Sunday School Commentary
Based on the International Lessons Series
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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 for my feet, a light on 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 Winter Quarters, and Dr. Geoffrey Guns, expositor for the Spring 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 Winter 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
- This Is My Story: Testimonies and Sermons of Black Women in Ministry, editor (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)
- The Heart of Black Preaching (Westminster John Knox Press, 1999)

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.
Reverend Dr. Geoffrey V. Guns ▼

Spring and Summer Quarters

Rev. Dr. Geoffrey V. Guns is a native of Newport, Rhode Island. He is the son of Dr. Frank Guns Sr. and the late Rev. Quincey C. Guns. He is a product of the Norfolk Public School System. He earned his B.S. degree in Business Administration from Norfolk State University in 1972, after which he served six years as a U.S. Army Infantry Officer.

In 1981, he earned his Master of Divinity degree from the School of Theology, Virginia Union University (graduating Summa Cum Laude). He earned his Doctor of Ministry degree from the School of Religion, Howard University in Washington, D.C., in 1985.

Dr. Guns is the Senior Pastor of Second Calvary Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, where he has served since June 1983. Second Calvary is a leader in serving the community and in the area of global missions. He currently serves as the State Director for the Department of Christian Education of the Virginia Baptist State Convention, Inc. Dr. Guns co-founded the Norfolk Pastors’ Coalition in 2014 to lead local Baptist congregations in addressing urban social and economic problems. Dr. Guns also served as the President of the Virginia Baptist State Convention (VBSC) from 1997 to 2001, and twice as the Moderator for the Tidewater-Peninsula Baptist Association (TPBA). Dr. Guns served as a member of the faculty of the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education from 1984 to 2015. He has travelled extensively to Europe, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, Asia, and Africa. He has led several short-term mission trips to Israel, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, and Uganda.

He has written numerous articles for *The Christian Education Informer* of the Division of Christian Education of the Sunday School Publishing Board, in addition to writing various Sunday school quarterlies. Dr. Guns serves as Co-Chairman of the Executive Council of Christian Education for the Division of Christian Education Accreditation and Credentials of the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC). He serves on the Home Mission Board of the NBCUSA, Inc. He served as a co-author the annual *Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary*, which is published by the Sunday School Publishing Board, from 2008 to 2015.


He is married to the former Rosetta Harding of Richmond, Virginia. Rosetta is a licensed clinical social worker and retired as a school social worker from the City of Chesapeake Public Schools. They are the parents of two daughters: Kimberly Guns and Nicole Patrice Guns Edwards (Lamont), a licensed minister; and have two granddaughters: Kennedy Nicole and Sydney Rae Cummings.
Love for One Another

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

God commands us to love one another as He loves us. This quarter begins with a widely known story about Joseph that deals with love within Jacob’s family. From the Joseph story we proceed with God’s laws, requiring care and concern for the poor and needy, loving and embracing of the stranger, and the demands of love for one another in the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. These lessons elaborate on themes of love for one another in the epistles of Paul and James, and the expressions of love in the early formations of the church in the book of Acts.

Unit I, “Struggles with Love,” has four lessons from the book of Genesis, revealing aspects of love. Lesson 1 reveals how a lack of familial love devolves into jealousy and destruction. Lesson 2 portrays Joseph’s commitment to love that refuses to hold on to past wrongs but rather seeks God’s path to future success. Lessons 3 and 4 show Joseph’s brothers’ coming to Egypt and reveal how love and reconciliation can prevail in spite of harsh and negative circumstances.

Unit II, “Inclusive Love,” has four lessons that center on love for the stranger, the poor, and enemies, as well as on divine love reflected in human life. The book of 1 Samuel shows David’s love for others. Luke explores the teachings of Jesus regarding love for one’s enemies, and Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. The book of 1 Corinthians explores the sermon on love from Paul’s writing that depicts the height of human love as coming from divine love.

October 6, 2020

Lesson 1

**ISSUES OF LOVE**

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **ADULT TOPIC:** When Love Is Lost
- **YOUTH TOPIC:** Love Loses Its Way

**CHILDREN**
- **GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** A Family at Odds
- **CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Jealousy Hurts

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
- **Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22**

**ADULT/YOUTH**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 37
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28
- **KEY VERSE:** Genesis 37:11

**CHILDREN**
- **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 37
- **PRINT PASSAGE:** Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28
- **KEY VERSE:** Genesis 37:11

**Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28—KJV**

2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him.

5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.

6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.”

**Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28—NIV**

2 This is the account of Jacob’s family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him.

4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 “We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”

8 His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign...
8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream: and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him;

24 And they took him, and cast him into a pit.

28 So when there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Jealousy, hate, and love are emotions that people experience in their families. How do people deal with these emotions? An absence of love for Joseph by his brothers led to envy and finally a plot to kill him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the circumstances of familial love and hatred between Jacob/Israel’s sons.
2. Repent of times when they allowed jealousy and hatred to override a commitment to love.
3. Develop strategies to allow a commitment to love to override feelings of jealousy and hatred.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Already jealous of his favor in their father’s eyes, Joseph’s brothers heard the reports of his dreams in the worst light.

—Jacob seems to be perpetuating the brokenness of his immediate family because he knew from experience how parental favoritism caused brokenness in his own life and in the life of his brother, Esau.

—Joseph’s approach to sharing his dreams and flaunting his special coat in front of his brothers
is partly to blame for the brothers’ escalating jealousy and anger toward him.
—The brothers’ jealousy crossed a line when they sold him into slavery to Midianite travellers and then later faked his death to deceive their father.
—Later, Joseph will interpret dreams through the power of God (Genesis 40; 41). The dreams in Genesis 37, however, needed no such interpretation, since the meaning was already obvious to all!
—Jacob repeated the same type of favoritism that his mother showed to him—a favoritism that sparked a similar homicidal fury in Esau (see Genesis 27:42).
—The pattern of sibling rivalry crossed another generational divide when Joseph’s brothers sold him to descendants of their grandfather Isaac’s sibling rival, Ishmael.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—The unique coat Jacob gave Joseph demonstrated that he loved Joseph more dearly than any of his other sons.
—The futuristic messages found in Joseph’s dreams were obvious to both his brothers and parents.
—When Joseph told his brothers about his dreams, they understood that he was saying he was going to be more powerful than all of them, even their father.
—Jacob’s choice to give Joseph the coat and Joseph’s choice to share his dreams with his brothers further fueled the jealousy and envy already present in the extended family.
—Jacob, in his love for Joseph, perpetuated to the next generation the same kind of sibling rivalry that Jacob’s mother fueled between him and his brother, Esau.
—Joseph’s brothers made a bad choice when they sold him to travelling Midianites and faked his death with their father.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The movement of this narrative is from Joseph’s initial dream (Genesis 37:5-9) to the secure settlement of Israel/Jacob in the land of Egypt under the governance of Joseph (Genesis 47:27). No one loved the land of Canaan as his “fatherland” more than Jacob did, but that land had been the scene of the story of the Hebrew people long enough. This family, now in its third generation, shall be moved to Egypt, where God shall turn a family into a nation (Jacob, 248). In its present form, the narrative is believed to have been constructed in the Solomonic period (tenth century BC). It represents a major literary attempt to provide a statement about the hidden rule of God in the affairs of persons and nations (Brueggemann, 290-91).

Genesis 37 lays the foundation for the crisis between Joseph and his brothers and foreshadows through dreams the final resolution to the crisis (Ross, 595). We find in this chapter themes and issues that will dominate the entire Joseph story. Joseph, beloved son of Jacob’s old age, comes on the scene abruptly. His presence signals a sharp new beginning. His presence signals a sharp new beginning. The whole chapter can be divided into three scenes. The first (verses 2-11) and the third (verses 31-35) take place in the father’s house; and the second (verses 12-30) takes place in the field. Verses 2-11 trace the growing estrangement and resentment between Joseph and his brothers, caused by the father’s love for and the Lord’s choice of Joseph. Early on, the reader comes to see the tensions and jealousies that will trigger the devastating negative actions to come.
THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The Joseph story begins with reminders of the land (Genesis 37:1) and promises of nationhood (37:2a), but attention moves immediately from the land to Jacob’s progeny (37:2b). Quickly we see the potential for family discord and strife. While working with some of his half-brothers, Joseph brings a bad report of them to Jacob. The open family strife, already intimated by the bad report, is further fueled by Jacob’s outrageous gift of a lordly garment to his favorite son. Soon thereafter, hatred bursts onto the scene. Joseph’s announcement of the dreams drives the wedge more firmly between himself and his brothers. The bad report of the favorite son, the bad blood on the part of his older brothers, and finally Joseph’s dreams of lording over them trigger the brothers’ fratricidal designs. Their contempt and sarcasm are plain to hear: “Here comes this dreamer” (37:19). Joseph is saved from the clutches of the other brothers by Reuben. Instead of doing away with him quickly, Reuben chooses to throw him into a dry pit. In Reuben’s absence, the other brothers are persuaded by Judah to make a profit from him, so he is sold to passing merchants (Turner, 161-62).

With the story of Joseph, we come to the last division of Genesis. In this section, we learn far more of Joseph than of any of the patriarchs preceding him.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Bilhah: the handmaid of Rachel. She was given by Rachel to Jacob and bore him Dan and Naphtali.
Jacob: the younger son of Isaac and Rebekah, and the twin brother of Esau; patriarch and father of the twelve tribal ancestors of Israel. His name means “to seize at the heel, hence ‘to beguile’ or ‘to overreach, supplant.’”
Joseph: the eleventh son of Jacob and the oldest of Rachel, Jacob’s favored wife. Like Isaac and Jacob before him, Joseph was born to a formerly barren woman to whom God had shown compassion. Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams and his administrative gifts were to have dramatic consequences for his life in Egypt (Eerdmans Bible Dictionary, 596).
Judah: the fourth son of Jacob and Leah. He plotted with his brothers to get rid of Joseph but convinced them to sell the lad into slavery instead of killing him.
Reuben: the firstborn of the twelve sons of Jacob and four sons of Leah, and the Israelite tribe of Reuben descended from him.
Zilpah: the maid of Laban, whom he gave to his daughter Leah when she married Jacob.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Dream (verse 5)—Hebrew: chalom (khal-ome’): dream; dreamer.
Robe (verse 3)—Hebrew: kethoneth (keth-o’-neth): outer robe or tunic; “coat” (KJV).
Were jealous (verse 11)—Hebrew: qanna (kan-naw’): being envious; provoked to jealousy; “envied” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. What’s Love Got to Do with It?
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. God at Work through a Family Torn by Hatred and Alienation (Genesis 37:2-4)
   B. When Dreams Cause Division among Loved Ones (Genesis 37:5-11)
   C. What Happens when Hate Wins (Genesis 37:23-24a)
   D. What the Brothers Intended for Evil, God Intended for Good (Genesis 37:28)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. What’s Love Got to Do with It?

There is no trouble like family trouble. It is, after all, the kind of trouble that not even the law of the land can ultimately settle. The law can decide and enforce behavior under threat of penalty, but it cannot make us love one another as we ought.

Leonard Sweet, in *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right*, notes that there are eleven words people most want to hear when they are near the end of their lives. According to a physician who has been present at the bedsides of too many dying patients to number, the words they long to hear are “I’ll miss you,” “Thank you,” “I forgive you,” and “I love you.” If they could hear only one of these statements on their deathbed, according to Sweet, most people would choose “I love you.” Yet in our everyday lives, these are the three words that all too many people find too difficult to say (Sweet, 1).

The word love has been used so often in the common vernacular of our day that it tends toward being intangible. It is a threadbare word that we have used so often to mean everything that it ends up meaning little or nothing. However, Christian thinkers agree that love is the central concept of Christianity. Love refers both to the nature of God and the divine nature of relationships. Love covers a broad network of interdependent relationships between God and the universe; God and humanity; God and the church; God and human beings; between human beings and other human beings; and, between each human being and himself and herself.

As the Joseph story begins, everything appears quiet and peaceful. Jacob’s older sons have been joined by their younger brother Joseph as they tend their flocks. An opportunity for companionship, familial bonding, and brotherly love are clearly within reach of these brothers. Here is a grand opportunity for them to pass on their wisdom and experience to their younger brother. Everything seems to be in place for love to abound. Even though their family seems ideal, just below the surface of this tranquil scene, three of the nastiest of human passions are festering, ready with deadly effect and far-reaching implications to break out into disharmony. These three are tale bearing, favoritism, and envy (Gibson, 225). Without love to bind these brothers together, disaster seems inevitable.

B. Biblical Background

With the introduction of this Joseph story, the writer is moving Israel’s ancestral history to a new generation. All the promises of Abraham and the future of Jacob and his clan are now lodged with Joseph. This purposive act is the very thing his brothers are not willing to concede. They do not see the hand of God made manifest in the younger Joseph; rather, they see a doting father favoring to excess a son born in his old age. Joseph is now called upon to serve a promise. His very name means “add.” He is added to the lineage of Abraham by the mercy of God. His father simply accedes early to the will of God with
his favoritism of the younger son. The dream, at the heart of this narrative, further alienates the brothers. The story unfolds without analysis as the dream is born into a hopeless triangle: the boy, the father, and the brothers (Brueggemann, 299).

The boy chosen by his father and God is young and therefore not able to do much work. From the beginning, Joseph has been able to get away with everything the older brothers had not been permitted to do. It is easy for them to resent their younger brother, especially when he becomes a tattler. Out of this deep, arbitrary, almost embarrassing devotion, Jacob gives Joseph a special robe, a mark of regal status, demonstrating that this son is the wave of the future—clearly intending to show that the promises made to Jacob long ago are still at work in his seed. The brothers in the story are observant and sensitive. They see what the writer of the story openly acknowledges. Jacob is partial to Joseph. His arbitrary love for his younger son stokes the hatred of the older brothers. Trouble is certain to come in such a triangle of love and hate (Brueggemann, 300).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God at Work through a Family Torn by Hatred and Alienation

(Genesis 37:2-4)

These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

The tensions and grievances driving this story arise from the breakup of the family caused by favoritism, foolishness, jealousy, and deceit. The brokenness in the family (verses 2-5) eventually leads to separation—with Joseph carted off and sold as a servant in Egypt (Roop, 240). At the outset, Joseph is portrayed as a faithful son among unfaithful sons. At the young age of seventeen, he can only be a helper to his brothers in the shepherding of the flock. His subordinate status is like the position of Joshua to Moses or of Gehazi to Elijah. His youth also justifies his assignment to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the wives of his father Jacob (Jacob, 248).

Soon we see the first element of tension in the family. Joseph brought their father a “bad report” about his brothers. Some translate this action as a report about his brothers’ evil deeds. The writer does not tell us whether the story was true or false, although the word for “bad report” could indicate gossip, plotting, and misinformation (Roop, 240). The tattletale report seems to have endeared Joseph to Jacob even more, while equally distancing him from his brothers.

Jacob’s favoritism for Joseph was on constant display. Because he was the son of his old age, Jacob loved Joseph more than any other of his children and made him a long robe with sleeves (verse 3). The coat was a special coat usually worn by an eastern chieftain—the kind of coat given to the son destined to be the father’s heir. It marked Joseph out as the one to whom Jacob intended to bequeath rulership of the clan and the lion’s share of his property. It
set him apart from his brothers and put him on an equal footing with his father (Phillips, 295). But the other brothers became very jealous of Joseph and his coat. The very sight of it added fresh venom to their hatred of their younger brother. After all, Joseph was not his father’s firstborn, but he was the firstborn of Rachel, the true bride of Jacob’s heart. The robe added insult to injury, and their father’s preference for the younger son rubbed salt into their open wounds of hatred and jealousy.

Predictably, the older brothers hated Joseph and could not speak peaceably to him (verse 4). The natural familial bond of love that ought to exist between siblings had been injured and was about to be ruptured beyond repair. The father who should have been doing all in his power to bring his children together was largely responsible for the breach. But the brothers hated Joseph, not their father. Those who are envious often turn their hatred on the one favored, not the one who showed the favoritism. Love’s defining characteristics of identity, understanding, and empathy are absent. Their hatred is so amplified that they can no longer greet their brother in a civilized manner (Ross, 598).

B. When Dreams Cause Division among Loved Ones

(Genesis 37:5-11)

And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

The sibling rivalry between Joseph and his brothers continues to escalate in verses 5-11. Joseph, lacking sensitivity, or determined to maintain a place of superiority over his brothers, described to them a dream he had had. He told of a harvest time when his brothers’ sheaves bowed down to his sheaves. While Joseph did not ask for this dream, he shared it with them instead of keeping it to himself—as he probably should have, given the tense nature of the relationship with his brothers—causing them to hate him even more. During this time in human history, dreams were thought to offer divine revelations of coming events, as, of course, this dream did. The anger of Joseph’s brothers rose to the boiling point (Williams, 254).

Later, Joseph had a second dream where eleven stars, the sun, and the moon bowed down to him. Still seemingly oblivious to their reaction to the previous dream, he told his brothers this dream also. He might as well have thrown gasoline on a glowing fire. Joseph went on to tell his father of the dreams and was rebuked by him, but the father did nothing more to douse the spreading flames of envy and hatred.

The emotion of hatred is referenced three times in this section. Such an intense feeling is a deep-rooted and sufficient motive for murderous intent. Hatred not only has the capacity to destroy the object of the hatred, but it eventually
destroys the ones doing the hating. It is a no-win situation all around. During the era of the Civil Rights Movement in America, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. refused to hate whites who spoke evil of him, threatened him, and even tried to harm his family. King intuitively understood that hate had the capacity to destroy in all directions. Thus, King insisted on an ethic of love in his dealings with all human beings, color notwithstanding.

While the jealousy mentioned in verse 11 is not the same as hatred, it does mean one’s loss of composure in the face of another person’s unmerited good fortune or luck. Jealousy has the capacity to simmer and sour every relationship in which it is allowed to fester (Jacob, 251). Its only antidote is love—where one lifts others as opposed to fuming over their good fortune.

C. What Happens when Hate Wins
   (Genesis 37:23-24a)

And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit.

From the outset, the brothers hate Joseph (37:4-5, 8). Three times we are told this and then we are shown how they feel about him: they smolder (37:11); they recognize an opportunity (37:18-20); and they finally seize upon it and act (37:22-23). Their hatred is provoked by their father’s love for and demonstration of that love toward their youngest brother. It is further sparked by young Joseph’s own boasting. This combination of their resentments leads them to seize their opportunity to rid themselves of this bragging, tattling, favored child. It is a long-awaited opportunity that is just too good to pass up (Humphreys, 81).

Away from their father’s house, pasturing the flock in faraway Dothan, they finally see their opportunity to have their way with their younger brother. There is no indication in this passage that anyone sought love’s higher ground. None of the brothers, including Joseph, reached out to the others in a spirit of forgiveness, hoping to keep the situation from getting worse. In the absence of common sense, feelings of resentment and anger can fester. The thing the brothers saw as representing their father’s favoritism—Joseph’s coat of many colors—is the thing they stripped from him first. Why did the coat arouse such rage? In the minds of his brothers, it had become identified with Joseph’s very person. When it was torn off him, Reuben could indeed say “The boy is no more” (37:30) (Cotter, 275). In the absence of familial love and a generous concern for the welfare of one another, the brothers sit and have a meal near the pit in which young Joseph is intended to die. Hatred has no shame and knows no bounds.

D. What the Brothers Intended for Evil, God Intended for Good
   (Genesis 37:28)

Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Having decided against outright murdering Joseph, the older brothers hatch a plan to explain his absence to their would-be grieving father. They lift Joseph out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt for twenty pieces of silver. They then take Joseph’s special garment and dip it in goat’s blood to deceive their father, intending to tell him that Joseph was killed by a wild beast. Thus, the story of Joseph and the strife
he incites comes to its sad conclusion (Cotter, 276). However, what the brothers meant for evil, God intended for good.

Later in this story, the reader will learn that God has not been absent from these activities, even though up to this point His name has not been mentioned. God is at work even through the worst pain and betrayal this family can inflict on one another. Even in evil, God works for good (Fretheim, 601). When human love cannot find a way to reconcile, God’s love will. Yet, it is not exclusively God’s activity. There is no divine determinism here where God fixes things despite our actions. The choice is ours when it comes to reconciliation. God will lay the path of reconciliation before us, but in the end, families must choose to live in harmony with one another.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Genesis 37 introduces us to Joseph, the major figure of his generation. It also lays before us the major themes of this final part of the book. The themes are not new but are common to the human situation: family strife and the elder being supplanted by the younger; the unabashed favoring of one son over the others; alienation and estrangement on display in a family’s life; and love gone cold with no reconciliation in sight. The theme of dreams is a new feature in the story and marks an important change in the religious atmosphere of this part of the book. God does not openly intervene in the lives of the characters but, rather, influences people’s actions by means of significant dreams or simply by guiding the actions they take. The most crucial theological statement of these final chapters in this family’s messy situation are to be found in Genesis 50:20: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (NIV). God’s plans for humanity are carried forward despite human obstacles and encumbrances thrown in our paths (Cotter, Genesis, 269). Humans may temporarily usurp the purposes of God, but in the end, redeeming love will find a way.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the blessings of family. We ask Your forgiveness when we break those strong bonds of love that should bind all families together. Give us a spirit of reconciliation, and teach us how to live in peace and harmony with one another. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 31–September 6, 2020)

Issues of Love

MONDAY, August 31: “Rachel, Mother of Joseph and Benjamin” (Genesis 30:22-24; 35:16-20)
TUESDAY, September 1: “Joseph Checks on His Brothers at Dothan” (Genesis 37:12-17)
WEDNESDAY, September 2: “Jacob Is Convinced that Joseph Is Dead” (Genesis 37:29-36)
THURSDAY, September 3: “From Slave to Ruler of Egypt” (Psalm 106:1-6, 16-22)
FRIDAY, September 4: “Jacob Lives with Joseph in Egypt” (Acts 7:9-15a)
SATURDAY, September 5: “Caution: Disputes May Lead to Violence” (James 4:1-7)
SUNDAY, September 6: “Jealousy Divides Families” (Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28)
Bibliography


Other Works Consulted


*The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary.*

*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible.*

*The Oxford Dictionary.*
September 13, 2020

Lesson 2

GOD REWARDS OBEDIENCE

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT TOPIC:** Love versus Bitterness  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Choosing Faithfulness amidst Struggles

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Moving Up with God’s Love  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Stepping Up with Help from Above

**DEVOTIONAL READING**

1 Peter 5:5b-11

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 41:14-57  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52  
**KEY VERSES:** Genesis 41:39-40

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 41:14-57  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52  
**KEY VERSES:** Genesis 41:39, 40a

**Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52—KJV**

25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.  
26 The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.  
27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.  
28 This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh.  
29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:  
30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land;

**Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52—NIV**

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.  
26 “The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream.  
27 “The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.  
28 “It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do.  
29 “Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt,  
30 “but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land.
31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.
32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.
33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

37 And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants.
38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?
39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:
40 Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

50 And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him.
51 And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.
52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: It may be difficult to hold on to dreams of future success when faced with extreme hardships. What inner resources are needed to continue one’s quest for success? Because Joseph loved and obeyed God, he was able to engage in wise and discerning problem solving that motivated Pharaoh to appoint him second-in-command over all of Egypt.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Discover how Joseph’s love for God and faithfulness helped him find success in Egypt.
2. Aspire to remain steadfast in love and obedience to God when facing extreme hardships.
3. Celebrate God’s providential care in times of suffering.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Joseph’s promotions seem connected to the times when those in power over him saw God working through him.
—Even though Joseph’s dreams seemed self-serving, God was able to work through Joseph’s interpretative insights to the benefit of the Egyptians and many of their neighbors.
—Joseph’s interpretation of dreams impressed those who were able to offer him power and authority in Egypt.
—The blessing of God in this story extends to the whole of creation, not just to Joseph or other “chosen people.” This reminds us of God’s covenant with Abram to bless all peoples through him. God does not play favorites.
—Joseph was a young man, just thirty years old, when he was promoted to a very powerful and responsible position in Egypt. God used him just as he was to provide food for many people during a time of famine.
—A delicious irony can be associated with Joseph’s dreams. His first dreams caused him to boast of an exalted position, and as a result, he lost everything (Genesis 37). In interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph rose from a subservient position to one of great authority.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Joseph’s achievements seem connected to others’ seeing God working through him.
—God blessed all people and even creation through Joseph’s faithfulness, not just the “chosen people” (reminds us of God’s covenant with Abram to bless all peoples through him). God does not play favorites.
—Joseph’s dreams in last session’s story could be seen as self-serving and boastful, whereas his dreams in this story benefitted Egypt and many others.
—When Joseph was arrogant, he experienced some of his lowest times—but when he sought to help others and give God credit, he was granted power and honor.
—In interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph gave God credit both for the insights and his gifts.
—Although Joseph interpreted the dreams to tell what God was planning to do, the hearers still had choices in their response to the dream telling.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Chapter 41 completes the larger unit of Genesis 39–41. These chapters have been arranged, edited, and bound together to form a coherent story of Joseph’s rise, fall, and elevation in Egypt. They show God’s guiding hand in Joseph’s unfolding destiny (Scullion, 306). Chapters 39–40 function as preparation for chapter 41, where Joseph is elevated to high office after interpreting the dreams of the pharaoh. At the end of chapter 40, as is true of the end of chapter 37, Joseph is a forgotten, lonely figure. Sold into slavery by his own brothers, he is taken down to Egypt. The trials he may have suffered along the way are passed over in absolute silence. When we meet him again, he has arrived in Egypt and is being sold to a high Egyptian official, a man named Potiphar. However, the Potiphar story, which begins in chapter 39, signals the reversal of Joseph’s fortunes; he is highly favored and on the rise once again (Brueggemann, 325-6). The proof of his change in status comes to fruition when Joseph is called on to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh in chapter 41. He will be rewarded handsomely for his interpretation.
THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This chapter forms the turning point in the Joseph story, for it tells the way in which Joseph came to power. The story of Joseph began with his dream of rulership one day and his brothers’ disbelief that Joseph would actually rule over them (Genesis 37). The story ends with the fulfillment of that very dream in chapter 45. In between the revelation and fulfillment of Joseph’s initial dream is the account of Joseph’s coming to power in Egypt through the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams (Genesis 41) (Ross, 636).

The scene changes from Pharaoh’s prison to Pharaoh’s palace, mirroring Joseph’s rise from weakness to strength. This time, Pharaoh himself has two dreams (verses 1-7). Joseph is called from prison to interpret the dreams and to give advice based on them (verses 13-46). As a result, Pharaoh promotes Joseph to the highest position in his government—equivalent to prime minister. This episode contains a storyline common to many cultures: elevation of a person from low to high status because he or she solves a problem (Fretheim, 620).

PROFICIENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Asenath: daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Pharaoh gave her to Joseph, son of Jacob, as a wife, and she became the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh. Later, Jewish legends attempted to explain the apparent heathen origin of Joseph’s wife. It is claimed that although she was Egyptian, she was converted to Yahwism by Joseph (Interpreter’s, 248).

Ephraim: the second son of Joseph and Asenath, and the one for whom the tribe of Ephraim is named. Born in Egypt, probably before the seven-year famine, Ephraim and his older brother, Manasseh, were adopted by the aged patriarch Jacob after he arrived in Egypt. Although the younger of the two, Ephraim received the more significant blessing from Jacob over Joseph’s strong objections (Eerdmans Dictionary, 342).

Manasseh: the older son of Joseph and Asenath, and the person for whom the tribe of Manasseh is named. The dying Jacob adopted Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and, after the fashion of his own father Isaac, gave the greater blessing of the firstborn to Manasseh’s younger brother, Ephraim (Eerdmans Bible Dictionary, 684).

Pharaoh: In the Bible, a title used as a name, or a title prefixed to a name of the king of Egypt. The names of the pharaohs had meaning. The majority of them can be translated as assertive sentences. For example, Ramses is the “sun-god” (Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, 773).

Zaphenath-paneah: the Egyptian name given to Joseph when Pharaoh set him over all the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:45). The meaning of the name is not certain. Its derivation, “the deity speaks and lives,” is commonly accepted (Eerdmans, 1081).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Famine (verse 27)—Hebrew: raab (raw-awb’): hunger.
In charge (verse 40)—Hebrew: al (al): upon; “be over” (KJV); above.
Wise (verse 33)—Hebrew: chakam (khaw-kawm’): skilled; wise.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Adversity Can Make Us Bitter or Better
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Dreams and the Purposes of God
      (Genesis 41:25-32)
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Adversity Can Make Us Bitter or Better

Adversity in life can make us bitter, or it can make us better. Joseph had decided that the pain and heartache he had experienced in life—much of it from the hands of his older brothers—would make him stronger. Although it may not seem so at the time, how we respond to the setbacks and difficulties in life is our choice. Often, we have no hand in what befalls us, but we do have the power of choice in terms of how we respond to what is facing us. There are those who are never able to overcome unexpected reversals in their lives. This is especially true when the reversal seems unjust and unfair. Many question God’s goodness and wonder how God could allow such a fate to befall them. The pain is even more difficult to bear when the one undergoing the suffering has made every effort to be faithful to God in his or her life.

God has never promised to spare us from the hardships and disappointments that all people face in their lives from time to time. However, He has promised never to leave us alone in our hour of trial. God has promised to be present with us when it is our time to walk through the deep and dark valleys of life. It is His abiding presence and steadfast love that give us the strength to see it through. There is an Arabian proverb that states that all sunshine and no rain makes for a desert in anyone’s life. The storm and rain must come to all of us, but in such hours we have the confident assurance that God will see us through and that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Throughout Joseph’s trials the narrator’s constant refrain is simple yet affirming: “And the LORD was with Joseph.”

B. Biblical Background

In Genesis 37–40, Joseph’s life had fallen into hopelessness. He was imprisoned on false allegations. He was presumed dead by the people who loved him. He was forgotten by the cupbearer, the one person in Egypt who had any appreciation for his gift of interpretation. In addition, for a time he seemed doomed to remain incarcerated. Though unknown to Joseph, God had always been at work through him to open the revelation of His faithfulness and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was the power of God that eventually got Joseph released from prison. God disturbed the sleep of the mighty Pharaoh with dreams he did not understand (Hoogsteen, 41-42).

B. A Promotion Ordered by God

(Genesis 41:33)

C. What Humans Mean for Ill God Means for Good

(Genesis 41:37-40)

D. Standing on the Promises of God

(Genesis 41:50-52)

III. Concluding Reflection
Pharaoh ruled over the far reaches of Egypt. He was deemed the all-powerful lord and god of the civilized world. He held the power of life and death over his subjects. He was even worshipped as a deity. However, the Lord God of heaven—by simply troubling his sleep—threw the mighty Pharaoh into despair. Even Pharaoh was not immune to the power of the Almighty. Pharaoh’s dreams were so grand that neither he nor his wisemen could unravel their interpretation. Pharaoh’s dreams also jostled the memory of his cupbearer—who had forgotten all about his promise to Joseph—about a Hebrew slave with an acute ability to interpret dreams.

Pharaoh thought that he ruled absolutely over his vast domain. But when he could not interpret his dreams and had to call on an incarcerated Hebrew slave, that act was proof that unconditional sovereignty belongs to God alone. Pharaoh learned this lesson, and after him this same truth was brought home to Canaanite kings, as well as to David and Solomon, and to subsequent world rulers on the order of Nebuchadnezzar, Ahasuerus, and even Alexander of Macedonia (Hoogsteen, 42-45).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Dreams and the Purposes of God
   (Genesis 41:25-32)

   And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

   Trials may be viewed from two standpoints, and it will make all the difference to our spiritual life and peace which of these two points of view we take. From the human side, Joseph’s suffering was due to injustice on the part of Potiphar, and ingratitude on the part of the cupbearer. From the divine side, these years had to be endured for the purpose of training and preparing Joseph for the great work that lay before him. If we look only at the human side of trials, we will become discouraged, even irritated and angered. However, when we look at things from the divine side, we will see God in everything and come in our own way to understand that God is at work in all things to bring about good for those who love Him (Thomas, 389).

   Pharaoh had dreams that no one could interpret. The cupbearer’s memory is jogged, and in a long speech he introduces Pharaoh to a “young Hebrew” who can open the future to others by interpreting dreams (Roop, 259). Languishing in prison no longer, Joseph is summoned. After being told the two dreams, Joseph provided an interpretation (Genesis 41:25-33). He told Pharaoh that both dreams revealed related facts about the future. Soon, God would bring about seven years of great abundance. That would be followed by seven years of famine.

   What a circuitous route Joseph’s life took to arrive at this point. He interpreted dreams
while still in his father’s house and became hated by his brothers. He was elevated in Potiphar’s house, and then sent to prison on false charges—but then he was about to occupy a royal position in Egypt based on his ability to interpret dreams. His had been a rocky journey, but one where God had watched over him carefully (Williams, 278). God has a way of leading and guiding us through the pitfalls of life. At times, it can appear that our lives have been given over to random events completely out of our control. However, as the Scriptures attest, God always watches over and provides for His own. Even when the love of others grows cold, God continues to love us unconditionally. God’s love knows no bounds.

B. A Promotion Ordered by God
(Genesis 41:33)

Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

Having shared with Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams, Joseph went on to give him a short lesson in economics. He advised the king to appoint a man to set over the land of Egypt to husband the harvests of the plenteous years against the years of want and woe (verse 33) (Phillips, 321). The advice Joseph gave Pharaoh was based on the hard-won experience and managerial skills he developed while working in Potiphar’s house (Williams, 276). Though none of the advice he gave was suggested in the dream, the policy he outlined would obviously need a skilled overseer. He told a grateful Pharaoh what he believed must be done in order to prepare the land for the lean years. He told Pharaoh that it would be necessary to appoint a wise and discerning man (Turner, 181).

Pharaoh was pleased not only with the interpretation but with the man—for God was clearly active in him. Therefore, Joseph was selected for the position, and once again his career is in the ascendancy. Just as Potiphar trusted him with everything in his house, so Pharaoh would trust him with everything in the realm. Once again, to the speechless Joseph, Pharaoh says that he is placed over the whole land of Egypt. Signs of office and privilege follow: a ring, a gold collar, and fine linen garments. Joseph is now allowed a fine chariot with a herald to cry out before him (Cotter, 302). Joseph’s ascendancy to the Egyptian throne shows that it is God who rules the universe and takes care of His own. It was the providential hand of God that saw to it that Joseph would appear before the Egyptian king when he needed someone to interpret two vexing dreams.

C. What Humans Mean for Ill God Means for Good
(Genesis 41:37-40)

And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

It was God’s will to elevate Joseph to a position of great power and prominence in the land. God had shown Joseph His plans for his life many years before in his boyhood dreams. The long years of discipline and frustration, heartache and pain had been designed to prepare Joseph for the high post he was about to command. It was the will of God not only to present Joseph to Pharaoh, but also to promote Joseph through Pharaoh. He would make Joseph the highest civil officer in the
land. Perhaps the post was vacant at the time; perhaps it was held by one of the courtiers standing confounded before Pharaoh. We do not know. All we know is that Joseph was lifted immediately to the highest post in the land and that near absolute power was placed in his hands (Phillips, 319-21). Joseph’s interpretation and advice moved Pharaoh to exclaim, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people” (verse 39-40a, NRSV).

Imagine if Potiphar, the Egyptian official who purchased Joseph from the Midianite merchants, had been present when Joseph was elevated by Pharaoh. We can only imagine what must have happened the night Potiphar arrived home. “Do you remember the Hebrew slave we had around here some years ago, the one you accused of molesting you? I only hope your accusation was just because Pharaoh has just appointed him to the highest office in the land.” Pharaoh saw great wisdom and virtue in Joseph. That wisdom had come to Joseph at a great price. He weathered the storms of life and came out of them a better, more disciplined person. He seemed to know intuitively that what others meant for ill in his life, God meant for good. Many of us are still in God’s school, learning the lessons of life. How are we getting along? Are we preparing for that day when God’s will shall be made manifest in our lives, or are we failing the tests He sends us from time to time? (Phillips, 321).

D. Standing on the Promises of God

And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

Not only did the Egyptian king elevate Joseph to the highest civil position in the land, but he also gave him a new Egyptian name—Zaphenath-paneah (verse 45). Additionally, he also gave Joseph a wife from a prestigious Egyptian family: her name was Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Asenath bore Joseph two sons. The firstborn was named Manasseh (“he causes to forget”), because God made Joseph “forget” all his previous loneliness and misery (41:51). The second son was named “Ephraim” (“twice fruitful”), because God had made Joseph “fruitful” in the land of distress (verse 52) (Youngblood, 257). Despite Joseph’s success and status, he did not forsake his heritage. He gave his sons Hebrew names. In Joseph’s naming his children, the themes of forgetfulness and fruitfulness are highlighted. What an incredible gift: God enables us to forget, to put the past behind us, to move beyond dwelling on misfortunes and get on with the ever-new gifts and opportunities that God brings. Joseph appears in this chapter as an ideal figure—patient through numerous setbacks and deep suffering; loyal to God while honoring human relationships in the midst of severe trials and temptations. Joseph stands as a model for the godly life (Fretheim, 624).

Genesis 37–41 tells the story of how God was with Joseph and of how God prospered him in everything he did. Joseph found favor in the eyes of his father (37:3), in the eyes of Potiphar (39:4), in the eyes of the prison warden (39:21), and in the eyes of Pharaoh himself (Youngblood, 257) (41:38). In all the pitfalls
and reversals in Joseph’s life, God was with him to fulfill his purposes in his life as well as in the lives of his father, Jacob, and his brothers. In the end, love wins. Those who belong to God must find in themselves the power to forgive and keep on loving. It is not our task to exact revenge on those we feel have done us wrong; rather, our task is to seek to be reconciled to all people in the full knowledge that God will be faithful and just in His dealings with us all. This story recounts the faithfulness of Joseph and his utter dependence on almighty God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One writer has said that the best way out is to go through. No one likes to undergo sustained conflict in their lives. This is especially true when the conflict involves loved ones and friends. However, from time to time some conflict is unavoidable in our lives. There is an old Arabian proverb that goes, “All sunshine and no rain makes for a desert in anyone’s life.” Storms will come—but those storms, like the rain that falls from heaven, can lead to seasons of refreshment and renewed vigor in our lives. Days of difficulty and hardship that shake us to our very core will come to all at some point.

Joseph’s life was filled with reversals and paradoxes. One moment he is favored, and the next moment he is being thrown into a pit or into jail. He is dearly loved by his father, Jacob, and severely hated by his older brothers. He is mistreated, lied on, and forgotten by people throughout his life. Yet, he endures and is ultimately victorious over the difficulties that befall him in life. Love will find a way. Love for all humankind and the guiding hand of God will eventually see all of us through to a brighter day. We live in hope that the struggles we encounter in life will not have the last word in our lives. Just as the Scriptures say that the Lord was with Joseph, that same God has promised to be with us.

PRAYER

Eternal God, we are grateful to You that You never leave, even in days of turmoil and despair. We ask that when it is our time to endure the difficulties of life that You would give us the strength to see it through. Help us ever to trust in the power of love, and do not let us be defined by the challenges and pitfalls of life. We entrust our lives to You, for we are confident that You will never leave us alone, even in the most trying of life’s circumstances. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 7-13, 2020)

God Rewards Obedience

MONDAY, September 7: “Paul and Barnabas Are Appointed for Ministry” (Acts 13:1-5)
TUESDAY, September 8: “Joseph, Chief Interpreter of Dreams” (Genesis 41:9-13)
WEDNESDAY, September 9: “Dreams of Cows and Corn Are Explained” (Genesis 41:14-24)
THURSDAY, September 10: “Preparing for the Expected Famine” (Genesis 41:34-36)
FRIDAY, September 11: “Storing Grain for the Future” (Genesis 41:41-49)
SATURDAY, September 12: “Egypt Feeds the Middle East” (Genesis 41:53-57)
SUNDAY, September 13: “Leadership during Crisis” (Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52)
September 20, 2020

Lesson 3

LOVE VERSUS GUILT

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT TOPIC: Haunted by Shame?
YOUTH TOPIC: When Loving Is Complicated

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Painful Memories
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Love Should Not Hurt

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 51

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 42
PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 42:6-25
KEY VERSE: Genesis 42:22

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 42
PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 42:6-25
KEY VERSE: Genesis 42:22

Genesis 42:6-25—KJV

6 And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.
7 And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.
8 And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.
9 And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.
10 And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.
11 We are all one man’s sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.
12 And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

Genesis 42:6-25—NIV

6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground.
7 As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he asked. “From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”
8 Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.
9 Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”
10 “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food.
11 “We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”
12 “No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”
13 And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.
14 And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:
15 Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.
16 Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.
17 And he put them all together into ward three days.
18 And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:
19 If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses:
20 But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verifi ed, and ye shall not die. And they did so.
21 And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.
22 And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.
23 And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.
24 And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.
25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people allow guilt of the past to poison their present. Is it ever possible to be free from condemnation for past actions? When Joseph saw and remembered his brothers who sold him into Egyptian slavery, he showed compassion while motivating them to recall and take responsibility for their earlier actions.
LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain why Joseph’s brothers interpreted their misfortune as punishment for their sins.
2. Sense the need for wholeness in their personal relationships.
3. Identify ways to accept God’s forgiveness and strive to offer grace to those who mistreat them.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Joseph’s brothers bowed before him like the sheaves in the dream he described to them, a dream that amplified their jealousy of him when they were younger.
—Twenty years or so have passed since Joseph and his brothers last saw one another, so it is understandable that his brothers would not have recognized him. Joseph was dressed as an Egyptian nobleman and spoke that language to them through an interpreter.
—Joseph’s power and authority as granted by Pharaoh was evident in the fact that he could have had his brothers imprisoned and ordered that their payment for the grain be returned to them.
—When Joseph tested his brothers’ integrity by imprisoning them, the brothers wondered aloud about this being payback (karma?) for their mistreatment of Joseph when they were younger.
—It is significant that Joseph asked his brothers to bring back Benjamin, his only full brother; their mother, Rachel, died in childbirth while delivering Benjamin (Genesis 35:16-20).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—When Joseph’s brothers appeared before him, they bowed just like the sheaves in the dream he described to them that angered the brothers when they were younger.
—Joseph loved his brothers, even after the hurtful ways they had treated him. He worked to forgive them for their mistreatment of him. His tears show us that he missed them during their years apart.
—The brothers went to Egypt at the urging of their father to find food for their families in the time of a terrible famine. Joseph recognized them immediately but the brothers did not recognize Joseph.
—When they were imprisoned by Joseph, not knowing who he was, the brothers wondered aloud about this being payback for their mistreatment of their brother Joseph when they were younger.
—We see how powerful Joseph is in the fact that he could have his brothers imprisoned and also had the authority to order that their payment for the grain be returned to them.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This journey of the brothers into Egypt forms the central part of the travel account of Genesis 42: the meeting with Joseph (verses 6-7a); the interrogation of the brothers by Joseph and the measures that result from it (verses 7b-25). Included in this account is the arrest of the brothers in verse 17 and the subsequent arrest of Simeon in verse 24 (Westermann, 106).
We learn in the previous chapter that it is the famine predicted by Joseph that sends the brothers into Egypt. The effects of the famine spread beyond Egypt to surrounding countries (see Genesis 41:57). We do not know how people became aware of Egypt’s stored-up supply of surplus grain. Verse 57 simply prepares us for the visit of Joseph’s brothers to Egypt in search of food (chapter 42). The famine threatened not only Egypt and nearby Canaan but also the known world. The famine of the Joseph story functions as a counterpart to the Flood in primeval history. Joseph is an antitype of Noah, building storehouses just as Noah built his ark. The storehouses of Joseph, however, were for the survival of the masses. The ark of Noah was for the survival of one man and his family (Hamilton, 513).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Chapter 42 presents to us a very different Joseph from the one we have seen in previous chapters. In chapter 37, he is a naïve and guileless boy who bears some responsibility for the fate that has befallen him. In chapters 39–41, he is a noble and effective man of integrity who is neither intimidated by the scheming woman of chapter 39, the royal officers of chapter 40, nor the Pharaoh of chapter 41. He understands the enormity of the office he now holds. He is not only in control of the scene in chapter 42, but he seems to take delight in his power to intimidate and threaten (Brueggemann, 336-37).

The famine is only the occasion for the narrative. The true agenda of the narrative is the opportunity for the members of this dysfunctional family to come to terms with each other, with the past, and with the dream that occasioned the original discord many years ago. This family is struggling for more than survival. They are also struggling for faith enough to trust in the promises of God. They struggle to believe in the power of a dream. The life of this family is a game with many players. None of the players know all the rules because the key player, God, is always less than visible but no less crucial to the outcome of the story. Despite the promises and the dreams, this family struggles to be reconciled to one another knowing what they know about each other. Yet, God continues to draw them together, to call them to be the people He would have them to be (Brueggemann, 337).

PROminent CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Benjamin: Jacob’s last son, born after his return from Mesopotamia. He was named Ben-Oni by his mother, Rachel, who died in childbirth, although Jacob preferred the name Benjamin (Genesis 35:18). He is mentioned often in association with Joseph, his only full brother (Harper’s Bible Dictionary, 104).

Reuben: the firstborn son of Jacob by his wife Leah and the ancestor of the tribe that bears his name (Genesis 29:32). His name indicates that God had seen Leah’s affliction. Genesis 30:14-15 depicts Reuben as a child devoted to his mother who gathers mandrakes and presents them to her (Harper’s, 866).

Simeon: the second son of Jacob and Leah (Genesis 29:33). Simeon and his brother Levi massacred the men of Shechem to avenge the rape of their sister, Dinah (Genesis 34). Simeon was later held hostage in Egypt when Joseph sent the other brothers back to Canaan for Benjamin (Genesis 42:24). Subsequently, Simeon and his six sons migrated to Egypt with the entire family of Jacob (Harper’s, 954).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Bowed (verse 6)—Hebrew: shachab (shaw-khaw’): bowed down.

Canaan (verse 5 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: Kna’an (ken-ah’-an): land west of the Jordan where the Jews came and where they settled, subduing the inhabitants.

Tested (verse 15)—Hebrew: bachan (baw-khan’): examined; “proved” (KJV); tried (a trial).
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Payday Someday

Joseph’s route to Egypt was circuitous indeed, but once there, the guiding hand of God was with him all the way. Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream eventually led him to occupy the highest civil office in the land. The famine that Joseph predicted came to pass, and the hateful brothers who sold him into slavery had to come to Egypt to buy grain for their families. Unbeknownst to them, the Egyptian officer before whom they bowed—Zaphenath-paneah—was in fact their brother Joseph. The reckoning for their evil deeds had been a long time in coming, but now it has finally arrived.

When Joseph saw the Lord fulfilling his dreams, he could not marshal the strength to pay evil for evil. How could he? A reality much greater and deeper than personal satisfaction possessed his senses and ruled his heart. The second-in-command over Egypt—their long-lost brother—aborted every selfish desire to exact revenge on his brothers. Out of the providential love God had bestowed upon him throughout his life he shared that same love with his brothers. With that love, he tested them severely and pressed them to confess their culpability in enslaving him, but his love for them ruled the day (Hoogsteen, 46-47).

B. Biblical Background

The scene in this chapter shifts back and forth between Egypt and Canaan, between palace and local village. The reader encounters Jacob and Joseph’s brothers for the first time since chapter 37 (Fretheim, 626). The unit opens by reminding us that Joseph holds two positions—his political position as administrator, or governor, of the land, and his economic position as the one who dispenses provisions or sells to all the people of the land (Genesis 42:6). The stage is now set for Joseph and his brothers to encounter one another again, described in verses 6-25. Verse 6 immediately brings the brothers into the presence of the highest official in Egypt—their long-lost brother Joseph. The brothers bow down to Joseph, showing respect for both his political and economic authority. Joseph not only exercises
political authority over his brothers’ lives, but he also exercises economic authority over them, which means he is the one who gets to decide whether they eat or starve to death (Hamilton, 518-19). Joseph now has the power, and the brothers are at the mercy of his decisions. What God showed him in the dreams of his youth has now come to pass.

Even though some twenty years have passed, Joseph immediately recognizes his brothers when they appear before him to ask for grain. However, he chooses not to reveal himself to them. He only asks about their origins. One can only imagine how difficult it would have been for Joseph to restrain himself or to control his emotions. What is going on in his head? Is he happy to see them? Does their presence bring bitter memories to mind? The brothers for their part do not recognize Joseph. There are any number of reasons why this would be the case. They assume he is dead. He is probably clean-shaven, and he addresses them in the Egyptian language through an interpreter. He is wearing the clothes of an Egyptian officer, and he has an Egyptian name. Their failure to recognize Joseph in this instance emulates their failure to recognize the Joseph that God was preparing him to be in Genesis 37 (Hamilton, 519). The brothers are about to come face-to-face with their past deeds, which have produced guilt and shame.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Dream Come True

(Genesis 42:6-9)

And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth. And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

It soon became known throughout Canaan that there was an abundance of grain in Egypt. Delegations were travelling southward to purchase grain there and bringing it home with them. It began to be obvious that Jacob would have to send his sons down to Egypt, and they were aware of this. It appears from the dialogue between Jacob and his sons that they were wondering what to do. Jacob had to take the initiative to instruct them on what to do: go down to Egypt. Jacob finally insisted that they go, each to bring back food for his own family and servants—for they had now reached the point where there was imminent danger of death by starvation. The youngest son, Benjamin, was kept home because Jacob did not want to take a chance of anything happening to him on the long and dangerous trip (Morris, 594).

Verse 6 immediately brings the brothers into the presence of the highest official in Egypt, upon whom they now depend—Joseph, the brother they mistreated so many years ago. They do not recognize him. The fact that they bow down before Joseph fulfills the dream in Genesis 37:7. The brothers’ repeated use of lord/servant language reinforces what Joseph saw happening in his dream many years ago. Although Joseph recognizes them, he decides to
treat them as if they were strangers. He speaks in an abrupt, bureaucratic manner, refusing to take them at their word (verse 8). He questions them sharply, repeatedly accusing them of spying (verse 9). The tables have been turned on the brothers; they now experience what Joseph experienced in chapter 37, including the possibility of being assigned to a comparable fate (Fretheim, 628). Joseph’s dream has now come true, and the brothers who treated him so harshly are now at his mercy. How will Joseph act? Will he be guided by mercy or revenge? Will he take the high road or the low road in dealing with his brothers? Joseph chose to be merciful, remembering the promise of God in his dream and the goodness of God in his life.

B. A Forgiving Heart Prompted by Love
   (Genesis 42:10-17)

And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man’s sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies. And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not. And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. And he put them all together into ward three days.

By the time his brothers appeared before him to buy grain, Joseph was more anxious for reconciliation with his brothers than for vengeance. He longed to be able to do something that would restore close family ties and a distinct family unity and sense of purpose. As he had been elevated to such prominence in Egypt, he must have realized that somehow this was for the very accomplishment of God’s plan for his family. But he wanted first to determine their true attitudes and then to set events in motion that would finally bring his brothers to a true attitude of repentance and unity toward God and among themselves (Morris, 596).

Joseph wanted to be sure that his brothers were remorseful of the crimes they had committed against him. Even though he desperately desired to be reconciled to them, he wanted to be sure they had repented of their wrongdoing (Ross, 652). Joseph began his interrogation of his brothers with a false accusation that they were spies. The brothers vehemently denied that they were spies (verse 11). As his brothers continued to insist that they had come merely to buy food, they began to volunteer more information about themselves. They were all brothers who lived and worked with their father back in the land of Canaan. As they talked, Joseph had no doubt been wondering about his youngest brother, Benjamin. At this point, he proposed to test the validity of their story about being brothers by having them send for their youngest brother. In the meantime, he would continue to assume they were spies, and keep them all in prison. As they had sent him away into slavery and imprisonment, so now it would be good for them to have a similar experience (Morris, 596-97).

C. Confession Is Good for the Soul
   (Genesis 42:18-21)

And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and
ye shall not die. And they did so. And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

Joseph made it known to the brothers that he would keep them in prison until they could verify their story by bringing their younger brother back to Egypt. However, after three days he summoned them again and told them it would not be necessary for all of them to remain there (verse 18). He reasoned that three days in prison would be enough to cause all of them to begin at least to have a change of heart from their earlier behavior and attitudes. By this time, their emotions and consciences were surely in considerable turmoil. Their minds were now exercised in remembering what they had done to their younger brother. They sensed that what they were now going through was a very appropriate punishment for what they had done to their younger brother in the past (Morris, 598).

Moving in the direction of reconciliation, Joseph then told his brothers that it would be enough for only one of them to be kept in prison while the rest of them returned home. In the meantime, they could proceed to carry the food back to their households which they said they had come to acquire (verse 19). Once they returned with their youngest brother, Benjamin, their words would be verified, and they would not die (verse 20). The brothers then began to confess their wrongdoing from years past. Standing before a brother they no longer recognized, they had gone through a truly traumatic experience the past few days, and it had stirred their consciences to the depths. Not only had they conspired to slay and then, changing their minds, to sell their brother, but they had ignored his anguished pleadings to spare him. They realized fully that they were now receiving what they had long deserved, and so their bitterness was directed against themselves, not against the governor (verses 21-22) (Morris, 599).

D. God Sees the Evil and the Good

(Genesis 42:22-25)

And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required. And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter. And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes. Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

Reuben reminded them that he had tried to stop them but that they would not listen (verse 22). The way they had mistreated Joseph had entombed them in guilt. They automatically felt that their dilemma was a result of their being punished by God for what they had done. Hearing his brothers speak to one another caused Joseph to turn his head to keep them from seeing him weep. Once he regained his composure, he ordered Simeon to be bound before their eyes. Why Simeon? Because he was the second oldest, and in Reuben’s absence he should have tried to protect young Joseph. In ordering Simeon to be bound, Joseph could have been saying to his brothers, “You willingly left me twenty years ago, you will now be forced to leave Simeon” (Williams, 284).

Their sacks were loaded with grain. The money they had used to pay for the grain was secretly replaced in their bags. Joseph also made
sure they had provisions for their journey (verse 25). One of the brothers discovered money in his sack on the trip home. It made them all tremble with the thought that God was further punishing them (Williams, 284). The last thing they wanted the governor—their brother—to think is that they had tried to cheat him. For all the poetic justice of this scene in chapter 42 it seems an almost unbelievable series of disasters to launch on a group of men already worried enough about how they might feed their families. Even though Joseph requires the brothers to jump through several hoops, the reader of this story understands that Joseph has forgiven his brothers and simply desires for them to come back with his youngest brother, Benjamin. Their remorse and guilt are on full display, and Joseph’s love and unmatched forgiveness will soon be realized in their lives. With the help of God, Joseph has shown himself to be the bigger person. He wins the day with love!

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are some things that only time and distance can heal. Twenty and more years had elapsed since Joseph had experienced the cruelty and injustice of his brethren, and yet when he meets them again his love for them knows no bounds. All that he says and does is really prompted by his devoted love for them and their best interests. There is nothing stronger in this world than human love. It is the most stubborn emotion in the human condition. When you truly love you have something that water cannot drown, fire cannot burn, and the wind cannot blow away.

There are few passages more striking in the record of Holy Writ that show the power of conscience than that involving the brothers of Joseph. The greatest punishment a person can suffer is that which comes from within and comes from a consciousness of guilt.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that a way has been made for us to bow down before You and confess our sins. You have promised that if we confess our sins You are faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Teach us how to love one another and how to be reconciled to one another in every walk of life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 14-20, 2020)

Love versus Guilt

MONDAY, September 14: “‘Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner’” (Psalm 51:1-12)  
WEDNESDAY, September 16: “Brothers Are Sent to Egypt to Buy Grain” (Genesis 42:1-5)  
THURSDAY, September 17: “Joseph Returns Money with Grain” (Genesis 42:26-28)  
FRIDAY, September 18: “Joseph Questions the Motives of His Brothers” (Genesis 42:29-34)  
SATURDAY, September 19: “Jacob Vows Not to Send Benjamin” (Genesis 42:35-38)  
SUNDAY, September 20: “Joseph Confronts His Brothers for Past Behavior” (Genesis 42:6-25)
GOD’S PLAN REVEALED

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: Love Prevails over All
YOUTH TOPIC: When It Seems like God’s Plan Takes a Detour

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Love Never Fails
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Keeping Hope Alive

DEVOTIONAL READING
John 14:1-14

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Genesis 43; 45:1-15
PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15
KEY VERSE: Genesis 45:5

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Genesis 43; 45:1-15
PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15
KEY VERSE: Genesis 45:5

Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15—KJV
THEN JOSEPH could not refrain himself before all
them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man
to go out from me. And there stood no man with him,
while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.
2 And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house
of Pharaoh heard.
3 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth
my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer
him; for they were troubled at his presence.
4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to
me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am
Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.
5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with
yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send
me before you to preserve life.
6 For these two years hath the famine been in the land:
and yet there are five years, in the which there shall
neither be earring nor harvest.

Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15—NIV
THEN JOSEPH could no longer control himself before
all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone
leave my presence!” So there was no one with Joseph
when he made himself known to his brothers.
2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him,
and Pharaoh’s household heard about it.
3 Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father
still living?” But his brothers were not able to answer
him, because they were terrified at his presence.
4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to
me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your
brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!
5 “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry
with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to
save lives that God sent me ahead of you.
6 “For two years now there has been famine in the land,
and for the next five years there will be no plowing
and reaping.
7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.
8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:
11 And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.
12 And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.
13 And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.
14 And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.
15 Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Sometimes one is overwhelmed by tragic events in his or her life. What can keep hope alive after the struggle ends? Joseph told his brothers that what they meant as harm was God’s plan for saving them, a remnant of God’s people.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand how Joseph viewed his past mistreatment at the hands of his brothers.
2. Recognize how God might be at work in their difficult circumstances.
3. Respond to mistreatment not with vengeance but with creative, transforming initiatives.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

— Jacob, referred to throughout this chapter as Israel, made the very difficult decision to allow Benjamin to travel with his brothers to Egypt because the famine was so dire that his family would die without the grain and provisions they could obtain there.

— It is notable that Joseph is the direct object and God is the subject of every verb in Joseph’s speech about God’s actions despite and through his brothers’ treacherous acts earlier in their lives. Joseph seems to see God working for good even through his mistreatment and dark days.

— Throughout this story, Joseph was humble when he could have been prideful, and he wept when he could have been angry. As he grew older, Joseph also matured and grew wise.

— Joseph’s speech as he reveals his identity to his brothers seems to indicate that, many years later, he is able to see God’s working for good for his family even through his mistreatment and trials.

— Joseph seems to have retained faith in God through all that he endured.

— Joseph identifies God’s ultimate purpose to place him in a position to preserve a remnant of his family in the time of famine.

Teachers of CHILDREN

— Even though he was afraid of losing another beloved son, Jacob sent Benjamin along with his brothers to Egypt in the hopes that they could purchase more grain and provisions to keep the family alive.

— Joseph’s words to his brothers show how he is now able to see God’s working for good for his family even through his most difficult days.

— Throughout the story, Joseph was humble. He wept in love for his brothers and felt their pain.

— Joseph was faithful to God through all the good and bad he experienced.

— Joseph said in his speech that he understood now how his position in Egypt would allow him to help his family, even his brothers who had been so unkind to him.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Genesis 37–41 describes how and why Joseph went down to Egypt, and Genesis 42–47 tells us how and why Jacob eventually did the same. Neither man went willingly. Joseph was sold into slavery and then imprisoned, rising to prominence only later. Jacob went to Egypt only after a long and complex series of events compelled him to make the move. However, those events and the stories behind them give Genesis 42–47 its drama and suspense and make it one of the most absorbing sections in all of Genesis (Youngblood, 259). Whether one views Joseph as the gentle orchestrator of his brothers’ journeys back and forth to Egypt—or whether one views him as a vengeful and calculating tyrant who manipulates the emotions and actions of his brothers, the full sweep of this saga shows God’s working out His plan for what would become His chosen nation. This entire section demonstrates how God works through human agency to effect His will, sometimes in spite of human machinations to the contrary.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This sad saga of human betrayal and familial alienation is about to reach its conclusion in chapter
45. The brothers have sold Joseph, who eventually enters Egyptian bondage—but owing to his ability to interpret dreams, God has blessed him to become the chief civil servant (vice-regent) in the land during a time of great famine (Genesis 41:39-40). Eventually, the brothers who sold him into bondage must travel to Egypt in search of food (Genesis 42:1-2). Unbeknownst to them, the chief official to whom they are appealing for food is their long-lost brother. Initially, Joseph chose not to reveal his identity to his ten brothers (Genesis 42:7). He asks about their father and their younger brother and demands that the younger brother be brought before him if they are going to receive their much-needed aid (Genesis 42:20). He imprisoned their brother Simeon to guarantee their return (Genesis 42:24). Once back home in Canaan, they tell their father of their travails and inform him that the vice-regent is requiring them to bring Benjamin back with them in order to gain their brother Simeon’s release (Cotter, 307).

The brothers return with Benjamin in tow, receive their grain, and head home once again. Joseph, in what appears to be a cruel trick, has his steward load their bags with stolen items. The most egregious alleged theft will be purposely placed in young Benjamin’s bag—Joseph’s silver cup (Genesis 44:2). The Egyptians catch Benjamin in the trap and take him into custody. The brothers are now in an impossible situation for what their father, Jacob, feared has now befallen them—their brother Benjamin has been taken away from them. Judah steps up to the still unidentified Joseph and tells the entire family secret. Twenty years have passed since they engaged in a terrible act and sold their brother Joseph into slavery. Judah cannot imagine that this much-loved younger brother would have survived such an ordeal. He stops short of acknowledging that he took his father’s favorite son away, but he tells Joseph he cannot bring himself to do it again (Genesis 44:34). In an act of redemptive love, so unlike his actions twenty years earlier, Judah offers his life in the place of Benjamin’s.

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

**Benjamin:** the youngest son of Jacob by Rachel (Genesis 35:18), and the ancestor of one of the twelve tribes. As the youngest son, especially loved by his father and favored by Joseph (his only full brother), Benjamin plays a special role in the Joseph story. When listed in Scripture, he is usually named along with Joseph.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Goshen (verse 10)**—Hebrew: *Goshen* (go’-shen): a district in Egypt east of the lower Nile.

**Remnant (verse 7)**—Hebrew: *sheerith* (sheh-ay-reeth’): a residue, remainder; “posterity” (KJV).

**Sent (verse 5)**—Hebrew: *shalach* (shaw-lakh’): directed; dispatched; “did send” (KJV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. The Redemptive Purposes of God

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. The Difficulties of Reconciliation (Genesis 45:1-3)

B. God Is at Work to Bring About Good (Genesis 45:4-8)

C. The God Who Watches over His Own (Genesis 45:10-13)

D. Modeling God’s Love and Forgiveness (Genesis 45:14-15)

**III. Concluding Reflection**
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Redemptive Purposes of God

“I am Joseph!” This is a standard formula of self-disclosure used even by God throughout the Scriptures. It is more than a simple introduction; it is a self-assertion which serves to reshape and redefine the entire situation. The essential truth in the life of this dysfunctional family is that they must now live with the reality of a live, powerful, ruling Joseph. The brothers stood in fear before Joseph, for they had yet to realize that Joseph had completely broken with the past and was not out to exact revenge on them. Given his trickery in chapters 42 and 44, it is understandable that the brothers would believe that he would make them pay for their past actions. However, love covers a multitude of sins, and enough time had passed to allow Joseph to recognize that God was at work in the evil deeds of his brothers. God had a plan all along to redeem Israel unto Himself (Brueggemann, 344).

Joseph breaks with their sordid past and invites his brothers to put that pitiful past behind them. In his recognition of the plan of God for his family, Joseph opens to his brothers a new future, a new possibility, a new way of being in the world. It is a way that does not involve tit-for-tat, holding old grudges, or nursing hurtful memories. Joseph offers his brothers a move into the new future that God has for them. Herein lies the true meaning of this story. Oftentimes what people mean for ill God means for good. When the brothers recognize that it is Joseph, they are alarmed at the grave danger in which they think they stand. Joseph had every right to be angry with them. However, in the spirit of love he chooses a different path. Instead of a response that depends on their past estrangement, Joseph moves his brothers toward the new reality of God’s grace. “Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5, NASB) (Brueggemann, 344).

B. Biblical Background

Twenty years have passed since Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph is now vice-regent of Egypt, and in a time of widespread famine his brothers are forced to come to him for food. At this climactic point in the brothers’ sordid relationship, Joseph sits in a position to do with his brothers as he pleases. Yet, he makes no effort to hold their feet to the fire; his language and demeanor (loud weeping) evidence no anger or irritation. Joseph clearly has reconciliation in his heart and on his mind. He sets aside the trappings of royalty and enters the pathos of the situation, all for the sake of reconciliation. Whereas Joseph’s tests were indispensable in bringing the family to this moment, a display of power and control was insufficient finally to heal them. What was required of Joseph was to step outside of his role as Egyptian ruler (hence the dismissal of others) and join the family at an intimate and vulnerable level (Fretheim, 645).
No longer could there be the least doubt in Joseph’s mind that his brothers were completely changed men. He had subjected them to the most severe tests, and they had passed with flying colors. The brothers (through their spokesman, Judah) had shown that they had changed from the sort of people who could sell their brother into slavery into the sort of people who would sacrifice themselves for another. The testing itself had been a means of spiritual growth for them. They were now more conscious than ever of the leading hand of God and their responsibility to obey Him. They were more aware than ever of their own unworthiness and of God’s mercy. It is also here that a central theological assertion of the story is articulated: God uses human actions to achieve divinely intended ends, even if the human actions seem thoroughly evil (Cotter, 313).

With Judah making such a strong plea that Joseph allow him to take Benjamin’s punishment, Joseph could no longer control his emotions. In a sudden sweep of emotion, he cried for his attendants to leave the room. When he was alone with his brothers, he cried out to them that he was their brother Joseph, the one they thought was dead. This is perhaps the most dramatic confrontation and reunion in literature. But far more than mere literature, this was the event which established the miracle nation of the children of Israel. This was the founding of that unique people through whom would be given to the world the Scriptures and by whom one day the Savior would come.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Difficulties of Reconciliation

(Genesis 45:1-3)

THEN JOSEPH could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

Judah’s plea for his younger brother Benjamin’s freedom proves to be highly effective (Genesis 44:18-34). He simply cannot return home to his father without his younger brother, Benjamin. He is willing to stay as a slave in Egypt rather than hurt the father he so evidently loves, though the father loves him less than he should. Judah has resigned himself to his father’s preference for the sons of Rachel—Joseph and Benjamin. This is real transformation, and it is effected not by any supernatural phenomenon but simply by a human being’s accepting the reality of his lot in life and responsibility for the choices he made twenty years earlier to engage in a horrific and hurtful act against his brother Joseph (Cotter, 315).

Now it is Joseph’s turn to react. Joseph can no longer control his emotions. He breaks down and he weeps. Rather than leave the room, he dismisses all attendants so that family members can deal with their issues privately. Yet, he weeps so loudly that it proves not to be a private affair at all (verse 2). One can imagine that there were ears pressed to those doors trying to hear more of this extraordinary event.
Standing alone with his brothers, he revealed his identity. He then asks if his father is still alive (verse 3). His brothers are reduced to a fearful silence, forcing Joseph to find a way to move beyond the awkwardness and deal with his brothers’ fears. The task of reconciliation is no easy matter. However, where there is a will, there is a way (Fretheim, 644). Joseph harbors no anger at all and has no will for vengeance. He sees the hand of God moving in a mighty way and responds to his brothers accordingly.

B. God Is at Work to Bring About Good
(Genesis 45:4-8)

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Joseph dismisses his brothers’ fears and explains how he has come to understand swings of fortune in his life as being orchestrated by God’s hand. He gradually put their minds at ease, proving that he was not resentful against them and was not planning to take revenge on them for what they had done to him. He urged them to come near so he could tell them what had happened when they sold him into Egypt (Morris, 621). He had long since learned that God had allowed them to do this for His own good purpose. The Lord had worked all these seemingly unplanned circumstances out in such a way that Joseph had been placed in Egypt to preserve lives through the great famine, not only those in Egypt but especially those of their own household.

Just when in Joseph’s experience might he have come to realize God’s hand was when what happened? Perhaps little by little his faith interpreted what was occurring. No one can say with certainty, but clearly over time Joseph came to believe that God was at work in him in a mighty way to bring about good for the many (Williams, 293). According to Joseph, “He wanted to preserve in Israel ‘a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance’” (Genesis 45:7)” (Morris, 621). Joseph kept emphasizing as strongly as he could that all of this had been planned of God. He wanted his brothers to recognize this also, that they might understand with greater appreciation how God was working on their behalf in order that He might fulfill His great promises to their fathers (Morris, 621).

C. The God Who Watches over His Own
(Genesis 45:10-13)

And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

The second part of Joseph’s speech records his instructions for the family. He told his brothers to return to Jacob with all the news of his glory (importance) in Egypt and with the instructions to move to Egypt to survive the famine (verse 10). In his instructions, Joseph continued to stress the sovereignty of God and
His purposive acts, instructing them to tell Jacob that God had made his son ruler over all Egypt (verse 9, not in the Print Passage). Now in order for Joseph to fulfill his destiny as the deliverer of his family, the family would have to move to Egypt where he could nourish them. To remain in Canaan would lead to poverty and death in the five years remaining in the famine (verse 11). Unless they were near to him where he could channel adequate supplies to them, they could not even be sure of survival through the bleak years ahead.

The brothers had apparently remained silent during these revelations and instructions. They could still hardly believe their eyes and ears, even though their fears were gradually being allayed. Joseph again assured them that it was really he that they were seeing and hearing (verse 12). He was speaking to them in their own language and speaking of things which no one but Joseph could know (Morris, 622). It would not be particularly easy for the brothers to take this message to Jacob (see 45:24)—for in telling the good news, the brothers would need to include the bad news: how Joseph came to be in Egypt in the first place. Hard as it might have been, such open confession was necessary for the healing of the family. But no healing would have been possible without their recognition of God’s mysterious ways (Ross, 674). We cannot help but to observe that the immediate results of Joseph’s disclosure of himself were threefold: It brought peace between the brothers, peace between Joseph and them, and peace to their family. That peace secured for them protection and guaranteed them plenty in the land of Egypt. God was indeed watching over them (Thomas, 433).

D. Modeling God’s Love and Forgiveness
(Genesis 45:14-15)

And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

After repeating his desire that they hurry on to Canaan and bring Jacob and the other members of the family back as soon as possible, he enjoyed a tearful reunion with Benjamin and then with his other brothers. So far, in this newly discovered relationship there has been monologue and tears. Joseph has done both. There has been talking but not touching. But at this point, there is touching and dialogue (verses 14-15). Starting with Benjamin, Joseph moves to each of the brothers, kissing each of them. Such a loving gesture by Joseph restores to the brothers their capacity for speech.

They have a lot of catching up to do to fill in the gaps of more than twenty years. Surely there was a time of blessed fellowship in that household all the rest of the day and on into the night. Joseph recounted everything that had happened to him in Egypt, and how the Lord had worked so mysteriously and yet so mightily. Quite probably, he called in his wife and his two sons and introduced them. For their part, his brothers told him all the news from home, about their own families, and everything that had transpired the past twenty-two years. It was a day to remember (Morris, 623). The announcement by the narrator that his brothers talked with and to Joseph is a signal that the breach between the brothers, which had long existed (Genesis 37:4), was now in the process of closing. The resurfacing of dialogue between Joseph and his brothers spells the
end of alienation (Hamilton, 581). This is the
turning point of the story; brotherly hatred has
died away, and those tears seal a new union
which makes the twelve sons of Jacob into true
brothers (Jacob, 305). God’s tender-loving
mercy and forgiveness will ultimately prevail,
and such purposive acts should serve as a model
for all who claim to know and love His name.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One major theological idea preserved in
this passage is that God sovereignly preserves
life on earth. He overcomes the crisis of the
famine by preparing a deliverer who would be
able to save His people and all the people. This
theological point informs the entire Joseph
story, but it particularly finds expression in
Genesis 45. A second idea growing out of the
first is that God can use the evil that people
do to themselves and others to bring about His
redemptive purposes on earth. This story makes
manifest the inscrutable balance between
God’s sovereign will and our human will. The
brothers of Joseph sold him into Egypt out of
hatred, but God sent him into Egypt to save
them (Ross, 669).

The righteous can discern that God works
even through the evil plans of humans (Acts
2:23). Those who do evil are responsible for
their actions, but God will use even those
actions to His glory. Out of this particular
theological point grows a practical matter.
When those who love God truly understand
that God can use the evil machinations of their
adversaries to advance His will, it allows them
to forgive others and not give in to retaliation
or bitterness. Repeatedly, God has shown that
what people mean for ill in our lives God can
take it and use it for good. God continues
to demonstrate His ability to step into a bad
situation and bring good out of it somehow.

PRAYER
Merciful Father, grant unto us a spirit of forgive-
ess in the face of wrongs and hurts from our
past. Give us the faith to believe that You are at
work in all things to bring about good and that
we should trust Your providential hand in every
path of life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(September 21-27, 2020)

God’s Plan Revealed

MONDAY, September 21: “During Trouble, Maintain Hope in God” (Psalm 43)
TUESDAY, September 22: “Benjamin Is Sent to Joseph with Gifts” (Genesis 43:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, September 23: “A Stolen Cup Is Found in Benjamin’s Grain” (Genesis 44:1-13)
THURSDAY, September 24: “Brothers Offer to Become Slaves to Joseph” (Genesis 44:14-17)
FRIDAY, September 25: “Judah Pleads with Joseph for Benjamin” (Genesis 44:18-26)
SATURDAY, September 26: “Jacob Will Die without Seeing Benjamin” (Genesis 44:27-34)
SUNDAY, September 27: “Joseph and His Brothers Reconcile Their Differences” (Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15)
LOVE AND DEVOTION TO OTHERS

**Adult/Youth**

**Adult Topic:** A True Friend Intervenes  
**Youth Topic:** Love Seeks Justice

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** Love Protects Others  
**Children’s Topic:** Stand by Me

**Devotional Reading**  
Matthew 5:43-48

**1 Samuel 19:1-7—KJV**

AND SAUL spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.  
2 But Jonathan Saul’s son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself:  
3 And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee.  
4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to theeward very good:  
5 For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore

**1 Samuel 19:1-7—NIV**

SAUL TOLD his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David  
2 and warned him, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there.  
3 “I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”  
4 Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly.  
5 “He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”
then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.

7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

6 Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.”

7 So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Although families are important, family dysfunction can skew our priorities and lead us to ruin. Is there a greater priority than family? Jonathan opposed the unjust intentions of his father, King Saul, in order to offer support and protection to David.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore the story of Jonathan’s defense of David when David was opposed by Saul.
2. Long for love and justice within the family and beyond.
3. Grow in their love and devotion for justice for others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Saul’s animosity toward David was rooted in fear and jealousy. Public adoration of David after the confrontation with Goliath seems to have initiated it (1 Samuel 18:6-9).

—King Saul’s jealousy with David after David’s very public defeat of Goliath caused him to become obsessed with the idea that David was undermining his power.

—Saul’s jealousy grew into hatred which caused him to order David to be killed.

—Jonathan, who was Saul’s son, was very close to David and advocated on David’s behalf, risking the wrath of his father, the king, who could also harm Jonathan for doing so.

—Although Jonathan’s advocacy on David’s behalf caused Saul to spare his life in this instance, Saul’s promise not to harm David was soon forgotten and David was again in danger.

—Jonathan showed true friendship to David by risking his own life in standing up to this father, the king.

—David remained respectful of Saul even when Saul’s behavior did not seem very respectable. Respecting Saul did not mean entering into his craziness or submitting to his hurtfulness.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—King Saul was jealous of David’s popularity with the public after David’s defeat of Goliath.

—Saul’s jealousy turned into hatred that turned into his order for David to be killed.

—Saul’s son, Jonathan, who was good friends with David, stood up to his father on David’s behalf.
—Vengefulness overwhelmed Saul and he broke his promise to his son, Jonathan, not to seek to kill David.

—Jonathan was a true friend to David.
—Even when Saul behaved badly, David remained respectful of him.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
As 1 Samuel opens, a transformation is about to take place in Israel’s life. The time of the judges has ended, and the reign of Israelite kings has begun. The books of Samuel tell the story of Israel’s origin and development under the leadership of Samuel, Saul, and David. In this time period, Israel’s government was transformed from a loose tribal confederation under Samuel into a robust monarchy in the later years of David’s reign. Scholars note that it is difficult to determine exact dates for this period because of the lack of precise chronological information for Israel’s leaders before the divided monarchy. That notwithstanding, Samuel appears to have been a young man when Shiloh was destroyed about 1050 BC, and Solomon’s accession is generally believed to have occurred between 971 and 961. Thus, these materials deal with Israel’s history for a hundred-year period prior to about 965 BC (Broadman, 1).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The Samuel saga begins with his birth, his dedication at the Lord’s house in Shiloh, and his call to be a prophet to succeed Eli. We next meet Samuel as a grown man acting as judge of Israel and bringing about by his prayers a miraculous deliverance from the Philistines. Despite this success, he is confronted with a demand from the people that he should appoint a king over them like the kings of the other nations. He warns them that in making this request they are going contrary to the known will of God, whose intention it is to rule His people as king through His representative Samuel. Samuel also warns Israel that one day they would regret their demand for a king.

