness and conviction.

As we go through life and we are walking the straight and narrow path with our eyes fixed on the prize of the high calling of God, we must also be wary of those who desire for us to walk the crooked pathway. That means that we cannot afford to take any spiritual vacations. Seasoned saints used to say it like this: “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” It would do us good to post a figurative sign in our collective consciousness and unconsciousness that reads, “No loitering on the premises.” Due to the fact that Folly has no shame, it is important for us at all times to maintain our spiritual aim. Isaiah 30:21 (NIV) gives this powerful promise to everyone who will believe: “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”

In this verse, vice imitates virtue. Folly uses the same words and phrases as Wisdom and issues a counterfeit invitation to the foolish folk. Satan is quite capable of transforming into an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Folly attracts “undecided voters” who may be headed in the right direction but have not developed the capacity to persevere in the Way and to sustain the practice of pressing toward spiritual maturity. Second Timothy 3:5-7 gives a very close parallel to this scenario: “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

The metaphor of “stolen water” primarily refers to adulterous intercourse just as is signified by the Scripture “drink waters out of thine own cistern” (Proverbs 5:15). In marriage, the grass may seem greener on the other side, but upon closer inspection what looked like greener grass is often just AstroTurf. After an affair, there is rarely anyone there to help pick up the pieces of a shattered marriage, a traumatized family, and a conflicted circle of friends. An ounce of prevention is worth much more than the cost of a divorce. An affair never solves marital problems; it compounds them. Some people consciously or subconsciously drift into an affair as a way to cope with their current uncomfortable or unfulfilling relationship connection. Perhaps they are desperate and feel they have run out of options. An affair may be exciting, but the odds are that it will destroy any possibility of salvaging a marriage. Desperation creates complication and the residual effect is usually worse than the original cause.

We must watch what we feed our minds and how we think. In our contemporary society, it is difficult to avoid scenarios in the media or in everyday life that are tempting in some way. But just like a smart consumer avoids offers that would be detrimental to one’s financial health, similarly it is also wise to avoid offers that may prove detrimental to one’s relational or marital well-being. Marriage requires work, so we should think of our marriage as a job. If we work little, we get paid little. But if we put
in the time and maximize the effort, we can expect powerful and commensurate results.

When we give liberty to our lusts the result is devastation in the lives of the people and families that are connected. A moment of pleasure can yield a lifetime of pain. It is the task of the Tempter to present a picture of something that seems too desirable to resist. But Solomon is uniquely equipped to tell the story of how sexual oversaturation may be initially enjoyable but is eventually empty and unsatisfying. Our contemporary culture celebrates sexual liberty and denigrates sexual discipline. This mentality contributes to the overlooking of many practical problems associated with failure to approach sex in the way that God commands. Ungodly sexual practices can cause our relationship with God to suffer, and can break the trust and intimacy with others. It can make our witness worthless and inflict damage upon our extended family. Infidelity can produce physical problems, emotional scars in children, and divorce and financial ruin. The fallout from infidelity is a big price to pay for such an insignificant benefit.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Every day of life, there is a plethora of different offers made to us that we must decide to either accept or to reject. For this reason, it is important to be prayed up and to be read up so that our choices will be godly ones. We are able to distinguish between wise and foolish choices through comparing our options to the Word of God and by passing the particular issue through the prism of protracted prayer. As we mature in our walk with God, it is the hope that there is some wisdom that we will accumulate with age. As we develop a healthy and holy respect and reverence for God, we will acknowledge God in all our ways and He in turn has promised to direct our paths (see Proverbs 3:5-6). As long as we live we will have many choices to make. But several of those choices can be made in advance of the situation and this tactic will help us to have a much higher percentage of healthy decisions made in the long run.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to make choices in life that bring us the most wisdom and that bring You the most glory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 22-28, 2020)

Wisdom’s Feast
MONDAY, June 22: “Law Provides the Edge” (Psalm 119:97-104)
TUESDAY, June 23: “Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids” (Matthew 25:1-13)
WEDNESDAY, June 24: “Church Proclaims the Wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:7-13)
THURSDAY, June 25: “No Wise Person among You?” (1 Corinthians 6:1-6)
FRIDAY, June 26: “Wise and Foolish Builders” (Matthew 7:24-27)
SATURDAY, June 27: “The Benefits of Making the Wise Choice” (Psalm 1)
SUNDAY, June 28: “Wisdom Delivers Many Benefits” (Proverbs 9:1-6, 8-10, 13-18)
Matthew 11:7-19—KJV
7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. 9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. 10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

Matthew 11:7-19—NIV
7 As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 “If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. 9 “Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 “This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ 11 “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.
14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.
15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,
17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.
18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.
19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

13 “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.
14 “And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elias who was to come.
15 “Whoever has ears, let them hear.
16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:
17 “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’
18 “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’
19 “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often label unusual or unexpected behavior as eccentric, foolish, or even wrong; and the persons who act in such unusual ways are vilified. What should be our assessment when someone’s behavior is unexpected? In the book of Matthew, Jesus says that His behavior and John’s, while unusual in their day, would eventually be proven wise by their subsequent deeds.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain how the actions of Jesus and John the Baptist, while very different from one another and different from the expected, ultimately displayed divine wisdom.
2. Feel encouraged to behave in ways contrary to the expected in order to follow Jesus.
3. Review their own behavior to determine whether it reflects godly wisdom and commit to focusing on one specific area of improvement.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Matthew 11:10 is drawn from Malachi 3:1 and is also reflected in Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27.
—Jesus expected John the Baptist to recognize Jesus’ identity as Messiah from the wise actions Jesus had been performing (see Matthew 11:2-5).

—Jesus intimates that showing wisdom means recognizing what is fitting, such as playing wedding music for a wedding—and what is not, like playing funeral music at the wedding instead.
—Jesus compares John (see Matthew 11:7-14) to the prophet Elijah. The reed was a Herodian symbol; John’s mission is contrasted with secular royalty and equated with Elijah’s role.
“See, I am sending my messenger . . .” is a paraphrase of Malachi 3:1.
—Jesus embodies wisdom and is vindicated.
—Jesus compares the generation of His time to children sitting in the marketplace.
—The mention of violence to the kingdom is a precursor to John’s violent fate (see Matthew 14:10).
—Jesus and John’s work was misunderstood.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Jesus’ speech to the crowd asserts John’s importance and the anointing given to him by God.
—Jesus asks the people if they came to see something as insignificant as frail grass blowing in the wind (verse 7).
—Verse 10 references the preparation for a royal visitation (see Malachi 3:1).
—Jesus proclaims John as a great prophet and declares none greater than John (verse 11), but also conversely states that the least in the kingdom is greater than John.
—Jesus’ and John’s social interactions were dissimilar, but both were considered controversial.
—John was reclusive, lived in the wilderness, and fasted. Jesus and the disciples did not fast and mingled among tax collectors/sinners.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The gospel of Matthew is one of four gospels and the first book presented in the New Testament. It is the longest of the four, having a total of twenty-eight chapters. Traditionally, the church has ascribed the first gospel to the apostle known as Matthew. Matthew composed his gospel in or around Antioch in the fifties and sixties of the first century. This date is chosen because there is no mention of the destruction of the Temple, which took place in AD 70. The entire text is artistically written and is consistent with the other three Gospels in the Bible (Mark, Luke, and John) regarding the historical events that occurred during Jesus’ time here on earth. In Matthew 11, there is great focus on John the Baptist’s question from prison and Jesus’ response to it. The book of Matthew was written to the Jews to answer their question about Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be their Messiah. The book served to answer the question, “If Jesus is the King of the Jews, then where is God’s promised kingdom?”

The gospel of Matthew presents many important facts and significant lessons. It clearly establishes that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. It proves that Jesus was the Son of God as He claimed to be and proved it by living a sinless and perfect life. It also records Jesus’ performing miracles through exerting power over nature, sickness, and death.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The book of Matthew was written in Aramaic at a time when much of the evangelism by Christians was directed more exclusively toward Jews living within the immediate proximity of the homeland itself. The apostle Matthew was a Jew himself, and he offered a decidedly Jewish perspective on the ministry of Jesus with the emphasis being placed on Jesus’ Davidic lineage. The book of Matthew is the most Jewish of all the Gospels. The community for which Matthew was writing was a Jewish Christian community that was encountering some new
tensions in the period of reconstruction after the Great Revolt (also known as the First Jewish–Roman War). One of the obvious reasons behind this conclusion of the audience’s being largely Jewish is because the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is mentioned more than thirty times in this book of the Bible; however, the phrase “kingdom of God” is mentioned about four times. This stems from the fact that the Jews do not speak the name of God, and this could be the reason why the author of this book used the former phrase. It seems that the Jewish community had been there for quite some time. They show consciousness of an older legacy of Jesus’ tradition, going back to before the Great Revolt. But then they experience new tensions and new problems in the aftermath of the revolt as a political and social reconstruction is taking place.

The events in the book of Matthew take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time, it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The opening chapters describe the events surrounding Jesus’ birth in Judea, where Herod had been appointed king by the Romans. The closing chapters end with Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Messengers from John the Baptist
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Greatness of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-11)
   B. Rejection and Acceptance (Matthew 11:12-15)
   C. Generational Factors (Matthew 11:16-19)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Messengers from John the Baptist
   Matthew 11 is centered on Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, and some particular cities. We see from this book that the news of Jesus’ activities travelled far and wide, eventually making its way to John the Baptist, who at that time had been imprisoned. While John the Baptist was still free and preaching, his message had not been accepted by many. Now hearing about Jesus from prison, John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the one that was prophesied to come. Jesus compares that generation to be like children who dance when music is playing or do not mourn when there is a reason; He showed that He had no sympathy for the cities that refuse to repent.

B. Biblical Background
   The gospel of Matthew was written before the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The frequent references to specific Old Testament texts are indicative that it was written for a Jewish Christian community. The eleventh chapter of this book reveals the disciples of Jesus to be ministering in the Jewish towns in and around Galilee. And we can glean from this section that John the Baptist, despite his strong faith, was going through a trial; the final verses of this chapter give a glimpse of the first Beatitude.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
A. The Greatness of John the Baptist
   (Matthew 11:7-11)
   And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
   The role and responsibility of John was to prepare the way for Jesus and to be the forerunner for the Messiah, preaching repentance because of the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus viewed John as a stalwart prophet who took his marching orders from God and who refused to be influenced by popular opinion or by current culture. When John went about as one crying in the wilderness, large crowds clamored to listen to him. Jesus, by His question (verse 7), wanted to know what they expected of this prophet. The imagery used by Jesus of a “reed shaken with the wind” is drawn from the bullrush plants that grew near the banks of the Jordan River. These reeds tend to bend in whatever direction the wind blows at the time. If they came to see a spineless, feeble character lacking strength or boldness, they were in for a rude awakening. John could be described as a
principles-driven, visionary prophet who was aware of his purpose and refused to be intimidated by the pressure-filled crush of the culture.

John’s wardrobe (verse 8) did not consist of the soft, luxurious apparel of princes. The fashion sense of John the Baptist did not extend beyond clothes made of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist. This somber ensemble paralleled the somber message of repentance that he was compelled to relay. This principle may have some contemporary inferences and implications for current prognosticators of the Gospel and the clothing that some choose to wear.

Those who went out into the wilderness to hear a prophet were certainly not disappointed when they encountered John the Baptist (verse 9). John was more than a mere prophet. He was connected to Jesus even before birth, as he leaped in his mother’s womb upon hearing the voice of Mary. John introduced Jesus to the nation and proclaimed that he was even unworthy to unlace the shoes of Jesus.

Verse 10 is a free rendering of a Malachi 3:1 excerpt from the Hebrew Scriptures, which reads as follows: “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the LORD Almighty” (NIV).

What determines whether a person is considered great (verse 11)? James E. Faust put it this way: “A grateful heart is the beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being.” Human standards are not capable of accurately measuring greatness, and that is why we need the divine perspective. God is great, and John was great because John was godly. Likewise, we can be great when we are godly.

B. Rejection and Acceptance
(Matthew 11:12-15)

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The phrasing of verse 12 is a bit difficult to understand. Many biblical scholars see this as a description of the crowd’s response to the ministries of John and Jesus. Whenever it was known that they were making a public appearance, the response was forceful and intense as the people strained to get close enough to see, to touch, and to receive from these men of God. In some cases, Jesus had to teach from a boat because of the press of the crowd. On one occasion, those who wanted to get to Jesus came through the roof of a home in which He was teaching. Even the family of Jesus occasionally could not reach Him and had to send word that they were waiting outside. These impetuous people seek to grasp the kingdom of heaven and all that it has to offer. Like soldiers who march against a rival city, those who seek the benefits of the kingdom take an assertive approach to receive what they believe they need.

Those who operated in the office of a judge or a prophet did their work pointing to the kingdom of heaven in the far-off future (verse 13). John, however, experienced Jesus firsthand and had the privilege of not only being a relative of Jesus’ but also serving as the prophetic
forerunner of Jesus and personally introducing the Lord of glory to the world.

Malachi believed that Elijah the Tishbite would immediately precede the Messiah (verse 14), as taught by the scribes of the time (see Malachi 4:5; Matthew 17:10; John 1:21). This tradition of expectation has continued in some sects of Judaism. The words “if you are willing to accept it” in verse 14 (NIV) acknowledge the understanding that Jesus was setting aside a strongly held belief. In other words, “If you are willing to receive and believe the truth that John came in the spirit of Elijah and was in fact doing the work of Elijah, you don’t have to look further to receive the truth.”

Verse 15 is a statement frequently used by Jesus to emphasize the need to be receptive to a truth that has just been revealed. Sometimes, this phrase was used following a problematic parable or some other teaching that may have been somewhat difficult to comprehend or accept (see Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9). We need the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us process and digest the content and intent of kingdom truths delivered by the King of Kings.

C. Generational Factors
(Matthew 11:16-19)

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Some of the perverse people of that time were a contentious collection of the childishly kind (verse 16) who tended to be critical toward any and every religious group that was not their own. This silly “game” is still played by some, and the participants have been used by the enemy to distract from the truth of God’s message and to destroy the unity of God’s people.

During occasions of festivals and other special celebrations, joyful music was typically played on flutes and lyres (verse 17). On the sad and somber occasions of funerals, the people would sing slow and mournful dirges to accompany the occasion. Children often imitate their parents and other adults without fully realizing what they are doing. John’s ministry was serious and somber as he spoke the truth about the kingdom of God. In contrast, the ministry of Jesus was warm and welcoming, yet He also preached the truth of God’s kingdom.

Scribes and Pharisees who were judgmental described and assessed John’s austere and solitary approach as demonic (verse 18). They reasoned that only a possessed man would wear a loin cloth made of animal skin and maintain a diet of honey and grasshoppers.

Jesus was fond of social settings and communal dining experiences. On such occasions, it was and still is common in that culture to have dinner wine to accompany the meal. Obviously, this approach dramatically contrasted with John’s personal lifestyle. Rather than simply appreciating the warmth and accessibility of Jesus, His accusers went to the extreme and labeled Him as a glutton (one given to excessive eating) and a winebibber (one who drinks much wine) (verse 19). The tax collectors, also known as publicans, were highly disliked by the Jews of Jesus’ day because of their perceived greed and collaboration with the Romans who politically and militarily occupied the region.
Tax collectors were also hated because they were sometimes known to extract more taxes than was legally required and take the excess for themselves.

Truth does not require a great deal of excess words in order to prove its veracity and legitimacy. Truth can stand on its own without false sources of support from questionable contributors. Émile Zola captured the force of truth when he wrote, “If you shut up truth and bury it under the ground, it will but grow, and gather to itself such explosive power that the day it bursts through it will blow up everything in its way.”

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

John the Baptist conducted ministry in a unique way that took many people by surprise. He looked different and preached a different message. Some people received his ministry, and others rejected it. Whenever the true Gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, it will be recognized as truth by those whose hearts are in tune to receive the Word or prepared to receive the Word. Recognition of the truth should not be hindered just because the hearers of the truth are distracted by the outward appearance of the truth teller. Truth is truth, regardless of the wardrobe of the deliverer. God has given each disciple a special gift that is to be used to the glory of God. People who are unaware of their gifts are wasting precious time and potentially depriving the world of many spiritual benefits. Every Christian has something to offer, and it is through the working out of our faith that we increase in our spiritual maturity.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to honor the working of Your Spirit in the lives of others through realizing that You manifest Yourself differently in a variety of people. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 29–July 5, 2020)

Wisdom’s Vindication

MONDAY, June 29: “Wise Counsel for Defending Your Faith” (Matthew 10:16-23)
TUESDAY, June 30: “Wise Deeds of the Coming Messiah” (Isaiah 35:3-10)
WEDNESDAY, July 1: “John the Baptist, God’s Messenger” (Luke 7:24-28)
THURSDAY, July 2: “The Messiah’s Wise Deeds” (Matthew 11:1-6)
FRIDAY, July 3: “Woes on Unwise Cities” (Matthew 11:20-24)
SATURDAY, July 4: “Wisdom’s Invitation to Come and Rest” (Matthew 11:25-30)
SUNDAY, July 5: “Wisdom Is Vindicated by Her Deeds” (Matthew 11:7-19)
**THE BOY JESUS**

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Wisdom that Amazes  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Wisdom that Amazes

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Jesus in the Temple  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Questions Are Good!