Saul is chosen by the sacred lot and is proclaimed king, and Samuel hands over to him the reins of government. Just as Samuel had foretold, the monarchy proved to be a mistake by the disobedience of Saul. Samuel solemnly accepts that God has deposed the king and secretly goes to anoint another king—David (1 Samuel 15:1–16:13). David is then introduced to the court of Saul by his success against the Philistine champion (1 Samuel 17:12-31). Saul becomes jealous of David and tries to kill him, then promises his daughter Merab in marriage only to break his promise (1 Samuel 18:10-11). Notwithstanding the apparent reconciliation brought about by Jonathan, Saul makes a second attempt on David’s life (1 Samuel 19:1-10) (Interpreters’ Bible, 855, 860-61).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
David: Israel’s second king. His Hebrew name is derived from the root word for “love.”
Jonathan: the eldest son of King Saul and his wife Ahinoam. He is regarded as one of the most noble figures in the Old Testament. He is characteristically described as brave, inspiring (1 Samuel 14:7), loyal, self-sacrificing, and a devoted friend. Jonathan served as the chief lieutenant of Saul’s army (1 Samuel 13:2). More than a warrior, he showed himself to be a devoted friend to David.
Saul: the first king of Israel who stood in a time of transition from a loosely organized group of tribes in the time of the judges to the larger and more
effectively united confederation under David and Solomon. His family home was at Gibeah in the tribal territory of Benjamin.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Delighted (verse 2)—Hebrew: chaphets (khaw-fates'): delighted in; “had taken a great liking to” (NIV, verse 1).

Philistine (verse 5)—Hebrew: Pelishti (pel-ist-tee'): inhabitants of Philistia.

Sware (verse 6)—Hebrew: shaba (shaw-bah'): to have sworn; vowed; “took . . . oath” (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Dangers of an Envious Heart
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Blessings of True Friendship
      (1 Samuel 19:1-3)
   B. A Loving Son’s Appeal to a Troubled Father
      (1 Samuel 19:4-5)
   C. The Misuse of Power in Strained Relationships
      (1 Samuel 19:6)
   D. Saul’s Sin Is Thwarted by a Loving Son
      (1 Samuel 19:7)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

   A. The Dangers of an Envious Heart

       The theme of 1 Samuel 19 is an all too common one—the end results of envy and jealousy run amok among families and friends. This chapter recounts the total undoing of Saul. This is the same Saul who began his kingship with so much hope and promise for the future. Returning home to Gibeah after being proclaimed king, the Scriptures say, “With him went warriors whose hearts God had touched” (1 Samuel 10:26, NRSV). Saul began with the goodwill of many and the divine support of God. His undoing began when he found himself unable to restrain his feelings of anger and jealousy at the success of others. So often it is our inability to address the roots of evil in the ordinary things of life that allows evil to fester and flourish. In time, such envy eventually takes hold of our lives. The blessings of God and the good wishes of His people notwithstanding, Saul’s small-minded, begrudging spirit eventually took their toll on a life that began with such promise for Israel.

       Saul did not start out as an evil man who rose to high places only to have his sinful nature catch up with him. Like all human beings, he had his flaws and failures, but early on in his kingship he seemed to be basically a good man who intended to do well. Often, those who end up doing terrible and hurtful things do not start out intending to do such things. But whenever we ignore or seek to justify our petty thoughts and deeds, we run the risk of ending up like Saul—rejected by God as king and unable to bring Israel into the future that God had intended for them (Birch, NIB, 1128).

       The Scriptures speak of an evil spirit from the Lord that came upon Saul and led to his attempt on David’s life with a spear. This evil spirit reminds us of Saul’s alienation from
God and God’s rejection of Saul as part of His divine plan for Israel. While God causes the anguish that overcomes Saul and sends him occasionally into a jealous rage, the biblical text takes care to note Saul’s own human motives of anger, jealousy, and self-interest. Such motives are not of the Lord. The “evil spirit from the Lord” may indicate intermittent losses of control and judgment, but Saul’s descent into murderous obsession and madness is largely accomplished in those moments of complete self-possession rather than spirit possession.

B. Biblical Background

The story of Jonathan and David’s friendship is one of the more heartwarming stories in all the world’s literature of any time period. Their friendship began in 1 Samuel 18:1-4; it continued to grow over the intervening years and ended only with the death of Jonathan (31:2). Even after Jonathan died, David continued to show loyalty to Jonathan’s descendants (2 Samuel 9). Close friendships often begin with chemistry. David and Jonathan were different in many ways: one a king’s eldest son and heir-apparent, the other the youngest son of a village shepherd. Yet, the two shared a common idealism and fearlessness that made them immensely popular with the people. The first time they met, the Scriptures say, “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David” (18:1, NRSV).

The friendship of Jonathan and David endured and grew over time because both men cultivated it. Although the narrator compresses the events of chapters 18–20 into a short period of time, it is likely that the friendship between these two men encompassed many months or even years. As they proved to be true to one another throughout that time, they grew closer and closer. Jonathan and David made a covenant together (18:3), a covenant not only between themselves, but before the Lord (20:23). Jonathan marked their covenant by giving to David his royal robe and princely armaments (18:4), revealing his willingness to sacrifice his own political ambition for the sake of his friend.

As David achieved greater popularity and acclaim without apparent effort, he did not ask Jonathan to love him so (18:1-3), nor did he organize the cheers that proclaimed him ten times the warrior that Saul was (18:6-7). David gave no clue that he consciously sought to supplant Saul. Quite the contrary—his primary energy went into serving the king and surviving Saul’s string of attempted murder.

Jonathan had less power, but he used his influence skillfully. While Jonathan could have swung his weight behind Saul to eliminate David, his heart would not allow him to do so, for he loved David as he loved himself. Jonathan also seemed to know that David was destined for the throne, yet he seemed happy to promote David’s cause, even to his own detriment (Cartledge, 244-47).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Blessings of True Friendship (1 Samuel 19:1-3)

AND SAUL spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan Saul’s son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: And I will go out
and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee.

David’s victory over Goliath in the valley of Elah made him a national hero and entitled him to the hand of Saul’s daughter in marriage (see 1 Samuel 17:25). However, David’s success also aroused feelings of jealousy and envy in Saul, which set in motion the events that fill the rest of 1 Samuel. Saul’s children, Jonathan and Michal, loved David, but Saul is nonetheless determined to kill him. The king is plagued by his inner demons. These injurious forces in his mind cloud his thinking and lead to an irrational suspicion of David. All of the king’s plotting to murder David simply contribute to David’s rapid rise in popularity (Arnold, 282).

Verse 1 marks an important step in the split between Saul and David (Tsumura, 489). Saul commands his “attendants” (servants) as well as his son, Jonathan, to kill David (19:1). Saul’s tortured duplicity becomes more and more evident as we recall that earlier he had ordered his attendants to tell David privately that the king was pleased with him (18:22). But now in this opening verse of chapter 19, any lingering shame about his hatred toward David seems to have disappeared. We are not told what Saul’s attendants thought of his radical proposal to murder David, but we are told that because of Jonathan’s fondness for David, he warned him of his father’s plot and then attempted to dissuade his father from taking the life of his covenant friend (Vannoy, 182).

Neither Jonathan nor his sister Michal wanted harm to come to David, but Saul was relentless in his determination to kill him. Jonathan tells David to go into hiding and stay there (verse 2). From this time the man after God’s own heart would be a hunted fugitive. He would hide from his best friend’s father at the beginning of his career and from his own son near its end (2 Samuel 17:9) (Longman and Garland, 198-99). The bonds of true friendship are strong, sometimes even stronger than the bonds of blood kin. In David’s time of trial, his true friend Jonathan is there to protect him from Saul’s wrath and evil machinations. Though Saul could clearly see the hand of God in David’s military accomplishments, he simply could not contain the envy that he felt toward the younger man with whom he once rejoiced. Unabated envy poisons relationships and erodes a friendly atmosphere and understanding between people.

B. A Loving Son’s Appeal to a Troubled Father
(1 Samuel 19:4-5)

And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

Jonathan approached his distraught father with kind words about David. In his conversation with Saul, he addresses him formally as “the king” (verse 4). Addressing him as king was a signal of respect for his father’s office and demonstrated that he was speaking about official business of the kingdom. Jonathan tries to help Saul see that he has no reason to be miserable about David (Murphy, 195). He used several arguments to persuade the king that his order to kill David was wrong (Steinmann, 369). He urged his father not to sin against one who had not sinned against him. In many contexts, the language of sin refers primarily to humanity’s relationship
with God. Sin is something committed against God. However, in this instance, Jonathan’s words convey to the king (and us) that sin is also against one’s neighbor—that one cannot be unjustly against one’s neighbor and for God. Our responsibilities to God and neighbor are always interrelated. The Scriptures remind us that we cannot love God whom we have not seen and hate our brother whom we see every day (Jensen, 123).

Jonathan further reminds Saul of David’s service to the king: his defeat of Goliath, which entailed substantial risk to his own life. There can be no cause, even for a king, to kill such a brave and courageous servant, one who was willing to give his life in service to the king (Jensen, 123). Jonathan tries to get his father to see that he is living in a happy ending, a good world brought about by David (Murphy, 195). Separate from the abject wickedness of Saul’s intended actions, Jonathan’s strongest line of argument against his father’s plan to kill David was that the Lord had chosen to give Israel victory over the Philistines through David’s leadership (19:5). This should have been a profound wakeup call for Saul. If he chose to continue his murderous plot to kill David, he would not only place himself in opposition to David, but also to God’s great work of deliverance for His people as well. Jealous though he was, Saul knew how many victories God had given to Israel under David’s military leadership (Vannoy, 182). Envy would not allow Saul to be gracious. Jonathan’s intervention was necessary to get Saul to see the error of his ways.

C. The Misuse of Power in Strained Relationships
   (1 Samuel 19:6)

And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul swore, As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.

Jonathan’s discourse produces the intended effect: Saul is open to Jonathan’s voice of reason. Not only does he heed the advice of Jonathan but Saul also swears an oath: “As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death” (verse 6, NIV). As the chapter unfolds, this oath will become a virtual prophetic utterance because, despite a number of further attempts on David’s life, he will not be put to death regardless of Saul’s best efforts (Bodner, 204). As the dialogue draws to a close, the picture is one of modest intimacy—as father and son can still have a civil conversation at this point in the story. Saul’s oath to David and Jonathan will be brutally shattered in the next chapter with abusive language and hurled spear. Saul’s jealousy appears to prevent him from keeping his word in his estranged relationship with David.

Verse 6 is not the first time that Saul makes an oath that he does not keep. Saul swears that David will not die but then seeks to kill him on several occasions, only to be foiled in his efforts. The biblical writer depicts Saul as one who foolishly seeks to keep a misguided oath and as one who breaks a proper one. An oath should be indicative of one’s highest priorities, but Saul’s are misplaced (Chisholm, 130). Saul clearly uses his powers as king in selfish ways, seeking to maintain his own position despite the obvious fact that he has lost favor with God. David, on the other hand, uses his power with simple honesty and ambition, serving the king by fighting his battles, surviving the king’s attacks by artful dodges, and preparing himself for whatever lay ahead (Cartledge, 247).

D. Saul’s Sin Is Thwarted by a Loving Son
   (1 Samuel 19:7)

And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all
those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

Saul has sworn that David will not be killed. Jonathan then called David from hiding, brought his friend to Saul, and restored the servant in his service to the king. Thus, Saul was richly rewarded for heeding the counsel of his son, as God continued to work salvation for Israel through David’s faithful and fearless service. For the moment, Jonathan had brought peace to his father and protection to David (Jensen, 123) (verse 11). But Saul’s unrelenting envy of David, which brought him under the judgment of God, would soon reappear, his promises not to harm David notwithstanding.

Saul’s does not represent a life lived against God, but a life lived without God. To be sure, it was Saul’s own failure that led to his rejection. But even as the narrator disclosed, Saul’s failure was more the failure of not being the right person for the job in the first place. As that became evident, he simply could not accept the fact that there was one in Israel more capable of leading the nation. Instead of turning to God, he turned to his inner demons of jealousy and envy, and they eventually destroyed him (Chapman, 165).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

How are we to explain Saul’s behavior and sad end? First, like all other people who find themselves alienated from God’s rule, Saul was torn apart by competing powers. On the one hand, Saul plainly knew how wicked his behavior was, which is why all throughout 1 Samuel he repents repeatedly. But on the other hand, Saul was under the influence of the mad passion of sin. Saul was living a lie. That is why he could so easily make pious vows and contradict them almost in the same breath. Saul represents in a concentrated form what must be true of everyone who is conquered by anger, envy, jealousy, and other crippling attitudes and hang-ups. Saul demonstrates for us what is true of every life lived outside of God’s grace: Without a saving change, a sinner is a mess.

Saul also exhibited a lack of growth and spiritual maturity in his life. It is difficult to see others excel and do well, especially when our goals and aspirations seem to be in decline. What is needed is not a spirit of envy, but a heart filled with the knowledge that God will supply our every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). God has a plan for each of our lives, and He wills us to succeed. We should all ask God for the wisdom to openly embrace that plan for our lives and to celebrate His plans in the lives of others.

David was unjustly persecuted by Saul; his life was in constant danger. Yet, the Spirit of God was so strong in David that he did not seek to avenge himself and also forgave his enemy Saul and never planned or performed any evil against him. Even when Saul was in his clutches at a later time, he not only did not kill him, but also did not even touch him. Jonathan and David remained steadfast in their love for one another. It was that strong bond of friendship that caused them to endure and eventually overcome Saul’s unreasonable attacks on David. Love will find a way (Cooper, 95).
PRAYER
Eternal God, help us to see that You have granted unto all of us a measure of grace. Do not let us become envious or jealous of the success of others, but help us to celebrate the blessings You grant unto all of us. Teach us how to love, rejoice in, and be glad for one another every day of our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(September 28–October 4, 2020)

Love and Devotion to Others
MONDAY, September 28: “Timothy, My Brother and Co-worker” (1 Thessalonians 3:1-6)
TUESDAY, September 29: “David Slays a Philistine with a Stone” (1 Samuel 17:41-51)
WEDNESDAY, September 30: “David and Jonathan Bond Together” (1 Samuel 18:1-5)
THURSDAY, October 1: “Saul Is Jealous of and Fears David” (1 Samuel 18:12-18)
FRIDAY, October 2: “Jonathan Asserts David as the Next King” (1 Samuel 23:14-18)
SATURDAY, October 3: “David Provides for Jonathan’s Son Mephibosheth” (2 Samuel 9:1-10a)
SUNDAY, October 4: “Saul Promises to Preserve David’s Life” (1 Samuel 19:1-7)

Bibliography
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### LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT TOPIC:** Overcoming Self-interest

**YOUTH TOPIC:** Loving Those Who Don’t Love Back

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Love Your Enemies

**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Loving Those Who Do Not Love Back

#### Devotional Reading

**Isaiah 1:12-17**

#### Background Scripture

**Background Scripture:** Luke 6:27-36

**Print Passage:** Luke 6:27-36

**Key Verses:** Luke 6:27-28

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**Luke 6:27-36—KJV**

27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. 29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. 31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. 32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. 33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. 34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

**Luke 6:27-36—NIV**

27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 “bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 “If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 “Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 “Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 “And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 “And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full.
35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.  
36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We often wonder how we should treat our enemies. How should we respond to them? Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies by forgiving them, by responding to their needs, and by being nonjudgmental.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore Jesus’ teaching about what it means to love our enemies.
2. Reflect on times when they felt hate toward others and were hated by others.
3. Engage in ways to love their enemies.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
— Today’s text from Luke 6 parallels the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5–7. Scholars differ on whether the two texts reflect the same teaching setting or different ones with similar teachings—even whether this was ever “preached” as a single sermon or simply collected from various settings.
— The Golden Rule—forms of which are part of the teachings of many major world religions—is included in this text.
— While the teachings in this text may seem on the surface to passively allow enemies to take advantage and abuse, an understanding of the context illuminates the creative resistance of injustice for which they advocate.
— The teachings in this text may start with conventional wisdom popular in the culture and day but they go far beyond to challenge disciples to actively love and wisely help others.
— Jesus’ alternative to conventional wisdom taught a new attitude toward possessions and those in need, as well as a fresh response toward hostile and oppressive behavior.

Teachers of CHILDREN
— Today’s Scripture parallels the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew’s gospel. It is called a sermon, but it is more likely a collection of teachings.
— The Golden Rule, which is a basic teaching shared by many world religions, is part of this text.
— While Jesus’ teaching in this text may seem to say we should be passive and allow ourselves to be taken advantage of, we can see how it meant something else to His hearers.
— The teachings in this text take ideas with which Jesus’ hearers would have already been familiar and used them to call for His followers to love actively and to help others wisely.
— Jesus taught a new attitude toward possessions and toward those in need as well as a new way of responding toward those who would bully or be mean.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The gospel of Luke focuses special attention on the literary and theological treasures of the third book of the New Testament. Each of the Gospels presents the story of Jesus in a different way, and much of their richness is lost if one tries to harmonize them into one consistent account. Each gospel contains a different structure, develops different themes, and portrays the person of Jesus in its own unique way. The writer Mark presents Jesus as an enigmatic and tragic figure often misunderstood and abandoned. The writer Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses who fulfills the Scripture. The writer Luke presents Jesus as a compassionate friend to outcasts worthy of our love and attention. How we treat them matters to God and should matter to us (Culpepper, 3-4).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The discourse found in Luke 6:27-36 highlights the ethical expectations Jesus has for His followers. The Sermon on the Plains is Luke’s equivalent to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. The fact that Luke can summarize for Gentiles what Jesus originally delivers to a Jewish audience shows how timeless and important the evangelist believed this ethic to be for the Christian community. The conceptual parallels to Matthew show that what Jesus taught must still be taken seriously by Jesus’ disciples today. The theme of this sermon is a call to exceptional love in the light of the offer of God’s gracious blessing. Jesus speaks definitively about what He desires of His followers, especially as they relate to those outside the community, which also includes those that oppose them (Bock, 186).

Jesus is addressing three specific groups of people: the apostles, a large crowd of His disciples, and a great number of people. The locale is probably a level area in the midst of a more mountainous region (6:17). The people gather to hear Him for at least two reasons: to listen to Jesus’ teaching and to be healed by Him. The healings involve both sickness and exorcisms. The power that proceeds from Jesus indicates the authority with which He works (6:18-19). His teaching and compassionate service combine to touch the hearts of the people in meaningful ways. Jesus’ message of God’s kindness is supported by His actions. The sermon divides into three parts: the prophetic blessings and woes (6:20-26); an exposition about exceptional love, mercy, and hesitation to judge (6:27-38); and remarks about righteousness, fruit, and wise building (6:39-49) (Bock, 187).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Sinners: persons in a state of dreadful estrangement from God or having an unrestrained commitment to evil.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Enemies (verse 27)—Greek: echthros (ech-thros’): those who are hostile.

Love (verse 32)—Greek: agapao (ag-ap-ah’-o): to love, feel affection toward.

Reward (verse 35)—Greek: misthos (mis-thos’): pay; wages; recompense.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. God’s Ways Are Not Our Ways
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   C. Reinterpreting the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31)
   D. Why Treating Others like They Treat You Is Not Enough (Luke 6:32-36)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. God’s Ways Are Not Our Ways

How often have we heard it said that the number-one law of nature is self-preservation? We are taught early on that humans have an instinctual desire to survive, so when that survival is threatened we tend to think of “self” first. At all costs, we are taught to do what we need to do to look out for ourselves first and then look after the needs of others. One of the great paradoxes of our faith is that Jesus teaches us the exact opposite. We are, according to Jesus, to look out for the well-being of others first as a way of life. This countercultural thinking runs against the grain of all that contemporary society teaches us to value.

This rugged individualism—where one goes it all alone and succeeds by himself or herself without any assistance from others—is highly valued in American life. In fact, it is a part of the American myth that putting oneself first and succeeding without the aid or assistance of others is a treasure to be highly valued. Whether we own up to it or not, we admire that individual who strikes out on his own, looks out for himself, and eventually comes to great accomplishment in life. For the most part, in today’s society we are not taught to deny ourselves. Rather, we are taught to indulge ourselves without feeling guilty about not caring for the rest of the world. People who are transparent about needing others are often branded as “losers” in American society. Self-made individuals seem to need no help from others and often offer no help to others.

Jesus admonishes us to overcome self-interest and think often of the welfare and well-being of others. He calls upon us not to put ourselves first but to demonstrate a concern for others in every area of our lives.

B. Biblical Background

Luke’s emphasis on one’s loving his or her enemies is seen most clearly in this section: 6:27-36. His continuing stress on the command to love one’s enemies is also seen in the account that follows in 6:37-42. Jesus, the early church, and all the evangelists emphasized that the command to love lies at the heart of Jesus’ ethical teaching. Luke, however, goes out of his way to stress this. The believer is to love outcasts, sinners, and Samaritans. Only in Luke do we read that at His crucifixion Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34, NIV). This prayer is then paralleled in Acts 7:59a, 60a (NIV), where “while they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, . . . . ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’” Luke’s readers, just as Jesus’ disciples, are to love their neighbors regardless of whether they are friends or enemies.

Whereas one’s feeling positively toward his/her enemies and “liking” them are indeed impossible at times, Luke helps us to understand that we can love our enemies by
willing good toward them, by doing good in return for evil, by blessing instead of cursing, and by praying for them. Often even the ability for one to will good for his/her enemies may seem impossible, but Luke believes that the same Spirit who empowered Jesus (Luke 4:14) dwells in believers and can empower them to choose love for enemies (Stein, 210). Jesus is not interested in giving His disciples a new system of morals but in transforming lives so that they will live out a higher standard of morals that emulates God’s dealings with the world. One’s love for enemies and actively seeking to do good to them is at the heart of this sermon. Such teachings on the part of Jesus may seem naïve, but its opposite has a proven track record of producing only chaos and perpetuating hostility and evil (Garland, 288).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Loving in the Extreme
   (Luke 6:27-28)

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

In verse 27, one finds a clear-cut statement, without ground or qualification, of the commandment to love in its most extreme possible form—love your enemies. The love required in such situations is not a matter of feeling, as is shown by the three verbs that follow. One is a verb of action: “Do good to those that hate you” refers to benevolent action toward those who hate you (verse 27). Two are verbs of speech: “Bless those who hate you, and pray for those who abuse you” are verbs intended to procure good or harm (verse 28). Irrespective of how one feels about the other person, we are commanded as Christians to engage in these types of actions and speech toward our detractors. We are especially commanded to do it for those who do not just dislike us, but even hate us. The actions we are called on to engage in come by way of divine command, not emotions or feelings (Evans, 334). The love of enemies proposed by Jesus is radical and paradoxical (the exact opposite of what seems to be true) and goes against the natural human tendency to place self-protection and self-interest first.

By asking any would-be disciples to bless those who curse them and pray for those who abuse them, Jesus is calling for a reversal of the universal urge for retaliation (Fogarty, 44). Jesus taught that Christian love must not be selective or emotionally irrational. Followers of Jesus are to love all people, regardless of how unlovable or even hostile they may be. Christians must act on that love by being willing to do good when it is within their power to do so. We are admonished to live peaceably with all people inasmuch as possible. There are several words for “love” in the Greek language: Eros means sexual love; phileo means friendship love. But the word used here is agape, which is a love that must be willed and chosen by the person doing the loving. It is a love of identity, sacrifice, and rational goodwill. Jesus is not talking about affection when He uses this word; rather, He is talking about an act of the will. It is an act of conscious effort on the Christian’s part in which he/she loves the person in a way that is best for that person (Barton, 156).
B. Christian Love in Action  
(Luke 6:29-30)

And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

To remove all doubt that Jesus is calling His followers to active, visible love for their enemies, He provides examples of the kind of love to which He is referring. If anyone was to strike us on the cheek, says Jesus, offer the other (verse 29). “Turning the other cheek” pictures a person slapped on the cheek in rejection or possibly even punched on the jaw. The natural response would be to punch back as hard as possible. However, Jesus offers another option. The Christian attitude is not to seek revenge but, rather, to say with heartfelt conviction, “I am ready to take another blow, if need be” (Barton, 157). The blow to the cheek is more for humiliation than for injury; it means that the Christian response to attempts to humiliate is active non-retaliation. To turn the other cheek is to show that one is not humiliated and that one does not need to strike back. It is important to note, however, that this verse does not preclude taking non-retaliatory actions that would prevent further abuse. It must be made clear that Jesus is not asking anyone to submit to regular beatings or verbal abuse without trying to make it stop (Vinson, 188).

The second illustration continues the picture of being vulnerable. If someone takes your outer garment, they should also be allowed to take your undershirt. The word for “coat” referred to the outer garment and “shirt” to the undergarment. The point is not so much being passive when being robbed as it is being compassionate to another’s need. If someone needs to steal a coat, Jesus says, then perhaps that person also needs your shirt also. In fact, Jesus goes on to state that the more general principle could be said in this manner: Give what you have to anyone who asks you for it; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back (6:30). This type of thinking completely confounds the world. It is antithetical to the spirit that says every person must look out for himself/herself. The faithful who follow Jesus do not need to retaliate, hold a grudge, or hang on to every item they own. They are free to give and free to forgive (Barton, 157).

C. Reinterpreting the Golden Rule  
(Luke 6:31)

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

The so-called Golden Rule in verse 31 works with the principle of reciprocity. It is important to note here that Jesus is challenging the conventional wisdom about reciprocity that governed most relationships in His day. The principle of reciprocity (do to others as they do to you; love your friends and hate your enemies) was widely accepted in the ancient world and represents the reason for the challenge on the part of Jesus. Both the Golden Rule and verses 32-35 attack this principle. We are not to do to others as they do to us, but as we would want them to do to us (Tannehill, 118). This turns reciprocity into a guide to proactive goodness, free of calculations concerning our past treatment of others. The point Jesus makes is striking: We are not to treat people as they treat us, but we are to treat them as we would like to be treated regardless of how they treat us.
In practice, the Golden Rule as Jesus interpreted it would look something like this: Think of the best thing you can do for the worst person and go ahead and do it. Think of what you’d really like someone to do for you and do it for him or her. Think of the people to whom you are tempted to be nasty and lavish praise on them instead. Think of the people who have wronged you in some way then go out of your way to help them have a brighter day. This understanding of “do unto others” has a fresh quality to it and turns a mean-spirited tit-for-tat on its head (Wright, 73). The Golden Rule is essentially another way of saying, “love your neighbor,” and as the verses that follow this admonition clearly show, the love of one’s neighbor—which involves doing and not feeling—goes beyond simple reciprocity toward one’s friends (Stein, 208).

D. Why Treating Others like They Treat You Is Not Enough
(Luke 6:32-36)

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

In each of the next three verses, we find three examples of the Golden Rule that show that reciprocity is not enough. Three sayings challenge the norm of loving (verse 32), doing good to (verse 33), and lending to (verse 34) only to those who can do so in return. That, says Jesus, is the kind of love sinners have for one another. Christian love must go beyond the kind of love sinners have for each other, for like the first command in 6:27-28, believers must love even their enemies. Here, sinners are defined as those who operate on the basis of a quid pro quo, which means, “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” The problem with this kind of reciprocity in relationships is that we are always acting out of some ulterior motive, always expecting something in return (Garland, 281).

In verse 35, the command for one to love his/her enemies is reiterated because it is the basis of every other command in this section and is what distinguishes disciples from “sinners.” Sinners return enmity for enmity. Disciples of Christ are to return love for enmity. And we are to do these things—love, do good, and lend—expecting nothing in return or hoping for nothing from it. Expecting nothing in return changes a loan into a gift, thus making it an act of grace. Jesus overturns the normal way of relating to others through negative or balanced reciprocity. Giving to others and treating them graciously is praiseworthy behavior that imitates God, and God will reward it (Garland, 281-82).

Finally, a crowning argument and motivation are added: “Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High” (verse 35b, NIV). Love of enemies does not lead ultimately to suffering and misery but to great reward, and that reward consists of being “children of the Most High,” with the great inheritance that follows. Disciples are properly children of God because they are acting as God does. God’s kindness and mercy extend to the ungrateful and wicked, including the disciples.
We who claim to be followers of Christ should copy God’s mercy rather than limit love as humans do (verse 36) (Tannehill, 119).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Any ministry worth its salt should reflect compassion and not just be a ministry of words. Jesus shows us how God cares for the people He loves. If God loves those to whom the church preaches, then certainly Christians should show that same love. Today’s lesson also underscores the authority of Jesus. The people could see that He had access to divine power. They could also see that He mediated God’s power and forgiveness. To exemplify love in a hostile world is difficult. It takes a change of heart and a change of thinking. The world is used to dealing with people on the basis of power, equal exchange, or tit-for-tat. We are too inclined to treat people like they treat us. However, Jesus calls us to a higher way of living in the world. When Jesus calls upon us to love our enemies, He is calling on us to love even those who have a different set of values than us and may not treat us in the way in which we are making every effort to treat them (Bock, 196).

The ethical teachings of Jesus in this passage contain forceful and imaginative language, which is to be clearly distinguished from legal language. Legal language must provide clear definitions in order to regulate external behavior. Forceful and imaginative language is not concerned primarily with regulating behavior but serves to stimulate moral insight by challenging the ruts in which people move. Such language succeeds when it stimulates the moral imagination to imagine the possibility that breaks out of these ruts. Forceful and imaginative language can change actions by working through the imagination, challenging old assumptions, and suggesting new possibilities while trusting the hearer to work out the details. Luke 6:27-36 contains a carefully crafted attempt to awaken the imagination so that radically new ways of relating to enemies will result.

PRAYER

Eternal God, give us the wisdom to love those who find it difficult to love us. Help us to treat people as we would want to be treated even when that desire does not come to fruition. Grant unto us a spirit of generosity to all humankind, with the expectation of nothing in return. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 5-11, 2020)

Love Your Enemies

MONDAY, October 5: “The Lord Is Merciful and Gracious” (Psalm 103:1-14)
TUESDAY, October 6: “Responding to Unwanted Demands” (Matthew 5:38-42)
WEDNESDAY, October 7: “Handling Family Difficulties” (Leviticus 25:35-39)
THURSDAY, October 8: “The Home Life of the Faithful” (Psalm 128)
SATURDAY, October 10: “Blessed and Rewarded” (Matthew 5:1-12)


LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Meeting the Needs of Others  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Meeting the Needs of Others

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Love Your Neighbor  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Loving Others with Our Whole Selves

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
*John 5:1-15*

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Leviticus 19:18, 34; Luke 10:25-37  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 10:25-37  
**KEY VERSES:** Luke 10:36-37

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Leviticus 19:18, 34; Luke 10:25-37  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 10:25-37  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 10:27

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**Luke 10:25-37—KJV**
25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?  
26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?  
27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.  
28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.  
29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?  
30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves,

**Luke 10:25-37—NIV**
25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”  
26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”  
27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”  
28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”  
29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”  
30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers.
which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.
31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.
33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,
34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.
36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.
31 “A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.
32 “So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
33 “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.
34 “He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.
35 “The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’
36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”
37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Selfish desires, self-gratification, and self-interests are highly valued in our time. How can we become better neighbors to one another? Jesus challenges us to address the needs and welfare of everyone, including perceived enemies.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the concept of “neighbor” in the conversation between Jesus and the lawyer.
2. Value all people as God does.
3. Share love and mercy with those who are in need, even those who are different from them.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The priest and the Levite might have thought that the injured person was dead so they passed on the other side to avoid being made ritually unclean by touching a dead body. However, the Talmud concluded that the law requiring a person encountering a dead body to stop and bury it took precedence and should have compelled them to attend to the person regardless. In this teaching, Jesus was highlighting the absurdity of the legalism that religious leaders prioritized over the law of love.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING

This scene of a lawyer questioning Jesus appears to have occurred immediately after Jesus spoke His exulting prayer and then turned to the Seventy with His beatitude (10:21-24). This indicates that other people were present and heard what Jesus said to the Seventy in particular. Among them was this lawyer, one who was well versed in all that the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition had to say about the Law. Questions about achieving eternal life and about the essence of the Law were common in Judaism (Liefeld, 942). Some think that the lawyer thought up his own question out of mere inquisitiveness, while others believe it might have been caused by the prayer of Jesus and by the beatitude that had been pronounced upon the Seventy. Some scholars believe that the lawyer sought to test Jesus because he was disconcerted by what he had heard and offered his question to show that more was required for life eternal than just to see and hear what Jesus was showing the Seventy (Lenski, 595).

— The Law’s teachings about loving neighbor (Leviticus 19:18, 34 and Deuteronomy 24:10-22) are some of the most frequently cited in the New Testament. Loving God and loving neighbor are the summation of the whole Mosaic Law in Jesus’ teaching in this text.

— The lawyer’s question was a request for Jesus to define who was to be considered a neighbor—the lawyer was looking for a legal definition to limit his liability.

— Jesus rendered the lawyer’s question moot when He told a story about what it means to be a neighbor. His teaching amplifies the Torah teaching about caring for widows, children, and non-citizens/resident aliens.

— Jesus’ story follows a format the lawyer would have found familiar until He named the Samaritan as the third and only truly virtuous character. Most Jews held strong, prejudicial feelings about Samaritans who had intermarried with non-Jewish spouses during the Assyrian occupation. Jesus challenged the lawyer’s prejudices with the law of love.

— The description of the Samaritan’s care for the injured man is filled with action verbs and detail. This is in contrast to the inaction and minimal detail about the priest and Levite to illustrate how they responded with the least possible action required by the Law (keeping themselves untainted).

Teachers of CHILDREN

— The priest and the Levite might have thought following religious rules was more important than being loving and helping the injured man.
— Loving God and loving neighbor is an idea taught in both the Old and New Testaments.
— The lawyer in the text asked Jesus to define neighbor. Instead, Jesus told a story that helped the man see what it means to be a neighbor.
— Jesus’ story uses a hero that would have surprised the lawyer. In doing so, he helped the man to see how his prejudices might be getting in the way of being loving.
— The lawyer probably thought he knew a lot about how to interpret religious law. Jesus took what the lawyer knew and helped him find another way of looking at things.
— The lawyer’s question wasn’t a real question. He asked the question, but he really wanted Jesus to give him an excuse not to help people that he did not want to help. Instead, Jesus taught him about doing the right thing instead of just asking questions about it.
The lawyer’s question revealed his self-centered interest about central issues of the faith—eternal life and the basic command to love one’s neighbor. Jesus responds to the lawyer’s queries with a story that revolves around a surprising reversal. The Jews of Jesus’ day considered only their fellow Jews to be their neighbors. In the Good Samaritan parable, Jesus contrasts the unloving actions of a priest and Levite with the loving actions of a Samaritan, a person who was despised and considered to be outside of God’s merciful grace. Though the priest and Levite were meticulous about observing the Law, it was the Samaritan who obeyed the central command of God’s law—to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Barton, 278). The lawyer would soon find out that God does not bestow the life of the kingdom on those who reject the command to love (Liefeld, 944). Love of neighbor is to know no bounds or boundaries (Evans, 467).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The exact setting in which Jesus gives this parable is not stated. Several elements suggest a Judean setting. First, there is the story of the robbery-infested road between Jerusalem and Jericho, depicting a priest and a Levite travelling that road. Second, Luke’s introductory words in the next paragraph (Luke 10:38-42) relate the event to Jesus’ journey and entry with His disciples into Bethany, the village of Martha and Mary just outside of Jerusalem. Finally, the desire of the lawyer to discuss eternal life indicates that Jesus is in territory familiar to Jewish beliefs and practices (Summers, 134). In a Jewish region where God’s laws would be carefully observed, the parable that Jesus tells is not only a call to help those in need, but also a warning not to become self-satisfied in one’s religiosity. The Word of God remains the standard of all conduct.

PRODIGAL SONS IN THE LESSON

Lawyer: an expert in the Jewish religious laws of Moses.

Levite: the lowest grade of priests who were set apart for service in the sanctuary. They assisted the priests in the tabernacle services.

Neighbor: in the Old Testament, a fellow member of the people of the covenant. In the New Testament, “neighbor” is defined by the Good Samaritan as he had compassion on the man who fell among thieves; he showed mercy on humankind regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation (Interpreters’ Dictionary of the Bible, 534-35).

Priest: in the Old Testament, a mediator between God and humankind.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Levite (verse 32)—Greek: Leuités (lyoo-ee’-tace): a descendant of Levi.

Neighbor (verse 27)—Greek: plésion (play-see’-on): near; neighboring; a friend; “neighbour” (KJV).

Samaritan (verse 33)—Greek: Samarités (sam-ah-ree’-tace): an inhabitant of the region of Samaria.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. A Lawyer and His Neighbor
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   C. A Neighbor Is Anyone in Need (Luke 10:30-32)
   D. A Despised Samaritan Offers a Helping Hand (Luke 10:33-37)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
   A. A Lawyer and His Neighbor

   The Samaritan in this lesson is not called “good” in the parable itself, or anywhere in Scripture for that matter. But he has become “good” through the telling and retelling of this story. As such, the “good” Samaritan has become synonymous with someone who helps another in trouble. Although many continue to refer to this Samaritan as “good,” the adjective “good” stereotypes him as if he was different from all other Samaritans. He, like any other faithful servant of God, irrespective of race or religion, stopped on the roadside that day in an effort to obey God’s command to love one’s neighbor as oneself. When one truly embraces this command, it becomes more than a slogan or a proverb, and it cannot be defined by race, ethnicity, or geographical location. It becomes a divine command that lovers of God seek to obey each and every day of their lives (Garland, 447).

   In the telling of this parable, Jesus showed that it takes eyes and ears and a compassionate heart to be a neighbor. Darrell Bock notes that the one major difference between the priest and Levite on the one hand and the Samaritan on the other is not what they see and hear but what they do with what they see and hear. Only the Samaritan takes pity. Only he has a heart. Neighbors are people with a heart that does more than merely pump blood. Their heart sees, feels, and serves humankind whenever and wherever the need arises (Bock, 302). One often hears that there is so much pain and suffering in the world that a Christian hardly knows where to begin. Such thinking runs the risk of becoming an excuse for inaction. Simply because we cannot heal all the brokenness in the world does not mean that we should not try to heal some of the pain in the world. A better attitude is to see everyone as our neighbor and pitch in wherever the need presents itself. The fact that we cannot help everywhere should not prevent us from helping where we can.

   We are daily confronted with the evil and horrors that humans inflict on one another. Humans are ravaged by war, famine, pandemics, and death on a scale hardly imaginable. We often feel helpless to do anything about it. Owing to modern technology and our willingness to share our personal lives online, we have never been so instantly connected to one another while at the same time so isolated and alone from each other on such a grand scale. Loneliness, alienation, and isolation are written large upon our daily interactions with one another. Distrustful, alienated people do not want to get involved in the strange, hostile, outside world. We, too, can find ourselves asking, who is my neighbor? But when we recognize that our neighbor is anyone in need, then we should reach out to whom we can in any way we can. Being a neighbor does not require us to meet every need of which we become aware but, rather, to recognize that we all have a part to play in reaching out to our fellow human beings to help when and where we can.

   Start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can in the larger world but also for the people who are around you daily.
B. Biblical Background

Scribes, defined as a class of professional teachers of the Jewish Law, were the ones who made handwritten copies of the Jewish Scriptures and interpreted them for the people. Owing to their familiarity with the Law, they were considered to know the Jewish religious laws better than most people. Luke, writing for non-Jews like himself, calls them lawyers. So, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we hear of a lawyer (an interpreter of Jewish Scripture) coming to test Jesus—to trip Him up, as it were. The lawyer asked Jesus a question about eternal life, to which the lawyer was sure he already knew the answer.

Jesus, quickly sizing up the situation and suspecting that the lawyer already had an answer, turned the question back on him and said: “What does the Law tell you?” (Barrell, 90-91). The lawyer replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (verses 27-28, NIV). The lawyer answers so well that Jesus only needs to agree. Thus, the first part of the dialogue (verses 25-28) emphasizes the common ground between Jesus and His Jewish lawyer. They agree on these central matters: that love of God and neighbor is the core of the Law and that living in this way is evidence one has eternal life (Tannehill, 181).

But the lawyer feels the reply has not answered his question specifically enough, especially as relates to who is actually his neighbor. So, the lawyer, wanting to justify himself (he wanted to show himself to be righteous and acceptable to God), asked Jesus for a more precise definition of “neighbor.” The lawyer’s question is really an attempt to create a distinction, arguing that some people are neighbors and others are not, and that one’s responsibility is only to love God’s people, which the lawyer defines as Israel, the people of the Covenant (Bock, 300).

Jesus tells the story of a man travelling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, where he is assaulted by thieves. The country between Jerusalem and Jericho was very rugged with an abundance of hills and caves (Summers, 135). Most first-century pilgrims making this journey would prefer, as did Jesus Himself, to travel down the Jordan valley to Jericho and then turn west up the hill to Jerusalem. Though much safer, even that path was not completely safe. The desert road from Jericho to Jerusalem had many turns and twists, and bandits could lurk out of sight in the nearby hills and valley, ready to strike at a moment’s notice. A lonely traveller was an easy target. When the man in the parable was accosted and left half-dead, those who went by could not tell whether he was dead or alive. As Temple officials, it was important for the two people in the story not to contract impurity by touching a corpse; it was better that they remain aloof, preserving their purity at the cost of their obedience to God’s law of love (Wright, 127).

Jesus deliberately picks a Samaritan as the highlight of the story because such a person is a “non-neighbor” in the lawyer’s eyes. The expectations in the account are that the priest and Levite are the good guys who could be expected to help the wounded traveller, but a Samaritan as a half-breed and renegade would
be the last person from whom one could expect
compassion. This is a surprising turn, since one
might expect a Jewish layperson to appear in
the story at this point. But to the surprise of
the lawyer listening to Jesus tell this story, it is
the Samaritan who has pity on the wounded
traveller. Jesus details in a series of verbs just
how actively the man ministers to his newly
discovered needy neighbor: he goes to him;
bandages him; pours oil on his wounds; puts
him on his donkey; carries him to the inn; and
takes care of him (verses 33-35) (Bock, 301).

Then Jesus asks a simple question: “Which
of these three do you think was a neighbor to
the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”
(verse 36, NIV). By making the Samaritan the
example of the one who shows mercy to the
wounded traveller, Jesus is pointing out that
neighbors may come in surprising places and
packages.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Basic Commands in the Lives of Believers
   (Luke 10:25-28)

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him,
saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He
said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest
thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy
God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all
thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as
thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right:
this do, and thou shalt live.

The parable of the Good Samaritan be-
gins with a lawyer standing up to test Jesus:
“'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inher-
it eternal life?’” (verse 25, NIV). The lawyer’s
question is an important one, for it concerns
itself with sharing the ultimate blessings of
God’s kingdom. The lawyer assumes that he
must do something to gain life everlasting.
In effect, he asks how he can be sure to par-
ticipate in and be blessed at the resurrection
of the dead. Jesus turns the question back to
the lawyer when He asks, “What is written in
the law? how readest thou?” (verse 26). The
lawyer responds well by citing Deuteronomy
6:5, a text that has become known as the Great
Commandment: “‘Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul and
with all your strength and with all your mind’;
and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (verse
27, NIV) (Bock, 196).

When Jesus says, “Do this and you will
live,” He is saying that the relationship to God
is what gives life. The chief end of humankind
is to love God wholly. We were designed to
love; but to love well, we must love the right
person. The right person is anyone made in
the image of God whom God has placed next
to us as neighbors (Bock, 196). That love is
to be demonstrated toward the other without
any regard for that person’s religious affiliation
or socio-cultural background. The motivating
factor behind our actions toward others is the
simple fact that they are human beings made in
the image and likeness of God. Just as God is
merciful, so too are we to be merciful, loving,
and kind to all we meet.

B. Who Is My Neighbor?
   (Luke 10:29)

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And
who is my neighbour?
In an ancient culture, as is true today, such limits might have run along ethnic lines. There was a category of “non-neighbor,” and the lawyer is seeking Jesus’ endorsement of that concept (Bock, 197). For most Jews, a neighbor was another Jew, not a Samaritan or a Gentile. The Pharisees and the Essenes (a Jewish sect that flourished in Palestine) did not even include all Jews as their neighbor. The teaching of the Essenes stands in sharp contrast to that of Jesus, for they taught that one was to love all the children of light who were a part of their community but to hate the children of darkness who stood outside their Jewish sect (Stein, 316).

Jesus’ reply to the lawyer not only challenges the premise of the question—who is my neighbor?—but brings a shocking surprise: each of us is to be a neighbor and realize that neighbors can come from surprising places. Jesus’ words reflect Leviticus 19:33-34: even “sojourners” deserve love. The original impact of the parable of the Good Samaritan is generally lost in our contemporary settings. After centuries of hearing this story, most people now see the Samaritan in a positive light. However, in the original setting to a Jewish scribe, a Samaritan would have been the exact opposite of a good guy; in fact, he would have been viewed as a notorious bad guy and a traitor. It is essential for the reader to remember that the Samaritan, the hero in this story, is a bad guy in Jesus’ day. He is the last person a typical Jew would expect to be hailed as an exemplary leader. Yet, according to Jesus, he is the one who demonstrates God’s love for humankind in the story (Bock, 197).

C. A Neighbor Is Anyone in Need
(Luke 10:30-32)

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

The central character in Jesus’ story is noticeably undefined and unnamed. He is not characterized by race, religion, or trade. He is merely a “certain man” who by implication could be any one of Jesus’ hearers (verse 30). Jesus’ audience, no doubt, imagined the man to be Jewish, but Luke’s audience may have assumed he was a Gentile. The point is that he is identified only by what happened to him and who helped him in his hour of need (Culpepper, 229). Jesus describes the man as one who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and unfortunately fell into the hands of thieves. Because Jerusalem sits on a mountain 2,500 feet above sea level, one always goes down from Jerusalem no matter which direction one takes. Jericho was seventeen miles east of Jerusalem and approximately eight hundred feet below sea level (Stein, 317).

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous. It ran through narrow passes at points, and the terrain offered easy hiding for bandits and robbers who terrorized travellers. This unfortunate man had been stripped, beaten, and left for dead. He was left with nothing to identify his status but his desperate need. Verses 31-32 signal a note of hope for the poor man’s plight. By chance, a
priest and a Levite come along the same road. The priest could not risk defiling himself by making contact with a dead person, except in the case of a close relative. This may have been the assumption of the hearers when he saw the man and passed by on the other side of the road. Others have suggested that it was not the priest’s fear of contact with a dead person but rather his fear of also being attacked by the robbers. The point Jesus makes is that he did not stop to help a person in need.

The Levite, whose duties in the Temple were inferior to those of the priest, also passed by the wounded man (verse 32). With His examples of the priest and the Levite, Jesus is simply pointing out that neither man practiced being loving neighbors that day. The Levite behaved just like the priest (Stein, 317). No reason is given for the behavior of either man, but in the end no reason justifies their neglect of the man in need. The fact that both men saw the man in need renders them culpable and accountable (Culpepper, 229).

D. A Despised Samaritan Offers a Helping Hand (Luke 10:33-37)

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Shattering all expectations of those who were listening to Jesus tell this story, the third traveller who comes along is a despised Samaritan (verse 33). By making a hero of the Samaritan, Jesus challenged the longstanding hatred between Jews and Samaritans. The latter were regarded as unclean people, descendants of the mixed marriages that followed from the Assyrian settlement of people from various regions in the fallen Northern Kingdom. Samaritans were seen as aliens and heretics from whom one might expect hostility (Fogarty, 67). By depicting the Samaritan as the hero, Jesus demolished all boundary expectations.

In the eyes of Jesus, and in the eyes of those who truly seek to obey God, social position, race, religion, or geographical origin count for nothing. The half-dead man on the roadside does not really care who it is who is stopping to help him. The answer to Jesus’ question about which of the three people in the story—priest, Levite, Samaritan—turns out to be the true neighbor to this man who fell among thieves is all too obvious. Anyone who has compassion and stops to help him is his neighbor. The despised Samaritan who showed mercy to the man in distress is the true neighbor on the road that day (verses 36-37) (Culpepper, 229).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Jesus and Luke sought to illustrate that the love of one’s neighbor must transcend all natural or human boundaries such as race, nationality, religion, and economic or educational status. To love God means to love one’s neighbor and to accept what God has done in His grace for all human beings. True love of God and humankind involves more than intellectual assent to theological doctrines. The kind of love we are expected to display toward our fellow human beings is
not emotion or a good feeling but, rather, is manifested through our actions, whether we feel like it or not. Another emphasis of note in this parable is the recurrent theme of the great reversal. Those who are fulfilling the scriptural injunctions and entering the kingdom are not the expected ones, for the priest and the Levite demonstrated that they loved neither God nor their neighbor. Strangely enough, the outcast, a cursed Samaritan, satisfied the requirements of the Law. Once again, the last became first and the first last. Love of neighbor is not determined by rank, status, or obedience to religious laws. True love of God is determined by how we treat our fellow humans in this world, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation (Stein, 319-20).

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, teach us how to love our fellow human beings without regard for their race, religion, or ethnicity. Teach us what it truly means to be a neighbor to any and all that we meet in life. Give us hearts and minds to extend a helping hand to all while expecting nothing in return. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**  
*(October 12-18, 2020)*

**Loving Your Neighbor**

**MONDAY,** October 12: “Help Your Neighbor in Need” (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)  
**TUESDAY,** October 13: “Love God and Brothers and Sisters” (1 John 4:16b-21)  
**WEDNESDAY,** October 14: “Adopt the First Commandments” (Mark 12:28-34)  
**THURSDAY,** October 15: “Jesus Accepts Thanks from Healed Samaritan” (Luke 17:11-19)  
**FRIDAY,** October 16: “Samaritan Village Refuses to Welcome Jesus” (Luke 9:51-56)  
**SATURDAY,** October 17: “Jesus Offers a Samaritan Woman Living Water” (John 4:1-15)  
**SUNDAY,** October 18: “Follow the Samaritan’s Example” (Luke 10:25-37)

**Works Consulted**

LOVE DIVINE

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** The Most Excellent Way
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Loving for Real

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Love Is God in Action
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Unlimited Love

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Romans 12:9-21

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** 1 Corinthians 12:27–14:1
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Corinthians 13:13

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** 1 Corinthians 12:27–14:1
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Corinthians 13:13

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**1 Corinthians 13:1-13—KJV**

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies,

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13—NIV**

IF I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.
2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.
4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
5 Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
7 Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. 11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. 13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Special gifts such as knowledge and wisdom can easily make us lose sight of our obligations to others. How can we avoid being pleased with ourselves? Paul suggested that love is the best way to relate to others and forget one’s own status.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Define Paul’s understanding of “love” as the apex of the Spirit-led life (“more excellent way”).
2. Appreciate love as motivation to share their God-given gifts.
3. Act in love when sharing their God-given gifts.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The text in 1 Corinthians 13 is best understood in the larger context of chapters 12–14. Seeing this discussion about love as a continuation and refinement of the teaching in chapter 12 about spiritual gifts helps clarify the nuance of its meaning.
—There were some in the church in Corinth who were claiming that the flashier spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues, were true signs of the presence of the Spirit and real faith. The author of this letter uses chapter 13 to identify love as a spiritual gift and, in fact, the most important of them all.
—Faith, hope, and love were commonly understood to be important (the most important?) virtues. This text prioritizes further among the three that love is central and first among the three.
—To say that love “believes all things” in verse 7 is not to indicate gullibility but rather a sense of the hope brought about by faith. It is a trust in the future culmination of God’s work started now.
—The notion of love as an emotion is counter to the biblical witness. The author of this letter reinforces what love is and does, but never how it feels.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Paul’s first visit to Corinth took place during his second missionary journey. He enjoyed significant evangelistic success in the city, converting people from the upper and lower classes, both rich and poor. After Paul had established the Corinthian church, he continued his missionary work. He travelled back to Syria and then launched his third missionary journey, strengthening the disciples along the way. He wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus before the feast of Pentecost, probably in the spring of AD 54 (1 Corinthians 16:8). Though he desired to spend more time with the Corinthians, his missionary work would not allow him to do so. Therefore, he sent Timothy to minister on his behalf (16:5-11). Timothy was sent to communicate the Pauline ways to the church, which means he would relay Paul’s teaching and moral instruction on certain matters. Paul undoubtedly hoped that Timothy could resolve some of the problems troubling the church, but upon hearing reports from friends and other sources in Corinth, Paul sat down and wrote what we know today as 1 Corinthians (Schreiner, 4-9).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The city of Corinth has a two-part history. As a Greek city-state, it flourished before and after the golden years of Athens (fifth century). It was during that century that it came into conflict with Rome and was destroyed by the Roman consul Lucius Mummius (BCE). The site of the old city lay dormant until it was resurrected by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 BC. Prosperity returned to the city almost immediately as Corinth quickly experienced a great influx of people from both West and East, along with all the attendant gains and ills of such growth. From the West the dominant Romans brought with them their culture and religions. However, since the city was historically Hellenized (under Greek influence) it maintained many of those ties—religion, philosophy, and the arts. From the East came the mystery cults of Egypt and Asia and the Jews, with their synagogues and “peculiar” belief in a single God (Fee, 1-2).

As is typically the case in such places, vice and religion flourished side by side. Old Corinth had gained such a reputation for sexual vice that the verb korinthiazō, which is to act like a Corinthian, was understood to mean “to commit fornication.”
However, Corinth was also the home to at least twenty-six different sacred places devoted to “the many gods.” Corinth was a diverse city of Jew, Greek, slave, and free (Fee, 1-2). It was also a city in which Christianity was not the dominant religion. When Paul arrived in Corinth, his problem was not that the Corinthians did not have a religion; his problem was that they were unfamiliar with the Christian religion. Before he could teach the Christian faith to them, he had to teach the false religions out of them. His antidote to what plagued the Corinthian Christians would be his understanding of Christian love—a love that guides and determines how Corinthians should treat one another. It is indeed a more excellent way.

### TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

**I. Introduction**
- A Love of Action
- Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
- Love Alone Counts
  (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)
- Love Alone Wins
  (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)
- Love Alone Lasts
  (1 Corinthians 13:8-13a)
- The Greatest of These Is Love
  (1 Corinthians 13:13b)

**III. Concluding Reflection**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. A Love of Action**

In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Richard B. Hayes observes that the purpose of chapter 13 is to portray love as essential to the Christian life. Moreover, he insists that love must govern the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit (Hays, 221). *Agape* love is presented here as a quality or character attribute that is to be shown forth in the actions of the members of the Corinthian church. “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14, NASB). The purpose of chapter 13 is to highlight an ethical concern for how Christians treat one another in the household of God and in the larger world. Paul is interested in character formation, not flowery speech and insincere gestures. Throughout this love chapter he offers a positive model for the construction of behavior. His emphasis is on not what we say, but what we do. Love is the principle of Christian social unity that Paul urges on the Corinthians. Christian
love involves empathy, sacrifice, and rational goodwill demonstrated toward all.

Two common misunderstandings of chapter 13 must be corrected. First, Paul does not write about love in order to debunk tongues and other spiritual gifts. His point is not that love should supersede spiritual gifts but that it should govern their use in the church. Love is not a better or higher gift; it is a “way” (12:31b), a manner of life in which all gifts are to find their proper place. Second, love is not merely a good feeling or an attitude; rather, love is the generic name for specific actions of patient and costly service to others (Hays, 222). Love is not an abstract quality or even an idea for Paul. It is behavior. To love is to act; anything short of action is not love at all (Fee, 628). If we pay close attention to what Paul actually says in this chapter, then all sentimental, sugary notions of love will be discarded and replaced by a rigorous vision of love that rejoices in the truth and bears all suffering in the name of Christ (Hays, 222).

The love of which Paul here speaks is the love by which Paul lived. R. C. H. Lenski notes that love is the motive power that sent Paul over land and sea to preach to others the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. Love is the inner power that sustained him amid all his labors, burdens, trials, sufferings, and persecutions. It was love that enabled him to rise above and eventually master hunger and hardship, false friends and bitter foes, bodily infirmity and dangers of death. His great joys and abilities, his high and holy office, his exalted position in the church, and his astounding success—all of them are what they are and what they came to be because of his love. We cannot understand Paul unless we understand the motivating factor behind his faith—love (agape) (Lenski, 544).

Gifts of the Spirit find their true expressions in Christian love. All works of the Spirit, the menial and the mundane, as well as the extraordinary and exciting, are equally the Spirit’s acts of diakonia (service). No gift is given for the sake of the individual’s self-indulgence or self-aggrandizement. There is no gift which does not bring with it a special responsibility for service to others. Love is made manifest through our actions, and we have all been gifted by God with some abilities to help our fellow human beings (Lockwood, 427). First Corinthians 13 is primarily about living in Christian community in a way that glorifies God, and that is by learning to treat other members of Christ’s body the way God has treated us—with self-sacrificing, others-oriented love (Ciampa, 619).

B. Biblical Background

Gordon D. Fee describes this chapter as one of the most beloved passages in the New Testament. However, the love affair with this passage often allows it to be read apart from its context, which does not make it less true, but causes one to miss too much. The final verse in 1 Corinthians 12 and the opening verse in 1 Corinthians 14 indicate a digression in Paul’s argument on spiritual gifts. Owing to the exalted nature of the prose in chapter 13, many have questioned whether it was composed for the first time for this argument. Some scholars claim that it had an independent existence before having been adapted and inserted here as chapter 13 (Fee, 627). C. K. Barrett outright declares that though chapter 13 was written by Paul, it was not written by him freshly for the
That may be the case, but one must recognize that in its current form not only is it fully Pauline, but also it has been thoroughly adapted to the context of the supremacy of Christian love in all matters of faith and practice (Fee, 625-27). In a series of three paragraphs, Paul sets out to put their zeal for tongues within a broader ethical context.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Love Alone Counts

(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

In verses 1-3, Paul proclaims the priority of love over gifts, asserting that gifts without love are useless (verse 1). Paul begins with the gift of tongues because it was no doubt the gift most prized by the Corinthians. Paul regularly discounts this gift in his discussion, placing it and the interpretation of languages last in his list of the gifts (12:10, 28, 30). In verse 1, Paul envisions a situation in which one speaks in the languages of human beings or even of angels. One cannot know if Paul actually believed that there were those in the congregation who could speak in the inspired speech of the angels, but his point is that even if believers speak in the most exalted languages imaginable, they are like instruments that make an annoying and irritating sound if they do not have love (Schreiner, 273). One writer believes the “tinkling cymbal” is a reference to the gong that was used to call them to pagan worship, the noise intended to drive away the demons in their former religious practices. Thus, Paul asserts that a church speaking with tongues but not practicing love is a meaningless phenomenon (Barrett, 300).

In verse 2, Paul widens the perspective to include three of the gifts (charismata) from 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. They include prophecy, the gift he regularly considers to be of primary significance for the community; knowledge, which was another of the Corinthian favorites; and faith, which together with its qualifier, “that can move mountains,” means the gift of special faith for mighty works. In order to make his point as emphatic as possible, Paul use the word all three times: all mysteries, all knowledge, all faith. Even if one embraced the whole range of charismatic gifts, if he/she at the same time...
failed to be full of love, Paul says that then, in the sight of God, that person would be nothing (Fee, 632). We also may know everything there is to know, but if we do not have love, we are nothing. In Paul’s view, though prophecy, knowledge, and miracles stand higher than speaking in tongues, even so, they are not comparable with love (Barrett, 300).

In verse 3, Paul offers examples of great personal sacrifice (Fee, 633). The religious practices held up against the standard of love are two different forms of self-denial: one’s giving away his/her possessions and one’s giving up his/her own body (Hays, 225). First, it is possible for one to give away all his/her possessions and do so without love. Jesus warns that people may give to secure a good reputation before others instead of for God’s sake and the love of their fellow human beings (Matthew 6:2). Paul contends that if such an action is not motivated by love then it is of no benefit to the giver. Even those who give up their bodies to be burned and who think they are gaining an advantage by doing such gain nothing without love (verse 3b) (Schreiner, 275). Paul’s point is clear: “If I in some great cause give myself up to the most painful of deaths, but have no love, even this is no credit to me” (Barrett, 303).

B. Love Alone Wins
(1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Love is the indispensable addition which alone gives worth to all other Christian gifts. In this section (where love alone wins), Paul attributes to love qualities elsewhere he ascribes to God (Hays, 226). What, then, is love? Paul finds it easier to answer questions about what love does and does not do. Those who love are long-suffering, which means they do not lose patience or temper, whatever they may have to put up with from others (verse 4). Further, argues Paul, people who are actuated by love are kind; love does good to those who do harm. Love is not envious, does not brag, and is not puffed up (Barrett, 303). Paul deflates the Corinthians’ pretensions of knowledge by declaring that “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” The fourth item—love is not rude—is a strong term referring to shameful behavior. Paul is saying that love does not elbow its way into conversations, worship services, or public institutions in a disruptive, discourteous, attention-seeking way (verse 5). The fifth item in Paul’s negative catalogue—love is not self-seeking—means that love seeks not its own advantage but, rather, the advantage of the other.

By this time, the Corinthians will have gotten the message: Paul is implying that everything he has heard about their behavior contradicts the character of Christian love. Paul continues with his list: Love “is not easily angered” and “keeps no record of wrongs” (verse 5, NIV). Love finds pleasure in virtue and what is good; thus, it does not delight in evil. On the contrary, the wicked delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil (Schreiner, 277). Anything that is wrong in God’s sight grieves a heart that is full of
love—not merely because the wrong hurts the one to whom it is done, but especially because God is displeased with the wrong. Instead of rejoicing over the wrong (negative), love grieves over the wrong (positive) (Lenski, 559). Christians rejoice in the truth, which means they embrace God’s way of righteous living. The lack of Christian love in the Corinthian church resulted in divisive and self-centered behavior. Paul wanted them to know that there is nothing base, nothing haughty in Christian love. The love to which he was pointing this divided church permits no schisms, makes no seditions, and does all things in sweet accord (Hays, 227).

After telling us what love is not, Paul ends this unit with four strong verbs that characterize positively the action of love (agape). Love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (verse 7, NKJV) (Hays, 226-27). The first verb—“bears”—may mean “protects” so that love covers over and does not bring to light the sins of others. However, taken together with the last verb, “endures,” a better reading of this passage probably means that love bears, endures, and puts up with much; it does not forsake people when life is arduous and one’s energy is taxed. The two middle verbs are also similar: love “believes” and “hopes” all things. This is not to suggest that Christian love is inclined to believe improbable or ridiculous things. It does mean, however, that love does not give way to cynicism and despair but, rather, hopes for the best since it looks to God—who can forgive sins and grant new beginnings. Belief and hope do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they are anchored in the promises of God (Schreiner, 278).

C. Love Alone Lasts
(1 Corinthians 13:8-13a)
Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three.

Verses 8-13 move the discussion in a different direction. Paul now contrasts the permanence of love with the transitory character of the spiritual gifts (charismata). While the word love is mentioned only in the beginning and end of this section, all the intervening material (verses 8b-12) highlights the temporary status of spiritual gifts, especially tongues, prophecy, and knowledge (Hays, 228). Paul’s treatment of the gifts is set up by an opening affirmation, simple yet profound: “Love never fails.” On the other hand, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will all be brought to nothing eschatologically (in the end times). Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will one day be nullified and abolished by God Himself. They will come to an end because they will no longer be necessary when the Lord returns and the fullness of His kingdom is present. These gifts of revelation are fitting for those who are living between the now and the not-yet, when the church must walk by faith. But at best, they are only partial (verse 9), providing believers with a real but imperfect glimpse of God’s future truth. When that which is complete comes, these partial instruments will no longer have any purposes and will be discarded by the
God who remains the same from endless age to endless age (Hays, 229).

**D. The Greatest of These Is Love**  
(1 Corinthians 13:13b)

but the greatest of these is charity.

Sentimentality and mushy feelings may abound when 1 Corinthians 13 is read at weddings and other occasions of significance in the lives of people we love, but that is hardly what Paul intended in the writing of this chapter. He is on the attack to correct the behavior of the Corinthian Christians who thought that the most important attributes in a Christian’s life were the gifts of the Spirit. Paul is arguing here for the primacy of love over tongues, knowledge, and even prophecy. The preeminence of love is not a gift but a way. The way of love leads away from competition and self-assertion. The way of love departs from the jealousy, boasting, arrogance, and inconsiderateness that characterized the Corinthians’ interaction with each other. The way of love transcends the pursuit of individual fulfillment and leads to true community (Nash, 386). Love is about action—how a person lives for the Lord and obeys Him, and how a person lives for others and serves them (Gardner, 583).

Paul’s description of the action and behavior produced by love is distinctly countercultural. It speaks against the envy, pride, and self-centeredness of the Corinthian Christians and in so doing speaks clearly to our generation as well (Gardner, 583). Gifts in and of themselves are dispensable for the Christian life, because Christians need not be graced with any of the particular gifts listed in chapter 12 in order to be Christian and spiritual. What is indispensable for the Christian life is faith, hope, and love. Faith has to do with the basis, the ground on which we stand. Hope is reaching forward for something to come. Love means being present in the here and now, acting in the interest of others. The situation in Corinth demanded love for God, for one another, and for ourselves (Garland, 626).

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

Paul wrote that love endures forever because in morally corrupt Corinth, love had become a mixed-up term with little meaning. Thus, in this chapter, Paul is addressing a sober truth for the impulsive and sensation-loving Corinthians: Gifts count for little, while character means much (Barton, 194). Many a gifted individual has lacked character. However, as the apostle points out, there is no real greatness of character without love. The Corinthians were placing the highest values on the wrong things. The gift matters less than the character of the person possessing it. If one is without love, then he or she is nothing. Loveless faith and loveless prophecy do great harm to our churches, community, and world. Lovelessness is often contentious and embittered, and often it is seen in the denial of Christian brotherhood to fellow believers. Character rather than gifts count with God. The warning from Paul was salutary, for the Corinthians were only too apt to become engrossed with their own importance—as evidenced in such gifts as prophecy and the faith that could accomplish veritable wonders—while forgetting the things that mattered most (Interpreters’ Bible, 170). Christian love is not demonstrated by how we feel or
what we say but rather what we do. “Actions speak louder than words” is the bedrock of the Christian understanding of what it means to love others. How we treat one another matters in the eyes of God, and it continues to be the sign of deep faith that comes to visible expression in our everyday lives.

P R A Y E R

Heavenly Father, teach us how to love one another and how to act in the best interest of one another. Let the love You showed for Christ Jesus be the love that we demonstrate in our lives every day. Help us always to remember that actions speak louder than words. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

H O M E D A I L Y B I B L E R E A D I N G S

(October 19-25, 2020)

Love Divine
MONDAY, October 19: “Activists and Supporters Share Victories” (1 Samuel 30:21-25)
TUESDAY, October 20: “The New Life in Christ” (Romans 12:1-8)
WEDNESDAY, October 21: “Live by the Mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:1-11)
THURSDAY, October 22: “Faith, Hope, and Love in Action” (Colossians 1:3-8)
FRIDAY, October 23: “Gifts for the Good of All” (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)
SATURDAY, October 24: “Pray with the Mind and Spirit” (1 Corinthians 14:13-19)
SUNDAY, October 25: “The Life of Love” (1 Corinthians 13)

W o r k s C o n s u l t e d

LOVING BY SERVING

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Upside-down Love
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Loving with Our Actions

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Loving by Serving
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Showing Love Gets Messy

**DEVOational READING**
*John 15:18–16:4a*

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** John 13:1-35
**PRINT PASSAGE:** John 13:1-15, 34-35
**KEY VERSE:** John 13:15

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** John 13:1-35
**PRINT PASSAGE:** John 13:1-15, 34-35
**KEY VERSE:** John 13:15

NOW BEFORE the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.
2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him;
3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;
4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.
5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.
6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?
7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

IT WAS just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.
3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;
4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.
5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.
6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”
7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”
8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.
9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.
10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.
11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.
12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?
13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.
14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.
15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

... ... ...
34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Multiple definitions of love lead people to be confused about how to love. What is the bottom line ("end") when it comes to love? Jesus taught that our love for one another should be manifested in our service to others.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Consider the significance of Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet.
2. Repent of pride that has prevented their serving selflessly.
3. Serve others as an expression of Christian love.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—John 13 marks a shift in the Johannine story with a section scholars refer to as “the Farewell Discourse.” Essentially, chapter 13 is the beginning of the end of the story in John’s gospel, where Jesus shifts His focus to Jerusalem and His eventual crucifixion and resurrection.
Jesus’ love for the disciples, those who are among “his own,” is evidenced in His selfless act of washing their feet. In many Middle Eastern cultures even today, contact with feet is considered untoward.

Although most people washed their own feet, the host had the prerogative to offer to have a servant do so. Jesus takes the role of both host and servant in washing the disciples’ feet.

Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet is symbolic. As the host in His Father’s house, Jesus demonstrates hospitality to His guests, the disciples. When Peter objects, he demonstrates his misunderstanding of the act as being about the water when it was really intended to be about relationship.

Jesus’ words at the end of verse 10 (“you are clean, though not all of you”) employ the second-person plural of “you.” He is referring to all of the disciples who are “clean” or in relationship with the Father through Him. This “washing” signifies the relationship already created and the kind of leader Jesus is and calls them to be. “Though not all of you” refers to Judas’s decision to betray Jesus.

Even after all their time together, the disciples still misunderstood Jesus’ model of servant leadership. The titles we use for “leaders” in the church (pastor, deacon/minister, elder/bishop) all indicate the servant nature of the leadership to which Jesus calls us.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

In Jesus’ day, feet got dirty when people walked long distances in sandals. When they arrived at a home as a guest, the host provided water for them to wash their feet. Sometimes a servant would wash guests’ feet for them as an act of gracious hospitality on the part of the host.

Since Jesus was their respected leader, it felt strange to the disciples that He would do the job of a servant and wash their feet. Peter objected to this, and Jesus taught that He was washing their feet not to help them clean up but to show how those who follow Him should selflessly help others.

Positions and roles in the church today are given titles that indicate their servant nature: pastor (shepherd), deacon/minister, and elder/bishop all fit this model. Jesus’ example teaches service as a central part of leadership.

The disciples misunderstood what Jesus was doing when He washed their feet. They thought it was about getting cleaned up, but it was really a symbolic act on Jesus’ part to signify the importance of the relationships they had with each other and with the Father through Jesus.

Other leaders the disciples knew and saw expected special treatment and service because of their roles and position. This kind of leadership was the norm in Jesus’ time and today.

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**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

John 13, verse 1 opens the second half of the gospel of John. Chapters 1–12 center on Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee and Judea. His audience in the first part of John is wide-ranging, as He sought men and women who would believe. He provokes cries of faith, according to Gary Burge, and in many of the chapters, there is a division within His audience. Some choose to believe, while others remain in unbelief. However, chapters 13–21 shift our attention to Jesus’ private ministry, up to the hours of His glorification (the Cross) that has been promised throughout chapters 1–12. The focus of the first half of John is on signs; the focus of the second half is on the hour. In chapter 13, verse 1, Jesus recognizes that “the hour” has come...
to depart the world, and therefore He focuses His attention on “His own,” whom He loves to the end (Burge, 363).

Some scholars have designated this section as the Farewell Discourses. But this passage involves far more than discourse material. Rather than simply being a farewell speech, chapter 13 begins with one of the most memorable acts of Jesus—the washing of the disciples’ feet. In His washing the disciples’ feet and in the issuing of a new commandment of love, Jesus demonstrates a model of discipleship that has at its heart service and devotion to others. In this act, He is attempting to show His disciples a model of love and obedience to God’s will (Burge, 369). Foot washing was a degrading and lowly task. When done by a wife (for her husband), a child (for his/her parents), or a pupil (for his teacher), it was always viewed as an act of extreme devotion. It is this lesson that Jesus desires to teach those whom He loves (Borchert, 77-8).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The text opens with the announcement that the events recorded here happened just prior to the Passover. This statement should be understood and interpreted as taking place in the context of the Passover setting. The “hour” spoken of in chapter 13, verse 1 refers to the time of Jesus’ departure from this world. What is more, this departure is next interpreted by John in the context of the ultimate extent of love (“he loved them to the end”), evidenced in Jesus’ death for the world (John 3:16) and particularly for those in the world who belong to Him (Laurin, 155).

The foot washing depicted in John’s (pre-Passover) meal event (13:2, “supper”) does not appear in the Synoptic Gospels, and what occurs in the Synoptics related to the institution of the Lord’s Supper does not occur here in John. However, there is little reason to doubt that the meal experience should be understood to be the same meal in both John and the Synoptics. One reason for such an identification is that in both John and the Synoptics, Jesus announced at the meal the presence of a betrayer (verse 21). Jesus goes even further in verse 26 and calls Judas out by name at the meal through the event of dipping. The occasion described here should rightly be referred to as the Last Supper, even though the Synoptics do not speak of a “supper” and John does not speak of an upper room (Borchert, 77-8).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Devil: another name for Satan, God’s adversary. As the prince of fallen angels, he is called “the father of lies” and “the murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

Judas Iscariot: one of the twelve apostles and the betrayer of Jesus. The meaning of the “appellative Iscariot” remains uncertain. A commonly accepted meaning is “man from Keriopolis.”

Simon Peter: the most prominent of Jesus’ twelve disciples. His original name was Simon. Jesus gave him the Aramaic name for “rock,” which in Greek is translated as “Cephas.” His original home was in Bethsaida, and he later lived in Capernaum. He was married, and he and his brother, Andrew, were partners in a fishing business.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Disciples (verse 35)—Greek: mathétés (math-ay-tes’): learners; pupils; persons who follow another.

Passover (verse 1)—Greek: pascha (pas’-khah): the Passover supper; a major springtime holiday observed by Jewish people commemorating God’s delivering the Jewish people out of Egypt.

Wash (verse 5)—Greek: niptó (nip’-to): to clean; to wash.
TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. People of the Towel
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Rendezvous with Destiny (John 13:1-3)
   B. The Example of the Servant (John 13:4-5)
   C. A Misunderstood Act of Service (John 13:6-15)
   D. The Command to Love One’s Neighbor (John 13:34-35)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. People of the Towel

   Chapters 13–17 of the gospel of John record what we have come to know as the Upper Room Discourse. In these five chapters, we see intimate teaching about service, love, the Holy Spirit, heaven, our union with Christ, and prayer. The discourse begins with a dramatic call to follow Christ’s example as a servant—to be people of the towel. Jesus tells us where we must begin and what qualities must be in our lives—and more importantly, what we must do—if we are to be His followers. The servant’s heart is a heart of love (Hughes, 311). We live in a time when the first question on the minds of many is, “What’s in it for me?” That is the wrong question for a faith characterized by love and service to others. If we are to count ourselves as followers of Christ, there must be humble service in our lives. We, too, must be people of the towel. The towel is indeed our testimony (Hughes, 316).

   Jesus washes the feet of His disciples to show us the way of humility and selfless service. It is a way that runs counter to the expectations of today’s world. Yet, it is the way that people of faith must travel. We enrich our own lives when we give ourselves to others. The way that Jesus calls us to live is the way that ultimately brings joy and contentment. Those who truly desire to serve, according to Jesus, must learn early on that if they want to live, they must be willing to die. If they want to have, they must learn how to give away. If they want to be great, they must learn how to become servants (table waiters) in God’s kingdom. True greatness comes through service. In addition, that service is viewed as a labor of love.

   Jesus chose a towel and the washing of feet to show us the pathways and possibilities of servant leadership. As He approached the end of His earthly life, according to the late Dr. Sandy Ray, His disciples were hopeful that He would assert His power and take over the leadership of the religious and political systems of the nation. Thinking they would have a part in it, the disciples had already started angling for position and power in what they believed would be Jesus’ political reign on earth. In order to demonstrate to His disciples...
the Christian way of serving humankind, Jesus stood up in their midst, laid His garments aside, and took a towel. The towel became His testimony. Of the towel and the foot washing Ray noted, “Jesus was not merely washing the dust from the Judaic deserts from their feet; he was washing shackling fetters of tradition from their minds. . . . Their feet were not as dusty as their hearts and attitudes. Their hearts and minds were dusty with ambition” (Ray, 31-33). Those who follow Jesus are people of the towel—for the towel is a metaphor for the type of loving service we are called upon to render to humankind.

B. Biblical Background

In the Synoptic account of the events surrounding this passage, we read of a dispute among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. John does not record this jockeying for position in his gospel, but he does tell the story of the foot-washing scene that rebukes the disciples’ lack of humility more strikingly than any words could have done. Thursday morning of the last week of Jesus’ earthly life was spent in preparation for the Passover, with its paschal supper that would be held that evening in commemoration of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. When all was ready, Jesus took His place on the cushions on which the guests reclined at meals. But before the supper was served, He stood up and girded Himself with the linen cloth of a servant/slave and prepared to wash His disciples’ feet.

The washing of the disciples’ feet is a significant action on the part of Jesus, setting the tone as it does for all that follows. It even foreshadows the Cross as it demonstrates the voluntary humility of the Lord and the way in which He humbly cleanses His loved ones and gives them an example of selfless service that they too are to follow. The fact that this foot washing takes place during the meal (verse 2) and not on arrival when the feet would normally be washed shows that it was an action taken deliberately by Jesus. It was not a mere act of courtesy. It is what Leon Morris describes as a parable in action, setting out that great principle of lowly service which brings cleansing and which finds its supreme embodiment in the Cross, setting out also the necessity for the disciples to take the Lord’s way and not their own (Morris, 544).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Rendezvous with Destiny

(John 13:1-3)

NOW BEFORE the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God.

The passage opens with a mark of time that is characteristic of John’s writing—“just before the feast of the Passover” (verse 1a). John views Jesus as being in complete command of the situation. Jesus knew that His hour had come, so when the “time” (or more literally, “the hour”) came, it did not take Jesus by surprise. He knew that the reason He had been sent into the world had now come. The “hour”
is not thought of now in terms of glory, but of leaving the world and going to the Father. The announcement of “the hour” marks the decisive end of Jesus’ earthly ministry (Morris, 544-45). Jesus did not forget in His hour that He was God, and yet He humbled Himself.

With His eyes on the Cross and His heart fixed on the road to Calvary, the love Jesus had for His own is kept central in John’s gospel. “His own” are those who belong to Him, who listen to His voice, and for whom He cares (Schnackenburg, 16). It was that love for His own that propelled Him forward in spite of what lay ahead. Not only did Jesus love those who would remain in the world, but also, He loved them to the end (verse 1b). In verse 2, we discover that while Jesus is about to perform a supreme and very meaningful ministry of love for His disciples, the devil—who is the opponent of both God and Jesus—is also at work. The devil makes Judas his instrument (Schnackenberg, 16). John indicates that the devil had “thrown” this evil notion to betray Jesus into the heart of Judas. Judas is the actor in this betrayal, but the devil is the one who inspires his heart.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power and that He had come from God and was returning to God (verse 3). Until now, Jesus has had a ministry to people in general, but from this point on He will concentrate on those He loves intimately (Morris, 545-46). Here, we see the heart of our foot-washing Lord and Savior—a heart that is aware of its royalty while overflowing with a love that loves to the uttermost (Hughes, 313). The lesson He taught on that night is instructive for all who follow Him: His is a way of humility and service (Hughes, 313).

B. The Example of the Servant (John 13:4-5)

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Because it was a Passover meal, the disciples were reclining in their traditional posture, each with his left arm to support his head and his right arm to reach dishes on the table. The Savior rose from the table and performed the last labor of His life. Considering the self-conscious, purposeful drama and the natural intensity it certainly evoked, there were probably a few murmurs and whispering and then silence. Jesus rises from supper just as in the Incarnation, having risen from His place of perfect fellowship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He lays aside His garments just as He had temporarily set aside His glorious existence. He takes a towel just as He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He wraps a towel around His waist, for He had come to serve (verse 4). He pours water into a basin, just as He was about to pour out His blood in order to wash away human sin. He washes the disciples’ feet, just as He cleanses His children. On this remarkable occasion, Jesus perfectly staged a portrayal of His whole life on earth—from birth to death to resurrection. It was a dramatization of love and selfless service to others (Hughes, 314).

Foot washing was practiced in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts in the ancient Mediterranean world. According to Gail O’Day, it had three main functions: (1) personal hygiene; (2) an act of hospitality; or (3) a cultic act. Foot washing was a way of one’s welcoming his or
her guests; a person’s feet would become dusty during a journey, and the host offered water so that guests could wash their feet. When Jesus washes the disciples’ feet, He combines the role of servant/slave (doulos) and host (O’Day, 722). In this instance, the act signifies cleansing and service to humankind.

C. A Misunderstood Act of Service (John 13:6-15)

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

In strength, Jesus knelt to serve, reflecting not a temporary mood of His own but the very character of the Father from whom He had come. He was not driven to serve, but He chose to serve. He carefully waited for the right moment to demonstrate the kind of love He wanted to see in His disciples. By taking off His outer clothing and wrapping a towel around His waist, Jesus adopted the look and role of a slave. He poured water into a basin and began His service of love (verse 5). He began His lowly task by working His way from one disciple to another, washing the feet of each one and drying them with the towel He carried. John does not report the order in which Jesus progressed, or how far He progressed before reaching Peter. But when He reached Peter, He was firmly resisted by Peter: “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” (verse 6, NIV).

The exchange between the Lord and His outspoken disciple would reveal some distinct levels of significance to Jesus’ behavior (Dongell, 166). The foot washing signified salvation offered through Jesus’ death. As Jesus said to Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (verse 8, NIV). To have a part with Jesus is to have fellowship with Him, to participate fully in His life. The foot washing is a symbolic act that draws the disciples into the love that marks God’s and Jesus’ relationship to each other and to the world. Through the foot washing, Jesus unites the believer with Him as He enters the events of His hour (O’Day, 723). At issue was more than an attitude adjustment for a stubborn disciple; it was acceptance or rejection of Jesus and His redemptive mission as a whole. In short, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet in order to symbolize the washing of redemption soon to be available through His death and resurrection (Dongell, 167).

The call to cleansing and service in this text cannot be separated from the call to participation with Jesus. One can follow Jesus’ example only if one has already experienced Jesus’ loving service for oneself. The call of verses 12-15 is to embody the love and service of Jesus for one another. In the community’s embodiment and enactment of Jesus’ love, the community reveals Jesus’ identity to the world. It is critical
to a right understanding of this passage that the Christological dimension not be overlooked. Jesus does not merely issue a general call to His disciples to serve one another; He issues a call to all who belong to Him to give as He gives and love as He loves. When the faith community embodies Jesus’ love, it not only reveals His identity but also assumes a new identity for itself, shaped by Jesus’ identity. We are people of the towel, loving as Jesus loved and serving as He served (O’Day, 725-28).

D. The Command to Love One’s Neighbor
(John 13:34-35)

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

The commandment of verse 34 builds on Jesus’ words to His disciples after the foot washing (13:15); His love for them has provided them with the model of how they are to relate to one another (O’Day, 732; Interpreter’s Bible). This is the major specified commandment that Jesus gives directly to His disciples in the entire gospel: “Love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (verse 34). This command had been known for centuries, being deeply rooted in the Mosaic Law as well as in the preaching of the prophets. It is called new in this verse because Jesus Himself now models the full nature of love as it has never been modeled before. The love of which Jesus now speaks is a humble love which gives itself for others even unto death (Dongell, 170). This new commandment is the foundation and impulse of the hospitality and humble service permeating the chapter (Swartley, 327).

For many Christians, Jesus’ command to love has often been translated into a command to love the world. However, in verse 35, Jesus is speaking specifically about how we love one another within His church. This command to love has its first application within the body of Christ. Gary Burge notes that when a non-Christian steps foot inside a church, this should be his or her first observation: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Burge, 387). Nothing so astonishes a fractured world as a community in which radical, faithful, genuine love is shared among its members. It is the mandate of the church to become a community of love, a circle of Christ’s followers who invest in one another because Christ has invested in them—who exhibit love not on the basis of mutuality and familiarity with one another, but on the model of Christ who washed everyone’s feet, including Judas’s (Burge, 387).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Dr. Sandy Ray captures the essence of today’s lesson when he declares that Jesus is saying in this foot-washing scene that the kingdom of heaven is not to be modeled after the Roman Empire and the contemporary church. “It is not to be a place for prestige, position, titles, and rank. The towel represents the royalty of service. Real royalty is wrapped in a towel, not a title. Humility is the watchword in the kingdom of heaven” (Ray, 33-4).

The washing of His disciples’ feet is intended by Jesus as an example for His apostles and for all Christians. Having used the foot washing as a paradigm (pattern) for His own atoning death, Jesus also employs it as a model for our sacrificial service in His name. He was
not establishing a ritual whereby lofty church officials would playact at foot washing during Holy Week as their annual gesture of humility. Rather, Jesus intended to set forth a lifestyle that emulates the example He set by this humble act of service (Phillips, 154).

PRAYER

O Lord, before whom the generations rise and fall, teach us the import and privilege of being servants in Your kingdom. Help us not to become lifted in pride and vainglory, but show us the power of humility and service in Your great cause of redemption. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(October 26–November 1, 2020)

Loving by Serving
MONDAY, October 26: “Laban Arranges to Wash Servant’s Feet” (Genesis 24:24-33)
TUESDAY, October 27: “Brothers Are Provided Water to Wash Their Feet” (Genesis 43:20-25)
WEDNESDAY, October 28: “Servants and Masters, but the Same Lord” (Ephesians 4:6-9)
THURSDAY, October 29: “Peter Denies Jesus Three Times” (John 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27)
FRIDAY, October 30: “Jesus Is Betrayed by a Trusted Disciple” (Psalm 41:8-10; John 13:21-30)
SATURDAY, October 31: “Mary Anoints Jesus’ Feet with Perfume” (John 12:1-7)
SUNDAY, November 1: “Jesus Loved the Disciples; Washed Their Feet” (John 13:1-15, 34-35)

Works Consulted
Pate, C. Marvin. The Writings of John: A Survey of the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse.
Swartely, Willard M. “John,” Believers Church Bible Commentary.
ABIDING LOVE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUTH TOPIC: The Love Connection
YOUTH TOPIC: The Love Connection

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Abiding Love
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Bearing Fruit by Loving Others

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 80:7-19

John 15:4-17—KJV
4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.
6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.
7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.
8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.
10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:4-17—NIV
4 “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
6 “If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.
7 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
8 “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.
10 “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.
11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. 16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

11 “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 “You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 “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. 16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 “This is my command: Love each other.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We try to love, but we feel beaten down by the world’s greed and jealousy. How can we love one another in the face of the world’s selfishness? Jesus declares that we will be able to love one another if we abide in Him, keep the commandments, and abide in His love as the Holy Spirit abides in us.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Comprehend how the metaphor of the vine and the branches applies to Jesus and those who follow Him.
2. Yearn for a more intimate, life-giving relationship with Jesus.
3. Commit to keeping Christ’s commandments and so abide in His love.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—This text employs the final of the “I am” statements in the gospel of John. The grammatical structure of these statements uses a familiar image (for example, the vine) and relates Jesus to it, as in, “the vine I am.” This formulation is unique to John’s gospel.

—The idea of pruning or cleansing coupled with being in relationship with Jesus appears several times in John’s gospel. Imagery and theology are intertwined in John’s gospel.

—Use of the word for the kind of love friends have (or brotherly love) is reinforced when Jesus calls His hearers “friends.” Jesus’ statements about dying for one’s friends echo a classical Greek ideal for friendship which He embodies in His own death.
—The imagery of the community of believers in John’s gospel is one of interrelationship and mutuality. There is no pride or privilege in this type of community—it is nonhierarchical and connected by love.

—This conversation took place between the time Jesus and the disciples left the Upper Room after the Last Supper and their arrival at Gethsemane. We can imagine they might have passed by a vineyard which became an illustration for Jesus’ teaching about remaining connected to God.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—John’s gospel uses the phrase “I am . . .” to describe Jesus, in this case relating Jesus to a vine and believers to branches.

—In the grammar of this phrase, Jesus uses familiar examples relatable to hearers during that time. For example, the phrase in this text means “that common thing you know, the vine and branches, you and I are like that.”

—Pruning sounds harsh, but in order to bear fruit, the branches must continually be pruned.

—Jesus calls the disciples His friends and tells them to love others like friends, just as Jesus has loved them.

—Jesus taught by example and words that pride and selfishness have no place in the community of believers. Believers are to care for each other and help each other.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Surprisingly for a book that has become one of the most beloved in the Bible, William Hull notes that the gospel of John was not at first warmly welcomed by the church. It was not utilized directly by the early church fathers until AD 180, almost a century after its initial appearance. Its slow acceptance notwithstanding, the striking originality of the gospel is ample proof that the intention of the book is not to pass on some unchanging body of doctrine but to relate certain Christian convictions to the challenges facing the community in which it arose (Hull, 201-02). John 15:1-17 poses challenging questions to the Christian community then and today about its self-identity. What does it mean for the church to live as the branches of Christ, the vine? What would the church look like and what would be its witness in the world if we loved one another as commanded by Jesus and if we embraced the model of love He has set for us? As Jesus nears the end of His earthly ministry, John grapples with the question of what it means to abide in Jesus and to serve God in a fallen world in need of God’s love (O’Day, 760).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Jesus as the true vine is a metaphor that would have been readily understood by all those who lived in the time of the historical Jesus. So common and valued were grapevines in Palestine and throughout the history of Israel that any teaching based on vines and their growth would have been an easy concept for the first-century listeners to grasp. Jesus is definitely speaking here in the language of the people (Dongell, 182). They would have also understood the role of the Father as the Master Gardener (vine grower) who is responsible for removing/trimming/cleansing the branches both positively and negatively. The importance of the vine and the vine grower lay in the role they play in the fruitfulness of the branches. It is very likely that in the Johannine churches there were a number of people who were identified as Christians but
who were not bearing fruit. The task of the master gardener was to distinguish between productive and unproductive branches. The unproductive branches would be eliminated, while the productive branches would be cleansed/pruned so that they would become more productive. God does the pruning and removal, since the church does not usually wish removal to take place because of its attachment to numerical size and a worldly sense of what is important.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
The True Vine: Jesus describes Himself as the “true vine” and His Father as the “vinedresser.” Jesus is probably comparing Himself to the vine of the Jews, who had become degenerate. The point He is making by referring to Himself as the true vine is that Christians must “abide” in Him if they are to bear the fruits of faith. Furthermore, the intimate bond between Christ and the church is strongly emphasized: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Interpreters’ Dictionary, 786).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Friends (verse 14)—Greek: philos (fee’-los): beloved; dear; friendly; associates; companions.
Fruit (verse 4)—Greek: karpos (kar’-pos): deed; action; result.
Remain (verse 4)—Greek: menó (men’-o): to stay, “abide” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. “I Am the True Vine”
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Path to Fruitfulness in a Christian’s Life
      (John 15:4-6)
   B. The Love that Makes Joy Complete
      (John 15:7-11)
   C. The Supreme Test of Love
      (John 15:12-15)
   D. Bearing Fruit that Will Last
      (John 15:16-17)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. “I Am the True Vine”

John 15 begins a new phase of Jesus’ farewell teaching, signaled by His departure from the Upper Room with the disciples. In John 14, Jesus sought to comfort the disciples’ fears in light of His imminent departure. Now Jesus gives the corresponding teaching regarding the disciples’ duty and obligation during His absence. Jesus did this by means of the seventh and last “I am” statement in the gospel of John (Phillips, 281). The route from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, east of the city, would have afforded Jesus and the disciples the sight of the great Temple atop Mount Zion. One of the Temple’s notable features was the large, decorative vine affixed above the entryway into the Holy Place. While we cannot say with certainty, it is possible that this sight prompted Jesus’ use of the vine to make His last
“I am” statement. Having led His disciples out toward the Mount of Olives, Jesus began teaching them again, saying, “I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

Richard Phillips observes that the vine was the symbol of Israel, which is why the Temple was adorned with this image. The idea of the vineyard expresses God’s labor and care in planting His people in the Promised Land. The vine was the Lord’s people, from which He desired a rich harvest of fruit. The problem was that Israel had never produced the fruit that the Lord had desired. It was in comparison to Israel’s failure that Jesus declared Himself the “true vine.” Israel became a false and wild vine through idolatry and wickedness. In contrast, the life of Jesus was pleasing to God the Father. As Isaiah foretold, Jesus “grew up before him like a young plant” (Isaiah 53:2, NRSV) and out of His humble circumstances He brought delight to the Father through perfect obedience. The fruit that God desired from Israel but did not find He gained for Himself by sending His own Son to be the true vine, from which His new and righteous people would live and bear fruit (Phillips, 282).

When we consider the life of Jesus, we can see in how many ways the “true vine” is an apt emblem for our Lord. The vine grows from a modest beginning to display great beauty with its leaves and grapes. So also does Jesus overflow with a beautiful character and love. Just as the vine is the source of life for its branches, Jesus is the true vine, the source of true and everlasting life for those who believe. Jesus taught, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, NRSV). Just as the fruit of the vine brings joy and refreshment to the hearts of humankind, Jesus came to give true joy and spiritual rest to heavy-laden hearts. In John 15:17, Jesus says that He gives these commands in order that we may love one another. As in chapter 14, Jesus repeats again in chapter 15 the admonition to love one another. Why the repetition? It is because Jesus knew that our unwilling hearts needed the repeated emphasis. Moreover, He repeatedly urged us to love one another, because everything He called His disciples to do was summed up in love. We gauge the quality of our Christianity by our loving treatment of others, our loving concern for the needs around us, and our loving prayers to God to help one another. The measure of a church is not merely the faithfulness of its doctrine, but the fruit of its love as well.

B. Biblical Background

The analogy of the vine brings before us the importance of fruitfulness in the Christian life and the truth that this is the result of abiding in Christ and not of human achievement. There is also a stern side to the analogy of the vine: branches that are not fruitful are purged out. Jesus is not simply issuing some comforting advice; He is outlining the difficult but important way of service. Interestingly, all the Old Testament passages that use this symbol appear to regard Israel as faithless or as the object of severe punishment. Jesus’ description of Himself as the true vine is to be seen against this background. Moreover, Jesus does not say that the church is the vine but that He is the true vine (see John 15:1). Believers are no more than the branches that are on the vine.

Characteristic of the gospel of John, Jesus immediately references the Father as the vine grower after declaring Himself to be the true vine. The Father’s work is decisive here. He
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Path to Fruitfulness in a Christian’s Life
(John 15:4-6)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

In John 15:1-3, we are told that Jesus is the vine and God the Father is the vine grower. Our fruitfulness and continued growth can only come through our abiding in Jesus Christ. In verse 4, the evangelist returns to one of his basic themes—that of abiding, remaining, or dwelling in Jesus. Just as the Father abides/dwells in Jesus (14:10) and the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) would abide in them (14:17), so they are commanded as His disciples to abide in the Vine. A branch is not a self-contained entity, and neither is a Christian disciple. A branch separated from the supply of nourishment cannot produce fruit; neither can the Christian. Fruit bearing for any disciple is totally dependent on a direct, unending connection to Jesus (Borchert, 142).

In verse 5, we are told that if we abide in Him we will bear much fruit. What is intended here is an understanding that the disciples will live such lives that it will be obvious that they are abiding in Christ Jesus. No branch bears fruit in isolation. Isolated vines wither and die eventually. They are thrown into the fire and burned. There is no use for a branch that is no longer connected to the nourishment provided by the vine (verse 6). Every fruitful branch has a vital connection to the vine. So, to abide in Christ is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness for the Christian. Fruitfulness doubtless includes both the production of Christian character and the winning of others to follow Christ. It includes everything that results from a vital union with Christ (Morris, 595).

B. The Love that Makes Joy Complete
(John 15:7-11)

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.
The focus of verse 7 continues the theme of abiding or remaining in Jesus the Vine, but the theme is here linked to the subject of prayer (Borchert, 145). It is not by accident that the two themes of fruit bearing and prayer are linked together. Their connection makes it clear that branches bear their fruit through prayer, and that prayer yields fruit as its outcome (Dongell, 184). Those whose lives are so in harmony with Jesus will find their prayers controlled by His Word, and such prayers will be answered and bring added glory to God (verse 8). The branch produces what the life coursing through its limbs desires—that is, the “fruit of the vine.” The disciple steps into a relationship of love with both Jesus (verse 9) and the Father (verse 10), out of which a transformed life—a fruit-bearing life—will flow (Burge, 418). What is fruit? It is the development of Christian character, the conversion of sinners through evangelism, and a vast array of other attributes rendered through Spirit-filled prayer. Since the answer to prayer is something given to the disciple, we see again that fruit is not the work of the branches, but the effect of the vine and the gardener working through the branches (Dongell, 184).

In verse 11, Jesus speaks of His joy being in us, which in turn makes our joy complete. Jesus means by this statement that He had the joy of living the completely fruitful life, and He wants that same joy to be found in His disciples as they live fruitfully in His name. Thus, the joy of which Jesus speaks emanates from community with Him. It is entirely connected with Christ, and it is embedded in His disciples. This joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit for John and for Paul (Romans 14:17). It is also a joy that cannot be taken away (Schnackenberg, 104). Our joy is in Christ Jesus! He does not intend a cheerless, barren existence for those who love and believe in Him. However, the joy of which He speaks comes only as His followers are wholehearted in their obedience to His commands (Morrison, 598). However hard the Christian way may be, it is a way of joy in its travelling and in its goal. There is always a joy in being obedient to the Savior. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. While it is true that Christians are sinners, they are redeemed sinners; and therein lies their joy. How can any person fail to be happy when he or she walks the ways of life with Jesus? (Barclay, 177). It is an inspiring thought that Jesus calls His followers into joy. The Christian life is not some shallow, insipid following of a traditional pattern. It is a life characterized by inexhaustible joy and hopefulness in the promises of God (Morrison, 598).

C. The Supreme Test of Love
(John 15:12-15)

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

This is the second time that Jesus has commanded His followers to love one another. This is the true test that will always mark His followers. This is the same theme that is sounded throughout the letters of John. “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11-12, NIV). Love for one another is fulfillment of God’s love for us and in us (1 John 4:17), and people who refuse to love as God loves are characterized by John as “liars” (1 John 4:20).
(Burge, 419). Verse 12 is a direct restatement of the love commandment of 13:34, while verse 13 is the most explicit statement in the gospel of what it means to love as Jesus loves (O’Day, 758). Speaking of His own love for them, Jesus continues, “No greater love has anyone than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.” The expression “lay down his life” recalls what Jesus as the Good Shepherd does for His sheep (10:11, 15). When the sheep metaphor is dropped, Jesus’ “sheep” become His “friends,” those whom He loves and cares about (verse 13).

Love for one’s friends, even to the point of death, was a virtue widely commended in the Graeco-Roman world. There is no greater love than that of one who lays down his life for others. Anything else must be less. This is the supreme test of love. Love gives and gives everything for all people. Jesus makes it clear that the members of the apostolic band are His friends, but friendship depends on common aims and outlook and thus Jesus qualifies “you are my friends” by “if you do what I command” (verse 14). Once again, obedience is the test of discipleship. The friends of Jesus are those who habitually obey Him.

In verse 15, Jesus states that He will no longer call His friends “slaves,” because the servant does not know his master’s business. The slave is no more than an instrument. It is not for him to enter any type of discussion concerning his master’s business. The slave’s task is simply to do what he is told. But this is not the pattern of relationship between Jesus and His disciples. He has called them “friends.” He has kept nothing back from them. He has revealed to them all that the Father has made known (Morris, 599). Servants and slaves customarily labored in the dark, uninformed about their master’s purposes. Their labor constituted a blind obedience to unexplained commands, ruling out both an understanding and an enjoyment of their efforts. But when Jesus brings them into the inner circle of knowledge, He transforms their labor and positions them as friends (Dongell, 186).

Friends! What a tremendous offer from Jesus! It means that we no longer need to gaze longingly at God from afar. We are no longer like slaves who have no right whatsoever to enter the presence of the master. We are not like a crowd that only gets a glimpse of royalty as they pass by. Jesus invites us into intimacy with God so that God is no longer a distant stranger, but now a close friend (Barclay, 178).

D. Bearing Fruit that Will Last
(John 15:16-17)

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Those who think that they are doing the Lord a favor by following Him need only be reminded that we did not choose the Lord—the Lord chose us. It was God’s unmerited favor extended to us that caused us to be chosen in time and space by Jesus, our Savior (verse 16a). The disciples are in this way made conscious of the unmerited gift of their friendship with Jesus, and this at once implies an obligation on their part. What Jesus is looking for in the friendship that He gives them is that they should go out and bear fruit (Schnackenberg, 111). The Lord has appointed us to go and actively serve His will. We are to spread the Gospel far and wide as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, our Savior (Keddie, 176).

If indeed we become fruit bearers, Jesus
promises in verse 16a that the Father will give us whatever we ask in Jesus’ name. Such prayers must be prayers of faith, which means we should pray with a firm belief in the all-sufficient love of God. Our prayers should be in the name of Christ, which means we should not pray for things of which we know the Lord would disapprove. We are not to pray in the name of Him (who is love) for vengeance on our detractors. In addition, our prayers should be prayers in keeping with God’s will. Prayer is not always asking God for things we want, but often it is asking God to enable us to accept the things He wills for our lives (Barclay, 180).

In verse 17, Jesus speaks of “these things,” which may properly be seen to gather all the teaching of the intervening verses as the motivational basis for loving one another. All the rich aspects of Christ’s example in His love for His chosen friends show them how they are to love one another. The more believers love God, the more they will be able to love one another (Keddie, 178). Loving one another is the mark of Christian discipleship.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Authentic discipleship is evidenced and encapsulated in love for other believers. This has been demonstrated for us by Jesus, who died for all who would believe in Him (John 15:13). This example of self-sacrifice is recognized by those whom Jesus calls friends, for they do what He commands (John 15:14). Our obedience to Him is not the result of some type of enforced servitude or slavery, since Jesus pronounces us as friends of God who are now able to learn from Jesus about the will of God (John 15:15). Our knowledge as friends of God and Jesus did not result from any capabilities of our own. Rather, it was given to us because we have been chosen and appointed by Jesus to bear fruit—that is, to spread the wonderful Gospel as our mission to others. In this way, God’s will is truly exemplified in a living community of believers who love one another (John 15:17).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the love You have demonstrated for us in Christ Jesus and His death on the Cross. We are grateful that You have chosen and appointed us to be Your ambassadors of love throughout the world. Help us to so live each day of our lives that the love You have shown us will be passed on to others. We pray for fruit-bearing love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(November 2-8, 2020)

Abiding Love

MONDAY, November 2: “God Is Disappointed with Israel” (Isaiah 5:1-7)
TUESDAY, November 3: “God Will Redeem Israel” (Isaiah 27:2-6)
WEDNESDAY, November 4: “Believers Continue God’s Work” (John 14:8-14)
THURSDAY, November 5: “Jesus Freely Lays Down His Life” (John 10:11-18)
FRIDAY, November 6: “Facing the World as Jesus Did” (John 15:18-25)
SATURDAY, November 7: “Jesus Tends to His Vineyard” (John 15:1-3)
SUNDAY, November 8: “Always Love One Another” (John 15:4-17)
CONFIDENT LOVE

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT TOPIC: Loving Others

YOUTH TOPIC: True Love beyond Just Words

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Godlike Love

CHILDREN’S TOPIC: The Power of Love

DEVOTIONAL READING

Hebrews 13:1-8

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 John 3:11-24; 2 John 4-11; 3 John 5-8

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 John 3:11-24

ADULT KEY VERSE: 1 John 3:24

YOUTH KEY VERSE: 1 John 3:18

1 John 3:11-24—KJV

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.
13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.
14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.
15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.
16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
17 But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

1 John 3:11-24—NIV

11 For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.
12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.
13 Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.
14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.
15 Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.
16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.
17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?
18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.
19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.
20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.
21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.
22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.
23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.
24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.
19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:
20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.
21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God
22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.
23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.
24 The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Hatred toward others sometimes seems far easier to attain than love. How can we show love for others? The willingness of Jesus to die for us and His command that we live for others bring that confidence.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the many dimensions of loving others according to 1 John 3.
2. Embrace God’s commandments to love with obedience and expectation.
3. Identify ways to grow in their faith in Jesus and their love for others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Although the authorship of the epistles of John is uncertain, there are notable similarities in imagery to the gospel of John: loving one another; walking in truth; the completion of joy among believers; references to believers as little children; the importance of abiding in Jesus or in the Father—among many others.
—The elder (who refers to himself as such) who wrote the epistles of John assures believers of their relationship with God and, thus, eternal life, in light of the challenge of contradictory teachers. The elder offers several ways to validate their faith in the face of false or contradictory teachers.
—The elder/author redefines death beyond physical death to include those who do not love, who “abide in death.” Thus, it is possible to die spiritually before dying physically by not loving. By the same token, eternal life begins here and now.
when we live in love with one another. Eternal life is connected inextricably to enacting God’s love with each other.
—The idea of laying down one’s life for sisters/brothers is made concrete in this text—by caring for each other in the basics, ensuring everyone has what they need to survive, we can live in God’s love as Jesus taught. Believers pass from death into (eternal) life via their love for one another.
—This text challenges us to consider the root of the violence in our world as a lack of love or abiding in love. Indifference to the basic human needs of others allows hatred and violence to take root. Abiding in God’s love—“doing” love—is the antidote.
—The text lifts up things of God as more important than things of the world or making a living. Rejecting the dualism of Gnosticism, the elder/author connects things of the world with making a living to point out how our stuff should be freely shared with believers who have need.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—The themes and images of John’s gospel are echoed in 1 John 1, though Bible scholars find no compelling evidence that the two books were written by the same person or people.
—The text offers examples of ways to test whether a teaching is true in order to help believers feel more confident that they know what God wants and that God is their friend.
—Not caring about the needs of others and not loving them with our actions causes hatred and makes God sad.
—Little children are the example used in this text. The traits of children help adults understand how to abide in God’s love and be friends with God and others.
—“Laying down one’s life for friends” is a metaphor for putting others’ best interests ahead of our wants and our own comfort, but can be a literal requirement.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The letters of 1, 2, and 3 John were believed to have been written by the apostle John around AD 85–90. The recipients of the letters are also unknown, apart from the Gaius mentioned in 3 John 1. The letters of John tell us virtually nothing about why they were written and who read them.

First John is the longer of the three letters and contains an elaborate polemic against beliefs that it opposed (Parsenios, 3–4). For its first seven centuries, the church’s reception of the Johannine epistles was fitful and uncertain. However, from the first century onward, acceptance of the first epistle was secure and widespread (Black, 366).

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

According to recent scholarship, the letters represent a later period in the history of the Johannine tradition than the gospel of John. For decades, the setting and purpose of 1 John were defined by reconstructing the opponents against whom the letter argues. The departure of some members of the community is clearly one of the precipitating factors that inspired the letter. There has been a schism and 1 John urges the remaining believers to stay with the community and not to join the schismatic group. There is great concern for communal concord throughout the letter. The
Elder argues that the only path to fellowship with the Father and His Son is to abide within this one community, and within no other. Communal coherence is a major concern in 1 John. To leave the fellowship of the community is not to choose an equally viable option but to choose a false community ( Parsenios, 20-21). Love for one another is the defining characteristic of this community of faith.

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

**The Spirit:** In both the Old and New Testaments, “Spirit” is translated as both “wind” and “spirit” (John 3:8). The Spirit given by God is the principle that creates and sustains life (Eerdmans Bible Commentary, 967).

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

- **Actions (verse 18)—Greek: ergon (er’-gon):** works; tasks; deeds; “deed” (KJV).
- **Hates (verse 15)—Greek: miseó (mis-eh’-o):** detests; loves less; “hateth” (KJV).
- **Heart(s) (verse 21)—Greek: kardia (kar-dee’-ah):** the heart, mind, character, inner self, will, intention.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Love as the Essence of the Christian Faith
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Gospel of Loving One Another (1 John 3:11-14)
   B. Jesus Shows Us How to Love (1 John 3:15-18)
   C. The Assurance and Obedience that Come with Love (1 John 3:19-22)
   D. Commanded to Believe and Love (1 John 3:23-24)

III. Concluding Reflection

### I. INTRODUCTION

**A. Love as the Essence of the Christian Faith**

The author of 1 John, who refers to himself as “the elder,” is writing to heal the wounds of a broken and divided community of faith, a community divided over doctrinal beliefs and practices. In 1 John 2:19, the author speaks of those who “went out from” them. He adds that if they had truly belonged to the community then they would never have left. The rupture in the fellowship had shaken this community, which had previously defined itself as one of unity and love. The task of the author is to reassert the traditional claims of the faith in light of the schism, while at the same time taking into account the new circumstance of division and dispute. The focus of his writing is not on the outsiders—those who left—but rather on those who remained in the fellowship. He challenges them to a renewed affirmation of their Christian identity (Johnson, 566).

He reminds them that the truth of who they are, especially in light of the division that has taken place in the community, must be translated into appropriate behavior. What they are called upon to demonstrate is real and effectual love for one another, which stands in...
contrast to the hatred so characteristic of the world (1 John 2:15). The sad fraternal relationship between the remaining community and those who have left is suggested by the example of Cain. He murdered his brother simply because “his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (3:12). In contrast to the example of Cain—who showed no love for his brother Abel—the remaining members of the community must perfect their love, removing the defensiveness that comes from fear and opening their hearts to each other in care. They must reestablish the bonds of love between them so that the community can stand firm in the midst of adversity and crisis. They are to pray for each other and correct each other (5:14-17). They are to care for each other in as practical and direct a fashion as God’s love in Christ operates (1 John 3:16-18) (Johnson, 566-67).

The sad truth is that divisions, splits, and schisms in churches cause hurt and pain for all those involved. Feelings of betrayal, disingenuousness, and backstabbing can cause long-term injury to relationships in a church family. When such bonds of trust are broken, love and forgiveness must become the order of the day. When strife and open conflict break out in the fellowship, it becomes quite a challenge to learn how to love and trust once again those whom we believe have hurt us and fought against us. This is indeed the message we have received from the beginning of our abiding in Christ Jesus, that we are to love one another. That love must prevail through disaster and disappointment, through heartache and heartbreak.

B. Biblical Background

It is obvious from the internal evidence of 1 John and the historical writings surrounding this epistle that a developing schism within the Christian community led the author to pen these words. The difficulties and disagreements had already reached a point where some members, including teachers, had separated themselves from the church and were in the process of setting up their own community. A split had taken place in the household of God. Although the breach was complete, the dissidents (secessionists) continued to keep in touch with the rest of the membership and were actively trying to entice them to join the new group (2:26). The depths of their disagreements can be identified in John’s epistle by what the false teachers denied. They denied that Jesus was the Christ. They denied that Christ had come in the flesh. They denied the authority of Jesus. They denied their own sinfulness as well as the salvation made possible through the work of Christ. They denied the authority of the writer of the epistle, and they also denied that the members of the community who did not follow them were in the truth (Barker, 297).

The writer responded to the false teachers by recognizing them as a supreme danger that was threatening the very life and faith of the community. He sensed the urgent need to reassure the faithful, thus he gave his letter a strong pastoral flavor. The contents of this epistle are marked by strong affirmations and words of encouragement for the community. He reassured them that the nature of the fellowship is one of love and righteousness (1:3); that its origin is from the beginning (1:1); that in the community there is genuine forgiveness of sins (1:9) and a walk of obedience not unlike
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Gospel of Loving One Another

(1 John 3:11-14)

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

In verse 11, the expression “the message you have heard from the beginning” refers to everything that has been passed down and experienced since the ministry of Jesus. It is also fitting to refer to the “beginning” here because 3:11 finally issues the command to “love one another” in the phraseology used by Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 13:34). Prior to this, the command to love fellow Christians has been expressed by the author of 1 John in terms of loving the brother. This expression is necessary because in verses 13-18, the author will apply the story of Cain and Abel to the problems in the church community to which he is writing. The imagery of a brother betrayed (in the story of Cain and Abel) is being directly projected onto the readers, subtly but clearly. The shift from “you” to “we” in verse 14 has a pedagogical quality, designed to urge the readers to remember that they are still a part of the community, still part of the “we”—provided they make the right decision. They can choose to remain with the fold and abide in new life, or
they can follow the Evil One, like Cain did, and abide in the realm of death. “We know that we have passed from death to life” is a conviction not based on self-judgment or self-justification but on the certainty that love is the basis for life in the believing community. Love does not cause the passage from death to the spiritual life, but it gives evidence of it. Conversely, to be unable to love means that a person is without life from the Father and remains in death. When one truly loves his or her brothers and sisters in the church and in the larger world, there ought to be some evidence of it. Talk is cheap, but true love is made manifest in our actions toward our fellow human beings (Parsenios, 101).

B. Jesus Shows Us How to Love
(1 John 3:15-18)

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

In verse 15, John states quite bluntly that hatred is tantamount to murder. Hatred is the wish that the other person was not there. In short, it is the refusal to recognize the existence and rights of another individual or group of people. It is a longing that they exist no more, that they be dead. Though some may shy away from John’s blunt language, it is necessary that he reveals the real character of hatred so as to warn us against it. John says that when we hate someone we are no different from a murderer in our attitude toward that person. Such a person is in league with the devil, the chief murderer, and therefore it should come as no surprise that such a person cannot possibly possess eternal life. Hatred is incompatible with the spiritual life (Marshall, 191-92).

From such a wretched picture of hatred and murder, John turns in verse 16 to consider the positive implications of love. John defines love by giving an example of what he means: this is how we know what love is, by observing that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. The idea of love is expressed with all desirable clarity in saying that the greatest example of love is when persons lay down their lives on behalf of their friends. This language recalls the picture of the Good Shepherd in John 10. The shepherd’s willingness to lay down his life for the sheep is due to his concern for their welfare. Love means readiness to do anything for other people. To lay down one’s life means that one is prepared to give up his/her own life in order that others may live. It is also the case that the laying down of life is done for the other person. The death of Jesus is not simply a demonstration of love in the sense that we might gaze on the spectacle of the crucified Son. Rather, the point is that the self-giving involved in Jesus’ death for our sakes shows us in concentrated form the meaning of love. There is no need to try to define love when you can point to a supreme example of it—Jesus Christ (Marshall, 193).

In verse 17, John brings us down to earth in terms of how to show love on a daily basis. While readiness to lay down one’s life is a high ideal to which we may enthusiastically consent, such an action is a fairly remote possibility. Does this mean that we should be content to live our present comfortable lives until such a sacrifice is required? No, says John. If you have
a comfortable living situation in this life and you see a brother or sister in want and you show no pity on him, then the love of God cannot possibly be in you. Christian love is love which gives to those in need, and so long as we have while our brothers have little or nothing, and we do nothing to help them, we are lacking in the love which is the essential evidence that we are truly children of God.

C. The Assurance and Obedience that Come with Love
(1 John 3:19-22)

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

In verses 19-22, the writer is dealing in a very pastoral manner with an implied problem within the community: the insecurity of devout Christians whose hearts may convict them of failure to do those things they ought. Those who take their walk with God seriously understand all too well the fear of inadequacy. One’s truly being willing to lay down his/her life for a friend is a formidable challenge. The summons to share our abundance with Christians in need can also trigger feelings of guilt and unworthiness when we consider how little we give as opposed to how much we have (Black, 423). It may happen that when a person engages in this self-examination he is alarmed by the result. He considers his life and can only conclude that he falls short of the divine standard. He does not love his brothers as fully as he should. He cannot claim that freedom from sin of which John spoke earlier. How can he possibly belong to the truth when he feels that his actions belie it? (Marshall, 197).

John says we reassure our hearts by obedience to God’s command. At times, the heart is the seat of truth telling, keeping us on the straight and narrow. At other times, it is not to be trusted, for it refuses to believe the truth (Schuchard, 389-90). God understands us better than our own hearts know us, and in His omniscience He knows that our often-weak attempts to obey His command spring from a true allegiance to Him. Thus, over against this anxiety stands the solace in knowing that “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (verse 20). Clifton Black observes that our supreme court is not the human heart, whose feelings are fickle and manipulatable by fear to self-condemnation. Our court of final appeal is God, whose antecedent love for us makes possible our own love (4:19) and in whom we invest complete confidence (3:21) (Black, 423-24). While the context here is prayer, what John says in this instance can be extended to any and every occasion when the believer is in doubt about his situation before God. No matter how much his heart may condemn him, God still welcomes and forgives the person who seeks His forgiveness and casts himself upon God’s mercy (Marshall, 199).

If we can set our hearts at rest by remembering that God is greater than our hearts and knows everything, then our hearts will no longer condemn us, and we shall be able to approach God with boldness. John makes it clear “that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us,” thus emphasizing that our prayers must be in accordance with God’s will. The point is that we ought to ask for those things
that are in accordance with God’s character and plan rather than for those things that arise from selfish motives (Marshall, 199-200).

D. Commanded to Believe and Love
(1 John 3:23-24)

And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Having spoken of the need to obey God’s commandments in verse 22, in verses 23-24 John expresses with clarity what he means by this. Although he sums up the commands as one command, they are summed up in two parts. It might be possible for some readers of 1 John to get the impression that the be-all and end-all of Christianity is love for one another, and thus conclude that anybody who shows love is a Christian. Such a misunderstanding of John’s argument could be avoided if the reader would pay close attention to this key verse. John 3:23 shows that belief and love go together, and that neither is sufficient without the other. With its stress on faith and love, this verse announces two of the main themes of the remainder of this epistle. John has made plain the nature of Christian love as the fulfillment of Christ’s command; now the theme of belief becomes a central command.

The emphasis here is on right belief. The readers are to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Belief in the name of Jesus means believing that His name contains the power that it signifies, so the question is not simply one of right belief but of trust in the one who is the object of the Christian confession. A Jesus who is not the Son of God and the Christ would not be able to save the readers from their sins and bring them into the light of God’s presence. A Jesus who is less than the Jesus of the apostolic witness is incapable of doing what that witness ascribes to Him: He cannot atone for our human sins, give spiritual help, or offer any assurance of eternal life after death (Marshall, 201-2).

Abides is one of the most important and common words in the letters of John. The word is meant to connote a deep and lasting relationship. In verse 24, a totally new sense of abiding is introduced: mutual abiding of the believer and God. Abide in this instance communicates two important points: first, that the Christian’s relationship to God is not just a series of encounters but a stable way of life; second, that the stability does not imply inertia but a vitality visible in the way one walks. In the gospel of John, as Jesus prepares to depart the world, He tells His disciples that He will send the Spirit (John 14:16-17). Here in the final verse of 1 John 3, the Spirit is precisely the entity that makes it clear that God abides in the believer. It is through the empowering presence of the Spirit that we not only talk the talk, but walk the walk.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

More than any other concept, love (agape) expresses the abiding nature of the unseen God. His initiative in sending Jesus evokes love as a possibility among us and specifies the practical pattern to which our responsive love should conform and be lived out daily. God’s love for us and our love for God are perfected in our sibling
love for one another. Come what may, we are called upon to love one another through any and all situations in the life of the community of faith. We are commanded to love and taught how to love by the love that God has demonstrated in His Son, Christ Jesus (Black, 377).

**PRAYER**

*Dear Lord, teach us how to love one another. Let our actions speak louder than our words in every way of life. Let our love for our brothers and sisters be genuine and without deceit. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(November 9-15, 2020)*

**Confident Love**

**MONDAY,** November 9: “An Example of Faith and Obedience” (1 Thessalonians 2:1-10)

**TUESDAY,** November 10: “Then Darkness, Now Light” (Ephesians 5:8-16)

**WEDNESDAY,** November 11: “Live by the Light” (John 3:16-21)

**THURSDAY,** November 12: “Children of God Love One Another” (1 John 2:28–3:10)

**FRIDAY,** November 13: “Walking Faithfully in the Truth” (3 John 1-4)

**SATURDAY,** November 14: “Imitate What Is Good, Not Evil” (3 John 9-12)

**SUNDAY,** November 15: “Believe Jesus Christ; Love One Another” (1 John 3:11-24)

**Works Consulted**

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November 22, 2020 Lesson 12

SHARING LOVE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Sharing Love in Truth
YOUTH TOPIC: Uncommon Sharing for the Common Good

Devotional Reading
2 Corinthians 6:1-10

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Looking after God’s Gifts
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Sharing Love

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Acts 4:32–5:11
KEY VERSE: Acts 4:32

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Acts 4:32–5:11
KEY VERSES: Acts 4:34, 35

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.
33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.
34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,
35 And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.
36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.
33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all
34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales
35 and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.
36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”),
37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

. . . . .
37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

BUT A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,
2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.
3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?
4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.
5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.
6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.
7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.
8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.
9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.
10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.
11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

NOW A man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.
2 With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.
3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?
4 “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”
5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.
6 Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.
7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.
8 Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”
9 Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”
10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.
11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: In every community, there are people who have less than they need to maintain healthy lives. How can we best meet the needs of everyone in our communities? As the first believers in Jesus shared everything in common, the needs of everyone were satisfied.
LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore the Jerusalem church’s practice and witness of communal sharing.
2. Regret their idolatrous attachment to material goods.
3. Create a plan to increase their giving for the common good.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Ananias, Sapphira, and Barnabas were all members of the landowning class who probably identified each other as peers. All sold land and placed the proceeds at the apostles’ feet, although Ananias and Sapphira held back some of their profits while claiming to give it all.
—Barnabas played a key role in the spread of faith in Jesus and became a well-respected elder and mediator who travelled widely, both with Paul and others, sharing the Gospel.
—The key issue with Ananias and Sapphira’s lies about their generosity was that they undermined the trust of the community and the mutuality within it. Their deaths make clear just how serious this issue was.
—The sharing in the early church was voluntary and spontaneous, but not every believer sold all of their property. However, the spirit of holding all things in common has continued even though this particular communal arrangement has not.
—God’s transforming grace—referred to as “great grace” in this passage—is what made it possible for believers to hold all things in common, working in partnership with God to set aside self-interest.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Barnabas sold his land and gave all the money to help others. By contrast, Ananias and Sapphira also sold land but lied about how much they received in order to keep some of the profit for themselves.
—The key issue with Ananias and Sapphira was their dishonesty and how it undermined the trust of the community and the mutuality within it.
—Peter preached a powerful sermon one day, and many people believed because of his preaching, even people who were in town for a holiday. Their lives were changed and some of those who were visiting decided to stay longer. The believers who lived in Jerusalem shared what they had with these visitors.
—Believers shared everything with other believers even though they did not have to. Many people in the first church wanted so much to help that they shared all their possessions with everyone else.
—The believers were able to share all things in common because God’s grace helped them.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This passage is the second episode in the section that reports on the life, witness, and trials of the community of believers in Jerusalem (3:1–8:3). The first episode focused on Peter’s early ministry in Jerusalem when he healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate and preached in Solomon’s Portico, which led to the arrest of Peter and John and their defense of the message of Jesus before the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin Council (Acts 3:1–4:31). In Acts 4:31–5:11, Luke writes of the life of the Jerusalem believers with a focus on this
Christian fellowship’s sharing material resources. Having all things in common represented an ideal Christian community. However, the example of Barnabas who sold a field and laid the proceeds at the apostles’ feet sets up the next incident in this narrative, which describes the selfish hypocrisy of a married couple in the church.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Acts 4:32–5:11 could well be styled “The Jerusalem Experiment.” This growing band of believers that constituted the early church had one quality that is rare in the modern church—they were “one in heart and mind.” The early church in its Jerusalem setting experienced the fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer for unity (John 17:20-23). This unity led to specific action, action that is possible only when believers have a common mind and spirit. What may have seemed as a temporary practice to meet a temporary need—where believers had all things in common (Acts 2:44)—was extended into weeks and even months. Thus, it would appear that the sharing of possessions in the early church was more than just a temporary practice. The early Christians had the proper attitude toward possessions. They looked upon themselves as stewards whom God had entrusted with possessions. Their love and concern for their fellow believers in Christ led them to address the practical needs of the Jerusalem community of faith. They used their possessions to glorify God and to uplift the neediest among them. They believed that God was most honored when they used their material possessions to care for the needy and downtrodden among them (Wade, 50).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ananias: a Christian of Jerusalem who, noting the attention bestowed upon other Christians who sold their property and brought the proceeds to the apostles, sold a property belonging to him and his wife, Sapphira, but held back a portion of the profit. When Peter pointed out his duplicity, Ananias fell dead before him.

Barnabas: Barnabas first appears in Luke’s account of communal living in the Jerusalem church. A man of some means, he gave to the church the proceeds from the sale of a piece of land. He is also called a Levite and a native of the island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36).

Sapphira: the wife of Ananias who joined him in his lie about the sale of the property. Since this too amounted to a lie to the Holy Spirit, she was also struck dead.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Fear (5:11)—Greek: phobos (fob’-os): the causing of fear, reverence, respect; revere.
Lie(d) (5:3)—Greek: pseudomai (psyoo’-dom-ahee): deceive(d); speak (spoke) deliberate falsehoods.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Measure of a Society
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Motivated by Love (Acts 4:32-35)
   B. A Heart of Love Touched by the Spirit of God (Acts 4:36-37)
   C. The Challenge of Possessions (Acts 5:1-6)
   D. The Consequences of Deceit (Acts 5:7-11)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Measure of a Society

Hubert Humphrey, the late U.S. senator from Minnesota, said, “The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.” What Humphrey said about a government is most certainly true of the church. The early church did its best to live up to this ideal. For a time, they shared their goods and property with one another in a way that demonstrated their unity in love. In this lesson, Luke describes a threefold blessing that came upon the early church as they grappled with the idea of putting their love for the Lord into action: they were “of one heart and soul”; they gave testimony “with great power . . . to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus”; and “they had everything in common” (see Acts 4:32-33). Their lives were totally consumed by one thing: their love for Jesus Christ.

Their concern for the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus resulted in tangible proof that this disparate collection of people were followers of Jesus and felt a common attachment, not only to their Lord but also to each other. Their care for one another was so genuine that they sold their possessions in order to ensure that the poorest among them was provided for. The question naturally arises whether Luke is advocating common ownership as a standard practice for Christian churches of today. By describing the church here in similar terms to the days immediately following Pentecost (Acts 2:44-45) as one in which believers held their goods in common and distributed to all who were in need (Acts 4:32), is Luke showing us the seeds of some kind of Christian-oriented democracy? What the early church was responding to was tangible expressions of love based on the needs of its membership.

If the world sees Christians criticizing each other in attempts at one-upmanship and self-promotion, it will turn away from and ultimately reject the promises of the Gospel. What the outside world witnessed in Jerusalem in the early days of the church was a community in which those who had much sacrificed for the sake of those who had little. It was a tangible expression of their love for each other. Do such tangible expressions of love distinguish our churches today? Does the plight of those who are in need arouse within us a desire to help in some way? Do our lives in twenty-first-century America reflect the kind of consistency that is evident among the early Christians in Acts? (Thomas, 116-21).

B. Biblical Background

This summary section, like the other ones in Acts, reinforces the thrust of Luke’s narrative about the ups and downs of the community of believers in the early church. The shar-
ing of goods and having all things in common frame this unit. Luke also uses this summary to promote the Christian sect as the ideal community, appealing to popular perceptions of virtue in antiquity. As it was on the Day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit here (4:31) produces a community of sharing and continued apostolic power. Luke’s point is clear: outpourings of the Spirit in response to prayer produces great results in the kingdom of God. The immediate result of the Spirit’s empowering the community is that the members share with and serve one another. Urban Mediterranean society sometimes romanticized older ritual notions of sharing and communal values. The ideal of sharing all things in common was especially attributed to friends, an ideal celebrated at least as early as Aristotle (Keener, 1176).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Motivated by Love
(Acts 4:32-35)

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

In verse 32, Luke announces what is motivating a heartfelt attitude of sharing on the part of the community of faith—a deep unity in the fellowship. The believers were of “one heart,” which is to say that the vital center of their beings were united in love. Love for brothers and sisters was their motivating factor (Schnabel, 268). Out of a concern for each and every member, they united around a fellowship of love. In the Gospels, the disciples often quarreled among one another and had to be corrected by Jesus (Luke 9:46-47; 22:24-27); but in Acts, the Twelve are a unified group (Luke 2:14), and this unity now spreads to the entire church. “Like priest, like people” would be an appropriate way to frame this dynamic. When the leaders of a congregation are united in love, it helps the members to be united also. But when the leaders are squabbling and at odds with one another, the members tend to engage in the same kind of behavior. What joined the believers together was not simply a common affiliation to the church. There was a spiritual unity among them and a unity of passionate commitment to mission. Thus, in the middle of Luke’s description of unity we find a “shout-out,” a word of support, regarding the witness of the apostles. With great boldness in the power of the Spirit the apostles continued to teach about Jesus—the main business of the community (verse 33). Community life is never an end in itself. Rather, a vibrant community is usually a community on mission (Fernando, 179).

Verse 34 sets forth an Old Testament ideal God established for Israel: “Neither was there any among them that lacked.” According to Deuteronomy 15:4, there were to be no poor people among them, and Israel was to keep God’s commands if they wanted to continue to enjoy God’s blessings. The Christians saw themselves as the people of God of the final times, and they were striving to realize the
ideal of the people of God with no poor among them. Verses 34-35 depict the means by which they sought to realize this ideal. Those who had lands or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds, and lay the money at the apostles’ feet. The proceeds were then distributed to the needy among them (Polhill, 152-53). The reference to “the apostles’ feet” denotes the authority of the apostles over the funds being brought to the community. The apostles assessed the needs of believers, and when they heard of people’s impoverished situations passed out the funds to the needy when believers sought material support (verse 35) (Schnabel, 272).

B. A Heart of Love Touched by the Spirit of God (Acts 4:36-37)

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

In verse 36, Luke provides us with a specific example of the Jerusalem believers who cared for needy members through the selfless sharing of their material resources. Luke introduces a Levite named Joseph Barnabas—one of the most frequently mentioned believers in Acts. There can be little doubt that the interpretation “son of encouragement” identifies him as one generally known for his kindness and support of others (Peterson, 206). Traditionally, Levites were not allowed to own land in Israel in Old Testament times, but this had changed by the first century. Barnabas owned a piece of land, probably in the vicinity of Jerusalem. He sold the land, took the money, and placed it at the apostles’ feet to be distributed to needy believers (Schnabel, 273).

When Barnabas humbly places the proceeds at the apostles’ feet, he forgoes the usual social benefit of praise and public honor. In effect, his donation is a private contribution to the common purse. With this narrative, Luke is encouraging others with wealth and status in the church to cross social barriers and benefit those in need. Genuine Christian community involves both mission and mutual support and fellowship. Mission and support happen when believers truly care about one another and the cause of Christ in which they share. Such community is experienced when the grace of God is powerfully at work through the preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas is progressively revealed as a model disciple because he unites in himself such a concern for mission and the welfare of other believers (Peterson, 207). Such was the life of the early church. In our day, we devise a thousand ways to acquire everything for ourselves. The early church sold their possessions and made them common property for those in need. Today, we are inclined to begrudge the poor and blame their misfortune on them. Love motivated the early church to share the bountiful blessings that God had bestowed upon them. Our contemporary challenge is to have that same largeness of spirit demonstrated by the church in the early years of her existence.

C. The Challenge of Possessions (Acts 5:1-6)

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost,
and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

In verses 1-11, Luke moves from the positive account of the generosity of Barnabas to the chilling tale of Ananias and Sapphira. Lest anyone should think that the material question is a small matter, we learn that what they do with their possessions becomes a matter of life and death. Their unfaithfulness and deception usher in the very first crisis to hit the young community of faith (Willimon, 53). Ananias is a Hebrew name meaning “Yahweh has shown favor.” Sapphira is an Aramaic name meaning “the beautiful one” (verse 1). The couple wanted to be praised for their humility and charity while at the same time holding back a part of the proceeds for themselves (verse 2). Sapphira knew about all her husband’s actions (Schnabel, 282). Satan filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, moving them to lie to the Spirit by practicing deceit in the church (verse 3). The powerful opposition of Satan in Luke’s gospel reemerges here, as even those within the community of believers fall prey to Satan’s influence (Peterson, 208).

There is something quite natural about the lies of this couple, for we all know the way we rationalize and excuse our own covetousness, acquisitiveness, and greed. Often, our pursuit of worldly gain and creature comforts is our attempt to deal with our human insecurity. We are finite creatures of the moment who seek to secure and establish our lives in improper ways. We try to live by our wits rather than by our faith. The church represented by Peter confronts the lies of Ananias and Sapphira because the deceit of one’s self or one’s brothers and sisters in the church is a way that leads to death (verse 3) (Willimon, 54). Peter’s Spirit-inspired words lay bare the attitude and actions of Ananias and condemned him before God and His people (verse 4). Hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. Their deaths are seen as a warning that God does not merely want our performance and material gifts—He wants our whole selves. This story warns not only against the allure of money, but also of anything that competes with an undivided allegiance to God.

D. The Consequences of Deceit (Acts 5:7-11)

And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

In verse 7, Peter confronts Sapphira with a question that involves a simple yes or no answer. His question is designed to give her an opportunity either to corroborate what her husband said or to state the truth. She confirms what her husband said and misses the opportunity to tell the truth (verse 8). She, too, falls at Peter’s feet. She has fully submitted to his power and authority, for now it is not her money that lays at his feet but her corpse.
(verse 10a). The description of her burial is just as terse as that of her husband’s (verse 10b). Sapphira, who shares her husband’s deception, now shares his fate—sudden death and burial.

Ananias and Sapphira saw what happened when Barnabas and others gave their possessions, and they wanted some of the same praise and attention. Therefore, they hatched a clever little scheme to gain the praise of humans without revealing the full price of the land. Their end was immediate death. Luke says great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. While the judgment may seem harsh, the church can only thrive as the people of God if it lives with the total trust of all its members. Where there is that unity of trust, that oneness of heart and mind, the church flourishes in the power of the Spirit. Where there is duplicity and distrust, its witness fails (Polhill, 160). There were people in the fellowship who desperately needed any aid that could be provided. There were others who had the means to help them if their hearts were sincere. Attempts to deceive the community not only hurt the church but also hurt the witness of the church in the wider world. Christians are called upon to share with one another in honesty and in truth.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The scenes in Acts 4 and 5 reflect a contrast. On the one hand, there is a community holding all things in common, with figures such as Barnabas contributing resources to the community (Acts 4:32-37). Love of the brethren is writ large across this scene. On the other hand, there are people pretending to give all but who do not. Ananias and Sapphira experience a judgment for claiming to give all while holding back funds (Acts 5:1-11). As Luke records the efforts at mission, he also takes the community’s internal pulse. For the new community’s members, the issue is not just mission but how they will function together as contributors to the cause as well as to one another. Luke is a realist about human longings and human actions. Love of neighbor at times struggles to win the day. After the unit of individual sacrifice modeled by Barnabas, a unit of dishonesty surfaces within the community. God deals honestly and directly with the dishonesty within the ranks of the church. God’s actions leave no doubt that God knows their hearts and knows what the individual members of the community are doing. Luke highlights the fact that accountability before God exists within the community. God will give us the strength to reach out to one another in love, especially when there are great needs among us. But God also sees the good, the bad, and the ugly—and will act to deal with it now or later (Bock, 212).

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we pray that You would open our hearts to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus and to the larger world. Take away from us the spirit of pride and conceit, and help us to humbly bless others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS  
(November 16-22, 2020)

Sharing Love  
MONDAY, November 16: “Preparing to Become a Deacon” (1 Timothy 3:8-13)  
TUESDAY, November 17: “A Healing Ministry Grows the Church” (Acts 5:12-16)  
WEDNESDAY, November 18: “A Church Sharing Plan Is Enlarged” (Acts 6:1-7)  
FRIDAY, November 20: “Sharing All of Life Together” (Acts 2:42-47)  
SUNDAY, November 22: “Sharing All Possessions Challenges the Church” (Acts 4:32–5:11)

WORKS CONSULTED
November 29, 2020

Lesson 13

IMPARTIAL LOVE

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A Community of Equals
YOUTH TOPIC: Loving without Distinction

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Loving through Our Actions
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Considering How Others Feel

DEVOTIONAL READING
Matthew 12:1-8

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 2
PRINT PASSAGE: James 2:1-13
ADULT KEY VERSE: James 2:5
YOUTH KEY VERSE: James 2:4

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: James 2
PRINT PASSAGE: James 2:1-13
KEY VERSE: James 2:8

James 2:1-13—KJV

MY BRETHREN, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.
2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;
3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:
4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?
5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?
6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

James 2:1-13—NIV

MY BROTHERS and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.
2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in.
3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,”
4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?
5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?
6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?
7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?
8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.
9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.
10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.
11 For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.
12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.
13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Favoring one person or group over others is a common occurrence in human relationships. Why is it unacceptable to show partiality to certain people or groups? James reminds us that love requires us to treat everyone equally.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand the difference between showing partiality and treating others equally.
2. Affirm that all people are equally valued and loved by God.
3. Practice James’s call to fulfill the “royal law” of loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—In this text, the author illustrates how preference for the rich rather than the poor violates the law of love. Further, the author teaches that refusing to help those in need reflects a hollow faith.
—The Law of Moses mandated that landowners make provision for the poor, directed that working poor be paid immediately for their labor, and forbade judges from discriminating between rich and poor based upon appearance.
—References to the “royal law”—a concept unique to this epistle—draw on the idea that the poor would inherit the kingdom of God. Thus, the royal law is that which draws upon “kingdom of God” teachings of Jesus. Jesus’ teaching prioritized love of neighbor as central to the Law.
—The author’s indictment of the community for its “double-mindedness” reflects the ways in which the people in this faith community
claim to follow the teachings of Jesus but are hypocritical at their core. In dishonoring the poor—whom Jesus declared to be blessed—by treating them with disregard but preferentially treating the wealthy (who oppress them), the community is failing to live up to its calling.

—The author, by describing their favoritism, indicts the community to whom this is written of being unjust judges (discriminating based on appearance of wealth or poverty).

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Treating rich people better than poor people breaks the law of love (to love God wholly and to love neighbor as self).

—In Bible times, people who owned land had to follow rules to protect poor people. Every day, they had to pay workers who did not make much money. They had to leave the leftover grain behind in the fields for hungry people to pick up to eat.

—Judges were not supposed to treat others differently based on whether they looked wealthy or poor—that way, everyone would have a better chance of getting a just verdict.

—In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3 states that the poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of God. The same kind of teaching is in this text. Jesus’ teaching made love of neighbor, poor or rich, important to following Him. This same idea is found in this letter.

—The author of this letter taught that it was wrong for anyone to dishonor poor persons by treating them as if they were worth less than individuals who had a lot of money.

—In this letter, the author points out that the rich to whom people were giving preference were the same people who mistreated them, and that makes no sense.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The epistle of James is a quasi-prophetic letter of pastoral encouragement and pastoral rebuke proceeding from an unquestioned right of pastoral vocation and authority. It was most natural that James as the first bishop of Jerusalem should address his charges, not only in Palestine but also in their many and great centers elsewhere. Like Paul in his epistles, James is addressing people who are supposed to know the rudiments of Christianity; his aim, as in the Sermon on the Mount, is to set forth the essentials of the Christian life that are to be lived according to God’s law. James’s task is mainly practical, to help sincere believers to live up to their faith and very often to correct errors, misunderstandings, and backslidings resulting in conduct unworthy of the Christian faith. The date for the writing of James is believed to be around AD 45.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

James’s purpose in writing this epistle is to call his readers back to the practice of true religion. We can assume that he had reasons to feel it necessary to issue such a call. James recognized that religious people were too inclined to attend church and profess orthodox doctrines and pay lip service to the actual working out of their faith. He argues in this passage that the proof of religion lies in behavior. He further adds that the marks of true religion are people’s controlling the tongue, caring for the needy, and shunning the world’s pollution.

Specifically, he addresses two separate yet related problems that serve as effective barriers
to the practice of true religion. First, there is the problem of favoritism—showing partiality within the church. Second, James addresses the problem of meaninglessness of faith—without its accompanying deeds to demonstrate its authenticity. Both issues are seen by James as behaviors barricading his people from the course of true religion. Such practices are more likely to result in a curse rather than the blessing that is promised to those whose religion is pure and faultless (Walters, 79). True religion flows from the heart and manifests itself in our behavior toward our fellow human beings.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
James: the brother (or half-brother) of Jesus (Matthew 13:55). It was this James who assumed the leadership of the church in Jerusalem while the other apostles were gone on missionary journeys. This James is most likely the author of the epistle of James.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Dishonored (verse 6)—Greek: *atimazó* (at-im-az’-o): disgraced; treated disgracefully; insulted; “despised” (KJV).

Favoritism (verse 1)—Greek: *prosópolémpsia* (pros-o-pol-ape-see’-ah): “respect of persons” (KJV); partiality.

Mercy (verse 13)—Greek: *eleos* (el’-eh-os): pity; compassion.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. A Test of True Religion
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Sin of Favoritism  
      (James 2:1-4)
   B. The Discrimination of God  
      (James 2:5-7)
   C. Fulfilling the Royal Law of Love  
      (James 2:8-11)
   D. Mercy Triumphs over Judgment  
      (James 2:12-13)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. Introduction

A. A Test of True Religion

   During an economic downturn in the 1980s, the pastor of a historic black church on the east coast encouraged his congregation to begin serving weekly meals to those who were struggling to survive in the community. He urged the congregation to open the doors of the church at least once a week to any and all who wanted to come to receive a good, hot meal. To his surprise, any number of members rose up in protest saying that such a feeding program would attract the wrong kinds of people to their beautiful church. Additionally, some argued that the church simply did not have the extra funds to undertake such a program. When the pastor asked them to name “the wrong kinds of people,” they pointed to the poor, the homeless, and the unemployed young men in their neighborhood. A few even fretted that such people might even want to join the church.
Needless to say, the pastor was disheartened to know there were Christians who felt they had no responsibility to aid the poor. And worse yet, there were those in the congregation who actually looked down on the poor and needy in their community. To the credit of the congregation, the naysayers were outvoted, and the feeding plan was soon underway. Many of the church members responded positively to the pastor’s plea for extra funds to maintain the program. Others urged the church to go even further in providing for the needs of those who were hurting in their community. Over a period of months, the church’s budget actually increased as more and more people gave when they saw their church taking seriously the needs and concerns of the less fortunate among them. Some, however, never caught the spirit of generosity and continued to feel that the church should only minister to bona fide members of the congregation.

What is our responsibility to the poor and downtrodden among us? Should we render assistance to the best of our ability, or should we ignore them and look down our noses at them? James provides answers in today’s lesson: those who believe in Christ should show no partiality. Believers should not prefer one person over another because of their appearance—their faith, their clothes, or any aspect of their outward appearance. Their economic standing and social position in the community should also have no bearing on how they are received into the fellowship of God (Doriani, 61).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
A. The Sin of Favoritism
   (James 2:1-4)

   MY BRETHREN, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile
And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

James 2 shows how we should live out our faith in relation to others within the church. James argues that faith and works must be held together (verse 1). He contends that authentic faith does not play favorites. The sin of favoritism is the problem of paying attention to the rich who have no physical needs while neglecting the urgent needs of the poor. The heart of James’s argument is a homely, down-to-earth illustration: Into the church assembly (meeting) come two strangers (verse 2). That they are strangers is evident from the fact that they do not know where to sit and need one of the members to find them a place. One stranger has all the outward trappings of wealth and gets ushered to a prime seat (verse 3). The other, a poor man, has to stand or squat on a stool, near the back probably. When we ask why this is, James believes it comes down to appearance: one looks well-groomed, indicating economic security, while the other looks bedraggled and disheveled, indicating poverty and a lack of money to buy clothes more fitting for the occasion (Motyer, 80-81).

This example of favoritism is so extreme that no one could possibly object to his point that a combination of favoritism and faith in Jesus is impossible. The gist of the diatribe against snobbery seems to be this: Faith must live in true brotherly love. True love shows no partiality. All are brothers and sisters in Christ, and God is no respecter of persons. Do not try to combine faith in Christ with worship of social status (Adamson, 102). God does not play favorites. Favoritism cannot co-exist with faith. Special respect for persons based on their high social standing is antithetical to faith in God. Believers must never mix faith with partiality. If they do, then in the eyes of James it is just another case of doublemindedness. When favoritism dominates in the church, the obedience of faith is compromised and undermined (Adamson, 102-08).

B. The Discrimination of God
(James 2:5-7)

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

In the next two verses, James poses a series of hard questions for his hearers. His questions are quite direct and are meant to be answered in the affirmative. These questions were bound to put the rich in a bad light as well as the Christian assembly for condoning the mistreatment of the poor. Instead of giving special honor to the poor, James asserted that his hearers had insulted them (verse 6). The act of shaming the poor was inseparable from the simultaneous act of honoring the rich. To act this way, the Christian assembly had to disregard the honor God has bestowed on the poor who love Him. In this way, the assembly had to become false judges—because God’s standard for what should be truly honored had not been followed. You cannot say you love God and then mistreat those who are loved by God—the poor.

James goes on to point out that the very people they are honoring—the rich—were the very ones who had denied them justice and fairness by defrauding them of what was due them. He asks, “Do not rich men oppress
you?” (verse 6b). The church members themselves were included among those the rich were oppressing. The rich had also robbed them of their small amounts of wealth. The believers’ own desires for greater wealth, status, and respect were in fact a snare manipulated by the rich, according to James. Those who want to be identified with the rich are often taken advantage of by the rich. So those believers who were hard-working and gainfully employed, though of humble means, should be reminded of their own plight at the hands of the rich. Further, James reminds them that it was the rich who dragged them into court (verse 6c). Even the judges in the courts knuckled under to the evil designs of the rich. Christians were to do this no longer. Their loyalty, their hearts, and their love must be directed toward the poor. James has consciously pitted the morality of defending the poor against the material advantages of favoring the rich. Failing to take up the cause of the poor is obviously a problem everywhere and in every age, and James did not allow believers to remain neutral, even less to side with the rich and powerful for personal advantage (Richardson, 116).

Then James asks a third question: “Are not the rich blaspheming the name of the Lord?” (see verse 7). The name of the Lord, whether God the Father or Christ, signifies the mutual belonging of God and His people. The noble name of the Lord was besmirched by the ignoble practices that had stemmed from playing favorites with the rich. Thus, to honor the rich was to dishonor Christ. Only when the rich became an example of humility could they be instruments that glorified the Lord (Richardson, 117-18). James is here warning against favoritism amongst the people of God. It leads to division within the fellowship and offends God’s determination to elevate the poor in the life of the church.

C. Fulfilling the Royal Law of Love

(James 2:8-11)

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

In speaking of the “royal law,” James supplies the antidote to the wrong thinking and false judgments of the rich (verse 8). Under this law, there should be no acts of favoritism to anyone. All should be equal recipients of the love that is due them. Neighbor love in Scripture is directed to everyone who comes in contact with each believer, without distinction. Whether or not the neighbor is a believer in Jesus, that person is to receive the same love. If favoritism is going to be avoided and the righteousness of God promoted, true love must serve everyone in need, regardless of religious commitments (Richardson, 119). The kind of love that Jesus is requiring of us leaves no room for favoritism. Selective love of neighbor is not love at all; it is a cover for the attempt to gain advantage or benefit (McCartney, 148).

In verse 9, James says that to show favoritism is to commit sin, and no matter how people may try to hide their pandering to the rich behind the screen of love, the ones who do so stand convicted as lawbreakers by the law that they profess to keep (verse 9) (McCartney, 90). In verse 10, James addresses the matter of
what it means to keep the “whole law.” Here is another powerful example of James’s commitment to attack halfhearted religious practices. There cannot be selective obedience. All of the Law expresses God’s intentions. One cannot obey most of the Law and then disobey one command without becoming a lawbreaker, says James. The Law as a whole is an expression of God’s will for His people. God never intended that His commands become a kind of moral cafeteria where people pick and choose what appeals to them. James insists that obedience is not a matter of finding things one agrees with, or those rules that one finds easiest to keep, and ignoring the difficult ones. James’s words speak powerfully to our day where selective obedience is a glaring sin within the Christian community. All too many of us decide which parts of God’s Word we will obey and which parts we will ignore. We pick out which commands we like, obey them, and then claim to be religious folk. James tells us that while such selective obedience passes for religion in the world, it does not find acceptability with God (verse 10) (Walters, 90).

D. Mercy Triumphs over Judgment
(James 2:12-13)

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

This section is intended to instruct the community on how to solve the troubling issue of favoritism. Favoritism is best handled by recalling clearly the eternal perspective—including judgment—that ought to characterize all true believers. We are to speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. Note here the linkage between speaking and acting. Again, James is insisting on consistency between one’s words and deeds. Both words and acts are to take place in the context of those who will themselves face judgment. Implicit in this warning against judgment are the words of Jesus that those who show mercy are in turn shown mercy themselves (see Matthew 5:7)—and to those who withhold mercy, judgment will be severe (Matthew 18:32-35). The law of love that extends mercy to all lawbreakers is not available to those who violate that same law of love by showing preference for people on the basis of wealth (Walters, 91).

James describes the nature of the second kind of judgment that condemns for every offense as “judgment without mercy” (verse 13). To anyone who has not acted mercifully, no mercy will be shown. To those who show mercy, any kind of merciless judgment against them is swallowed up, as it were, by mercy. What was declared in the previous verse is based on the principle in this verse. Love and mercy define the “law of freedom.” Rejecting this liberating law means falling under judgment of the whole law. A play on words is evident: there will be judgment without mercy on those who have shown no mercy. James’s merciless hearers committed their acts in the face of God’s mercy (Richardson, 125). Like the prophets, then, James resolves the tension between justice and mercy by giving precedence to mercy. Since the advantage of a judgment tempered by mercy is offered to us in Christ, the Christian must always so speak and act that by always showing mercy in this life, or trying to do so, so he or she may have some with which to face their own judgment.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

James 2 stings the complacent believer with several sharp warnings about sin. First, even small, common, all-but-invisible sin such as favoritism has large consequences—for when we engage in it we fail the true tests of religion. The true test of religion is whether we love all of our fellow human beings with the same love. There is no difference between rich and poor; we are all of one blood. Second, James argues that we have no right to pick and choose among God’s commands. If we reject a command because it is unpalatable, then we have rejected the Lord who gave that law. These are serious matters. Still, God’s grace is greater than our sin. The Gospel is meant to be proclaimed to sinners, to the unworthy, and to the poor in spirit. Third, the Lord is pleased when we obey, and for all who repent and believe, He loves and forgives us even when we fail (Doriani, 78).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to apply the law of love in our lives each day. Help us not to show favoritism but to see all people as being equal in Your sight and worthy of our love and attention. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(November 23-29, 2020)

Impartial Love

TUESDAY, November 24: “Love One Another from the Heart” (1 Peter 1:17-23)
WEDNESDAY, November 25: “In Christ, Gentiles Share Abraham’s Faith” (Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14)
THURSDAY, November 26: “The Faith of a Levite Mother Saves Moses” (Exodus 2:1-10)
FRIDAY, November 27: “Unexpressed Faith Has No Value” (James 2:14-17)
SATURDAY, November 28: “Faith and Works Complement Each Other” (James 2:18-26)
SUNDAY, November 29: “Disdain the Practice of Partiality” (James 2:1-13)

Works Consulted

The Call of God in the New Testament

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter examines God’s call in stories from the New Testament. The greatest call came to Jesus. Other calls in the New Testament led to the extension of Christian ministry into the known world.

Unit I, “The Beginning of a Call,” has four lessons from the gospel of Matthew. Lesson 1 highlights the heritage of Jesus. Lesson 2 tells the story of Jesus’ birth. Lesson 3 speaks of the witness of the Magi to Jesus’ call as the Messiah. Lesson 4 tells of the call of John the Baptist.

Unit II, “Jesus and Calls in His Ministry,” presents four lessons about Jesus’ ministry. Luke emphasizes Jesus’ call to proclamation and ministry and identifies Jesus as one who calls followers. Mark speaks to Jesus’ call to a ministry of healing. John gives us a look at Jesus’ call as the intercessor for those who follow Him.

Unit III, “The Call of Women,” is a five-week study highlighting women in ministry. Lesson 9 is a focus on prophesying women mentioned in the New Testament. Lesson 10 is a focus on the Samaritan woman’s evangelistic ministry. Lesson 11 is an exploration of Mary Magdalene’s call to unwavering discipleship. Lesson 12 is a study on the impact of Priscilla’s ministry. Lesson 13 is a focus on Lydia’s call to service and hospitality.
Knowing God’s Call
December 6, 2020

Lesson 1

CALLED THROUGH HERITAGE

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Fulfilling One’s Calling

**Youth Topic:** Legacy to Live

**Devotional Reading**

Psalm 102:12-22

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** Called through Our Ancestors

**Children’s Topic:** The Heir of Promise

**Devotional Reading**

Psalm 102:12-22

**Adult/Youth**

**Background Scriptures:** Hebrews 1; Matthew 1:1-17

**Print Passages:** Hebrews 1:1-5; Matthew 1:1-6, 16-17

**Adult Key Verse:** Hebrews 1:2

**Youth Key Verses:** Hebrews 1:1-2a

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**Children**

**Background Scriptures:** Matthew 1:1-17; Hebrews 1

**Print Passages:** Matthew 1:1-6, 16-17; Hebrews 1:1-5

**Key Verses:** Hebrews 1:1, 2

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Hebrews 1:1-5; Matthew 1:1-6, 16-17 —KJV

GOD, WHO at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: 4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time,

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Hebrews 1:1-5; Matthew 1:1-6, 16-17 —NIV

IN THE past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or...
Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

THE BOOK of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;
3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;
4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;
5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;
6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.
17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Where we come from often speaks volumes about what we are like. How are people rooted in what has come before? Hebrews affirms the ultimate origins of Jesus in the very life of God, and Matthew explains how Jesus was the product of His long biblical heritage.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Grasp the significance of Jesus’ earthly heritage and His heavenly origins.
2. Wonder at the depth and scope of God’s eternal plan to bring salvation through Jesus.
3. Worship Jesus as God’s definitive self-revelation to humanity.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The genealogy in Matthew 1 is given for the primary purpose of placing the story of Jesus solidly within the tradition of the past acts of God in the world and in His coming kingdom, and the secondary purpose of documenting the history of Jesus’ earthly ancestry. Both of these purposes were known and valued by the original audience.

—Although its form is different from that of Matthew’s genealogy, the introductory statement from Hebrews functions in much the same way—to set the story of Jesus in the context of God’s redemptive work in the larger story of human history.

—In the original language (Greek), Hebrews 1:1-4 is one long, beautifully written sentence comprising a complete unit of thought. Some scholars believe that this passage might even have been part of the liturgy of the early church in which the original audience participated.

—Hebrews 1:1-4 employs classical Greek rhetorical devices that serve to help the author make a case. One example is the lack of a definite article for the word translated “Son” in verse 2. The presence of the definite article (the) would have identified the Son among all other sons to qualify Him to speak on behalf of the Father because God the Father chose Him.

—Some scholars believe verse 3 may be an early Christological hymn formulation that the author wove into the text.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Matthew connects with his Jewish audience by identifying Jesus’ genealogy through Abraham and David (1:1-16). Four Gentile women are listed in Jesus’ family tree: Ruth, Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba. Joseph is named as the husband of Mary because Jesus’ birth was the prophetic fulfillment of His being born to a virgin.

—Matthew highlights Jesus as the Messiah who had been promised from the line of David. Jesus is God’s fulfillment of the promise of a king and Messiah whose reign will never end.

—Hebrews describes how Jesus is far greater and more excellent than any beliefs or traditions practiced or created by the Jews. He is the Messiah, but many Jews rejected Him.