**DEVOOTIONAL READING**  
Leviticus 12:1-8; Numbers 3:11-13

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; Luke 2:39-52  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b; Luke 2:39-52  
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Luke 2:40  
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Luke 2:46

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; Luke 2:39-52  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7; Luke 2:39-52  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 2:46

---

**Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b; Luke 2:39-52—KJV**

TO EVERY thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

7 a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.
40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.
41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.
42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.
43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they

---

**Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b; Luke 2:39-52—NIV**

THERE IS a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

7 a time to be silent and a time to speak.

39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own city Nazareth.
40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.
41 Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.
42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.
43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in
returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were astonished: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

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?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 Then 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 favour with God and man.

**UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE:** Some young people amaze us with a wisdom that seems beyond their years. How should we respond to precocious wisdom? Ecclesiastes affirms that there is a time to speak and a time to be quiet, and Luke records that the teachers in the Temple were awed by the wisdom of twelve-year-old Jesus, but Mary and Joseph were confused and exasperated.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Explore the account of Jesus’ experience in the Temple at the age of twelve.

2. Sense the awe experienced by all those who witnessed Jesus’ precocious wisdom as well as the angst experienced by Mary and Joseph.

3. Rejoice in the opportunity to know the wisdom of God through Jesus.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Jesus’ interaction with the Temple scholars is consistent with the affirmation in Ecclesiastes 3:7b.

—Jews were required to make three pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year: Passover/Unleavened Bread (see Exodus 12:6, 15-20, etc.), Pentecost (see Leviticus 23:15-21; etc.), and Tabernacles (see Exodus 23:16b; 34:22; etc.). Therefore, the Temple was a familiar place to Jesus by the time He was twelve (see Luke 2:41-42).

—“Be in my Father’s house” (Luke 2:49, NIV) can also be translated “be involved in my Father’s affairs” and “be among those belonging to my Father.” In either case, Jesus’ response indicates awareness that being in relationship with the heavenly Father was of greater importance than the earthly one of Mary’s question in Luke 2:48.

—Luke tells us that Jesus was raised by a devout Jewish family. His presence in the Temple with the teachers further shows His foundation in the Law and Prophets.

—Contrary to traditional interpretations, Jesus does not teach the elders; rather, He impresses them with His questions. Wisdom is exercised through cogent questions.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 3:7b speak to the appropriateness of right timing, involving godly discernment as well as an awareness of God’s sovereignty.

—The Feast of Passover required all Jewish males to journey to Jerusalem.

—The journey to Jerusalem took place in caravans, so it would have been understandable for Mary to think that Jesus might have been with other relatives.

—Jesus’ presence in the Temple was not passive, but His questions and interactions with the teachers drew amazement among the teachers.

—Mary expressed to Jesus the concern and worries His disappearance caused.

—Jesus’ response (verse 49) can be connected to the book of Ecclesiastes in terms of God’s purposes and timing.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Ecclesiastes was compiled by someone who identified himself by the Hebrew word qoheleth, which is commonly translated in English to mean “teacher” or “preacher.” This preacher went on to call himself “the son of David, king of Jerusalem” (1:1), continuing that he had “increased in wisdom more than anyone who had ruled over Jerusalem before me” (1:16) and was one who had collected many proverbs. With Solomon being the wisest man during his time and also being the writer of most of the book of Proverbs, it is safe to assume that Solomon is the qoheleth being referred to in the opening verse. The book claims that the wisdom that inspired the content comes from one shepherd, the Lord Himself (12:11).

The timeless nature of the book’s wisdom makes it unnecessary to link it with any particular period. The writing of this book of the Bible is dated in the third or fourth century BC by some scholars; others date the book to the time of Solomon (therefore before Solomon’s death in 931 BC). Still others date the book’s writing sometime in the eight or seventh centuries BC, but no one can be really precise. The information contained in the book of Ecclesiastes is also reflected in the books of Psalms, Jobs, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon. This book’s central message and focus is that the
course of life to be pursued is a God-centered life because the pleasures of life are not intrinsically fulfilling and cannot offer lasting satisfaction, but they can be enjoyed as gifts from God. The intent of the book of Ecclesiastes is to contend that there is nothing “under the sun” that can give meaning to life.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Some scholars opined that the Hebrew of this book shares similarities with post-biblical Hebrew and that there is a discernible influence from Greek philosophy. This opinion has been strengthened by the presence of a few Persian words and some Aramaic influence in the book of Ecclesiastes. Generally, Ecclesiastes is a book that teaches the reader how to traverse the spheres of life. It carries a core message: fulfillment is God’s business, and it gives us a naturalistic vision of life.

The setting for the book of Ecclesiastes is during the period of the early kingdom of Israel, before the division of Israel into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. During this period, the kingdom of Israel encompassed the largest geographical area ever in its history, covering the majority of modern-day Palestine. Under the rule of King David and then King Solomon, the nation of Israel was truly in its golden period, a period we will see again when Christ returns to establish His kingdom.

Though some scholars argue that the purpose of Ecclesiastes was to expose the fundamental inadequacy of this paradigm, it is undeniable that the conventions of the genre had a profound influence on the development and organization of the text.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jesus: Jesus was raised by a devout Jewish family. In this lesson, His presence in the Temple with the teachers further shows His foundation in the Law and Prophets.

The Teacher/Preacher: The book of Ecclesiastes was compiled by someone who identified himself by the Hebrew word qoheleth, which is commonly translated in English to mean “teacher” or “preacher.”

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1)—Greek: pas (pas): all; the whole; every kind of; “every thing” (KJV).

Heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1)—Hebrew: shamayim (shaw-mah’yim): the usual Hebrew word for “heavens” (NIV) is shamayim, a plural form meaning “heights,” “elevations.”

Law (Luke 2:39)—Greek: nomos (nom’-os): usage; custom; that which is assigned, hence usage, law.

Season (Ecclesiastes 3:1)—Hebrew: zeman (zem-awn’): appointed time; time.

Speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7)—Hebrew: dabar (daw-bar’): to assert; to boast; to command; to counsel; to declare.

Time (Ecclesiastes 3:1)—Hebrew: eth (ayth): the basis of the Hebrew measurement of “time” was the day and the lunar month.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. A Time for Everything
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Timing Is Everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b)
   C. His Father’s Business (Luke 2:46-52)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. A Time for Everything

Ecclesiastes 3 teaches about seasons and discusses working and toiling. This chapter of the book speaks about injustice in the world—wicked people being in positions of power and how they act without justice, corrupting things that should be just. We can see from this chapter that there is a reward for every role people play in life; the good and bad will somehow be rewarded or punished. In this chapter of this Bible book, we are admonished to enjoy what we do while we still have time.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Ecclesiastes is read throughout the year during the Festival of the Lord or Jewish Memorial Holidays. Traditionally, it is read at the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, and the background of the book is unique in that the Preacher (Qoheleth), though being a believer, often posed questions and made statements as though he was not. Consequently, all he says must be taken in the context of his conclusion.

This book of Ecclesiastes focuses on life and draws logical conclusions about life. However, we are to remember that when God is left out of the equation, life is empty and devoid of value. Ecclesiastes reminds us that an empty, futile life is not an inevitable predicament. If we remember God while we are still young, respect Him and keep His commandments, we will make it through life intact.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
A. Timing Is Everything

(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b)

TO EVERY thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. . . . a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

Solomon composes a brilliant treatise on the topic of timing. Timing is the ability to select the precise moment for doing something for the optimum effect. The truth is that there are some things that might be right for us but that does not necessarily mean that they are ripe for us. It is quite possible to be inside of God’s will, but outside of God’s timing. Although God’s will is perfect, God still allows us plenty of room for the exercise of our free will. This divine allowance often results in our revealing our wide variety of individual imperfections. From a spiritual perspective, a “season” is a specific time that God has designated for something to take place. If we are not in tune with God’s will, it is entirely possible for us to miss God’s appointed time and season for our lives. But when we are aligned with God’s mind, we can be in the right places at the right time to be blessed by the remarkable timing of God.

There is an old saying that goes, “You have two ears and one mouth; let the majority rule.” (See verse 7b.)
B. The Story of Jesus  
(Luke 2:39-45)

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

Nazareth was the geographical site where Jesus spent most of His early childhood (verse 39). It is important to remember that Jesus was both human as well as divine. The divine part of Jesus came from heaven, but the human part of Jesus dwelled on earth and experienced everything that humans experience.

Jesus grew strong in spirit, mind, intellect, and in understanding (verse 40). The fact that Jesus was full of wisdom is reflected by His speaking wisely while just a child of twelve years old when He held conversation with the elders in the Temple. Even as a child, Jesus was wise, pure, pleasing to God, and well-versed in divine Law.

Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem in observance of Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Weeks or Pentecost), and Sukkot (Tabernacles, Tents or Booths) (verse 41). All Jewish males were required to participate in the festivities. Some of the strictest Jewish laws had been somewhat relaxed during the Jewish diaspora. Those who participated in all the festivities were considered devout and adhering to the rich traditions of the past.

Childhood (verse 42) for a Jewish boy was indicated by the following stages: age three—the boy was weaned and donned the fringed or tasseled garment as described in Numbers 15:38-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12; age five—education started, and the boy learned the Law through extracts written on scrolls, the Shemk, the Creed of Deuteronomy 2:4, the Hallel or Festival Psalms (Psalms 114–118; 136), and by school teachings; age twelve—the boy became more directly responsible for his obedience to the Law; age thirteen—he put on for the first time the phylacteries worn at the recital of his daily prayer (Matthew 23:5). Phylacteries are small leather boxes containing Hebrew texts on vellum, worn by Jewish men at morning prayer as a reminder to keep the Law.

Jesus did not stay behind in Jerusalem in intentional defiance of His parents (verse 43). In consideration of His combination of full divinity and humanity, the probable reason had more to do with His precocious nature and His thirst for knowledge and exposure to the sharp intellects in the Temple. He was most likely seeking wisdom in order to adequately fulfill His Father’s will. The best way to understand this is to resist the urge to place this scenario into contemporary setting to try to make it make sense from today’s perspective.

The parents of Jesus went an entire day’s journey because they assumed that Jesus was in the care of relatives and extended family in the caravan (verse 44). It was only when they were unable to locate Him in the usual places and with the usual people that they changed their tactics. From a spiritual perspective, how often have we been confident that Jesus was with us, only to find out that He was nowhere around us? We look for the security of Jesus’ presence in the company of family members.
and friends, but after we make a good search, we find that we come up empty and are forced to change tactics.

C. His Father’s Business
(Luke 2:46-52)

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. 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. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

On the third day after leaving Jerusalem (verse 46), Jesus was located in the place of worship. Even though He was just twelve, Jesus was not found playing with other children or enthralled in some mischief, but His father found Him in His Father’s house. He was actually not in the Temple building itself, because that space was reserved for the Levitical priests. But He was in the “court” of the Temple (see Matthew 21:12). He was in dialogue with the teachers and the rabbis, who were the instructors of the people in matters of the Torah. He was both posing and answering questions.

Teachers and interpreters of the Law were impressed and amazed by the high level of knowledge and theological acumen Jesus demonstrated (verse 47). Perhaps Jesus was likewise very much at ease and enamored with the opportunity to dialogue with the rabbis and instructors. God is not limited or restricted to whom He may use as an instrument to communicate the message of truth.

When Mother Mary discovered that Jesus had been in the Temple instead of with the rest of the family caravan, she responded to Him on a human level as a worried and concerned human mother who was speaking to a precocious and seemingly careless son who has gotten Himself in big trouble (verse 48). Her words were laced with motherly reproach as she understandably released her frustration on her son. However, even at that age He was strong enough to take it, as was evidenced by His response.

Jesus’ response to His mother’s in explaining His absence at first sounds disrespectful (verse 49). There are many seasoned mothers I know who would surely not have tolerated such a response. Jesus, of course, intended no disrespect but was quick to reveal the fact that He was indeed being obedient. But His obedience was to His heavenly Father rather than to His earthly father. His Father’s business was for Him to serve as a prophet to the nations and to usher in the kingdom of God. Even though Joseph and Mary were the earthly parents of Jesus, they did not completely understand Him even though they were related (verse 50). That same trend continues today: Although we are spiritually related, we do not always understand.

The heart of Mary must have been so full because of all the things she had to store there (verse 51). Undoubtedly, there were many instances in which Mary observed things about Jesus that she had to deposit rather than share
because nobody else would quite understand. Even though Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, Joseph was still honored and respected as was Mary.

There is not a great deal of information that is documented about the early life of Jesus (verse 52). We read about Jesus at birth and this snapshot of His life at age twelve. At that point, there is an eighteen-year gap during which we know very little about His life. Although this verse is brief, it can serve as a template for categorical growth in individuals between the ages of twelve and thirty. Jesus grew intellectually (wisdom), physically (stature), spiritually (favor with God), and socially (favor with man). This balanced approach to growth can produce a lifetime of positive results when one is continually grounded in God’s Word and led by God’s Spirit.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Wise people have learned when to speak and when to keep silent. The right words at the right time can unlock previously dead-end situations. Conversely, the wrong words at the wrong time can build tall walls of division and offense. Reliance on the Holy Spirit can keep us from falling into negative patterns of disobedience to God.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to live a life that is reflective of Your pattern of growth when You walked the earth as a young adult. Help us to increase in wisdom, stature, favor with God, and favor with others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 6-12, 2020)

The Boy Jesus

MONDAY, July 6: “Everything Has Its Time and Season” (Ecclesiastes 3:2-8)
TUESDAY, July 7: “Perform Your God-given Task” (Ecclesiastes 3:9-15)
WEDNESDAY, July 8: “The Firstborn Belong to God” (Numbers 3:11-13)
SATURDAY, July 11: “Anna Speaks about the Christ-child” (Luke 2:36-38)
THE WISDOM OF JESUS

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Wisdom that Astounds and Offends
YOUTH TOPIC: Wow! What Wisdom!

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: An All-wise Jesus
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Don’t Let the Doubters Stop You

DEVOTIONAL READING
Mark 7:14-23

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 6:1-6; 7:1-23
PRINT PASSAGE: Mark 6:1-6
ADULT KEY VERSES: Mark 6:2-3
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Mark 6:2

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 6:1-6; 7:1-23
PRINT PASSAGE: Mark 6:1-6
KEY VERSE: Mark 6:2

Mark 6:1-6—KJV
AND HE went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.
2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?
3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.
4 But Jesus, said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his relatives and in his own house.
5 And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.
6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

Mark 6:1-6—NIV
JESUS LEFT there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.
2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?”
3 “Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.
4 Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”
5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.
6 He was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.
Summer 2020–TOWNSEND PRESS COMMENTARY | 415

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people amaze us by displaying unexpected wisdom. What happens when people show such extraordinary wisdom? Mark tells us that the people in Jesus’ hometown were both astounded and offended by Jesus’ wise teachings, and the religious leaders were incensed when Jesus’ wisdom challenged their traditions.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Identify the reason or reasons why the people in Nazareth could not accept the wisdom with which Jesus spoke.
2. Repent of occasions when Jesus’ words resulted in their taking offense rather than in accepting the wisdom inherent in those words.
3. Commit to accepting the words of Jesus even when His words are challenging and stretching.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Jesus’ teaching and preaching are very sharp and critical, especially of religious leaders who have varied from the truth of God. This style reflects what the writer of the book of Hebrews says of the Word of God: “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow” (see Hebrews 4:12).

—The term “Son of Mary” may be an insult: people were known by their father’s name, not their mother’s.

—Verse 4 indicates that Jesus is among the prophets, whose message from God is rejected by their own people.

—“Corban” (Mark 7:9-13): A child could, per the aural Torah, declare possessions to be korban, i.e., an offering to God. The commandment to “Honor your father and mother” was interpreted as giving parents a right to a child’s possessions. Making possessions “korban” circumvented a child’s obligations to his parents under the Law.

—Jesus came from humble beginnings and His friends and neighbors knew that; they knew His family and knew that none of them had done such wondrous things and were upset when they believed that Jesus thought higher of Himself than what they once knew Him to be.

—His hearers could not believe that Jesus was filled with so much wisdom yet was so humble and lowly.

—Jesus acknowledged that the people closest to Him would not understand the mission and vision that was created for Him.