—Jesus is God and has been with God forever. Jesus is the one who purifies creation of sin and offers forgiveness to all.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The place of Hebrews in the canon and the New Testament is significant; it comes after the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. One of its distinct contributions is that it picks up the central themes from the entire storyline of the Bible. It notes that God’s promises have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the long-anticipated Son of God, the Messiah, and the Melchizedekian high priest. The new covenant promised in the Old Testament has been realized through Jesus, who, in obedience to God’s will, accepts God’s call and claim on His life. He takes on humanity to do the work of His Father. Hebrews announces that believers are forgiven of their sins through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. However, this fulfillment in Christ has an already-but-not-yet dimension. The new age has been inaugurated but not consummated. Thus, the new covenant has indeed come, but believers are not yet perfectly free from sin. The age to come has arrived through Christ’s resurrection, yet believers still await the coming of the heavenly city (Schreiner, 27-28).
THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Historically, authorship of Hebrews was attributed to the apostle Paul and even to Luke. Today, however, most scholars share the assessment of early Christian scholar Origen concerning the book’s authorship: “God only knows.” Despite the ambiguity regarding authorship, Hebrews is written with a creative flair. The author was not trying to dazzle the reader with theological sophistication. Instead, he wrote for very practical reasons that are made evident throughout the warning passages that permeate the letter. Through those warnings the purpose of the letter becomes clear: The writer warned his listeners not to turn away from Jesus and the new covenant to revert to the Mosaic Law and the old covenant. Jesus is God’s final revelation for the salvation of the world. To this end we are indeed in the “last days,” for all days behind Jesus Christ are the last days (Hebrews 1:2). His long-awaited coming is not accidental; the Matthean genealogy clearly shows that since the foundation of the world He has been a part of the redemptive plan of God (see Matthew 1:1).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Messiah: God’s anointed king; in the Old Testament, specifically the promised Jewish messiah; and in the New Testament, Jesus Christ.
Prophets: those in the Old and New Testaments who speak forth the truths of God. Their understandings of God’s actions in history accept meaning only in divine concerns, divine purposes, and divine participation.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Appointed (Hebrews 1:2)—Greek: tithém (TEE-thay-mee): placed; laid; set.

Begat (Matthew 1:2 [KJV only])—Greek: gen-naó (ghen-nah’-o): brought; begotten; fathered children.

Glory (Hebrews 1:3)—Greek: doxa (dox’-ah): honor; renown; glory, an especially divine quality; the unspoken manifestation of God; splendor.

Heir (Hebrews 1:2)—Greek: kléronomos (klay-ron-om’-os): an heir, inheritor.

Inherited (Hebrews 1:4)—Greek: kléronomeó (klay-ron-om-eh’-o): obtained (possessed) by inheritance; acquired; “by inheritance obtained” (KJV).

Prophets (Hebrews 1:1)—Greek: prophé-tés (prof-ay’-tace): prophets (interpreters or forth-tellers of the divine will); persons who declare the mind (message) of God.

Provided purification (Hebrews 1:3)—Greek: katharismos (kath-ar-is-mos’): cleansing; purifying; purification: literal, ceremonial, or moral; met: expiation; “purged our sins” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Importance of Genealogy
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Speaking God (Hebrews 1:1-4)
   B. Jesus’ Superiority over the Angels (Hebrews 1:5)
   C. Who Is Jesus Christ? (Matthew 1:1-6)
   D. Jesus Was Born of Mary (Matthew 1:16-17)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Importance of Genealogy

At some point in life, most of us become curious to know our own origins. Who are our ancestors and how did they come to live in certain cities and regions throughout the nation? Genealogy Web sites promising information about long-dead ancestors abound on the Internet.

Genealogy is important—for we not only carry the bloodline of our ancestors, but we also carry many of their physical and physiological traits. The things that make a person “tick” travel through the bloodline. The idiosyncrasies and eccentricities that we see in ourselves and often cannot explain are also carried in the bloodline. Our ancestors live on in and through us. They form our sacred story and they impact decisions and life choices even beyond the grave. Our ancestors are in some ways determinative of our opportunities and challenges in life. What we are by history and by blood affects who we are now and who we will be in the future.

Of equal importance is the ancestral line of the historical Jesus. From where did he come and what is the story of His ancestors and their offspring? Genealogies had many uses in the ancient world. Since society was organized around kinship patterns, lists that describe actual kinship relationships were central as the basis for regulating social interactions, marriage, and inheritance. The genealogy in Matthew 1 is a linear type used by rulers to justify their power, rank, and status. At the same time, it is used to state political relationships between families by noting a common ancestor (Abraham) and the three groups of fourteen generations, showing the special status of the ruler (the royal Messiah descending from David) (Osborne, 61).

B. Biblical Background

The genealogy in Matthew 1:2-17 proclaims that the history of God’s people Israel has moved toward one goal. It has been a checkered history, marked sometimes by faithfulness to God, but more often by faithlessness. Through his use of the name Jesus, Matthew communicates the crucial concept of “fulfillment” before offering even one Old Testament citation. The rich genealogy gives structure and purpose to Israelite history that culminates in the messianic age with Jesus. There is a unity to the Old and New Testaments. It is a unity that consists in the man Jesus who is called Christ. The genealogy confirms for us that all that precede Jesus find their meaning in Him. And since Jesus brings in the reign of God now and will usher it in finally in power at the end of the age, all that follows the story of His ministry will be rightly related to Him (Gibbs, 82).

New Testament scholar Jeffrey A. Gibbs notes that a worldview is presupposed in this presentation of Jesus by Matthew. Matthew proclaims Jesus in terms that are both
corporate and creational. For Matthew, Jesus is the goal of a history of a people. Although God deals with humans as individuals, human beings also belong to a larger community. We are individuals, but we are not isolated individuals. So, God’s dealings were with a people, Israel, and with its kings. This means that the salvation that God offers in Jesus is salvation unto a people that will be constituted as the true and new Israel in Jesus (Gibbs, 82-83).

Also noticeable in Matthew’s genealogy is the presence of four women. The four women are a diverse group. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess surely were Gentiles, and many scholars assert that both Tamar and Bathsheba were Gentiles also. Some acted righteously, though all were surely sinners. The emphasis does not fall on the women’s resourcefulness or initiative, but on the surprising grace of God (Gibbs, 88).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Speaking God

(Hebrews 1:1-4)

GOD, WHO at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

In terms of theological content, Hebrews opens with a poetic description of divine revelation as the speech act of God (verse 1). God is pictured not as a silent and distant force, impassively regulating the universe, but as a talker—one who has been speaking, arguing, pleading, wooing, commanding, telling stories, and conversing with humankind (Long, 7). The main point of the opening verses of Hebrews is that this talking God has spoken finally and definitively through His Son. The author contrasts the past era in which God spoke to the ancestors and prophets with the last days in which God spoke to us by His Son (verse 2). The last days represent the days in which God’s promises are fulfilled, and they have now commenced with the coming of the Son. Believers no longer live in the days when they await the fulfillment of what God has promised. The writer communicates from the outset that Old Testament revelation, which was diverse and incomplete, finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Son is the heir and ruler of the universe, since He is the creator of the universe and shares God’s nature (Schreiner, 52-54).

Jesus is the culmination of God’s revelation. The Old Testament Scriptures point to Him and are fulfilled in Him. We see Jesus in the introduction of Hebrews as prophet, priest, and king. He is a prophet because God’s final word is spoken by Him and in Him. Jesus is the priest by whom the final cleansing of sins is accomplished. He is the king who reigns at the right hand of God (verse 3). In His place at the right hand of God, Jesus is superior to every other agent through whom God’s word has come, particularly the angels, Moses, Joshua, and Aaron (Attridge, 39). The last days have indeed arrived in Jesus and God’s final word has been spoken through Him. Consequently, there will be no further revelation until He returns. Believers are to put their faith in what God has revealed in and through Jesus Christ.
He is our long-awaited hope of the lineage of Abraham and David who now steps forward to claim His heritage and to do God’s will (Schreiner, 61-62).

B. Jesus’ Superiority over the Angels
(Hebrews 1:5)

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

The author begins verse 5 (NIV) with a question: “To which of the angels did God ever say . . . ?” Rather than probing for information, this rhetorical question simply seeks to make a point. The writer is in fact proclaiming, “There is no angel to whom God has said . . .” (Guthrie, 68). It is clear from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the concept of Messiah as God’s Son was an aspect of Jewish thinking even prior to the Christian era (Guthrie, 68). Why would the author feel the need to demonstrate Christ’s superiority over the angels? It is possible that the community to whom he was writing tended to conceive of the nature and work of Christ along lines suggested by overblown theories about angels in first-century Jewish circles. Any such theory had to be challenged lest it compromise the unique and definitive status of Jesus and minimize the significance of His redemptive work ordained of God through centuries of prophetic speech and hoped-for fulfillment. The author writes to affirm that as Jesus lays claim to His heritage and accepts God’s call upon His life, He is uniquely suited to the redemptive purposes of God. Not even the angels can share in His “unique” status—the heritage of the promised redeemer belongs to Jesus alone (Attridge, 51).

C. Who Is Jesus Christ?
(Matthew 1:1-6)

THE BOOK of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.

The opening line of Matthew’s gospel speaks volumes about what will come in the pages that follow. Matthew intends to speak about a specific man: Jesus. It is not some abstract concept or some mysterious idea that the evangelist takes in hand to communicate to his hearers. Matthew will tell of the words and deeds of a man, Jesus of Nazareth. It is in and through Jesus that God has come near in a new way to usher in the last days of judgment and salvation for Israel and for all people. Thus, Matthew begins his gospel with an account of the “origins of Jesus” (verse 1a) (Gibbs, 72-73).

Matthew’s opening words—“Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”—had special importance to a Jewish audience, which traced its ancestry through the covenants that God made with Israel. The heading with Jesus’ name and His ancestry is packed with meaning. This book is indeed about Jesus, which is His historical birth name, the name most often used in the narrative of the Gospels. This name, which is a shortened form of the Hebrew name “Joshua,” will come to have profound notions of salvation associated with it throughout Jesus’ life and ministry (Wilkins, 56).
“Christ” (Christos) is a title derived from the Hebrew masiah, which means “anointed” (verse 1b). The term came to be associated with the promise of an “anointed one” who would be the light of hope for the people of Israel. God had promised David through Nathan the prophet that his house and throne would be established forever (see 2 Samuel 7:11b-16)—a promise now seen as having been fulfilled in Jesus as the Messiah. “Son of David” is another important expression in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew uses the name of this great king seventeen times, more than any other book of the New Testament. King David was the revered, conquering warrior of Israel’s history. His name evoked images of a conquering messiah—a mighty warrior like David who would destroy Israel’s enemies and reestablish the throne in Jerusalem and the kingdom of Israel as in the golden days of David (Wilkins, 56).

After the designation “son of David” comes the designation “son of Abraham.” The lineage is traced all the way back to Abraham, the great patriarch who received God’s covenant promise. Jesus is the one in whom the promise of blessing made in the covenant (Genesis 22:18) comes to full fruition (Case-Winters, 24). Consequently, the introduction of this Gospel with its ancestry of Jesus offers an important key to interpreting Matthew’s message. Jesus’ ministry brought fulfillment of God’s covenant to the particular people of Israel, but it also brought fulfillment of God’s promise to bring universal hope to all nations (Wilkins, 56).

D. Jesus Was Born of Mary
(Matthew 1:16-17)

And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

In verses 16-17, Matthew arrives at the culmination of the genealogy. Jesus is the true Son of David, a rightful legal heir to the covenant promises linked to the Davidic throne. He is likewise the true son of Abraham, a rightful legal heir to the covenant promises linked to the Abrahamic seed and land. But there is much more about Jesus than anyone may have anticipated. His birth, says Matthew, was not like any other in the line of David. Matthew displays intentional precision in his account of Jesus’ earthly life and ministry in order to accentuate truths that are important for devotion and doctrine. He purposely uses a feminine gender pronoun which points specifically to Mary as the one from whom Jesus was born (verse 16).

Michael J. Wilkins observes that while Matthew’s genealogy regularly emphasizes the male who fathers a child, in verse 16 he delivers a precise statement of the relationship of Jesus Christ to Joseph and Mary. While the genealogy establishes Joseph as the legal father of Jesus, Matthew emphasizes that Mary is the biological parent “of whom” Jesus was born, preparing the reader for the Virgin Birth by shifting attention from Joseph to Mary. In verses 1:2-16, the verb born appears forty times and usually in the active voice, emphasizing human action in giving birth to a child. But in verse 16, the verb born appears in the passive voice, where the subject, Mary, receives the action or is acted upon. Matthew wants the hearers to be clear that it was not the sole action of Mary who gave birth to Jesus. In so doing, he is preparing the reader for the angelic
announcement of divine actions in the conception and birth of Jesus (Wilkins, 63).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In the opening verses of Matthew 1, Matthew unfolds the lineage of Jesus, the one whom he has identified as the Messiah. However, the genuineness and the unlikeliness of this genealogy must have stunned Matthew’s readers. Jesus’ descendants were humans with all of the foibles and failures, yet potentials, of everyday people. But God worked through people such as these to bring about His plan of salvation. There is no pattern of righteousness in the lineage of Jesus. In Matthew’s genealogy we find Jews and Gentiles, heroes and cowards, and saints and sinners. One of the most extraordinary things about this genealogy is the inclusion of Gentile women, who, like their Jewish male counterparts, were human beings whose lives were marked by success and failure. Even here, Matthew’s point is clear: God works with ordinary people in the midst of the irregularities and scandals of our lives. Though all four women were socioeconomically, politically, or culturally powerless, to their credit, they all fulfilled their role in Israel’s salvation history by overcoming obstacles created by people in authority unwilling to fulfill their responsibilities (Case-Winters, 24-25).

Taking note of the juxtaposition of sinners with righteous people in the genealogy, one biblical scholar proclaimed that from the very beginning, the Gospel of Jesus Christ emphasizes the all-embracing love of God. Nothing can stand in its path. There is no one who does not stand in need of God’s grace. Likewise, there are none so unworthy in the eyes of God that they cannot have a part in His unfolding plans for His people. Not in spite of one’s heritage but because of his or her heritage, God uses any who will accept His call and claim on his or her life and live for Him.

PRAYER

Dear God, we give You thanks for the genealogies that mark and mar our lives. Our hope and trust are that in spite of our lineage You can use us to Your honor and to Your glory. We give You thanks for the plans that You have for our lives. Help us to receive them in faith. We vow this day to be workers together with You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 30–December 6, 2020)

Called before Birth

MONDAY, November 30: “God’s Anointed Ruler of All Nations” (Psalm 2)
TUESDAY, December 1: “Blessed and Chosen in Christ” (Ephesians 1:1-14)
WEDNESDAY, December 2: “Christ, Head over All People/Things” (Ephesians 1:15-23)
THURSDAY, December 3: “In the Family Line of David” (Matthew 1:6b-15)
FRIDAY, December 4: “God Anoints Jesus as King” (Hebrews 1:6-9)
SATURDAY, December 5: “Jesus, Creator and Eternal Ruler” (Hebrews 1:10-14)
SUNDAY, December 6: “Expectations of Jesus before His Birth” (Hebrews 1:1-5; Matthew 1:1-6, 16-17)
December 13, 2020

Lesson 2

CALLED BEFORE BIRTH

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Called to Participate in a Promise
YOUTH TOPIC: Born with a Promise

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Called to Form a Family
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: A Special Promise

DEVOTIONAL READING

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 1:18-25—KJV

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.
19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.
20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.
22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

Matthew 1:18-25—NIV

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.
19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.
20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
21 “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”
22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:
23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.
24 When Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:
25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: A newborn baby inspires us to wonder about the potential of every human life. How do we understand the designs of our lives? Joseph’s call to form a family with Mary suggests that God calls us to give hope to the world through our families.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Remember the story of the angel’s announcement to Joseph of Jesus’ birth.
2. Rejoice that the birth of Jesus fulfilled God’s promise to be with His people.
3. Live with greater awareness of God’s abiding presence.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The name Jesus means “Yahweh saves.” Significant Old Testament figures have variations of that same name: Joshua, who led the people of Israel into the Promised Land, Hosea the prophet, and Yeshua/Joshua, the high priest instrumental in rebuilding the Temple (see Ezra 3:1-3).
—Joseph sought to keep Mary’s surprising pregnancy private, not exposing her to public shame (deigmatisai). Ironically, Mary’s Son, Jesus, would publicly shame (edeigmatisen) the great and powerful of this world by triumphing over them in His crucifixion and resurrection (see Colossians 2:15).
—Isaiah gave the original Immanuel prophecy to King Ahaz of Judah (see Isaiah 7:10-16). A child would be born to a young woman as a sign that the political threats Ahaz feared would soon be gone. Matthew saw this prophecy as having additional prophetic significance regarding the Messiah.
—The description of Joseph as a man who was righteous/just/faithful to the Law (dikaios) yet desiring to show mercy is theologically important in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew records Jesus’ pairing righteousness/justice with acts of undeserved mercy (5:6-7, 45; 25:37-40).
—At first, Joseph would have seen Mary’s announcement as terrible timing—the pregnancy of an unmarried woman! Paul, in contrast, affirms Mary’s pregnancy as an example of God’s perfect timing (see Galatians 4:4-5).
—Sexual unfaithfulness during the betrothal period, when a couple was legally bound to one another but not yet involved sexually, was considered adultery—an offense punishable by death.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—Matthew identifies Joseph as the husband of Mary and not as Jesus’ father. Luke identifies Mary as a virgin when the angel Gabriel tells her the good news of Jesus’ conception by the Holy Spirit.
—Mary, the mother of Jesus, was engaged to Joseph. The families had agreed to the marriage and the public announcement was made, but the wedding ceremony and the consummation of the marriage had not taken place.
—Joseph was greatly disturbed by Mary’s news that she was pregnant. The civil law allowed for Joseph to divorce her or she could be stoned by the Jewish leaders.
—Joseph met the challenge of his intended wife with compassion and decided that he should quietly divorce Mary.
—When Joseph fell asleep he had a dream. Joseph received a message from God to make Mary his wife; this became a call on his life.
—Joseph responded to his call with obedience and dispatch. At the child’s birth, Joseph named Mary’s firstborn Son Jesus.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
In Matthew 1:18-25, we see a change in the “A begat B” formula repeated more than forty times in the first seventeen verses. In a manner of speaking, Matthew is shifting gears and moving to a sudden change in formula with the words “This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah (Christ) came about” (Matthew 1:18, NIV). The story that follows describes how the Son of God is also Son of Abraham and Son of David. This highly theological account is the first of three stories about the angelic appearances to Joseph, which are knit into the infancy narratives (Mullins, 84).

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
By identifying Jesus as “God with us,” Matthew continues a theme that permeated the Old Testament concept of God with His people. When God gave the law to Israel in the desert, He stressed His covenantal intent: “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12, NIV). The nation was called to a relationship in which they were to understand themselves to be God’s people. The later promise of a coming Davidic Messiah was also intertwined with the promise that God Himself would be with His people (Ezekiel 37:24-28). There is considerable significance in the interpretation of Jesus’ name as *Immanuel*. God has come to be with His people to fulfill the deepest meaning of the covenant. Matthew not only gives attention to Jesus’ genealogy, but also gives accounts of His miraculous conception and infancy. Matthew attests to both human and divine natures in the remarkable conception of Jesus. The child has a human lineage through King David and the patriarch Abraham (1:1-17), a human name, “Jesus,” by which He identifies with His people” (1:21), and a human birth (1:25). But the child also has a divine relationship through the Holy Spirit.
(1:23), a divine description—“Immanuel”—which means ‘God with us’ (1:22), and a divine origin through the Holy Spirit in His conception by His virgin mother (1:18, 20) (Mullins, 89).

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

**Angel:** a spiritual being serving God and supporting humankind.

**Joseph:** the husband of Mary and putative (commonly accepted) father of Jesus. According to Matthew, he was a Bethlehemite carpenter who later settled in Nazareth, but Luke’s account has him journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to comply with the census edict.

**Mary:** the mother of Jesus and wife of Joseph. Mary lived in Nazareth where she was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. Before the consummation of their marriage, the angel Gabriel appeared to her at her home with the message that she would bear a son, who was to be God’s own Son.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Angel (verse 20)—Greek: ἁγγελός (ang’-el-os):** a messenger of God.

**Christ (verse 18)—Greek: Χριστός (khri-stos’):** the Anointed One, “Messiah” (NIV), Christ.

**Espoused (verse 18)—Greek: μνεύτηκεν (mnace-tyoo’-o):** betrothed; “pledged to be married” (NIV).

**Prophet (verse 22)—Greek: προφήτης (prof-ay’tace):** a prophet (an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will).

**Righteous (verse 19, NASB)—Greek: δικαιός (dik’ah-yos):** correct; righteous; by implication innocent; “just” (KJV); “faithful to the law” (NIV).

**Save (verse 21)—Greek: σώζω (sode’-zo):** to save, deliver.

**Sins (verse 21)—Greek: ἁμαρτία (ham-ar-tee’-ah):** sinful deeds; failures.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction

A. The Virgin Birth

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The One Born of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-19)

B. An Angel of the Lord and a Dream (Matthew 1:20)

C. The Child’s Name and Mission (Matthew 1:21-23)

D. An Obedient Joseph and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:24-25)

III. Concluding Reflection

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. The Virgin Birth**

In Matthew’s story of the miraculous conception, Joseph becomes aware of the pregnancy before he learns the cause. His immediate response is that of a “just man”: he must divorce her. Joseph has yet to understand the movement of God in his family’s situation (Hare, 8). God has preordained Joseph to play a vital role in the coming of Jesus Christ into
the world. However, the decision to respond in faith and accept God’s will for his life will be up to him. God’s grace is prevenient, which means God had been at work on Joseph prior to Joseph’s turning to Him in faith. Not only was God at work before the birth of Jesus, but He was also at work before the birth of Joseph. Faith is defined as the positive response of the total person to the initiatives of almighty God. When the angel informs Joseph that Mary’s pregnancy is of the Holy Spirit, Joseph must decide whether to respond positively to the initiatives of God. After the appearance of the angel, Joseph decides to take Mary home as his wife. He decides to say yes to the actions of God in his life. All our lives have been ordered by God—the question is whether we will accept His will or go our own way.

B. Biblical Background

Matthew’s birth narrative broadly fits the genre of the birth announcement seen in the Old Testament and other literature. Although it is usually referred to as a “birth narrative,” what Matthew narrates is the conception of Jesus, not His birth. Matthew states as a matter of fact that Mary’s pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit, but Joseph does not yet know this. It is highly likely that many ancient readers would have mocked such a claim, but others would have been open to this possibility. Given Jesus’ mighty works, to include the Resurrection, many would have expected an unusual birth of such an amazing figure. Moreover, the ancients—Jews as well as pagans—appreciated the workings of God in everyday life. Many in that day also believed that a once-barren woman’s giving birth was the work of divine power. If such thinking was true in the case of a barren but married woman, how much more so in the case of an unwed virgin (Evans, 40)?

Mary’s miraculous conception would have been understood very much in terms of the powerful working of God’s Spirit, as seen in every conception, and especially seen in the examples in the Old Testament in which elderly or otherwise barren women conceive. Mary’s virginal conception tops them all, for her child is none other than Israel’s long-awaited Messiah and God’s Son (Evans, 41-43).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The One Born of the Holy Spirit
(Matthew 1:18-19)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

Matthew describes the birth of Jesus by telling the unique manner in which His mother, Mary, became pregnant. Before she and Joseph came together, Mary was found with child. Betrothal according to Jewish custom of the time was, for all intents and purposes, already a marriage waiting to be consummated. The intended marriage was arranged by the parents often while the prospective marriage partners were quite young. The contract was legally binding and subsequent sexual promiscuity was seen in the same light as adultery. Although betrothal had taken place, the marriage could only be deemed complete when the bride was
brought to the house of her husband. In the case of Mary, she was betrothed but not yet taken to her future husband’s house. She was found to be with child and therefore in apparent violation of the moral and legal obligations of the betrothal contract. Infidelity to the contract was seen in similar terms to infidelity in marriage and similar penalties were laid down (Mullins, 84).

The Mosaic Law in Leviticus 20:10, 21 prescribed the death penalty for adultery, leaving the manner of execution open. Deuteronomy 22:21-22 specified stoning for a woman who could not show evidence of virginity. Deuteronomy 22:23-27 prescribed that a woman who was unfaithful during betrothal should be brought to her father’s house and stoned by the men of the city because of the disgrace she had brought upon her father’s house. These laws do not seem to have been enforced in Jesus’ time and the “injured party” seems to have had the option of dealing with the matter privately. Joseph, who chooses to deal with the pregnancy privately, is described as a just man, a pious Jew (1:19). The words “just man” describe one who does the will of God and so facilitates God’s plan for the coming of the kingdom. Being a just man, he was aware of the requirements of the Law—but in choosing the other option he also showed the qualities of a pious Jew. Joseph sensed, though maybe not fully, that God was at work in the pregnancy of his soon-to-be wife.

**B. An Angel of the Lord and a Dream**  
(Matthew 1:20)

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

As Joseph considered divorcing Mary quietly, an angel of the Lord appears in his dream. The appearance of the angel has the marks of an epiphany or divine encounter as the angel addresses Joseph with the exhortation not to fear to take Mary as his wife. His decision not to publicly expose Mary is affirmed by the angel in his dream. The angel tells Joseph not to divorce Mary but to complete his marriage to her. What Joseph might well have suspected—something supernatural in the conception of this child—is confirmed by this messenger from heaven. He is directed to make Mary his wife and to treat the child as his own (verse 20). Further, Joseph is told by the angel to bring mother and child into the house and line of David (Mullins, 87).

Why is it so important for Joseph to obey the voice of the angel in his dream? This messenger from God wants Joseph to know that God has already been at work to effect His redemptive purposes on the earth. He has made His claim upon Jesus even before He enters the world as a baby in Mary’s arms. All who obey are also playing their part in God’s purpose, and all who resist will find themselves on the wrong side of God’s actions on behalf of humankind.

**C. The Child’s Name and Mission**  
(Matthew 1:21-23)

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.
The angel further tells Joseph that the child is a boy and that His name must be Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins (1:21). The name Jesus means “the Lord saves.” The Lord saves and delivers His people in many ways: He gives food to the hungry; He heals the sick; He comforts the brokenhearted. Many also hoped that the Messiah would save Israel from their Roman oppressors. But the angel declares God’s agenda. Jesus has not come to save His people merely from physical enemies; He has come to save His people from their sins (verse 21). Sin is the root of all other calamities. While calamities come from many sources—accidents, disease, willful disobedience—the root cause of disorder is sin and the greatest disorder is to be at odds with God. Jesus will save His people from all such (Doriani, 18).

The birth of Jesus not only begins the unfolding of God’s salvation for humankind, but it also fulfills the Scripture. The precise words are instructive: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet” (verse 22, NIV). The prophet in this instance is Isaiah. These are God’s words, spoken in the long ago by a prophet whose heart had been touched by God. The birth of Jesus also shows us that God is with us (verse 23). God is always with us. We can never flee from His presence on land or on sea (see Psalm 139:7-9). We can ignore God, deny God, or even curse God, but He never goes away. He never disappears. His rule and reign (kingdom) extend over all creation. God is omnipresent.

D. An Obedient Joseph and the Holy Spirit
(Matthew 1:24-25)

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

When the angel had finished speaking, Joseph woke up, believed, and did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife (verse 24). His submission to God was as powerful and complete as that of Mary’s, who also offered herself as a servant of the Lord. Joseph refused to give in to feelings of shame or anger. He laid aside his pride and his initial thoughts of divorce and took Mary as his wife. To make the supernatural conception of Jesus perfectly clear, Matthew says Joseph had no union with Mary until she gave birth (verse 25). What a blessed testimony to living faith! Mary and Joseph listened to God and refused to give heed to their emotions of fear and shame. Because they were willing to listen to the voice of God, no matter what people might think or say, they show us how to listen to and obey God rather than our own impulses.

This portion of Matthew offers a picture of faith, but more than that it is an account of the triune acts of God. God the Father has broken into human history and His plan of redemption has been initiated. The Spirit as co-partner in God’s eternal scheme of redemption has fashioned life in the womb of Mary and moved the hearts of Mary and Joseph to accept their role in the divine drama. We have been called to participate in this divine drama. In leading the way, Mary and Joseph have become our example. It is still God’s divine right to call and our responsibility to answer. Obedience is still better than a sacrifice. Our heeding God’s call and participating in His promises are our challenges in modern-day America.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Matthew’s recounting of the birth of Jesus is intended to say to all that when necessary, God intervenes in human affairs. Joseph was about to divorce Mary, and God sent an angel in a dream vision to tell him God’s intentions for him and to give him orders. We could all wish that God would do so in our lives and guide us so directly. However, God does not always use miraculous means to make His will known—not even in biblical times.

We can never fully understand how Jesus can be fully human and fully divine, but this passage tells us at least the means by which this was accomplished. Jesus is our friend who understands our weaknesses and can “sympathize” with our plight—but at the same time He is our sovereign Lord, the object of our worship.

Third, the Holy Spirit is central in Matthew’s gospel. He wants his readers to realize the Spirit’s presence in Jesus’ birth and in our world. This is the age of the Spirit, the final stage in God’s plan to prepare this world for the end time (eschaton), when the eternal will be inaugurated. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings Jesus to birth in persons, the one who makes Jesus alive in human life, and the one who makes Jesus historical and real. In Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is present with His people in a whole new way. He was ordained of God and called by God to this work (Osborne, 80-82).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that You have planned our lives from the foundations of the world. You have called us to play our parts in the grand scheme of the redemption of the world. Help us to respond to Your initiatives in faith. Enable us to see Your guiding hand in all that we do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 7-13, 2020)

Called before Birth

MONDAY, December 7: “A Sign of God’s Presence” (Isaiah 7:10-15)
TUESDAY, December 8: “Called as Light to the Nations” (Isaiah 42:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, December 9: “Called to Mission before Birth” (Isaiah 49:1-7)
FRIDAY, December 11: “Simeon Foretells Jesus’ Ministry” (Luke 2:34-38)
SATURDAY, December 12: “Mary, in the Lineage of Ruth” (Ruth 4:9-17)
December 20, 2020  Lesson 3

A REGAL RESPONSE TO HOLY LIGHT

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/ YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** International Honor for the King of the World  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Honoring the King of the World

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 2:7-15  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 2:7-15  
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 2:11

Matthew 2:7-15—KJV  
7 Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.  
8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.  
9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.  
10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Matthew 2:7-15—NIV  
7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.  
8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”  
9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.  
10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Witnesses to the Divine Call  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Respect and Honor

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 2:7-15  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 2:7-15  
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 2:9

Matthew 2:7-15—NIV  
7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.  
8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”  
9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.  
10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.
12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.
13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.
14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:
15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.
13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”
14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,
15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: As we live on, we are exposed to more and more people who differ from us in race, culture, and religious values. Is there hope for unity in such a world? By summoning wise men from far-off lands to worship Jesus, God demonstrated that this newborn King would transcend the differences that divide us.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain how the wise men point to the universality of Jesus’ mission.
2. Grieve for those who suffer innocently due to the world’s brokenness and sin.
3. Join with peoples of every ethnicity and culture to worship Jesus, the king of all nations.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Wise men (Greek: “Magi”) were experts in sacred writings, ancient wisdom, and astrology. It is likely that the Magi became familiar with the idea of a coming Jewish Messiah because the Jews had been exiled centuries before in Persia and Babylon.
—Herod the Great was appointed by Rome to govern the Jews from about 37 to 4 BC. History shows him to be a ruthless ruler willing to resort to murder and political assassination to retain power.
—Matthew’s account deals with events that occurred after Jesus’ birth (see Matthew 2:1), while Luke wrote of the last days of Mary’s pregnancy and the birth of Jesus (see Luke 2:5-7). Both gospels, however, record that visitors outside of the mainstream of Jewish society were divinely directed to visit Jesus.
—It was logical that the Magi sought a newborn king of the Jews at the palace in the capital city. While that visit gave the wise men direction from Scripture concerning the Messiah’s birthplace, it also intensified Herod’s fears of a threat to his own reign.

—Like Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy (see Isaiah 7:10-16) in Matthew 1:23, the reference to the mourning in Ramah (see Jeremiah 31:15-17) was originally given in another historical context but was viewed as a typology of the Christ event.

—The wise men gave gifts that confirmed Jesus’ call as prophet, priest, and king.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Jesus’ birth announcement was given to two very different groups: the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) and the Magi, wise men (Matthew 2:1-2). The shepherds were able to travel quickly to see the newborn king in Bethlehem and told many about Jesus’ birth. The Magi had to travel much further and found Jesus when He was about one or two, at home with Mary and Joseph.

—The Magi travelled many miles to see Jesus. They may have come from various countries and possibly been scholars who studied astrology and read various ancient manuscripts.

—The Magi followed a star that would lead them to find the King, Jesus, whom they worshipped with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were gifts fitting Jesus’ calling as prophet, priest, and king.

—Although King Herod trusted the Magi to reveal where Jesus was, they did not honor Herod’s request. The Magi followed God’s warning in a dream not to see Herod again and went back home to their respective countries another way.

—Herod the Great died and the Scriptures were fulfilled that God’s Son would come out of Egypt (see Hosea 11:1). Joseph had taken his family to Egypt as the angel had directed to escape Herod’s decree to kill the young males ages two and younger (see Matthew 2:13-17). Some scholars think that Matthew uses Jeremiah’s prophecy and fulfillment of this event to reflect an Old Testament connection (see Jeremiah 31:15).

—God’s call and self-revelation to the wise men indicates the all-inclusive nature of Jesus’ ministry.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

After positioning Jesus’ origin and lineage in Jewish history (see Matthew 1), Matthew proceeds to place Jesus’ birth, politically and socially, in the time of Herodian rule. In the unfolding plot of Matthew 2, Matthew highlights kingship and, particularly, the conflict of rivaling kings. The conflict between Herod and Jesus, the rightful king, comes into full view. Matthew underscores Herod as king by repeating his title in Matthew 2:1, 3, and 9. Herod fears that Jesus poses a threat to this present kingship and is disturbed by the Magi’s question about the location of the One who had been born king. Herod became furious when his plans to intercept the child were hindered (see 2:16). Matthew emphasizes both the authenticity of Jesus as rightful king and His vulnerability as a child king (Brown and Roberts, 33).

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

Matthew emphasizes the Davidic origin of God’s true king through Jesus’ birth in David’s hometown, Bethlehem. A Jewish reader would have known that Herod did not have Davidic an-
cestry and so was not God’s rightful king. Herod the Great was half-Jew and half-Idumean, who, through accommodation to the Romans, ascended to power as client-ruler of Israel in 37 BC (Brown and Roberts, 34). As he grew older, he became increasingly paranoid about threats against his life and reign as king. He had numerous sons, wives, and others close to him put to death because he feared plots to overthrow him.

Jesus is God’s chosen Davidic Messiah-king, yet He is also portrayed as vulnerable in these early chapters of Matthew. The evangelist makes a theological point of unfolding events in the early life of Jesus. The Magi see the child, worship Him, and present Him with gifts (2:11). Joseph takes the child to Egypt to protect Him until after Herod’s death (2:14). Joseph then takes the child and returns home (2:21-22). The detailed recounting of the story emphasizes an important theological point: God attentively watches over the young, still-vulnerable king through warnings and guidance that come in dreams and through angels (2:12, 13, 19) (Brown and Roberts, 34).

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

**Herod:** Herod the Great (73–4 BC), second son of Antipater II, who named him governor of Galilee at age twenty-five in 47 BC. It was toward the end of his reign that Jesus was born. Matthew reports that Herod identified the birth as a threat to his own power.

**Magi (wise men):** designated originally as a type of Median. By New Testament times, the term was used quite broadly for persons adept in any of a number of secret arts, including dream interpretation, mediation on divine messages, astrology, fortune telling, magic, and divination.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Behold** (verse 13 [KJV only])—Greek: *idou* (id-oo’): look; see; lo.

**Magi** (verse 7)—Greek: *magos* (mag’-os): a Magian; an (Oriental) astrologer; by implication a magician.

**Rejoiced** (verse 10)—Greek: *chairó* (khah’-ee-ro): to have rejoiced; was glad; “were overjoyed” (NIV).

**Search** (verse 8)—Greek: *zetéo* (dzay-teh’-o): to seek, examine closely.

**Star** (verse 7)—Greek: *astér* (as-tare’): a star.

**Worship** (verse 8)—Greek: *proskuneó* (proskoo-neh’-o): to express profound reverence.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. A Rising Star and the Visit of the Wise Men

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. The Wise Men and the Deceitful Acts of Herod (Matthew 2:7-8)

B. A Guiding Star and Unspeakable Joy (Matthew 2:9-11)

C. Home by Another Way (Matthew 2:12)

D. The Escape to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15)

**III. Concluding Reflection**
I. INTRODUCTION
A. A Rising Star and the Visit of the Wise Men

In the first half of the infancy narrative, Matthew focuses on the identity of Jesus—but in this scene (2:1-15), he introduces Herod and the Magi and sharply contrasts their reactions to the news of Jesus’ birth. The Magi are not kings but a combination of wise men and priests probably from Persia. The wise men come to Jerusalem after observing a star rising in the east. A new star in the sky was often believed to herald the birth of a significant person in the land over which the star shone (Blomberg, 62). The Magi travel to Jerusalem in search of answers about the rising star. In asking the location of the child associated with the star, they emphasize the word born: “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” (verse 2, NIV). They are clearly asking about the baby-king who has the legitimate claim to Israel’s throne by virtue of His birth. Herod, by comparison, is viewed as the usurper or unlawful occupant of the throne. Jesus is the legitimate king.

If Herod had been a true follower of biblical Judaism, then he would have rejoiced greatly over this news of a rising star in the East, but he did not. He viewed the new child as a mortal threat. Not only was Herod frightened (verse 3), but all of Jerusalem as well. “All of Jerusalem” primarily refers to the religious leaders of Israel who dominated the city, many of whom were personally installed by Herod. The usurper, Herod, shows his limited knowledge of Scripture by having to ask the religious authorities where this Messiah is to be born. The chief priests and scribes inform Herod that the child is to be born in Bethlehem, as was prophesied by Micah in the Old Testament (Micah 5:2) (Blomberg, 63).

According to Thomas Long, this story shows how these characters—Herod, the chief priests and scribes, and the wise men—relate to the birth of Jesus. The wise men arrive in Jerusalem seeking “the King of the Jews” because they have observed a phenomenon in nature—the rising of a star (verse 2). Their arrival produces two responses with theological significance. The first response is that Herod “and all Jerusalem with him” are frightened (verse 3). If the wise men are seeking a child who is “King of the Jews,” then this obviously calls into question the standing and stability of Herod himself, who is currently the political, Roman-authorized king of the Jews. The birth of the true Messiah undermines all pretenders to the throne. Whenever the true nature of the Gospel is understood by the powers-that-be, all proud and boastful rulers turn fearful and all religious leaders who have sold out their faith are exposed for who and what they really are—hypocrites who have long since left their first love.

The second response to the inquiry of the wise men is that Herod calls together the religious officials for some Bible study to determine where the Messiah would be born.
Putting their heads together and combining Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2, the authorities inform Herod that the Messiah is to be born in “Bethlehem, in the land of Judah” (Matthew 2:6). Jesus, the great Shepherd-King, is to be born in the village of David, the shepherd-king. Herod then deceitfully passes on this information to the wise men, who follow the star to Bethlehem seeking to find the child Jesus.

B. Biblical Background

Matthew sets Jesus’ birth in the context of contemporary history and kingship, in the days of Herod the king (37–4 BC). Far from the normal expectations of a king charged with shepherding the flock of Israel and modeling the expectations of a new David, the Herod family showed no such tendencies in their rise to power. Herod and his royal house are very different from the messianic expectations of an ideal shepherd-king of Davidic descent. The imagery of corrupt power exemplified by Herod is quite different from the power that will characterize the Son of David. The days of Herod were very dangerous days, particularly for any political rival within or outside the family of Herod. All lived in fear of his vengeance and would have rejoiced at his downfall.

Against such a background, Matthew tells the story of the arrival of a group of gift-bearing Magi from the east who announced the birth of a newborn King of the Jews, a child of whom Herod knows nothing. The coming of the Magi is heralded in the story as a momentous event in salvation history. A procession of Magi bearing gifts from the east would have been part of the contemporary royal scene in palaces and temples. Royalty and dignitaries came in procession to more powerful potentates to curry favor, seek protection, or head off hostilities. The Magi recognized the birth of the King of the Jews in the star at its rising (Mullins, 94-95). The story of the wise men ends with their being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, but to go directly to their own country (2:12). God spoke to Joseph, a true son of David, through a dream, and now God was speaking to these Gentiles, sons of another family, in the same manner. As they head over the horizon, this is the last we see or hear of the wise men. They enter the scene for a brief, yet theologially significant, moment in the story of Jesus (Long, 19-20).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Wise Men and the Deceitful Acts of Herod

(Matthew 2:7-8)

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

The Magi are the first of several characters in the gospel of Matthew who point to the Gentile mission. Historically, “magi” were of Persian origin, a priestly caste able to interpret dreams and portents. Matthew describes them generically as coming “from the East” and following the guidance of a star. The Magi represent the people of goodwill, those seeing the hand of God in the universe and reading the
signs of the time. They represent those who will be open to the mission of the Christ/Messiah and His disciples. That they come “from the East” does seem to be of such great importance to Matthew. His emphasis is on the significance of their coming to offer gifts and pay homage to the newborn King (Mullins, 97).

The star that attracts them is not just any star but “His star,” a special divine sign pointing to Jesus (Senior, 44). Following the star, the Magi come to Jerusalem to find the “King of the Jews.” Their journey may be reminiscent of the pilgrimage of the nations, a biblical image that anticipated that the nations would ultimately come to Israel either as captives or willing pilgrims, intent on paying homage to the God of Israel (Senior, 44-45). When Herod learns of the Magi’s quest, he summons them to his court to find out the exact time the star had appeared (verse 7). Herod’s hypocrisy matches his shrewdness when he sends the Magi on their way with the request to find the child and let him know His location so that he may go and pay homage to Him (verse 8). This scene serves to indicate Herod’s treachery as well as laying the groundwork for the slaughter of the infants in Matthew 2:16 (Schnackenburg, 23).

B. A Guiding Star and Unspeakable Joy
(Matthew 2:9-11)

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

The Magi heard Herod out (perhaps skeptically). Upon learning that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, the Magi resume their journey. The star appears again and goes “ahead of them,” coming to rest over the house in Bethlehem (verse 9). None of this could be explained naturally; the miraculous star illustrates God’s guidance, which fulfills the travelers’ longing and is the reason for their great rejoicing. Their response is notable: They are “overwhelmed with joy” as the star leads to the very place they seek (verse 10, NRSV). Upon seeing the child and His mother, they fall down and pay homage to Him. The house in which they find the child “with Mary his mother” (Joseph is not mentioned) suggests a permanent residence. The homage paid to the child fit His royal station and, according to Eastern custom, would have been carried out with bowing and full prostration, adoration and reverence due to God (Schnackenburg, 23).

Upon opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts (verse 11). The presents are gifts of homage for the King of Peace. Such gifts were in keeping with homage shown to a ruler, and their lavish nature makes sense since this is a royal scene. Down through the centuries, all kinds of imaginative metaphorical meanings have been read into the gifts (gold for His royalty, frankincense for His divinity, myrrh for His suffering and death), but Matthew ignores such characterizations. These were simply the types of expensive gifts given to a future king (Osborne, 91). Matthew here is not concerned with the origin or symbolism of the gifts but with streams of peoples who journeyed from far away (see Isaiah 2:2-3). The wise men were symbols of a journey now being undertaken by the nations, the floods of Gentiles entering the church of Jesus (Matthew 28:19). That the
C. Home by Another Way  
(Matthew 2:12)

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi went home another way. You can never see Jesus and go back the same way you came. A modern-day songwriter exclaimed with joy, “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart.” The Magi were warned not to return to Herod. Matthew’s emphasis is on the supernatural nature of the warning, indicating that God continues to control the action. A major thrust of the first gospel is that when people try to block or undermine God’s will, He intervenes supernaturally to overcome all such hostile actions. The fact that this time no angel appears in the dream, according to Grant Osborne, stresses even more the hand of God in the warning. So, the Magi (wise men) take another route home, and Herod’s evil plan is thwarted (Osborne, 91).

D. The Escape to Egypt  
(Matthew 2:13-15)

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

This passage describes how Joseph, warned by God in a dream, fled with Mary and the boy Jesus away from the murderous Herod to the safety of Egypt. According to Thomas Long, once again Joseph demonstrates that he is an example of the “higher righteousness” sought by Jesus (see Matthew 1:18-25). Joseph’s faith is not just a book religion; he is alert to the presence of God in the moment, ready to obey God’s unpredictable Spirit. He listens to the voice of God’s messenger and, without hesitation, leaves behind his familiar surroundings to enter the strange land of Egypt (verse 13).

For the third time Matthew tells a story about Jesus and connects it to an Old Testament prophetic text. In this instance, the flight into Egypt is linked to Hosea 1:1: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Matthew thought that it was clearly necessary for Jesus to be taken to Egypt in order that the prophecy about His coming out of Egypt could be fulfilled. Jesus is shown to be travelling the same path as did the people of Israel. The quoted passage in Hosea (“out of Egypt I called my son”) refers to the Exodus, to Israel being brought out of Egypt. Matthew is emphasizing the truth that Jesus is the embodiment and fulfillment of the mission and identity of Israel. Everything that God called Israel to be, says Long, Jesus is (Long, 21).

In these verses we begin to see the faint outlines of a theological theme that will become ever more prominent in Matthew—the hidden hand of God ruling human history. If we view this narrative only on the surface, we see a sad bit of human history. Herod, a political tyrant,
is on the edge of engaging in a reign of terror to preserve his grip on power. An innocent family is caught in the power play and must flee for their lives. Events seem out of control and one wonders if history is “a tale told by an idiot.” However, in Matthew we see beneath the surface of the terrible events of the day to find another story, being firmly written by the hidden hand of God (Long, 21).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

From the beginning of his gospel Matthew gives prominence to the theme of Gentile inclusion. The four women at the front of the genealogy (1:3, 5, 6) are Gentiles who have been included in the life of Israel. The Magi are the first Gentile characters in the story of Jesus. They respond positively to Jesus the Messiah by worshipping Him (2:2, 11), foreshadowing other Gentiles of faith who will populate Matthew’s story of Jesus.

The Magi show us how to respond to the initiatives of God in our lives. They knew one thing: the King of the Jews had been born. The scribes had more and better information than the Magi did, but the Magi acted on what they knew. They traveled to see the baby-king. They left work, home, and family to follow a star for many months. They embarked on a perilous journey—travelling, most likely, on lumpy, foul-smelling camels through alien lands. They brought the most expensive gifts they could find. When they arrived, they worshipped and then gave gifts. They knew little but acted on what little they knew. The Magi gave both themselves and their resources, as all disciples should. Whether we evangelize, lead, pray, teach, or give financially, our gifts cost us something. There is both sacrifice and pleasure in giving to the God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Doriani, 36).

PRAYER

Eternal God, our Father, we give You thanks this day for that Rising Star who was born King. We are grateful to You for Your saving purposes made manifest through our newborn King. Hasten that day when every nation, kindred, and tongue shall bow down and worship Him for the great things He has done. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 14-20, 2020)

A Regal Response to Holy Light
MONDAY, December 14: “Midwives Frustrate Pharaoh’s Decree” (Exodus 1:15-22)
TUESDAY, December 15: “God Answers Solomon’s Dream” (1 Kings 3:5-14)
WEDNESDAY, December 16: “Insight into the Meaning of Dreams” (Daniel 1:8-17)
THURSDAY, December 17: “In Christ, No Divisions Allowed” (Galatians 3:25-29)
FRIDAY, December 18: “A Gracious Ruler Is to Come from Bethlehem” (Micah 5:1-5)
SATURDAY, December 19: “A Successful Return from Egypt” (Matthew 2:19-23)
SUNDAY, December 20: “Safe in the Midst of Danger” (Matthew 2:7-15)
Matthew 3:1-12—KJV
IN THOSE days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
4 And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.
5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,
6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.
7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matthew 3:1-12—NIV
IN THOSE days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea
2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”
3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”
4 John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.
5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.
6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”
8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:
9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:
12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

8 “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.
9 “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.
10 “The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
12 “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Important projects require thoughtful preparation. What endeavors demand our greatest efforts in preparation? John called for people to repent of their sins and thus be ready to welcome the soon-coming Messiah.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recognize the reality of sin and the necessity of repentance.
2. Identify with John the Baptist in his call to prepare the way for Christ.
3. Repent of their sins and bear witness to this repentance through their deeds.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Jewish leaders sent emissaries to hear John, apparently not because of interest as much as to investigate and evaluate the threat his popularity posed to them (see John 1:19-22).
—John’s preaching was appealing to the outcasts of Jewish society, including tax collectors and members of the occupying army (see Luke 3:10-14).
—The message of repentance was offensive to the two major parties of the Jews—the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were a sect that preached strict adherence to the Law of Moses. The Sadducees were generally wealthier and more politically connected. Therefore, both groups were confident that they were good enough in God’s eyes and had little need to repent (see Luke 18:9-14).
—John was the first prophet since Malachi, who had prophesied four centuries earlier. The last verses of Malachi predict the coming of another Elijah who would preach repentance in preparation for a coming day of the Lord (see Malachi 4:5-6).
—John proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah but later harbored some doubts about this proclamation (Matthew 11:2-6).
Teachers of CHILDREN
—John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin. His parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth. He wore clothes of camel hair with a belt, and ate wild honey and locusts.
—John preached a distinct message of repentance that the kingdom of heaven is here. He baptized those who confessed their sins.
—Matthew records how the Pharisees and Sadducees came to see John while he was baptizing. John challenged the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and unwillingness to follow the real truth of the Law. He challenged the Sadducees for wanting to bolster their political status by their religious actions.
—John had a strong following of believers. John compared those who did not repent to trees that would be cut down.
—Isaiah 40:3 is quoted by John as he announces Jesus’ coming. John believed that Jesus was superior to and more powerful than him, and that he was unworthy to even unstrap Jesus’ sandals.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

John the Baptist appears prominently at the beginning of all four Gospels. Chapter 3 begins a new subsection signaled by the solemn, biblical phrasing, “in those days.” This section begins with the appearance of John and extends through the pericope in 4:12-17, which narrates the arrest of John and the beginning of Jesus’ own ministry. The opening scene of Matthew 3 pictures John preaching repentance. It concludes after noting the arrest of John, with Jesus preaching this identical message (3:2; 4:17). John’s announcement of “the coming one” (3:11) corresponds to his question in 11:3, “Are you the one who is to come?” In chapter 3, John is the primary speaker, and the reader receives John’s view of Jesus Himself. In chapter 11, John is offstage, Jesus is the primary speaker, and the reader receives Jesus’ view of John and himself (Boring, 154).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Throughout the Bible, “in those days” refers to a new period. Unlike Luke, Matthew’s gospel does not include John the Baptist in the early life of Jesus. He appears in the desert like an Old Testament prophet dressed in clothing similar to Elijah’s (2 Kings 1:8)—because John will be the new Elijah. The wilderness is the area east of Jerusalem close to the Dead Sea, where the Qumran community and other religious Jewish movements had their settlements. The desert in the history of Israel was a place of communion with God, associated with prayer and success and also temptation. It was the place where one not only prepared for God, but also connected with God.

John baptized in the Jordan, offering a ritual for believers to publicly affirm their preparation for the coming of God’s presence. Many came for baptism—the sincere and the curious and even “vipers,” evidently the evil. The Pharisees and Sadducees were among those who showed up yet stood opposing John and Jesus. The most valid sign of rebirth and renewal has always been the bearing of spiritual fruit, that is, a changed life. The mere observance of rituals, whether in the Temple or through baptism by John, will not save anyone from the wrath of God. True repentance and righteousness bring God’s favor. The reference to the ax might be an additional warning: bear fruit or be cut down (O’Grady, 15-16).
PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Abraham: patriarch of the Israelites and an important figure in salvation history.
Isaiah: a major Old Testament prophet, whose ministry in and prophecies against Jerusalem and Judah are recorded in the book of Isaiah.
John the Baptist: the son of the priest Zechariah and Elizabeth. John is traditionally regarded as a cousin of Jesus Christ. He is perhaps the most enigmatic figure in the New Testament.
Pharisees: one of the parties or movements within Judaism of the late Second Temple period. The Pharisees were noted most for the exact observance of the Jewish religion, their accurate exposition of the Law, and their belief in the coming Resurrection.
Sadducees: a party existing within Judaism from sometime in the second century BC to the war of AD 66–70. The name came most likely from that of Zadok, the high priest of David’s day from whom the high priests were descended.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Baptized (verse 6)—Greek: baptizó (bap-tid’-zo): dipped; sank; submerged.
Confessing (verse 6)—Greek: exomologeó (ex-om-ol-og’-o): agreeing; professing.
Preaching (verse 1)—Greek: kérussó (kay-roos’-so): heralding; openly proclaiming.
Prepare (verse 3)—Greek: hetoimazó (het-oymad’-zo): to prepare; to make ready.
Repent (verse 2)—Greek: metanoeó (met-an-o-eh’-o): to change one’s mind or purpose.
Voice (verse 3)—Greek: phóné (fo-nay’): a tone, sound; speech.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. John the Baptist’s Call to Repentance (Matthew 3:1-3)
   B. The Mission of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:4-6)
   C. Words of Warning to a Brood of Vipers (Matthew 3:7-10)
   D. The Coming of the Messiah (Matthew 3:11-12)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near

This opening scene in Matthew 3 has two phases: (1) the presentation of John and his mission, and (2) the introduction of Jesus (3:13-17. In the course of this narrative, Matthew announces several key themes of his gospel: the rule and reign of God upon the earth; eschatological (end-time) judgment; the call to repentance and good deeds; and the notion of “righteousness” or justice. The Christological focus on Jesus as Messiah and unique Son of God is strongly enforced by John’s testimony and by the revelation at the moment of baptism (Senior, 52).

John the Baptist comes on the scene with a startling message and a startling appearance. A disheveled and unkempt figure, he does not dress in the clothing of more civilized society.

Although John lives on the edge, in the wilderness of Judea, he comes with a message for the whole society, even to those at the very center of religion and politics. The words of John the Baptist, just like those of the prophets before him, were confrontational appeals to repentance and righteous living. While only two of the gospels begin with the birth of Jesus, all four preface Jesus’ ministry with the story of John the Baptist. John’s message is a call to repentance (Case-Winters, 44).

B. Biblical Background

In Matthew 1:1, Thomas Long declares that Matthew makes a theological claim about the “who” of Jesus: He is the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. In chapter 3, Matthew announces that Jesus is not only the climax of Israel’s generations, but also He is the one whose coming into the world brought down the curtain on the old era and raised the curtain on the new one. As the door to the new era swings open, Long says John the Baptist is the ideal hinge. He is dressed like the old age, but points to the new. His preaching style is patterned after that of the Old Testament prophets’, but his message paves the way for the new Israel. He appears in the likeness of the prophets of old but announces the coming of One who is even greater than the prophets. He baptizes those who repent in the waters of the ancient Jordan River, but he promises the coming of One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. With the coming of John the Baptist, everything is about to change. The old is passing away and the new is pressing in. The long, lost night of hopelessness is coming to an end, and John the Baptist is the herald whose voice will awaken a sleeping world to the new day that is about to dawn (Long, 25).

Who is John the Baptist? According to Luke 1:11-17, he was the son of the priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, who made his home in the mountainous region of Judea and who, himself, had lived in the wilderness since his youth. John the Baptist is
a unique personage, a “charismatic prophet” whose proclamation of judgment marks him as a preacher of repentance. He is the forerunner of Jesus, that baptizer in the Spirit (Matthew 3:11-12); he is Elijah returned (17:12); he is the witness to the Son of God come into the world (John 1: 6-8, 15) (Schnackenburg, 29).

In Matthew’s gospel, John the Baptist is depicted in three ways. First, he is the embodiment of Old Testament prophecy. He speaks not as an isolated preacher but, rather, as the voice of the great Old Testament prophetic tradition. Matthew connects John through scriptural references (e.g., Isaiah 40:3). He also connects him through what he wears. In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah is said to be a “hairy man with a leather belt around his waist.” John the Baptist is equally depicted in Matthew as wearing “clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist” (Matthew 3:4, NRSV).

Second, John is depicted as a preacher of repentance. Matthew (in a single sentence) records John as saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2, NRSV). Finally, he is presented as one who points the way to Jesus. John’s mission is not only to announce the arrival of the kingdom, but also to point to the one who has brought the kingdom near—Jesus (Long 29-30).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. John the Baptist’s Call to Repentance

(Matthew 3:1-3)

IN THOSE days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

“In those days” is a description regularly used to introduce a new departure, a significant event, or a birth (verse 1). Matthew uses the phrase to announce the coming of John the Baptist. John comes proclaiming, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (verse 2). The “kingdom of heaven” is Matthew’s term for “the kingdom of God.” In using this term, he is respecting his Jewish members’ sensitivity about pronouncing the divine name (Mullins, 107-108). This announcement of the kingdom, common to both John and Jesus, signals the imminent arrival of God’s reign in this world (Brown and Roberts, 39). John considered himself primarily a street preacher, proclaiming the message God had given him. The wilderness of Judea is between the Dead Sea and the lower Jordan River and south of Jerusalem. John’s message of repentance is revolutionary and apocalyptic. It must have been a shock to those who heard him. Here is no rabbi reasoning and giving options; here is no priest, leading ritual; here is no scribe, prescribing repentance to a set of rules (Osborne, 110).

John speaks with a thunderous voice, demanding a new relationship with God. The word repent (metanoia) is a striking command that calls for an ongoing and complete change of mind and action. It means a change of heart, a turning away from a certain path, or an arrival of a different view (Kittel, 626). Repentance is more than an intellectual transformation; it also demands a lifestyle change as well. It is an urgent message to turn around while there is still time.
The task of John the Baptist and of the church is to clear the path for the highway to Zion—that is, we are to be the means God uses to clear all obstacles for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist is the messianic forerunner preparing the way for Christ. We, too, are called to prepare the way. Crucial to this preparation for the people of John’s day and ours are repentance and renewed loyalty to God and the things of God.

B. The Mission of John the Baptist
(Matthew 3:4-6)

And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. John is a messianic forerunner in terms of Isaiah in verse 3, and now his dress is reminiscent of the wilderness prophet Elijah, both in terms of his coat (Zechariah 13:4) and his belt (2 Kings 1:8). God is clearly no longer silent, and the centuries of waiting are over. The Messiah is on His way and the people of God must get ready for Him. Locusts (including grasshoppers) and wild honey (probably taken by John himself from beehives) were the food of the poor, especially those living in the desert. John clearly saw himself as a wilderness prophet, a somber man committed to discipline and self-denial, calling with a stern voice for people to repent and return to God (verse 4). The response to John’s appearance and message is incredible. People began to come from everywhere around, not only Jerusalem but the whole of Judea, and even the entire area of the Jordan (verse 5). The point is that John had a great impact on the people. John preaches repentance to the crowds. The people confess their sins and are baptized (verse 6) (Osborne, 112).

C. Words of Warning to a Brood of Vipers
(Matthew 3:7-10)

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

The surge of response to John’s message provides Matthew with an opportunity to present the religious leaders in a negative light, as seen throughout his gospel. Along with the crowds come many Pharisees and Sadducees, but John stops them short with a blistering attack. The leaders demonstrate failings that are detested by this gospel. When the haughty religious professors, who give no evidence of repentance, come with the rest, seeking baptism, John rebukes them harshly, saying, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath that to come?” (verse 7) (Senior, 52) When John calls them vipers, he means that they are spreading poison like a serpent. Who warned you to flee, says Jesus, the coming wrath and come for baptism, when in fact you show no sign of repentance? The wrath of God is not just anger but the inevitable condemnation by a holy, loving God of any sin which defiles God’s creation, and which destroys the dignity of humanity as part of that creation. The Jewish leaders turned against God’s plan.
by elevating their understanding of the Torah above God’s will. They were about to reject God’s prophet and His Messiah (Osborne, 113-14). Thus, they are rebuked by John and warned of the judgment to come if they do not “bear fruit worthy of repentance” (verse 8, NRSV). Matthew uses John’s critique to once again emphasize the theme of Gentile inclusion. The theme is implied in John’s claim that God could raise up children of Abraham from “these stones” (verse 9). If God can create people of the covenant from inanimate objects like rocks, how much more from Gentiles (Brown and Roberts, 41)?

D. The Coming of the Messiah  
(Matthew 3:11-12)

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Verses 11-12 get to the real focus of John the Baptist’s ministry. John points ahead and beyond himself to another person. John has a powerful place in God’s history of salvation, but he knows it is only preparation for the main event. Calling the nation to repentance is important, but it is not the main event (verse 11a). The main event is the appearance of the One who will inaugurate God’s kingdom on earth. Although there is continuity between the messages of John and Jesus, John especially emphasizes the contrasts between himself and the Coming One. John’s baptism was uniquely associated with repentance, but as unique as it was, it was only preparatory to the baptism associated with the Coming One. The Coming One will baptize the repentant—those who are prepared to receive Him—with the blessing of the Holy Spirit (verse 11b). But the unrepentant—those who are not receptive to the Coming One—He will baptize with the judgment of eternal fire (verse 12) (Wilkins, 137).

The impact of this message on John the Baptist’s audience must have been profound, because they are gathered with mixed motives. John is drawing a line in Israel that is intended to test the hearts of all who hear. Those who have come out to hear him with impure motives are even now being warned that the Messiah will bring judgment on them, a judgment that ultimately will be eternal. But those who have come out to hear him with sincere motives of repentance and confession of sin will be prepared for the coming of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Spirit. The repentant will form the nucleus of those who receive the Expected One’s gracious ministry. According to Michael J. Wilkins, this message turns upside-down the religious and social norms in Israel. The ones often considered most worthy because of their training, commitment, and dedication, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, are the ones singled out for the most stinging criticism. But turning upside-down the norms in Israel is not new. The prophets of old were well known for criticizing the religious and political establishment (Wilkins, 138).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The abrupt appearance of John in Matthew’s gospel is a matter of intentional theological design, not literary coincidence. Humankind may temporarily frustrate the
redemptive purposes of God, but in the end God will win. History is not only on God’s side, but is also under His command. The actions of God in history are often sudden, unexpected, and, to our eyes, maybe even intrusive. God’s will does not always work gently, climbing quietly like ivy up the lattice of history. Sometimes an Elijah appears, a nation repents, a Berlin wall is dismantled, a Martin Luther King Jr. strides across the landscape. God’s will shatters the mold, violates the categories, and breaks in on the world as a jarring surprise.

So, the doors of Matthew 3 suddenly swing open, and there stands John in the wilderness of Judea, looking for all the world like the Elijah of old. His surprising appearance is, itself, a claim that God’s ways with the world are often strange, unforeseen, and unpredictable. Here at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, says Eugene Boring, John the Baptist is a call to worship in the flesh. It is a real call that shakes the cobwebs off the pews: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

**PRAYER**

*Dear God, instill in us the willingness to be set apart for Your service. Help us not only to hear Your call but also to heed Your call for preparation. Forgive us our sins and create in us clean heart. Get us ready to be the kind of servants You need us to be in order to effect Your redemptive purposes upon the earth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(December 21-27, 2020)*

**Called to Prepare the Way**


**TUESDAY,** December 22: “John the Baptist Is the Greatest” (Matthew 11:2-15)

**WEDNESDAY,** December 23: “The Baptist’s Testimony of Faith” (John 1:19-34)

**THURSDAY,** December 24: “Jesus, the Father’s Beloved Son” (Matthew 17:1-8)

**FRIDAY,** December 25: “In John, Elijah Has Come” (Matthew 17:9-13; Malachi 4:4-5)

**SATURDAY,** December 26: “John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan” (Matthew 3:13-17)

**SUNDAY,** December 27: “John Prepares the Way for Jesus” (Matthew 3:1-12)

**Bibliography [Lessons 1–4]**


Boxall, Ian. *Discovering Matthew: Content, Interpretation, Reception.*


CALLED TO PROCLAIM

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** An Amazing Ministry  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Ministering to Those in Need

**CHILDREN**  
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Called to Preach  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Listen and Be Amazed!

**DEVOTIONAL READING**  
Deuteronomy 8:1-11

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**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 4  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 4:14-22a  
**KEY VERSES:** Luke 4:18-19

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 4  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 4:14-22a  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 4:18a

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**Luke 4:14-22a—KJV**
14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.
15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.
16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.
17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,
18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

**Luke 4:14-22a—NIV**
14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.
15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.
16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,
17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,
19 “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.
21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.
22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.
21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People hear conflicting messages and proclamations all the time. Is there one message that offers answers to life’s deepest problems? The worshippers in Nazareth listened to Jesus’ proclamation of justice and compassion and marveled at His words.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Comprehend the meaning and significance of Jesus’ reading from the Prophet Isaiah.
2. Sense the impact of Jesus’ pronouncement in Nazareth.
3. Align their faith response with Jesus’ call and mission.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—While we do not have much detail about first-century worship in the synagogues of Palestine, there is some indication that there were readings from the Torah in a three-year cycle. One of the readers for the day would have been handed a scroll from the prophets and would have been free to choose a passage of at least three verses to read in Hebrew, then interpret in Aramaic. The reader would stand to read the text and sit to teach.
—The Lukan narrative draws mostly from Isaiah 61:1ff but brings in a phrase from Isaiah 58:6 and leaves out a phrase about the day of God’s vengeance from the end of Isaiah 61:2.
—The phrase “the year of the Lord’s favor” (verse 19) is a reference to the Year of Jubilee which was often described but never fully implemented.
—The importance of the reading from Isaiah cannot be overstated. This text was a powerful statement of Jesus’ work and was met with a curious response. The author of Luke indicates that the words from Isaiah meant one thing to Jesus and another to the listeners, as noted by the fact that, eventually, Jesus was run out of town.
—By applying the words of Isaiah 61 to Himself, Jesus revealed Himself to be the anointed...
servant, the Messiah. This was a rare occasion, since Jesus generally avoided this title until closer to the end of His ministry. See Matthew 16:20; Mark 1:25, 34; 7:36.

Teachers of CHILDREN
— The synagogue had become the place of worship for Jews because the Temple had been destroyed. After the Temple was rebuilt, synagogues were central to the Jewish community. In the synagogue, boys studied their weekly lessons.
— Ten Jewish families were needed to establish a synagogue. It was customary for Jews to attend service at the synagogue once a week. Jesus faithfully followed this weekly tradition.
— Rabbis were invited by the leader of the synagogue to teach and preach. When Jesus, who was a rabbi, was asked to teach, He chose the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah (61:1-2) to proclaim God’s word of liberty and justice (see the Year of Jubilee, Leviticus 25:8-17).
— Jesus declared Himself to be Israel’s promised deliverer and Messiah as prophesied by Isaiah (see Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-2, 7; 11:1, 10).
— Jesus’ words had authority from God; they were profound to some and troubling to others. He would be rejected by many and unwelcomed even in His hometown of Nazareth.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Unlike Mark and Matthew, the gospel of Luke sets out a complex chronological and religious context for Jesus’ origins. His story begins with an extensive birth narrative of Jesus’ precursor, John the Baptist. Having established this context, Luke moves to the birth of Jesus and two events in the Temple that confirm His identity as God’s chosen one (Simeon and Anna). Jumping a dozen years forward, Luke introduces the boy Jesus in the Temple, giving further affirmation and depth to the young man’s portrayal. With another chronological leap of eighteen years, the story begins to converge with the Synoptic portrayal of the beginning of John’s ministry as a fully grown man. Following the inaugural test of Jesus’ loyalty to God in the desert (see Luke 4:1-13), the center section of Luke’s gospel begins by recounting Jesus’ ministry in His hometown and surrounding localities (see Luke 4–9). The Galilean portion of His ministry extends to Luke 9:50. In a series of healings, exorcisms, and teaching events, the ministry of Jesus is met with disapproval from His followers and the general public. The culmination of this section is the Transfiguration, in which Jesus’ identity is fully revealed and His opponents are clearly revealed as unrighteous (Neale, 34).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Luke adopted Mark’s organization of traditional materials around a geographical plan. Most of the events in this section are explicitly described or implicitly assumed to have taken place in and around the region of Galilee. Luke found a version of this incident in the gospel of Mark, though Mark placed it later in his narrative, after the public ministry of Jesus had begun. The reference to Jesus’ works in Capernaum (verse 23) presumes activity that Luke described only later in Luke 4:31ff., and is an indication that Luke shifted the sequence of events as found in Mark’s gospel by making this story the initial episode in his account of Jesus’ public ministry (Nickle, 41).
I. INTRODUCTION
   A. Proclaiming in the Power of the Spirit

   In the synagogue in Nazareth that day, Jesus preached the Gospel according to Himself—something only He, being one with God, was authorized to do. By the time He delivered this powerful sermon He had earned something of a reputation as a preacher. Jesus had known from childhood of His calling to proclaim the Good News of the coming rule and reign of God upon the earth. The secret of His success was that He proclaimed this good news in the power of the Spirit. This is the secret of any successful ministry. That which enables anyone to preach and to teach this Good News effectively is the empowering influence of the Holy Spirit (Ryken, 164).

   Jesus’ proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth is meant to assist Luke’s readers in understanding the nature of Jesus’ messiahship and the response it elicited from the Jewish laity and leadership. The sermon is quite important, for in it, Jesus introduces and explains His mission and ministry. Luke purposely places this first description of what Jesus taught at the very beginning of His ministry, even though he knew that Jesus already had a successful ministry in Capernaum (see Luke 4:23). For Luke, an orderly presentation of the things that Jesus said and did was more important than chronological...
exactness—thus, unlike the other gospel writers, Luke presents this sermon at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

The importance of Jesus’ sermon is also highlighted by Luke’s statement that “the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him” (4:20, NIV) as well as Luke’s recording that Jesus intentionally “found the place where it was written” (4:17). The importance of the sermon is further highlighted by the fact that it involved the fulfillment of the Scriptures (Stein, 154). In the full power of the Spirit, Jesus boldly announced that His ministry, in fulfillment of the Scriptures, would be taken to outsiders. The hometown crowd would not be granted any special favors. His ministry would be to the lost, the looked over, the left-out, and the least.

B. Biblical Background

Luke 4:14-44 summarizes Jesus’ powerful teaching and healing ministry. After noting in 4:14-15 how Jesus’ ministry was gaining attention, Luke gives a glimpse of an exemplary day in the synagogue, the very day on which Jesus declared Himself and His miracles to be the fulfillment of prophetic promise (4:16-30). Luke 4:14-15 introduces and summarizes the general character of Jesus’ ministry during its early Galilean stage. Since Galilee was Jesus’ home, it is not surprising that His ministry began there. Exposure to Jesus in Galilee would be a requirement for apostolic selection (Acts 1:21-22), so this period was foundational for building up a base of disciples (Bock, 134). Luke notes that the same Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness to face temptation also guided the introduction of His ministry in Nazareth. Luke places intentional emphasis on Jesus’ responsiveness to God’s leading. As Jesus ministered, His fame spread. In the ancient world, these reports went by word of mouth. One cannot know with certainty if the power of the Spirit also refers to His miraculous activities, but what clearly catches the attention of the people, according to Luke, is Jesus’ teaching. He taught with such authority and power that the people “praised” Him. The word for “praise” (doxazo) is a word normally reserved for the praise of God (Bock, 134).

This text is one of a few that describe a first-century synagogue service. Jesus stood to read but sat to teach, implying there was a lectern or table behind which He stood to read, and a chair from which He taught. If a seated man could be the focus of the whole audience, then a logical arrangement for the room would be stadium-style benches on three sides of the room, with the speaker standing at the open end (Vinson, 116).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Ministering in the Power of the Spirit
   (Luke 4:14-15)

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.
on Jesus is intended to hold the reader’s interest, since Jesus had not yet done anything in Nazareth to prompt such news. Up to this point in Luke’s narrative, everything had gone well. Jesus taught in “their synagogues” (verse 15), and had done well making a circuit in lower Galilee rather than remaining in His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus “teaching” may refer to scriptural exposition, but could also refer to wisdom sayings, ethical maxims, or midrashim (exposition of Hebrew Scriptures) (Levine-Witherington, 110-11).

Jesus spoke often in Jewish synagogues. In the absence of a temple, synagogues were established as gathering places of worship on the Sabbath and as schools for young boys during the week. Any town with at least ten Jewish families could have a synagogue. The synagogue was administered by one leader and an assistant. Often, the leader would invite a visiting rabbi to read from the Scriptures and to teach. Thus Jesus, travelling from town to town—teaching, preaching, and performing miracles—would be a strong candidate for serving in local synagogues. Many praised the young rabbi. His teaching was fresh—as Matthew recorded, “He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:29, NIV) (Barton, 91-92).

Up to this point, Jesus was a local hometown boy who had done well. Words of praise about Him spread throughout the region of Galilee. People love a winner—John F. Kennedy said, “Success has a thousand fathers, but failure is an orphaned child.” The people in the surrounding countryside as well as the hometown crowd seemed to love the popular Rabbi. The locals crowded into synagogues to hear Him teach, but not everyone who awaited His return to Nazareth was ready to accept the Message that the Spirit of God urged Him to share. Although things began well in Nazareth that day, for many, they did not necessarily end well. Jesus came in the power of the Spirit to proclaim the Good News of the inbreaking activity of God (Bock, 87-88).

B. The Word Reading the Word in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-17)

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaia. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

Jesus had been on a preaching tour of Galilee (verses 14-15), and at last came to the village of His boyhood home. Although Jesus had been born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7), His parents had fled to Egypt to protect their Son from King Herod (Matthew 2:7-18). After King Herod’s death, Joseph had brought his family back to Israel, to the district of Galilee, to live in a town called Nazareth (see Matthew 2:22-23). Jesus went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath (verse 16). His synagogue attendance indicates His respect for Jewish traditions (Levine, 113). Even though He was the perfect Son of God, Jesus attended services every week. As a visiting rabbi, Jesus was invited to read the Scriptures. The synagogue service usually included recitation of the Shema, benedictions, a psalm, a priestly blessing, prayers, a reading from the Law and then from the Prophets, and then an interpretation of the readings. Because there were no permanent rabbis, visiting teachers would often be invited to preach. Likely such an invitation was extended to Jesus on His return home (the apostle Paul would later benefit from this custom) (Barton, 92-93).
Luke states that Jesus “stood up to read” (verse 16b) and thus suggests Jesus was literate, something that could only be said of about 10 percent of the population of His time. One would need to stand since the scroll of Isaiah is too large to hold. It would have been laid out on a table. Once handed the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus “finds the place” from which He will read (verse 17). In remarking that Jesus found the text, Luke could be suggesting that Jesus chose these particular verses. Given the size of the Isaiah scroll, it might have taken Him some time to find the passage that day (Levine-Withering, 114). It is unclear whether Jesus asked for this particular scroll, or whether it was handed to Him and then He chose the reading. Finding a specific text in a scroll without chapter and verse divisions is difficult, and it suggests that Jesus was so familiar with the Scriptures that He knew where to turn (Garland, 196). But the ancient words of hope and restoration that He chose that day came to life on the lips of the one about whom those words had prophesied (Barton, 93-94). Those ancient words of Isaiah found their fulfillment in the One called of God from the foundations of the world.


The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Having found the place in the scroll, Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2. Isaiah’s words pictured the deliverance of Israel from exile in Babylon as a Year of Jubilee when all debts were to be cancelled, all slaves freed, and all property returned to original owners (Leviticus 25). But the release from Babylonian exile had not brought the fulfillment that the people had expected; they were still a conquered and oppressed people. Isaiah was prophesying a future messianic age, a time when one would come in the Spirit of the Lord, anointed to preach good news to the poor . . . freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (see verses 18-19). This passage offered great expectations to an oppressed people (Barton, 94).

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (verse 18). The preposition upon implies a compelling force rather than an indwelling. “He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” The anointing is connected to preaching, since proclaiming the Good News of the reign of God will summarize the essence of Jesus’ ministry. The “poor” are not only the economically impoverished but all those who are marginal or excluded from human fellowship. They are the losers in the competitive race for scarce resources, economic security, honor, and power. Their only recourse is to look to God for help. “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.” In Luke’s account, Jesus’ ministry does not have Him setting free literal prisoners—the image is metaphorical. “Release” is synonymous with salvation. Those who are captive are those shackled by Satan. The exorcism marks the relief of the victims from Satan’s stranglehold (Garland, 198).

“And recovery of sight to the blind.” Blindness was a common disease in Palestine, and “the blind” may refer to those who are literally blind. They belonged to a class of persons excluded from the Temple. Opening blinded eyes
is also related to seeing God’s salvation plan being accomplished in Jesus. The disciples on the Emmaus road, for example, had their eyes opened (see Luke 24:31). “To let the oppressed go free”; this literally means to release those who have been at the mercy of others. “To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” The acceptable year of the Lord is closely connected to the reign of God. This is God’s year to act! Jesus here draws on Jubilee imagery to refer to the day of salvation. The Jubilee imagery is therefore intended to evoke images of eschatological redemption rather than temporal social and political reform. Social and political reform are not excluded, but they follow the redemption offered by Jesus (Garland, 200).

Jesus’ application of one of the Servant Songs in Isaiah to Himself does more than announce good news to beleaguered people. He implies that He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, and the Servant of the Lord, who is to fulfill the program outlined in Isaiah. The sermon does not go further than announcing “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” because the content of the sermon lies in the phrases of the text outlining ways in which Jesus will bring salvation (Garland, 206).

D. Gracious Words from the Mouth of Jesus
(Luke 4:20-22a)

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

The Jews wondered what this long-promised Isaianic passage meant for them. The eyes of the people were upon Jesus as He closed the book and sat down. When Jesus informed them that “today” the Isaiah passage was fulfilled in their hearing, He was proclaiming Himself as the one who would bring good news to pass (verse 21). He was the “Anointed One,” a king in the line of David and the one through whom the promises to David would be fulfilled. Jesus had come to evangelize the poor, proclaim freedom, give sight to the blind, and release the oppressed. People of faith should not fall victim to the modern-day tendency to spiritualize Jesus’ concerns for the poor and physically needy. Neither should people collapse all of His words into the single desire for social reformation. Jesus’ ministry, as the promised Messiah, would focus on calling people back to God—those who saw their need, such as the poor, the outcasts, the disabled, and the Gentiles. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy about Him, but in a way that many Jews were unable to grasp. Many saw Jesus as a conqueror who would free them from Roman political oppression. Instead, Jesus was a conqueror who would first free them from their sins and restore them to wholeness (Barton, 94).