—Jesus did not allow the plan for His life to be stopped even though they admonished Him.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Jesus, along with the disciples, returned to Nazareth.

—When Jesus began to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, His listeners were astonished. They wondered how Jesus had so much wisdom and power, seeing as though He was just a carpenter’s son.

—When the people rejected Jesus, He expressed that a prophet is without honor among his own people.

—The listeners’ rejection established an
environment of faithlessness. This lack of trust in Jesus hindered the listeners from fully receiving what Jesus had to offer, including miracles and other signs and wonders.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

There is some measure of disagreement as to the exact date of composition of the gospel of Mark. Those who support the theory that both Matthew and Luke used Mark’s gospel as their primary source also tend to hold that Mark was composed in the fifties or early sixties AD. Still others contend that the content of this gospel points toward chronological placement of Mark around AD 70, shortly after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The name of the book is the same as its most likely author. Although there is no specific reference to Mark as the writer, the early church universally agreed that John Mark penned this gospel (see Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37).

The gospel of Mark poignantly focuses on the life, ministry, and crucifixion of Jesus the Christ. This second book of the Synoptic Gospels is the earliest gospel on record, and it serves as an important scriptural guide for inspiration, information, and instruction. The gospel of Mark is also referred to as a passion narrative because one-third of the book describes the final week that Jesus ministered in Jerusalem. Mark divides his gospel according to the geographical areas of northern Palestine (encompassing Galilee and adjacent areas) and southern Palestine. Mark was likely written in the regions of Italy or, more specifically, in Rome.

PROFICIENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Mary: Mary was the mother of Jesus. She conceived and bore other children naturally after Jesus’ supernatural conception. Mary’s husband was Joseph, who served as Jesus’ earthly father.

Jesus’ brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas are all mentioned as the brothers or siblings of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).

Jesus’ sisters: Matthew 13:56 states, “His sisters, are they not all with us?” There were two or more sisters who were probably married and residents of Nazareth. Siblings are not mentioned at all until after Jesus began His ministry and are first mentioned as going with Jesus and Mary to Capernaum (see John 2:12). It is not clear whether they followed Him or even believed in His claims until after His death and resurrection.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Hometown (verse 1)—Greek: patris (pat-rece’): of one’s father’s homeland; fatherland; “own country” (KJV).

Miracles (verse 2)—Greek: dunamis (doo’-nam-is): might; power; marvelous works; “mighty works” (KJV).

Prophet (verse 4)—Greek: prophétés (prof-ay’-tace): a poet; a person gifted at expositing divine truth.

Synagogue (verse 2)—Greek: sunagógé (soon-ag-o-gay’): an assembly; congregation.

Teach (verse 2)—Greek: didaskó (did-as’-ko): to teach, direct, admonish.

Took Offense (verse 3)—Greek: skandal-izó (skan-dal-id’-zo): was made to stumble, sin; became indignant, shocked, offended; “were offended” (KJV).
I.  INTRODUCTION

A. Jesus: The Minister

The gospel of Mark shows Jesus as a doer of mighty works rather than as a teacher of profound truths. Obviously, He is both. Throughout the gospel of Mark we see Jesus as the suffering servant and incarnate Son of God. A key verse in Mark is found in Mark 10:45, which reads, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” Mark is therefore characteristically a gospel of deeds rather than a gospel of words. The gospel of Mark gives explanations about Jewish customs (see 7:2-4; 15:42), translates Aramaic words (see 3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22, 34) and devotes a special amount of interest to the subject of persecution and martyrdom (see 8:34-38; 13:9-13). These characteristics make the gospel of Mark a likely candidate for its readers’ being Romans.

B. Biblical Background

In order to spiritually prepare oneself for a study of Mark, a prayerful reading of the following passages would be of great benefit: Isaiah 42:1-21; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12; Zechariah 3:8; Philippians 2:5-8. Mark is basically a gospel whose language is simple and is easier to read than Luke or Matthew. Through using the historical present tense more than 150 times, Mark is able to help the readers identify more with the Jesus of the present rather than simply the Jesus of the past. The utilization of extended description and narrative by Mark draws the reader in and places us inside the action of the moment. Mark’s parenthetical statements further serve to help the reader to translate and grasp the magic of the moment and to paint a descriptive picture such as is seen in Mark 4:41 (NIV): “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” Mark showcases eighteen miracles of Jesus and demonstrates how Jesus has absolute power over disease, disability, demons, and even nature. The gospel of Mark paints the picture with extraordinary vividness.
A. Declaration and Doubt at Home

(Mark 6:1-4)

AND HE went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus, said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

Why did Jesus return to Nazareth (verse 1) when He already knew there were people with ill will there who meant Him no good? Instead of giving in to the natural human propensity for fear, Jesus refused to allow this trait to prevent Him from ultimately fulfilling His divine calling. Perhaps Jesus also had hoped that there had been a change in the hearts of the people of Nazareth since He had announced in the synagogue there that “the Spirit of the Lord” was upon Him (Luke 4:18) and that the message of the Gospel had somehow saturated the hometown society to the point of their embracing Him as their native son who had started from the bottom and now was operating a wide-ranging ministry. Sadly, such was not the case. The blatant distaste for His teachings and disrespectful disregard for His authority that was present when He was there the last time still remained. One can only imagine the hope and expectation Jesus may have had as He returned to the familiar place where He grew up to revisit the community of people who had known Him the longest.

In the synagogue (verse 2), Jesus preached the Gospel and expounded upon the Law and the Prophets. As He did so, the natural ability and spiritual skill that had existed at age twelve had been honed and heightened to a level and degree much higher than any other comparable individual before or since that time. Matthew 7:28-29 reflects a similar reaction when people heard Jesus speak: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (NIV). They made the mistake of placing the same limitations on Jesus that they had placed on themselves. Perhaps they reasoned thusly, “I am not able to explain the Scriptures in such a profound manner and Jesus comes from the same place that I come from, so how can He possibly know more than I know being so much younger?”

The people from Jesus’ hometown fell victim to the problematic issue of comparison syndrome. This faulty line of reasoning short circuits our potential for progress. We can never reach our true potential when we continually compare ourselves to others, or when we compare others to ourselves. “If I become someone else, who will be me?” We were created as original, and the challenge of life is not to die as a copy.

Perhaps the people of Nazareth expected Jesus to follow in the same choice of occupation as His carpenter father (verse 3). They expected Him to limit Himself based on what His brothers James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon had accomplished. (The mere fact that Jesus had these four brothers and other sisters is evidence that

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
Joseph and Mary continued to have children. That the people of Nazareth were shocked at the obvious capacity of Jesus demonstrated that they were probably unaware of the significance of the name of their city. The name “Nazareth” means “separated, crowned, sanctified.” This is exactly what their city’s most famous resident embodied. He was separated from everything that was ordinary. He was crowned at birth as Messiah, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was sanctified or set apart for a special mission in life: to give abundant life and to save the people from their sins.

The proverb quoted in verse 4 is also found in Matthew 13:57. We should recognize and give honor to people we may know and even to strangers because we never know how God may plan to use them to accomplish His purpose. Sadly, it is often one’s own friends and relatives who are the first to highlight one’s personal faults and the last to recognize one’s true greatness. Perhaps familiarity breeds contempt among people. Hebrews 13:2 (NIV) reminds us to “not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

Since the people of the city of Nazareth had witnessed Jesus growing up and probably acting like any young boy would act, they assumed that they knew all about Jesus. What a lesson that is for us today; we should never assume that we know everything there is to know about Jesus. He is much too big and powerful to be boxed in by our limited thinking, traditions, and human parameters. A fresh take on this important lesson is provided by The Message Bible’s paraphrase of Isaiah 40:27-31: “Why would you ever complain, O Jacob, or, whine, Israel, saying, ‘God has lost track of me. He doesn’t care what happens to me? Don’t you know anything? Haven’t you been listening? God doesn’t come and go. God lasts. He’s Creator of all you can see or imagine. He doesn’t get tired out, doesn’t pause to catch his breath. And he knows everything, inside and out. He energizes those who get tired, gives fresh strength to dropouts. For even young people tire and drop out, young folk in their prime stumble and fall. But those who wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run and don’t get tired, they walk and don’t lag behind.”

B. Jesus’ Power Is Limited
(Mark 6:5-6)
And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

Is it possible to limit God by our own limited thinking (verse 5)? When we think we know God too well we fail to leave room for God’s forever unknown aspects. We can hamper God’s progress by the overestimation of our own knowledge and by the presence of any level of doubt about God’s capability. According to Romans 14:23 (NIV), “Whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” Faith is an important factor for God’s power to be manifested. Faith activates the power of God like fire and air activate the power of heat. Our faith level depends on how much we are willing to trust God. The reason our spiritual lives sometimes seem to run out of gas is because they have run out of faith and are operating on fumes. Faith is that invisible force that changes...
our course. If you could crystallize hope and hold it in your hand, that substance would be faith. Faith enables us to take something that does not exist and trust God to make it reality. Sometimes, we have to just “faith” it until we make it. Since God is invisible in the natural, our faith in Him affirms His existence and relevance in our lives. God shows appreciation by rewarding our demonstrations of faith. Faith is a process that combines the power of God’s great ability with the simple actions of childlike obedience.

There were not many things that could amaze Jesus (verse 6). But one of those things was not very complimentary and not a badge of honor or a thing to be desired. When considering His hometown of Nazareth, He was amazed at their lack of faith. The Nazarenes based their belief on false assumptions, and it is difficult to arrive at a correct conclusion when one’s basic premise is incorrect. The wind of doubt emanating from the Nazarenes figuratively extinguished the light emanating from Jesus’ candle in the community. It is frightening to ponder the fact that our seemingly innocuous but faithless attitudes or actions may unwittingly serve to stifle some of the work that God is able to accomplish in our lives, our families, our workplaces, our schools, our communities, and our world. It is good that Jesus did not completely allow the unbelief, doubt, and lack of cooperation by the people to prevent Him from offering effective ministry to others who were open to receive it.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There is a natural tendency for some people to feel threatened when in the presence of excellence—those with superior knowledge or skills. If this happens, the change that needs to happen is not with the one who is excellent, but with the one who is mediocre. It is important not to allow negativity and disbelief to prevent one’s forward progress toward obeying the will of God. There will always be naysayers, but we must not allow their hollow voices to distract from our divine directions. Excellence is doing ordinary things in extraordinary ways. Anything worth doing is worth doing right with a spirit of excellence.

PRAYER

Lord, give us a spirit of excellence that we might represent You and attract more disciples to the kingdom of God. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 13-19, 2020)

The Wisdom of Jesus
MONDAY, July 13: “Jesus Restores Leader’s Daughter to Life” (Mark 5:35-43)
TUESDAY, July 14: “Samaritans Testify to the Wisdom of Jesus” (John 4:27-29, 39-42)
WEDNESDAY, July 15: “All Wisdom Dwells in Christ” (Colossians 2:1-5)
THURSDAY, July 16: “Jesus Denounces Human Traditions” (Mark 7:1-8)
FRIDAY, July 17: “God’s Wisdom Trumps Human Commands” (Mark 7:9-15)
SATURDAY, July 18: “The Heart, Not the Stomach, Defiles” (Mark 7:17-23)
SUNDAY, July 19: “Jesus’ Wisdom Astonishes His Hometown People” (Mark 6:1-6)
John 14:1-14—KJV
LET NOT your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.
2 In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.
4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.
5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?
6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.
7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.
8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

John 14:1-14—NIV
“DO NOT let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.
2 “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?
3 “And 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.
4 “You know the way to the place where I am going.”
5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”
6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
7 “If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”
8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”
9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?
10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.
11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.
12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.
13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?
10 “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.
11 “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.
12 “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.
13 “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
14 “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people say there are many ways to salvation and that everyone attains it by following his or her own way. What are we to make of such claims? Just as Proverbs contrasted the way of wisdom with false ways, Jesus proclaimed that He is the way, the truth, and the life through whom His disciples would come to know and understand God the Father.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the encounter between Jesus and the disciples in the upper room as Jesus told them that He was going away and that they would only later be able to join Him in a place He would prepare.
2. Appreciate the difficulty the disciples had in understanding Jesus.
3. Celebrate the promise of Jesus to prepare a place for His followers and to hear and respond to their prayers.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Jesus’ words and proclamations in John 14:1-14 offer similarities to Wisdom’s speech in Proverbs 8:1-36.
—Chapters 14–17 are known as the Farewell Discourse of Jesus. Jesus bequeaths wisdom and power to the disciples.
—John 14 shows the difficulty the disciples had in understanding Jesus. These things He spoke of were very new to them and hard to perceive.
They asked questions to get clarity, but only later would they come to a better understanding.

—The unity of the Father and the Son (14:11) is a recurrent theme in John’s gospel.
—Jesus as truth in John 14:6 aligns with “the truth” in 1:14.
—Verse 13: “in my name” means to ask as Jesus’ representative rather than invoking the name Jesus as a kind of magic spell.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Jesus speaks words of comfort and care to the disciples as He prepares for His death and resurrection.
—Jesus is informing the disciples that His love for them is so great that He has already prepared a place for them in eternity with the Father and Himself.
—The disciples did not fully understand what Jesus was saying about the way, the truth, and the life.
—Jesus rebukes Philip for his desire to see the Father, questions all of the disciples’ faith and belief in Him as truth, and expects them to focus their attention on God’s working inside Him (Jesus).
—Jesus proclaims that persons of faith will follow Him in their actions and will do things that are even greater than what He does.
—Jesus declares that anything done or asked in His name will be blessed.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Proverbs 3:17 and Proverbs 8:32-36 (Background Scripture) teach about the righteous way. Solomon is credited as the author, and he composed these sayings to offer instruction, wisdom, and understanding during his reign in the tenth century from 970 to 930 BC. In general, the book of Proverbs is a compilation of Israelite wisdom, and it provides insight on how to live a life that is pleasing to God. Proverbs 3 serves to persuade believers to be holy and provides them with the necessary direction in this regard. The seventeenth verse shows the importance of gaining wisdom. Similarly, Proverbs 8:32-36 emphasizes the benefits of being righteous and able to correctly discern the ways of the Lord. These passages are compiled around the central contrasting themes of wisdom and folly.

Authorship of the book of John is credited to the beloved disciple of Jesus named John, the brother of James and the son of Zebedee; he was a part of the inner circle companions of Jesus. A close study of the gospel of John gives some clue as to the identity of the “beloved disciple.” This disciple must be a Jew, a native of Palestine, an apostle, and an eyewitness of the account being written. All these criteria are satisfied by John. The gospel of John obviously was written after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and further evidence suggests it was written in a relatively short time. It is dated around 90–100 CE. This book of the Bible was written to the church, and it focuses on the divinity of Jesus Christ, signs and miracles, and how these connect with faith.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The cultural setting for the book of Proverbs goes as far back as the time prior to the Babylonian exile, providing details about the lives lived by the children of God during this time. The wealth of masculine language in this book is indicative of the vastly different cultural spheres that existed among men and women in this age and the attendant varying child-rearing practices that were used in training boys and girls. The style of the Proverbs found
in this book is also similar to what is to be expected in Near East communities and civilizations.

The gospel of John has a different setting from the Synoptic Gospels. This book of the Bible was written in a different context and time—around the end of the first century—when the church was confronting a new challenge. False teachers had arisen in the church, and some people were beginning to question and challenge the deity of Christ. Others were questioning His humanity. John wrote to lay to rest these issues, and in the opening lines of this book he confirms the deity and humanity of Jesus by stating, “The Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Later, he continues, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14a, NIV). The geographical setting of John’s gospel has always been disputed. However, the two possible locations where this gospel could have been written are Syria and Ephesus. Syria is a possibility because of the connection of the gospel with the Odes of Solomon and Ignatius of Antioch. However, according to early church tradition, it is suggested that John composed his gospel in Ephesus.

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON**

Solomon: credited as the author of most of the Proverbs. He composed these sayings to offer instruction, wisdom, and understanding during his reign in the tenth century from 970 to 930 BC.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

Believe (verse 1)—Greek: *pisteuó* (pist-yoo’-o): to have faith in; to trust, entrust.

Heart(s) (verse 1)—Greek: *kardia* (kar-dee’-ah): the heart; inner life (lives); intention.

Know (verse 5)—Greek: *eidó* (i’-do): to know of anything; remember; be aware of; behold.

Place (verse 3)—Greek: *topos* (top’-os): a place, region, seat; an opportunity.

Prepare (verse 2)—Greek: *hetoimazó* (het-oy-mad’-zo): to prepare, make ready.

Way (verse 4)—Greek: *hodos* (hod-os’): a way, road, journey; path.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. God’s Wisdom Provides the Way, Truth, and Life
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Don’t Worry
      (John 14:1-5)
   B. Don’t Wonder
      (John 14:6-9)
   C. Don’t Waver
      (John 14:10-14)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. God’s Wisdom Provides the Way, Truth, and Life

Even though the Proverbs passage is in the background Scripture, it provides an important context for today’s lesson. The overall General Lesson title is “Wisdom: The Way, Truth, and Life.” The book of Proverbs has historically been considered an anthology of wise sayings. When it is connected with the book of John, which presents Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we can see the unique connection. The book of Proverbs teaches about divine wisdom. Chapters 3 and 8 of Proverbs reveal that real peace comes from an understanding and knowledge of the way of God, and it advises that living true to this path would bring benefits to the believer.

John 14 shows Jesus in conversation with His disciples, telling them to cast aside their worries and trust in Him completely. In this text, Jesus establishes that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that He is the only channel through which God the Father can be accessed. Jesus goes further to tell His disciples about the Advocate that would be with them when He returns to His Father in heaven.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Proverbs has its background in the cultural Jewish belief system. Proverbs 3:17 and 8:32-36 introduce the concept of the way of the righteous and the merits of living by the code and precepts outlined in the Bible. It was and is designed to school young men in particular and young people in general on how to live right through the application of wise thoughts. Wisdom in Proverbs is based upon having a deep reverence for God and a willingness to be obedient to His laws. Proverbs tells us that the “fear of” or reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom.

John 14:1-14 is deeply rooted in faith and its numerous workings, and how Jesus has paid the price and gone to prepare a place for those that truly believe. In this passage, Jesus reassured His disciples that His death has a divine purpose and He sought to help them understand why it was necessary that He die. His reassurance is embedded in His statement that He is “the way, and the truth, and the life.”

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Don’t Worry

(John 14:1-5)

LET NOT your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

As the disciples convened in the Upper
Room, they struggled to grasp the concept of Jesus’ imminent departure, and undoubtedly a somber sense of dread must have pervaded the atmosphere. The tone set by Jesus suggests that one has a choice as to whether he or she will “allow” his or her heart to be troubled (verse 1). Some people labor under the false assumption that worry and dread are inevitable terrorists that mercilessly attack us at will and there is nothing that can be done about it. However, Jesus informs us that we can actually choose healing over heartache, peace over panic, and calm over chaos. Jesus Himself demonstrated this capacity as He encountered the dread of death (see John 12:27; 13:21).

Belief in God and belief in Jesus were given as powerful ways and reasons that we can refuse to flinch in the face of fear. Problems of the present pale in comparison to a sure and unwavering confidence in God. The Jews of the time accepted the reality of God just as they relied on breathing every day. Jesus, however, desired for them to extend the trust they had in God and to apply it to Him as well. This was a difficult exercise to accomplish because some of the Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. But Jesus was present with God in the beginning (see John 1:1), and at the appropriate time the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory (see John 1:14). First Peter 2:8 (NIV) refers to Jesus as “a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. In this verse, Jesus is saying to the listeners then as He is still saying to us now that if we truly understood the kind of peace that He offered, we would gladly embrace it and our unnecessary worries and burdens would be lifted.

The Greek word for “house” (verse 2) is the same one used metaphorically in 2 Corinthians 5:1. These are the only two places where this word is used in the New Testament. Perhaps Jesus was attempting to allay their fears regarding His departure by reminding them that His leaving would not be a permanent condition. Like a father who is about to leave on a long trip, Jesus promised that He and His disciples would eventually be reunited with the Father in a place that had plenty of space with no possibility of overcrowding for those who qualified.

In verse 3, Jesus simply yet profoundly provides a guarantee of making good on His promise to the disciples. A common practice for a band of travellers in that day was to send a few representatives ahead of the group to make adequate preparation for the arrival of the rest of the group. Jesus adapts this practice and applies it to Himself as the one who is going ahead to prepare a place for future fellowship to occur. The three parts, then, of this promise is the leaving, the return, and the forever fellowship.

In verse 4, Jesus wisely answers the disciples’ question before they ask it. He is continuing to provide a sense of assurance that the three years they have invested with Him has not been in vain. His departure is part of His purpose which cannot be fulfilled without His exit. When Jesus tells His disciples that they know where He is going it serves as a bridge of hope and assurance that they have what it takes to continue the ministry and to fulfill the vision that was cast by the Master.

It should be no surprise that it is Thomas who interjects a line of questioning and doubt into the assurances being given by
Jesus (verse 5). Thomas has walked with Jesus and lived with Jesus and watched Jesus operate up-close and personal for the past three years and after never seeing Him falter or fail or speak one mistruth, he still consistently demonstrates his innate tendency toward doubt. By his statement, Thomas essentially discloses that despite all the time that he has spent with Jesus, he still never learned the lesson Jesus repeatedly taught about the necessity of Jesus’ return to the Father. Thomas seemed to be a bit of a spiritually slow learner, and the same can be said for many of us who are given the same lesson multiple times, yet we continue to fail the tests.

B. Don’t Wonder
(John 14:6-9)

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

This classic statement by Jesus in verse 6 is a staple in many Vacation Bible Schools and is a great verse to use when introducing someone to Christ. Jesus uses the personal pronoun “I” in order to distinguish Himself from all other possible imitators (see John 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus offers a remedy to Thomas’s nagging doubt regarding the ability of Jesus. Jesus serves as the bridge between the holy divinity of the Father and the sinful state of the people. Jesus Christ is God’s solution to the problem of human imperfection and evil. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, we do not have to be separated from God any longer. Jesus paid the price for our sin, and in so doing He bridged the gap between God and us.

Rather than making efforts to reach God on our own terms, all we have to do is accept the sacrifice that has already been provided. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish” (see John 11:25-26).

Perhaps Jesus was saying to His understudy disciples in verse 7, “If you had really known Me as you should have known Me, you would also know My Father God as well because we are as one.” The way to receive that revelation is through the power of the Holy Spirit who gives us wisdom, insight, and spiritual revelation (see Ephesians 1:17). This statement accentuates the reality that truly knowing Jesus is not about public fast facts or even about visual observation and proximity. Truly knowing Jesus comes from the development of a growing, obedient, and intimate relationship with the risen Savior with evidence through bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

After Jesus has responded to the question asked by Thomas, He is then accosted with another dubious statement, this time by Philip (verse 8). Philip’s request concerns Jesus’ giving still more proof of His divinity and proof of His connection to Father God. It must have been frustrating, if not sad, for Jesus to have poured so much of Himself and His teachings into the lives of the disciples only to have Philip miserably fail the test at the moment of the “final exam.” Surely then, as well as now, Jesus willingly and compassionately performs miracles in order for the people to take Him at
His word. He wanted them to stand on the fact that “man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Jesus had opened blinded eyes, healed the lame, fed multitudes, and even raised the dead. Despite all this miraculous and incontrovertible evidence of His divinity, many still did not believe (verse 9). This is proof that the central factor at stake is not the need for Jesus to prove Himself but the need for people to believe. Jesus had already done His due diligence by performing excellent teachings, mighty miracles, and demonstration of character. Belief was the problem. One of the most difficult hurdles for the people then and now was/is the ability to believe that a man could also actually be God (see Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18).

C. Don’t Waver
(John 14:10-14)

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

First of all, Jesus wants to make sure it is understood that nothing He does and says comes from a place of self-centered ego tripping (verse 10). Everything He does undergirds the central purpose of glorifying God the Father. He takes the disciples back to the spiritual classroom and teaches a refresher course on Basic Discipleship 101. He had taught this many times before, and it starts with Jesus’ being in God and God’s being in Jesus (see John 8:28, 38). If this basic premise is not accepted, then it will always be difficult to significantly build beyond that.

Through His profound understanding of the human condition and its limitations, Jesus wanted to make sure that the listeners had the best possible chance of receiving and believing the truth of the Gospel. To that end, He gave them a choice in verse 11: either believe Him because of their personal experience with Him, or believe Him because they saw His works with their own eyes. His works must have been quite profound for Him to use them as evidence of His divinity. Some people only need a one-time experience with Jesus to believe. Others require a lifetime of proof, and even then the most extraordinary miracles may still be suspect.

Verse 12 has been a source of speculation among the theological community due to Jesus’ own comparison of His works and the works of those who would come after Him. The primary focus is upon the word greater. What does this word mean in this context, and how could any human’s effort or works possibly be greater than the works of Jesus?

There are at least two kinds of “greater” that could be considered here. One type of “greater” is greater in number, quantity, or occurrence. Another type of “greater” is greater in terms of quality. It would be very difficult even to come close to superseding the quality of Jesus’ miracles. Who else can compare, even though the disciples still accomplished miracles, serving as vessels for physical healings? According to Acts 5:15 (NIV), “people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.” Beyond that in terms
of greater works, Jesus’ ability to make an impact was limited to a small radius. Since that time, the Gospel has been spread over the entire world, and evangelists such as Billy Graham have personally preached to millions more than Jesus did in His time on earth. The introduction of television and the Internet even further increases the gap between how many people are reached by Jesus personally and how many are reached by His contemporary disciples.

What does it mean to ask for something in Jesus’ name (verse 13)? Is this phrase composed of the right magic words that will be sure to activate special powers needed to grant my request? Does God even hear prayers that do not end with the phrase “in Jesus’ name”? First of all, to do anything in Jesus’ name would be doing that thing not only in the name of Jesus, but also in the will of God. It is wanting what God wants and doing what God would do. Praying and saying “in Jesus’ name” is not a guarantee of successful endeavors or answered prayers. Proof that God does answer prayers without the prayer ending “in Jesus’ name” is seen in the fact that many of the prayers included in the Bible do not include the phrase in question. Even the prayer that Jesus taught to His own disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray ends in, “For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.” What God desires is a heart that is flexible enough to be molded and shaped into the divine will of almighty God so that God’s glory may be seen and His kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is natural to have questions when it comes to trusting God, understanding God, and developing our walk of faith. God is not afraid of our questions as we navigate life decisions and search for deeper meaning in life. However, there should come a point in the life of the believer when God has already shown so much power and capability that we should have no doubt about whether or not God can and will make a way. Even beyond believing God for the things that God has already done, there is also the need to learn how to walk by faith and not by sight. The mature Christian is the one who has no need to be constantly reassured that God is good and able.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, teach us to remember what You have taught us, and help us to walk by faith and not by sight. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 20-26, 2020)

Wisdom: The Way, Truth, and Life
TUESDAY, July 21: “Jesus Does What the Father Does” (John 5:19-24)
WEDNESDAY, July 22: “‘Love as I Loved You’” (John 13:31-35)
THURSDAY, July 23: “The Spirit of Truth Dwells in You” (John 14:15-17)
FRIDAY, July 24: “Love Binds Believers to God” (John 14:18-24)
SATURDAY, July 25: “The Spirit of Wisdom Is Promised to All” (John 14:25-31)
SUNDAY, July 26: “Jesus, the Way to the Father” (John 14:1-14)
FAITH AND WISDOM

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUTH TOPIC:** Ask for It
**YOUTH TOPIC:** The Pursuit of Wisdom

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Faith and Wisdom
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Believe and Know

---

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Isaiah 40:1-8

---

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** James 1:1-11
**PRINT PASSAGE:** James 1:1-11
**KEY VERSE:** James 1:5

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** James 1:1-11
**PRINT PASSAGE:** James 1:1-11
**KEY VERSE:** James 1:5

---

**James 1:1-11—KJV**

JAMES, A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.
2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;
3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.
4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.
5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.
6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.
7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.
8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.
9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

---

**James 1:1-11—NIV**

JAMES, A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.
4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.
6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.
7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.
8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.
9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.
10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.  
11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.  
11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

**UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE:** People desire to be seen as wise. What is the source of wisdom? The letter written by James affirms that God gives wisdom generously and ungrudgingly to those who ask in faith.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**

*Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:*

1. Consider the relationship between wisdom and perseverance through trials.
2. Affirm the value of trials and hardships in making one a wiser and more productive disciple.
3. Pray for godly wisdom by which to endure life’s trials and temptations.

**AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED**

**Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH**

—Most likely the “James” who wrote this book is “James, the Lord’s brother” (see Galatians 1:19).
—Verse 2 represents the first of fourteen times that James addresses his readers as “brothers” (or “brothers and sisters”; Greek: ἀδελφοί). See 1:16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 10, 12, 19 (except the NRSV does not translate ἀδελφοί in 1:16, 19; 5:7, 10, 12).
—James’s perspective on trials’ producing character echoes that of Paul’s (see Romans 5:3) and of Peter’s (see 1 Peter 1:6).
—The description “double-minded” is unique in the New Testament and ancient Greek literature. Some biblical scholars believe that James coined the term.
—Verses 9 and 10 reflect Jesus’ warnings about the difficulty (impossibility) of the rich to be saved as well as the concept of the first being last and the last first (cf. Matthew 19:23-30).

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Suffering is a test of one’s faith.
—Tests develop perseverance, thus enabling one to mature.
—True wisdom comes from God and is available to all who seek it without doubting.
—Although God wants to supply what we lack, we must pray to God confidently with expectation.
—True wisdom differs from secular knowledge.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This book is considered by many to be part of the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, James was martyred in approximately AD 62, and his book is probably the oldest book of the New Testament, having been written as early as AD 45 before the first council of Jerusalem in AD 50. The teachings of James focus on the works that exemplified justification with God. He was writing to Jews to encourage them to continue growing in their newfound Christian faith. He constantly emphasizes that good actions will naturally flow from those who are filled with the Spirit and questions whether someone has a saving faith if the fruits of the Spirit are not evident in the person’s life. Sixty obligations are presented in 108 verses of the book, and focus is placed on the truths of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount.

James gives instructions for the Jews and those beyond the Jerusalem church. He charged them to stay connected to the body of Christ. James provides biblical methods for praying, having faith, controlling the tongue, pulling through suffering, connecting good works and salvation, chastising the rich, comforting the poor, showing how to rightfully apply wisdom, and learning the true nature of being a Christian. The purpose of this book is all-encompassing, with emphasis being placed on the Christian faith.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book is addressed to Jewish Christians scattered abroad and was written primarily to the Jews who had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire during a time of intense persecution (see James 1:1). The book makes no mention of any Gentile controversy and thus was probably written before that controversy broke out and the Jewish church came to be divided between the faithful and the Judaizers. It is believed that the book was written early before AD 49. The book of James outlines that good works come through genuine religion, genuine faith, and genuine wisdom. The information contained in this book of the Bible is reflected in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. The first chapter of this book begins with a description of the general traits of a believer’s walk in faith. Subsequent chapters of this book discuss social injustice and faith in action. Also, the comparison is made between worldly and godly wisdom, and admonition is given to desist from evil and draw closer to God. The concluding part of this book encourages believers to pray fervently, be patient in suffering, and care for one another, while supporting their faith through fellowship.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

James: James the Just was an early leader of the Jerusalem church of the apostolic age, of which Paul was also affiliated. He was the half-brother of Jesus, being one of the sons of Mary and Joseph. Although he grew up in the same house with Jesus of Nazareth, he was not a believer for the earlier part of his life. He taught about faith and sought to establish that true faith is demonstrated by what believers are, how they live, and what they do.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Complete (verse 4)—Greek: bolokléros (hol’ok’-lay-ros): complete in every part; sound; perfect; “entire” (KJV).

Greetings (verse 1)—Greek: chairó (khah’ee-ro): to rejoice, be glad; salutation(s); send greeting(s); “God speed.”

Joy (verse 2)—Greek: chara (khar-ah’): gladness; delight.

Servant (verse 1)—Greek: doulos (doo’-los): a slave; someone who belongs to another.

Testing (verse 3)—Greek: dokimion (do-kē-mē-on): to test; that by which something is tried or proved; “trying” (KJV).
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Deeds, Not Words

The book of James was written by the servant of God to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion—that is, to Jewish Christians who do not live in the Jewish homeland in Palestine. It is the first of a group of letters that were addressed to Christians in general rather than to a particular church (as seen in most of Paul’s letters). James reminds us in his book that there is an urgent need for Christian standards and values to be evident in all of life. Deeds, not simply words, are the focus and primary message of this book. The entirety of this book admonishes believers to stand firm amid adversities, trials, and tribulations. James advises readers not to doubt God, irrespective of the happenings in their lives. The specific Bible text of James 1:1-11 teaches believers to count it as joy when their faith is tested through tribulation and to continually seek wisdom in all their doing.