“All spoke well of him” (verse 22). Jesus’ initial words won their approval and excited their wonder. Their positive reaction is further confirmation of His spiritual power. The “gracious words” do not refer to His winsome oratorical skill that keeps them spellbound but are a technical reference to His message of grace. His words can confer grace, though only if one listens in obedience (Garland, 202). It is best to understand this verse as a positive response toward Jesus’ teaching up to this point (Stein, 157). The phrase “that came from his mouth” recalls the temptation scene and Jesus’ retort to...
Satan from Deuteronomy 8:3—“Man shall not live on bread alone” (Luke 4:4). Luke omits the continuation of the quote: “but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord”—but the biblical resonance of the phrase is so common that it implies that Jesus’ words are like the Word of God in bringing life and salvation (Garland, 202).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The Lord Jesus had one supreme purpose in mind when He came to earth: He came to be our Savior. He answered the call of His Father. Once He began His mission, He had immediate success: “And Jesus returned,” Luke says (i.e., from His temptation), “in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about” (4:14). He then arrived back in His boyhood village of Nazareth, where He knew the people well. The people in the synagogue where He spoke that day could find no fault in Him. His grace and power were evident to everyone (Phillips, 96). Ultimately, the people would expect Him to lavish miracles and healings on those whom He knew best. However, Jesus understood that His call had come from God and it was to God that He must remain faithful. Although the hometown crowd ended up bitterly disappointed in Him, Jesus never veered from God’s call and claim on His life. He is our example and perfect sacrifice of a life lived in obedience to God Almighty.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Jesus Christ. We thank You for His perfect obedience to Your will. Help us to witness to His example of a life lived in obedience and service to You. Give us the strength to hear and to heed Your call and claim on our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 28, 2020–January 3, 2021)

Called to Proclaim

MONDAY, December 28: “Live by God’s Word” (Deuteronomy 8:1-11)
TUESDAY, December 29: “Jubilee—the Year of God’s Favor” (Leviticus 25:8-17)
WEDNESDAY, December 30: “The Miracle of the Meal and Oil” (1 Kings 17:8-16)
THURSDAY, December 31: “Naaman’s Leprosy Is Healed in the Jordan River” (2 Kings 5:1-14)
FRIDAY, January 1: “Jesus Overcomes the Devil’s Temptations” (Luke 4:1-13)
SUNDAY, January 3: “Jesus’ Mandate for Ministry Is Announced” (Luke 4:14-22)
DEVOTIONAL READING

**Luke 5:1-11—KJV**

AND IT came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,
2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.
3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayer him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.
4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.
5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.
6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.
7 And they Beckoned unto their partners, which were

**Luke 5:1-11—NIV**

ONE DAY as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.
2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.
3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.
4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”
5 Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”
6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.
7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to
in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People seek significance and purpose. Are we on earth just to eke out a living, or can we be part of something greater? Jesus called Simon and his cohorts to follow Him and find fulfillment in doing the work of God’s kingdom.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Contemplate the story of the miraculous catch of fish.
2. Reflect on Simon’s changing attitude toward Jesus as the story progresses.
3. Hear Jesus’ instructions and eagerly obey them.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—With this text, Jesus begins to gather the disciples who will join Him in the work of the kingdom. Jesus meets two boats of professional fishermen, including Simon Peter, James, and John (the latter two were brothers—the sons of Zebedee) on the shore of a lake.
—The lake in the story was adjacent to Gennesaret in Galilee a little south of Capernaum, the city Jesus was leaving at the end of the last chapter.
—Fish was one of the staple foods in Palestine in Jesus’ day, and fishing was a booming business due in part to the Romans’ great appetite for it.
—After having fished all night, these experienced professional fishermen caught nothing. Obeying Jesus’ instructions, Simon cast the nets into the deep water and caught such an abundance of fish that the boats began to sink.
—The disciples were common men engaged in their regular work when Jesus called them to become fishers of people.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Jesus used practical and everyday examples to teach people and draw them to God. In this
Scripture, Jesus uses a fishing trip to draw disciples that will catch people who will accept, love, and obey Him. Jesus is teaching on the Sea of Galilee. James and John (the sons of Zebedee) and Peter are among the fishermen on the shore. On the seashore, as Jesus finished teaching from Peter’s boat, He asked Peter to let the boat drift away from the shore. Peter does not hesitate and willingly complies. 

—After this miracle, Peter confessed his sin and unworthiness to Jesus. Jesus reassures Peter and tells him that he will catch people. The other fishermen were astonished at the miracle of Jesus’ catching fish and followed Jesus too. —Peter, James, and John each became one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, part of His inner circle, and important leaders of the early church.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Luke 5 highlights the impact of sin, impurity, and disease in human lives. The chapter functions as a parable about these fundamental issues of the human condition. A fisherman, a leper, a paralytic, and a tax collector all encounter Jesus and experience transformation. Each character represents the experience of one or more of these realities. Each finds deliverance from their condition: sin gives way to righteousness, impurity to purity, and disease to healing. Verses 1-11 introduce the character Simon to the story (Neale, 126-27). Unlike Matthew and Mark, who place the calling of the first disciples at the very beginning of the narrative of the ministry in Galilee, Luke places the calling of the first disciples at this point in the narrative of the ministry only after they have had an opportunity to hear the preaching and see the works of Jesus (see Luke 5:1-11). Jesus calls the disciples in the context of the miraculous catch of fish, a highly symbolic action spelling out the meaning of their future role and the power behind it. The focus on Simon (without mention of his brother, Andrew) sets the scene for Simon’s high profile in Luke and Acts (Mullins, 183-84). Simon has a special relationship with Jesus throughout Luke. It begins here in chapter 5. Luke is careful to develop the character of Simon as the leading disciple, the one who interacts with Jesus on their behalf. Jesus stays in Simon’s home, uses his boat, and has extended conversations with him.

This is all material unique to Luke and stands on its own as a unique call narrative to Jesus’ disciples (Neale, 126-27).

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

This section introduces the disciples and other potential followers, sounding the theme of hearing Jesus’ words and leaving everything to follow Him. Mark presents Jesus’ calling of the disciples at the beginning of His ministry but gives no indication of why they should follow Him. Luke’s account of the call of the disciples focuses initially on Peter and provides a context and motivation for him to leave everything to follow Jesus. In Luke’s account, Jesus is not simply passing by, as in Mark, but teaching a huge crowd by the shore. The scene warrants the use of Simon’s boat to allow teaching from a better vantage point on the lake (Garland, 222).

When Jesus had finished speaking from the boat He engaged in a rather odd conversation with the fishermen. This Son of a carpenter from an inland town, told Simon, the obvious leader of these experienced fishermen, to launch out into the deep and put the nets down for a catch. At this point, Simon has already witnessed Jesus’ power, heard His teaching, and joined the enthusiasm of the crowds pressing around Him. Even though Simon offers an initial protest to Jesus’ command to go fishing again in the same waters, he nonetheless
obeys (Mullins, 184). After a futile night of fishing, when he and his partners have caught nothing, it makes sense that they will obey Jesus’ command, even though it may seem an exercise in futility. Obedience results in an overwhelming catch of fish that almost swamps their boats (Garland, 222).

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

**James and John:** apostles of Jesus; the sons of Zebedee of whom John is the elder brother. They were among the first called to be disciples and (along with Peter) belonged to the inner circle among the disciples. Their father, Zebedee, was also a fisherman.

**Simon Peter:** Peter’s original name was Simon. Jesus gave him the Aramaic name “rock.” Peter originally lived in Bethsaida and later in Capernaum—he was married and, along with his brother, Andrew, partnered in a fishing business with James and John.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Answering (verse 5)—Greek: apokrinomai (ap-ok-ree’-nom-ahee):** to answer, reply, take up the conversation; “answered” (NIV).

**Astonished (verse 9)—Greek: thambeó (tham-beh’-o):** to be astonished, amazed; amazement.

**Hear (verse 1)—Greek: akouó (ak-oo’-o):** to hear, learn; “listening” (NIV).

**Multitude (verse 6)—Greek: pléthos (play’-thos):** a great number; “large number” (NIV).

**Taught (verse 3)—Greek: didaskó (did-as’-ko):** was taught, directed, admonished.

**Was standing (verse 1)—Greek: histémi (his’-tay-mee):** was made to stand; “stood” (KJV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

**A. What a Catch!**

The ultimate fish story begins at the Lake of Gennesaret in Luke’s gospel. On this day, the people crowded around Jesus to hear Him teach the Word of God. The Lord noticed a couple of empty boats drawn up by the shore, one of which belonged to Simon Peter (see 5:1-3). Peter willingly let the Lord borrow his boat and pushed it out a bit from the land. The Lord sat down and began to teach the people from this unconventional platform. One writer has suggested that the acoustical properties around the lake were quite remarkable, allowing the still waters to act as a sounding board and a loudspeaker. The calm waters
picked up Jesus’ voice, throwing it across the shore and the hillside so that everyone could hear what was being said, even when it was spoken in a conversational tone. The great catch of fish was not the only miracle to take place on this day (Phillips, 100).

Peter was clearly pleased that the great preacher Himself should be sitting there in his boat, His voice ringing out to one and all. Peter’s fishing companions were nearby, busily mending their nets with their hands while listening to Jesus along with all the others. Once He was finished teaching, Jesus instructed Peter to “put out into the deep waters” and let down his nets for a catch (verse 4, NIV).

Notice the interesting progression: (1) thrust out a little from the land; (2) launch out into the deep; and (3) let down your nets. This is often the way the Lord works things out in our lives. He offers directions and insights unknown to us. He only asks that we obey. Peter initially resisted the Lord’s request to let down the nets. Trusting in his own experience, he felt confident that there was nothing more in that part of the lake to catch. Surprised by the tremendous catch, he called for his fishing partners in the other boat to come to help them. Pulling on the nets, he realized that the catch was greater than the nets could support and more than his crew could handle without assistance. As they filled the boats with fish, the boats began to sink. Peter instantly saw Jesus in a new way and fell at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (verse 8) (Phillips, 100).

B. Biblical Background

One of the ways that Luke encourages persons to make a decision for Christ is by telling the story of the first people to ever make that decision. Luke 5 begins with Jesus’ calling His first disciples. From their call we learn at least four things about following Jesus. First, we learn that a true disciple listens to Jesus. In those days, Jesus had a growing reputation as a preacher, and people were coming from all over the place to hear Him. So large were the crowds that one day, Jesus got into Simon Peter’s boat and asked him to put it out a little from the land so that He could sit down and teach the people from the boat. A huge crowd of people had gathered and they were coming to Jesus for the right reason. They were “pressing in on him to hear the word” (Luke 5:1, NRSV).

Second, a true disciple is a repentant disciple. In order to follow Jesus, we have to turn away from our sins. The person who makes that turnaround in this story is Simon Peter. Jesus led him to repentance by making a strange request: “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4). Peter had been up all night, because this was the time to fish, especially in deep water. The fish generally did not surface during the bright hours of sunshine, but stayed deeper down, so it was better fishing at night. Peter was trying to “enlighten” Jesus by emphasizing that he and his companions had already spent many hours doing what Jesus now recommended that they try again. “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing” (Luke 5:5). By stepping into the boat and giving orders, Jesus took authority in the same space where Peter was usually in charge.

Third, a disciple follows repentance with service. Jesus told Peter that He would make him a fisher of men (see Luke 5:10). This is a third mark of Christian discipleship: every true disciple draws others to Jesus.

Fourth, a disciple leaves everything behind to follow Jesus. This is what Peter and his friends did at the end of this episode—they
left everything behind to follow Jesus. On the day of the great catch, the disciples make an all-or-nothing decision to follow Jesus. (Ryken, 203-212).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Call of the Disciples
   (Luke 5:1-3)

AND IT came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

The call of the disciples begins with Jesus’ standing by the Lake of Gennesaret with the people crowding around Him, listening to the Word of God. Here, Luke begins to build his characterization of Jesus as a teacher. He already teaches “in their synagogues” (4:15) and in Nazareth with “authority” (4:32). All are amazed at His words. As in the other Synoptic Gospels, teaching was the main activity of the Galilean ministry. Interspersed with this activity are healings and controversies. But, above all, Jesus is portrayed as one who brings the Word of God. The phrase “the word of God” is a favorite expression of Luke’s (verse 1). It appears in Luke 5:1; 8:21; 11:28, and eleven times in Acts. The setting is idyllic, with Jesus seated in a boat teaching those around Him. In the audience are Simon and his partners, quietly washing their nets (verse 2) (Neale, 128).

The crowds grew so large that Jesus got into one of the boats (verse 3). These fishermen who were cleaning their nets were probably right next to their boats on the shore. So, when Jesus got into the boat, He called to its owner, Simon (Peter), and asked him to put out a short distance from the shore, then He sat down and taught the crowds from the shore. This allowed Jesus to continue to speak and be heard—as His voice could carry across the water. Sitting down was the preferred teaching position of the rabbis (Barton, 112).

B. Fishing in Deep Waters at the Command of Jesus
   (Luke 5:4-7)

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

Jesus finished the lesson to the crowd and then spoke to Simon, the owner of the boat (verse 4). Simon had not yet officially become a disciple of Jesus’, but he knew Jesus. When Jesus told Peter to put his nets out into the deep and let them down for a catch, Peter was undoubtedly exhausted from a fruitless night of fishing. Peter told Jesus that they had been out all night and caught nothing, but in an act of obedience that would be greatly rewarded, he said to Jesus, “Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets” (verse 5, NRSV). When they had done so, they caught so many fish that their nets began to break (verse 6). Simon Peter was awestruck by this miracle, and his first response was to feel his own insignificance in compari-
son to this man’s greatness. Simon knew that Jesus had healed the sick and had driven out demons, but he was amazed that Jesus cared about his day-to-day routine and understood his needs. God is interested not only in saving our souls, but also in our daily activities. But our first step must be to relinquish command to Him (Barton, 114-115).

Fishing in the darkness, the fishermen caught nothing—but the night had ended, and the “Light” had appeared in Galilee. From this moment on, Peter and the other disciples would live in the light of Jesus’ presence. Although Peter appeared briefly in connection with the healing of his mother-in-law, this is the first passage in Luke’s gospel where Jesus interacts with His future disciples. Peter will now respond to Jesus’ pattern of teaching and performing miracles and will enter the kingdom of God and its preaching when Jesus calls him to be a “fisher of men [people]” (Just, 205-206).

C. Catching Peter’s Attention
(Luke 5:8-9)

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken.

Simon and company “worked all night long” in the depths of the lake and “caught nothing” (verse 5, NRSV). Yet, at the command of Jesus they caught so many fish that they could hardly contain them in their boats. Their “amazement” again reflects a wobbling response between faith and doubt, understanding and confusion. But Simon was making progress on coming to know who Jesus really is. He knew that Jesus was more than a fishing specialist or profitable wonder-worker who would be good for business. Simon showed enough faith in Jesus to follow Him. Simon is on his way to becoming Simon Peter—as he is first called in 5:8. His rocking on a boat about to sink pictures the fearful flimsiness of his faith. As the boat’s hull dips lower and lower, Simon sinks to his wobbly knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man! (Luke 5:8, NRSV). In declaring his sinful state, Peter’s point is that he has woefully “fall[en] short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NIV) revealed in the Lord Jesus (Spencer, 132-33).

D. Walking Away from a Miracle
(Luke 5:10-11)

And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Jesus’ encounter with the fishermen moves them from discouragement through excitement to renunciation. Jesus came upon these fishermen at a very low moment in their lives. They were discouraged professionals who had done their best to catch the fish they needed to sustain their livelihood. They had tried every trick of the trade, keeping at it when most others would have given up—but still they caught nothing. Many know what it is to do your best (that is, all that you know to do) and still fail. The loneliness of such discouragement is profound. But their utter discouragement is soon replaced with excitement when, at the command of Jesus, they let down their nets once again into the deep waters of the lake. They have caught so many fish that their nets begin to tear, and their boats begin to sink. However, the third and most crucial level of this story is the moment when Jesus teaches
the importance of being willing to walk away from moments of unprecedented success and abundance for the privilege of becoming true servants of God. Peter had managed with the help of friends to get this great catch of fish to the shore. Having just taken him a record-breaking haul, Peter likely thought that his most important task was to find the quickest way to cash in on his big catch. Instead, Jesus made it clear to Simon what kind of fisherman he was destined to become. “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people” (verse 10, NRSV). The Lord made it clear to all who witnessed the miracle that people were more important than fish. Jesus calls us to come help Him net people for the coming rule and reign of God upon the earth (Nickle, 50-51).

Simon’s life’s work of catching people could not get underway until he walked away from one of the greatest miracles in his life—a great catch of fish. God never calls us to something without first calling us away from something. The Scriptures are filled with the stories of people who have walked away from something in faith. We can never fully hear and heed God’s call and claim on our lives until we learn how to walk away in faith from present abundance and blessings. They “left everything and followed him” (verse 11, NIV). In Matthew (4:19) and Mark (1:17), they are commanded to follow Jesus, but Luke has no such command. For Luke, the commission is implied. The disciples, soon to be apostles, know in the presence of Jesus what they are to do. For a while they just stand there, looking at Jesus and looking at the fish. Finally, they turn from their great catch and leave behind their lives on the sea to follow Jesus (Levine and Witherington, 138-39).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Miracles that lead to faith are at the heart of this lesson. Jesus does not perform miracles simply to give economic assistance to struggling fishermen. Luke believes that miracles can evoke faith, which can lead to discipleship. Miracles have the capacity to validate Jesus and show the source of His power. Throughout the Scriptures, miracles are an effective device for turning people to faith. The key is to see God’s power behind the miracle.

The miracle grants Peter and the other fishermen remarkable success through a great catch of fish. The clue to how to handle that success occurs at the end of the narrative. They cannot have it all. They must leave everything behind to follow Jesus faithfully. The disciples cannot be effective in their mission calling if they want to use this miracle merely to establish themselves as well-heeled fishing magnates. Discipleship requires forfeiting everything for Christ (see Philippians 3:7-10).

PRAYER

Open our eyes, Lord, that we may see that the miracles that happen in our lives are demonstrations of Your power and a deeper call for faithfulness to You. Help us to be open to Your call and Your claim on our lives, and give us the courage to walk away from the things of this world and walk into the life of service that You command. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(January 4-10, 2021)

Called to Significance
MONDAY, January 4: “Called to Lead Israelites from Egypt” (Exodus 3:1-12)
TUESDAY, January 5: “Called to Deliver Israelites from Midianites” (Judges 6:11-16)
WEDNESDAY, January 6: “Called and Cleansed for Ministry” (Isaiah 6:1-8)
FRIDAY, January 8: “Repentance—the Goal of God’s Kindness” (Romans 2:1-11)
SATURDAY, January 9: “Jesus Calls Peter to Ministry” (John 21:15-19)
SUNDAY, January 10: “Don’t Be Afraid to Catch People” (Luke 5:1-11)

Luke Bibliography
January 17, 2021

Lesson 7

**CALLED TO HEAL**

**Adult/Youth**
- **Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Healing for the Whole Person
- **Youth Topic:** Going Out of Our Way for a Friend

**Devotional Reading**
- Psalm 103:1-14

**Adult/Youth**
- **Background Scripture:** Mark 2:1-12
- **Print Passage:** Mark 2:1-12
- **Key Verse:** Mark 2:9

**Children**
- **General Lesson Title:** Called to Heal
- **Children's Topic:** Stand Up and Walk!

**Adult/Youth**
- **Background Scripture:** Mark 2:1-12
- **Print Passage:** Mark 2:1-12
- **Key Verse:** Mark 2:11

**Children**
- **Background Scripture:** Mark 2:1-12
- **Print Passage:** Mark 2:1-12
- **Key Verse:** Mark 2:11

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**Mark 2:1-12—KJV**

AND AGAIN he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. 3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. 4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. 6 But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, 7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? 8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit

**Mark 2:1-12—NIV**

A FEW days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”
that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? 10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) 11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. 12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? 9 “Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? 10 “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, 11 “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: The limitations of human existence make genuine wholeness an elusive goal. Where can we find true healing? By declaring a paralyzed man’s sins forgiven and restoring his physical health, Jesus demonstrated that God had called Jesus to heal infirmities of the soul as well as the body.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Study Mark’s account of Jesus’ healing the man who was paralyzed.
2. Appreciate how one’s physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs are intertwined.
3. Pray for God’s healing grace to touch them at a specific point of need.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The text indicates that Jesus was living in Capernaum. The action in this story takes place in a house where many gathered to hear Him preach. Friends of a paralyzed man removed portions of the roof to lower the man into the house to receive prayer. The roof was likely a mat of reeds, clay, mud, and pebbles that were rolled smooth on top of the roof beams.
—Jesus’ immense popularity (the house was packed with people who wanted to hear Jesus’ teaching) created an obstacle for the friends of the paralyzed man who wanted to be healed by Jesus. Their strong confidence in Jesus’ ability to help the man played a role in the miracle (“when Jesus saw their faith”).
—Jesus first forgave the paralyzed man’s sin. When He sensed the scribes’ pondering whether this might be blasphemy, Jesus pointed out that the Son of Man had the power to forgive sin. Jesus healed the paralyzed man as evidence of His authority to forgive sin. The scribes’ concern over the possibility of blasphemy was overshadowed by the miracle.
In prior healing stories, Jesus restored physical health to those whose conditions physically separated them from community. In this story, Jesus forgives sin, which spiritually separates people from God.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

— Jesus had healed a man of leprosy in Galilee and left there to travel to Capernaum, where He would heal more persons.

— In His hometown of Capernaum, Jesus was preaching at someone’s home. The room was packed and there was no more space for anyone else to come inside. This did not stop the friends of a paralyzed man from helping him to see Jesus.

— The men decided to climb up the back steps of the stone house, rip open the roof made of mud and straw, and lower their paralyzed friend into the house. Jesus forgives the man’s sin, heals his paralysis, and tells him to get up and walk.

— Mark refers to Jesus as the Son of Man in verse 10. The title “Son of Man” reflects Jesus’ full humanity, while the term “Son of God” (see John 20:31) points to Jesus’ full divinity.

— The healed man got up and walked, and many, except the religious leaders, rejoiced and were amazed. The religious leaders continued to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They did not believe that Jesus was God’s promised Messiah. The others in the crowd praised God and exclaimed that they never before witnessed healing like that.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

This story of healing and forgiveness introduces a new theme: conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. It is the first of a group of five stories involving conflict (Mark 2:1-3:6). It is quite probable that these stories were gathered to illustrate how Jewish leaders rejected Jesus’ ministry and spiritual authority. The refusal to accept Jesus’ authority led to Jesus’ ultimate rejection and eventual death by crucifixion, a fate foreshadowed in Mark 2:20 and 3:6. This chapter, therefore, is more than a simple collection of conflict stories; rather, it is a demonstration of Jesus’ authority and the refusal of the Jewish religious leaders to recognize it (Hooker, 83). For the readers of Mark’s gospel, this story brings assurance of the power of Jesus to heal and to forgive sins. Whether the original witnesses or Mark’s later readers ever experienced healings, they would certainly know about the new life that Jesus made available to those whose sins were forgiven (Hooker, 84).

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

The setting of this passage is unusually detailed and vivid. Jesus is finally able to return to town once again. But soon after the crowds learned that Jesus was there, the house was suddenly filled with the townsfolk. The crowd packed the room and spilled out into the street. Desperate to get him to Jesus, the friends of the paralytic devised a plan to get him to Jesus. They literally unroof the roof. The end justifies the means. People already situated in the house undoubtedly join in the effort to get the man down through the roof. Jesus sees the faith of the friends, the faith of the crowds, and the faith of the paralytic and marvels at all that He sees. The details in the passage enable the readers to feel their way into the text, to identify with the persons in the scene, and thus to participate in the event so
that the text becomes a living word. A house in Capernaum becomes a house of hope with Jesus in the midst (Willimon, 63).

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

Paralytic Man: The Gospels record several instances of paralysis, which often originates with organic disease of the central nervous system. The Capernaum paralytic was evidently paraplegic. His condition may have been caused by an accident early in life or by a bone lesion.

Son of Man: Jesus’ favorite self-designation in the Synoptic Gospels (a term referring to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

Crowd (verse 4)—Greek: ochlos (okh’los): a multitude; the common people; “press” (KJV).

Faith (verse 5)—Greek: pistis (pis’-tis): conviction of the truth; belief; trust; confidence; fidelity; faithfulness.

Forgive (verse 7)—Greek: aphiémi (af-ee’-ay-mee): to let go, leave alone, remit.

Hearts (verse 8)—Greek: kardia (kar-dee’-ah): the hearts, minds, characters, inner self; wills; intentions; centers.

Sins (verse 5)—Greek: harmartia (ham-ar-tee’-ah): sins; failures; faults; “missing the mark.”

Word (verse 2)—Greek: logos (log’-os): a word (as embodying an idea); a statement; a speech.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. He Came to Heal and to Forgive
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Jesus Brings Hope to a House (Mark 2:1-2)
   B. Unroofing the Roof (Mark 2:3-4)
   C. Faith in Jesus’ Power to Heal and to Forgive (Mark 2:5)
   D. Questioning the Lord’s Power to Make Us Whole (Mark 2:6-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. He Came to Heal and to Forgive

Without a doubt, Jesus’ birth and His steadfast march to Calvary represent good news, but can only be recognized as such when people recognize their sense of their deep need for what Jesus offers. And therein lies our dilemma. Arguably, the greatest human dilemma of the present age is the waning or disappearing awareness among many Christians and non-Christians alike of their absolute desperate need for what Jesus came to bring the world. The monumental and eternal significance of God’s great saving act of sending Jesus as Savior of the world slips by so many almost unnoticed.

The telling of this wonderful story of a loving Savior is our challenge. The good news of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus is the only way to help a hurting world face up to the brokenness that permeates our existence. Jesus came to save a sinful world from
themselves. It is so often difficult to hear someone talk to us about the brokenness in our lives, and yet we experience it in some form or fashion daily. The late Dr. A. Louis Patterson observed that “it is underneath the skin where life is truly lived.” Henry David Thoreau captured some of this inward human dilemma in his words: “The mass of [men] lead lives of quiet desperation.” These sayings affirm a truth that many have already discovered. Millions of people who project an exaggerated persona of serenity and cheerfulness are often masking the turmoil, unrest, fear, and angst that reside in the inner chamber of their hearts.

No one should be ashamed of the reality of their own brokenness; everyone experiences seasons of pain in life. People experience broken homes, friendships, hearts, relationships, promises, trust, and so forth. Simply put, Jesus came to save and to serve broken people. In today’s lesson, Jesus not only heals a man, but also forgives him and makes him whole and complete in every way. That is the message for today. That is the good news for today. We must be thankful that God sent His only Son into the world because there was something wrong at the very center of our existence. Not all sickness results from sin, but so often the real healing our bodies require begins with spiritual healing. Jesus came to heal and forgive.

B. Biblical Background

Up to this point, Mark has recounted stories that have demonstrated the rising fame of Jesus and His magnetic appeal to great crowds of people. Throughout most of His ministry, Jesus continued to attract the multitudes. Jesus begins to face mounting disagreement and contempt from the Jewish leaders, especially the religious teachers and scribes who openly opposed Him. The first incident in these “conflict narratives” (as they are called) tells of the healing of a paralyzed man. Interwoven with the miracle of healing is a sharp dispute over Jesus’ right to forgive sins. In accordance with His assertion that Jesus “could no longer enter a town openly” (1:45, NIV), Mark implies that Jesus quietly slipped back into Capernaum. “He was at home” suggests that Jesus made Capernaum the headquarters for His Galilean ministry. However, it is also plausible that the home could have been that of Simon Peter’s or his brother Andrew’s. The townsfolk crowded into a small house where Jesus was preaching the Word. Many knew that Jesus’ mere presence brought hope and healing. A paralyzed man, brought to the house by four friends, was desperate to see Jesus, but the entranceway was clearly blocked. Desperate for a miracle, they hatched a plan that would ultimately catch the Master’s attention (Turlington, 278).

The determination of the four to present their friend to Jesus causes them to carry the mat up to the roof of the house. The friends make an opening in the roof, literally digging through it. They engage in an improvised demolition of a substantial part of the roof. It is quite likely that once they open the roof, those who are standing below help to place the paralytic before Jesus. Jesus saw their faith. Faith in this instance is the positive response of the total person to the initiatives of God demonstrated that day by Jesus. They trusted Jesus to heal him and He did not disappoint. Jesus takes it a step further and not only heals the man but forgives His sin. The challenge from the religious authorities is on full display, but in the end, Jesus prevails (Schnabel, 65-66).
A. Jesus Brings Hope to a House
(Mark 2:1-2)

AND AGAIN he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

The words “When he returned to Capernaum after some days” suggest that Jesus had already carried out His intention to preach throughout the countryside, since Mark 1:45 states that He was no longer able to enter a town openly. The crowds prevent Jesus from ministering openly in towns, and they thronged Him even in the countryside. After the crowds died down, Jesus apparently arranged a quiet return to Capernaum some days later. Jesus returned to the place where His public ministry began (Mark 1:21). During a recent visit, Jesus ministered in the synagogue, but on this visit to Capernaum, He ministered in a house (Geddert, 61-62). Mark’s description of the crowd is quite vivid. The little house is jam-packed, the doorway blocked with people, and those on the outside are still jostling about for a way to get in to see Jesus. There was no room for anyone in the crowd to gain easy access to Jesus.

In deciding to enter this home, Jesus brought great hope to all who crowded in to hear Him speak the Word of God. Jesus sensed the needs of the people for hope and healing in their lives. He understood the burdens of the human condition and how desperate people are for relief from the cares and concerns of life. Then and now, they flock to this Savior who has promised relief from the anguish and pains of life. In the first chapter of Mark, the crowds marveled at Jesus’ authority to teach and to drive out an unclean spirit—but in this second chapter, they marvel at His authority to heal and forgive sins. Last time, they claimed that Jesus had greater authority than the scribes (Mark 1:22), but this time they saw Him demonstrate it. Jesus brought great hope to anyone in great need of that which He alone could provide (Geddert, 61-62).

Up to this point, Mark has recounted stories that recalled Jesus’ rising fame and wide appeal to large crowds. There is no change in this regard: Jesus continued to attract the multitudes. But now begins a strong new note, contentious and mounting in anger. Jesus begins to face the major opposition of Jewish leaders, especially the religious teachers or scribes. The first incident in these “conflict” narratives tells of the healing of a paralyzed man. Interwoven with the miracle of healing is a sharp dispute over Jesus’ right to forgive sins (Turlington, 278).

B. Unroofing the Roof
(Mark 2:3-4)

And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

The throng of people in front of the house made direct access to Jesus impossible, which presented a problem for the four friends who carry a paralyzed man on a mat which must have had a wooden frame. The man is severely handicapped (perhaps a paraplegic): he is unable to walk. Mark does not comment on the cause of the paralysis, which might have existed from birth or might have resulted from
a medical condition like multiple sclerosis, a stroke, or a spinal cord injury. The friends had difficulty bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus because of the crowd (verse 4). This is the first occurrence of the word ochlos (“crowd”), a term that shows that Jesus’ ministry did not take place in private but, nearly always (in Mark’s gospel), in front of crowds of people. Crowds, however, are never associated with the teachers of the law or with the Pharisees (Schnabel, 65).

The friends’ determination to present their paralyzed friend to Jesus prompts them to carry the mat up to the roof of the house. The friends “made an opening in the roof,” which means they literally dug through a part of the roof. They made an opening large enough to lower the man’s body into the house, expecting the people who were gathered there to place it in front of Jesus (Schnabel, 65). The Greek expression for the stretcher used in the original text is derived from a Latin word to describe a poor man’s mattress or even a spartan bedroll of a soldier (Witherington, 114).

C. Faith in Jesus’ Power to Heal and to Forgive (Mark 2:5)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

As the friends look through their hole into the room below, Jesus sees their faith (verse 5a). Faith, here, as elsewhere in Mark, is closely linked with Jesus’ power to perform miraculous healings. Faith is the expectation that Jesus exercises the power of God to cure the illness. Jews would not expect to be healed by a demon, and they would know that only God has the power to instantaneously heal a serious illness such as paralysis (Schnabel, 66). It is likely that the faith of the friends who lowered the man into the home where Jesus was speaking caused Jesus to respond as He did to the paralytic. Their daring action in disassembling the roof presumably is what we are meant to think demonstrated their faith. They dared to do the difficult, the dangerous, and the controversial in order to bring their friend into the presence of Jesus. Christian love knows no bounds in its desire to bring healing to hurting brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they may be (Witherington, 114-15). It is also likely that Jesus could also be responding to the faith of the paralyzed man who may have asked his friends to take him to Jesus (Schnabel, 66). The persistence of the man’s four friends reveals their faith in Jesus’ ability to heal (Geddert, 62).

Jesus’ immediate response is not a word of healing, but of unanticipated forgiveness: Son, thy sins be forgiven thee (verse 5b). Jesus deals with the man’s paralysis by focusing first on his sins, with the implication that forgiveness of sins and physical healings are interrelated. Such a connection is often found in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we find the same balance: sometimes suffering, illness, and death are the result of specific sins of the people concerned, while other passages deny that such a direct connection can always be made for the calamity that a person suffers. Jesus may have been aware that the man’s paralysis was the result of his sin. Or the man may have believed, rightly or wrongly, that his condition was the result of sin and was looking for more than physical relief. Alternatively, perhaps Mark intends the forgiveness of sins to be understood in the general context of repentance and faith that Jesus demands in view of the coming of the kingdom of God (Mark
The statement “Your sins are forgiven” is understood by the scribes as not merely stating a fact but as actually forgiving, an understanding that Jesus reinforces (verses 8-12). The context makes it clear that Jesus had authority to forgive sins.

Jesus’ words are striking. The idea of the free forgiveness of sins was something entirely outside the scope of the Law, where forgiveness was associated with ritual cleansing. Jesus’ words go beyond those of the Law, for He is boldly and clearly asserting His own personal authority to forgive. Once again, Jesus did something which the Law could not do—He dealt with the root of the problem. The act of cleansing/healing also involved forgiveness (Hooker, 86).

D. Questioning the Lord’s Power to Make Us Whole (Mark 2:6-12)

But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

The narrator of Mark informs us that the scribes take exception to Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness of sins (verse 6). Their view is that only God can forgive sins. They refer to Jesus with the derogatory “this fellow” and accuse Him of blasphemy (verse 7) (Geddert, 62). Jesus knew their thoughts and directed a question to them (verse 8). According to the commonly held Hebrew belief, a person needed to seek divine forgiveness before he/she could expect to recover. It was even said that no one got up from their sickbed until all their sins were forgiven. However, there is no indication that Jesus conformed to this view in His pronouncement of forgiveness. Without any demonstration of repentance on the part of the sick man, Jesus simply said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Thank God for a Savior who extends blessings despite human shortcomings and the tendency to sin. The truth is that no one has ever been good enough to deserve forgiveness. Jesus Himself said, “none is good, save one, that is, God” (Luke 18:19). Thus, Jesus offered forgiveness based on the immeasurable goodness of God, never the merits of the recipient.

The rabbis taught that God was merciful and that He alone could forgive sin. They also taught that God would only forgive any person who was truly sorry for his/her sins, confessed, and turned away from them toward God (Turlington, 279). Thus, these scribes, the guardians of acceptable religious teaching, took offense at Jesus’ words.

The authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins was signaled by the healing of the paralytic man (verse 10). There in the crowd, at Jesus’ command, the healed man arose and picked up his pallet, and the crowd made an aisle for him to leave (verse 11) (Turlington, 280). Although the paralyzed man had been lying on his pallet unable to get up, Jesus healed him with a single command to stand on his feet and to carry the very thing that had long carried him—his makeshift bed. The command to “take up his bed and walk” implied full healing—the ability to do what healthy people do: bend down,
pick up loads, and carry them. The people were amazed and confessed that they had never seen anything like this (verse 12).

### III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

When Jesus caused the paralytic to walk before the eyes of His critics, they were forced to see (even if they would not admit) that this declaration of forgiveness had been effective. The interrelationship of forgiveness and healing is emphasized by the conclusion to the narrative: having received the forgiveness of God, the afflicted man received healing. This is the nature of the salvation that Jesus brings. The healing of the paralytic was more than a display of mercy to a wretched man. The announcement and presentation of radical healing to his entire person was a sign of the kingdom of God drawn near. Jesus came to give full and complete healing of both the body and the soul (Lane, 98-99).

### PRAYER

*Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus into the world. Help us to open our minds and our hearts to divine healing and forgiveness. We confess to You that we are broken in body and in spirit, and that only by Your power are we made whole again. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

*(January 11-17, 2021)*

**Called to Heal**

**MONDAY,** January 11: “Peace and Healing Will Come” (Isaiah 57:14-21)

**TUESDAY,** January 12: “Healed by Christ’s Wounds” (1 Peter 2:18-25)

**WEDNESDAY,** January 13: “A Canaanite Daughter Is Healed by Her Mother’s Faith” (Matthew 15:21-28)

**THURSDAY,** January 14: “Anoint the Sick with Oil and Prayer” (James 5:13-16)

**FRIDAY,** January 15: “A Woman Is Healed by Her Faith” (Mark 5:21-34)

**SATURDAY,** January 16: “The Sick Need a Physician” (Mark 2:13-17)

**SUNDAY,** January 17: “Jesus Heals and Forgives the Paralytic” (Mark 2:1-12)

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January 24, 2021
Lesson 8

CALLED AS THE INTERCESSOR

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** Standing in the Gap
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Standing in the Gap

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** John 17:14-24
**PRINT PASSAGE:** John 17:14-24
**KEY VERSE:** John 17:20

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Called to Pray for Others
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Seeking Help for Others

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** John 17:14-24
**PRINT PASSAGE:** John 17:14-24
**KEY VERSE:** John 17:9

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**John 17:14-24—KJV**
14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.
15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.
16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.
17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.
18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.
19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.
20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;
21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.
22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

**John 17:14-24—NIV**
14 “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.
15 “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.
16 “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.
17 “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
18 “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.
19 “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.
20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,
21 “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
22 “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—
23 “in them and you in me—so that they may be
23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often look for ways to appeal for assistance on the behalf of others. How can people respond to the urge to intercede in a meaningful way? In praying for His disciples, Jesus demonstrates how to use intercessory prayer for the sake of others.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore Jesus’ intercessory prayer for His disciples.
2. Long for Jesus’ prayer to be answered more fully in their lives and in the church.
3. Pray for others and work for unity in the body of Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The stated purpose of John’s gospel is to give evidence to believe in Jesus as Messiah in order to gain [eternal] life (John 20:31).
—Eastern religions teach that the world is an illusion that must be transcended. Jesus did not ask for His disciples to escape an illusory world, but rather that they be made holy (sanctified) with truth as they live in it.
—Jesus referred to Judas as “the one destined to be lost” (ho huios tes apoleias, the son of destruction) in John 17:12.
—The idea of giving glory has to do with demonstrating that something or someone has real value. Jesus taught that God is made real to the world in this way by the loving unity shown by Jesus’ disciples (see John 13:35; 15:22-23).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—John 17 is a powerful prayer that Jesus prays for His disciples.
—Jesus prayed that His disciples would come together in harmony, joy, and sanctification. He prayed to keep them from the Evil One who would harm them.
—Jesus knew the world hated them and prayed that God would protect them as they ministered and preached the Word of God.
—Jesus prays for God’s protection of believers. Jesus knew that His followers would live and interact with unbelievers. Jesus desired that believers would live so that even unbelievers would be drawn to God by the disciples’ commitment to love and fairness toward others.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This new prayer stands out clearly as Jesus’ prayer on His departure from His disciples. The prayer reveals the real meaning of the “glorification.” It has the purpose of releasing those forces which bring salvation and mediate life and which Jesus has made available to all people by His death. The prayer culminates in the request that the disciples may also be where He is and that they may participate in His glory (17:24). This prayer that was spoken aloud in the presence of the disciples by the departing Savior is very similar to the other discourses that precede it in the Gospel, also spoken in the hearing of other believers (Schnackenburg, 167-68).

This high-priestly prayer is usually subdivided in the following way: (1) Jesus’ petition for His own glorification (verses 1-5); (2) His intercession for His present disciples (verses 6-19); and (3) His intercession for future believers (verses 20-23) (Schnackenburg, 168).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Encapsulated in John 17 are a series of seven distinct petitions that generally invoke the name “Father” and are like flashing signals notifying the reader of changing emphases in Jesus’ great prayer. Jesus was born into a Jewish world that had developed a distant view of God, one that needed angels to carry messages. The people had ceased to use the name of God for fear of taking His name in vain, just like the Prodigal Son, who could speak of “heaven” but not use the name of God (see Luke 15:18, 21). Jesus came into this context of speaking of God by means of surrogate titles and boldly called God His Father. But even more astounding was that He taught His disciples to approach God in prayer as “Our Father” (see Matthew 6:9). For the Jews of that day, such a personal view of God was very degrading of God and close to blasphemy (see John 5:18). Jesus’ own personal sense of the Father’s presence likely prompted Him to model the manner of relating to God as a Father. Jesus therefore taught the disciples to honor and glorify God through consistent obedience to the Father’s will.

PROFESSOR CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Father: In the New Testament, “Father” can refer to the male progenitor, but in most instances, it is used to refer to God. This Christian practice probably derives from the intimate term for “father” that Jesus used to address God (John 17).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Ask (verse 15, NASB)—Greek: erótaó (er-o-tah’-o): to ask, question; “prayer” (KJV); “pray” (NIV).
Believe (verse 20)—Greek: pisteuó (pist-yoo’-o): to think to be true, have confidence; to entrust.
Sanctify (verse 17)—Greek: hagiazó (hag-ee-ad’-zo): to make holy, consecrate, purify.
Sent (verse 18)—Greek: apostelló (ap-os-tel’-lo): to have ordered to go to a place appointed; sent away.
Word (verse 14)—Greek: logos (log’-os): a word, speech, divine utterance; analogy.
World (verse 16)—Greek: kosmos (kos’-mos): order; the universe; Earth.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Prayer of the Departing Redeemer
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Called Upon to Engage a World Opposed to God (John 17:14-16)
   B. Sanctified for Service by God’s Truth (John 17:17-19)
   C. Jesus’ Prayer for the Unity of All Believers (John 17:20-22)
   D. Christ’s Prayer for Our Purposeful End (John 17:23-24)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Prayer of the Departing Redeemer

John 17 invites the reader to listen in on Jesus’ conversation with the Father. It is a divine conversation of the highest order, in which Jesus speaks of the completion of His tasks on earth and prays earnestly for His followers, both present and future. Uniquely, this prayer offers a glimpse of Jesus in relation to the Father and portrays those things that are close to Jesus’ heart in these last days of His life among the disciples on earth (Burge, 469).

In this prayer, Jesus is not talking to His disciples, but to God. The reader is allowed to “listen” in. Such prayers as those found in John 17 are a teaching vehicle; they are meant to be overheard so that disciples can study them and learn. Even though Jesus was speaking to God, He apparently intended for the prayer to be heard.

The first notable aspect of Jesus’ prayer is the fact that Jesus prayed. There is significant evidence throughout the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus was a man of prayer, but here is a prime example of Jesus in prayer.

Second, one may also note that Jesus was not simply interested in His relationship with the Father, but also concerned for His followers. Jesus prays for every disciple—those present and far, far beyond the table with Him!

Third, the prayer calls disciples to remember that Jesus prayed on behalf of the mission and ministry of the church. The church should reflect God’s glory and love for the world and should exhibit a confidence in its knowledge of God since it bears the true Word of God.

B. Biblical Background

John 17 records what should rightly be called the true Lord’s Prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, and His answer is known as “the Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13). The Matthean prayer is really a prayer for Jesus’ disciples to pray, while John 17 records the Lord’s own prayer. Jesus’ prayer is significant as a model and example of prayer for all believers. It is a reverent prayer, indicated by Jesus’ lifting up His eyes to heaven and by His humble manner of address. It is a reasoned prayer, reflecting forethought and clear biblical thinking. It is a prayer that expresses Christ’s readiness to do His Father’s will. It is a believing prayer, asking God to perform the very things He has promised to do, a prayer that is centered on God’s sovereign plan for salvation. Finally, Jesus’ priestly intercession is a prayer on which Christians may utterly rely. We can rest assured that what Jesus asks in this prayer will be answered by His Father (Phillips, 386-87).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
A. Called Upon to Engage a World Opposed to God (John 17:14-16)

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them
from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Jesus has given His disciples the word or message from God. This had already provoked hatred from the world (verse 14). Why should this be the case? Because they were not of the world anymore. They had crossed a moral and spiritual line of demarcation and though they had not fully realized it yet, they were indeed citizens of a heavenly country (see Hebrews 11:6). Those with no desire to be “bothered” or transformed by God’s Word may find in Jesus and in His faithful followers another way of life hostile to their own pursuit of the lifestyle they, the children of darkness, so desperately desire. The real Jesus, the real teaching of the Bible, and the real way of life of believers in Christ are often hated for their refusal to conform to a world system that is celebrated by those who do not know God.

Those who desire to be like Jesus can expect trouble in such a world. But Christians can take comfort in the fact that God will never forsake those who live and labor in defense of the Gospel. Jesus did not pray for believers to be taken out of the world—as God wants them to be actively engaged for good in a world of unbelievers. We are in the world to stand for what is good and right. We are called upon to proclaim the Good News to any who will hear. Thus, Jesus’ prayer is not for believers to be removed from the evils of the world but, rather, to be protected from the Evil One while they remain in the world (verse 15) (Keddie, 258).

**B. Sanctified for Service by God’s Truth**  
(John 17:17-19)

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

The main focus of this section of the prayer is on the preparation of the disciples for mission. The disciples, like Jesus, would experience the sense of being aliens in the hostile world (17:14), but this prayer does not advocate abandoning the world to the devil’s charge. Quite the opposite is true because just as it has been repeatedly said throughout this Gospel that the Father sent Jesus into the world, so it is here clearly asserted that Jesus has sent His followers into the world (verse 18). The Greek word for “sent” carries the idea of being sent for a purpose or sent on a mission (Borchert, 203). Jesus does not want the Father to take the disciples out of the world—on the contrary, He has Himself sent them into the world. The fact that the disciples are not of the world and have been sanctified and set apart for service are not reasons to withdraw from the world. They are an invitation to continue Jesus’ mission in the world. Just as Jesus Himself was equipped, “sanctified” (10:36), and sent into the world by the Father, so too are the disciples prepared and sent out by Jesus. Jesus was sent into the world to bear witness to the truth (see 18:37) and to testify openly to the whole world what He had seen and heard with His Father. This same voice would continue to be heard in the world through His disciples.

Because of the One who sanctified believers and commissioned them to serve, Christians have a story to tell that extends beyond the four walls of the church (Schnackenburg, 186-87). That story of Jesus must include the message of His death and resurrection. Thus, in verse 19, when Jesus speaks of sanctifying Himself, that phrase is to
be understood as an act of submission to the holy will of the Father, and dedication to Calvary and all that Calvary signifies. Sanctifying, as used in the text, meant being set aside for God’s special purpose. In sanctifying Himself, Jesus modeled for the disciples what it means to be alien from the world and yet committed to a mission in and to the world, even to the point of death (Borchert, 203-204).

C. Jesus’ Prayer for the Unity of All Believers (John 17:20-22)

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.

The idea of unity appears in more than one place in John 17 (verse 11b). However, Jesus returns to His request for unity after dealing with several other petitions. The remarkable nature of Jesus’ call for unity is described in 17:20: it is to be a unity of the kind that exists between the Father and Jesus Himself. The unity that Jesus desired was to be brought about in reciprocal love (verse 20). Love, then, is not the result of human exertion, but of God’s gift and the handing on of that received love to every believer. The unity existing between Jesus and the Father is not only the fundamental model that should exist among believers, but is also the basis for making this unity possible in their lives. The unity to which this text refers is based upon God and His love. It is a unity that penetrates believers from above and compels them to be one in brotherly love. It is also a unity with a purpose: so that the world may know that God has sent Jesus into the world and Jesus has in turn sent believers into the world (verse 21)! Unity enables believers to make a powerful witness in coming together as one in the name of God the Father and His Son, Jesus (Schnackenburg, 190-91).

What is striking in this prayer is that Jesus not only draws believers into a divine union of life and conversation, but also invites them to participate in the glory of God. “The glory that you have given me I have given them” (verse 22, NRSV). As Jesus turns in the prayer toward the life of His followers and to the church that will follow, His chief concern is that they too live lives that glorify God. They are to exhibit such a life in their worship, their words, and their work. It is to be the same glory that Jesus exhibited on earth. This is the essence of Jesus’ vision for the church. The church is a community that invites people to touch the glory of God, to be changed by it, and to bear it to the world. Spiritual fruit is essentially that which glorifies God. What a powerful witness the church could have in the world if we glorified God in our words and deeds. May God help us to live in such a way that all people see that we have been sent into the world by this loving God to transform the whole of humanity in His name (Burge, 476-77).

D. Christ’s Prayer for Our Purposeful End (John 17:23-24)

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.
Addressing His Father again in verse 24, Jesus expresses His desire and His will that His own should see His glory.

When Jesus says that we will see His glory, we may consider this in a number of ways. First, we will see true manhood glorified. Owing to the human form that Jesus took up in the Incarnation, humbling Himself and setting aside His heavenly splendor while on earth, He will now be able to reveal His glory more perfectly to the objects of His love. When the disciples are raised to sit with Jesus upon His throne, we shall behold His glorified humanity, not as His disciples beheld Him as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3), but in that glorified form in which He shall always be present to the sight and embrace of the saints above.

Second, it is not merely the glory of His incarnate manhood, which Jesus took to Himself, nor merely the glory of His divine being, which Jesus possessed from all eternity. Ultimately, Jesus speaks of His mediatorial glory in the office that the Father gave Him as Redeemer and Head of the church. The glory given to Christ upon His return to heaven is that glory He earned by saving us from sin and making Himself our new covenant Lord. Jesus adds the remarkable statement that the Father ordained this glory of His Son “for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (verse 24b). Here again, salvation is grounded in God’s love for His Son, by which the Father willed that Christ should be glorified as the Head of a redeemed people forever. Thank God for Jesus, who loves us throughout eternity and who has promised to be with us until that day when our eyes shall behold Him and not another. Christians can take great comfort in knowing that Jesus has prayed for us and that the victory is ultimately ours. We should strive to be workers together with God of one mind, one unity, and one purpose.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The beginning point in any interpretation of John 17 must be the acknowledgment that the words in this chapter are portrayed not as Jesus’ instruction to the community of faith, but as Jesus’ words offered to God in prayer. When this narrative is viewed as a prayer, three important themes emerge that are instructive for Christian living: (1) on the eve of His death, Jesus speaks to God on behalf of the faith community. Jesus entrusts the hope of the future of His followers to God in prayer. Jesus’ prayer for the community models how the community is to understand and receive its identity in the Word—it’s life rests and depends on God’s grace; (2) in this prayer, the reader overhears the intimacy of Jesus’ relationship with God. The language in the prayer creates a tone of intimacy, for the whole prayer is built around an I-you axis of communication. Jesus is close enough to God that He can lay His petitions and intercessions before the Father in the confidence that He will be heard; and (3) when contemporary readers overhear this prayer, they are given a glimpse of life with God that transcends conventional limits and expectations. This prayer points the faith community toward a future in which God’s governance and care of them is complete. It is a reminder that God is responsible for the nurture of the future (O’Day, 797-98).
PRAYER
Heavenly Father, give us the strength and wisdom to know the value of unity in the fellowship of believers. Help us to entrust our work and witness to You in the full assurance that Jesus has prayed for us and awaits us when our work on earth is done. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(January 18-24, 2021)

Called as the Intercessor
MONDAY, January 18: “Prayer for Peter in Prison” (Acts 12:5-11)
TUESDAY, January 19: “Pray for a Successful Ministry” (Romans 15:22-33)
WEDNESDAY, January 20: “Pray for Inner Strength and Power” (Ephesians 3:14-21)
THURSDAY, January 21: “Pray the Prayer of Our Lord” (Matthew 6:7-13)
FRIDAY, January 22: “Pray for Your Abusers” (Luke 6:22-33)
SUNDAY, January 24: “Jesus Prays for His Disciples” (John 17:13-24)

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January 31, 2021

PROPHESYING DAUGHTERS

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Women Speak Out
YOUTH TOPIC: Daughters Who Speak Out

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Two Believing Sisters
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Sisters Speak Out

DEVOTIONAL READING
Joel 2:28-32

ADULT/ YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Luke 2:36-38;
Acts 1:12-14; 2:16-21; 21:8-9
PRINT PASSAGES: Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21;
21:8-9
KEY VERSE: Acts 2:17

CHILDREN
John 11:1-45
PRINT PASSAGE: John 11:17-27, 38-45
KEY VERSE: John 11:27

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the
daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a
great age, and had lived with an husband seven years
from her virginity;
37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four
years, which departed not from the temple, but served
God with fastings and prayers night and day.
38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks
likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them
that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet
Joel;
17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith
God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and
your young men shall see visions, and your old men
shall dream dreams:

16 “No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:
17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my
Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will
prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old
men will dream dreams.

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of
Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had
lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,
37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.
She never left the temple but worshiped night and
day, fasting and praying.
38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave
thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who
were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

16 “No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:
17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my
Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will
prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old
men will dream dreams.

18 “Even on my servants, both men and women, I
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Everyone has a unique purpose in life. How do we affirm each person’s purpose? The gospels of Luke and John and the book of Acts provide examples of women responding to God’s call.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine how God called and empowered women to proclaim His message.
2. Affirm the contributions of godly women to the church’s mission.
3. Advocate for greater recognition of God-called women in the church.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—In Acts 2, Peter quotes the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of Joel 3:1-5. Just a couple of words are changed by Peter for clarity of meaning: “in the last days” is substituted for “after these things” to highlight the new eschatological purpose, and “God declares” is added to clarify the implied source of the prophecy and this new outpouring.
—The prophetic community specifically described in Acts 2, but echoed elsewhere, is remarkably inclusive and perhaps indicative of the upside-down character of the coming kingdom. Not only are women given important roles, but also, now slaves are called servants and given inclusion in the new community.
—Philip is mentioned in Luke 16:8-9 to bring
full clarity to the narrative of Paul’s spiritual transformation. Prior to his conversion, Paul persecuted Philip, Stephen, and others. Paul would later reside in Philip’s home on his way to Jerusalem, where he himself faced persecution.
—The inclusion of “certain women” in Acts 1 recalls the importance of women in Jesus’ ministry and highlights the continuing vital role that women would play in the church’s mission throughout history.
—The presence of the prophetess Anna (Luke 2) as witness to Jesus’ presentation at the Temple reiterates the long tradition of female prophets in the Old Testament.
—The stereotype for prophecy is that it tells the future; however, the biblical model for prophets is that they deliver God’s Word (often preceded by “thus saith the Lord”). Prophecy is more accurately understood as forth-telling rather than foretelling.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Jesus was friends with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. He had eaten and taught at their home. Martha fussed about having too much housework and Mary quietly sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him teach (see Luke 10:38-40).
—Jesus had received word that His friend Lazarus was sick and would die if He did not come quickly to heal him. Yet, Jesus chose to stay in the village beyond the Jordan where He had just preached.
—Jesus comforts Martha by reminding her that her brother, Lazarus, will rise again. Martha does not realize that Lazarus will rise from the dead soon as well as later as she is thinking. Jesus’ power to give life was not limited to a future resurrection but can create life out of death now.
—Mary cried because of Lazarus’s death, as did the professional mourners who were with her. It is not clear why, but Jesus cried too.
—Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away from Lazarus’s tomb. Martha protested about the odor of Lazarus’s dead body and Jesus admonished her that if she believed, God’s glory would be revealed. Jesus prayed to God and called Lazarus by name, and Lazarus was raised from the dead.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts stands as the sequel to Luke’s gospel. Luke refers readers to his account of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Whether he wrote Acts as a separate work or as the second volume of a unified composition, there is no doubt that Luke wanted to connect the account of the life, work, and teachings of Jesus to the beginnings of the early church. What began in Jerusalem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which included women and slaves, along with the proclamation of the apostles, really began in Galilee, where Jesus began to preach the Good News of the arrival of the kingdom of God to help people in need (Schnabel, 69). In Luke’s introduction to the second volume of his work on the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, Luke squarely places Jesus at the center. While the gospel of Luke described what Jesus began to do and to teach, the second volume—Acts—describes what Jesus continued to do and to teach in and through the ministry of the apostles. The Holy Spirit is also at work in a new and marvelous way—a way that includes all the people of God: women and men, young and old, slaves and those born free. No one is to be left out of the grand redemptive scheme that comes through God’s inbreaking activity in Jesus Christ. The women in Luke and Acts speak out in a powerful way under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. They too are a part of the missionary work and the pastoral ministry of the risen Lord, who empowered His disciples with...
the gift of the Holy Spirit, who now sits at the right hand of the Father (Schnabel, 65).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts is a picture of the early church in action. It tells the story of the church leaders actively engaged in the work of ministry. It is an exciting story, one that if carefully read dispels the myth that being a Christian is an armchair exercise. It is a book well-named: Acts. There are numerous important signs in the book of Acts that help believers to live out the meaning of what it means to be a Christian. First, there is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all who gathered in Jerusalem that day. The Spirit brings life, freedom, and inclusivity to all who have a desire to work for Jesus. Second, the church leaders and church members who star in this story are all engaged in evangelism. There is little time to spend arguing about who can serve and who is not allowed to serve. All who desire to tell the world about Jesus can serve, including women. Finally, all the participants in Acts have a story to tell about the good things the Lord Jesus has done in their lives. They then go out to share that story without fear or favor to the rest of the world (Fernando, 13).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Anna: the daughter of Phanuel, an aged widow, and a prophetess, whose lineage is traced to the tribe of Asher. Joel: the second of the minor prophets. He appears to have lived in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Much of his prophecy appears to be a reaction to significant national tragedies. Phanuel: the father of the prophetess Anna, of the tribe of Asher. Philip: one of the seven chosen to assist the apostles in the distribution of provisions to the widows of the church. Philip was the first to take the Gospel to the Samaritans. He was then sent by an angel to take the Gospel to an Ethiopian official who was returning home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Prophesy (Acts 2:17)—Greek: prophéteuó (prof-ate-yoo’-o): to foretell, predict, speak forth by divine inspirations.
Prophetess (Luke 2:36)—Greek: prophé-tis (prof-ay’-tis): a female who declares or interprets oracles; a female “prophet” (NIV).
Redemption (Luke 2:38)—Greek: lutrósis (loo’-tro-sis): in the Old Testament: ransoming from imprisonment for debt, or from slavery; release from national misfortune, etc.; liberation; deliverance; release.
Servants (Acts 2:18)—Greek: doulos (doo’-los): slaves; persons who are enslaved.
Widow (Luke 2:37)—Greek: chéra (khay’-rah): a woman whose husband has died.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
A. The Sovereign God and His Call to Those Whom He Calls
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. Anna the Prophet Is Devoted Totally to God (Luke 2:36-38)
B. The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh—Including Women! (Acts 2:16-17)
C. Wonders and Signs of God’s Redemptive Acts (Acts 2:18-21)
D. Philip’s Four Unmarried Daughters and the Gift of Prophecy (Acts 21:8-9)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Sovereign God and His Call to Those Whom He Calls

Lydia Hoyle of the Divinity School of Campbell University notes that since Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, who then bore the good news of His resurrection to the disciples, women have been among those faithfully sharing the message of Jesus’ resurrection to the world. Some, however, in every age and in every generation, have not welcomed their voices. Some have even committed time and energy to the work of silencing those voices they find so offensive. Others, though, have listened, have felt the movement of the Spirit, and have heard the voice of God through women who followed God’s call to preach (Hoyle, 188).

It is important to understand that no one is so intelligent or powerful as to tell a sovereign God whom He can use and how He can use them. The sovereignty of God speaks to His supreme authority, inarguable right, and unlimited power to do whatever He decides to do. From endless age to endless age God remains the same, and answers to no one. Throughout time, God has called and anointed persons to deliver a divine message or to speak with authority about Him.

B. Biblical Background

Luke’s narrative of the third incident in the Pentecost episode (2:1-41) describes Peter’s speech before the Jews of Jerusalem, Judea, and the diaspora. When the assembled crowd heard Jesus’ disciples’ speaking in languages they could not have learned as Galilean Jews, and saw the manifestations of sound and light, they eagerly demanded an explanation. Peter explained that the phenomenon was the fulfillment of prophecies in the Scriptures—specifically Joel 2:28-32, which explains the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter days. Peter affirms that what the crowd witnessed was the manifestation of the Spirit of prophecy that was poured out by the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord, Jesus Christ. The Spirit would rest upon sons and daughters, young and old men, and male and female slaves without respect to gender, ethnicity, or social class. In fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, all who respond positively to the Spirit’s message would receive salvation by repenting and calling on the name of Jesus the Messiah (Schnabel, 126).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE
A. Anna the Prophet Is Devoted Totally to God
   (Luke 2:36-38)

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
In verse 36, Luke introduced Anna the prophet as a counterpart to Simeon, whom he introduced in verse 25 (NRSV) as “righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel.” Anna was endowed with the Spirit and through her father, Phanuel, from the northern tribe of Asher, she was located squarely within the Israelite heritage. She was of great age, which is of itself a symbol of respectful status in her world (verse 36). It is quite likely that she reached the age of 105, having lived as a widow for eighty-four-plus years. She exemplifies the aesthetic ideal of marrying once and devoting oneself only to God in widowhood. Verse 37b reads, “She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day” (NRSV). Her fasting is a form of prayer, entreat ing God to set things right (Green, 151).

Anna allowed God to use her in a magnificent way. Coming into the presence of Jesus, she was immediately able to recognize the child’s prophetic significance. She perceives in the child the answer to her prayers, her hopes, and those of others for the redemption of Jerusalem.

B. The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh—Including Women!

(Acts 2:16-17)

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Peter begins his explanation of the manifestations of the Spirit that the crowds witnessed on the Day of Pentecost with the argument that it was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 (verse 16). The last days of which Joel prophesied began with the coming of Jesus into the world. Peter links the last days not with the coming of the Holy Spirit but with the entire ministry of Jesus. The ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus constitute the beginning of the final epoch in history when God acted in a decisive manner to bring salvation through His Son. According to Peter, that new age had arrived, and the Lord had begun to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, an event that would impact all sectors of society and be accompanied by wonders and signs in the sky and on earth.

In this new age marked by the presence of Jesus in the world, God will pour out His Spirit “on all people” (verse 17a). This means that God will distribute the Spirit to not just a few people, on special occasions, and for special tasks, and most certainly not just to “men,” but to all—to everybody. In Joel’s context, “all flesh” denotes all the people of Judah whose fortunes would be restored, but for Peter, “all flesh” (all people) refers to anyone who repents and believes in Jesus as the Messiah.

Since Joel’s prophecy speaks about future events, the expression “your sons and daughters” refers to all Jews, male and female, who will be alive at the great and glorious day of the Lord. The pair “young men” and “old men” describes the entire male population above the age of children. The verb translated “prophesy” denotes (1) to proclaim an inspired revelation; (2) to tell about something that is hidden from view; and (3) to foretell something that lies in the future. “Visions” and “dreams” describe experiences that convey, under divine inspiration, supernatural revelation. While the dividing line between visions and dreams is not always clear, one cannot conclude that the Spirit will affect the young and the old in different ways.
The point that is not to be missed in the fulfillment of this prophecy is that no one is left out of God’s great effort to share the message of redemption through Jesus Christ.

C. Wonders and Signs of God’s Redemptive Acts (Acts 2:18-21)

And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Joel’s prophecy speaks of male and female slaves receiving God’s Spirit and prophesying. This implies that the coming of the Holy Spirit on all people will remove all distinctions of class and caste (verse 18). Joel’s prophecy of wonders and signs was fulfilled in the events of Jesus’ death, notably in the darkening of the sun, mentioned in verse 20. Joel’s prophecy of “wonders in the sky” was fulfilled in the ascension of Jesus, who ascended in a cloud. This prophecy was also fulfilled in the manifestations of the Spirit on Pentecost, which descended “from heaven” and which Peter is in the process of explaining. In the context of Joel’s prophecy, these manifestations of “blood and fire and a cloud of smoke” and the prophecy that “the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood” are connected with God’s judgment and should be understood as eschatological signs—that is, signs of the end time when Jesus shall have put all things under His feet (verses 19-20) (Schnabel, 138-39). God summons everyone’s participation as He establishes His plan to offer salvation to the world.

D. Philip’s Four Unmarried Daughters and the Gift of Prophecy (Acts 21:8-9)

And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

Luke’s report of Paul’s final visit to churches in the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia emphasizes the importance of encouragement in invigorating and comforting believers. This narrative of his travels (see Acts 20:2-21:17) involves three different episodes of his missionary work and highlights again the importance of teamwork, of flexibility in carrying out one’s plans, and of the significance of God’s will in carrying out the work they have all been assigned to do, come what may. These travel reports and community scenes provide a portrait of the churches established by Paul and other missionaries. The third episode includes the visit of Paul to the city of Caesarea. After arriving in the large harbor of that city they go into the house of Philip (verse 8a). He is identified as the evangelist who preached on the road to Gaza. He was also a member of the seven, who had been appointed by the Jerusalem church to organize the support ministry for the widows of the congregation (verse 8b). Philip had travelled throughout the region, preaching the Gospel in various towns, including Azotus, Samaria, and Caesarea (8:40).

The reference to Philip’s four unmarried daughters reinforces the community setting of the incident, which had been indicated by the theme of hospitality (the house of Philip) and the description of Philip as an evangelist. There is no good reason for why Luke mentions
the fact that Philip’s daughters were unmarried (virgins), unless he wants to indicate that they were still members of his household. They could have been as young as sixteen, yet they were prophesying and apparently accepted by the community in which they lived. They went around in their community speaking forth the things of God. No time seems to have been wasted by their community’s arguing over whether they had been called by God (Schnabel, 820, 856).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

What a day for women when the Spirit of God continues to call forth people into the service of God. Jesus clearly demonstrated an openness to women in ministry. His very birth involved women from the annunciation by the angel to His presentation in the Temple with Simeon and Anna. The presence of the Holy Spirit in Acts clearly shows that God is calling everyone to proclaim the Good News of the plan of salvation for the world. The early church accepted women in all capacities, including those of prophecy—as demonstrated by the prophecy of Joel and the four virgin daughters of Philip. God is calling women today to join in His call for the redemption of the world.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for calling us into Your service. We are grateful to You for the freedom of Your Spirit to call any who will hear Your voice. We give You thanks for the service to Your great cause of all those who have heeded the call into ministry. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 25-31, 2021)

Prophesying Daughters

TUESDAY, January 26: “Jesus Responds to Sisters’ Call” (John 11:1-11)
WEDNESDAY, January 27: “Jesus Raises Lazarus; Mary Believes” (John 11:38-45)

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Lesson 10

CALLED TO EVANGELIZE

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** No Insignificant Witnesses
**YOUTH TOPIC:** An Unusual Witness Emerges in the Strangest Place

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Called to Witness about Jesus
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** “Come See Who I Know”

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
John 1:37-51

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** John 1:37-51; 4:25-42
**PRINT PASSAGE:** John 4:25-42
**KEY VERSE:** John 4:39

John 4:25-42—KJV
25 The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.
26 Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.
27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? Or, Why talkest thou with her?
28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the city, and saith to the men,
29 Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did: is not this the Christ?
30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.
31 In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.
32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.
33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** John 1:37-51; 4:25-42
**PRINT PASSAGE:** John 4:25-42
**KEY VERSE:** John 4:42

John 4:25-42—NIV
25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”
26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”
27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”
28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,
29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”
30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.
31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”
34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.
35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.
36 And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.
37 And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.
38 I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men abored, and ye are entered into their labours.
39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.
40 So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.
41 And many more believed because of his own word;
42 And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”
33 Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”
34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.
35 “Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.
36 “Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.
37 “Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true.
38 “I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”
39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.”
40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.
41 And because of his words many more became believers.
42 They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people wonder if they are qualified or worthy to give direction to others. What is the best way to share with or witness to others? The woman at the well was considered an outcast, but after meeting Jesus she eagerly became a witness and brought others to Him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Identify the barriers Jesus crossed in conversing with the Samaritan woman.
2. Sense the wonder the Samaritan woman felt in her encounter with Jesus.
3. Share with others the transforming power of God at work in their lives.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
— After returning from exile, the people of Israel separated themselves from those who were descendants of Israelites and their foreign wives (see Ezra 10:10-11; Nehemiah 13:23-25).
— In His tabernacles discourse, Jesus also made the promise of giving living water (see John 7:37-39). In that discourse and possibly in the conversation with the Samaritan woman, that promise would have recalled memories of Moses’ calling for water to flow from a rock to nourish the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land (see Exodus 17:1-7).
— This incident involving the woman at the well seems to have taken place prior to Jesus’ revealing His identity as Messiah to others, even those closest to Him (see Matthew 16:13-20).

Teachers of CHILDREN
— Jesus travelled to Samaria and waited to speak with a woman at Jacob’s well in the city of Sychar.
— During their conversation, Jesus tells her about living water that will quench her thirst forever. She wants this living water. He also tells the woman whom He has never met certain details about her life. She is shocked at His truth and tells everyone that they must come and see a man who could be the Christ.
— Her witness was convincing and persuaded many to come to see Jesus for themselves. Many believe in Christ because they witness and experience Him for themselves.
— The disciples had left Jesus alone while they went searching for food. When they returned with a meal for Jesus, He told them that His greatest hunger was not for food, but for doing the will of God the Father, who sent Him.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This lengthy and important story about Jesus’ interaction with a Samaritan woman continues the form begun in chapter 3, where Jesus speaks with particular people who bear so many features of the world of first-century Palestine. The dialogue with Nicodemus makes perfect sense—a Jerusalem rabbi and leader interviews a seemingly outrageous teacher from Galilee—but here in chapter 4, we have a story that intrigues as much as it surprises. There is a certain irony to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. In the preceding chapter we find the story of Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus by night (John 3:1-2), but the episode involving the Samaritan woman takes place at “noon.” Light and darkness are such prominent motifs in the gospel of John that their presence in the narrative signals important theological meanings. Religious people and worldly outcasts alike are sitting in darkness until they come into the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. Those who acknowledge Jesus’ lordship step into the light, while those who refuse continue to walk in darkness. Once people see the light, there is an unquenchable thirst to tell others about Jesus (Burge, 138).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

By Jesus’ day, a heated tension existed between the people of Judea and Samaria. Partly based on race and religion, it echoed many centuries of terrible political fights. Therefore, when we read that Jesus, in passing through the region, meets a
“Samaritan woman,” the story does not mean that she is a resident of the city of Samaria, but that she is from the region of Samaria. She is a woman bearing the history, language, religion, and attitudes of people on the far margin of Judaism. A first-century reader would barely expect Jesus and the woman to acknowledge each other’s presence, much less speak. Both in their own way broke through cultural barriers to do the work of God in their day (Burge, 139-41).

The character in today’s lesson is a Samaritan woman who has had multiple marriages. The social restrictions of the day notwithstanding, Jesus engages this woman and she eventually comes around to acknowledge His lordship. She runs to tells others about Jesus and as a result, many others come to believe in Him.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S)
IN THE LESSON
The Samaritan Woman: The Samaritan woman belonged to a strict religious sect that observed the Torah with a resolute pride in their religious heritage. They maintain that they and not the Jews are the bearers of the true faith of ancient Israel as expounded by Moses and as practiced at Mount Gerizim in ancient times.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
City (verse 30)—Greek: polis (pol’-is): a city; the inhabitants of a city; “town” (NIV).
Come (verse 29)—Greek: deute (dyoo’-teh): come hither; hither; an exclamatory word.
Disciples (verse 31)—Greek: mathétés (math-ay-tes’): learners; pupils.
Finish (verse 34)—Greek: teleioó (tel-i-o’-o): to bring to an end; to complete, perfect.
Seek (verse 27, NASB)—Greek: zéteó (dzay-teh’-o): to seek, search for, desire, require, demand; “seekest” (KJV); (no equivalent for NIV).
Speak(ing) (verse 26)—Greek: laleó (lal-eh’-o): to talk, tell, say, utter.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
A. From Doubtful Listener to Dedicated Evangelist
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. The Long-awaited Messiah Is Here (John 4:25-26)
B. Jesus and the Place of Women in the Work of God (John 4:27-30)
C. The Food of Jesus (John 4:31-38)
D. Effective Witnessing Is Telling Others about Jesus Christ (John 4:39-42)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. From Doubtful Listener to Dedicated Evangelist

This story about Jesus and a Samaritan woman begins in the Samaritan town of Sychar, at the well dug by Jacob (a patriarch claimed by Jews and Samaritans alike). Jesus, exhausted from His journey, sat down alone (without His disciples to help Him) and had no means of drawing water. He asked this woman for a drink of water. He was thirsty and was willing to cross over painful cultural, racial, religious, and gender divisions to quench His thirst. The
woman observed that Jesus lacked the proper equipment to supply for Himself even a single cup of water. Along with failing to perceive who Jesus was, she also failed to discern the nature of the gift she stood to receive that day—eternal life. The water Jesus offered had the ability to satisfy thirst forever.

Still, the woman could not completely comprehend what Jesus was offering her. With astounding skill, Jesus broke through the impasse with a request designed to lead her to the truth of who He was: “Go, call your husband and come back” (verse 16, NIV). Her denial of having a husband provided Jesus with the opportunity to demonstrate His supernatural knowledge of human hearts and human histories and His desire to move the conversation to a deeper level of spiritual need (Longell, 79).

Owing to His intimate knowledge of her life, the Samaritan woman’s eyes were opened. Somehow, He knew her. Remarkably, the awareness of Jesus’ knowledge of her did not drive her to hide from Him but seemed, rather, to draw her to Him.

B. Biblical Background

Because the success of His own baptizing mission had grown to surpass that of John’s, Jesus began withdrawing into Galilee to escape the hostility of the Pharisees, who had little tolerance for Jesus or John. His decision to pass through Samaria was not strictly necessary (long detours were possible), but it was practically necessary. The disdain Jews held for Samaritans arose in part from the similarities between them. Both peoples claimed the same spiritual lineage, the same Scriptures (though the Samaritans limited their body of sacred Scriptures to the Pentateuch along), and the same worship ideal. The commonalities seemed only to intensify their centuries-old grievances with one another.

The Samaritans as a people stemmed from the mixture of surviving (North) Israelites with various foreigners planted on Israelite soil by the conquering king of Assyria (721 BC and following). This mixture of races led to the compromise of Israel’s religion and the creation of ongoing tensions between the groups. The last thing the Samaritan woman expected at Jacob’s well that day was to be blessed by a Jewish rabbi who raised her suspicions when He requested of her a drink of water. Having discovered an incredible power within Jesus, she ran and left the water jar behind. Not only did she have a new hope in life, but she also had a new mission—telling others about Jesus Christ.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Long-awaited Messiah Is Here

(John 4:25-26)

The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well and asked of her a drink of water. When she hesitated, Jesus told her that He could give her water where she never would thirst again. Jesus proceeds to define carefully for the woman what was coming and what was
currently dawning on earth—true worshippers who will worship God in spirit and in truth (verse 23). True worship is not to be tied to holy places, but impacted by a holy person who, through His cross, will inaugurate the era in which the Holy Spirit would change everything (verse 24).

In response to Jesus’ comments about true worshippers’ worshipping in spirit and in truth, the woman boldly states that she knows that the Messiah is coming who is called Christ (verse 25). Jesus immediately seizes the opportunity to reveal Himself to her and declares, “I that speak unto thee am he” (verse 26). In John, the use of “I am” is an important theological theme that is used in the mouth of Jesus as a self-identifying vehicle for announcing some important theological idea concerning Himself. The force of Jesus’ statement here needs to be noticed. He is basically saying (in effect), “The conversation is finished!” The long-awaited Messiah is here! Respond in faith and you will never be spiritually thirsty again (Borchert, 209-10).

B. Jesus and the Place of Women in the Work of God (John 4:27-30)

And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

Verse 27a reads, “Just then his disciples returned” (NIV). The return of the disciples constituted an interruption that in effect set up a striking contrast between the woman, who is an outsider, and the disciples, who are insiders. The contrast is a study in reversal because the insiders who ought to know Jesus and His mission reveal their lack of understanding about who Jesus really was and why He had come. On the other hand, the enlightened outsider poses an important question that moves her in the direction of understanding Jesus’ true identity and mission. The disciples were astonished that Jesus was talking with a woman. The disciples were clearly men of their times, probably more concerned that Jesus was “talking with a woman” than that she was a Samaritan (Borchert, 210).

In the eyes of many, the woman at the well had three strikes against her: (1) she was a woman, (2) she was a Samaritan, and (3) she had multiple husbands. However, Jesus did not seem to be bothered by such traditional patterns of restrictive conversation. His message, then as now, was for everyone, those of every culture and standing in society. Jesus was clearly a man ahead of the times—cross-cultural in His perspective and concern for others. When the woman accepts Jesus’ offer of living water, she leaves behind the very thing she had guarded so carefully and ran to fetch others so that they might see the wonderful Jesus for themselves. O, the things we are willing to leave behind in the presence of the Master (verses 28-29)! The woman’s zeal to share her discovery made her leave behind anything that would hinder her. Jesus talked about her past in a way that lifted her up as opposed to breaking her down. He spoke of her past in order to save her, not to shame her. Jesus’ goal was to reach the woman without reviling her. In Jesus, the Samaritan woman found a friend and she ran to tell others of the amazing things He had done for her (Borchert, 210).
C. The Food of Jesus
(John 4:31-38)

In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men abored, and ye are entered into their labours.