B. Biblical Background

James has its background in the Jewish Christian communities in the Roman Empire. This particular text introduces James, the half-brother of Jesus. He is devoted to the mission of Christ, charges believers to hold their ground, admonishes the rich on how to conduct themselves, and advises those that lack knowledge to seek from the giver of knowledge. This text teaches that faith will be tested, but perseverance is necessary for triumph.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Tested Faith
(James 1:1-4)

JAMES, A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James refers to himself as a servant of God...
and Christ (verse 1). The term servant actually means “slave.” A slave is one who has been bought with a price (see 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). This is the same term used in 2 Peter 1:1 and by Paul in Romans 1:15 and Titus 1:1. The content of the letter is directed toward the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad in the Jewish diaspora. The number “twelve” features prominently in the Bible. In terms of biblical numerology, the number “twelve” is a symbol of faith, a symbol of the church, and a symbol of divine rule. The Old Testament book of Genesis states that there were twelve sons of Jacob, and those twelve sons formed the twelve tribes of Israel. The New Testament also tells us that Jesus had twelve apostles.

The specific type of temptation mentioned in verse 2 refers not so much to fleshly attractions but more so to persecution, trials, and affliction. God does not tempt us, but God does test us in order for us to grow toward spiritual maturity. Temptations can lead us into sin, but testing can lead us into greater growth. Matthew 5:10 (NIV) declares, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The reason why testing can lead to joy is because if we pass the test, we are promoted. We are promoted to greater maturity—patience, endurance, wisdom, faith, and more. Even though the exam may have been difficult, the joy is experienced through the promotion.

When our faith is tested or tried (verse 3), there is a positive and productive yield. Trials and difficulties do not in themselves necessarily produce patience; it is in conjunction with faith and prayer that this result occurs. A similar perspective is found in Romans 5:3-5 (NIV), which contends, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Success in the spiritual life is a dynamic process, not a detached formula. The key to victory in life is to trust God and apply God’s principles even when we do not understand them. Rigorous physical exercise may initially feel painful to the human body, but in the long term the stimulation produces better circulation, muscle growth, endurance, and an increase in stamina, enabling us to accomplish greater challenges.

Verse 4 places patience or perseverance in an active, assertive role, rather than in a passive, dormant state. Waiting can be done in a winning way even before the outcome. Even in difficulty or loss we can reap a harvest of blessed growth if we sow in faith. Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) holds, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” The development of endurance requires great work, but it also yields great rewards. Instead of wanting problems and pain to be removed from our lives, our quest should be to have the wisdom to use our problems to propel us in the right direction. When we plant our faith in the soil of afflictions, we can produce a harvest of spiritual fruit that feeds a multitude. The power of God that resides inside can enable us to learn how to rejoice regardless of the state or situation in which we may find ourselves.
When patience and perseverance are perfected, that means that they are completed or fully developed. Underdeveloped patience will not suffice. Half-done perseverance is woefully inadequate. When we decide to endure the entire patience process, that decision and that act prepare us to powerfully prosper. Never waste a painful experience because it very well could have been prepared by God to build your patience and endurance.

B. Double-mindedness
(James 1:5-8)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

If you were asked to identify the greatest aspect of Christian character in the lives of the average Christian, what would you say it was? Alexander Maclaren contends that the great deficiency in the average Christian’s character is wisdom (verse 5). Wisdom is the principal thing. Knowledge is retaining information through education. But wisdom is the application of that knowledge to specific situations. To James, wisdom is the ability to properly discern how and when to refrain from or take a particular course of action, stance, or disposition. To be truly wise, then, is to think as God would think, speak as God would speak, and act as God would act.

The primacy of faith can never be overemphasized, as is highlighted in verse 6 and by Hebrews 11:6, which reads, “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” (NIV). We can never find favor with God without placing our faith in God. Whenever we make a request of God, it must be done with the right motive and in the right spirit if we are to expect an answer. A firm faith and a confident request tend to produce firm results and specific answers from God. One of the worst things we can do when we petition God is to ask in doubt. Doubt cancels faith, and we cut short our own blessings in the process. Waves that are driven by the wind are unstable, unsteady, and unpredictable. As we journey through the sometimes dark and unpredictable twists and turns of destiny, faith is the fire that must be ignited in order to illuminate the landscape of our lives.

A cut-and-dry case is presented in verse 7 for the necessity of faith. When operating under the auspices of the faith walk, nothing is impossible. But when one chooses to operate in doubt and fear, nothing is possible. Expectation creates the atmosphere for miracles to take place. Faith is the incubator for abundant living and for strongholds to be broken. Apologist C. S. Lewis once said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” It is a common thing to hear someone say, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” But when it comes to a relationship with God, a more accurate statement would be, “I’ll see it when I believe.” We are called to trust God even when we cannot trace God. Before we can expect anything from God, God expects something from us and that something is simple childlike faith and trust in
God’s ability to provide all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The literal translation of the word double-minded (verse 8) is “double-souled.” This is a condition of the human mind and heart in which part of one’s loyalty and priority belongs to the flesh and the other part of one’s loyalty and priority belongs to God. This is a toxic mix that causes a great number of problems and difficulties internally as well as externally. In such cases, complications can occur socially, emotionally, spiritually, and sometimes even physically. Matthew 6:24 tells us that “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (NIV). Therefore, in order to avoid a case of spiritual schizophrenia it is important to choose this day whom we will serve. Revelation 3:15-16 (NIV) further informs us, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

C. Fading Wealth
(James 1:9-11)

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

Disciples of Jesus Christ live in what has been called an upside-down world (verse 9). In order to see and appreciate this, one need look no further than the apparent contradictions in the life and statements of Jesus. On one hand, Jesus can make statements like, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:58, NIV). On the other hand, this same Jesus can say in Matthew 26:53 (NIV), “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” Throughout the Bible, a high place is accorded to those who find themselves in a lowly condition. Matthew 6:19-23 (NIV) underscores this principle: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Those who are wealthy do not have to apologize for their wealth, but they can use their wealth for the glory of God (verse 10). In the midst of maintaining wealth to give away, those who give should do so with a humble attitude. If one displays an act of charity and that act is done in a prideful way, then the significance of the very act is compromised. Matthew 6:1-4 (NIV) underscores this principle: “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what
your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” One’s relative poverty or wealth is also a state of mind and depends on what one prioritizes and values in life.

Verse 11 is taken from Isaiah 40:8 (NIV): “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” Although those who are rich may boast an attractive exterior, like a flower blossom, this outward beauty is rendered inconsequential without the inward anchor of a solid trust in and obedience to God. An old gospel song underscores this sentiment of verse 11 by encouraging us to build our hopes and dreams on things in life that are eternal. This is the way and the key to successfully hold on to God’s hand that does not change with the shifting tides of life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Faith in God is the engine that drives our relationship with God. Without the motor, we are unable to get very far as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our faith does not exist in a vacuum but will be tested from time to time in order to prove its contents. Like items and ornaments made of gold and silver, the only way to deliver a superior product is to expose it to the heat of difficulty. First Peter 1:6-7 acknowledges this notion: “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 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” (NIV). In order to experience maturity in Christ, we are challenged to find joy in the midst of trial and difficulty. Our relationship with God is deepened when we have confidence that God is producing character and perseverance in our lives despite the trials we may endure.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the opportunity to walk by faith and not by sight. Help us to see our pain and our difficulties as avenues toward greater power and strength. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 27–August 2, 2020)

Faith and Wisdom

MONDAY, July 27: “Suffering on Behalf of the Church” (Colossians 1:24-29)
TUESDAY, July 28: “Saved by God’s Mercy” (Titus 3:3-7)
THURSDAY, July 30: “Rejoice in Your Sufferings” (Romans 5:1-5)
FRIDAY, July 31: “God’s Loving Actions toward Sinners” (Romans 5:6-11)
SATURDAY, August 1: “Grass Withers but God’s Word Stands” (Isaiah 40:1-8)
SUNDAY, August 2: “Wisdom Overcomes Trials and Temptations” (James 1:1-11)
August 9, 2020 | Lesson 10

HEARING AND DOING THE WORD

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: “Talk Is Cheap”
YOUTH TOPIC: Be a Doer, Not Just a Hearer

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Hearing and Doing the Word
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Hear and Do

DEVOTIONAL READING
1 Corinthians 1:26-31

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 1:19-27
PRINT PASSAGE: James 1:19-27
KEY VERSE: James 1:22

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 1:19-27
PRINT PASSAGE: James 1:19-27
KEY VERSE: James 1:22

James 1:19-27—KJV
19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.
21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.
22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.
23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:
24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.
25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James 1:19-27—NIV
19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,
20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.
21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.
22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror
24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.
26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.
27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People read and talk about doing good but find it difficult to help the most vulnerable in society. How is righteousness accomplished? According to James, righteousness is achieved by hearing and doing the Word of God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand that the proof of wisdom is not merely in what one says but in what one does—especially in what one does for those who are in need.
2. Feel compassion for those who are most vulnerable and desire to act on their behalf.
3. Engage in ministry that demonstrates a “religion that is pure and undefiled before God.”

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Verse 19 is a proverb that James coins to provide the structure for what follows. Verses 20 and 21 expand on the third part of the proverb, verses 22–25 on the first, and verse 26 on the second.
—The word anger here does not refer simply to the emotional reaction to wrongdoing or injustice, which can be helpful (cf., occasions when Jesus was angry). Here, it seems to represent the unregulated, hurtful words people shout at others when they are angry.
—The Greek word translated “sordidness” in verse 21 is used nowhere else in the New Testament. A form of the word appears later in James (describing the poor man’s “dirty” clothes [James 2:2]), and another form appears in 1 Peter (describing the “dirt” on the body that baptism does not remove [1 Peter 3:21]).
—James’s insistence that pure religion looks out for the most vulnerable (verses 26-27) reflects the same concept as Jesus’ teaching of the sheep-and-goat judgment (see Matthew 25:31-46).
—James’s insistence that we be doers of the Word and not mere hearers finds a parallel in 1 John 3:18 (NRSV): “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

Teachers of CHILDREN
—James gives advice about listening and speaking, but also about anger.
—Although James warns not to judge what believers think, say, and do, his warning does not ignore injustice and sin.
—We are encouraged to honor God and Jesus with our lives.
—Not only must we hear God’s Word, but we must also do what God’s Word says.
—James is very critical of believers who do not care for others, especially those who have no one to care for them or have very limited help.
—Persons who only listen to the Word are deceiving themselves.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

James the Just, the brother of Jesus, is credited with the authorship of the epistle of James (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). This James was very prominent in the New Testament church and is mentioned first as being esteemed as a pillar of the church (see Galatians 2:9). Although he grew up with Jesus, he was only converted after Jesus’ resurrection (see John 7:3-5; Acts 1:14; Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 15:7). He immediately began associating with the apostles and became the presiding elder of the Jerusalem church.

The book of James is considered by many to be among the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. According to the historian Josephus, this book is probably the oldest book of the New Testament, having been written as early as AD 45 before the first council of Jerusalem in AD 50. James’s teaching was focused on the works that exemplified justification with God. He was writing to Jewish Christians to encourage them to continue growing in their newly found Christian faith; he constantly emphasized that good actions will naturally flow from those who are filled with the Spirit and questioned whether someone has saving faith if the fruits of the Spirit are not evident in the person’s life.

Sixty obligations are presented in 108 verses of the book, and focus is placed on the truths of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount. This book of the Bible gave instructions for the Jews well beyond the Jerusalem church and charged them to stay connected to the body of Christ. James provides biblical methods for praying, having faith, controlling the tongue, pulling through suffering, connecting works to salvation, chastising the rich, comforting the poor, showing how to rightfully apply wisdom, and understanding the true nature of being a Christian. The purpose of this book is all-encompassing with emphasis being placed on the Christian faith.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book is addressed to Jewish Christians scattered abroad and was written primarily to those dispersed throughout the Roman Empire during a time of intense persecution (see James 1:1). The book makes no mention of any Gentile controversy and thus was probably written before that controversy broke out and the Jewish church came to be divided between the faithful and the Judaizers. The setting of this book of the Bible is such that the meeting of the church is referred to as the “synagogue,” and this has prompted the belief that the book was written early before AD 49. This book encompasses the detail of the relationship between faith and works; followers of Christ are challenged to put in genuine effort in all their endeavors.

The book of James outlines that godly works come through genuine religion, genuine faith, and genuine wisdom. The information contained in this book of the Bible is reflected in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. The first chapter of this book begins with a description of the general traits of a believer’s walk in faith. Subsequent chapters of this book discuss social injustice and faith in action. Also, the comparison is made between worldly and godly
wisdom, and admonition is given to desist from evil and draw closer to God. The concluding part of this book encourages believers to pray fervently, be patient in suffering, and care for one another while supporting their faith through fellowship.

James 1:19-27 begins with three exhortations: “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” James desired that these exhortations be applied as the Christian’s response to the Word of God. This passage of the text teaches believers to have a teachable spirit and be ready to receive instructions from the Word of God; believers are equally urged to be cautious in blurting out their opinions concerning the Word of God without careful study, and equally to be patient with those who disagree with us concerning the Word of God.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

James: the author of the book of James. He was a brother of our Lord, Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Angry (verse 19)—Greek: orgé (or-gay’): to have anger, “wrath” (KJV), passion.

Mirror (verse 23)—Greek: esoptron (es’-op-tron): a mirror; looking-glass; “glass” (KJV).

Righteousness (verse 20)—Greek: dikaiosuné (dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay): justice; justness; the condition acceptable to God.

Slow (verse 19)—Greek: bradus (brad-ooce’): not quick; slow of understanding.

Speak (verse 19)—Greek: latéó (lal-eh’-o): to talk; to speak or say.

Word (verse 21)—Greek: logos (log’-os): words; speech; divine utterance.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Hearers and Doers
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Avoid Anger
      (James 1:19-21)
   B. Be a Doer of the Word
      (James 1:22-25)
   C. True Religion
      (James 1:26-27)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Hearers and Doers

The book of James was written by the servant of God to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion—that is, to the Jewish Christians who did not live in the Jewish homeland; here in this context the phrase symbolizes all God’s people. The entirety of this book admonishes believers to stand firm in times of adversity, trials, and tribulations. James encourages readers not to doubt God regardless of the happenings. The specific Bible text of James 1:19-27 teaches believers to be both hearers and doers of the Word of God. James stresses that real faith produces authentic actions. For James, faith is not some abstract theological concept that is only good for dissection and debate among clerics. Faith is best constructed when it puts on work clothes and is hammered out through interactions with people in the vicissitudes of life.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

B. Biblical Background

James 1:19-27 is deeply rooted in the practices of true religion. The true religion here is established to be one that is pure and faultless and takes care of less-privileged persons. Believers are charged to be true to their belief and desist from self-deceit. Disciples are to rid themselves of moral filth and evil and to be humble in all their dealings. It has been said that the book of James is similar to the Old Testament book of Proverbs but just dressed up in New Testament clothes. This attribution is made because the book of James is focused on practical acts of faith and ways in which one’s relationship with God can be lived out in the everyday aspects of life. There are some who seem to feel that a life of holiness is a state of living that is either impractical or unachievable. However, the book of James establishes that holiness is the standard for the believer. Anything less than a life of holiness is unacceptable for one who claims to have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

A. Avoid Anger

(James 1:19-21)

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Rather than holding God responsible for allowing things to go wrong in our lives, it is much better to maintain an open mind and heart to be able to seek and discern God’s purpose for our pain and God’s direction through our difficulties. Never waste a painful experience. God often uses crisis and conflict to clarify our character and to develop our spiritual maturity. When we run away from problems, we often prolong our pathway toward progress.

Our listening should be to God and to one another (verse 19). One of the chief fuses that lights the dynamite of conflict is the fuse of an angry tongue. Short emotional fuses produce volatile, interpersonal situations that often do much more harm than good. One effective question to ask when experiencing difficulties is, “Lord, what are You trying to teach me through this situation?” A quick listen and a slow response lead to a calm atmosphere. But a slow listen and a quick response lead to a chaotic atmosphere. Anger is actually a surface emotion which is often the tip of a much deeper and larger iceberg. Beneath and behind anger are at least three possible elements and causation factors: hurt, fear, and frustration. As we faithfully practice scriptural principles, we will experience relational success.

Human anger and holy righteousness do not coexist well together (verse 20). We are implored in Scripture to be angry and not sin. Giving in to anger is often the beginning of giving place to the devil. Ephesians 4:29 and verses that follow implore us not to allow any corrupt communication to come from our mouths but only edifying words that extend grace to the hearers. Bitterness, anger, clamor, and evil speech are all to be rejected and replaced with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness, because this is the type of response
that God has displayed toward us. When Jesus became angry with the buyers and the sellers in the Temple, His response was not one of personal offense. His reaction was an expression of righteous indignation in response to the unholy misuse of that sanctified space.

Galatians 5:19-21 identifies the acts of the flesh (verse 21) as sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; and drunkenness, orgies, and the like. This exhortation to totally dispense with moral filth and evil may be a tall task for some people. This purging is not possible through sheer human willpower alone. Our part is the personal, honest confession as is noted in 1 John 1:9. God responds with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit who cleanses us from all unrighteousness. God washes us with the water of the Word and empowers us to override the temptations of the flesh and the distractions of the world.

B. Be a Doer of the Word
(James 1:22-25)

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

The chasm between just hearing God’s Word and both hearing and doing God’s Word is a vast one (verse 22). What would make one want to complete only the first half of the process of spiritual obedience? One reason might be that the hearing of the Word is the easy part, but the doing is the more challenging part. We experience this principle in early childhood when our parents make a rule or give an assignment and we only complete half of it. It is possible for the hearer-only persons to deceive others and themselves because they portray a semblance of spiritual maturity but without adequate follow-through.

Very common imagery is used to convey the concept of seeing but failing to see. The mirrors in the East (verse 23) were not made of glass but of polished steel. The irony here is that the purpose of the mirror is to inform the looker of obvious, necessary corrections and enhancements to the image that appears. When someone sees the need and ignores the need, the whole purpose of looking into the mirror then becomes inconsequential (verse 24). Biblical commentator Matthew Henry contended, “Mere hearers are self-deceivers; and self-deceit will be found the worst deceit at last. If we flatter ourselves, it is our own fault.” Sometimes when we gaze into the mirror of the Word, our reflection reveals blemishes, defects, and deformities. When this occurs, our reaction should not be to run away from the mirror or to cover the craters with makeup but to seek the help of God’s mighty power to transform our messes into miracles.

The visual imagery in verse 25 presents a picture not of someone who takes a casual glance at the law of the Lord. A casual glance would fail to advance the believer toward a state of spiritual maturity. Casual Christianity is a troublesome disease that affects and afflicts a great deal of Christians who are a part of the average church today. Casual Christianity occurs when God becomes a low priority in issues of everyday life. When we become
guilty of seeking *fifth* the kingdom of God instead of seeking it first, we cannot expect anything else godly to be added to us. Casual Christians think that a head knowledge of God and periodic attendance in church is good enough for them. Casual Christians subsist on spiritual milk rather than the solid food of the deeper things of God. Casual Christians are easily angered, are easily disappointed, and easily give up and take their toys home. Casual Christians do not have a daily quiet time or devotional time with God. They would rather get a religious dose on Sunday morning and generally take over the rest of the week for themselves. Casual Christians are also usually carnal Christians who do not respond well to critique or correction because they think they already know what they need. Casual Christians are not usually tithers or great givers, and if they do give they want public recognition and praise for their efforts. Casual Christians do not have a lot of time for extended prayer and deep study of the Scripture. True worship is not a priority to them because they do not usually have the time to devote to actions and exercise through which they do not see tangible or immediate results.

C. True Religion

* (James 1:26-27)

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

James makes a direct connection between spiritual maturity and verbal acrobatics (verse 26). The words that we speak serve as an accurate indication of the contents of our hearts. Proverbs 23:7 reads, “For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (NKJV). Luke 6:45 (NRSV) concurs: “The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.” The need to keep a tight rein on the tongue is necessary because of the condition of the heart—as is explained by Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV), which states, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” The tongue can be compared to a wild stallion that must be broken and disciplined in order to be rendered useful. Our words can be tools to inspire or weapons to destroy. That is why we must feed our minds quality food so that the fruit of our lips will not come out spoiled.

Control of the tongue must be applied constantly because one moment of neglect could turn into a lifetime of regret. Speaking harsh words can happen so rapidly as a knee-jerk reaction to just the “right” provocation. Consequently, we must remain on guard in order to be mindful of every “opportunity” to bring dishonor to almighty God. All of this requires practice and intentionality as is reflected in the words of Psalm 19:14—“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight.” When we start with a pure heart and we practice what we preach, then our video will begin to match our audio.

There is a possibility for verse 27 to be misunderstood with the usage of the term *religion*. A contemporary definition of the general word *religion* might be that religion is humanity’s effort to reach up to God, as opposed to having a relationship with Jesus
Christ which represents God’s effort to reach down to humanity. External religion falls far short of the ultimate mark due to humanity’s inadequate capacity to fulfill every need. A better translation of the term true religion would be “true worship.” The writer has taken the time to outline what is false in merely surface spirituality, and now he uncovers that which is true. The two general characteristics of true worship are active sacrificial love and personal inner holiness. More specifically, the assistance of orphans and widows would entail affiliation with and assistance of two groups of people who would probably be unable to return any material or social benefit. Consequently, the will to assist orphans and widows would most likely stem from a pure motive. These two groups of individuals are not the only ones who deserve charitable consideration. They are merely representatives of people who typically have great needs through no fault of their own and also those who have no means to be of direct commercial benefit to those who show love to them. True worship is never one-sided and displayed only externally (publicly) or felt only internally (privately); it is balanced by being both.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are those who have said, “Put your money where your mouth is.” But as this lesson has illustrated, in the spiritual realm it is important to realize that people usually put their mouths where their hearts are. It does little good to talk right without living right. It is not so much about the conversation as it is about the application. God is calling us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. When we hear the Word and do the Word, we fulfill the will of God, who desires us to become the hearts that love, the hands that heal, and the lips that speak words of edification and redemption.

PRAYER

Lord, make us instruments of Your peace and enable us to play in the key of love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 3-9, 2020)

Hearing and Doing the Word
MONDAY, August 3: “Impartial Relationships with One Another” (Leviticus 19:13-18)
TUESDAY, August 4: “Praised for Steadfast Faith in Persecution” (2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, 11-12)
THURSDAY, August 6: “Suffering for Doing the Right Thing” (1 Peter 3:13-19)
FRIDAY, August 7: “God’s Choice—the Foolish, Weak, Lowly” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)
SATURDAY, August 8: “Treat the Rich and Poor Impartially” (James 2:1-7)
SUNDAY, August 9: “The Wise Hear and Do Good” (James 1:19-27)
FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: “Just Do It”
YOUTH TOPIC: Is Your Faith Dead or Alive?

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Faith without Works Is Dead
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: A Working Faith

DEVOTIONAL READING
Matthew 18:23-35

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 2:14-26
PRINT PASSAGE: James 2:14-26
KEY VERSE: James 2:26

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 2:14-26
PRINT PASSAGE: James 2:14-26
KEY VERSE: James 2:18b

James 2:14-26—KJV
14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?
15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,
16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?
17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.
18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.
19 Thou believest that there is one God. thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.
20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?
21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

James 2:14-26—NIV
14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?
15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.
16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?
17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.
19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe, and shudder.
20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?
21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?
22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?
23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.
24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.
25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?
26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.
23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.
24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.
25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?
26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people make bold claims about the standards by which they live, but their actions deny those claims. How can we tell when someone is genuine? James says that the one who has faith will demonstrate that faith by his or her works, as did Abraham and Rahab.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Compare and contrast a faith that is no more than empty talk with a faith that is proved by actions.
2. Reflect on the power of Abraham’s and Rahab’s examples of faith in action.
3. Commit to demonstrating faith with tangible works.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—James alludes to Genesis 15:6 when he says the Scripture reads, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (verse 23, NRSV).
—Verse 19 (NIV), “You believe that there is one God,” refers to one of the most basic tenets of the Jewish faith. See Deuteronomy 6:4.
—The actions of Rahab are recounted in Joshua 2:1-21.

—Abraham and Rahab are both cited as examples of people with faith in Hebrews 11 (verses 8-19 and verse 31, respectively).
—Faith must be put into action.
—The examples of Abraham’s and Rahab’s actions undergird faith in action.
—The question “What good is it to believe something is right to do and not do it?” echoes the binding faith with works.
—The Scripture teaches that we show faith by helping meet the needs of others who are suffering or struggling.
—In this Scripture (2:18), faith is demonstrated by doing good deeds.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—James argued against an incomplete definition of faith.
—James and Paul seem to disagree on how faith is expressed.
—Mere confession of faith accomplishes nothing.
—James proclaims that even the demons know there is only one God.
—The biblical account of a faithful believer is expressed in Abraham’s righteousness and whom God called friend (2:23).
—Rahab was not a believer but demonstrated faith through actions when she protected the spies (see Joshua 2).

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
In the New Testament, four men bear the name James. The author of the epistle of James could not have been the apostle James (son of Zebedee), who died in AD 44, since the book is believed to be from a later time. The other two people who bore the name James did not have the status, the respect, or the authority that the writer of this letter seems to have possessed.

Jesus had several brothers, and James was probably the eldest if we are to go by the order of the list in Matthew 13:55. In John 7:2-5, we see that Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Him as Messiah at first. James was most likely included among the doubting brothers. Later, he became a key member of the church, being active in major roles and incidents. He was one of the few people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:7). As seen earlier, James was a key figure among Jerusalem Christians (see Acts 15:13). Paul referred to him as a “pillar” of the church (see Galatians 2:9). After the apostle Paul’s conversion, he went to see James in Jerusalem (see Galatians 1:19). On his last visit to Jerusalem, Paul also went to pay James a visit (see Acts 21:18). After Peter’s rescue from prison, he told his friends to inform James (see Acts 12:17). There are other references to James in the New Testament. He was eventually martyred sometime around AD 62.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
We already know that the book of James was written to Jewish Christians and focuses on happenings in the synagogue and among Jewish Christians. In an era when people’s lives and living were dominated by separation and segregation of various sorts, James admonished Christians to keep this out of the church. He admonished the Jewish Christians in particular to treat everyone the same: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (James 2:1, NKJV).

This was a time when the world was largely subdivided like ours is today. People were categorized on the basis of background, religion, financial status, and political affiliation. Unlike today, when many people generally consider it wrong to be partial, it was normal and socially acceptable to be partial in those days. Preferences were based on whether a person was Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or Barbarian. The church was participating in that unjust system, and James wrote against such practices in the church. James recognized that a key part of Jesus’ goal was to unite humanity, making us all one (see Ephesians 2:14-15). People were amazed at the unity and oneness
in the early church. James’s letter shows that this oneness did not just fall upon them. Key elders like James had to teach it to the early Christians.

In James 2:2-4 NKJV), we see human prejudice specifically identified: “For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”

Based on all of this, James tells us that we must treat each and every person impartially. In James 2:12, we are encouraged to be merciful in our deeds. James 2:24 (NRSV) sheds additional light regarding how we should treat each other: “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

James: the author of the book of James. He was a brother of our Lord, Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Believe(st) (verse 19)—Greek: pisteúó (pist-yoo’-o): have faith in; trust in; entrust.

Dead (verse 17)—Greek: nekros (nek-ros’): lifeless; subject to death; a corpse.

Faith (verse 14)—Greek: pístis (pis’-tis): belief; trust; confidence; fidelity; faithfulness.

Peace (verse 16)—Greek: eiréné (i-ray’-nay): peace of mind; quietness; rest.

Save (verse 14)—Greek: sózó (sode’-zo): to heal, preserve; rescue.

Show (verse 18)—Greek: deiknyō (dāk-nū’-ō): to show, exhibit, demonstrate, point out, “shew” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Don’t Be Partial; Be Merciful
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Live Faith versus Dead Faith
      (James 2:14-17)
   B. Employed Faith versus Unemployed Faith
      (James 2:18-22)
   C. The Just Shall Live by Faith
      (James 2:23-26)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Don’t Be Partial; Be Merciful

In Matthew 18:23-35 and in James 2:14-26, we see the importance of being merciful and acting as Christians. The book of James tells us to move away from partiality and favoritism as Christians. The smallest things count, and we are called to refrain from showing more love to some people simply because they are richer than others. We should not pay less attention to the needs of some others because they are less glamorous.

As God has given to us, we should also give to others. Also, as God has forgiven us, we should also forgive. If God did not consider how sinful we were when He forgave us, then
we should not hurt others or show favoritism because they are not as advanced as we would prefer. Jesus sets for us a great example of how we should give, forgive, and live.

B. Biblical Background

James 2 speaks of fairness, cancels partiality, and talks about being merciful. It talks about treating everyone as human and releasing forgiveness and kindness just as God has given to us.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Live Faith versus Dead Faith

(Hebrews 2:14-17)

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

At this point, we enter the notorious battleground where we consider the contest between two formidable contenders: Faith and Works. Verse 14 summarizes the argument that was to come, which is this: What good is faith without works to verify that faith? What was elevated is genuine, verifiable faith as opposed to ineffective, inoperative faith. The contrast is between a dead, empty faith and a full, living faith. Works are needed in order to verify true faith. Like a skilled attorney pacing the floors of a courtroom, James purposefully poses this rhetorical question: Can faith alone save us? The answer is offered to the audience in the verses that follow.

Exhibit #1 is offered in verses 15-16 as attorney James makes his case. Suppose there was a homeless person who had no food, clothes, or shelter and it was in the wintertime. If the response to such a person was to send him or her away with a cheerful “Have a good day, and God bless you!” what good would that do? The connotation is that of being heartless, uncaring, and detached. Such a statement might have a semblance of spirituality, but the authenticity of one’s spirituality would be seen in what is done about the homeless person’s condition. It is not our words that verify our compassion, but it is our action. Action moves our sentimental, abstract faith into a verifiable, concrete state.

The deadness of abstract faith (verse 17) stems from its inability to make a practical difference in a particular condition or in the lives of any persons. Action-less faith is like a car without a motor, skates without wheels, and a sailboat without a sail. True faith goes beyond the head knowledge and produces tangible results. Having even the noblest of faith not accompanied by action is of absolutely no use.
and may well be empty chatter just to make the speaker feel good about himself or herself.

B. Employed Faith versus Unemployed Faith

(James 2:18-22)

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

The thought pattern and line of reasoning is continued here in verse 18 from that which was introduced in James 2:14, 16. What if someone were to draw attention to the existence of his or her deeds in contrast to someone who only has faith? This situation might occur when someone performs a laudable act without being motivated by the powerful presence of faith. Righteousness does not rest in the act alone but also in the faith that motivates the act. When combined, the belief and the demonstration result in the manifestation of holistic faith.

Intellectual belief takes center stage and goes on trial for its validity (verse 19). Many people fall into the category identified here because they believe that God exists, but that is as far as it goes in relation to their everyday life. Intellectual assent can trick us into thinking that nothing more needs to be done. Other forms of inadequate belief alone may stem from family tradition (“My grandmama raised me in the church”), or personal intuition and opinion (“I just feel like God understands”). Other people may depend on their impressive theological education as validation of their salvation. Sadly, none of this suffices. Even devils and demons believe that God exists because, being spiritual beings themselves, they are all too aware of the incontrovertible evidence for the existence of God. The problem comes in their lack of submission and obedience to the will and ways of God.

Attorney James establishes the utterly foolish choice to presume there is some significant value in possessing interior faith without also expressing exterior works (verse 20). As James prepares to elevate his argument, he introduces another rhetorical question to the reader and offers to substantiate his point with Exhibit #2. Just as a fruit tree without fruit is useless, so faith without works is dead.

When Abraham was bold enough to show he was willing to sacrifice his long-awaited son Isaac on the altar (verse 21), he set a high bar with regard to obediently trusting in God and walking by faith rather than by sight. Abraham is considered the father of the faithful and is a stellar example to the faithful of what it means to follow God in the face of daunting circumstances. Development of an Abraham-level faith is not a common phenomenon. What made Abraham’s demonstration of faith stand out so much was that the stakes were so high in God’s request for Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Second, this request was unusual and unlike God’s typical requests. Consequently, Abraham had to make sure that he was closely listening to the voice of God and not to some imitation of God. This requires closeness and intimacy. Third, Abraham’s obedient act was not accompanied by God’s giving Abraham advance understanding and clarification of the reason for the request. Sometimes, God may ask us to obey without providing a background
explanation. Fourth and finally, if Abraham followed through on his act of obedience he would not get the chance for a do-over if he misunderstood God’s voice. It was a winner-take-all or loser-lose-all type of situation, and Abraham bet the bank on his God.

Highlighted in verse 22 is the absolute necessity for complete cooperation between the two entities of Faith and Works. These two spiritual giants serve the important purpose of mutually complementing each other and mutually validating each other. They are not in any kind of competition because they are on the same team. When these two team members work together and do their best in their respective roles, the result is a convincing win for the home team.

C. The Just Shall Live by Faith

*(James 2:23-26)*

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Isaiah 41:8-10 (NIV) records, “But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you: do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” This Scripture provides some helpful clues as to what is required to qualify as a friend of God (verse 23). *Clue 1:* God chooses us. However, this does not mean that we are obligated to accept God’s choice. The uniquely human ability of free moral agency enables us to accept or reject God’s will. *Clue 2:* God’s friendship with Abraham was so strong and substantive that the friendship continued beyond Abraham’s life and extended to Abraham’s children. Likewise, those who are a part of Abraham’s spiritual seed today can also be afforded the privilege of friendship with God no matter how isolated from God they may feel. *Clue 3:* In addition to being a friend of God, we are also still called to be servants of God. Our service to God is simply an outgrowth or result of our friendship with God.