In the woman’s absence, the disciples urged Jesus to eat (verse 31). Jesus’ claim to possess food baffled them, since their assignment was to find food (4:32). Surely, they wondered whether someone (the woman?) had given Him food (verse 34). Their minds were on earthly things, and their misunderstanding enables Jesus to press their thinking to another level. Obeying God the Father, argues Jesus, is the more deeply satisfying task. Thus, Jesus asserted that His “food” was to do the will of the One who sent Him and to complete His work. Jesus then reached for an agricultural metaphor to explain the urgency of His work to the disciples (verses 35-36). In farming, as in so many other labors, significant labor precedes harvest. Sometimes, those who do the preparatory work are not the same as those who harvest. Jesus declared in verse 37 that “one soweth, and another reapeth.”

This is probably a reference to John the Baptist or even to Jesus Himself. Either way, it is an important theological statement, since it defines Christian mission in terms of what God has been doing in advance of our efforts.

D. Effective Witnessing Is Telling Others about Jesus Christ
(John 4:39-42)

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

In John 4:39, the Samaritans reenter the scene and the harvest is at hand. Their faith—they believed in Him—is based on the woman’s testimony, which underscores the value of human witness in the work of God (verse 39). Evangelism is a cooperative effort, in which the preparatory work of God joins with our witness to what God has done and is doing in the world. Jesus and His followers, at the request of the townspeople, agree to remain two days where many more believed because of His word (verses 40-41). They, too, came to understand that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. This was the reason why Jesus came through Samaria. And this great outreach effort of winning others to Christ was effectuated by a woman who refused to keep her testimony to herself. Owing to her willingness to evangelize, many people came to faith in that area. It is quite likely that her efforts laid the groundwork for the later ministry of Philip in Samaria (see Acts 8) following Stephen’s martyrdom. The Samaritans eagerly received Philip, confessed their faith, were baptized, and received the
Holy Spirit. Philip no doubt benefitted from the previous labor of this testifying Samaritan woman. Effective witnessing is telling others about Jesus Christ and leaving the results to God (Burge, 150).

The final statement in this story (4:42) is an important summary of the fruit of the woman’s labor. The Samaritans believe after hearing her evidence what every believer must have—a faith that is not secondary or dependent on someone else. Rather, they have seen and experienced Christ for themselves.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

An incredulous Samaritan woman became a strong witness to the Gospel. She told her story with compassion and conviction to any who would hear her. This text suggests that the life of faith and discipleship will be refreshed and invigorated by embracing Jesus’ vision of a transformed reality in the kingdom of God. The Samaritan woman is proof that God’s salvation is available now to all who are willing to receive it. However, that salvation will be offered on God’s own terms and not necessarily in the form that those who wait on it have determined in advance (O’Day, 572).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the moment when You spoke peace to our souls through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us the courage and willingness to set aside any barriers and prejudices that keep us from spreading this Good News to others. Help us to declare with power and conviction that You have come into the world to save us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 1-7, 2021)

Called to Evangelize

MONDAY, February 1: “Receive the Water of Life” (Revelation 21:1-7)
TUESDAY, February 2: “Jesus Declares, ‘I Am from Above’” (John 8:21-30)
WEDNESDAY, February 3: “God’s Children Are Led by the Spirit” (Romans 8:12-17)
THURSDAY, February 4: “Simon and Andrew Are the First Disciples” (John 1:37-42)
FRIDAY, February 5: “Galileans Philip and Nathanael Become Disciples” (John 1:43-51)
SATURDAY, February 6: “Jesus Heals the Son of a Galilean Official” (John 4:43-54)
SUNDAY, February 7: “Samaritans Come to Jesus” (John 4:25-42)

Bibliography

MARY MAGDALENE: A FAITHFUL DISCIPLE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT YOUTH TOPIC: Showing Loyalty
YOUTH TOPIC: Being Faithful

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Mary Magdalene: A Faithful Disciple
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Loyal to the End

DEVOTIONAL READING
Romans 4:13-25

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Mark 15:40; 16:1-9;
Luke 8:1-3; John 20:10-18
PRINT PASSAGES: Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40;
John 20:10-18
ADULT KEY VERSES: Luke 8:1b-2
YOUTH KEY VERSES: Luke 8:1b-3

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Mark 15:40; 16:1-9;
Luke 8:1-3; John 20:10-18
PRINT PASSAGES: Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40;
John 20:10-18
KEY VERSES: Luke 8:1b-2

Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40; John 20:10-18
—KJV
AND IT came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him,
2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,
3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40; John 20:10-18
—NIV
AFTER THIS, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,
2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;
3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.
40 There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome;

10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.
11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,
12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.
13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.
14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.
15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.
16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.
17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.
18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Being a truly committed follower of someone is often difficult, but there are some persons who show consistent loyalty no matter what happens. How do you show your loyalty and faithfulness? Mary Magdalene demonstrated her unwavering discipleship and loyalty to Jesus even beyond His death.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Discern Mary Magdalene’s motivations for committing her life to Jesus.
2. Appreciate the sacrifices Mary Magdalene made in order to follow Jesus.
3. Embrace a lifestyle of wholehearted discipleship.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Although popular culture has taught that Mary Magdalene was sexually immoral, there is absolutely no biblical evidence to support the myth.
—The women who financially supported Jesus’ ministry (see Luke 8:1-3) are those who witnessed His crucifixion from a distance (see Mark 15:40) and were quite possibly those who gathered with the disciples and Jesus’ family after the Resurrection (see Acts 1:13-14).
—Just as the Samaritan woman was among the first to whom Jesus revealed His messiahship (see John 4:25-26), Mary Magdalene was the first to witness His resurrection.
—Jesus’ command to Mary after His resurrection has been translated as a command not to touch Him (see John 21:17). Most likely, viewing it as a command not to keep holding on to Him is a superior translation.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Each of the Scripture passages describes the women disciples that followed Jesus. Mark notes that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Susanna, Mary the mother of James the younger, and Joses are some of the women mentioned as disciples of Jesus (see Mark 15:40 and Luke 8:1-2).
—Luke 8:3 states that the women who followed Jesus and supported Jesus and the disciples used their own resources.
—Mary Magdalene was a devout disciple of Jesus’. The Bible does not specify whether the seven demons cast out of her (see Luke 8:1-3) were due to evil spirits or physical infirmities.
—Mary Magdalene was weeping at the empty tomb when Jesus appeared and revealed Himself to her. Jesus does not allow her to touch Him but directs her to report to the disciples that she has seen Him alive.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and their other associates are introduced as grateful and generous disciples of Jesus. Although they are not featured as prominently as their male counterparts, they are ever present in the ministry of Jesus. By contrast, at least from the perspective of the written text, Peter and the male disciples have major recurring and supportive roles. As Luke’s gospel proceeds, though, a few promising moments for women continue to emerge. Jesus reaffirms women’s capacities for heeding God’s Word as equal members in God’s household (see 8:20-21, 11:27-28); Martha and (another) Mary host Jesus as Lord (see 10:38-42); Jesus continues to heal some women who do not become disciples (see 8:40-56; 13:10-17); He features women positively in parables and lessons (see 13:20-21; 15:8-10; 18:1-8; 21:1-4); and in addition to Galilean women, some “daughters of Jerusalem” lament His death (see 23:27-28). These are encouraging signs of a closing gender gap in Luke’s gospel. Throughout his narrative, Luke presents Jesus as very supportive of the women He encounters. The women follow Jesus gladly, supporting His ministry with their resources and out of their abundance (Spencer, 205).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
One important motivation for women’s discipleship in Luke arises from their personal experience of Jesus’ liberation from evil spirits and diseases. Luke reports that Jesus freed Mary Magdalene from the oppression of “seven demons” (see 8:2), without specifying the exact illnesses or problem from which she was delivered. As natural
as it would be for those whom Jesus heals to want to follow Him, there is no evidence of such in Jesus’ mission: neither the demon-possessed man in the synagogue, Simon’s feverish mother-in-law, the leper, the paralytic at Capernaum, nor the man with the withered hand enlists, in any identifiable way, as Jesus’ disciple. But these women, the beneficiaries of His liberating ministry, choose to follow Him and Jesus welcomes their fellowship.

It is no small detail that Jesus’ ministry was significantly supported by women of independent means—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and others who take the lead in underwriting Jesus’ mission (Spencer, 203-04).

**PROROUTICAL CHARACTERS IN THE LESSON**

**Chuza:** a steward of Herod’s. He and his wife may have been believers among the aristocracy. His wife, Joanna, provided for Jesus and His disciples.

**Joanna:** the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward. One of the women whom Jesus had healed who followed Him, providing for Jesus and the disciples as they travelled in Galilee (Luke 8:3). She was one of the women who discovered the empty tomb on Easter morning.

**Joses:** one of Jesus’ brothers. Jesus did have other (half) brothers and sisters born to His mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph.

**Mary Magdalene:** a woman from Magdala on the Sea of Galilee who ministered to Jesus and contributed financially to Him and His disciples, along with some other women. She was present at the crucifixion and burial of Jesus and was among the group of women who went to visit the tomb on Easter morning (see Luke 28:1). It was she who reported Jesus’ resurrection to the apostles.

**Salome:** According to Mark 15:40 and 16:1, she was one of the Galilean women at Jesus’ crucifixion and later at the empty tomb, perhaps the wife of Zebedee and thus the mother of James and John (see Matthew 27:56).

**Susanna:** one of the women who provided for the financial needs of Jesus and His disciples.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Healed** (Luke 8:2)—Greek: *therapeuó* (*ther-ap-woo'-o*): served; “cured” (NIV).

**Kingdom** (Luke 8:1)—Greek: *basileia* (*bas-il-i'-ah*): the territory subject to the rule of a king; sovereignty; royal power.

**Ministered** (Luke 8:3)—Greek: *diakoneó* (*dee-ak-on-eh'-o*): served; attended to; “were helping” (NIV).

**Preaching** (Luke 8:1)—Greek: *kérussó* (*kay-roos'-so*): heralding; publishing; “proclaiming” (NIV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Mary Magdalene: A Loyal Supporter of Jesus Christ
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Women Called to Serve (Luke 8:1-3)
   B. Women Who Are Faithful to the End (Mark 15:40)
   C. The Women Saw Him First! (John 20:10-14)
   D. The Gardener Was Jesus! (John 20:15-18)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Mary Magdalene: A Loyal Supporter of Jesus Christ

In today’s lesson, we see Mary Magdalene standing by Jesus in His public ministry and crucifixion, and finally at the tomb. By all accounts, Mary Magdalene was a faithful and loyal disciple to Jesus throughout much of His ministry. She demonstrates great loyalty and appreciation for what Jesus did in her life. Mary’s gratitude and devotion made her a faithful supporter of Jesus and His public ministry. In Mary Magdalene one finds an exemplary life totally dedicated to the work of her Savior.

In so many ways, Mary Magdalene’s story is a common one. She comes to Jesus with a compelling spiritual need—a need which Jesus meets. Luke simply records that Mary along with some other women joined the ministry of Jesus as He went through cities and villages proclaiming and bringing Good News (see Luke 3:2). In a deep sign of gratitude to Jesus, she appears to have left all to follow Him. Mary appears repeatedly at critical points throughout Jesus’ ministry. We first see her in Luke, following and supporting Jesus along with other named women. Next, we see her at the Cross, looking on that horrible scene from a distance with the other women who had come up with Jesus to Jerusalem (see Mark 15:40). Finally, we see her weeping at the tomb only to be surprised by the risen presence of her Lord: “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” (see John 20:14-15). Mary Magdalene had a true friend in Jesus and He had a friend in her.

B. Biblical Background

Luke 8:1-3 is the only reference in any of the Gospels to the role of a group of women followers during Jesus’ Galilean ministry; it serves as a corrective to the assumption that all of Jesus’ followers were men. Characteristically, where Luke mentions a male figure or group, he often links it with a corresponding female figure or group—for example, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna. In keeping with Luke’s purposeful balancing when it comes to men and women, the women who followed Jesus in chapter 8 are given special prominence in the citing of the important role they played in Jesus’ ministry. They not only accompanied Him along with the men, but they also supported Him out of their resources (Culpepper, 174).

The women were among those “whom Jesus had healed from evil spirits and sicknesses.” The first named is “Mary called Magdalene, from whom He cast out seven demons.” This is her first appearance in Luke; she appears again in 23:49-56 and 24:1-10 as part of the group that watched Jesus’ public crucifixion and burial by Joseph, saw the empty tomb and the angels, and then became the first witnesses to the Resurrection. Joanna is likewise named here and in the Crucifixion account. Luke indicates that her husband worked for Herod Antipas; since Antipas had a strained relationship with both John the Baptist and Jesus, it is not certain whether Chuza was aware of his wife’s attachment to Jesus’ movement. The
third woman, Susanna, is not named again; at 24:10, the third name is “Mary the mother of James.” These women, like the Twelve, were “with Jesus.”

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Women Called to Serve
(Luke 8:1-3)

AND IT came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

This opening summary of the activity of Jesus indicates that the Twelve and the women continued to follow Jesus throughout His itinerant mission crisscrossing Galilee. The Twelve do not serve yet as co-workers in the task but are companions who go with Him. The journey with Jesus is the basic frame for understanding the concept of discipleship. Their growth occurs as they learn from watching and listening to Jesus and from their own missteps (verses 1-2a) (Garland, 341). Luke 8:2b-3 highlights three women for special mention who ministered with their resources. The women who are called to follow Jesus are not mere spectators to ministry. Rather, they use their gifts and resources in service to Jesus. Whether delivered from physical illness and demonic oppression or sent from the courts of kings, these women give of their resources to make effective ministry possible. Part of their ministry is to support those who do ministry, a key role in the community. Texts like this affirm the role of women in a first-century culture—where they were either seen as property or relegated to an almost invisible role—and are significant in showing that women have played and continue to play a major role in contributing to the ministry of the church (Bock, 221).

As Jesus ministers, He draws followers who come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mary Magdalene is apparently a single woman of independent means, while Joanna was the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, evidence that Jesus’ message has reached even into the palace. When these and other women come to faith, they immediately give of their resources to enable Jesus’ ministry to continue. This note is important, since the passage makes clear that those contributing to Jesus’ ministry span both gender diversity and the social scale. The pattern of grace they received and the ministry they pursued emerges in the exemplary response of these women. Their ministry comes at two levels: personal involvement and the contribution of resources. Both levels of involvement are important to effective ministry (Bock, 220).

B. Women Who Are Faithful to the End
(Mark 15:40)

There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome.

The various moments of Jesus’ crucifixion are uniquely presented by the respective Gospel writers. In Luke, Jesus commits Himself obediently into the hands of God and breathes His last (see Luke 23:46). In John, Jesus cries out triumphantly, “It is finished,” then bows His head and dies (see John 19:30). In Mark
(as in Matthew), by contrast, Jesus dies with a loud cry on His lips. His victory over death is important to Mark. The portrait Mark paints of Jesus’ death is focused directly on the starkness of the suffering and on the agony of the death. However, Jesus is not forced to endure this agony and suffering alone. Without exception, however, each gospel writer consistently includes the detail that women followed Jesus all the way to the Cross. Even though they stand at a distance, they stand together bravely to witness the mockery, the suffering, the death, and the centurion’s confession. Mark gives us their names—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome (verse 40). These women play two important roles. First, they are simply there. They may not do or say anything but being there makes them at least a symbol of following all the way to the Cross. Second, they witnessed what happened. Three times in a short space we are alerted to what these women see. They see Jesus’ death. They see where Jesus is laid (see Mark 15:47), and finally, they see the open, empty tomb and the divine messenger of the Resurrection (see 16:46).

These women are of the utmost importance in Mark’s gospel, even though women were not valued as witnesses in a first-century Jewish context. But Mark considers the testimony of the women to be valid—otherwise he would not portray them as witnesses of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.

C. The Women Saw Him First!
(John 20:10-14)

Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

John 20:10 (NRSV) simply reads, “Then the disciples returned to their homes.” He then proceeds to talk about the women who stayed at the cross. It is intriguing indeed that John opens his appearance accounts not with well-known male disciples but with a woman at the tomb. John wrapped the Mary Magdalene story around Peter and the beloved disciple. The beloved disciple believed without an appearance (see John 20:8) and Mary recognized the Lord when He called her by name (see 20:16). John continues to highlight the presence of both men and women in the company of Jesus. In a patriarchal society where a woman’s testimony to the Resurrection would not be highly valued, the length of this story in John’s gospel is rather striking. The sheer length of this account is significant. Of even greater significance is the fact that Mary is also commissioned to carry a message to the community of believers (Borchert, 296).

The disciples went home presumably to tell others the news or possibly because they saw little to be achieved by merely lingering at the tomb. But Mary Magdalene did linger—overcome by an intense sadness. This woman whom Jesus had so greatly blessed (see Mark 16:9) could not bear the thought of knowing that something unthinkable had happened to the body of her loving friend and Savior. How could the body be missing? Thus, she lingered at the tomb (verse 11a) and, through her tears, looked inside one more time, perhaps hoping against hope that somehow Jesus’ body would
be there, undisturbed and at rest. Mary did not see a body, but she saw two angels—God’s ministering spirits. She did not recognize them as the “two men in shining garments who had earlier greeted the women” (see Luke 24:4). Their visible presence was a testimony to both the triumph of life over death and the revelation of the glory of God to a lost and sinful humanity in Jesus Christ. Death and darkness had been banished from that tomb. The angels were God’s herald of the imminent revelation of the risen Jesus. Mary does not respond to them, however, as heavenly visitors. She was possibly so distracted by the empty tomb that she paid little attention to them. When one angel inquired as to the reason for her weeping, she simply explained her problem as she might to anyone who inquired. Mary said, “They have taken away my Lord” (verse 13). Her grief rested on a mistaken conclusion—that Jesus was dead and gone forever. She was looking for Jesus in the wrong direction. He was in fact not dead and in her past, but alive and right behind her in the garden. She had not the slightest inkling that she was about to be the first person to whom Jesus would reveal Himself as risen from the dead (verse 14) (Keddie, 372).

D. The Gardener Was Jesus!
(John 20:15-18)

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Jesus asked Mary, “Why are you weeping?” Mary, in her state of confusion, thought He was the gardener (verse 15a). Only when Jesus broke through by calling her name, “Mary” (20:16), did she burst into joyful recognition of her Savior. She no doubt recognized the Master’s voice as Jesus had promised—“the sheep hear his voice” (John 10:3). To the sound of her own name on the lips of Jesus, Mary replied instantly with her familiar name for Him—“Rabboni” (verse 16). In time, Mary would embrace the reality of the Resurrection and learn that Jesus had not been simply restored to her but glorified in the highest measure. Lost in her joy, Mary begins to grasp Jesus and hang on to Him, perhaps around His feet in adoration. Jesus pleads with her to stop holding on to Him, for He had not yet returned to the Father (verse 17a) (Dongell, 236).

Owing to her determination to remain loyal to the Lord until the end, Mary had the honor of not only being the first person to see the risen Jesus, but also of being the first to be sent by Him bearing the good news of His resurrection. It is no small thing that during Jesus’ first post-Resurrection appearance, He sent a woman to tell the story of the fulfillment of God’s redemptive promise to humankind. The message she carried gave witness that Jesus had successfully completed His redemptive mission and affirmed that the resurrected Jesus would meet His disciples soon. The message also included carefully chosen language describing God: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (verse 17b, NIV). Jesus is no doubt expressing the similarity between Himself and His disciple—both now enjoy the great privilege of living under the Fatherhood of God.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The women followed Jesus as a token of their thankfulness, because they had received both physical and spiritual blessings from Him. Jesus taught them the Gospel of the kingdom of God and delivered them from evil spirits and sicknesses. In the eyes of some, this fellowship of women would seem to be inappropriate. But in fact, this shows us that our acknowledging our personal need for Jesus only strengthens our walk with Him. Jesus invites everyone to come to Him as they are—He lifts them to where they ought to be. These women remained faithful to Jesus and He remained faithful to them. Christ not only received the women as His devoted followers but also kept them in His company. Mary Magdalene had a story to tell, as do millions of other women who have had personal encounters with Jesus.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for women who have blessed the world in their work on Your behalf. Please continue to send strong, faithful women into the fields to labor in support of ministry to others. May they each find strength and encouragement from the women of Scripture who have gone before them. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 8-14, 2021)

Mary Magdalene: A Faithful Disciple

MONDAY, February 8: “Jesus Appears to Paul” (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)
TUESDAY, February 9: “Present with Jesus at the Cross” (John 19:25b-30)
WEDNESDAY, February 10: “Spices Prepared to Anoint Jesus’ Body” (Mark 16:1-8)
THURSDAY, February 11: “Mary Magdalene Finds Tomb Empty” (John 20:1-9)
FRIDAY, February 12: “An Angel Confirms Jesus’ Resurrection to the Women” (Matthew 28:1-10)
SATURDAY, February 13: “Jesus Appears; Disciples Are Sent into Ministry” (John 20:19-23)
SUNDAY, February 14: “Mary Magdalene: Faithful Female Disciple” (Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40; John 20:10-18)

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February 21, 2021

Lesson 12

PRISCILLA: CALLED TO MINISTER

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Risk Taker

**YOUTH TOPIC:** Risking Our Necks

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Priscilla: Called to Minister

**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Sharing an Important Message

**DEVOTIONAL READING**

Colossians 4:7-15

**ADULT/ YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Acts 18:1-26; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

**PRINT PASSAGES:** Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4

**KEY VERSES:** Romans 16:3-4

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Acts 18:1-26; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

**PRINT PASSAGE:** Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26

**KEY VERSE:** Acts 18:26

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**Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4—KJV**

AFTER THESE things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;
2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.
3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.
19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but

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**Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4—NIV**

AFTER THIS, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.
2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,
3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

18 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.
he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.
20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;
21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.
25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.
26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:
4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

19 They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.
20 When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined.
21 But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus.

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.
25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.
26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.
4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Encounters that bring together people with similar gifts and talents can lead to greater opportunities for service in other arenas. How can people’s common interests or experiences lead to a meaningful engagement in ministry or service? Priscilla and Aquila shared their tent-making business with Paul, and Paul shared his ministry of the Gospel with them.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Research the lives and ministry of Priscilla and her husband, Aquila.
2. Appreciate the ministry of those who teach and testify of Jesus.
3. Seek opportunities to use their gifts or abilities to promote the Gospel.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Contrary to the practice of teachers in his day, Paul sometimes refused to take money from those he taught. Instead, Paul often relied on earnings from his trade to finance his ministry and personal expenses.
—Corinth was a center of commerce but also had a reputation for decadence. At one point, the Corinthian temple of Aphrodite employed more than one thousand temple prostitutes.
—Apollos preached the baptism of John, which was for repentance (see Mark 1:4) and not Christian baptism for the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38).
—Paul’s ministry in Corinth brought about dangerous opposition, including a criminal trial for promoting an illegal religion (see Acts 18:12-13). Paul’s recognition of risks taken by Priscilla and Aquila on his behalf was apparently well-justified (see Romans 16:3-4).
—Priscilla was an integral participant in vocation and ministry in partnership with her husband and Paul.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—In Corinth, Paul preached the Gospel in a strong Greek culture that promoted all types of immorality, wickedness, and worship of pagan gods and goddesses. It was a very wealthy city because of its commercial business and a very political area.
—Paul met the tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. They worked together making tents and sharing the Gospel of Christ.
—After Paul left Ephesus, Apollos became part of the ministry. He was an eloquent speaker but did not fully understand the Gospel.
—Priscilla and Aquila explained the truth of the Gospel to Apollos in greater detail.
—Paul left Corinth and travelled to Ephesus. He would later write letters to the Corinthians to address specific church concerns and matters of Christian faith.
—Paul remembered the faithful friendship and witness of Priscilla and Aquila and sent them greetings in his letter to the Romans (see 16:3).

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Acts 18 falls easily into two broad sections. Acts 18:1-17 describes Paul’s Corinthian ministry and trials, while Acts 18:18-28 serves as a transitional passage to Acts 19, which focuses on Paul’s time in Ephesus. Acts 18:18-22 offers a condensed account of Paul’s missionary travels, while verses 24-28 tell of Apollos in Ephesus and his subsequent journey to Corinth. As a city of economic and political significance, Corinth was the next logical stop in Paul’s journey. Paul’s ministry was largely centered in well-populated urban areas of the region. Soon after his arrival, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who had recently arrived from Rome. Luke does not say why they settled in Corinth but does indicate that they left Rome involuntarily when Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because of agitation and unrest between Jews and Jewish Christians over the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The opening scene of Acts 18 shows Paul travelling from one Greek city (Athens) to another (Corinth). Although there is a great difference in the
amount of time spent in each city, there are some common points that emerge in Paul’s ministry in both cities: the preaching of the Gospel, the ingathering of professing believers into a distinct community, and Jewish opposition against the Gospel message. Once in Corinth, Paul met the acquaintance of a certain Jew, Aquila, and his wife, Priscilla. Paul established an immediate bond with the couple. Like Paul, they were believing Jews born outside of Corinth who were employed in the tentmaking trade.

Tentmaking was a profession that was both portable and social. Paul travelled with his tools and materials and made contact with many people through his trade. Paul took reasonable satisfaction in the financial independence that tentmaking afforded him (see Acts 20:34). While in Corinth, Paul was engaged in two activities. First, he remained with Aquila and Priscilla and began to work. Second, Paul began teaching in the synagogue each Sabbath. According to his custom, Paul entered the Corinthian synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath and reasoned with his hearers, presumably from the Scripture. His goal was to persuade his hearers, both the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks who were present, that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah promised by God in the Old Testament Scripture (see Acts 13:16-43). That he did this each Sabbath suggests an ongoing pattern of preaching the Gospel in the Corinthian synagogue, even as he devoted himself to tentmaking during the week (Waters, 429-32).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Women Who Heard and Obeyed God’s Call
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Paul’s Arrival in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3)

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Commanded** (Acts 18:2)—Greek: *diatassó* *(dee-at-as’-so)*: to have arranged thoroughly; charged; appointed; “ordered” (NIV).

**Departed** (Acts 18:1)—Greek: *chórizó* *(kho-rid’-zo)*: to have separated; went away; “left” (NIV).

**Reasoned** (Acts 18:19)—Greek: *dialogomai* *(dee-al-eg’-om-ahee)*: to have discussed, mingled thought with thought, addressed, preached.

**Remained** (Acts 18:18, NASB)—Greek: *pros-menó* *(pros-men’-o)*: continued with one; “tarried” (KJV); “stayed” (NIV).

**Vow** (Acts 18:18)—Greek: *euché* *(yoo-khay’)*: a prayer to God; promise.

**Worked** (Acts 18:3)—Greek: *ergazomai* *(er-gad’-zom-ahee)*: worked for; labored; “wrought” (KJV).

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

**Apollos:** a Jewish Christian from Alexandria who appears in the narrative of Acts and in 1 Corinthians. He possessed great skill in Greek rhetoric and had already learned much about Jesus when he arrived in Ephesus and began speaking in the synagogue. His abilities soon brought him to the attention of Priscilla and Aquila, who gave him further instruction in the Christian faith.

**Aquila and Priscilla:** Jewish Christians from Pontus in Asia Minor, who, like Paul, were tentmakers by trade. Aquila and his wife, Priscilla (Prisca), were expelled from Rome. Paul lodged with them during his stay in Corinth, and they became amongst the most trusted of his co-workers.

**Claudius:** the fourth Roman emperor. Though generally conciliatory toward the Jews, he expelled some from Rome because of rioting.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Women Who Heard and Obeyed God’s Call

Today’s lesson shows the crucial role that Priscilla played in the early development of the church. She knew the Scriptures well. While Priscilla worked alongside her husband in profession and Christian service, she did not shy away from assisting others, male or female, who did not know the teachings of the church as well as she did. She was of great assistance to Paul in his ministries throughout the region and was a key player in the development of the church in its earliest beginnings. Her love of God, devotion to Christ, and compassion for others helped to establish the church when it needed a calm and steady voice. Priscilla received God’s call and did not shirk or shrink from her divine assignment.

B. Biblical Background

From the faded glory of Athens, once the most important city of Greece, Paul moved fifty miles west to Corinth, the ancient cultural center of Greek life. Corinth was by far the most strategic and cosmopolitan city that Paul had yet visited. Had he chosen to do so, Paul could have engaged socially with Persians and Iberians, Carthaginians and Gauls. This may be why God’s divine providence allowed Paul to be ejected from lesser cities and to settle down in Corinth for eighteen months.

When he had to, Paul evangelized alone as he had done in Athens. When Paul faced the challenging city of Corinth, God encouraged his heart by assembling capable and loyal helpers. God provided Silas from Jerusalem, Timothy from Lystra, Priscilla and Aquila from Rome. Later they were joined by Apollos, a gifted leader from Alexandria whom they took aside and led to deeper personal faith. In the providence of God, Aquila and Priscilla were banned from Rome; they moved their trade to Corinth just in time to meet Paul, who arrived shortly after they did. Repeatedly, the reader can observe what a blessing this remarkable couple was to the newly established churches. The couple was indeed a blessing to Paul. Having met in Corinth, they formed a lifelong bond with the apostle and actively supported his ministry throughout their lives (Shade and Nicholls, 265).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Paul’s Arrival in Corinth

(Acts 18:1-3)

AFTER THESE things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart
from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Corinth in Paul’s day was the largest and most cosmopolitan city of Greece. Luke briefly mentions Paul’s departure from Athens and his travel to Corinth. The journey to Corinth is about fifty miles and would have taken three days. When Paul arrived in the city, he quickly met a Jewish couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla (verse 2a). Paul and Luke always mentioned them together, never separately, a likely indication that Priscilla and Aquila were a team in ministry. They both honored and acknowledged the other’s call from God. Paul referred to Priscilla as “Prisca,” which was her formal name. That Priscilla is usually mentioned before her husband is indeed remarkable—for first-century usage—but probably has more to do with her prominence in Christian circles. Priscilla appears to be one of those women like Lydia (Acts 16:14), whose service in the Christian community stood out.

Luke only mentions as an incidental detail that the couple had recently come from Rome because the emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from the city (verse 2b). Paul went to see them because he was of the same trade—tentmaking. Aquila and Priscilla gave Paul the opportunity to support himself financially by working in his trade. It is possible that the emerging church met in their house. Priscilla along with her husband Aquila made themselves available to Paul (and God) in the advancement of the Gospel.

B. Faithful Companions in the Cause of Christ
(Acts 18:18-21)

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Verse 18 speaks of Paul’s continued missionary activity in Corinth. Even though the Jews in that city engaged in a united attack on Paul and tried to get him kicked out, Gallio, the proconsul, refused to get involved in their affairs—which allowed Paul to stay longer in Corinth (see Acts 18:12-17). When Paul finally decided to leave, he set sail for Syria with his faithful companions, Aquila and Priscilla, by his side. They accompany him as far as Ephesus, where it is likely that they owned a home that would eventually become the location of a future church house (1 Corinthians 16:19) (Schnabel, 765-766).

What is clear is that Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila, never missed an opportunity to be of assistance to Paul in the great work he was doing. Whenever it was in their power to do so, they freely gave out of their means to advance Paul’s ministry. Priscilla is remembered today for her unsparing graciousness and assistance to Paul as he spread Christianity throughout the empire. This is what we are called to do: to give of our all in the great work of salvation.

C. Priscilla as Guardian of the Faith
(Romans 18:24-26)

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came
to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

In Acts 18:23, Luke relates Paul’s departure from Antioch and his visit to the churches in Galatia and Phrygia (see 18:23). Then Luke narrates events that occurred in Ephesus after Paul’s earlier visit (see 18:19-20). He introduces the readers to the ministry of Apollos, a Christian believer from Alexandria whose inadequate grasp of theology is corrected by Priscilla and Aquila. The brief reporting on the evangelistic work of Apollos in Ephesus illustrates the significance of Paul’s network of churches.

Luke describes Apollos as learned and well-versed, by which he meant that he was competent in the Scriptures, powerful in explaining them in sermons, and effective in using biblical texts in debates. He also acknowledges that Apollos had been instructed in the “Way of the Lord,” which is to say he had learned about the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and Savior (verse 25a). However, there remained some glaring deficiencies in Apollos’s understanding of the Christian faith. When Apollos spoke, he was fervent in the Spirit, indicating that his witness was empowered by God, but, says Luke, “he [knew] only the baptism of John (verse 25b).

Although Luke provides no details concerning the nature of their instruction, it is quite likely that he may have been baptizing people with an emphasis on repentance and forgiveness without explaining the association of immersion in water with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Schnabel, 784-85).

When Priscilla and Aquila hear Apollos speak in the synagogue, they recognize that his teaching is incomplete and requires further instruction at least regarding the significance of repentance, baptism, and the corresponding connection to Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila are eager and able to explain “the Way of God,” the revelation of God’s path to salvation for Israel and the world through Jesus. The phrase “more accurately” indicates that Apollos’s teaching about Jesus was incomplete but was not rounded out by Paul’s co-workers from Rome and Corinth, perhaps with Priscilla taking the lead. A strong woman who had spent considerable time in the presence of Paul corrects an eager but newly minted man in the faith.

D. Co-workers for Life in Jesus Christ
(Romans 16:3-4)

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Although Romans was not the first epistle written by Paul, it heads the list of his letters because the church came to regard it as Paul’s most important writing. When the New Testament texts were put together, Romans was placed prominently as the first of the whole collection of thirteen letters claiming Paul as their author. In the closing of this all-important letter to the Romans, Paul greets twenty-six individuals, twenty-four of whom are named (see Romans 16:1-16). First to be greeted are his longtime acquaintances Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila (verse 3). Now, the couple are back in Rome, where they host a house church. There is no evidence that Paul sent them to Rome in advance of his planned visit, but given their prior association with Paul, it is understandable that he names
them specifically and calls them his co-workers (verse 3a).

Paul also goes to great lengths to express his sincere appreciation for all the times they had supported his missionary career. Paul clearly shares how the couple literally risked their lives for his life. For their daring action, Paul was thankful to Priscilla and Aquila, as were all the churches of the Gentiles (verse 4). Had the couple failed to assist Paul, his mission to the Gentiles may well have been cut short.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

God is no respecter of persons. Everyone is called to ministry in the name of God. Throughout Scripture we see time and time again highly capable women who dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ and entered into God’s service for a lifetime commitment. Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila, shows what lives dedicated to God can mean for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Irrespective of gender, race, or ethnicity, our prayer should be, Lord, do to me what You must so You can do through me what You will. Amen.

PRAYER

We give You thanks, God, for companions and co-workers in the great work You have called us to do. Please strengthen the ties that unite us and increase our love for You and for one another. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 15-21, 2021)

Priscilla: Called to Minister

MONDAY, February 15: “Paul Reflects on His Ministry” (2 Timothy 4:9-18)
TUESDAY, February 16: “Greetings to Saints in Jesus Christ” (Colossians 4:7-15)
WEDNESDAY, February 17: “The Holy Kiss Strengthens Ministry Bond”
(2 Corinthians 13:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28)
THURSDAY, February 18: “Ministry Shifts from Jews to Gentiles” (Acts 18:4-11)
FRIDAY, February 19: “A Roman Official Refuses to Settle a Dispute” (Acts 18:12-17)
SATURDAY, February 20: “Greetings to All Sisters in Ministry” (Romans 16:1-2, 6-7, 12-13, 16)
SUNDAY, February 21: “Priscilla, Key Outreach Minister” (Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26;
Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19)

Bibliography

LYDIA: CALLED TO SERVE

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT TOPIC:** Showing Generous Hospitality  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Being Hospitable to All People

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Lydia: Called to Serve  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Genuine Hospitality

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**DEVOTIONAL READING**  
Psalm 33:1-12

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**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30  
**PRINT PASSAGES:** Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30  
**KEY VERSE:** Acts 16:15

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Acts 16:11-15, 40  
**KEY VERSE:** Acts 16:15

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Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30  
—KJV

11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;  
12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.  
13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.  
14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.  
15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be

Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30  
—NIV

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis.  
12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.  
13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.  
14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.  
15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider
faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Many people have been recipients of generous hospitality or have been in a position to extend hospitality to others. In what ways can openness and a listening ear provide opportunities to serve? Lydia was an attentive woman who responded to the Gospel message with faithfulness and generous hospitality.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Consider how Lydia used her gifts and social standing to support Paul’s ministry.
2. Repent for having looked down on others who lack certain opportunities or advantages.
3. Serve others joyfully through whatever resources are available to them.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Paul’s Philippian mission was unique in that, as far as Paul could determine, there was no established synagogue in Philippi. Therefore, on the Sabbath, Paul sought out “God-fearers,”

Gentiles who worshipped God near the river outside the city. The words “place of prayer” mean the same thing as “synagogue.” —Paul’s worship with the God-fearing women gathered at the place of prayer (synagogue) by the river seems to indicate that there was not a minion (the ten Jewish men required for an
official Jewish worshipping community) in Philippi. Paul enjoyed the hospitality of Lydia’s household as well as the benefits of relationship with such a prominent and well-respected woman.
—As a dealer of purple cloth, Lydia was connected to the elite and wealthy in the area. Rich and royal people in the Roman world could afford purple cloth, and it signified status. Lydia hailed from Thyatira, a city renowned for its textile industry, especially purple dyes.
—Paul’s vision was of a Macedonian man beckoning him to come over to help the people there. Paul was so compelled by this vision that he and his colleagues left immediately to go to Macedonia. It is somewhat ironic, then, that Paul’s first encounter once in Macedonia was with a group of faithful women.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Lydia lived in Philippi of Macedonia. She had migrated to Philippi from Thyatira in Asia Minor. Paul and his companions travelled from Philippi to Macedonia.
—Lydia was among a group of women who gathered for prayer on the Sabbath near a river outside Philippi. Paul and his companions joined them one Sabbath and Paul began to share the Gospel.
—Lydia sold purple cloth, which was worn as a sign of nobility and royalty. Lydia was probably a wealthy woman and business leader. She was from the city of Thyatira.
—Lydia believed in God, but she had not accepted the Gospel message of Christ. After listening to Paul, Lydia accepted the message of Christ. Lydia and her household declared their faith publicly through their baptism.
—After receiving baptism, Lydia prevailed on Paul and his companions to be guests in her home. They agreed to accept her hospitality, for there were few public accommodations in those days.
—After being imprisoned, Paul and Silas stopped to bid farewell to Lydia and those gathered there.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Paul’s second missionary journey began in Acts 13:1-4, when he and Barnabas were set apart for service by the Holy Spirit. Having completed their visit of churches established on Paul’s first mission, the three—Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy—headed north, but somewhere along the way they determined to go to Asia. However, the Holy Spirit intervened to redirect their path. During the night, Paul saw a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul realized that this vision was the method and means of God’s divine calling to a mission in Macedonia. Timothy and Silas readily agreed as soon as Paul had shared the experience with them. It is also quite likely that Luke joined the missionary party at this time. At the urging of the Spirit, they journeyed from Troas to the city of Philippi (Acts 16:11). Asia would come later, but there was work for Paul to do in the region of Macedonia, specifically in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:9) (Polhill, 344).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Acts 16 continues to outline and describe the missionary travels of Paul and his associates. Verse 11 gives a detailed log of the journey. Samothrace was a mountainous island in the northeastern Aegean Sea. It was a common stopover for ships as captains preferred to anchor there rather than to face the
hazards of sea at night. Philippi was about ten miles inland, so they landed at Neapolis and travelled over land to the region of Macedonia. Macedonia became a Roman province in 146 BC. Philippi was a Roman colony, which means its constitution was patterned after Rome. It was governed by two annually appointed chief magistrates. Note that Paul and Silas were brought before the magistrates (verse 20). On the Sabbath, Paul and his friends went to the river outside the city gate, expecting to find “a place of prayer” (verse 13). Although “place of prayer” was used in those days for synagogues, this must have been simply a place where people met to worship God. It was necessary to have ten men to organize a synagogue, but only women were gathered upon Paul’s arrival (Fernando, 443).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Lydia: a traveling merchant who sold luxurious purple-dyed cloth for a living. Perhaps she was a freed woman and her name was given because she came from Thyatira, in the district of Lydia. She met Paul when he arrived in Philippi and, along with her household, was converted to Christianity. According to Acts, Lydia had sufficient means to give extended hospitality to Paul and Silas in her home.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Gathered (Acts 16:13)—Greek: sunerchomai (soon-er'-khom-ahee): came together; assembled; “resorted” (KJV).

Heart (Acts 16:14)—Greek: kardia (kar-dee'-ah): the heart, mind, character, inner self, will, intention, center.

Persuaded (Acts 16:15)—Greek: parabiiazomai (par-ab-ee-ad’-zom-ahee): employed force; pressed; was constrained by entreaties; “constrained” (KJV).

Speaking (Acts 16:13, NASB)—Greek: laleó (lal-eh’-o): to talk; “spake” (KJV); “speak” (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Lydia: One of the First Converts in Philippi

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The Gospel Encounters the Roman World (Acts 16:11-13)

B. Lydia Accepts Christ and Opens Her Heart and Home (Acts 16:14-15, 40)

C. God Calls Ordinary People into His Service (1 Corinthians 1:26-28)

D. God’s Call Excludes Human Boasting (1 Corinthians 1:29-30)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Lydia: One of the First Converts in Philippi

Lydia is no insignificant woman. She was no doubt named after the ancient territory in which her native city of Thyatira was located. Thyatira was indeed a center of the purple dye trade. Lydia’s business is not an incidental detail. It marks her as a person of means. Purple goods were expensive and often associated with royalty; thus, her business was a lucrative one. Lydia’s invitation to the four missionaries to stay in her home was an indicator of Lydia’s considerable substance, such as servants...
and guestrooms to accommodate them adequately. Among the believers in Paul’s churches, the Philippians’ generosity stood out. Women like Lydia were particularly prominent in Paul’s missionary efforts in this portion of Acts—the women of Thessalonica (17:4) and of Berea (17:12), Damaris in Athens (17:34), and Priscilla in Corinth (18:2). Priscilla and Lydia took an active role in the ministry of their churches. They were women of means who were devoted enough to put their prestige and hard-won reputations on the line for the Christian faith (Polhill, 349).

Lydia was a “worshipper of God” (16:14), one of those devout Gentiles like Cornelius who believed in God but had not become a full convert to Judaism. As he had with Cornelius, God responded to her faith and “opened her heart” to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Paul proclaimed. As always with divine grace, it was God’s Spirit’s moving in her heart that led to faith. Lydia did not stop with merely “becoming” a Christian; she wanted to live out her faith in real and meaningful ways. She made the missionaries’ acceptance of her hospitality the test of whether they really believed that she had become a believer. She used God’s blessings in her life to bless the missionaries who had offered themselves for service in the cause of Jesus Christ. She and the many women like her made a big difference in the opening years of the Christian witness.

B. Biblical Background

The second half of Acts narrates the missionary work of Paul (see Acts 13–28). It began with Paul and Barnabas preaching the Good News of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Savior of the Gentiles, in Asia Minor in the provinces of Cyprus, Galatia, and Pamphylia (see 13:1–14:28). The increasing number of Gentile conversions raised concerns among a vocal group of Jewish Christians who taught that in order to be fully saved, Gentile Christians had to be circumcised and committed to obey the entire Mosaic Law. This issue was resolved by the Apostles’ Council (see 15:1-33).

The next major section relates Paul’s missionary work in Europe (see 15:35–18:22). Paul and his new partner, Silas, visit the existing churches in Syria, Cilicia, and south Galatia—but plans to establish new centers of missionary work in cities in the province of Asia were thwarted by divine intervention. As a result of a dream-vision in the night, Paul and his associates perceive that God wants them to travel to Macedonia and preach the Gospel in Macedonian cities. What became known as the “Macedonia cry” altered the direction of the movement of Christianity.

Paul and his associates travel to Philippi, visit the place of prayer by the river (which could well have been a synagogue), and proclaim the Gospel to women who are gathered there, among whom was Lydia. She becomes a believer and is baptized along with her family. Soon thereafter, in a show of her ongoing support for their work, she invites the missionaries to her home. She became one of the major supporters of Paul’s ministry throughout the rest of his career. On his way out of the region of Macedonia, after being released from the Philippian jail, he pays a visit to Lydia, a clear sign of how much he had come to appreciate and depend on her love and hospitality (Schnabel, 676-77).
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Gospel Encounters the Roman World
   (Acts 16:11-13)

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

From Troas the missionaries put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, an island at the northern end of the Aegean Sea (verse 11). No evangelist work is mentioned in Samothrace or the nearby Neapolis, perhaps because there was not a synagogue or Jewish place of prayer in either context, or because Paul was deliberately heading for the larger and more influential center of Philippi. Philippi was a prosperous city, which outstripped all other cities in the region of Macedonia (verse 12). It is the only city in Acts specifically described as a Roman colony. Roman colonies were originally settlements or Roman citizens in conquered territory, with legal rights the same as their fellow citizens’ in Italy. They had a Roman form of local government, were free from tribute and taxation, and used Roman law in local as well as external matters. They were effectively a piece of Rome transplanted abroad. This situation is reflected in Luke’s Philippi narrative, not just to add local color but because the narrative is centrally concerned with the mission’s encounter with the Roman world (Peterson, 459).

In this first encounter with the Romans, a woman would be the first one to accept Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. When Paul visited a city for the first time, he ordinarily went to the synagogue on the next Sabbath. But since he did not do this in Philippi, we are left to conclude that there was no synagogue in the city. The usual Jewish practice was to start a synagogue when there were ten or more Jewish men in the community. The absence of a synagogue in Philippi leads one to believe that there were very few Jews in the city. Instead of a synagogue, Paul and his party find a group of women meeting for worship outside the city beside the Gangites River. The place where they met was called a “place of prayer,” which could simply mean an informal place of worship (verse 13). Paul and his companions met with the women, and Paul was invited to speak to them (Wade, 169).

B. Lydia Accepts Christ and Opens Her Heart and Home
   (Acts 16:14-15, 40)

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

One of the most attentive listeners who heard Paul speak that day was a woman named Lydia, a Jewish proselyte from Thyatira. Luke highlights the work of the Gospel in the life of this woman. She was called a dealer in purple cloth (verse 14a). The Scriptures do not indicate whether Lydia was a widow, married, or
single woman, yet she was obviously a woman of some means—for the purple cloth she sold was quite expensive. The fact that she is engaged in this trade and owns a home suggests that she is a wealthy woman (Wade, 170). As Paul and his friends began to present the Good News, Lydia was moved by their message. She not only heard the Gospel, but also, the Lord opened her heart to receive the things being spoken of by Paul (verse 14b). Here, Luke reminds us that a sinner is converted by the sovereign grace and power of God. Paul’s preaching of Christ was the instrument or means by which Lydia came to trust in Jesus Christ, but it was the Lord’s work upon her heart that enabled her to receive and not reject the Gospel presented to her (Waters, 391).

Luke then depicts the fruit of Lydia’s faith. First, we are told that after hearing Paul speak, she and the members of her household were baptized, according to Christ’s command. As with Cornelius (see 10:48) and the Philippian jailer (see 16:33), Lydia and her household receive Christian baptism (verse 15a). Second, she tells the company of missionaries, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay” (verse 15b, NKJV). She is insistent that the missionaries receive her hospitality. Lydia’s faith was evident by her good works. She opened her home, her purse, and her heart to the missionaries. In so doing, she became a great laborer in the spread of the Gospel. Christians need not be wealthy in order to contribute to the work of ministry. What they do need is a willing heart that is open to the things of God. They need a desire to contribute cheerfully to the work of the kingdom in the full assurance that little becomes much when you place it in the hands of the Lord.

In Acts 16:40 when Paul prepares to leave the region, he meets one last time in the home of Lydia, giving some indication of the importance of this woman to his ministry. Lydia had been loyal to Paul. Even though he was not being forced to leave, he probably felt it best to move on after his imprisonment and release from the Philippian jail (see 16:19-24). Lydia is unwavering in her support for the work. She was a strong, confident woman who did not shrink when trials came. It is quite likely that Paul felt he could move on to other parts of the empire, knowing that someone like Lydia would remain behind to carry on the work. Strong women have historically kept the faith alive in days of turmoil and tough times (Wade, 175).

C. God Calls Ordinary People into His Service
(1 Corinthians 1:26-28)

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

For all those who think that one needs the wealth and stability of a Lydia in order to make a meaningful contribution to the work of God in the world, we only need to hear the apostle Paul speak to the Corinthians about their calling. In 1 Corinthians 1:26 (NRSV), he says, “Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise.” Christians are
defined as those whom God has called. They are not defined by their wealth or their station in life. They are defined by their obedience to the call and claim of God upon their lives. When they respond to that call-in faith, they become the people of God. God employs different standards than those of the world when He is calling people into His service. There are places where rank, status, education, and financial holdings determine whether one is accepted into certain organizations and institutions. Not so with God, according to Paul. He said this to the Corinthians: There are not many of you who were wise, powerful, or nobly born (verse 26). In its early stages, Christianity was a religion of women and slaves. It is the call of God that qualifies all who hear and heed that call for service.

Not only are God’s standards and terms of reference different from the world’s, but also, according to Paul, God is presently engaged in overthrowing the world’s false standards. Paul declared that God has chosen what the world counts as foolish in order to put to shame the world’s wise men (verse 27). God leaves the so-called wise people of the world out of the scope of salvation unless they are willing to become fools for Christ. Paul writes these words because there were some in Corinth wrongly evaluating their gifts and judging themselves according to the standards of the world (verse 28). Paul reminds them that their Christian existence depends not on their merit but on God’s call, and on the fact that the Gospel is the message of the Cross. We are not worthy to serve because of what we have achieved in the world. We are worthy to serve because we have accepted God’s call on our lives, and we live in the light of that reality. Whether we are rich or poor; educated or unlearned; male or female; bond or free—what matters is that we have been called and sanctified by God for service. Lydia used her abundant resources to be a blessing to Paul’s ministry, but the Scriptures are filled with people who had little to offer but their heartfelt desire and willingness to serve the Master wherever and whenever they were called upon (Barrett, 58-59).

D. God’s Call Excludes Human Boasting
(1 Corinthians 1:29-30)

That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Every believer needs to be occasionally reminded that the ground is level at the foot of the Cross. Whether we have little or much, none of us has any cause to boast. In Paul’s view, the relatively low status of most of the Corinthian Christians was a sign of what God did at Calvary and therefore is doing in the world: overturning expectations. God is creating His new community out of unimpressive material precisely to exemplify the power of His own unlimited grace. The social composition of the Corinthian church is an outward and visible sign of God’s paradoxical election. What is the purpose of the sign? “Paul’s answer,” says Richard Hays, “is clear and emphatic: “so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (verse 29). No human flesh can stand before the awesome holiness of God or contribute anything that God needs. God and God alone is the source of the very existence of the Corinthian community. We have been brought into being by God in Jesus Christ (verse 30) (Hays, 32-33).
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

We all have a part to play in God’s grand scheme of redemption. Something as simple as one’s opening her home to the missionaries had a big impact on Christian ministry in its early stages. The newly converted Lydia offered her home to Paul and Silas. She not only offered her home, but she also shared with them out of her abundance. Everyone has some contribution they can make in the furtherance of the Gospel. We all have to make decisions about when and where we can best serve the cause of the kingdom.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for calling us to be participants in the great work You are doing. We are grateful that You called us to be co-workers together with Your Son, Jesus Christ. Enable us to say yes to any and every need that advances Your work in and for the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(February 22-28, 2021)

Lydia: Called to Serve
MONDAY, February 22: “Don’t Complain but Serve One Another” (1 Peter 4:7-11)
TUESDAY, February 23: “Everyday Expressions of Hospitality” (Romans 12:9-19)
WEDNESDAY, February 24: “Hospitality Practiced in Jail and at Home” (Acts 16:35-40)
THURSDAY, February 25: “Hospitality Practiced by Widow and Bishop” (1 Timothy 5:9-10; 3:2)
FRIDAY, February 26: “Christ, God’s Power and Wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)
SATURDAY, February 27: “Know Jesus Christ Crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Bibliography
Barrett, C. K. The First Epistle to the Corinthians.
Wade, John W. Acts.
Prophets Faithful to God’s Covenant

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter introduces the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. God employed people who lived among Israel and Judah to be spokespersons for God. As a formal representative of God, the prophet had a message meant to effect social change that conformed to God’s desired standards as prescribed under the Law.

Unit I, “Faithful Prophets,” has four lessons drawn from the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and 1 and 2 Kings; they explore the reasons why prophets were necessary in Israel’s history. Moses led the people out of Egypt, thus fulfilling God’s promise to bring the people back to Canaan. In Deuteronomy, Moses relayed to the people God’s promise to give them prophets who would speak God’s word to them. Stories about Joshua, Huldah, and Elijah illustrate the fulfillment of God’s promise given through Moses.

Unit II, “Prophets of Restoration,” contains four lessons that reveal the compassion of God during the times in Israel’s history when the people continually forsook the ways of God. On Easter, Isaiah’s prophetic writings and the book of Luke are used to portray Jesus as the Suffering Servant and the one through whom believers receive salvation. Passages from the prophecies in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Lamentations show the faith of the prophets as they presented new hope to the Israelites.

Unit III, “Courageous Prophets of Change,” is comprised of five lessons that show the boldness of God’s prophets in the books of 1 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jonah. Israel and Judah were released from captivity and charged to rebuild Jerusalem. God sent prophets to call the people to restore their covenant relationship with God. When the people strayed away from their covenant with God, the prophets called them back.
March 7, 2021

Lesson 1

**MOSES: PROphet OF DELIVERANCE**

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Following True Leaders

**YOUTH TOPIC:** Following True Leaders

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Exodus 12:28-50; Deuteronomy 18:15-22

**PRINT PASSAGE:** Deuteronomy 18:15-22

**KEY VERSE:** Deuteronomy 18:15

**DEVOTIONAL READING**

Psalm 77:11-20

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Exodus 12:28-50; Deuteronomy 18:15-22

**PRINT PASSAGE:** Exodus 12:31-42

**KEY VERSE:** Exodus 12:33

**Deuteronomy 18:15-22—KJV**

15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not.

17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him

**Deuteronomy 18:15-22—NIV**

15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

16 For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.”

17 The LORD said to me: “What they say is good.

18 “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.

19 “I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.

20 “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet
to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.
21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?
22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”
21 You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?”
22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Life often confronts us with situations that appear to offer only poor outcomes. How should we respond when faced with dilemmas in which making a choice seems impossible? At God’s direction, the people of Israel left Egyptian slavery led by the faithful prophet, Moses, who became a model of spiritual leadership.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Study Moses’ role as a prophet of God in leading the Israelites out of Egypt.
2. Reflect on leaders who guide us through seemingly impossible situations.
3. Develop and commit themselves to a five-point list of ways to rely on God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—God’s tenth plague on Egypt changed their attitude toward the Israelites and their God.
—Numbers 2:32 confirms the adult male population (exclusive of the Levites) to have been 625,540. It is estimated that the entire Israelite population that exited Egypt may have been more than two million.
—In their haste to leave Egypt, the Israelites did not have time to put leaven (yeast) in their bread to make it rise. This was the basis of the Passover meal and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.
—The Israelites’ 430 years of slavery in Egypt represented the fulfillment of prophecy in Genesis 15:13-14.
—Moses warned against false prophets (see 18:20). Eventual fulfillment is one test of true prophecy (see 18:21-22), though further tests may also be required (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5).
—Moses, as a prophet, had spoken on God’s behalf (see Exodus 3–4). True prophets deliver words of prophecy that come directly from God (see verse 18; Jeremiah 1:7-9)—words that often go beyond their own understanding.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—God tells Abram that his descendants would be enslaved and mistreated in a foreign land for four hundred years (see Genesis 15:12-13).
—The Israelites lived outside Egypt in the land of Goshen and were slaves for 430 years.
—God chose Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land.
—The Lord told Moses to have the Israelites ask for gold, silver, and clothing from the Egyptians to take with them.
—Leaving Egypt quickly, the Israelites had only unleavened bread, which became a symbol of God’s promise of deliverance.
—The Israelites remembered their deliverance by celebrating the Passover.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Deuteronomy covers the final phase of the Israelites’ forty-year wilderness journey. It is the final entry of the first five books of the Old Testament, referred to as the Torah, the Law, and the Pentateuch. Tradition ascribes the authorship of these writings to Moses, the first leader of the children of Israel. Deuteronomy means “Second Law”—a reference to the book’s account of Moses’ call for commitment to the commandments first given to Israel at Mount Sinai. According to Deuteronomy 1:5, Moses had led the people to a point where they could see the Promised Land. They were in the land of Moab, just opposite the Jordan River. Deuteronomy is a call to remember and to hear the Word of the Lord and obey (see Deuteronomy 6:4; 9:1). Throughout Deuteronomy Moses reminded Israel to remember what God had done in their lives (see Deuteronomy 5:15; 7:18; 8:2, 18; 9:7, 27; 15:15; 16:3). They were just a few days from entering the Promised Land after forty years in the wilderness (see Deuteronomy 1:3). They needed to remember what they had been through. Their parents and grandparents had all died in the wilderness because of their rebellion against God (see Numbers 14:20-35). All the people to whom Moses addressed these words were either unborn or younger than twenty years old at the time of the Exodus. They had spent most (if not all) of their lives wandering without a permanent home. Moses was the only leader they had known and, soon, he would be taken away (see Deuteronomy 34:1-8). The Israelites had lived a hard, trying, and difficult life in the wilderness. For forty years they had only known the harshness of the desert. Now, they could look across the Jordan River and see the lush fields and flowing springs of the land they would soon enter. It would be easy to put the past behind them once they were settled and began to reap the blessings and benefits of the Promised Land.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The Exodus was the most decisive event in the history of Israel. It is mentioned throughout the Old Testament as the highwater mark of God’s mighty deliverance and presence with His people, Israel. It marked a new beginning for a people who grew from being a single family to becoming a large and prosperous nation. Israel spent forty years in the wilderness, mostly in an area known as Kadesh-Barnea. Deuteronomy 1–4 recounts the journey from Kadesh-Barnea to the plains of Moab and how the Israelites were compelled to conquer the people who lived in those places. Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses and the beginning of Joshua’s elevation to the role and position of national leader (see Deuteronomy 34:9).

Understanding Deuteronomy’s place in the Old Testament canon is critical to comprehending the remainder of the history of Israel. Deuteronomy became the basis upon which the kings of Israel were judged, particularly as it related to keeping the Law of Moses (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Some Old Testament scholars believe
that portions of Deuteronomy reflect the thinking and theology of a period just after the Babylonian Exile, based upon some of the contents of the book. It is believed that Deuteronomy was the book that led to the reforms of Josiah, when Hilkiah, the high priest, reported that they had found the Book of the Law in the Temple (see 2 Kings 22:8-13).

The Deuteronomistic History begins with the book of Deuteronomy and includes Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings. These historical books all explain the reasons for the downfall of Israel and its total collapse after the reign of Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:1-13). Tradition holds that a large portion of the book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses, since it reflects the words that he spoke to Israel in the latter days of his life.

At the center of Deuteronomy is the renewal of the covenant first made with God at Sinai (see Exodus 19:1-7). All the kings are judged based upon their commitment to the covenant and the words of Moses in Deuteronomy. They are reminded to remain true to the Lord and not take on the idolatrous ways of the people around them.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Leaders that Make a Difference
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. God Promises a Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15)
   B. God Responds to the People (Deuteronomy 18:16-17)
   C. A Prophet’s Qualifications (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)
   D. Beware of False Prophets (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

III. Concluding Reflection

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**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Message** (verse 21)—Hebrew: *dabar* (daw-baw’): speech; utterance; “word” (KJV).

**Moses** (Exodus 12:50 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: *Mosheh* (mo-sheh’): a great Israelite leader, prophet, and law giver.

**Prophet** (verse 15)—Hebrew: *nabi* (naw-bee’): a spokesman, speaker.

**Raise up** (verse 18)—Hebrew: *qum* (koom): rise up; stand; “raise . . . up” (KJV).

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

**Israel**: the name of the Hebrew people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose name was changed to Israel (see Genesis 32:28).

**Moses**: Israel’s first great leader. He was the son of Amran and Jochebed, who were members of the tribe of Levi. He led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. The books of Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy describe in some way the leadership of Moses in helping establish the Hebrew nation. He was their leader for forty years during the wilderness wandering.
world now and what He will do in the future; Proverbs 29:18a reads, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

One of the most critical needs of the church is for leaders who have a vital and vibrant relationship with God. These are men and women who understand the importance of hearing from God and are able and willing to speak for God in a world filled with a discord of uncertain sounds. Who fills that void in the life of the people of God? God raises up leaders who respond to His call and commands.

If the church is to continue to be the moral and social conscience of an increasingly immoral society—where men and women love darkness rather than light (see John 3:19)—her leadership must become more spiritual and effective. Christian leaders, in whatever capacity they serve, must ensure that their presence make a difference. That difference must be felt within the local congregation and in the larger community.

It is not easy being a leader of the Lord’s people. The experience of Moses vividly teaches that leadership can take its toll upon those who are conscientious about their task. The Bible records that the Israelites murmured constantly against Moses. Near the end of his forty-year tenure of leadership, Moses reminded the people of their most important responsibility, which was to remember God and the great things He had done for them. This is the task of every spiritual leader: to align their followers with God.

B. Biblical Background

This lesson is set within the context of the life and ministry of Moses, one of the great leaders of Israel. Moses was considered to be a prophet without equal. He was called and commissioned by God to speak on God’s behalf (see Exodus 3–4). In his final days of leading the nation, Moses delivered a series of messages to the people of Israel regarding how they were to enter the Promised Land and how they were to live when they arrived and had conquered and settled the land. These messages are captured and summarized in the book of Deuteronomy.

One of Moses’ concerns was the potential influence of Canaanite culture and idolatry in the Promised Land. Moses repeatedly reminded the people of their responsibility to remain steadfastly committed to their covenant relationship with God. He warned them that the people of the land had their own gods and customs that God’s people were never to imitate. The Canaanites engaged in divination, witchcraft, sorcery, and magic—practices that God had forbidden. In Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Moses called the people to spiritual perfection, reminding them that the Lord forbade them to practice the ways of the people of the land. Moses pointed out that these practices were an abomination to God.

Just as God used Moses to defeat the magicians and sorcerers of Egypt, he exhorted the people that God would raise prophets who would speak truth to them. God would put His Word in the hearts and mouths of the true prophet. This new prophet would be one of them who would speak the Word of God to them.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God Promises a Prophet
(Deuteronomy 18:15)

The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.

Verse 15 is the continuation of Moses’ discourse regarding practice of the occult, divination, witchcraft, sorcery, and child sacrifice that began at verse 9. Israel would not need to look for a spiritual leader, because the Lord would raise up one to speak His word to the people. The word prophet (Hebrew: nabi) refers to someone who speaks for another, usually for a deity (see Jeremiah 11:1-2). Three statements are made about the prophet whom God would raise up. First, he must come from among them. Second, he must be one of their brothers or family members. Third, he would be a prophet like Moses. This could refer to Moses’ relationship with God, as one who spoke face-to-face with God and received God’s words directly (see Exodus 19:20-21).

During the time of the ministry of Jesus many believed that He may have been the one like Moses (see Mark 8:27-28; compare with Mark 6:14-15)—the prophet who was to come (see John 1:45; Acts 3:22, 23; 7:37). The Hebrew language suggests that the reference to a prophet is to a singular individual and not necessarily a school or series of prophets.

Moses anticipated the day of his death; he prepared the people for the next chapter of their lives. Who, then, would speak to the people on God’s behalf? God’s people have always looked for a voice who would proclaim God’s Word to them. This is the present-day role of the pastor/preacher/prophet who serves as the herald of God.

B. God Responds to the People
(Deuteronomy 18:16-17)

According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.

Verses 17-18 refer to the confirmation of the covenant between God and Israel (see Exodus 19:1-7). Rather than hearing the voice of God directly, the people wanted God to appoint a spokesman to represent Him and speak His Word to them (see Exodus 4:9-14; 19:21-25). This was not Moses’ request; it was that of the entire assembly’s. When they saw the fire and smoke and heard the loud, thunderous sounds, they were terrified and feared that they would all die. Now, in the plains of Moab, Moses was reminding the people of what happened at Mount Horeb. When the Israelites reached the base of the mountain, the Lord called Moses to come up and receive the words of covenant. These events are retold earlier in Deuteronomy 5:22-27; compare with Exodus 20:18-19). In verse 17, the Lord affirmed the people’s request to have someone to speak on God’s behalf to them.

These words remind us of what it means to enter into the very presence of God. One should come before God with humility and deep reverence. Perhaps worship would be more meaningful for the Lord’s people if
they came before God with the same sense of awe and reverence as the Israelites. Moses reminded Israel that God’s people enter into His presence, prepared to hear what the Lord has to say to them.

C. A Prophet’s Qualifications
(Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

For forty years, Moses had been the intermediary between God and the people (see Deuteronomy 5:5). What would happen to them when he was no longer around? God would appoint a new leader and endow him with all that would be needed to lead the people. These verses list the qualifications for those who would wear the prophetic mantle after Moses’ death. First, it would be someone called by God for the specific task (see Jeremiah 1:4, 9). The prophet Amos would later acknowledge to Amaziah, priest of Bethel, that he was neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet; rather, he was a herdsman and keeper of sycamore trees. Amos said he was only qualified because the Lord had called him to be a spokesman and champion of justice (see Amos 7:14-15; 5:23-24). Second, the prophet whom God called would be a fellow Israelite. He could not be from any of the surrounding nations that had no connection to the covenant community. Third, the Lord would put His word in the mouth of the prophet (see Isaiah 5) 4; 51:16). The word of the prophet would be the Word of the Lord; hence, he could not help but speak what “Thus saith the Lord.”

Like the prophet, the preacher does not speak on his or her own behalf but, rather, is called to declare the Word of the Lord. This, at times, puts the preacher at odds with the culture and popular opinion; yet, this is the assignment given by God.

D. Beware of False Prophets
(Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Verses 20-22 lay out the parameters for determining whether or not a prophet is God-sent or a fraud. “Presume” is translated from the Hebrew word aid and denotes pride and arrogance. It is used to describe the prophet who, without authority, presumes to speak on behalf of God (see Jeremiah 14:1, 15; 23:13-15). Jeremiah confronted the prophet Hananiah, who falsely announced that the Lord was going to break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar in two years (see Jeremiah 28:10-17; compare with Jeremiah 29:20-23). In Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Moses had previously told the Israelites that they were not to listen nor hearken to prophets who preached in the name of other gods (see 2 Kings 18:19, 27).

Verse 21 is a rhetorical question—“How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?” In verse 22, Moses provided the answer to the question. The phrase “if the
thing follow not, nor come to pass” is better translated by the NIV, “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true (italics added)—and this is a word that is to be rejected and the prophet is not a true prophet. He has no legitimate authority to speak on behalf of the Lord God. Israel was cautioned not to have any fear of this prophet.

Jesus also warned His disciples that they were to beware of false prophets, those who would come in the name of the Lord but have no calling nor authority in His name. One of the clearest ways to recognize someone who is a prophetic imposter is by listening to the content of his or her message. Any message that is contrary to the revealed and written Word of God is to be rejected—the message is not from God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Who dares speak for God! Who has the audacity to stand and say this is what the Lord says, today? That is precisely the role of the prophet. The prophets were not so much foretellers of the future as they were forth tellers of what God would say to the generation. The prophet looked at the current context in which they lived and said, this is what the Lord says about justice, righteousness, and truth. In addition to preaching and proclaiming God’s wrath and judgment against sin, they also announced words of grace, mercy, hope, and life. One great challenge for the church of the twenty-first century is rising to the divine call to be engaged with our culture. We are not called to stand over and against culture and offer nothing but criticism; rather, we are summoned by God to be that watchman on the wall calling the world to repentance.

PRAYER

Our Father, grant that Your servants may hear Your truth with discerning ears. May we never be duped by the sound of smooth words filled with half-truths. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 1-7, 2021)

Moses: Prophet of Deliverance

MONDAY, March 1: “Remember God’s Acts of Deliverance” (Psalm 77:11-20)
TUESDAY, March 2: “Listen to Moses, a Witness with Authority” (Luke 16:24-31)
WEDNESDAY, March 3: “Instructions for Observing the Passover” (Exodus 12:43-50)
THURSDAY, March 4: “Aliens and the Unclean Share a Passover Meal” (Numbers 9:9-14)
FRIDAY, March 5: “Consecrate All Firstborn to God” (Exodus 13:1-2; Deuteronomy 15:19-20)
SATURDAY, March 6: “Observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread” (Exodus 13:3-10)
SUNDAY, March 7: “God Leads through Prophets” (Deuteronomy 18:15-22)
13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? 14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? 15 And the captain of the LORD’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

NOW JERICHO was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. 2 And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” 14 “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” 15 The commander of the LORD’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

NOW THE gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.
3 And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.
4 And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.
5 And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.
16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

2 Then the LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.
3 “March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days.
4 “Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.
5 “When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”

15 On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times.
16 The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!”

20 When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Everything we do involves choices. Which choices lead to the greatest success? Joshua and the people of Israel succeeded when they chose to honor God’s covenant, obeying God’s instructions perfectly.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain how Joshua acted obediently to the vision from God.
2. Reflect on personal disappointment or failure that resulted from disobeying God.
3. Renew their commitment to obeying God especially in challenging times.
**AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED**

**Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH**

—God commissioned Joshua as the leader who would guide the Israelites over the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

—After Joshua supervised the circumcision and observed Passover, proving the people’s willingness to obey God’s commands, an angel of the Lord visited Joshua with a message.

—The presence of God’s messenger (angel) was affirmation that victory would come to Israel at God’s intervention, not because of human action.

—The ark accompanied the Israelite army for seven straight days and was a symbol of God’s presence and guidance.

—Joshua was victorious not because of military might, but because the hand of God was on him and because he obeyed God’s instructions.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—In obedience to God’s directions, Moses chose his assistant, Joshua, to be his successor as the leader of Israel (see Numbers 27:15-23).

—After Moses’ death, Joshua became the new leader and the army commander. God told Joshua that the city of Jericho would be delivered into the hands of the Israelites.

—As Joshua drew close to Jericho, the angel of the Lord appeared to him as a man with sword drawn. Joshua was not afraid to confront the man and ask whose side he was on. The angel told Joshua to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground.

—Joshua led Israel in following God’s plan to take over the city of Jericho. God told them to march around the walls of the city, once a day, for six days, following the priests and the ark of the covenant.

—On the seventh day, Joshua obeyed God and told the people to march around Jericho seven times—and then blow the trumpets, shout, and overtake the city.

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**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The book of Joshua picks up where Deuteronomy leaves off. Moses had come to the end of his time as the leader of Israel. For forty years, he had kept the new nation from crumbling under its own rebellion and disobedience. Moses successfully steered them through four decades of living off God’s provision of manna and water. As Moses reached the end of his life, the Lord God allowed him to view the Promised Land from the peaks of Mount Nebo, showing him all of the land from Gilead to Dan and much of the land of Judah, Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim (see Deuteronomy 34:1-5). God selected Joshua, a man who had been a faithful assistant to Moses, as the nation’s next leader. God filled Joshua with the spirit of wisdom and gave him the helm of leadership. After a long, wearisome journey through the wilderness, the children of Israel were finally ready to enter the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Like Moses before him, Joshua sent two spies to survey the land, particularly the city of Jericho (see Joshua 2:1). The Israelite spies entered the city of Jericho and ended up at the house of Rahab, a harlot who lived within the city walls. When the king’s men came looking for them, Rahab hid the spies and sent the king’s men off looking for them in a different direction, away from the city. The two spies made an alliance with Rahab and established an oath that they would spare her entire family from destruction if she promised not to reveal their presence to the king of Jericho (see Joshua 2:15-21).
Finally, the time came for Joshua to lead the children of Israel across the Jordan River (see Joshua 3:14-17). After God held back the waters of the Jordan River to allow the people to cross over on dry land, He commanded Joshua to circumcise every male who had been born in the wilderness and was not circumcised (see Joshua 5:1-9). Just as Moses before him, Joshua obeyed the word of the Lord.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Before entering the Promised Land, the Israelites “journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho” (see Numbers 22:1). The land God promised to Abraham and his descendants was called Canaan.

Jericho was the first major fortified city that the children of Israel had to conquer. God had promised the land to them, but they had to fight for it. Jericho was one of the oldest cities in the world, dating to approximately 9500 BCE. By the time of the conquest, Jericho was known as the “city of palm trees” (see Deuteronomy 34:3). Today, Jericho is located about four miles west of the Jordan River, near the site of ancient Jericho at Tell es-Sultan.

Jericho figures prominently in the Old and New Testaments. It was in Jericho that the prophet Elijah was carried to heaven in a whirlwind (see 2 Kings 2:11). Elisha purified the waters of Jericho with a jar of salt (see 2 Kings 2:19-21). When the Babylonians overran Jerusalem, King Zedekiah fled the city, only to be captured in the plains of Jericho (see 2 Kings 25:5). The city was a prominent tax collection point for the Romans. It was the last major stop before pilgrims would take the road that ascended up to Jerusalem (see Mark 10:46; Luke 18:36; 19:1). Jericho remains to this day a very vibrant and important Palestinian city.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Joshua: successor to Moses, who led Israel into the Promised Land (see Numbers 27:18-23). He was the son of Nun, a member of the tribe of Ephraim. Joshua is the central character in the book of Joshua. He was one of the original twelve spies chosen by Moses (see Numbers 13:16). His birth name was Hoshea, but it was changed by Moses to Joshua, meaning “Jehovah is salvation.”

Priests: They were descendants of Levi, third son of Jacob, sometimes referred to as the Levites. They were responsible for all of the priestly duties at the tabernacle, to include the care of the ark of the covenant.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Holy (5:15)—Hebrew: qodesh (ko’-desh): apartness; sacredness.

Jericho (6:1)—Hebrew: Yericho (yer-ee-kho’): a city in the Jordan Valley captured by Joshua.


Rams’ Horns (6:4)—Hebrew: yobel (yo-bale’): wind instruments.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. God’s Blueprint for Success
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Joshua Meets the Captain of the Lord’s Host (Joshua 5:13-15)
   B. God’s Plan of Attack (Joshua 6:1-5)
   C. The Seventh Day and the Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:15-16, 20)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. God’s Blueprint for Success

Whether they receive it or not, God has always mapped out a blueprint for His people’s success. God would not permit Moses to enter the Promised Land, but this in no way negated God’s promise of rest and inheritance for the people. Joshua led Israel into the land and into a victorious first fight for conquest of the land. Joshua, as the new leader of Israel, had to make a decision regarding whom he would serve. Would he serve the God of their ancestors, or would he choose the gods of the people of the land? In Joshua 1:8, the Lord gave Joshua and the people a choice: “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 good success” (ESV).

When we make the decision to accept the call of God and follow the discipleship teachings of Jesus, our lives and churches become more productive and impactful. Most of us are just a shadow or reflection of what God has perfectly willed for our lives. God’s blueprint for success begins with our full obedience to His Word. Joshua would make his way prosperous by being obedient to God.

B. Biblical Background

Joshua’s role as Moses’ successor was neither sudden nor random (see Numbers 27:8-23; Deuteronomy 1:38). God had begun molding and shaping Joshua for the helm of leadership shortly after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. Joshua was among the leaders who went with Moses to the base of Mount Sinai on the day when God gave Moses the words of the covenant. Among all the leaders who were with Moses, Joshua was mentioned by name.

Thus, very early on, Joshua was being groomed with knowledge and experience so that he could understand God’s intentions for Israel. Joshua was not a novice; he was well acquainted with God’s plan for His people. For many years, Joshua had stood faithfully alongside Moses as one of his right-hand men. According to Exodus 17:9-13, it was Joshua who defeated the Amalekites in Israel’s first battle.

Before assuming leadership, Joshua had proven himself. He had faithfully served Moses and the people as administrative assistant, a soldier with proven military experience, and a man upon whom God had placed His Spirit. Joshua was ready to lead the nation because he had been tried in the crucible of experience and sharpened on the anvil of time. He was prepared for God to lead the people across the Jordan to conquer the Promised Land, and ready to face the greater challenges that lay ahead. In short, Joshua was ready to take the people forward into their divine destiny.
This week’s lesson text is divided into three passages, each detailing some facet of the conquest of Jericho. The first passage, Joshua 5:13-15, describes Joshua’s encounter with the commander of the Lord’s army. In the second passage (Joshua 6:1-5), Joshua was given specific directions for how Israel was to approach the city of Jericho. The final passage (Joshua 6:15-16, 20) gives details of the seventh day and Israel’s ultimate victory over Jericho.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Joshua Meets the Captain of the Lord’s Host (Joshua 5:13-15)

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

Verse 13 continues the account of Israel’s entry into the Promised Land and first military victory. The text does not give many details of Joshua’s encounter with the angel—whether the angel appeared suddenly, where the encounter took place, etc. The writer offers details of the angel’s sword, Joshua’s awe, and the brief dialogue between the commander of Israel’s army and the commander of the Lord’s army.

Joshua asked the angel, “Are you with us or for our enemies?” His answer was not one that Joshua would have expected. The response was “Nay.” The text gives no indication whether Joshua was armed with a sword or spear, but he did not back away from the angel. Joshua needed to understand whether the angel was there to help Israel or not. Simply put, Joshua asked, “Are you with us or against us?” The angel told Joshua that he had come as captain of the host of the Lord, meaning that he was neither for Joshua nor Jericho; rather, he was there to do the Lord’s work. Although the angel remained unnamed, he was clearly important—the commander of the Lord’s army.