The dual concept of servanthood and friendship can sometimes be a bit confusing, and we may ask the question, “Which one are we to God—friends or servants?” Jesus weighed in on the understanding of friendship with God when He said to His disciples, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15, NIV). The bottom line is that God wants an intimate spiritual friendship with us. But out of that friendship springs forth an innate desire on our behalf to want to honor, obey, and serve God because of the genuine sense of friendship.

James pleads for his readers to open their eyes to the simple yet profound reality of righteousness through strong faith which yields good works (verse 24).

James circles back to revisit the account of Rahab’s redemptive actions in hiding the spies in Jericho (verse 25). Rahab’s faith was activated when she heard about how God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could safely pass. She must have reasoned that any God who was powerful
enough to part the sea and to destroy the cities of Sihon and Og deserved to be obeyed. It was a simple yet real faith. Her faith despite her profession illustrates the notion that the life of faith is a process and not a destination. All God wants is a yes that we believe that what God says is true.

The final simile in verse 26 is like a hammer driving the last nail into the coffin of an airtight case. The term without expresses the thought “apart from.” A body without a spirit is an unappealing sight that is likely to horrify one who encounters it. Likewise, faith without works is a ghost of a notion that can serve no good purpose on earth. If good works do not follow professed faith, then that fact alone is enough evidence to safely conclude that faith is not live faith. The presence or absence of a living faith might be understood by the following characteristic: A living faith is grounded in the Word of God. A living faith is guided by the Holy Spirit. A living faith is a growing faith. A living faith transforms the bearer and those with whom he or she comes into contact. A living faith is a confident faith that verbally articulates assurance in God and actively demonstrates that assurance through works. A living faith is an active, living giving faith that is not afraid to sacrifice all (if necessary) to the glory of the kingdom of God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is important to be not just a hearer of the Word or just a doer of the Word, but both a hearer and a doer of the Word. We need not broadcast our good works but allow those works to speak for themselves so that God, who sees our faith at work, will reward us, whether privately or publicly. True meaning in life is not about congratulating ourselves but about developing others. People do not care how much we know until they know how much we care. If Rahab can be included in the Biblical Hall of Faith because of her trust in God combined with her bold actions, then we as contemporary disciples have a challenge before us to live our best lives by faith and to yield good fruit in love.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to walk by faith and to be fruitful in that endeavor. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 10-16, 2020)

Faith without Works Is Dead

MONDAY, August 10: “Abraham Is Blessed for Fearing God” (Genesis 22:9-19)
TUESDAY, August 11: “Spies Are Saved by Rahab’s Quick Actions” (Joshua 2:1-7)
WEDNESDAY, August 12: “Forgive Others like God Forgave You” (Matthew 18:23-35)
THURSDAY, August 13: “Devoted to Good Works; Avoiding Distractions” (Titus 3:1-2, 8-11)
FRIDAY, August 14: “Works Guided by Loyalty to God” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
SATURDAY, August 15: “Receive God’s Mercy by Showing Mercy” (James 2:8-13)
SUNDAY, August 16: “Faith and Works Must Go Together” (James 2:14-26)
TAMING THE TONGUE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: “Bite Your Tongue”
YOUTH TOPIC: Watch What You Say

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Taming the Tongue
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Watch Your Tongue

DEVOTIONAL READING
Isaiah 50:4-11

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 3:1-12
PRINT PASSAGE: James 3:1-12
ADULT KEY VERSE: James 3:5
YOUTH KEY VERSE: James 3:10

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 3:1-12
PRINT PASSAGE: James 3:1-12
KEY VERSE: James 3:10

James 3:1-12—KJV
MY BRETHREN, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.
2 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.
3 Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.
4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.
5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!
6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.
7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of

James 3:1-12—NIV
NOT MANY of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.
3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.
4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.
5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.
6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.
7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea
serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:
8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.
10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.
11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?
12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,
8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.
10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.
11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?
12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: The spoken word can be either an affirming or destructive force in the lives of vulnerable humans. How can the affirming force prevail in human interactions? James informs believers that only through the discipline required in taming the tongue can the fruits of godly wisdom be made visible in the lives of others.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain how bits and bridles, ships’ rudders, and small sparks illustrate the power of the tongue.
2. Repent of times when the use of their tongue has ignited a destructive fire.
3. Practice controlling the tongue so that it becomes consistently a source of healing and refreshment to others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The warning that those who teach will be judged more strictly expands on what Jesus said in Matthew 12:36-37.
—“Able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle” (verse 2) is the verb form of the same word that appears in verse 3, where it is a plural noun and translated as “bits.”
—James speaks of the tongue as if it operates independently (“boasting great things,” etc.). This must be tempered with what Jesus says about the role of the heart in what comes out of the mouth (see Matthew 12:34-35). Controlling the heart, then, becomes key to controlling the tongue.
—The irony of blessing the Lord with the same
mouth that curses those made in His likeness (verse 9) has a parallel in 1 John 4:20 (NRSV): “those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.”

—Teaching is a serious vocation.
—Speaking with restraint may keep the tongue from doing harm.
—James stresses that we all make mistakes in the things we say.
—The tongue can cause harm.
—The tongue is a contradiction, speaking both blessings and curses.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Perfect speech is not only saying the right thing but also controlling what we say.
—Vivid images are used to highlight James’s point about the power of the tongue.
—James indicates that though the tongue is one of the smallest members of the body, it can cause much trouble.
—Humans tame animals better than they control/tame their tongues.
—James wrote about the contradictory nature of the tongue.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of James was largely written to Jewish Christians. There is little doubt in regard to the authorship of this book. This is especially so because the title of this book already names the author. However, to which James is the book attributed? It is generally believed that the author of this book, the “James” being referred to, is most likely Jesus’ sibling. The author identifies himself as James in the beginning of the book. It is believed that he was the brother of Jesus and a leader of the Jerusalem church. This same James spoke up in Acts 15:13.

In the New Testament, four men bear the name James. The author of the epistle of James could not have been the apostle James who died in AD 44, since the book is believed to have been written at a later time—probably around AD 60. The other two people who bore the name James did not have the status, respect, or authority that the writer of this letter seems to have had.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

We already know that the book of James was written to Jewish Christians and focuses on happenings in the synagogue and among Jewish Christians. In an era when people’s lives and living were dominated by segregation of various sorts, James admonished Christians to keep it all out of the church. He admonished the Jewish Christians in particular to treat everyone impartially.

In James 3, James stresses the importance of controlling the tongue (watching our speech). James advises that we should not all be teachers because teachers would be more strictly judged. At a time when all sorts of teachings were being spread, there was a need to make sure that the teachings in the young Christian church remained true to Christ’s teachings as affirmed by the Old Testament.

James 3:9-12 reads, “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water” (NIV). James decided to let people know the power of speech, the importance of what we speak, and that there are consequences for evil teachings.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Control That Tongue!

Isaiah 50:4-11 (Devotional Reading) and James 3:1-12 teach us the importance of having guided utterances. In Isaiah 50, the prophet speaks of the confidence he has in his utterances because the words he speaks are from God. He knows that he will not be put to shame, no matter the storm around him. In verse 10, he admonishes people who fear God and obey His commands to continue walking that path. In James 3, James warns the assembly of Christians against false teachings and advises that we are to tame our tongues. He explains that the tongue, despite being small, is capable of destroying a person. Both Scriptures inform us of the power of words. In James 3:6 and in Isaiah 50:11, we see the consequences of false declarations, false teachings, and deceitful words. Both Scriptures tell us to guide our tongues and speak words that are of God.

B. Biblical Background

At a time when various sorts of teachings were rampant and everyone wanted to be a teacher in the assembly of the saints, James took it upon himself to remind the people of the responsibilities and the yoke of being a teacher. He reminds them that teachers will be subject to a stricter judgment.
Deuteronomy 27:18 and Jeremiah 23:13-22 are just some of the Scriptures that show how much God detests teachings that do not come from Him. God detests teachings and utterances that lead people astray. In Isaiah 50 and James 3, we see that these servants of God echo the same point, telling us to guide our teachings and speech. It was an important lesson to the early Christians and helped to keep the flock together in unity and oneness until various teachings came up, creating division in the church much later.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Challenge of the Tongue

(Ann 3:1-4)

MY BRETHREN, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

When those who were Jews converted to Christianity, many of them desired to become teachers because that was a highly honored and respected office. However, just as every spiritual gift is given by the Holy Spirit, teaching is a gift and an office into which people need to be called rather than just calling themselves (verse 1). In any spiritual position, those who call themselves must keep themselves; those whom God calls, God keeps.

The reason why spiritual teachers are judged more strictly is because they are in a position to shape and influence others who are in the vulnerable position of students. Teachers are held responsible for the content they teach as well as for the example they set with the lives they live. Jesus felt so strongly about this that in Matthew 18:6 (NIV), He said, “If anyone causes one of these little ones—that those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

In addition to being called by God to teach, some of the other important and desirable characteristics for spiritual teachers include the following: (1) Good teachers have genuine love for the student population being taught and a connection with/understanding of the students. They ask questions like, “How do these students think? What are their priorities?” They also can overlook temporary flaws in order fulfill a greater cause. (2) All good teachers have a little bit of preacher in them and all good preachers have some teacher in them. In other words, there should be insightful instruction delivered with conviction, passion, and enthusiasm. (3) Good teachers are current and relevant. Good teachers are good students of the culture and of the felt needs of the class. (4) Good teachers are transparent, and they keep it real. Students are drawn in and captivated by teachers who do not mind displaying appropriate personal vulnerability in order to gain the trust of the students and so that they can adequately identify with them. (5) Good teachers incorporate their students
into the learning process. When students are involved in the subject matter through interaction rather than being detached, the percentage of learning and comprehension significantly increases. (6) Good teachers teach both for education and for transformation. They are not satisfied with mere head knowledge, but they keep pushing for a change in the heart and the life of the student.

Everybody has faults, and no one is exempt from personal flaws, spiritual shortcomings, and character deficits. The word offend (verse 2, KJV) means “to stumble, to fall, to make a mistake, and to fail in our line of duty.” Often our errors lead to injury of others. It is common for our life errors to be facilitated by the instrument of the human tongue. Offending with the tongue is such a common human occurrence that the one who is able to escape the tongue trap is designated in this text as a “perfect” man. The word perfect carries with it a sense of spiritual maturity as opposed to carnal thinking and acting. Successfully controlling the tongue requires daily spiritual discipline and consistent practice. Controlling the tongue is an exercise in humility, and this character quality can be applied across the board to the “whole body” of other life functions and relationships such as marriage, family, school, work, and church.

Unless one was raised on a farm, the usage of a “bit” (verse 3) may seem like a totally foreign and unfamiliar concept. A bit is a part of a bridle which is used in equestrian activities, is usually made of metal or a synthetic material, and is placed in a horse’s mouth for the purpose of controlling and directing the animal. The “bit” for the Christian might be the spiritual fruit of self-control. This fruit allows us to rise above the common annoyances, temptations, and provocations that might arise in everyday life to make us veer from the path of righteousness.

The imagery of the horse bit is exchanged for the metaphor of a ship rudder (verse 4), but both serve the same purpose: to control. Both a bit and a rudder are considerably smaller than the much-larger objects to which they are attached. The larger object is rendered practically useless without the proper operation of the smaller object. A broken bit or a malfunctioning rudder would be catastrophic, just as a malfunctioning tongue spells trouble for the Christian.

B. The Corruption of the Tongue
(James 3:5-8)

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

The power of the tongue continues to be emphasized through the power of imagery. Although small in size, its ability is impressive (verse 5). Verbal imagery is matched with the movement of the tongue. When speaking, the tongue has a tendency to boast and to brag with a very high estimation of itself. Both positivity and negativity can flow from the tongue, and the outcome is dependent upon which exerts the greatest amount of influence. This same dual quality exists in the property of fire. When applied in the right conditions, fire has the capacity to heat living spaces, ignite the spark to propel engines, and provide illumination. But
when used with faulty motives fire can burn buildings, can ruin vehicles, and can literally kill people.

The tongue as a fire (verse 6) is a metaphor which continues the analogy from the spark mentioned in verse 5. What may begin as a seemingly innocent spark can easily morph into a blazing inferno of wickedness and trouble, much like the infamous California wildfires that seem almost unstoppable. The kinds of fire that the tongue can set include the fires of gossip, falsehood, slander, and negativity. The way that wildfires proliferate is by continuing to have something left to burn. Likewise, the co-conspirators of the heart and tongue are so deceitful that they will continue to destroy if left to their own devices. A corrective measure is available through heeding the classic advice to T.H.I.N.K. before you speak: T—Is it True? H—Is it Helpful? I—Is it Inspiring? N—Is it Necessary? K—Is it Kind?

James now moves from the imagery of fire to the imagery of animals to further illustrate the power of the tongue (verse 7). The reader of the day would have easily identified with the need for a bit, a bridle, and reins in order to control and direct an animal such as a horse, mule, or ox. The irony is that even though these items can successfully subdue a beast, there are few things known to humans that are truly effective in controlling the tongue (verse 8).

C. The Duplicity of the Tongue
(James 3:9-12)

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Unfortunately, the tongue has a tendency to turn into whatever happens to be convenient at the time (verse 9). If telling the truth is more convenient, the truth is told. If the tongue can get by with a lie, then the lies have it. This tendency to turn into a creature of convenience is a characteristic of the unredeemed, disobedient, rebellious tongue. On the other hand, the same tongue that is used to curse and defile can be the same tongue used to praise and worship. One might wonder how these things can be so. First John 4:20 (NIV) also raises this question of duplicity of character: “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” There are some Christians who depend on their own ability to live the Christian life, but they are continually frustrated because they lack the power to persevere.

Two different kinds of water originating from the same source would indeed be a curious phenomenon (verse 11). It is highly unlikely for fresh water and salty water to be near each other, much less emanating from the same source. The concept of sanctification focuses on the dedication of a thing to one purpose only. In a kitchen, a mixing bowl is not also used as a planter for flowers—and in a bathroom, one’s toothbrush is not used to scrub the tub. Likewise, a disciple’s words should be devoted to the activities that would match a disciple’s heart, such as praise and worship of God and encouragement/instruction offered to other people. For a disciple to use that same tongue for slander, lies, or blasphemy (verse 10) would
be less than expected, because consistent discourse that honors God is a witness to the world and a blessing to other believers.

The metaphorical comparison and contrast of the tongue continues in verse 12 and extends to the plant world. Luke 6:43-45 bears a very close resemblance to the spirit of James 3: “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (NIV). The unusual production of fruit of a type different from its original source is very unlikely.

God has given us everything we need to develop a life of godliness, but we are required to do our part in disciplining ourselves like an athlete prepares for a sports competition.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Since the power of life and death is in the tongue, then we must be careful to harness the power of our words. The careless use of the tongue can burn down relationships and demolish institutions. We all could use an inspirational word to motivate and uplift us in the midst of life’s everyday occurrences. As we use our tongues to bring hope, healing, and encouragement to others we will live out what it means to be the living letters referenced in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 (NIV): “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” God’s plan is for disciples to reflect a sense of spiritually pleasing consistency in our thought life, in our words, and in our actions.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, please give us the grace to develop the discipline we need to control our words, so that all we say and do honors You and uplifts others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 17-23, 2020)

Taming the Tongue
MONDAY, August 17: “It Is Unwise Not to Listen to Teachers” (Proverbs 5:7-14)
TUESDAY, August 18: “The Testimony of a Wise Teacher” (Isaiah 50:4-11)
WEDNESDAY, August 19: “Slander and Abusive Language Are Not Allowed” (Colossians 3:1-11)
THURSDAY, August 20: “Use the Tongue to Speak God’s Praise” (Psalm 119:169-176)
FRIDAY, August 21: “Believers Anointed with Fire and Tongues” (Acts 2:1-12)
SATURDAY, August 22: “Tongues and Teachers Are God’s Gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)
SUNDAY, August 23: “Speech Is for Healing and Refreshment” (James 3:1-12)
August 30, 2020 Lesson 13

TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Two Kinds of Wisdom
- **ADULT/ADULT TOPIC:** Wise Up!
- **ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Wise Up
- **YOUTH TOPIC:** Wise Up

**CHILDREN**
- **GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Two Kinds of Wisdom
- **CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Think First

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Psalm 32:1-11

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** James 3:13-18; 5:7-12

**PRINT PASSAGE:** James 3:13-18; 5:7-12

**KEY VERSE:** James 3:17

---

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** James 3:13-18; 5:7-12
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** James 3:13-18; 5:7-12
- **KEY VERSE:** James 3:17

**CHILDREN**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** James 3:13-18; 5:7-12
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** James 3:13-18; 5:7-12
- **KEY VERSE:** James 3:13

---

**James 3:13-18; 5:7-12—KJV**
13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.
14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.
15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.
16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.
17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.
18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

---

**James 3:13-18; 5:7-12—NIV**
13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.
14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.
15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.
16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.
17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.
18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.
8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.
9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.
10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.
11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.
12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.
9 Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!
10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
11 As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
12 Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Throughout history, many have risked their lives by resisting oppressive regimes, thus saving the lives of others. What motivates a person to defy evil and choose to act for the good of strangers? James compares and contrasts the consequences of using wisdom for righteousness or for evil.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain the value of acting with wisdom from above and with patience amidst trials.
2. Repent of actions that have been done out of earthly wisdom and lack of patience.
3. Embrace wisdom from God and seek to demonstrate it consistently and patiently.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The word translated “life” in 3:13 (NIV) is not the typical Greek word for “life” (zoe), which is used more than 130 times in the NT. It is a word that means “manner of life, conduct, behavior, or deportment.”
—The word for “gentleness” in 3:13 is derived from the root word translated “meek” in Matthew 5:5.