Joshua bowed in awe as he quickly recognized that he was in the presence of someone greater and mightier than himself. It is apparent that Joshua recognized that this was a heavenly being. Joshua fell on his face out of deep respect and reverence. This is the typical position for worship of God in the Old and New Testaments (see Leviticus 9:24; Numbers 16:22, 45; Luke 5:12).

In verse 15, the angel tells Joshua to remove his shoes—for he was standing on holy ground. This verse reinforces the conclusion that Joshua was in the very presence of the Lord. Although there is no direct reference to God’s presence here, it was not uncommon for God to make a physical appearance before a major turning point for His people (see Exodus 3:2-8). This passage assures every believer that they can count on the Lord’s help when they have been found faithful in God’s work. God always provides the means and resources to achieve the purpose to which He calls His servants.

B. God’s Plan of Attack (Joshua 6:1-5)

NOW JERICHO was straitly shut up because of the
children of Israel: none went out, and none came in. And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

In verse 1, Jericho was completely shut up. The words “straitly shut up” are a translation of the Hebrew word sager, meaning “to completely close off, shut, or close,” as in blocking the gates of a city (see Genesis 19:6, 10). First Kings 11:27 describes Solomon’s work of closing up the breach at the Millo, which was critical to the defense and security of Jerusalem. Jericho was closed off because the residents had already heard about the miraculous deeds done by the Lord on Israel’s behalf. They knew that it was only by a miracle that they could have crossed the Jordan River during the season when it overflows its banks and floods the surrounding region (see Joshua 3:15). The Israelites had already overcome some of the surrounding nations in their march to Canaan. Was there fear within the walls of the city? Rahab had confided to the spies that many of her people had heard of Israel’s reputation and feared them and their God. The Lord had directed Israel to take Jericho and offer all the spoils of battle to Him as an offering. Conquering the entire Promised Land had to begin with conquering the first city, Jericho.

God affirmed the promise He made to Joshua in the Plains of Moab (see Joshua 1:5-9). Moses was dead, yet the promise of the land did not die with Moses. The same God who had been with Moses made a solemn commitment to also be with Joshua. At Jericho, Joshua and the Israelites would face valiant, battle-tested warriors—men with more weapons and experience. Yet, the Lord had assured Israel of victory, because no one can succeed when God sides with their opponent. When the Lord gave Jericho into Joshua’s hands, victory for Israel was certain. There was no need to fear.

Verses 3–5 describe God’s battle plan. Joshua was to lead a procession of the men of war around the city of Jericho once a day for six consecutive days. It would be a worship procession because the very symbol of God’s presence went with the army into battle (see verses 6-14 for a description of the order of the march around Jericho). Seven priests were assigned to carry the ark of the covenant and seven trumpets made of rams’ horns, called shofars. For six days, the procession encircled the city, once per day—and on the seventh day, they would compass the city seven times. At the end of the seventh march, the priests blew their horns and the people shouted, as the Lord commanded. Suddenly, Jericho’s city walls crumbled and fell flat to the ground, enabling the people to rush in and conquer the city.

There are several important observations to make in these verses. First, there is distinction between the army of Israel and that of Jericho. Israel’s army is simply referred to as the “men of war,” whereas Jericho’s army is made up of “mighty men of valour.” Without God, Israel’s army would have faced certain defeat.
Israel’s victory was a matter of God’s power and presence. Second, the introduction of seven priests’ carrying the ark of the covenant symbolically signified complete victory over Jericho. The number “7” is the number of completion and finality in the Scriptures. Third, victory was only possibly by faith and total obedience to God’s plan. Joshua was given strict and specific instructions to facilitate victory for Israel. Joshua was neither lucky nor remarkably skillful in battle—he was simply blessed. Wisely, Joshua followed God’s instructions to the letter, thereby sealing Israel’s success. Hebrews 11:30 indicates that Joshua fought and was victorious by an act of faith. No one knew what would happen on the seventh day. They simply had to trust the Lord’s word as spoken through Joshua. Fourth, the people were given specific instructions regarding their role in the procession. They were not to make a sound nor utter a single word during the march and this, also, they followed to the letter.

This passage highlights the importance of leaders’ remaining in touch with the Lord and being obedient to the Word of God. Often, leaders can be pressured by members or church leaders to turn aside from that which the Lord has commanded. This not only encourages disobedience, but also hinders the blessings of God upon that church. The people of God deserve leaders whom they can confidently trust to walk obediently to God, always seeking to hear God’s instructions for the community of faith.

C. The Seventh Day and the Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:15-16, 20)
And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. . . . So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

According to verse 15, on the seventh day, Joshua and the people rose very early, probably before daybreak. It was going to be a long day and it was necessary to begin early. For six consecutive days, the people, priests carrying the ark of the covenant, and armed men of war marched around the city of Jericho. Throughout the week, they remained completely silent, while the seven priests blew the rams’ horns. On the seventh day, the procession made its way around the city seven times. Then, on the seventh day, Israel’s warriors marched seven times. When they had completed the seventh trip around the city, Joshua gave the command for the priests to blow the horns and for the people to give a great shout (verse 16). Joshua told the people that the Lord had given them the city. Israel showed up for the battle, ready to fight, but God Himself gave them victory. At that very moment, with the sounds of the shofar and the people’s shouts, the wall of the city fell flat. This was the signal to rush forward and seize the city.

This was not the typical military victory. It was a miracle of great proportions, equivalent to all the other mighty demonstrations of God’s power. What lessons were the people of Israel to take from their victory at Jericho?
Their first lesson was that God keeps His promises. God fulfilled an old promise He had made to Abraham, and then to Isaac and Jacob. The second lesson was to remain hopeful in weariness. After forty years in the wilderness, Israel finally could see the reality of God’s favor unfolding before them. The final lesson was that God’s people win victories when they make the choice to depend on God for direction. No weapon is mightier than the power of God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The story of Joshua poignantly illustrates that men and women who lead God’s people must be anchored to the power and presence of God. It is vital that spiritual leaders remain spiritually grounded and connected to God. This allows them to hear from God more clearly, especially when God’s will may not be easily discerned.

Leaders must walk in complete confidence that the Lord will be with them and that He will be their strength. Cast aside every fear of failure. Cast aside doubts about the future. Cast aside thoughts that say you cannot achieve great results. God seeks faithful obedience from those who serve as leaders. God does the hard work; all we have to do is be faithful to Him. As Moses was faithful to God, so would Joshua remain faithful, obeying God to the end. The challenge for the contemporary church is simply this: Remain faithful to the Lord, who has guaranteed us victory over the power of evil.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we learn to trust You even when we cannot see what You are doing. When the task looms larger than life, may we recognize that with You all things are possible. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 8-14, 2021)

Joshua: Prophet of Conquest
MONDAY, March 8: “Rahab Is Rewarded for Her Faithfulness” (Hebrews 11:23-31)
TUESDAY, March 9: “Jesus Heals a Blind Man from Jericho” (Luke 18:35-42)
WEDNESDAY, March 10: “Enjoying the Manna and Local Produce” (Joshua 5:8-12)
THURSDAY, March 11: “Marching around the City of Jericho” (Joshua 6:6-14)
FRIDAY, March 12: “Rahab and Spies Confirm the Rescue Plan” (Joshua 2:15-24)
SATURDAY, March 13: “Rahab Is Saved, while Jericho Is Destroyed” (Joshua 6:22-25)
SUNDAY, March 14: “Joshua’s Successful Conquest of Jericho” (Joshua 5:13–6:5, 15-16, 20)
2 Kings 22:14-20—KJV
14 So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.
15 And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,
16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:
17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.
18 But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire

2 Kings 22:14-20—NIV
14 Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.
15 She said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,
16 “This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read.
17 “Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.’
18 “Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of
of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;
19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou hearest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.
20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: No one knows the full implications of what they learn. Who can help us understand what the future holds? King Josiah’s advisers consulted the prophetess Huldah, who shared a prophetic message about what God had in store for Judah and the king.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Analyze the prophetess Huldah’s message from God for King Josiah.
2. Reflect on Josiah’s behavior after hearing the words of the Book of the Law.
3. Seek godly advice about their future.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Josiah became king at a very young age and desired to do what was right in the sight of God.
—Josiah was willing to respect a messenger of God without regard to her gender or social/economic standing.
—God had harsh words for Israel but promised to deal with Josiah mercifully.
—The Old Testament records four female prophets (Hebrew: neviah): Huldah; Miriam, sister of Moses (see Exodus 15:20); Deborah, who also

became a great military leader (see Judges 4:4); and Isaiah’s unnamed wife (see Isaiah 8:3).
—Although not identified as prophets, other Old Testament women are believed to have spoken prophetically: Rachel (see Genesis 30:24); Hannah (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10); Abigail (see 1 Samuel 25:28-31).
—Josiah died relatively young, at age 39, and was remembered for the fervor with which he turned to the Lord (see 2 Kings 23:25).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Josiah was the great-grandson of Hezekiah. Both developed a strong relationship with God
and wanted the people to repent and give their hearts to God.
—Josiah became king at the age of eight, and later, at the age of twenty-six, he led a reform of the people to follow God after the Book of Law was found in the Temple. Josiah would later learn from the prophetess Huldah how wicked his nation had become.
—Huldah was a prophetess of the land. She was married and lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. Prophetess Huldah was respected by Josiah.
—The high priest Hilkiah, Ahikam (son of Shaphan), Acbor (son of Micaiah), Shaphan the secretary, and Asiah (the king’s attendant) went to speak to the prophetess Huldah at the king’s request regarding what was in the book and how this would affect him and the people.
—The Israelites had turned away from God and had chosen to follow and worship the idol gods. God was angry with them for their disobedience. Huldah revealed that God would honor Josiah’s actions of repentance for the nation. Josiah would be buried before the wrath of God would engulf the people.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
In order to grasp the significance of the prophetic ministry of Huldah, one would need to go back three generations to the reign of Hezekiah, who ruled the Southern Kingdom from 715–687 BCE. Hezekiah ranks as one the great kings of the Southern Kingdom, referred to as Judah. Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he succeeded his father, Ahaz, as king and he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. He was unlike his father, Ahaz, who failed to honor the covenant, committing religious atrocities on an unparalleled scale (see 2 Kings 16).

Hezekiah was recognized as a righteous, holy man, who did what was right in the sight of the Lord—like David, who was Israel’s greatest king. One of the first things that he did as king was initiate massive reforms of the house of the Lord (see 2 Kings 18:4; compare with 2 Chronicles 29:1-36). Hezekiah succeeded in turning the religious life of Judah around. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh succeeded him (see 2 Kings 20:20). Manasseh spent fifty-five years undoing everything that his father had done to purge the nation of the idolatrous practices of his grandfather, King Ahaz.

Manasseh’s reign is characterized as “evil in the sight of the Lord” (see 2 Kings 21:1-18; compare with 2 Chronicles 33:1-20). He led the nation in committing abominations like the nations around them. Manasseh had all of the high places rebuilt, which were local pagan shrines set up across Judah on hills and mountains. In 642 BC, Manasseh’s disastrous reign came to an end (see 2 Kings 21:16-28). His son Amon became king and he reigned for just two years before being assassinated by his own servants (see 2 Kings 21:23). He is described by the biblical historian as following in the footsteps of his father, Manasseh, doing evil and serving idol gods.

In 640 BC, after the death of Amon, Josiah, his son, succeeds him and over the course of his thirty-one years he would lead a massive religious revival and renewal in Judah. He undid everything that had been done by his father, Amon, and grandfather Manasseh. The prophetic words of Huldah led to the reforms of Josiah, which are found in 2 Kings 23:1-26. Josiah is the last of the Davidic line who models his life after David’s.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The ancient Hebrew prophets were a major
factor and force in the religious revivals that took place in the Southern Kingdom of Judah and in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Their prophetic pronouncements were often at the center of these great religious movements, calling the nations back to the covenant they made with God at Mount Sinai. Moreover, when we think of the prophets, we normally think of the writing prophets, those whose writings appear in the canon of the Old Testament. Additionally, we think of the prophets Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha, who are among the most notable non-writing prophets. There were many prophets in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms who were active and engaged in the prophetic ministry. These are the other, lesser known and not highly regarded prophets in the Old Testament. However, rarely do scholars include the women who were significant prophetic voices during the period covered by the Old and New Testaments.

Who were the prophets? The word prophet comes from a Hebrew word nabı, which means “to call.” This word is the masculine form of the Hebrew word for “prophet.” The feminine form of the Hebrew word for “prophet” is nebıaḥ, which is the word that is used in 2 Kings 22:14. Prophets were people who were often called upon to speak to the centers of political power, which were frequently and directly responsible for the economic and religious corruption in both Judah and Israel. Women prophets were very prevalent and active in ancient Israel—for example, Miriam (see Exodus 15:20); Deborah (see Judges 4:4); Huldah (see 2 Kings 22:14); Noadiah (see Nehemiah 6:14); and the wife of Isaiah (see Isaiah 8:3). All of these women were leaders with considerable power and clout in Israel.

The prophetess Huldah used the same speaking and utterance formula as those used by the male prophets: “Thus saith the Lord.” Her active ministry coincided with those of Jeremiah’s and Zephaniah’s. Women prophets were quite effective and successful in ancient Israel.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Hilkiah: the high priest during the reign of Josiah. He found the Book of the Law in the Temple during the time of its renovation and restoration. Hilkiah was sent by Josiah to have the words of the Book of the Law verified and to seek guidance regarding what to do next.
Huldah: She was a prominent prophetess living in Jerusalem during the time of Josiah. She was the person whom Hilkiah consulted regarding the book that had been found in the Temple. Her husband was named Shallum and he was the keeper of the wardrobe.
Shallum: husband of Huldah and keeper of the wardrobe.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Forsaken (verse 17)—Hebrew: azab (aw-zab’): left; neglected; deserted.
Huldah (verse 14)—Hebrew: Chuldah (khool-daw’): an Israelite prophetess in the time of Josiah.
The Book (verse 16)—Hebrew: sepher (say’-fer): The Book of the Law found during Josiah’s reign was responsible for the renewal of the covenant and other reforms.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Why the Church Teaches
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Josiah’s Delegation to the Prophetess Huldah
      (2 Kings 22:14)
   B. Huldah’s Answer and Prophecy
      (2 Kings 22:15-17)
   C. Huldah’s Prophetic Promise to Josiah
      (2 Kings 22:18-20)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Why the Church Teaches

The rise of the Internet and social media, along with the major innovations in the mobile telephone industry, have given people across the globe an ability to connect with millions of people, almost instantly. The Internet is one of the most powerful communication tools ever conceived. With a few touchscreen clicks, anyone can transmit information worldwide, whether true, false, uplifting, or outrageous.

Likewise, the Internet is also a powerful tool and means for evangelism and outreach. During the height of COVID-19, millions of churches learned the necessity of using technology for everything from Bible study to Sunday school, Sunday worship, offerings, announcements, church meetings, and corporate prayer. The Internet offers churches an immeasurable capacity to reach and engage millions of members, prospective members, friends, and total strangers with the message of the Gospel. This is why the church must master and perfect the art of transmitting ministry via the Internet and social media.

Unfortunately, millions of people are naïve enough to believe almost anything. They are inclined to accept as truth anything that is posted, shared, chatted, tweeted, and retweeted, and that goes viral. If the church neglects to make use of current technologies for the sake of the kingdom, she will miss a daily audience of millions, whose near undivided attention is fixated on e-mail, social media, and Web sites accessible via their many electronic devices. If the world has mastered the art and science of using the Internet to promote its best interests, then why should the church not do so? Let it not be said that “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” Technology tools, used smartly, will only elevate the impact of our preaching and teaching to a broader audience.

Jesus identified teaching as one of the necessary tools for making and perfecting disciples. Teaching is the foundation of church ministry and, therefore, one of its most vital and essential functions. Noted Christian educator Dr. Mary McConnell wrote, “The church cannot function and grow without the teaching of God’s Word.” What happens when the church stops teaching or minimizes the importance of teaching the Word of God? The church that forfeits or loses its impact risks becoming like Judah during the reign of the wicked king Manasseh. Because of the neglect of the Word of God, the people of God lost their way. God’s Word is the anchor that keeps the church tethered to the purpose of God in the world.

B. Biblical Background

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah (see 2 Kings 23:4-30 for the account of his reforms and reign as king). King Josiah’s reign lasted thirty-one years before coming to a tragic and untimely end in a battle at Megiddo against Pharaoh Neco,
king of Egypt (see 2 Kings 23:29). Josiah is remembered as one of the greatest kings in the history of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and all Israel. Best remembered for his righteousness, Josiah led the religious revival in Judah that reversed the destructive policies of his father, Amon, and grandfather Manasseh.

During the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah led the renovation and restoration of the Temple, which had been in disrepair and misuse since the time of his grandfather (see 2 Kings 22:3-8). Josiah raised funds for the work and commissioned Hilkiah, the high priest, to oversee the work, hire the workers, and see that all were paid. During the process of restoration, Hilkiah found a Book of the Law in the Temple and delivered it to Shaphan the scribe, who read the book. Shaphan reported to Josiah all that had been done on the work of the Lord’s house, then reported the discovery of the Book of the Law. Shaphan read the book to King Josiah (verses 9-10). Upon hearing the Word of the Law, Josiah was deeply moved and tore his clothes in an act of humility, guilt, remorse, and deep sadness (verse 11). Old Testament scholars generally agree that this Book of the Law was likely some portion of the book of Deuteronomy. Josiah commanded Hilkiah to form a delegation and to research the authenticity of the book. This Book of the Law became the major driver of the reforms of Josiah, restoring the covenant relationship of Judah and the Lord.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Josiah’s Delegation to the Prophetess Huldah (2 Kings 22:14)

So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

Verse 14 continues the narrative regarding the recovery of the Book of the Law that had been found in the Temple. Josiah was so moved that he commanded that Hilkiah go and inquire about the contents of the book and its meaning for Jerusalem and Judah. Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor (NIV spelling), Shaphan, and Asahiah were all very reputable men from Jerusalem. They went to the home a prophetess named Huldah. Her words mattered and her messages were from the same God who calls, chooses, and speaks through whomever He pleases in the proclamation of His Word.

The text offers several biographical details about Huldah. She was a prophetess of the Lord, which is simply a female prophet with the same prophetic authority and calling as a male counterpart. Her husband’s family descended from at least three generations in Jerusalem and her husband, Shallum, was the keeper of the wardrobe—but it remains unknown whose wardrobe Shallum kept. Scholars suspect that he was the keeper of the priests’ vestments which had to be kept in pristine condition. Others maintain that it may have been the king’s wardrobe. In either case, Shallum would have been a man of considerable local regard.

Huldah and her husband lived in an
expanded part of the city of Jerusalem. The KJV translated the Hebrew word *misneh* as “college.” The word is better translated as “second quarter (NASB),” or “new quarter” (NIV). This was an extension of the city that expanded Jerusalem in the direction of the western hills and to the north, away from the Kidron Valley (see Nehemiah 3:9, 12; compare with Zephaniah 1:10, both of which mention a second district in the city of Jerusalem).

B. Huldah’s Answer and Prophecy
(2 Kings 22:15-17)

And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

In verse 16, there is the second prophetic formula: “Thus saith the LORD”—only this time, Huldah’s words were an ominous prediction of coming calamity: “Behold,” look, see, and understand that what is about to happen is the wrath of the Lord. The Lord God was going to bring evil (Hebrew: *ra-ah*), denoting a calamitous situation.

“This place” could mean one of two things: First, it could have been a reference to the Temple that had been polluted with idols and false worship. The prophet Amos denounced Judah’s worship as hypocritical and pointless (see Amos 5:23-25). Second, it could have referred to Jerusalem, the place where the people of God gathered and the home of the kings. God’s wrath would be poured out upon Jerusalem and the people who lived in the city. Everything that Josiah read about would happen, which may suggest that he was reading Deuteronomy 28:15-64: “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee” (Deuteronomy 28:15).

Verse 17 provides the reason for the wrath of the Lord God’s being poured out on Jerusalem. This was a pronouncement of doom for Jerusalem that had been gestating in the womb of time for centuries. As far back as the time of the Judges, Israel had forsaken the Lord, turned to other gods, and worshipped them (see Judges 2:12-14; 3:7). The Lord would forgive them and for a time they would be faithful, but their repentance was always short-lived. At the dedication of the first Temple built by Solomon, the Lord
promised to bless Israel—provided that the sons of Solomon would walk in the ways of David. However, He would cast them out of His sight if they failed to keep the commandments (see 1 Kings 9:6-7).

They were burning incense to other gods. Centuries earlier, Moses was directed by God to make an altar specifically for burning incense twice a day (see Exodus 30:1-10 for all the details regarding this sacred practice). The incense that Moses was commanded to make was not to be duplicated, nor was it to be used for any other purpose. The gods Judah worshipped with incense were lifeless works of their own hands (see Psalm 115:4-8; Isaiah 2:8; Micah 5:13). Huldah prophesied that nothing could be done to turn away the fierceness of God’s wrath. The phrase “It will not be quenched” was a metaphor for a fire that cannot be put out. God’s wrath to come would be as certain as the rising sun.

C. Huldah’s Prophetic Promise to Josiah (2 Kings 22:18-20)

But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou hearest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

In verses 18-20, Huldah offers a word of peace to Josiah. The delegation is told to tell Josiah that he would not experience the same calamitous end as would come upon Jerusalem. Verse 19 explains that God would spare Josiah for three reasons. First, because his heart was tender, meaning that he was not dismissive of the words of the Book of the Law. He responded when he heard them read. Second, it would be because he humbled himself. Unlike kings before him who were defiant and arrogant, Josiah tore his royal garments in a public act of spiritual regret and remorse. For the king to do this in front of his most trusted and highest-ranking staff took deep conviction and sheer courage. He was deeply moved when he heard what would happen to Jerusalem and the Temple. Third, he had wept before the Lord, a sign of his sorrow over the coming destruction of the people and the city. Just as the Lord had seen Hezekiah’s tears and heard his prayer for mercy, so had He heard Josiah (see 2 Kings 20:1-6).

Verse 20 is the climax to the passage and end of the prophetic word and presence of Huldah in the narrative. In the years to come, Josiah would die and be buried with his ancestors in the royal cemetery. His eyes would not see the massive destruction that would come upon Jerusalem within ten years of his death (see 2 Kings 24-25). The evil that would surely come would not be the result of a nation’s overpowering them; rather, they would be tools in the hand of God to exact punishment upon Judah for her failure to honor the terms of the covenant.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

When Solomon finished the construction and dedication of the Temple, the Lord decreed that He had set His name and His love upon that place perpetually (see 1 Kings
On the condition of Solomon’s faithfulness, God promised to bless Solomon. But Solomon disappointed God and betrayed the nation by introducing the worship of strange gods in Israel that were never fully removed from the culture. Although the Temple was a great blessing to the nation, in time, many in Israel began to view the place of worship (the building) as more important than the person of worship (the God of Israel). As God’s chosen people, many Israelites felt exempt from any consequences for their growing neglect of true worship. Israel’s tragic downfall resulted from their substitution of nationalism, syncretism, and paganism for true righteousness, all while keeping the form and rituals of the faith. As they discovered too late, there are no substitutes for true worship.

How sad it is that many Christians remain more inclined to bow to the busyness of church life than to bow before the Lord. Buildings, budgets, programs, and positions can all crowd out the real reason why believers gather each week, which is for true worship of the King of Kings. God takes no delight in those who honor Him with empty words and yet have a heart that is far from Him. The Word of God brought Josiah to the point of repentance that the Lord honored by sparing him of impending disaster. God would spare Josiah but judge the nation. There is no substitute for the Word of God—it is the source of the church’s self-understanding, and the foundation of its commission to make disciples through preaching, teaching, and evangelism. The lesson from ancient Judah is this: judgment is sure to follow when believers stop believing and lose sight of God.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we learn to love Your Word and cherish it as food for our spirits. Grant that Your servants will seek to live according to the Scriptures and do those things that please You. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS (March 15-21, 2021)

Huldah: Prophet of Wisdom
MONDAY, March 15: “God Loves Covenant Keepers” (Psalm 25:1-10)
TUESDAY, March 16: “Entering God’s Promised Rest” (Hebrews 4:1-11)
WEDNESDAY, March 17: “A New Covenant Made with the Israelites” (Deuteronomy 29:1-6)
THURSDAY, March 18: “Josiah Prepares to Repair the Temple” (2 Kings 22:1-7)
FRIDAY, March 19: “Josiah Seeks Guidance to Confront Disobedience” (2 Kings 22:8-13)
SUNDAY, March 21: “Huldah Confirms Coming Judgment; Josiah Is Spared” (2 Kings 22:14-20)
ELIJAH: PROPHET OF COURAGE

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** The Bearer of Bad News  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** The Courage to Speak Up

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Bold Enough to Speak for God  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Courage to Speak

**DEVOTIONAL READING**  

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** 1 Kings 18–19; Matthew 17:1-13  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 18:5-18  
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 18:18

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** 1 Kings 18–19; Matthew 17:1-13  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 17:1-13  
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 17:3

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**1 Kings 18:5-18—KJV**

5 And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.

6 So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

7 And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?

8 And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.

9 And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?  
10 As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not.

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**1 Kings 18:5-18—NIV**

5 Ahab had said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals.”

6 So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another.

7 As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, “Is it really you, my lord Elijah?”

8 “Yes,” he replied. “Go tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”

9 “What have I done wrong,” asked Obadiah, “that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death?

10 “As surely as the LORD your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or
11 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.
12 And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.
13 Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water?
14 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.
15 And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day.
16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.
17 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?
18 And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people are unwilling to accept that their crises are a direct result of their own actions. Why do we need people with the courage to confront us when we are wrong? Elijah boldly challenged King Ahab to denounce his idolatry and rejection of God's commandments, then called the nation to repentance.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Compare and contrast King Ahab’s perspective on Israel's trouble with the explanation given by the prophet Elijah.
2. Explain the reasons for Obadiah’s hesitation to report Elijah’s message to Ahab.
3. Act in boldness when speaking the Word of God.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—God provided a place of refuge for the prophet during the three years that there was drought and famine in the land.
—Elijah courageously obeyed God’s instructions to deliver a message to Ahab, even though the king despised Elijah.
—Elijah fearlessly challenged King Ahab’s idolatry and Baal worship at a time when Queen Jezebel had commanded the murder of all the true prophets of Israel.
—Obadiah, whose name means “servant of the Lord,” feared God; he was a longtime steward in the household of wicked King Ahab.
—Despite a diligent search throughout the nation (see 1 Kings 18:10), Ahab and his men could not find Elijah until God directed Elijah to return to Samaria and appear before the king.
—Ahab called Elijah a troublemaker because Elijah’s prophecy of a three-year drought in Israel had come to fruition (see 1 Kings 17:10). Elijah knew that Ahab’s sin was the root cause of the nation’s drought and spiritual decline.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—The Transfiguration event is found in the gospels of Mark (9:2-13), Luke (9:28-36), and Matthew (17:1-13).
—Jesus selected His disciples Peter, James, and John to witness a miracle that previewed Jesus’ glory and divinity.
—On the mountain, Peter, James, and John saw an amazing vision of Jesus transfigured into radiant glory before speaking with Moses and Elijah. The episode identified Jesus as the Son of God and a mouthpiece for God greater than either Moses or Elijah.
—Moses and Elijah were Old Testament prophets. Moses represented the Law and the old covenant, and Elijah represented the messianic prophets who proclaimed the coming Messiah and the new covenant. Both confirmed Jesus’ messianic work.
—The disciples were initially afraid, but Jesus comforted them. Peter wanted to honor Jesus and the prophets by building dwellings for each of them. God interrupted Peter to affirm Jesus’ magnificence—His identity and divine nature.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophet Elijah was one of the most important religious figures in the Old Testament. He is mentioned thirty times in the New Testament, more than any other prophet.

Bible historians know virtually nothing about the early life of “Elijah the Tishbite” (see 1 Kings 18:1), except that he was a native of the village Tishbe, located in the region of Gilead, on the eastern side of the Jordan River in what is now modern-day Jordan. Elijah’s prophetic ministry occurred in the ninth century BC, during the reign of King Ahab, ruler of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). The name Elijah means “Yahweh is my God.” The narrative concerning Elijah gives no details regarding the prophet’s family nor indication of whether he ever married.

Elijah was active in the Northern Kingdom during the time of the Omride Dynasty, begun by King Omri, who ruled for twelve years from 885–874 BC (see 1 Kings 16:23-28). Omri was the sixth king of the Northern Kingdom, established by Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Upon Omri’s death, Ahab (referred to as Israel’s most wicked king in 1 Kings 21:25), became successor to Israel’s
throne, ruling for twenty-two years from 874–853 BC (see 1 Kings 16:29-30).

Elijah is most famously known for his confrontation against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:19-40). He was often at odds with Ahab and his wife, Queen Jezebel, who stands tall among the Bible’s most evil women. Elijah’s prophetic ministry lasted throughout much of the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophetic ministry of Elijah was primarily focused in Israel, the Northern Kingdom (see 1 Kings 15:25), and at Ephraim (see Isaiah 11:13; Jeremiah 31:6), the territory of Israel’s largest tribe. The Northern Kingdom was located in the central region of Israel.

The Northern Kingdom was established by Jeroboam I, son of Nebat, in 922 BC (see 1 Kings 12:19-20), when ten tribes of Israel withdrew politically from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam I built the city of Shechem (in the hill country) and made it Israel’s new capital (see 1 Kings 12:25) city. Instead of continuing the tradition of worship and celebration of Feasts at Solomon’s Temple in Israel, Jeroboam established Bethel in the south and Dan in the north as national worship centers (see 1 Kings 12:26-28)—devoted to the mixed practice of idolatry and a watered-down form of worship to God. Each location featured golden calves whom Jeroboam I declared to be the gods who had brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Jeroboam dared to ordain his own priests from among the worst people in

the land and appointed a substitutionary annual feast day to dissuade the people from making the customary pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Ahab became king and did evil in the sight of the Lord. Ahab continued the practices of his father, Omri, and walked in the wicked ways of Jeroboam. The Northern Kingdom lasted until the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC and the removal of most of the people from the land into exile (see 2 Kings 17:1-6, 7-10).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ahab: king of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) from 869–860 BCE. First Kings 16:28-33 notes that Ahab did more evil than any king before him. He was the son of Omri, founder of the Omride Dynasty in 876 BCE, and the husband of Queen Jezebel.

Elijah: the ninth-century BCE prophet who defied King Ahab and Jezebel. By a miraculous demonstration, Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:16-46) and killed them. Elijah, noted for many miracles, was taken to heaven in a whirlwind (see 2 Kings 2:11) without experiencing death.

Jezebel: remembered as one of the most wicked women in Scriptures. She was a murderous manipulator and idolater. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and was responsible for introducing Baal worship in Israel, along with the worship of Asherah (see 1 Kings 16:31). Jezebel married King Ahab as a political alliance between Israel and Sidon. The account of her life is found in 1 Kings 18:19; 19:1-9; 21:3; 21:8-16; 2 Kings 9:32-33.

Obadiah: the chief servant of King Ahab who
directed Ahab’s entire household. He was also the Lord’s faithful servant who hid one hundred prophets from Jezebel (see 1 Kings 18:3-5) and saved them alive.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

Ahab (verse 5)—Hebrew: *Achab* (akh-awb’): the seventh king of Israel who reigned from the capital of Samaria. During his marriage to Jezebel, Ahab backslid from the worship of God and began worshipping Baal. (See 1 Kings 18:16-18.) Ahab’s wickedness is his royal legacy (see 1 Kings 16:30).

Baals (verse 18)—Hebrew: *Ba’al* (bah’-al): heathen gods; false gods (plural) whom ancient pagans and backslidden Israelites falsely credited with rain, storms, fertility, and fruitfulness; “Baalim” (KJV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Leading with Courage
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Ahab and Obadiah Search for Grass (1 Kings 18:5-6)
   B. Elijah Returns to Samaria (1 Kings 18:7-16)
   C. Elijah Meets Ahab (1 Kings 18:17-18)

III. Concluding Reflection

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Leading with Courage**

The selection of leaders is one of the most important functions of organizations, communities, nations, and institutions of faith. There is no task more critical to the life of a local church than its selection of spiritual leadership. More than any other group, leaders make the most significant impact upon the life of the church and its people. Such individuals fulfill a sacred charge and absolutely must be men and women whose morality and faithfulness meet biblical requirements; whose spiritual gifts match their respective assignments; and whose reputations and track records prove an absolute commitment to the kingdom of God.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ does not thrive solely on strong budgets and ministry programming alone. It must be driven by that which moved Jesus—the passion to do God’s will. Spiritual leaders must always be concerned about matters that relate to the promotion, the proclamation, and the preservation of uncompromised truth—the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophet Elijah stood firm against the insidious and destructive leadership practices of King Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel. When others would turn a blind eye, the bold prophet raised his voice like thunder, declaring what the Lord said. Elijah
demonstrated the kind of courage that makes waves with civil authorities but makes God’s heart glad.

B. Biblical Background

Chapter 18 of 1 Kings is the highwater mark in Elijah’s ministry. Elijah is perhaps best remembered for the decisive confrontation between himself and the 450 prophets of Baal which occurs later in the chapter. At the opening of the chapter, Elijah obeys God’s command to go and meet king Ahab and announce to him that the three-year drought and famine was over (see 1 Kings 17:1). God was proving to Ahab and the nation that it is God who controls the rain.

King Ahab suffered the ravages of the drought as did everyone else in Samaria. The severe lack of rain had left the land scorched and burned, without relief, from the searing rays of the Middle Eastern sun. Without rain, many livestock died from thirst and starvation. Ahab ruled Israel, but the God of creation ruled the heavens. Neither Ahab nor any of his hundreds of pagan priests could bring rain to the land again. In desperation, Ahab called for his servant, Obadiah, to help him search for grass to keep the horses and mules alive. Ahab went in one direction and Obadiah in another. At some point, Obadiah ran into Elijah, who sent him with a message for King Ahab. Obadiah, in turn, told Elijah that the king had commanded a massive search for him throughout Israel. Obadiah feared that if he delivered the prophet’s message to the king, and Elijah disappeared again, then Ahab would surely kill him. Elijah promised that he would meet Ahab and not put Obadiah at risk. When Ahab saw Elijah, he called him the one who troubled Israel. Elijah reminded Ahab that all of the troubles that had come upon Israel resulted from the spiritual failings of the king’s own wicked family.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Ahab and Obadiah Search for Grass

(1 Kings 18:5-6)

And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

In verse 5, Ahab decides that saving the horses and mules alive required quick, decisive action. Consider the heart and mind of Ahab: there is no mention of the people (who are obviously suffering)—only mention of his animals. So, the King commands Obadiah to join him in a search for grass. The men searched hard in places where they had seen water or heard that water had been discovered. “Obadiah” was a very common name in ancient Hebrew society (see 1 Chronicles 3:21; 7:3; 8:38; 9:16; 2 Chronicles 17:7; 34:12; Ezra 8:9). The name means “servant of the Lord.” He was a righteous man who, when Jezebel tried to kill the prophets of God, hid them in the caves and provided them with bread and water.

Notice that Ahab is ultimately searching for water—that is, a place where water has
allowed grass to grow. Jezebel has introduced the worship of Baal, the so-called “fertility god” in ancient Israel, and established pagan worship as the state religion. For three full years, Baal worshippers had trusted Baal to produce rain; yet, for three years, Baal had failed the nation and proven powerless to provide the much-needed water. Ahab and Obadiah divided the land between them. We are not told which direction either man went, but it is likely that Obadiah headed north, since he met Elijah on his return from Zarephath, which is north of Samaria.

B. Elijah Returns to Samaria

(1 Kings 18:7-16)

And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, what have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord’s prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

These verses describe the return of Elijah to Samaria and his unexpected encounter with Obadiah, who had mixed feelings about seeing him. Obadiah searched for grass for the animals but met Elijah, whom no one had seen for years. Elijah repeatedly showed up in places where he was least expected. Obadiah immediately recognized the prophet and (out of deep respect) fell on his face and asked if it was really Elijah. The sense of the question conveys how unlikely it was that Elijah would suddenly appear in Samaria, unannounced.

Elijah’s first response is for Obadiah to go and tell Ahab, whom he does not mention by name, that Elijah is here. This is the first indication that Elijah has no respect for the king. Elijah acknowledged that Ahab was Obadiah’s lord (Hebrew: adoni), a term used to designate someone of a superior position. Verse 9 is the first of three times in which Obadiah expressed his concern about being killed by Ahab. Obadiah hesitated to deliver the prophet’s message because he feared Ahab would kill him. What would happen if Obadiah summoned Ahab to see Elijah and finds that Elijah still cannot be found? Wisely, Obadiah feared that Ahab would have him killed. He knew Ahab’s and Jezebel’s reputations. Therefore, his concern was quite valid. In verse 10, Obadiah told Elijah that his absence had precipitated a national crisis, and that the king had searched everywhere for him throughout Israel, and in every kingdom and nation (likely an exaggeration), leaving no stone unturned. Ahab even made each member of his search party take an oath that they had not seen nor were they harboring Elijah.

In verses 11-12, Obadiah appealed to Elijah not to put him in mortal danger with the king. He reminded Elijah of a good deed
he had done, suggesting that he did not deserve to die. By some measure of faith in Elijah’s words, Obadiah delivers the message to Ahab, indicating that he believed the Spirit of the Lord would ferry him away to some unknown location. This would leave him vulnerable to being killed by Ahab. Again, Obadiah expresses what he believes to be factual—Ahab would kill him and likely his family, too.

Note verse 12d—“But I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.” Although he worked for the king and may have even lived in the palace, Obadiah wanted Elijah to know that he was one of the servants of the Lord. He had been so since the time of his youth. Verse 13 is a long question wherein Obadiah wanted Elijah to know of his heroic actions to protect one hundred prophets. When Jezebel sought to slay them, Obadiah dutifully hid them in caves and fed them daily water and bread. Obadiah wanted to know if Elijah had heard about this act. Surely something so significant would have been known and talked about among the prophets.

Verses 14-16 are the conclusion to the meeting between Obadiah and Elijah. Obadiah repeated his fear and concern a third time: “Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.” Elijah offers Obadiah his personal assurance that he would meet Elijah that very day. Obadiah departed and went to meet Ahab. We are not told where he met Ahab or how much time elapsed between the meetings. Obviously when he heard the news of Elijah’s return, Ahab went quickly to meet him.

C. Elijah Meets Ahab
(1 Kings 18:17-18)

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.

The lesson concludes with the meeting of Ahab and Elijah at some unknown location. The two men did not exchange pleasantries. Rather, Ahab immediately calls Obadiah a troublemaker: “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” Ahab had contempt for Elijah; it was at his word that the rain had stopped. Ahab knew that Elijah was not just one of the many prophets in Israel; he was greater than all of them, given his extensive record of miracles. Elijah’s response was stern and direct—he was not responsible for the trouble that Israel experienced. To help Ahab pinpoint the real problem, he explained that it was the Omride Dynasty that caused problems for the nation. The father of Ahab was Omri, the patriarch and progenitor of the Omride dynasty (see 1 Kings 16:23-29). Elijah accused them of two major sins. First, they had forsaken the commandments of the Lord. The covenant relationship between God and Israel was tied to keeping His commandments (see Exodus 19:1-7; Leviticus 22:31; Numbers 36:13; Deuteronomy 4:13; 6:1; 11:26-27; 28:1, 9, 13). Israel was commanded to not adopt the ways nor the religion of the Canaanites when they entered the Promised Land. Over time, the Israelites fell into the trap of idol worship and were no longer interested in serving and following the Lord, the God of Israel.

Second, Elijah stated that the nation’s
troubles were the bitter fruit of pagan worship and spiritual compromise. God’s own people had given themselves to Baal. They had given Baal the honor that was due only to God.

God had warned Israel about being too familiar or friendly with Canaanite customs and religion. However, soon after possessing the Promised Land, Israel adopted the religious ways of the Canaanites and worshipped the Baalim (see Judges 2:11; 3:7; 8:37; 10:10; compare with 1 Samuel 7:4; 12:10; Jeremiah 2:23; 9:14; Hosea 2:13, 17; 11:2). The drought proved that Baalim was no match for the Lord of creation, because the Lord had caused it not to rain for three years. Baalim was powerless to make it rain after Elijah said it would not rain for three years.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The ancient Hebrew prophets were usually sent to preach to a people who had a reputation of deserting the Lord. Generations earlier, Israel had been commanded to remain faithful, yet they repeatedly turned aside to worship other gods. Is there a lesson for the church today in this ancient text? Yes! And it is this: God still requires faithfulness in His people. In this chapter of world history, there is a desperate need for Christians to return to the simple faith and unwavering commitment of the early Christian church. These are perilous times for the world, and difficult times for the church. The world needs bold witnesses who will challenge the voices of atheism (the belief that there is no God), moral compromise (in and out of the church), and secular humanism (the belief that the world is no longer governed by biblical principles or a biblical worldview). The Lord is still calling for those who love Him to be true and faithful to the charge and commands of the Master.

PRAYER

Lord, teach us to number our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. May we never stray from the path of righteousness. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 22-28, 2021)

Elijah: Prophet of Courage
MONDAY, March 22: “Elijah Is with Moses and Jesus” (Mark 9:2-8)
TUESDAY, March 23: “John the Baptist, the New Elijah” (Mark 9:9-13)
WEDNESDAY, March 24: “Elijah Is Sent to King Ahab” (1 Kings 18:1-4)
THURSDAY, March 25: “Elijah Challenges Baal Prophets” (1 Kings 18:20-26, 30-33, 36-39)
FRIDAY, March 26: “Elijah in the Wilderness with God” (1 Kings 19:1-8)
SATURDAY, March 27: “God Commissions Elijah for New Work” (1 Kings 19:9b-15)
SUNDAY, March 28: “King Ahab Meets Prophet Elijah” (1 Kings 18:5-18)
THE SUFFERING SERVANT
BRINGS SALVATION

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT TOPIC:** Finding Hope in the Midst of Oppression

**YOUTH TOPIC:** Our Help Has Come

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Salvation Is Sealed

**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Their Eyes Were Opened!

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Philippians 2:1-11

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Luke 24:1-35

**PRINT PASSAGE:** Isaiah 53:4-11a

**KEY VERSE:** Isaiah 53:5

**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Luke 24

**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 24:13-16, 22-35

**KEY VERSE:** Luke 24:31

**Isaiah 53:4-11—KJV**

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the L ORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off

**Isaiah 53:4-11—NIV**

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the L ORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off
out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.
9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.
10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: In life’s darkest moments, people wonder if there is still hope for the future. Where can we find the promise of joy to overcome our deepest sorrow? Isaiah offers us the hope of God’s Suffering Servant, revealed in the Gospels as the resurrected Jesus.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
2. Affirm the power of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Jesus, written some seven hundred years before His birth.
3. Share the story of the Suffering Servant, who is the resurrected Jesus Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Christians today worship a Savior who was victorious through nonviolent sacrifice, not military conquest.
—Believers today should follow the example of Jesus, who sought to serve rather than dominate others.
—Christians today view Jesus’ being crucified as a willing sacrifice, not as martyrdom.
—As believers, we proclaim Jesus’ crucifixion as the payment for our sins.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus’ followers quickly gave in to disbelief and confusion.
—Two of Jesus’ followers were walking on the road to a village called Emmaus. Jesus joined them, engaging in conversation and asking why they were sad. Neither of them recognized Jesus.
—Cleopas shared with Jesus the women’s account of Jesus’ resurrection; the story was rejected by the disciples because it did not make sense to them. He explained that Peter had run to the
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

By many measures, Isaiah stands at the pinnacle of all of the prophetic books. The style and prose of his writings ranks him as one without equal, hence his place as the first prophetic book in the canon of Scripture. Isaiah is quoted 66 times in the New Testament and there are more than 340 New Testament references to his writing. With the exception of Psalms, Isaiah is quoted more than any other Old Testament book.

Like many of the prophets, we know very little about the life of Isaiah. Isaiah’s influence and prophetic activity covered the reigns of four kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all of whom ruled the Southern Kingdom of Judah (ca. 740–686 BC; see 2 Kings 19:2, 5-6, 20; 20:1, 4, 7-8; 2 Chronicles 26:22; 32:20, 32). He began his prophetic ministry at a young age, believed to be about the time that Uzziah died in 740 BC (see Isaiah 6:1). He lived and preached during some of the most turbulent times in the history of Judah. Among his contemporaries were the prophets Hosea and Amos, both preaching in the Northern Kingdom, and Micah, who was also active in the Southern Kingdom. Isaiah, unlike many of the other prophets, had a close relationship with the kings of Judah, especially Hezekiah.

Isaiah was deeply concerned about the social injustices he witnessed in Judah, especially those perpetrated against the poor by the king and the wealthy elite. He called into question the leadership of the kings, especially that of Ahaz (see 2 Kings 16:1-20; compare Isaiah 7:1-9, 10-16). Isaiah prophesied to a nation full of corruption that had turned away from the Lord God (see Isaiah 1:3-4). He called upon the people to turn from evil, wash themselves (spiritually), and seek justice (see Isaiah 1:16). Among the most important prophecies of Isaiah are those that looked forward to the coming of the Messiah (see 7:14-16; 9:7; 52:12–53:12). Of all the prophetic books, none stands as tall as Isaiah.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Christians across the centuries have turned to the book of Isaiah for comfort and inspiration. The prophet Isaiah spoke across the ages once to announce the coming of a Savior and then to certify Him as the one who suffers on behalf of the world. Isaiah proclaimed the Servant as the one who took upon Himself our pain. Yet, the study of the book of Isaiah is not without theological and literary debate. One of the principal questions concerning Isaiah relates to the literary unity of the book. Is Isaiah a composite work, consisting of two or three different books, woven into one? Or is it a single work by the Isaiah who is mentioned in the opening verses as Isaiah, son of Amoz? The question is raised because the contents of the book address at least two different time periods. Chapters 1–39 cover the period 740–700 BC, which covers a period of about forty years—up to the time of the death of Hezekiah. The second half of the book, chapters 40–66, focus
on a period of time after the Babylonian Exile, which ended in 538 BC with the conquest of Babylon by the Persians, led by King Cyrus. In two passages, Cyrus is mentioned as one who is the shepherd of the Lord and as one who is God’s anointed (see Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). Between these two sections of the book are differences in the writing style, language, words, and historical time periods. Christian tradition has maintained that the author of Isaiah was a single individual whom God used to declare a time when the Servant of the Lord would suffer for all.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Suffering Servant: appears in Isaiah 52:12–53:12 and is widely accepted to be a messianic image of the crucified and risen Christ. Isaiah identified Him as a “root out of dry ground, despised, and rejected by men.”

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Afflicted (verse 4)—Hebrew: anah (daw-baw’): defiled; to be bowed down or afflicted.

Servant (verse 11)—Hebrew: ebed (eh’-bed): slave; a person who performs duties for others.

Sheep (verse 6)—Hebrew: tson (tsone): small cattle; sheep and goats; flock.

Suffering (verse 4)—Hebrew: makob (mak-obe’): pain; “sorrows” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Jesus Christ Died at the Right Time
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. He Was Wounded for Our Transgressions (Isaiah 53:4-6)
   B. A Lamb for the Slaughter (Isaiah 53:7-9)
   C. He Was an Offering for Sin (Isaiah 53:10-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Jesus Christ Died at the Right Time

   The message of the Gospel is that at the right time, Christ died on the Cross for our sins (see Romans 5:6). The Greeks had two primary definitions of “time.” Chronos refers to everyday time. Chronos gives us the word chronology. Chronos is sequential time that moves from one minute, day, or month to the next. Paul did not use the word chronos.

   The other word for “time” is kairos—opportune or decisive time. It refers to the right time to do something. It has nothing to do with chronological time; rather, it refers to the decisive moment (see Ecclesiastes 3:1-10) when conditions come together to produce the right moment for something powerful to happen.

   The good news of the Gospel is that Calvary is not the final point of God’s redemptive plan of salvation. The hope of Resurrection Sunday is the church’s great high moment—a
recurring reminder that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of God’s redemption for humanity.

B. Biblical Background

At the heart of the second half of the book of Isaiah are the Servant Songs, which begin at 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:12–53:12. The prophet proclaims God’s gracious forgiveness of Judah in Isaiah 40:1-2, that Judah has paid the price for her sins of rebellion and idolatry. In 52:12–53:13, there is a focus shift from Israel the servant nation to an individual Servant, who is the Servant of the Lord. In the opening paragraph of the Servant Song, He is high and exalted, yet His appearance would be marred by men. Isaiah says that He will “sprinkle the nations,” a presumed reference to His cleansing or purifying the nations of sin with the blood of His sacrificial death.

This Servant is not the nation, but an individual. He becomes the one who takes upon Himself the brokenness and sins of the human race. God has willingly laid upon Him our griefs and sorrows—He has borne the sins of humanity and healed the world of sin by His sacrifice. The early Christians saw these verses fulfilled by Jesus Christ—the “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). The Servant of the Lord is the one who vicariously suffers a substitutionary death in the place of sinners. In these verses, the meaning of “suffering” is redefined. God allowed one who was completely innocent to stand in the place of others. This particular Servant Song is quoted several times in the New Testament as a description of Jesus’ ministry, death, and burial (see Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37; 1 Peter 2:22). Isaiah 53:11b (NIV) states that at the end of His suffering He will see the light, a likely reference to the resurrection of Jesus. This passage speaks of the horrors of the Crucifixion and the joyful hope of Jesus’ resurrection.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. He Was Wounded for Our Transgressions

(Isaiah 53:4-6)

Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Verse 4 begins a detailed description of the work of the Servant of the Lord. This verse is often cited in connection with Matthew 8:17—that faith in Jesus Christ makes it possible for all sicknesses and diseases to be healed. Matthew quoted this verse to show that Jesus’ healing ministry was a fulfilling of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Him (see Matthew 8:16).

The Servant of the Lord is the one who takes upon Himself the weight of human sin (see 2 Peter 2:24). The pronoun “He” is emphatic and places the burden squarely on the one previously mentioned in verses 1-3. The prophet declared that this is what the Servant of the Lord has done—He Himself, the one who was a “root out of dry ground,” despised, forsaken, and shunned for His appearance. This is the very one who has
“borne” (Hebrew: nasa) our griefs. “Borne” has in it the idea of enduring something unpleasant or harmful. It also denotes the lifting of a heavy weight. Isaiah saw a vision of the Suffering Servant’s bearing the weight of our griefs (Hebrew: holi), which denotes miseries and afflictions. What we were not able to bear, the Suffering Servant did for us.

Second, He “carried” (Hebrew: sabal) our griefs, a word close in meaning to “borne” but implying the carrying away of a weight laid upon a person. In these words, there is an obvious allusion to the scapegoat of the atonement, who carried sins of the people away into the wilderness (see Leviticus 16:20-22). Here, we see the very heart of God, whose love and grace are extended in abundance. He loved the world enough to lay upon His Son the sorrows, pains, and grief of sinful humanity. In spite of what the Servant of the Lord has done, “we,” an emphatic denotation of corporate responsibility, share accountability for the Servant’s burden. We are responsible for what God has done to Him. He was “stricken” (Hebrew: naga)—that is, hit or plagued with a condition of sickness or disease. The Servant was also “smitten and afflicted,” meaning that His pain was reinforced on behalf of others.

Verse 5 points out that everything the Servant of the Lord endured was for the benefit of someone else. The people’s transgressions brought these things upon the Servant. The words used by the prophet are no light afflictions; rather, they denote the gravity, or heaviness, of the sins for which He is afflicted. “Wounded” is translated from a word that means “pierced through”; “bruised” implies being broken in pieces; and “chastisement” points to being disciplined by God. Isaiah’s point is that the Servant was not punished for His own sin, but for others’ sin. We are healed, not of physical conditions but of the spiritual maladies of sin, rebellion, iniquity, and transgressions (as supported by the context). The Suffering Servant is our peace—He has cleared the way for reconciliation with God (see Romans 5:1, 10; Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20; 1 Peter 2:25). None are exempt from the judgment of God, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (see Romans 3:23).

These verses are among the most poignant and powerful expressions of God’s redemptive love in Scripture. They reveal the great lengths to which God went to reverse the rebellious sin imputed to humanity by the fall of Adam. Isaiah’s prophecy reveals a shadow of the Cross, the ultimate expression of God’s condemnation of sin and the clearest manifestation of His undying love for His creation. When Jesus Christ died on the Cross, He bore our sins in His body and stood in our place.

**B. A Lamb for the Slaughter (Isaiah 53:7-9)**

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Verse 7 begins the third paragraph in the Servant Song of Isaiah. The passage has
been seen by the early Christians as a lens to the last day of the earthly life of Jesus. Jesus was arrested in an olive grove, tried by the religious and civil authorities, and paraded through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, which means the “Place of the Skull (see Matthew 26:36, 57; 27:1-2, 33). Though innocent, the Servant faces the hardships of oppression, which eventually leads to His death and, ultimately, a burial among those who are labeled as wicked and rich.

Isaiah depicted the Servant’s being forced to endure the harshest and most brutal treatment. The word oppressed (Hebrew: nagas), in Isaiah’s context, recalls the image of the Egyptian taskmasters who forced the Hebrew people to make bricks without straw (see Exodus 1:8-11; compare Exodus 3:7; 5:6, 10-14; Isaiah 9:4; Zechariah 9:8).

Isaiah develops a sheep metaphor of the sheep, positioning one righteous sheep against the many who have gone astray. He was afflicted and tormented, not because he deserved it, but because he was compelled to suffer on behalf of others. The imagery of a helpless lamb fits the motif of the Suffering Servant, who dies for others. He does not just die; rather, he is “slaughtered,” which literally means “butchered.” In these words, we see the Lamb being led to the slaughter, willingly submitting to His tormentors. In this is the image of Jesus, who stood before His accusers and never voiced a word of complaint nor opposition (see Matthew 26:62-63; 27:12, 14; Luke 23:9). He was the “Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world” (see John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:6, 12; 13:8).

C. He Was an Offering for Sin (Isaiah 53:10-11)

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall hear their iniquities.

Verse 10 states that “yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him” and bring unspeakable grief upon the Servant. Here, we are told that the suffering of the Servant was not some random misfortune, but an event devised and directed by the Lord Himself. Christians interpret this verse as another messianic reference to Jesus’ sufferings. The intense pain and humiliation of Jesus’ death occurred according to the predetermined, planned purpose of God. Jesus died in our place. He stood where we should be standing. He became sin for humanity—our substitute. He was the sacrifice for our sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul wrote, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (NASB). He became the Lamb who took away the sins of the world (see John 1:29; compare Matthew 1:21; Romans 5:6; 1 Peter 1:19). Jesus died for our sins; this is the central truth of the Gospel. His death on the Cross was not the execution of a willing martyr. It was not the tragic ending of a good man who sought to do great things. It was not the death of a helpless victim, nor was His death an accident. He willingly became our substitute, paying the penalty for human sin and reconciling us to God. In Acts 2:23, the apostle Peter declares, “Him, being delivered by the determinate
counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”: He became our substitute.

Verse 10b reads, “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. “Seed” symbolizes self-perpetuating life. It is an indication of the possibility of fertility. When God created the world, He put into every living organism the seed to perpetuate itself. Our children are our seed; they are the extension of ourselves, reaching into the future. Kill and corrupt the seed and the future harvest is dim and dark. The ever-increasing tide of murder and community killings is an indication that the seed has been corrupted by sin, social isolation, systemic and endemic poverty, pervasive ignorance, economic exploitation, and a continuation of the legacy of slavery. This growing wave of violence means that some family names are being snuffed out. It means that the self-perpetuating life God has given us will cease because of senseless killing.

Verse 11a is the conclusion of the lesson and it looks forward to a time when the Servant experiences joy and satisfaction at the end of His assignment. Most scholarly interpreters translate the word satisfied as “light,” indicating that it speaks of the Servant’s resurrection. It is a direct reference to the resurrection of the Savior and an allusion to eternal life. Isaiah could not have known that he was being shown an image of the death and resurrection of the eternal Son of God. Yet, he saw this event in the Spirit; he saw the Savior’s being crushed and killed, which might have ended every possibility of a new generation, but not in this case—for every believer is the offspring of His resurrection. Who are His offspring?

Everyone who believes that God has raised Him from the dead and has been born again.

All of the New Testament writers and saints bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:20 that Jesus Christ is the first fruits of them that sleep. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep. The resurrection of Jesus Christ stands at the opposite end of hopelessness. We are not a people looking for pity; rather, we are people rejoicing in the victory we have through the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’ resurrection gives us a glimpse of what God is going to do with us.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Today, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central message of the Gospel and the most important faith tenet of the Christian church. The Resurrection is also the central theme of each of the New Testament writers. The early Christians preached the Resurrection; the message still stands as the foremost element of Christian preaching today (see Romans 6:8-9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22). The apostle Peter’s first sermon on Pentecost is the earliest preaching of the Resurrection message, according to Acts 2:23-24 (NASB): This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Luke 24:1-35 shares that the women—
Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James—rose very early on the first day of the week, which would be Sunday. They made their way to Jesus’ burial site to perform the customary anointing of the deceased with precious oils and spices. As they made their way to the site of the tomb, they discussed how they would manage the stone that covered the entrance. (Many burial places were caves, carved out of the side of hills.) But before they finished their discussion, they arrived at the tomb and found the stone already rolled away. When they went inside the tomb, they did not find the body of Jesus. You can only imagine the surprise these women felt. While standing in a state of complete bewilderment, suddenly there appeared two men standing before them in clothing that gleamed like lightning. These were not human beings; they were angels sent by God to bring good news to the frightened women that Jesus was alive.

The women were terrified, but reverently bowed their faces to the ground, refusing to look up. The angels then said to the women, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how he spoke to you while he was still in Galilee” (Luke 24:5-6, NASB). Galilee is a region where Jesus conducted His ministry—the place where they first met the Savior and Lord.

“He has risen!” This is the message we proclaim today and every day. The Lord Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. It is Good News in a world dominated by a never-ending news cycle of bad news. It is Good News in a world where greed keeps millions locked in poverty and separated from the bounty of the earth. He has risen!

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, may we appreciate the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant, Your Son, Jesus Christ. Today, we celebrate His resurrection from the dead, and rejoice that He is the first fruits of our resurrection. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(March 29–April 4, 2021)*

**The Suffering Servant Brings Salvation**

**MONDAY,** March 29: “Isaiah Foretells the Suffering Servant” (Isaiah 52:13–53:3)

**TUESDAY,** March 30: “Jesus, the Suffering Servant” (Acts 8:26-35)

**WEDNESDAY,** March 31: “Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection” (Luke 18:31-34)

**THURSDAY,** April 1: “Jesus—Raised from Death” (Luke 24:1-12)


**SUNDAY,** April 4: “Christ Suffered and Interceded for Sinners” (Isaiah 53:4-11)
Ezra 10:1-12—KJV

NOW WHEN Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God,

Ezra 10:1-12—NIV

WHILE EZRA was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.

2 Then Shekaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel.

3 “Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law.

4 “Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it.”

5 So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath.
and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days.

10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

6 Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

7 A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem.

8 Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

9 Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain.

10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel’s guilt.

11 “Now honor the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.”

12 The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: “You are right! We must do as you say.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people lose their sense of spiritual direction and turn away from the values they once honored. How can we renew our commitment to the values we once cherished? Ezra led the people of Judah in a prayer of repentance, read from the Book of the Law, and worshipped the Lord with them.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Contrast the people’s need for repentance with their joyful response to God’s Word.
2. Believe in their hearts that God’s truth is eternal.
3. Grow in their determination to serve God in their community and beyond.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Each foreign/unbelieving wife would be given a formal “bill of divorcement,” restoring her to the status of an unmarried woman. This meant she was free to marry another husband.

—Ezra demonstrated leadership by throwing himself before the Lord in front of the entire assembly.

—Israel wanted to demonstrate their absolute conviction toward repentance by disavowing their unlawful marital unions.

—Marriages to foreign/unbelieving spouses had to be dissolved because they brought spiritual compromise and idolatry, which corrupted Israel’s worship of Yahweh.

—The people’s sincerity in confession and repentance was demonstrated by an oath before God, binding them to do what they had promised.

—The mandate to avoid marriage to foreigners/unbelievers was based on a religious imperative, rather than a cultural or racial bias.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Nehemiah was devoted to God and became a leader among the Jews to rebuild the wall around the Temple that Zerubbabel had built seventy years earlier.

—Nehemiah was a contemporary of Ezra’s, the priest, scribe, and spiritual leader of the people.

—Ezra read God’s Law to all who were gathered. The people understood God’s Word and responded by repenting and celebrating.

—Ezra gave the people a chance to give offerings to the needy and to praise the Lord for seven days.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In 597 BC, the army of King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, captured the city, plundered the Temple, and carried the first group of exiles to Babylon (see 2 Kings 24:12-14). The poorest people of the land remained in the city of Jerusalem. These events took place during the reign of King Jehoiachin, who was among the first group of Judeans taken into exile, along with his mother and wives (see 2 Kings 24:15-16). Over the course of the next ten years the Babylonians periodically plundered and laid siege to Jerusalem. Finally, in 587 BCE—in the eleventh year of the reign of King Zedekiah—the Babylonians broke through the city walls and captured Jerusalem. They proceeded to burn down the house of the Lord, the king’s house, and all the houses of the city, and then tore down the walls around the city (see 2 Kings 25:8-12). They captured and carried tens of thousands of Jerusalem residents into exile to Babylon. This catastrophic event came to be known as the Babylonian Exile (see Jeremiah 52:24-30). The destruction of Solomon’s Temple marked the end of the First Temple Period.

In 538 BC, King Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonians and released all the conquered nations that the Babylonians had taken into captivity. Among the people he released were the Judeans, many of whom returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak. They were successful in rebuilding the altar and, after years of delay and opposition, finally completed the second temple in 515 BC (see Ezra 1–6).

In 458 BC, in the seventh year of the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra the scribe came to Jerusalem (see Ezra 7:7-8). He was skilled in the Law of Moses and more than likely had been
educated in Hebrew schools while in Babylon. Ezra went to Jerusalem to teach the Law of Moses to the people who had returned and to help restore the spiritual life and Hebrew culture to Jerusalem. The first six chapters of the book of Ezra cover a period in which Ezra was not present in Jerusalem. It is not until chapter 7 that he appears in the book and in Jerusalem.

In the Jewish Talmud, Ezra and Nehemiah were considered to be a single book. There are various traditions that indicate Ezra is the author of both Ezra and Nehemiah and others that hold that Nehemiah was the author. The book covers the period of the first returnees and the subsequent restoration of the priesthood and annual festivals.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The question of divorce and mixed marriage has been a thorny issue for thousands of years. It was always the intention of God that a covenant of marriage would remain unbroken until death. For spiritual rather than racial reasons, social liaisons and intermarriage outside the culture and faith of Israel were absolutely forbidden by the Law of Moses. Prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses warned the people not to enter marital relationships with the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites (see Deuteronomy 7:1). God’s people were to make no covenants with the people of the land nor show them any favor—to utterly destroy them. Why such a drastic measure? Israel was a holy nation, established and consecrated by God to be a light and witness for other nations. God had forbidden all social mingling and other entanglements with the people of the land to minimize the risk and influence of pagan idol worship.

God strictly prohibited ungodly intermarriage: “you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons” (Deuteronomy 7:3, NASB). Blended marriages between Israelites and pagans would not only risk turning Hebrew sons and daughters away from following the Lord, but also compromise the preservation and passing of the faith to the next generation. Rather than serving the Lord, Moses had warned that the sons of Israel who took pagan women as wives would begin to serve other gods.

The biblical prohibition of intermarriage is not based upon racial prejudice but upon a commitment to safeguard future generations from the negative spiritual influence of pagan religion. The fact that several of the leaders, rulers, and even priests had married women of the land posed a real problem to Ezra.

Without understanding the biblical foundations of Ezra’s actions, one might falsely conclude that Ezra was merely a merciless man who broke up the families of every man who had taken foreign wives. Many biblical interpreters attribute Ezra’s relative lack of popularity to the bold action he took to defy the spread of idolatry among God’s people. This action of driving away “foreigners” may be seen as the exception in Jewish culture, not the rule. The Law specifically required compassionate treatment of foreigners living among God’s people (see Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ezra: He was the main character in chapters 7–10 of the book that bears his name. He was a scribe and a man skilled in the Law of Moses. He is most
remembered for the reforms that he led during the period of the Restoration and return from Babylonian Exile.

Jehohanan: one of the priests who served at the Temple in Jerusalem. He was the son of a man named Eliashib. He allowed Ezra to use his residence at the Temple for prayer and fasting.

Shechaniah: one of the sons of Jehiel and the one who alerted Ezra of the severity of the problem with mixed marriages among the Israelites (see Ezra 10:2). Shechaniah belonged to the family of Elam, who were part of the remnant of Israel that relocated from Persia to Jerusalem with Ezra.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Confessing (verse 1)—Hebrew: yadah (yaw-daw’): to cast down; throwing down; “confessed” (KJV).
Covenant (verse 3)—Hebrew: berith (ber-eth’): a treaty, agreement, pledge.
Foreign (verse 2)—Hebrew: nokri (nok-ree’): alien; pagan; “strange” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Chief Cause of Divorce
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Ezra’s Contrition (Ezra 10:1)
   B. Shechaniah’s Call for Action (Ezra 10:2-4)
   C. Ezra’s Response to Shechaniah’s Request (Ezra 10:5-6)
   D. The People Gather in Jerusalem (Ezra 10:7-9)
   E. The Call to Separate (Ezra 10:10-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Chief Cause of Divorce
   The subject of divorce and remarriage is just as difficult today as it was during the days of Jesus. During the time when Jesus answered questions about the lawfulness of putting away one’s spouse—divorce and remarriage were hotly debated topics in Jewish society. In His discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus held that God’s original intention was that marriage would be permanent.

   Divorce causes a multitude of problems, often with women and children paying the highest price. Women are often left to bear full financial, spiritual, and social responsibility for
their children and to manage all the problems associated with daily survival. Sometimes, fathers receive custody, but typically, this is more an exception than the rule. In many instances, divorce plunges most women into poverty within four months of the husband’s departure. Divorce leaves children feeling abandoned and rejected.

Even among Christians, the divorce rate is about the same as the general population’s. The challenge that we have as Christians is not departing from the absolute will of God—the gold standard of God’s original intention.

Jesus said the chief cause of divorce is one thing—hardness of heart. In the Scripture text for this week’s lesson, Ezra dissolved “unequally yoked” family unions established on the premise of rebellion and disobedience to God’s law. Israelite men had taken foreign wives and given their daughters as wives to foreign men, in defiance of God’s word on the subject. Ezra has often been misunderstood and criticized for his role in trying to reverse a wrong that should never have occurred among God’s people. The claim that Ezra was unfair or prejudicial is without support. Ezra was not striving to cause upheaval among the families. The question of whether to obey or defy God’s Word based on human reason, sentiment, convenience, or preference should never be such a hotly debated subject. Ezra did not write the law of God, he simply enforced it.

B. Biblical Background

Over the course of about one hundred years, there were three groups of exiles who returned from Babylon. The first group left Babylon in 538 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The second group of exiles returned while led by a scribe named Ezra. Nehemiah led the third and final group of exiles from Persia around 444 BC. A deeply spiritual and faithful man, Ezra was able to trace his lineage sixteen generations and knew that he was a descendant of Aaron’s, the first high priest (see Ezra 7:1-5). Ezra was instrumental in establishing ethnic purity among the Jewish people, who had returned from exile in Babylon. Because of his own devotion to the Law, Ezra became particularly concerned with the remnant’s practice of intermarriage with the people of the land.

Ezra was instrumental in restoring many of the religious feasts and celebrations that had been forsaken over the years (see Nehemiah 8:13-18). He put an end to the practice of mixed marriages between Jews and people from the neighboring nations (see Ezra 10:1-3).

The account of Ezra’s campaign against mixed marriages is found in Ezra 9–10. The leading culprits of this practice were the princes and rulers of the people (see Ezra 9:2). Grieved by the news, Ezra tore his garments and pulled out some of his hair, after which he sat down in the Temple complex, appalled and deeply saddened that the remnant of Israel had contaminated themselves and been unfaithful to God (see Ezra 9:4). After sitting in grief for a while, Ezra was joined by a host of people who also felt the burden of the people’s unfaithfulness. How is it that God’s own people are often unoffended by sin and disobedience that grieves Him, but greatly offended by any form of rebuke and correction of sin? Driving
away foreign wives and their children may have been hurtful and harsh, but the fault was not with Ezra, but with those who disregarded God’s law from the beginning and established relationships and families that violated God’s specific command.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Ezra’s Contrition

(Ezra 10:1)

NOW WHEN Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

Verse 1 marks the conclusion of Ezra’s prayer that began in Ezra 9:5. Ezra prayed near the outer court of the Temple complex, a large, open area accessible to both men and women. His prayer contained four elements: openness, confession, weeping, and prostrating himself on the ground. Evidently, Ezra was not engaged in a quiet act of meditation—others both heard and saw him praying. His public prayer drew the attention of a large crowd of men, women, and children. Why was this prominent Jewish scribe behaving in such a manner in public? Ezra did not hide what he was doing; the words of his prayer were heard clearly by all who gathered around him. As they listened to Ezra praying, the people were moved to express their own contrition before God and to bitterly weep in the Temple complex.

B. Shechaniah’s Call for Action

(Ezra 10:2-4)

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage and do it.

Shechaniah’s family were among the first group of exiles who returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC, with another small band coming to Jerusalem with Ezra in 457 BC (see Ezra 2:7; 8:7). Shechaniah responded to the anguish of Ezra’s prayer of confession by admitting that they had violated the covenant with God by marrying strange wives. This is a reference to the eight nations of the peoples of the land mentioned in Ezra 9:1 (compare Deuteronomy 7:3-4). By taking strange wives, the men introduced customs, religion, and practices that were forbidden to Israel by God. This kind of spiritual compromise was the cause of King Solomon’s demise. Shechaniah believed that correcting the situation with bold leadership and decisive action would be the best way to avoid judgment and future consequences for the faith community.

Standing together before God, the people confessed their sins, read from the Book of the Law, and vowed to put away or divorce their wives, sending them away along with the children that were born to them (see 2 Chronicles 15:8-15; 29:15; Nehemiah 9:38). Israel’s covenant with God was the foundation of their relationship with God. They had promised to honor God by worshipping Him alone and placing no other gods before Him. They had vowed to live in
covenant with God and obedience to God's law. Their ancestors had openly violated God's covenant. Now, again, many had dared to live daily in open violation of the very covenant that led the nation into Babylonian captivity. Shechaniah assured Ezra that if he would lead, others would stand with him against the unauthorized marriages. The necessary action, while difficult, would be done according to the law of God, haphazardly or without sensitivity (see Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

In verse 4, Shechaniah encouraged Ezra to rise and take the necessary steps to purge Israel of the scourge that was on the nation. Ezra was the nation's spiritual leader and conscience, and Shechaniah was convinced that the people would stand with him. The decision to break up families was not easy, because it involved ripping apart deep bonds of emotion and kinship.

C. Ezra's Response to Shechaniah's Request
(Ezra 10:5-6)

Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

Verse 5 reveals Ezra's clear decisiveness. The text gives no indication of the time lapse between Shechaniah's words and Ezra's actions. Ezra would not have to go far to find the chief priests and Levites—for they were within the confines of the Temple complex. The third group he brought into the discussions included “all Israel,” the general population of the former exiles, or repatriates who returned from Babylon. The people who remained in Jerusalem are believed to have been the ones who intermarried with the people of the land—they were hence shunned from identifying with the rest of the faith community. Ezra had the priests, the Levites, and all the people of Israel to swear obedience and allegiance to God.

Ezra prayed openly in the Temple complex before retreating to a private location to continue his prayers and without public interference or observation. His prayer was to God alone—Ezra had no need for an audience. His manner of praying speaks to the sincerity with which he approached the matter.

The text mentions a man, Jehohanan, the son of Eliashib, whose identity cannot be confirmed. The name of Eliashib (Jehohanan's father) was evidently a rather common name because it, too, appears in several verses of Ezra (see Ezra 10:24, 27, 36; compare Nehemiah 12:10). The text suggests that these men descended from prominent families in Jerusalem.

D. The People Gather in Jerusalem
(Ezra 10:7-9)

And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.
In verse 7, “they” refers to the princes and the elders, who conferred with Ezra to convene a national assembly to address the matter of unlawful intermarriage. The proclamation was given as an oral declaration delivered to all of the “children of the captivity,” a clear reference to the people who had returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel in 538 BC (see Ezra 2:1-64) and with Ezra in 444 BC. It was a simple proclamation that all the repatriates would gather at Jerusalem. It did not take long to spread the word, as there were only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, represented within an area that ranged approximately thirty-five miles from north to south and twenty-five miles east to west.

In verse 8, all the people had to assemble in Jerusalem within three days. The decree was from the princes and the elders and not just from Ezra. Two forms of punishment would come to the person who failed to show up. First, all his possessions would be confiscated. Ezra was within his legal authority to do this, having been granted authority by King Artaxerxes of Persia (see Ezra 7:26). Second, the individual (along with his family) would be ex-communicated from the assembly of the exiles. These exiles were Jews, especially the priests who traced their lineage back to the time prior to the captivity in Babylon (see Ezra 2:61-63).

Verse 9 reports that all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at the appointed time in Jerusalem. The gathering was held on the twentieth day of the ninth month, December 20. There was much uncertainty and fear over exactly what would happen next. The people stood trembling, likely because of the proclamation itself and the cool December temperatures.

Ezra acted to uphold God’s law, which forbade marriage to foreigners. As a devout Jew, Ezra was personally bound to uphold the Law, but he was further directed by King Artaxerxes to implement the Law of Moses and ensure that all the people followed it. Making and affirming major decisions within the context of a larger body ensure that no one person bears the weight of the decisions’ unpopularity. Church leaders would do well to learn from Ezra’s experience.

E. The Call to Separate
(Ezra 10:10-12)

And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

In verse 10, Ezra did not act on this case as a disgruntled member of the community, but with the full authority of his office as the priest. He reminded the offenders that they had transgressed God’s law. Ezra addressed everyone, not just the guilty men but the whole assembly of Jews, those who were guilty of standing by and giving silent consent to the situation. “Transgressed” denotes an intentional act of breaking God’s law (see Numbers 5:6; Joshua 22:31; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 12:2; compare Luke 15:18-19, 21). The practice of idolatry was a violation of the first commandment, but marrying outside the faith of Israel was an abomination.

Ezra commanded that the violators confess their sins and separate from their
unbelieving wives. “Separate” denotes a kind of divorce based upon the Law.

Ezra was a leader unafraid to make a hard decision. What he did was necessary to ensure the preservation of the nation and to bring the people in line with the Word of God. Ezra reflects the heart of a leader who listens to God’s Word and follows without regard for public popularity.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the greatest flaws of the ancient Israelites was their consistent failure to learn from past mistakes and apply the wisdom of tough lessons learned to their present context. What does this mean? Throughout their journey from slavery in Egypt to exile in Babylon, Israel repeated the same mistakes again and again. We see this cyclical pattern of behavior especially throughout the book of Judges. Before Israel entered the Promised Land, Moses warned them to make no covenant with nor allow their sons and daughters to intermarry with the people of the land. Why? God had marked them as a holy nation, set apart from the other nations to serve Him. The ancestors failed to heed Moses’ words and in time, the nation chased after the various gods and idols of the surrounding nations—until 587 BC, when the final straw was broken and the last of the twelve tribes was carried away into Babylon captivity. After spending more than fifty years in captivity, the exiles were released, and many began to return to Jerusalem. Many of them had never been to Israel and had no idea of what to expect.

On the other side of captivity, Israel would make the same mistakes as were made by their ancestors, including entering into forbidden marriage covenants. Many regard Ezra’s leadership as harsh and unfathomable, but his actions were anchored in God’s law and were merely a response to the people’s own disobedience. Sometimes, God requires tough actions, hard decisions, and actions that others may call unreasonable or harsh.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, teach us to number our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Give us sound minds and ready spirits to hear Your words and obey them. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 5-11, 2021)

Ezra: Faith-and-Action Preacher

MONDAY, April 5: “A Light to Jews and Gentiles” (Acts 26:19-23)
TUESDAY, April 6: “Live the New Life in Christ” (Ephesians 4:17-24)
WEDNESDAY, April 7: “Keep Land Faithful to Godly Practices” (Leviticus 18:24-30)
THURSDAY, April 8: “Ignoring God’s Laws Leads to Judgment” (Zechariah 7:8-14)
FRIDAY, April 9: “People Are Anxious to Hear the Law” (Nehemiah 7:73b–8:6)
SATURDAY, April 10: “People Respond Actively to the Law” (Nehemiah 8:9-12)
SUNDAY, April 11: “Committed to a Life of Obedience” (Ezra 10:1-12)
NEHEMIAH: THE CAPTIVE CUPBEARER REBUILDS A NATION

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Initiating Renewal
YOUTH TOPIC: A Plan for Restoration

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Prayer Builds Faith
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Rebuilding the Wall

DEVOTIONAL READING
Daniel 9:4-6, 15-19

ADULT/ YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Nehemiah 2:11-20; 13:1-22
PRINT PASSAGE: Nehemiah 2:11-20
ADULT KEY VERSE: Nehemiah 2:17
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Nehemiah 2:18

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:11-20
PRINT PASSAGE: Nehemiah 2:11-20
KEY VERSE: Nehemiah 2:20

Nehemiah 2:11-20—KJV
11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. 12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. 13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. 14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king’s pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. 15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

Nehemiah 2:11-20—NIV
11 I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days 12 I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. 13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. 14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king’s pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. 15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.
16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

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

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People usually take time for contemplation before making major decisions. How should one proceed after putting careful consideration into a major decision? Nehemiah set out to rebuild the wall after praying and surveying the ruins.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine why Nehemiah decided to restore the walls of Jerusalem and reform/revive the Sabbath law.