—James’s contrast between wisdom that is “earthly” and that which is “heavenly” has parallels in Paul’s writing. See 1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:5-6.
—“The word patient [5:8] does not mean that they were to sit idly by, doing nothing. Rather, the word carries the idea of endurance, bearing the burdens and fighting the battles until the Lord comes.” (Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament (p. 734). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.)
—James’s prohibition on swearing (taking oaths) draws from the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:33-37).
—James 3:17-18 provides a list of what might be called the “fruits of wisdom,” similar to the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5.
—Godly wisdom is good; self-indulgence is evil.
—Godly wisdom is without prejudice or favoritism; wisdom from God is pure and wholesome.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—James contrasted earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom.
—Like a tree, one with true wisdom is known by what he or she produces.
—Wisdom from God brings peace and mercy and bears good fruit.
—James states that the Lord will judge each of us for what we do or do not do.
—James states that patience during suffering is not without God’s compassion and mercy, as Job learned through his painful ordeal.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The book of James was largely written to Jewish Christians. There is little doubt as to the authorship of this book. This is especially so because the title of this book and the greeting already name the author. However, to which James does the book refer? It is generally believed that the James referred to is Jesus’ sibling. This James became a leader of the Jerusalem church. This same James is mentioned in Acts 15:13.

In the New Testament, four men bear the name James. The author of the epistle of James could not have been the apostle James who died in AD 44, since the book is believed to be from a later time—probably around AD 60. The other two people who bore the name James did not have the status, respect, or authority that the writer of this letter seems to have had.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
We know that the book of James was written to Jewish Christians and focuses on happenings in the synagogue and around Jewish Christian life. In an era when people’s lives and living were dominated by segregation of various sorts, James admonished Christians to keep it all out of the church. He admonished the Jewish Christians in particular to treat everyone impartially.

In James 3:13-18, James explains that heavenly wisdom is essential and that it guides us in our living. He shows that heavenly wisdom is meek and not arrogant. James 5:7-12 was his message on patience and behavior while waiting on God. This all outlines the theme of wisdom, which teaches the reader how to act. Wisdom in the cultural and religious Hebrew mindset did not simply refer to being shrewd. The kind of godly wisdom outlined here refers to the willingness to hear God, to obey God, and to follow God’s commands.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
James: the author of the epistle of James. He was a brother of our Lord, Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Bitter (3:14)—Greek: pikros (pik-ros’): acrid; malignant.
Good (3:13)—Greek: kalos (kal-os’): beautiful; good; worthy; as an outward sign of an inward good; noble.

Humility (3:13)—Greek: prautés (prah-oo’-tace): mildness; gentleness; “meekness” (KJV).

Pure (3:17)—Greek: hagnos (hag-nos’): clean; chaste; holy; sacred.

Understanding (3:13)—Greek: epistémón (ep-ee-stay’-mone): emphasizes understanding based on building on previous knowledge; knowing; “knowledge” (KJV).

Wise (3:13)—Greek: sophos (sof-os’): learned; cultivated; skilled.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Be Wise and Behave

James 3:13-18 explains wisdom and deeds. James links heavenly wisdom with action and behavior. He extols heavenly wisdom and links heavenly wisdom with being meek. James 3:13 (NIV) asks the question, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” James tells us that if a person has wisdom, it shows in the person’s life. This is because the wisdom here refers to the ultimate wisdom that comes from listening to and doing the will of God. In James 5:7-11, we see that if a person stands with God, that person will triumph.

B. Biblical Background

The essence of this lesson is a portrait of godly wisdom. This is wisdom that comes from God and is the most important kind of wisdom. No matter how wise a person may be, if one is only wise in his or her own strength, then there is still much more to be gained from God’s wisdom. Throughout the Bible, we see how some people tried to seek God’s face, knowing that God is the ultimate source of wisdom. The wisdom that never fails is simply to trust in God, obey God, and live according to God’s Word, as seen in Proverbs 1:7 (NIV): “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
A. Earthly Wisdom
   (James 3:13-16)

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against...
the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above,
but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and
strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

True wisdom does not consist of the mere
accumulation of worldly knowledge but in the
application of worldly and spiritual knowledge
demonstrated through a godly life (verse 13).
Worldly wisdom accentuates the senses and the
emotions. Godly wisdom focuses on holy char-
acter traits. Worldly, earthly wisdom advocates
obedience to the dictates of the human heart.
Godly wisdom concurs with Jeremiah 17:9 that
the human heart is deceitful above all things.
Worldly wisdom holds that one must see in or-
der to effectively believe. Godly wisdom crosses
to the other side of the spectrum with the
John 20:29 perspective that blesses those who
have not seen and yet have believed. Worldly
wisdom allows for loving one’s family and
friends, but godly wisdom charges us to love
our enemies also and bless them (see Matthew
5:43-47). It is obviously easy to spout worldly
wisdom, but godly wisdom requires a much
deeper commitment and thought process.

Envy is that feeling of discontent or resent-
tful longing aroused by coveting someone else’s
possessions, qualities, or experiences (verse
14). Aristotle defined envy as pain at the sight
of another’s good fortune, stirred by “those
who have what we (think we) ought to have.”
Psychologists make the following distinction
between envy and jealousy: Envy occurs when
we lack a desired attribute possessed by an-
other. Jealousy happens when something we
already possess (usually a special relationship)
is threatened by a third person. Envy reacts
to lack, and jealousy responds to the threat of
losing one’s possession. Neither characteristic
is worth the energy required to expend or to
respond.

False/earthly wisdom (verse 15) wears exter-
ior clothing that covers up the true motives that
lie below. Earthly wisdom may sound good on
the surface, but the essence of earthly wisdom
is antithetical to godly wisdom. Examples of
worldly wisdom include the following: “There
are no absolutes or objective truth”; “Look out
for #1”; “If you can’t beat them, join them”;
“Trust no one over 30 . . . until you reach 31.”
Worldly wisdom self-promotes. Godly wisdom
raises others. Worldly wisdom seeks the
highest place of honor, but godly wisdom prac-
tices humility. Worldly wisdom seeks truth in
novels and business journals, but godly wisdom
submits to the mirror of the Word. Worldly
wisdom trusts in the bank account or the 401K,
but godly wisdom trusts in treasures beyond
the grave. Worldly wisdom boasts, but godly
wisdom is slow to speak. Worldly wisdom says
that trials will crush you, but godly wisdom says
that trials will mature you. Worldly wisdom
says lust is normal, but godly wisdom embraces
discipline. Worldly wisdom says that “seeing is
believing,” but godly wisdom says, “Blessed are
those who have not seen and yet have believed”
(John 20:29, NIV). Simply put, any thought,
word, or deed that compromises our ability to
love God and obey God is faulty.

Worldly wisdom arises from thought
processes, maxims, or principles that focus on
the sensual, natural appetites and propensi-
ties rather than spiritual influences. Demonic
wisdom may contain a sliver of truth, but the
result of obeying such wisdom runs counter to
the concepts of Christ.
When envy is present, it usually means that love is absent. The presence of envy and strife mean the proliferation of confusion, agitation, and instability. Envy and selfish ambition (verse 16) are the monsters that destroy families, churches, organizations, and businesses. Selfishness is often easily recognized except by the one who demonstrates it. One who is selfish is excessively or exclusively concerned with oneself and concentrates on one’s own advantage, pleasure, or well-being with little or no regard for others. Selfishness arises from concern with one’s own welfare or advantage in disregard of others. This attitude gives rise to every evil work because selfishness serves as the progenitor of sin.

There are several practical signs that you or someone you interact with may be selfish: (1) when one is always talking about one’s self and generally monopolizing the conversation; (2) when one feels deserving of special treatment or when placing one’s self ahead of others who are waiting in line; (3) when one barely or rarely says “Please” or “Thank you”; (4) when one insists on getting his or her own way in some action or expressing his or her own opinion in a conversation—and others’ points of view are disregarded; (5) when one resists accountability from an authority figure or equal partner; (6) when one has a low threshold for being taught something new; (7) when one exhibits the need to be in control; (8) when one finds it difficult to apologize; (9) when one finds it hard to offer sympathy or to practice empathy; (10) when one operates as a taker more than as a giver; (11) when it’s all about “me” and not about “we.”

B. Heavenly Wisdom
(James 3:17-18)

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Verse 17 forthrightly describes the characteristics of the kind of wisdom which comes from God. Above all, godly wisdom is pure. Pure godly wisdom is not mixed or adulterated with any other substance or inferior material. Pure wisdom has no extraneous and unnecessary elements and is therefore free of any contamination. Some possible sources of contamination include fear, pride, or idolatry. The second characteristic of godly wisdom is that it loves peace. Peace-loving wisdom seeks to find ways to calm conflict and to build bridges of unity rather than building walls of division. Peace-loving wisdom speaks from a perspective of maturity and sees the big picture rather than the immediate issue. Godly wisdom always considers others before speaking a word or initiating an action.

Earthly wisdom focuses on the immediate perspective, but godly wisdom honors what is everlasting. Godly wisdom has no problem with submission. Many people unfortunately see submission as a weak, negative concept. But submission is actually joining forces with another force in order for both mutually benefit from the liaison and to become better together. Godly wisdom is also full of mercy. Mercy is when compassion or forgiveness is shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm. When mercy is extended, restraint is exercised and God’s love can be showcased. Godly wisdom is sincere. It
is free of pretense or deceit and proceeds from genuine feelings. Godly wisdom is impartial, fair, and just. It treats all parties equally even if they may be rivals or disputants. Finally, godly wisdom bears plenty of good fruit. Since the Holy Spirit is the source of godly wisdom, then this wisdom necessarily reflects the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23a), and Paul’s discourse on love (1 Corinthians 13).

At first glance of verse 18, the concept of a peacemaker may seem rather docile and innocent. But peacemakers are tremendously powerful people. One of the most prestigious awards worldwide is the Nobel Peace Prize. In order to qualify, one “shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.” Although most ordinary people will never be considered for an award on such a level, everyone can contribute toward peace within their own families, schools, churches, and communities. God knows we need it. When seeds of peace are sown, a harvest of righteousness can be reaped. But when there is no seed sowing, there can be no harvest reaping. Consider the following practical ways to begin living the life of a peacemaker, and feel free to add your own ideas: (1) Pray up. Ask God to use you to be a vessel of peace. (2) Sign up. Join local organizations with a history of working for peace and justice. (3) Speak up. Use your voice to make a difference. (4) Act up. When necessary, demonstrate for the cause of peace. Peacekeepers act out of fear. Peacemakers act out of faith. (5) Love up. Demonstrate kindness even when kindness has not been demonstrated to you.

C. The Power of Patience

(James 5:7-12)

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

The original readers of this writing existed in an agricultural society and would have fully understood the writer’s comparison in verse 7 linking the patience necessary in waiting for the Lord’s coming with the patience necessary in waiting for the farmer’s harvest. Both are sure, but both take time. Impatience is a sign of weakness, but patience is a sign of strength. Patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry, upset, or unfocused. Patience requires effort and work, but in the end it is worth it because it yields happiness, greater work, better relationships, and more success in general. We can practice being patient through taking deep breaths, being aware of the invented need to hurry, and intentionally stopping to notice the beauty in the details.
From time to time we all could use an attitude adjustment (verse 9). First Thessalonians 5:18 provides a spiritual template for how the disciple should respond to life: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (NIV). The opposite of giving thanks is making complaints. It has been said that a grudge is an aging complaint still being held against another person. The longer we carry a complaint against another, the greater the probability that it will become a grudge too heavy for us to handle. Complaining often gives birth to resentment, but we are called to “be hospitable to one another without complaining” (1 Peter 4:9, NRSV).

When going to court, it never helps to complain. Likewise, as long as God is the judge, complaining only leads to complications. In his book Knowing God, J. I. Packer instructs his readers on the characteristics of God as a judge. As judge, God is one with authority and His decisions are final, no matter what humanity may say. As judge, God alone is the one with ultimate authority. Not only can God state the verdict, but He can also carry it out with enforcement if necessary. As our judge and maker, God is our Lord and owner. As judge, God is the personification of what is good and right. As judge, God loves justice and fairness and loathes all ill treatment of one person by another. “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?” (Micah 6:8, NIV). Micah 6:8 calls for us to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. The Righteous Judge is one with the wisdom to distinguish between truth and falsehood. In the judgments of God, there is no jury present, but God has the final say.

There is great value in facing suffering (verse 10), even though contemporary culture does not embrace suffering for its potential virtue. Even church culture elevates the exact opposite of suffering and prefers pleasure, prosperity, blessings, and convenience. First Peter 4:1 tells us, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin” (NIV). Suffering is a necessary aspect of spiritual maturity. In the process of God’s extending love to us, we are not exempted from pain, suffering, affliction, and persecution (see 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Timothy 3:12; Colossians 1:24; Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 2:10; Isaiah 43:2).

Poet Robert Browning wrote a poignant verse about suffering:

I walked a mile with Pleasure;  
She chatted all the way;  
But left me none the wiser  
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow;  
And ne’er a word said she;  
But oh! The things I learned from her,  
When Sorrow walked with me.

Suffering can remind us of our limited humanity and can definitely increase our prayer life. Suffering can help us understand what is ultimately important and can help us to be more sensitive and to more effectively minister to others who are hurting. Suffering received and endured can have a powerful effect on our spiritual maturity and can add unprecedented depth to our character.

There is great power in perseverance (verse 11). Perseverance is persistence in doing something despite any difficulty or delay in achieving success. Perseverance requires endurance,
patience, and persistence in the process. In order to realize a dream that is before you it is first necessary to visualize it. To visualize your dream is to figuratively see it, hear it, and feel it. Next, there is a need to agonize. This means to endure the discomfort of wrestling with the vision and pressing past the pain to move to the next place in the process. Then, there is the need to familiarize. Get acquainted with your dream and learn all about it. Then, strategize. Make a plan and a specific goal with a specific result in mind. Finally, organize. Get together with likeminded people to move forward with your purpose. As time progresses there may be a need to revise, so be sensitive to the voice of God to make sure you are still following that quiet voice of divine direction.

This warning against swearing in verse 12 places the central focus of the passage on the necessity for simple, clear, understandable communication. Verse 12 is very similar to Matthew 5:37, where Jesus says, “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (NIV).

No matter the situation, there is no way to ignore the importance of clear communication. As is seen in this passage, the book of James deals with practical issues of everyday life. Much can be gleaned and applied as we look to the Word of God for insight and illumination.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

We gain divine wisdom as we seek the face of God through prayer, Scripture study, fasting, and the wise counsel of mature disciples. Godly wisdom offers to us guidance and direction when we are not sure which way to go. Godly wisdom offers us divine discernment to assist us in accurately assessing our surroundings. Godly wisdom gives us the confidence to conquer our fears and to press toward our goal with the assurance that God will always make a way despite all external circumstances.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to operate our lives with the mind of Christ so that our choices will be wise as we listen to and learn from Your still, small voice. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 24-30, 2020)

Two Kinds of Wisdom
MONDAY, August 24: “Wisdom about End-time Signs” (Matthew 24:3-14)
TUESDAY, August 25: “Wisdom for Speaking a Prophetic Message” (Jeremiah 38:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, August 26: “Wisdom in Knowing Hearts without Blame” (1 Thessalonians 3:6-13)
THURSDAY, August 27: “Wisdom in Speaking Clearly” (Matthew 5:33-37)
FRIDAY, August 28: “Living Gracefully with One Another” (1 Peter 4:7-11)
SATURDAY, August 29: “Wisdom in the Prayer of Faith” (James 5:13-20)
SUNDAY, August 30: “Acting Wisely with Patience and Love” (James 3:13-18; 5:7-12)