2. Appreciate Nehemiah’s determination to restore the wall and reform Jewish worship.

3. Identify ways to restore worn parts of the faith community and revive old traditions that honor God.
In 539 BC, King Cyrus and the Persians conquered the mighty Babylonian Empire. Cyrus released all the peoples that the Babylonians had conquered and taken as captives. One of the groups that Cyrus released were the Israelites of Judah (see 2 Chronicles 36:22f, Ezra 1). When their captivity ended, three groups returned to Jerusalem, each under a different leader. The first group of Jews to return to Jerusalem came under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 538 BC (see Ezra 2:1). The second group came back with Ezra in 458 BC (see Ezra 7:1); and finally, the third group came back with Nehemiah in 444 BC (see Nehemiah 2:9-11).

Each one of these leaders played unique roles in rebuilding Jerusalem. Zerubbabel led in the reconstruction of the Temple (see Ezra 1–7; Zechariah; and Haggai). The first group laid a foundation for the altar and Temple and attempted to rebuild the walls around the city and hang new gates. They were interrupted by opposition from two men from Samaria—Rehum, the commander, and Shimshai, the scribe (see Ezra 4:4-7, 8-16, 17-24, who wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes accusing the Jewish repatriates of plotting a rebellion against the king. They claimed that if the Jews were successful, they would not pay the tribute that they were required to pay.
Years later, when Ezra arrived, he found that while the people had rebuilt the Temple, they had failed to completely restore worship and reverence for the Law of God (see Ezra 7-10). There is a point during which Ezra and Nehemiah were both in Jerusalem at the same time (see Nehemiah 8:9). Nehemiah led in the rebuilding of the wall and the gates that protected the city. His work is found in the book of Nehemiah. All three of these men possessed one common trait—a strong faith in God. A spiritual leader without faith in God is like a tree without roots: he or she will not be able to overcome the trials of leadership.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book opens with Nehemiah serving King Artaxerxes, king of Persia, at his winter palace in Susa (in the southern part of modern-day Iran) during the Jewish month Chislev (late November/December). Nehemiah’s brother, Hananai, and others who had recently returned from Jerusalem told Nehemiah that Jerusalem was in great distress and reproach because the walls of the city had been broken down and gates burned with fire (see Nehemiah 1:3). Nehemiah was greatly distressed and troubled at the news. He spent a period of four days praying and weeping over the condition of the people who had returned to Jerusalem. During this period, the Lord was putting in Nehemiah’s heart and spirit the need to go to Jerusalem to help in rebuilding the walls around the city.

Walls were important in ancient cities. During the latter days of the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites entered an area known as Transjordan, which was occupied by the Moabites, Amorites, and Ammonites. Many of these cities were fortified with high walls and strong gates (see Deuteronomy 3:5). After crossing the Jordan River, they faced Jericho, a formidable city in the Jordan River Valley that was protected by high walls and strong fortifications (see Joshua 2:15; 6:5).

Walls were central to the protection of ancient cities and often served as the first line of defense against invaders (see 2 Samuel 11:20-21). Property and houses within the confines of the walled cities were deemed more valuable because the walls of the city provided a greater degree of safety (see Leviticus 25:29-31; Numbers 35:4. Many of these ancient city walls were made out of stones, mud bricks, and in some cases large stones that had been shaped by stone cutters. When the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem, they tore down the walls, leaving piles of rubble that had remained for nearly fifty years. Without these walls the people would not be able to keep out wild animals, invading armies, and roaming bands of marauders. The first six chapters detail how Nehemiah received permission from King Artaxerxes to travel to Jerusalem to lead the people in rebuilding the wall. He successfully organized and led the people to rebuild the wall in just fifty-two days (see Nehemiah 6:15).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Geshem: an Arab and close ally with Sanballat and Tobiah; he was part of the group who tried to keep Nehemiah from completing the construction of the walls around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah: The name means “the Lord has compassion.” He served as governor of Judah and was instrumental in the rebuilding of the walls around the city and hanging of the gates. He served as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia prior to coming to Jerusalem.

Sanballat: served as governor of Samaria during the time when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem.
He was one of the ringleaders who opposed the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. Sanballat also started a series of rumors about Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 6).

**Tobiah:** an Ammonite and one of the three men opposed to Nehemiah’s rebuilding program in Jerusalem; he was married to an Israelite woman and was part of the conspiracy to accuse Nehemiah of rebellion against the king.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

- **Gates (verse 13)**—Hebrew: *shaar* (shah’-ar): gate; gateways.
- **Rebuild (verse 17)**—Hebrew: *banah* (baw-naw’): to build again; “build up” (KJV).

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**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. Faith: The First Essential Quality of Leadership

Extraordinary leaders capable of delivering results under difficult and challenging circumstances are hard to find. Throughout time, every organization has had a great demand for good leadership. The January 8, 1996, edition of *BusinessWeek* magazine featured a lead story entitled “The Top 25 Managers of the Year,” a list of men and women who ran some of the largest, most profitable corporations in the world. The article revealed that these top managers had at least four common characteristics that contributed to their success.

First, they were all innovative. They used technology to expand and enhance their businesses to produce double-digit growth. Second, they recognized the need to develop strategic partnerships with other companies around the world, also known as networking. They were willing to work with other organizations to achieve their long-term goals. Third, they worked with a global perspective and saw their target markets extending beyond their own spheres of operation. These leaders all cultivated global vision for their businesses. Fourth, they embraced change and innovation—that is, they successfully led their companies to adapt to ongoing changes in the marketplace. They were willing to restructure and reengineer their businesses to maintain their competitive edge and stay a step ahead of their competitors.

Those men and women were highly successful leaders who achieved great success for themselves and the organizations they managed. There is great benefit in imitating the...
good habits of effective leaders. Leadership is a learned behavior: leaders are not born—they are made through discipline and diligent work.

God is always looking for good leaders. God’s number-one criteria for leadership is faithfulness and faith in God (see Joshua 1:5-10). In today’s world, there is a clear need for effective leadership, both in and outside the church. Nehemiah’s story is especially compelling because he was such an unlikely candidate for the work he completed so effectively. Nehemiah had never even been to Jerusalem, yet God used him to mobilize and unite a discouraged and broken people, and to complete a great work. His accomplishment was an extraordinary one, worthy of study.

B. Biblical Background

Nehemiah 2 can be divided into two parts. The first half, verses 1-10, describes how Nehemiah’s prayer was answered for royal permission to travel to Jerusalem. The second half, verses 11-20, examines the steps Nehemiah took to inspect the wall and gates. The latter half of the chapter offers valuable details about the layout and approximate size of the city of Jerusalem, based upon the number of gates and their location.

Four months transpired between the events of chapters 1 and 2. The text indicates that within that time, Nehemiah successfully obtained permission to go to Jerusalem with all the necessary supplies to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. For four months, Nehemiah had hidden his despair and great disappointment about what was going on in Jerusalem. Apparently, Nehemiah worked to maintain a pleasing, agreeable persona in the presence of the king. On one occasion, however, when King Artaxerxes sensed that something was bothering him, Nehemiah took the time to explain why he was despondent. Jerusalem had become a mere shell of its former glory. The king kindly asked if there was something that he could do to assist. Nehemiah asked for and received permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. Thirteen years after Ezra first went to Jerusalem, Nehemiah travelled to begin the process of rebuilding the city wall and restoring its gates.

Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah everything needed to travel to Jerusalem. When asked how long it would take, Nehemiah gave the king a specific time. He requested letters from the king that would grant him permission to pass through the various provinces without being detained (see Nehemiah 2:7). He also requested a letter to be given to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, giving him the quantity of timber needed for the gates and fortresses (see Nehemiah 2:8). After rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah continued with reforms that affected the economy, national buildings, and trade (see Nehemiah 13:1-22).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Nehemiah Arrives in Jerusalem

(Nehemiah 2:11-12)

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

In verse 11, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem after a very long journey of nearly 850
miles. Given the challenges Nehemiah faced, the journey likely took several weeks, if not months, to complete. Three days after arriving, Nehemiah went straight to work determining what was necessary to repair the gates and rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

Verse 12 indicates that Nehemiah went out at night to quietly and secretly survey the damage for himself. Nehemiah told no one what he felt led to do in Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s heart and spirit had been touched by the Lord—his task was God-given, and he had to complete it. Not wanting to alert or call attention to what he was doing, Nehemiah went to the site after dark with only a few men and one animal, most likely a donkey.

Nehemiah was decisive. Decisiveness is the ability of a person to settle an issue and effectively achieve a definite result. It is one’s making up his or her mind to do something and following through with it until the job is done. Decisiveness includes seeing a need, deciding what to do, and finishing the task in spite of present obstacles.

B. Nehemiah Inspects the Wall and Gates
(Nehemiah 2:13-18)

And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king’s pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

Verse 13 provides a perspective on the topography and approximate size of Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah. After the exile, the city of Jerusalem was arguably smaller than the former city, which stretched out toward the Western Hills. Bible scholars and archaeologists debate whether that part of Jerusalem was ever enclosed by walls because there is no archaeological evidence to support that view—and most agree that the city of Jerusalem consisted of the Temple Mount, the site upon which the Temple sat with its large, open area and the area that comprised the original City of David. It would have been bordered on the east by the Kidron Valley and the west by the Tyropoeon Valley and the south by the Hinnom Valley (for more information, consult a Bible atlas or conduct an Internet search of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah).

Nehemiah circled the city (beginning with the Valley Gate) and headed south past the dragon well, an unidentified source of water today. He came to the southern tip, which is where the Dung Gate was located, the place where trash and refuse was dumped, before turning north to view the walls and the various gates that had been destroyed by fire. He then passed the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, which may have been the Pool of Siloam in Jesus’ day. It is possible that the debris and rubble from the destruction were so bad that his animal was not able to get past it freely. He continued north through the
Kidron Valley and finally returned to the city through the Valley Gate.

Verses 17-18 conclude this paragraph. The context lets us know that the leaders of Jerusalem knew of his arrival and commission by King Artaxerxes. Verse 18 mentions that Nehemiah recognized that the hand of his God was upon him so he could accomplish the task at hand. The verses that follow present four different kinds of leaders in Jerusalem—Jews, priests, nobles, and rulers.

C. Opposition Arises
(Nehemiah 2:19-20)

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Verse 19 confirms that the three primary opponents of Nehemiah did not relent or go away. The first was Sanballat the Horonite. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, located about thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem. By birth, Sanballat was half-Jew and half-Moabite. Some scholars believe that Sanballat may have appointed himself or otherwise negotiated his own appointment as unofficial caretaker of Judah some time prior to Nehemiah’s arrival in Jerusalem. Nehemiah first encountered Sanballat’s anger in 2:10. Nehemiah’s second opponent was Tobiah, an Ammonite who had married a woman of Jewish heritage (see Nehemiah 6:18). Some scholars argue that Tobiah descended from a prominent family. The third opponent to join this unlikely group of characters was an Arab named Geshem. These three men were the thorn in the side of Nehemiah. When they realized what Nehemiah was planning to do, they approached him and ridiculed the effort. In seventy-five years, no one had been able to complete the project. The walls and gates had continued in ruin since the arrival of Zerubbabel. Doubting Nehemiah’s ability to complete the task, the men laughed at, despised, and accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the king.

Nehemiah was unmoved by his enemies’ threats. He had complete confidence in the God of heaven. His confidence was well placed because he had already experienced great success up to that point. Nehemiah informed the three that they would have no place or part in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. One of the realities leaders face while doing the work of the Lord is that opposition exists. Whenever one sets his or her heart to do something for God, opposition comes alive. We must never be surprised or discouraged by the experience of opposition. Many young preachers, managers, supervisors, and leaders fail to achieve their goals because they refuse to anticipate the possibility of opposition. Nehemiah was not intimidated by his enemies—he was ready for their opposition and the criticism that came with it.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

What motivated Nehemiah to do what he did? It was clearly not money, prestige, fame, or power. In order to grasp his motivation, keep in mind everything that has happened up to this point. The biblical memoir of Nehemiah’s work provides a telling glimpse of his motivation.

First, Nehemiah was motivated by a strong religious heritage. He knew why the people of Israel were in Babylon. He understood their history of disobedience to God. The Jews,
as they came to be known after the Exile, were the very people of God. Nehemiah was concerned that their lives be rebuilt. Second, Nehemiah was motivated by his own desire to go and make a difference in the city of his fathers. His emotional outbursts, the prayers, fasting, and meditation were all the seedbeds of his desire to go to Jerusalem.

Third, Nehemiah was motivated by the hand of God upon him. Nehemiah was burdened and compelled to go to Jerusalem. It was a God-given burden.

Fourth, Nehemiah was motivated by what he saw in Jerusalem. When he surveyed the broken-down walls, heard the despair of the city’s leadership, and felt the pain and discouragement in the hearts of the people, Nehemiah was moved to continue with what God had laid upon his heart. If we but open our eyes, we will see brokenness around us that God might have us to mend and restore.

Fifth, Nehemiah was motivated by his own pride. He gathered the leaders together and had them to just look at the poor condition of the city, with its broken-down walls. He said, “This is a terrible indictment against us and the name of the God we serve. We have to do something about this.” Nehemiah essentially said that it was a shame for God’s own people to live before Him in that way.

All five factors, both internal and external, motivated Nehemiah’s great effort. Be aware of the forces that drive you to effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) for God. People are driven and motivated by the things to which they have attached themselves.

**PRAYER**

_Eternal God, on this day we thank You for choosing and equipping capable leaders to become a part of Your grand design for Your people. Thank You for the leaders in our churches and throughout our land that are sensitive to Your guidance. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen._

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**  
*(April 12-18, 2021)*

**Nehemiah: The Captive Cupbearer Rebuilds a Nation**

**MONDAY,** April 12: “Daniel Intercedes for Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:4-6, 15-19)  
**TUESDAY,** April 13: “Nehemiah Orders Temple Cleansing and Restoration” (Nehemiah 13:4-9)  
**WEDNESDAY,** April 14: “Nehemiah Restores Ministries of Levites, Singers” (Nehemiah 13:10-14)  
**THURSDAY,** April 15: “Nehemiah Reforms Sabbath Observances and Practices”  
(2 Timothy 1:15-22)  
**FRIDAY,** April 16: “Nehemiah Sets Standards for Jewish Marriages” (Nehemiah 13:23-27)  
**SATURDAY,** April 17: “Nehemiah Is Sent to Rebuild Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:1-10)  
**SUNDAY,** April 18: “Nehemiah Inspires the People to Rebuild” (Nehemiah 2:11-20)
April 25, 2021
Lesson 8

A PLEA FOR RESTORATION

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: Overcoming Losses and Brokenness
YOUTH TOPIC: Overcoming Bad Situations

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Restored by God’s Loving-kindness
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Begging for Help

DEVOOTIONAL READING
Lamentations 3:22-33

Lamentations 5:1-22—KJV
REMEMBER, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.
2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.
3 We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.
4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us.
5 Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.
6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.
7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.
8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.
9 We get our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.

Lamentations 5:1-22—NIV
REMEMBER, LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.
3 We have become fatherless, our mothers are widows.
4 We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price.
5 Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.
6 We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.
7 Our ancestors sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.
8 Slaves rule over us, and there is no one to free us from their hands.
9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.
10 Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.
10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.  
11 They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.  
12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.  
13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.  
14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.  
15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.  
16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!  
17 Because of this our hearts are faint; for these things our eyes are dim.  
18 Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.  
19 Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.  
20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?  
21 Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.  
22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.  

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People seek restoration when their possessions are taken and relationships are broken. How do people cope with the loss of things that they treasure? The writer of Lamentations trusted God to restore the broken relationship with Israel.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand why the writer of Lamentations pleaded with God for the restoration of Israel.  
2. Sense the writer’s feelings over the oppression of his nation.  
3. Pray for and engage in the restoration of broken relationships with God.
There are four questions that will help our understanding of the chronological setting of the lesson. Who was the author? When was Lamentations written? Why was it written? Who was the original audience? The first question has been debated for centuries. Jewish and Christian tradition has it that the prophet Jeremiah was the author of Lamentations. This position is based upon Jeremiah's location in the English Bible, where it immediately follows the book of Jeremiah. Since Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet, it stands to reason that he must be the author of Lamentations. One tradition teaches that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations in the cave known as Jeremiah's Grotto near Golgotha, where Jesus would be crucified. One of the most likely explanations given for Jeremiah's authorship is the superscription or title of the book as it appears in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). This title reads, “And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said . . . .” This title leads into the first verse of chapter 1. Further, in the Septuagint, Lamentations is placed right after the book of Jeremiah, which
has been cited as further evidence supporting his authorship.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Lamentations is placed third in the section known as the Ketuvim, a Hebrew word that means “Writings.” The eleven books of the Ketuvim include the Five Megilloth, or “scrolls”—Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. In the Megilloth, Lamentations does not bear the title or superscription found in the Septuagint version. This has led some scholars to uncertainty regarding Lamentations’s authorship. Their position is that whoever wrote it was an eyewitness to what happened in Jerusalem between 597 and 587 BC. This also means that the book was more than likely written shortly thereafter, or just within a few years of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

There are three possible audiences, persons who would have been among the first to read or hear the words of Lamentations read. The first group would have been the exiles in Babylon who, at the time of its writing, would still be reeling from the disastrous blow to their national and religious pride (see Psalm 137; compare Jeremiah 29:1). The second group could have been persons who fled to Egypt to escape the army of Nebuchadnezzar (see Jeremiah 43:1-7; compare 44:1-2). Scholars believe that Jeremiah went with this group to Egypt and never returned to Jerusalem. The third group may have been people who remained in Jerusalem—the poorest in the land (see 2 Kings 24:14).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

God promised Abraham that He would bless him, make him a great nation, and extend the promise to Abraham’s descendants (see Genesis 12:1-3). One of the provisions of the promise was the gift of the land of Canaan, which would become the family inheritance (see Genesis 12:7; 17:8; 26:3; 31:13). The land was always God’s inheritance to the people of Israel, through the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was reaffirmed to Moses when he met the Lord in the form of a burning bush on Mount Horeb (see Exodus 3:7-8; 6:8). When the children of Israel entered Canaan, the land was divided among the twelve tribes as their portion of the inheritance (see Numbers 26:55; 34:14-18; 36:2-12; compare Deuteronomy 12:9-10; 31:7).

God commanded Israel to keep the land sacred and free of idolatry and pagan religion. Israel occupied the land as God’s firstborn (see Deuteronomy 32:9). Throughout the years, even with reformer kings, neither Judah in the south nor Israel in the north was able to rid the land of false prophets and idol gods. Finally, in 722 BCE, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) fell to the Assyrians, and in 586 BCE, the Southern Kingdom (Judah) was literally destroyed by the Babylonians (see 2 Kings 17:24-25).

Jeremiah had a front-row seat to Jerusalem’s final days. The Lord told the prophet that He was going to remove Israel from the land (see Jeremiah 12:14; compare Jeremiah 16:18). For nearly forty years, Jeremiah preached, and no one heeded his message. The deep, painful agony of his heart and spirit finds expression throughout the book of Lamentations—as he weeps over the fallen inheritance of God’s chosen people.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jeremiah: an ancient Hebrew prophet who lived and prophesied during the latter days of the Southern Kingdom. His ministry began during the reign of King Josiah (639–609 BCE) and ended in 596 BC with the destruction of Jerusalem. The son of a priest named Hilkiah, Jeremiah was from the small town of Anathoth. The writing of the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations has been attributed to him.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. God Never Fails

The Bible is filled with the experiences of the saints of old who persevered through periods of deep pain and yet persevered. From their struggles and stories, we learn the importance of having an indomitable faith and holding on to hope that things will get better.

Hope is the expectation that regardless of how things look today, there is a brighter tomorrow on the horizon. Hope is what makes the book of Lamentations a marvelous template of assurance for hard times. Lamentations introduces Jeremiah, a man who wrestled with untold sorrow on a scale that he never could have imagined, much like the ravages of a world war or global pandemic. Despite everything that he faced, Jeremiah still found hope for the future.

Lamentations is believed to have been written by the prophet Jeremiah, just after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BC. In this short book of five chapters, the prophet speaks both for himself and the city of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah wanted to instill a ray of hope into the hearts of the people who had endured so much tragedy. In Lamentations 3:24, he assures them that God is faithful. In a world broken by sin and separation from God, people are looking for restoration when their possessions are taken and relationships are broken. The writer of Lamentations trusted that even in judgment, God would never utterly forsake Israel. This is the hope we must have today.
B. Biblical Background

The five chapters in Lamentations are classified as poetry because most prophetic speech is written in poetic form. Lamentations is written using an acrostic literary style, in which each verse in chapters 1, 2, and 4 begin with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet beginning with the first letter, ALEF. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and the writer used this technique in each chapter with the exception of chapter 3, which has sixty-six verses. Laments express the writer’s pain and deep sense of sorrow.

The lament is one of the most common forms of the Old Testament psalms. There are individual (e.g., 3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 120, 139, 142) and corporate laments (e.g., 12, 44, 80, 94, 137). There are two types of laments in the book of Lamentations. First, the “individual lament” is a personal declaration of private pain and struggle. The second, the “corporate lament,” expresses the hurt and pain of an entire community, as found in Lamentations 5.

Especially through the early chapters, Jeremiah agonized over the suffering of the city and its abandoned streets (see Lamentations 1:1). The writer painted a picture of a city broken by her enemies, so much so that his eyes filled with tears (see Lamentations 1:16). He graphically depicted the city’s downfall as a result of the sin and rebellion (see Lamentations 2:1).

In Lamentations 2:14, Jeremiah declared that many of Judah’s prophets had only seen false and foolish visions and failed to expose the people’s iniquity. Preaching that does not speak to the issues of morality and sin places the people at risk of judgment. Many of Judah’s prophets had been false and misleading. In chapter 3, Jeremiah refers to himself as the man who had seen affliction. In verse 5 (NASB), he wrote, “He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship.” Feeling walled in, he felt he could not escape its “heavy chains.” Desperation filled the streets as hunger and thirst gripped Jerusalem (see Lamentations 4:4-5).

Chapter 5 is the shortest chapter in the book of Lamentations. Throughout it, the writer speaks in the first-person plural on behalf of the suffering masses who remained in Jerusalem. The chapter begins with a call for the Lord to remember what had happened to Jerusalem. The people living the nightmare of suffering were paying the price for the sins of their fathers. The chapter ends with an appeal for the Lord to restore the people and renew them as in the past.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. “Lord, Remember Us”

(Lamentations 5:1-10)

REMEMBER, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows. We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us. Our necks are under persecution: we labour and have no rest. We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. Our fathers have sinned and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand. We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.
Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.

Verses 1-10 could very well be the words of a prayer. The passage begins with a call for the Lord to remember the people of Jerusalem. It is not that the Lord has forgotten—He forgets nothing. The Hebrew word zekar has in it the sense of recalling and bringing back to mind (see Genesis 8:1; 19:29; 40:14, Exodus 13:3). The people’s despair suggested their sense that God had forgotten them. The prophet called upon the Lord to consider and behold what happened to Jerusalem and its people. “Consider” and “behold” are written in the imperative tense to demand immediate attention. The once-proud nation had fallen into reproach (Hebrew: herpat), meaning disgrace and humiliation. Jeremiah had prophesied earlier that the rebellious ways of the people would bring judgment (see Jeremiah 29:18; 42:12, 18; compare Nehemiah 2:17).

The prophet described the desperation that filled the streets of Jerusalem. Their inheritance, the Promised Land, was suddenly occupied by strangers and aliens, a likely reference to the people who came to dwell in the nearly deserted city (verse 2). The war and violence heaped upon the city by the Babylonians had left many either devastated or dead. The capture and carrying away of many of the men left children fatherless and women as widows (verse 3). Things were so bad that water that would normally be available at the Pool of Siloam had to be purchased. Wood for fires that would be found in their forests had to be purchased (verse 4).

Verses 5-10 describe the condition of servitude and subjection that the people of Judah and Jerusalem had been forced to live with. The phrase “our necks are under persecution” indicates oppression and forced labor without rest. Verse 6 has been interpreted in several ways. The best sense of the verse is that Judah reached out to others for help, but they, too, were defeated by the Babylonians. In the past, Judah and Israel (before Assyrian conquest) had depended on other nations to help them, not the Lord. When they were no longer able to turn to the Assyrians or the Egyptians, Judah had reached out to other nations for bread, hoping to avoid starvation (verse 9). Their condition is mentioned again in verse 10 as the famine began to impact more than the people’s hunger—affecting even their skin tone.

Verses 7-8 point to what had come upon the people. They were reaping the sins of their ancestors. The fathers sinned, but the children paid the price. They would be ruled by leaders appointed by the Babylonians (see Jeremiah 40:5-7). Judah was all alone in the world, and no ally could save them from the Babylonian invasion.

B. The Ravaged People of Zion
(Lamentations 5:11-14)

They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah. Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.

Verses 11-14 point out that no one was spared the humiliation and disrespect heaped upon the remaining citizens of Jerusalem: the women, maids (young women), princes, elders, young men, the old men. He moves
from speaking in the first person to speaking in the third-person plural as he describes what the enemies of Judah have done. “Ravished” is translated from a Hebrew word that usually refers to sexual intercourse. In this context, it most likely refers to the raping of women, married or unmarried. Even the heirs to the throne of David were hanged by their hands in acts of public humiliation. The elders were disrespected, something that rarely ever occurred in ancient Near Eastern culture. Men and children alike were forced to work without compensation. As grief permeated the city, the elders stopped gathering at the city gates to conduct business, and young men stopped playing their harps.

C. The Crown Has Fallen
(Lamentations 5:15-18)

The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned! For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

Verses 15-18 describe the prophet’s continuing despair, as he wept over what happened to Jerusalem. There was no joy in the city, and no one found time or reason to celebrate. Dancing was replaced by grieving. The word crown signifies power and royalty (see 1 Samuel 12:30; Jeremiah 13:18). In verse 16, the reference to “the crown is fallen from our head” can refer to two things. First, it could be a reference to the end of the Davidic dynasty with the capture and exile of Zedekiah to Babylon. In addition to the king, there were Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest, along with the three officers of the Temple (see 2 Kings 25:18-19). Everything of value was stripped from the city, leaving a mere shell of her former glory. The second interpretation could be that the once-proud nation, which had formerly dominated the region, had fallen to the status of a mere subject relegated to the submission of foreign rulers. The magnificent Temple that had stood proudly for nearly 375 years was reduced to a pile of rubble. Why had this calamitous situation come upon them? They had sinned and failed to honor the covenant.

The people were heartbroken by what they witnessed. Their eyes were dim from the horror of seeing everything destroyed. Zion is a reference to Mount Zion, the place where the Temple stood. In its place were only foxes roaming freely among its ruins. No one was prepared to deal with such a devasting turn of events.

D. “Lord, Why Are We Forsaken?”
(Lamentations 5:19-22)

Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.

Jeremiah drew a distinction between the streets of Jerusalem and the throne of God. The former grandeur and glory of Jerusalem with its rich history and majestic Temple had been halted. The capital of the Hebrew people had fallen. The seat of national power had collapsed and the throne of the Davidic dynasty seemed to be faded. Jeremiah uttered words of praise and prayer that the Lord endures forever: “thy throne from generation to generation (see Psalms 45:7-8; 90; 92:2; 102:13-14). He then raised a twofold
question—whether the Lord would forget and forsake His people for so long. Since it was inconceivable that the Lord would desert His people, the prophet called upon the Lord to turn the hearts and minds of the people back to Him. If they returned to Him, the Lord Himself would be the one to make it happen (compare Jeremiah 31:18). The chapter ends not with a word of hope but with an expression of further pain. Jeremiah declared that the Lord had completely turned His back on them and even questioned any hope of the Lord’s forgiveness.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Lamentations is a reminder that God’s patience has limits. The Lord will never stop loving us, but there are times when His mercy comes to an end. Jeremiah stood in disbelief that God had allowed the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed. He wondered where God was when His people needed Him so desperately? How could God have allowed their mothers, wives, and daughters to be violated by a pagan people for whom they had no regard? Throughout Lamentations are repeated reminders that there are strong consequences for rejecting God’s love and grace. No diplomacy or political maneuvering can override the wrath of God’s judgment. The answer for Judah’s fate is not political—it is spiritual. Whether they realized it or not, Judah chose to make themselves victims of Babylonian conquest. Ungodly national leadership can mean the difference between a people’s survival or destruction.

There is a small spark of hope found in Lamentations 3:22-26—God’s mercies are new every day and His lovingkindness never fails. When all else fails, Jeremiah reminds us that our hope must always be grounded in Him. Jeremiah never lived long enough to see the recovery of Judah, but by faith, he assured God’s people that one day it would come.

PRAYER

Lord God of creation, teach us to trust You in everything. We confess our sins and receive Your forgiveness today. Grant us Your peace. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(April 19-25, 2021)

A Plea for Restoration
MONDAY, April 19: “Praise for God’s Wonderful Works” (Psalm 111)
TUESDAY, April 20: “God’s Blessings Are Intended for All” (Zechariah 8:18-23)
WEDNESDAY, April 21: “The Lord, Our Sovereign” (Psalm 102:12-22)
THURSDAY, April 22: “A Plea for Mercy for Jerusalem” (Psalm 79)
FRIDAY, April 23: “Mourn the Destruction of Zion” (Jeremiah 9:17-22)
SATURDAY, April 24: “God’s Mercy and Love Never End” (Lamentations 3:22-33)
SUNDAY, April 25: “Remember and Restore Us” (Lamentations 5:1-22)
MICAIAH: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** Speaking Truth
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Courage to Speak the Truth

**Devotional Reading**
1 John 3:23–4:3a; Deuteronomy 18:19-22

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 22:1-40
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 22:14

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Truth Has Its Price
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Truth and Power

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** 1 Kings 22:1-40
**PRINT PASSAGE:** 1 Kings 22:13-14, 17-23, 26-28
**KEY VERSE:** 1 Kings 22:14

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1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28—KJV
15 So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramothgilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.
16 And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?
17 And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.
18 And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?
19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28—NIV
15 When he arrived, the king asked him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?” “Attack and be victorious,” he answered, “for the LORD will give it into the king’s hand.”
16 The king said to him, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”
17 Then Micaiah answered, “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, ‘These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.’”
18 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?”
19 Micaiah continued, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.”
20 And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.
21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him.
22 And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.
23 Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.

26 And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son;
27 And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.
28 And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

“And the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?’ One suggested this, and another that.
21 “Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will entice him.’
22 “‘By what means?’ the Lord asked. ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,’ he said. ‘You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the Lord. ‘Go and do it.’
23 “So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster for you.”

The king of Israel then ordered, “Take Micaiah and send him back to Amon the ruler of the city and to Joash the king’s son
27 “and say, ‘This is what the king says: Put this fellow in prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I return safely.’”
28 Micaiah declared, “If you ever return safely, the Lord has not spoken through me.” Then he added, “Mark my words, all you people!”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Speaking a hard truth to people in power can be difficult. How does one give a difficult message to powerful people? Micaiah resolved to tell King Ahab only what the Lord said to him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Examine the impact of Micaiah’s courage.
2. Identify with Micaiah’s boldness in declaring the Word of the Lord.
3. Commit to telling the truth, especially when it is uncomfortable.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Micaiah’s name means “Who is like Yahweh?” The prophet demonstrated his connection to God by his refusal to be intimidated by King Ahab’s rank or dislike for him.
—The state of peace between Judah and Israel (1 Kings 15:16-24) may have been facilitated by the marriage between Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram, and Ahab’s daughter, Athaliah (see 2 Kings 8:18).
—Worship of Yahweh had ceased to be predominant in Israel, but many still practiced the faith, as evidenced by the presence of the other prophets.
—Some scholars assert that Ahab had produced his own prophets, likely those who would give him a message he wanted to hear.
—Micaiah was affirmed as a true prophet of God when his prophecy regarding Ahab’s fate came to pass.
—In his vision, Micaiah saw Israel as sheep without a shepherd. Jesus looked upon God’s people in the same way (see Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Micaiah was a prophet of the Lord during the time of Ahab, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Ahab hated Micaiah because his prophecies were not favorable to him.
—Ahab and Jehoshaphat wanted to know if they should go to war together against the king of Aram (Syria). The pagan prophets encouraged both kings to go to war and declared that they would be victorious.
—Jehoshaphat wanted to do what was right—he asked for a prophet of the Lord to come and discern what the Lord would have the kings do. Both kings ignored Micaiah and went into battle.
—Micaiah mocked the pagan prophets by telling the king to go to war, for the Lord would give him the battle. Then, he assured Ahab that he would lose the battle and die.
—Ahab was enraged by Micaiah’s prophecy and had him thrown in jail. Ahab was wounded and died in the battle. Jehoshaphat ruled Judah for twenty-five years and did what was right before the Lord.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING
OF THE LESSON
King Ahab spent a period of his reign in conflict against the king of Aram, an area located to the north of Israel, in what is modern-day Syria. In 855 BC, King Ben-hadad of Aram marshaled his army to invade Israel. Along with him were a coalition of thirty-two regional kings along with horses and chariots (see 1 Kings 20:1). King Ben-hadad demanded that Ahab give up all of his silver and gold, along with his wives and children (see 1 Kings 20:2-5). When he refused, the king of Aram invaded Israel. King Ahab was approached by a prophet who declared that he would defeat the king of Aram and his massive army (see 1 Kings 20:13-22). The same prophet warned King Ahab to prepare for war the next year because King Ben-hadad would return (see 1 Kings 20:23).
When King Ben-hadad returned the next year with an even larger force, he was again defeated by King Ahab (see 1 Kings 20:26-34). During the second war, Ahab was instructed to kill the king of Aram, who had been captured. He failed to follow through, instead entering into an alliance with Ben-hadad that would later lead to his downfall (see 1 Kings 20:31-34). The third and final conflict with Aram began two years later, according to 1 Kings 22:1. It was during this period that King Jehoshaphat, of the Southern
Kingdom, joined with Ahab in an ill-conceived plan to defeat the Arameans (see 1 Kings 22:2-13, 29-40). During the battle, King Ahab was killed and Jehoshaphat was nearly killed.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

King Ahab spent the last five years of his reign over the Northern Kingdom engaged in conflict with the Arameans. The Arameans were a loosely organized confederation of tribal kingdoms located to the north of Israel. The strongest of these city-states was Aram, whose capital was Damascus, which was located at the intersection of the two main international highways—the Kings Highway and the International Coastal Highway.

The origin of the Arameans has been clouded in history with various opinions regarding who they were and where they came from. They were descendants of someone named Aram; however, there are several mentions of this person in the Old Testament. In Genesis 10:22, Aram is one of the sons of Shem; in Genesis 22:20-21, Aram was the grandson of Nahor, Abraham’s brother. In Deuteronomy 26:5, there is a historical connection between the descendants of Abraham and the Arameans: “My father was a wandering Aramean and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there.”

There was conflict between the Arameans and Israel, going as far back as the time of David, who defeated the Arameans and made them subjects of Israel (see 2 Samuel 8:3-8). Across the years, the relationship between Israel, Judah, and Aram was filled with intrigue, betrayal, and war. At the heart of the conflict was control of the valuable trade routes that ran from east to Africa and Asia. At the time of the lesson, Ahab was attempting to take back Ramoth-gilead, a town located on the Kings Highway that was centrally located in Transjordan. This campaign would prove to be the end of Ahab’s reign of terror over Israel.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ahab: king of Israel and son of King Omri. He was married to Jezebel; together, they formed the most lethal pairing of rulers in ancient Israel’s history. His marriage to Jezebel reinforced the presence of Baal worship in the Northern Kingdom.

Jehoshaphat: ruler of the Southern Kingdom who was the son of King Asa. He is noted in 1 Kings 22:43-44 as being a king who did right in the eyes of the Lord. He also made peace with Israel, the Northern Kingdom. His son married Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab.

Micaiah: a prophet during the time of King Ahab. His prophetic ministry was centered in the Northern Kingdom. He prophesied to both Kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat. He was the son of a man named Imlah.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON


Micaiah (verse 15)—Hebrew: Mikayehu (me-kaw-yeh-hoo’): “Who is like Yah?”; son of Imlah.

Truth (verse 16)—Hebrew: emeth (eh’-meth): firmness, faithfulness; right; “that which is true” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The People of God and Compromise
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The Prophet Micaiah Stands before the King
(1 Kings 22:15-18)

B. Micaiah Speaks Truth to Power
(1 Kings 22:19-23)

C. Micaiah Is Cast into Prison
(1 Kings 22:26-28)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The People of God and Compromise

The Christian church in America constantly finds itself in the midst of an ongoing scenario in which the need to speak truth to power becomes a crying necessity. It is important for the Christian church in America, regardless of denominational label or theological stance, to be willing to stand firm on the truths as revealed through the teachings of Jesus Christ and the prophetic voices of the Old Testament. It is unfortunate that there has been and continues to be a disconnect and enigma between what many religious leaders believe theologically but fail to practice politically. Our faith as believers must be lived out in rural areas as well as urban areas. We must be willing to speak truth to power to mayors, governors, and presidents. The church must never allow herself to become too closely identified with a political party that people begin to interpret those churches as being a religious arm of that particular party.

Church leaders must be bold in telling political leaders what “thus says the Lord.” It is unfortunate that many church leaders have been and continue to be willing to compromise their belief in Scripture as the moral barometer by which individuals are judged. What happens to the church’s witness when she is no longer willing to speak truth to power? What happens when believers are more interested in appointing judges who hold a particular political view and who may not stand up for the moral and ethical teachings of Scripture? Christians are to be guided by the fundamentals of the Bible and the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. Christians are called to hold to a higher moral standard—one that upholds.

B. Biblical Background

Micaiah, Elijah, and Elisha were contemporaries. They all lived and prophesied in the Northern Kingdom. We have no record that they either knew each other or ever met face-to-face. Micaiah comes to us out of the shadows and emerges as one of the strongest prophets of that day for his stance against the reckless leadership of King Ahab (see 1 Kings 22:1-40). King Ahab rejected the words of the prophets throughout most of his reign. His silence gave sanction to Jezebel’s murderous actions against the prophets of the Lord (see 1 Kings 18:4). Micaiah appears as a nemesis of King Ahab, who had very little
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Prophet Micaiah Stands before the King

(1 Kings 22:15-18)

So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord? And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

Verses 15-18 comprise the initial conversation that took place between the prophet Micaiah and the king of Israel, who was Ahab. Ahab was ruler over the Northern Kingdom, called Israel. The name of the king is never mentioned throughout the passage, but the larger context makes it clear that it is Ahab. The passage is structured in the form of a question-and-answer session. It begins with the king asking Micaiah whether he should conduct a campaign to take back the town of Ramoth-gilead from the hand of the king of Aram (see 1 Kings 22:3; compare Deuteronomy 4:43; Joshua 20:8; 21:38). This area was originally part of the inheritance given to the tribe of Manasseh and Gad. Micaiah’s response was the same as the four hundred prophets’. “Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king (see 1 Kings 22:6). Forbear means “to wait before taking an action.” King Ahab wanted to know whether or not he should proceed or exercise caution.

In verse 16, the king replied to Micaiah...
with a question. Why would he not tell him the truth? He only wanted to hear what the true word of the Lord was, not what he thought he wanted to hear. King Ahab appeals for Micaiah to be honest with him about what his prospects would be. The implication is that the words of the other four hundred prophets cannot be trusted.

In verse 17, Micaiah declared that he saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd. The army of Israel was pictured as being in total disarray, running frantically in different directions. This vision indicated a total defeat, because the king of Aram would rather fight in the valley and on the plains where their chariots and horses would give them a decisive advantage. (See 1 Kings 20:23.) “Sheep without a shepherd” is a phrase found throughout the Old and New Testaments (see Numbers 27:17; Jeremiah 50:6; Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34). What shocks King Ahab is that the vision implies that he has either been captured or killed. This is stated twice—they have no shepherd; they have no master.

The second part of the verse can mean one of two things. Let them (referring to the army) return now to their homes before you, Ahab, undertake this disastrous campaign. Or, Let them return in peace, after they have been defeated on the battlefield. Further, the idea that King Ahab dies in the battle may indicate that a new era of peace—shalom—is about to be ushered in.

In verse 18, the king of Israel is incensed and told Jehoshaphat that he was right all along—that Micaiah would never say anything good about him or to him, only evil. Evidently, the king and the prophet had had previous encounters during which Micaiah prophesied words that did not sit well with the king.

B. Micaiah Speaks Truth to Power
(1 Kings 22:19-23)

And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.

Verses 19-23 contain the second vision that Micaiah saw. There has been a lot of scholarly and academic debate as to how to interpret this passage, given what it purports to say about God and whether or not God would entice someone to lie. I will share what I believe is an explanation of the passage. In verse 19, “He” refers to Micaiah and not to the king of Israel. King Ahab is commanded to hear the word of the Lord, which was a traditional form of prophetic speech (see Isaiah 1:10; 28:14; Jeremiah 9:20; Ezekiel 25:3; 34:7; Hosea 4:1; Amos 7:16). Something of great importance was about to be said and the king of Israel must take notice. In the vision, Micaiah peered into the throne room of heaven. God is seated on His throne and He is surrounded on all sides by the angels of heaven (see Isaiah 6:1-13; Revelation 4:1-4).
The “host of heaven” refers to the angelic army of God that stands ready to do His bidding. There is a conversation in heaven. The Lord asked, “who will persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?” What is he to be persuaded to do? He is to be persuaded to attack his enemy, the king of Aram, and attempt to take back Israel’s land. Ahab has been anxious and eager to reclaim Ramoth-gilead for some time and was at a point where he would do anything to reclaim the territory (see 1 Kings 22:3). “Fall at Ramoth-gilead” is a reference to falling in battle. The Lord had already decreed His judgment and how Ahab would die (see 1 Kings 21:18-19). There is an open discussion among the heavenly council with various thoughts and ideas regarding how to accomplish God’s plan.

In verse 21, there came forth a spirit that stood before the Lord and stated that he would go forth and put a lying spirit into the mouths of Ahab’s prophets. This is what the prophets were already doing: they were appeasing Ahab’s ego and telling him only what he wanted to hear. The false prophets constantly lied to keep their positions and places of influence with the king. God tells the lying spirit to go and persuade him to believe that he can prevail against the king of Aram (verse 22). Micaiah declared to that gathered throng of kings, false prophets, and other court officials that the Lord was the architect of this matter. Micaiah said that it was the Lord who had put a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets. Contrary to what King Ahab’s prophets were saying, the Lord had spoken evil against him and there was nothing that any of his prophets could do to keep this from happening.

One question is how do we understand God’s role in enticing a lying spirit to deceive King Ahab? It is possible that the vision of Micaiah of the throne room is a prophetic imaginative speech which was intended to explain why these chosen prophets of the king were constantly lying to him. The die had already been cast and Ahab would surely pay the price for his sins with his life, God had spoken. In that day, there was a universal belief that God was cause of everything that happened in the lives of people (see Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10).

C. Micaiah Is Cast into Prison
(1 Kings 22:26-28)

And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king’s son; And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you.

The passage concludes with Ahab’s reaction to the prophetic words he has just heard. There is no mention of how King Jehoshaphat reacted to the words of Micaiah. The king was incensed that what had just occurred only reinforced his belief that Micaiah was not a friend. He commands that the prophet be taken to prison. This suggests that he had previously been confined and was released to offer words that might have satisfied King Jehoshaphat. Amon was the governor of the city, which refers to Samaria. Joash was the king’s son. Not much is known about this Joash, outside of the fact that he was responsible for the king’s prison. The king instructed his men to have Micaiah confined with just enough food and water to
keep him alive. He was to remain in custody until the king returned in peace (verse 27). Upon hearing the sentence passed, Micaiah makes one more prophetic utterance—that the Lord had spoken by him and that there was no way Ahab would return in peace. Were that to be the case, then Micaiah said that the Lord had not spoken by him. He called upon the people to listen to him—that is, Micaiah—for their own benefit.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the downfalls of social media is its inability to prevent the spread of half-truths and conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories abound throughout social media on just about any subject. During the global Coronavirus Covid-19 Global Pandemic, conspiracy theories abounded as to the cause and origin of the virus. Prior to the Coronavirus grabbing a firm foothold in America, the president of the United States downplayed its impact. Two months later he found himself and his administration embroiled in a life-and-death battle against an unseen enemy. Some people believed that the whole story was a hoax by the Democratic party to taint the presidency of Donald Trump. Some people were willing to believe almost anything if it assuaged their anxiety and fears about the spread and impact of the Coronavirus. Such was the case with King Ahab; he was prepared to believe anything that his prophets told him, whether or not it was true. Ultimately, it was his honesty and candor that cost him his freedom and maybe even his life. What happens when men and women who are filled with the Spirit of the Lord confront and stand over and against the entrenched, godless might of their generation? Chances are they will experience what Micaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Jesus, Paul, and Martin Luther King Jr. experienced—imprisonment and, worse, death. Yet, we are called not to compromise our faith but to stand with the Lord against any force that believes it is greater than the Creator.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the courage to stand against the wickedness of this generation. May we embody the spirit of Micaiah, who was not afraid to speak truth to power. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(April 26–May 2, 2021)

Micaiah: Speaking Truth to Power
MONDAY, April 26: “Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat” (2 Kings 3:9-17)
TUESDAY, April 27: “Kings Propose Battle against Aram” (1 Kings 22:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, April 28: “Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophesy Falsely” (1 Kings 22:7-14)
THURSDAY, April 29: “A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster” (2 Chronicles 18:18-22)
FRIDAY, April 30: “King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury” (1 Kings 22:29-40)
SATURDAY, May 1: “Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel” (1 Kings 22:41-46)
SUNDAY, May 2: “Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth” (1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28)
ISAIAH: OFFERING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: Empty Rituals Are Useless
YOUTH TOPIC: The Source of True Hope

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: God’s Mercy Will Prevail
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: A New Future

DEVOTIONAL READING
Jeremiah 29:10-14

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 29
PRINT PASSAGE: Isaiah 29:13-24
KEY VERSE: Isaiah 29:24

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 29
PRINT PASSAGE: Isaiah 29:13-24
KEY VERSE: Isaiah 29:19

Isaiah 29:13-24—KJV
13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:
14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.
15 Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?
16 You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”?
17 In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?

Isaiah 29:13-24—NIV
13 The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.
14 “Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”
15 Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, “Who sees us? Who will know?”
16 You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”?
17 In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?
17 Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?
18 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.
19 The meek also shall increase their joy in the L ORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.
20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorners is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off:
21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.
22 Therefore thus saith the L ORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.
23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.
24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

18 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.
19 Once more the humble will rejoice in the L ORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.
20 The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down—
21 those who with a word make someone out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice.
22 Therefore this is what the L ORD, who redeemed Abraham, says to the descendants of Jacob: “No longer will Jacob be ashamed; no longer will their faces grow pale.
23 “When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.
24 “Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Relationships suffer when humans lapse into immorality. What are the other consequences of personal immorality? Isaiah prophesied that God would punish the people of Judah but still be merciful and restore the nation.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Consider how God’s promise of mercy will triumph over God’s judgment.
2. Believe that the essential nature of God is forgiveness, not punishment.
3. Rejoice in the manifestation of God’s love in their own lives.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
— Hezekiah’s attempt at religious reform imposed worship practices on the people. They believed they could satisfy God with empty worship practices and then go about living their lives as they chose.
— Hezekiah had attempted to reverse the idolatry and paganism that spread through the kingdom as a result of the alliance his father, Ahaz, made with Assyria.
— Jerusalem is addressed in verse 1 as “Ariel,” meaning “Lion of God.” Ariel is also a reference to “Hearth of God,” or the place where the altar fire continually burns to God (see Isaiah 31:9; Ezekiel 43:15-16).
— Isaiah sent a shocking message: in a year or more Jerusalem would be besieged and reduced to dire straits. The people were shaken from their spiritual and mental slumber.
— God would give Judah up to judgment until they turned to God in repentance. Despite previous warnings, they had turned away from God to follow after their own ways as if they were incapable of understanding the things of God.

Teachers of CHILDREN
— Isaiah was a powerful prophet who foretold God’s faithful deliverance.
— Isaiah 29 includes God telling the Israelites that they could not hide their evil from Him. The Lord clearly knew their plans of wickedness.
— Unfortunately, the people pretended to worship God and practice their religious traditions with pure hearts, but their motives were false.
— The hypocrisy of the people would vanish because their nation was set for destruction.
— God planned to allow everyone to rejoice in hearing His word—the deaf, the blind, and the humble.
— God revealed the coming of a new world order free of injustice, pain, and violence, where God’s joy, peace, and justice would reign.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophet Isaiah lived during the eighth century (BC). He lived and preached during the tenure of four kings—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (see Isaiah 1:1). He began his prophetic ministry in the year that King Uzziah died (see Isaiah 6:1). His father was a man named Amoz, believed to be from a very prominent Judean family. Isaiah’s ministry was centered largely in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, specifically in Jerusalem. Isaiah’s ministry is dated between 740/739–700 BC in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah’s reign.

Isaiah lived during one of the most perilous periods in the history of Judah. Judah was in constant danger of being overrun, either by the major military powers in the Ancient Near East (such as Assyria, Babylon, or Egypt) or the smaller city states of Aram, Moab, and Ammon (see 2 Kings 15:29; 16:1, 5-6, 7; 2 Kings 17:1-5, 6; 18:7, 13-20, 21; compare Isaiah 36–39). Eventually, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC (see 2 Kings 137:1-18).

According to 2 Kings 17:4-6 and 18:9-12, the Northern Kingdom of Israel (ten tribes) had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 BC. All that remained was the nation of Judah, where Hezekiah was king. According to the biblical text, Sennacherib sent messengers to Hezekiah, calling on him to surrender Jerusalem to his army.
Hezekiah refused to bow to the pressure of the Assyrian king. Even though he refused to relent, the stage had already been set for the eventual conquest of Judah by Babylon about 130 years after his reign ended.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

When King Solomon died in 931 BC, everything in Israel changed forever. The proud nation that had once enjoyed a unique relationship with the God of creation was headed for difficult days. Israel split into two kingdoms: Judah in the south and Israel (sometimes referred to as Ephraim) in the north (see 2 Kings 12). The Southern Kingdom was made up of two tribes—Judah and Benjamin, led by King Rehoboam, heir of Solomon. The Northern Kingdom comprised the remaining ten tribes, led by Jeroboam. Jerusalem remained as the capital of the Southern Kingdom, as well as the seat and center of her religious life.

Shechem, an area in the hill country of Ephraim, was the site of the first capital of the Northern Kingdom (see 1 Kings 12:25). Jeroboam also established two sanctuaries, each with golden calves—one at Bethel and the other at Dan (see 1 Kings 12:28-29). It was during the reign of Omri that Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom (see 1 Kings 16:23-24). The Northern Kingdom lasted until 722 BC, when it was completely overrun and destroyed by the Assyrians. This occurred during the sixth year that Hezekiah was king over Judah (see 2 Kings 18:9-12). It was during this period that the prophet Isaiah warned Judah to change its ways lest it suffer the same fate as the Northern Kingdom. In Isaiah 28:1-4, Isaiah described the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) as the proud drunkards whose crown and glory days were as fading flowers. He cautioned that what happened to them was the result of God’s wrath and judgment for disobedience. Isaiah warned the leaders of Jerusalem that they were making a covenant with death by presuming that God would spare them of the judgment suffered by the Northern Kingdom (see Isaiah 28:14-16). In vain, Isaiah tried to dissuade the Southern Kingdom from its false belief that nothing could touch them because they were God’s people, inhabitants of the City of David, Zion (see Isaiah 28:16-17). Soon it would be Judah’s turn to face God’s wrath for breaking the covenant at Sinai (see Exodus 19:1-7; compare 2 Kings 17:18-20). In 587 BC, the judgment for the Southern Kingdom came at the hands of the Babylonians, just as Isaiah had predicted (see Isaiah 39:1-9).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: author of the book of Isaiah. An eighth-century prophet considered to be the greatest of all the prophets. He began his ministry shortly after the death of King Uzziah (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Lips (verse 13)—Hebrew: saphah (saw-faw’): speech; language.
Lip service (refer to verse 13): a verbal statement of allegiance not backed by action.
Wayward (verse 24)—Hebrew: taah (taw-aw’): to err, go astray; “erred” (KJV).
Woe (verse 15)—Hebrew: ah (aw’) or hoy (hoh’ee): an interjection often translated “Woe!” or “Alas!” signaling alarm or grief.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Importance of Worship
   B. Biblical Background
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Importance of Worship

One of the most important religious activities of the ancient Hebrew people was worship. The theme reverberates throughout the book of Psalms and was deeply ingrained within the fabric of the culture of ancient Israel. In their worship, Israel recalled the experiences of their past and God’s great acts of providential care. They recounted how God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt and met their physical and spiritual needs (see Psalm 106). In worship, they celebrated God’s greatness and the many reasons they had to give God glory and honor.

There are several things that we must remember about worship, beginning with the fact that God is the object of worship. Second, we remember that God instituted the Sabbath as the day of rest and that, over time, the Sabbath became Israel’s day of worship. As Christians, we worship on Sunday, because it is the day of the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ (see Mark 16:2). Third, we remember that the place of worship has significance. Worship takes place within the context of a certain location (i.e., the Temple, synagogue, church building). For ancient Israel, the Temple was the most sacred place in their culture, the place where the Lord appeared to Solomon and promised to hear the prayers of the people when they gathered to make sacrifices to Him (see 2 Chronicles 7:12-14).

Since worship was central to Israel and continues to be central for the Christian church, we must continually examine the purpose for which we gather. In His day, Isaiah proclaimed that the people drew near to God with their words, but their hearts were not devoted to Him. The people’s worship was more of a learned perfunctory ritual than true, heartfelt devotion. Today, contemporary believers continue to gather for worship to celebrate God’s greatest act of deliverance and salvation—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Likewise, they must guard against the proclivity to fall into a pattern of empty religious rituals void of true devotion.

B. Biblical Background

Isaiah 28–31 is a series of prophetic oracles against Jerusalem, which scholars date to the reign of Hezekiah. Oracles are pronouncements that generally contain warnings.
for disobedience followed by blessings for obedience. Each of these chapters begins with the Hebrew word *hōy*, an interjection often translated “Woe.” The theme of these oracles is the foolishness of separating religious practices from daily trust in Yahweh to provide for the nation. For years, Israel and Judah relied on their political alliances and connections with Egypt to assist them in resisting the advances of the Assyrians (see Isaiah 30:1-2; 31:1). Isaiah condemned the leaders of Jerusalem who had neglected their covenant with the Lord in preference for their alliance with Egypt. Isaiah referred to the alliance with Egypt as a covenant with death and Sheol that prevents either from touching them when Assyria passed by (see Isaiah 28:15).

This sense of arrogance revealed the hypocrisy of Judah’s worship and exposed the vanity of their idolatry. Their religion was merely empty words without conviction. Yet, there remained a ray of hope to a people destined to be carried into exile. Isaiah declared that the day was coming when the Lord would once again show them great and marvelous things. On that day, they would be amazed by God’s wondrous and marvelous acts. However, Judah made one critical error: they attempted to manipulate God with their rituals and ceremonies (see Isaiah 1:10-15; compare Amos 5:21-23). God speaks to the prophet with a fitting analogy of a potter and clay, wherein the clay considered itself to be equal to the potter. In this example, the Lord challenges Judah’s claim that they were not brought into existence by the Lord (Isaiah 29:16).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Judah Is Rebuked for Empty Worship
   (Isaiah 29:13-14)

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

The first paragraph describes the empty worship of the people. It was all ceremonial and ritual without any real meaning.

In verse 13, Isaiah recited the words of the Lord and proclaimed that the people were not the Lord’s people. They were “this people,” not the people who had been delivered from slavery in Egypt and had settled in land they did not deserve. The phrase “Forasmuch as this people draw near” are words that express intentionality and purpose. The people followed their age-old traditions, going to the Temple to pray and present sin offerings, burnt offerings, and drink offerings. They observed the annual feast days of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of the Ingathering (see Exodus 34:21-26). There was no true heartfelt devotion, just words and meaningless chatter. They knew the words, rhythm, and melodies of the great antiphonal psalms of praise. Yet, it meant nothing because they refused to practice justice and equity. The priests had taught the outward form of worship but failed to show them how to truly serve the Lord (see Ezekiel 33:31). “Precepts” is translated from a Hebrew word that means “commandments or commands.” The sense is that the people had been taught the commandments and were
expected to learn them, but not necessarily practice them. They were all words without deeds.

In every generation, the spirit of the people of God can become dulled to the voice of the Lord. If not careful, one can get caught up in the rituals, uniforms, special days, and performance and yet forget who God is. God is not moved by any worship ritual that is outwardly full of faith and righteousness, but inwardly is dry and spiritually dead (see Matthew 23:25-28). Authentic and sincere worship must begin in the heart of the believer. One must be truly open to the Spirit of God.

In verse 14, God does not respond in judgment against His people, but in wonderment and amazement. This was the generation who had not seen the mighty works of God’s power. They were not privileged to see and hear the great prophetic voice of Elijah thundering across the crest of Mount Carmel. Rather, for them religion had become routine. The Lord said He was going to show them the greatness of His power. Once again, the people would be amazed by the extraordinary power of God. There is no specific mention of what would happen, when, or how God would reveal Himself to His people.

B.  Warnings against Making Secret Plans
(Isaiah 29:15-16)

Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

Verses 15-16 record Isaiah’s prophetic utterance against the leaders of Judah, who not only practiced blatant disobedience but also disregarded the Lord. What was their sin? They would not seek the counsel of the Lord regarding their plans. They met together to devise secret plans, through their secret meetings and clandestine alliances with Egypt. The Assyrians had quickly become the dominate military power in the region and to protect herself, Judah decided to align herself with Egypt (see Isaiah 30:1-2). The Egyptians had a formidable army, but in time they would prove to be no match for the might and military prowess of the Assyrians. The imagery of the text is of a group of people huddled together in a secret place, out of earshot and eyesight of others. Under the cover of darkness, they crafted their secret agenda. The flaw in their thinking was the belief that no one could see them. Jesus said that men loved darkness because they believe they can hide their evil deeds in it (see John 3:19). God can see even in the darkness (see Psalm 139:12). No one can hide his/her deeds from the Lord (see Luke 12:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5; compare Isaiah 5:20; Proverbs 4:19).

Verse 16 lifts up the further absurdity of Judah’s attempt to reverse the order of creation. God created all that is contained in the universe, including humans. The people of Judah erred in presuming themselves to be more qualified than God to decide how to proceed with their lives—their folly is pictured in the imagery of the clay’s telling the potter what to do and how to fashion it. How foolish for the created being to challenge the Creator who fashioned it.
C. A New Day Is Coming
(Isaiah 29:17-21)

Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorners are consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

Verses 17-21 announce a series of imminent social and political reversals. God planned to do something new and different (see Isaiah 43:19-21). God gave no indication of a specific date, only that His plan would unfold in a “very little while”—an indication of a sudden shift. God promised a reversal of the fortunes of His people, especially those who were marginalized and exploited by their leaders.

Scholars have debated the meaning of the text’s reference to Lebanon. First, the reference could be considered (literally) as the country of Lebanon, but the context of the passage makes that unlikely. Second, the meaning can be derived from how it is used elsewhere in Isaiah. In some passages, Lebanon symbolizes power, wealth, might (see Isaiah 2:13; 10:34; 33:9; 35:2). This seems to be the most likely interpretation. Some interpreters have understood the fruitful field to refer to Mount Carmel and the region of the Jezreel Valley, which is near Carmel. The sense of the verse is that God was going to bring about a reversal that would begin with creation, symbolized by Lebanon’s being turned first into a fruitful field, and eventually into a forest.

In verse 18, the words “And in that day” indicated when the disenfranchised would have their fortunes reversed. Jesus often talked about the coming of a time when the first would be last and last would be first (see Matthew 19:19; compare with Luke 1:46-56). The text gives no indication of timing. Generally, the Day of the Lord was always associated with some form of judgment and punishment (see Isaiah 7:18; 13:6, 9; compare Micah 4:1; Zephaniah 17-18).

The text names four categories of people to experience the reversal or transformation in that day: the deaf, the blind, the meek, and the poor. Are these to be understood metaphorically, as representing something else, or as a literal declaration? The context of the verse, which includes Isaiah 28-31, supports the interpretation that the blind and deaf are to be understood as metaphors for those who have not been able to hear the truth of the Word of God—whether because of leaders who failed to preach truth, or because of followers who had closed their eyes to the realities around them. The meek and poor were two groups who had long suffered oppression at the hands of the powerful elite. In that day, those who have been left behind will rejoice and glorify the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

In verse 19, the meek and poor refer to two distinct groups of people who were especially vulnerable. The meek were those who had suffered some debilitating or disabiling injury that led to an impoverished life. The poor were those oppressed by others and relegated to a condition of social neglect.

Verses 20–21 describe four groups of people who would not share in the great transformation of society. The words “brought
to nought,” “consumed,” and “cut off” all refer to death or destruction. No other word fully captures the meaning of the Hebrew concept of death. This would seem to some to be a fitting punishment for those who have run roughshod over the people of the Lord. “Terrible” refers to a tyrant who, by sheer use of force, takes advantage of others. “Scorner” refers to someone who mocks and derides others, and “iniquity” refers to the practice of wickedness and injustice. Verse 21 refers to the scornful, ill-treatment of those who seek justice at the gate. Those who sought justice were received as if they had committed an offense. “Lay a snare for him who reproveth at the gate” means to use the power of words to confuse the issue so as to reverse right and wrong. Shrewd lawyers are able to twist the law so that even the most heinous person can appear to be innocent. Then, and now, many people have labored to make the law work against the biggest victims of the justice system. How often does this happen today? People who are not well-financed and who have limited resources for fair legal representation are always at a disadvantage within a legal system that is often biased toward the rich and powerful. The Lord announced through Isaiah the coming of a day when such injustice would end.

D. The Day of Redemption
(Isaiah 29:22-24)

Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

Verses 22-24 close the prophetic utterances that condemned Judah for her sins. Rather than condemn, the passage ends with a ray of hope. “Therefore” suggests that in light of all that has been said, what follows is a list of expectations for which the people may hope. Abraham was the chief patriarch of the Hebrew people. Jacob was the son of Isaac and the progenitor of the twelve tribes of Israel. The text, however, does not refer to any of the patriarchs as individuals, but to the entire nation of Israel, including both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The text likely refers to God’s bringing Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and making him the father of a great nation. God promises to vanquish the nation’s past shame, scorn, and humiliation, and pointed to a future time when the sins of the nation are behind her—a time when she would no longer live in shame, feeling spiritually inferior to anyone.

Verse 23 employs the language of personification, using a single person to represent the whole nation—as in, Jacob will one day see his offspring (who are the works of God’s hand) sanctifying the name of the Lord. Verse 23 uses synonymous parallelism to state the same thing twice: “they shall sanctify my Name, and sanctify the Holy One of Israel.” These statements repeat the same thought—namely, that Israel would one day recognize who God is and what He had done in the life of Israel. On that day, they would reverence and fear the God of Israel, who brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Verse 24 closes out the passage by declaring a new day of learning. Israel had been founded
on the foundation of learning the law of God and was instructed to teach God’s Word diligently to their children (see Deuteronomy 6:6-8; compare Proverbs 1:2-7). The first phrase refers back to verse 14, wherein the people would learn new and wondrous things about God. They would know the truth about their God even without wise men to instruct them. The phrase “they that murmured” refers to the Israelites who murmured against Moses in hopes of returning to Egypt (see Deuteronomy 1:27; Psalm 106:25). In that new day, the people would seek understanding and rejoice in the day of the Lord’s deliverance.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Jesus had nothing good to say about the traditions of the Jewish elders. Local religious leaders criticized Jesus on several occasions because He did not encourage His disciples to observe the traditions of the elders (see Matthew 15:1-3). The tradition of the elders were interpretations of the Old Testament Law that were handed down from one generation to the next. These traditions, the Mishnah, were developed sometime during the third century BC. Over time, they developed a status that made them equal, in the eyes of many Jews, with the Word of God. Jesus was very critical of the Mishnah and the Pharisees, who were the primary observers of the tradition of the elders.

One of the important truths of the prophetic preaching of Isaiah centered around the Judah’s fascination with empty rituals and celebrations. They seemed to believe that faithfulness to a ritual would exempt them from faithful obedience to God’s law and save them from their enemies. Today’s believers must be careful not to confuse church membership and attendance with true discipleship. Jesus is looking for true worshippers and disciples, not just those devoted to the observance of programs, rituals, and special days.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we learn from the lessons of those who have gone before us. Create within us a spirit of obedience. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(May 3-9, 2021)

Isaiah: Offering Hope for the Future
MONDAY, May 3: “Discipline the Immoral Person with Respect” (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)
TUESDAY, May 4: “Uphold Justice for All Peoples” (Exodus 23:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, May 5: “Seek and You Will Find Me!” (Jeremiah 29:10-14)
THURSDAY, May 6: “Lip Service Is Not Enough” (Mark 7:1-8)
FRIDAY, May 7: “Jerusalem Is Punished and Rescued” (Isaiah 29:1-8)
SATURDAY, May 8: “Judah—Blind to God’s Ways” (Isaiah 29:9-12)
SUNDAY, May 9: “Israel Will Enjoy a Bright Future” (Isaiah 29:13-24)
May 16, 2021
Lesson 11

JEREMIAH: THE SUFFERING PREACHER OF DOOM

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: The Consequences of Giving Challenging Advice
YOUTH TOPIC: Following Good Advice

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Preparing for Doom
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Difficult and Dangerous Words

DEVOTIONAL READING
Jeremiah 38:7-13; 39:15-18

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Jeremiah 37–38
PRINT PASSAGE: Jeremiah 38:14-23
ADULT KEY VERSE: Jeremiah 38:15
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Jeremiah 38:20

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Jeremiah 37–38
PRINT PASSAGE: Jeremiah 38:14-23
KEY VERSE: Jeremiah 38:20

Jeremiah 38:14-23—KJV
14 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me.
15 Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?
16 So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.
17 Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon’s princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall...

Jeremiah 38:14-23—NIV
14 Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. “I am going to ask you something,” the king said to Jeremiah. “Do not hide anything from me.”
15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me.”
16 But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: “As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who want to kill you.”
17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon,
not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house:
18 But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon’s princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.
19 And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.
20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live.
21 But if thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that the LORD hath shewed me:
22 And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah’s house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon’s princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back.
23 So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: No one wants to be the bearer of bad news or challenging advice. How can we find courage to speak when what we have to say is likely to cause controversy or hard feelings? Jeremiah frankly discussed his concerns with King Zedekiah and then spoke with confidence that he was delivering a message from God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Identify Jeremiah’s hesitation to give controversial advice to Zedekiah.
2. Sense Jeremiah’s apprehension when talking to Zedekiah.
3. Commit to giving challenging godly advice.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Jeremiah was concerned for his life because he was despised by the chief officials in Jerusalem who didn’t like Jeremiah’s unchanging message of “submit to Babylon or perish.” A previous attempt to take his life had been unsuccessful.
—Zedekiah, son of Josiah, was a weak and wicked ruler whose name means, “Yahweh is righteous.” He sought Jeremiah’s advice privately but rejected the prophet publicly.
—Zedekiah feared the opinions of the people more than he feared the wrath of God.
—Jeremiah continued to proclaim the Lord’s prophecies and would not waver, despite the unpopularity of his words—even to his own detriment.
—Jeremiah’s horrific prison experiences began twenty years before the Babylonian army took Jerusalem.
—When the armies took Jerusalem, Jeremiah was still incarcerated and was carried with other captives headed the way to Babylon, but was released six miles outside Jerusalem, freeing him to continue his prophetic ministry.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Jeremiah was a prophet under five kings, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.
—His prophecies from the Lord were not well received by the kings or the people. Jeremiah predicted that Judah would be destroyed and only those who surrendered to the Babylonians would live.
—The officials thought Jeremiah should be killed because the prophecy he spoke scared the soldiers and the people.
—King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and asked him what the Lord said. Zedekiah feared what would happen to his political base if they saw him talking to Jeremiah.
—Jeremiah repeated the prophecy to the king and described what would happen to Zedekiah and his family if he did not surrender. In chapter 39, Jeremiah’s prediction was fulfilled and the king witnessed his children’s death and was blinded, shackled, and taken prisoner to Babylon.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
In 612 BC, the political landscape of eastern Asia changed forever. Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon and proceeded to conquer territory and nations from the shores of the Persian Gulf (modern Iraq) all the way to the continent of Africa. Babylon was a mighty power destined to become one of the greatest empires in the history of human civilization. While Nebuchadnezzar was consolidating his empire, there was turmoil in Jerusalem. Josiah, the revered and beloved king of Judah, was mortally wounded in battle against the Egyptians in 609 BC, leaving the nation in turmoil and as a vassal state to the Egyptians. Once again, Israel was a servant of the Egyptians. About this time a young man named Jeremiah was beginning his prophetic ministry (see Jeremiah 1:1). Between 609–597 BC there were three kings in Judah according to 2 Kings 23:29-36.
In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem, which is recorded in 2 Kings 24:10ff.
At that time, Jehoiachin was in his third month as king. Nebuchadnezzar’s army overran Jerusalem, ransacking the Temple, taking priceless treasures, and capturing nearly ten thousand people. According to verse 14, Nebuchadnezzar’s army carried off all of the princes, the mighty men of valor, craftsmen, silversmiths, and the best of the land. All that remained were the poorest people. This is what is referred to as the First Deportation of the Babylonian Exile. Included in this group of people were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego); Daniel 1:1-7 refers to this event.

In order to ensure that his policies would be carried out in Jerusalem and that the taxes would be collected, Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, Josiah’s third son, king over Judah, according to 2 Kings 24:17. Nebuchadnezzar changed Mattaniah’s name to Zedekiah. Throughout all of these tumultuous years, Jeremiah had been preaching that the nation of Judah needed to repent and return to God. He preached that it was no accident that Jerusalem had been conquered by Babylon. Jeremiah had long prophesied that judgment was coming to Judah (see 1:11-15; 5:10-18; 21:1–22:30. According to the biblical record (see 2 Kings 24:20), nine years into his reign, Zedekiah began to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah let the kings of Tyre, Ammon, and Egypt convince him to join an ill-advised plot to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. The Babylonian army returned to Jerusalem in 589 BC and, according to 2 Kings 25:1-3, laid siege to the city for nearly two years. During the period, there was a scarcity of food and water. The only thing that was abundant in Jerusalem was fear, panic, and pessimism.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In Jeremiah 38:7-12, the prophet makes five separate references to a man named Ebed-melech, one of the leading officials in the court of King Zedekiah. Ebed-melech was the man responsible for Jeremiah’s being pulled out of the muddy cistern in which his enemies had placed him. Additionally, he was one of the most trusted members of the king’s court. Ethnically, Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian eunuch. The African presence in the Scriptures is sometimes mentioned using several words: Cushi, Cushi, Cushites, Ethiopia, and Ethiopians. All of these words refer to the skin color of the nationalities just mentioned. According to the prophetic writings of Jeremiah, people from Cush, sometimes referred to as Ethiopians, were very prominent officials in the court of Zedekiah.

Ebed-melech was a very high official in the court of the king—one whom the king trusted greatly. When Ebed-melech heard that Jeremiah had been put into prison, he was the one who appealed to the king and was given permission to rescue him. Although he is referred to as a servant of the king, he is not to be considered as a slave, which has been the habit of many interpreters of this passage. J. Daniel Hays (From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race, p. 132) has argued that Ebed-melech’s freedom to approach the king and challenge the decision to imprison Jeremiah undermines the notion that Ebed-melech would have been a slave. He was given permission to facilitate Jeremiah’s rescue with the assistance of thirty additional men (see Jeremiah 38:10-12).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jeremiah: Bible scholars refer to him as the sixth pre-exilic Israelite prophet from Judah. His name means in Hebrew either “The Lord Exalts” or “The Lord Throws Down.” He is also known as the “weeping” prophet.
King Zedekiah: Zedekiah was the last king of Judah and was king when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC and the majority of the people were carried into exile. Zedekiah’s original name was Mattaniah. He was the son of King Josiah and the brother of King Jehoahaz and King Jehoiakim. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he was made king. He did evil in the sight of the Lord.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Babylonians (verse 19)—Hebrew: Kasdim (kas-dah’ee): inhabitants of a region of South Babylon (or Chaldea) who led the conquest and capture of Judah; “Chaldeans” (KJV).
Counsel (verse 15)—Hebrew: yaats (yaw-ats’): to advise.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Destructive Power of Fear
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Zedekiah’s Meeting with Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38:14-16)
   B. Jeremiah’s Message to Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38:17-18)
   C. Zedekiah’s Fear of the Jews (Jeremiah 38:19)
   D. Jeremiah’s Second Message to Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38:20-23)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Destructive Power of Fear

   King Zedekiah admitted that he was afraid of the Jews who had deserted to the Babylonians. While we may want to condemn him, we must be careful because fear has affected all human beings. Zedekiah’s fear ultimately led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Fear is one of the most powerful strongholds found in the Scriptures. The word fear appears in various forms more than 475 times in the Old and New Testaments. The spirit of fear leaves many of God’s people trapped in mediocre living. Fear reduces God’s people to mortals without adequate spiritual power to overcome the enemies of the kingdom of God.

   Fear does not go away when one enters ministry or service to the Lord’s church. Sometimes, Satan intensifies and heightens fear, hoping to diminish a person’s willingness to serve or ineffectiveness in witnessing. Timothy was pastor. Paul himself had laid hands on Timothy, imparting the presence and power of God upon his ministry. Fear is a spiritual foe that seeks to overshadow the work of God in a person’s life. It undermines the courage necessary for the work of ministry. This fear is not to be confused with the “fear of God,” which refers to the due reverence and respect for God. Neither does it compare to any type of emotional impulses—rather, it is an ungodly influence that seeks to conquer the heart and erect barriers of spiritual impotence. The spirit of fear is most active when a believer is too intimidated to actively use the
gifts and authority given by God. Those who are afraid to use their spiritual gifts deny God the chance to gain glory from their spiritual work. The spirit of fear works to oppose the spirit of boldness that God has placed within the heart of the believer. One’s overcoming the spirit of fear requires the person’s putting his or her trust in God. The Lord has promised to keep those who place their trust in Him (see Isaiah 26:3-4).

B. Biblical Background

Jeremiah 37–39 describes the events that led to the final days of the Southern Kingdom. There are parallel details in 2 Kings 24–25 and in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah. After Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive, he appointed his uncle Mattaniah king (see 2 Kings 24:15-17). Nebuchadnezzar then changed his name to Zedekiah, which means “The Lord Exalts” or “The Lord Throws Down.” Jeremiah was a firsthand witness to Jerusalem’s final days before exile.

Zedekiah and Jeremiah met at least three times regarding the Babylonian threat. Jeremiah had tried to convince King Zedekiah to take the threat seriously. The safest way out would be to capitulate and turn the city over to the Babylonians. Yet, at every turn Jeremiah encountered the resentment and resistance of a group of leaders in the city. After the first meeting, Jeremiah was imprisoned (see Jeremiah 37:1-16). After the second meeting, Jeremiah was thrown into a muddy cistern, where he would have died if it were not for the intervention of Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian who was a member of the king’s staff (see Jeremiah 38:1-6). In their final meeting, Zedekiah already knew what Jeremiah would say—Jeremiah’s message was always the same. He had essentially given the same advice on two other occasions (see Jeremiah 34:1-7). Instead of trusting Jeremiah, Zedekiah continued to listen to prophets of doom who ultimately jeopardized the nation and the king. It was a decision that changed the course of Israel’s history.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Zedekiah’s Meeting with Jeremiah

( Jeremiah 38:14-16)

Then Zedekiah the king sent and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that is in the house of the Lord: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me. Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me? So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life.

Verse 14 records Zedekiah’s vacillation between whether to believe and trust Jeremiah or hold to the position of the other leaders. Jeremiah was falsely accused of deserting to the side of the Babylonians and was arrested by Irijah and put into prison (see 37:13, 20-21). Jeremiah declared that Judah had two options: (a) surrender to the Babylonians, or (b) resist them and face certain death by the sword, famine, or pestilence (see Jeremiah 38:2). For a second time, Jeremiah was imprisoned, but this time in a muddy cistern (see Jeremiah 38:6). Fortunately, Jeremiah had at least one friend in the royal court, an
Ethiopian official named Ebed-melech who appealed to King Zedekiah to release Jeremiah because he had been treated wickedly and unjustly (see Jeremiah 38:8-10). They rescued Jeremiah from the cistern and kept him in the guardhouse for his own safety.

Zedekiah was desperate for answers and advice. The Babylonians had once again laid siege to Jerusalem and this time the result would be catastrophic. In an attempt to save face, King Zedekiah had Jeremiah brought to him in secret as he sat near the third entrance to the house of the Lord, grappling with fear and loneliness. Zedekiah was afraid that others who despised Jeremiah would see him meeting with the prophet in private. Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to promise to tell him the truth. He had been lied to so much by the prophets in the city that he had lost confidence in them all (see Jeremiah 27:14; 28:1-17; compare Lamentations 2:14). At this point, King Zedekiah trusted no one but Jeremiah.

In verse 15, Jeremiah responded to Zedekiah by asking whether the king would put him to death for being honest. Jeremiah had already been imprisoned twice—what would be different about this time? He went on to say that if he were to give Zedekiah sound advice, the king would not listen to him (see Proverbs 1:5; 9:9; 14:6). This was not a new conversation between the king and the prophet—they had previously spoken of the same thing, all to no avail (see Jeremiah 37:6-10; 17-19).

In verse 16, in an effort to reassure Jeremiah, the king secretly vowed that he would not have Jeremiah executed nor turn him over to the men who hated him. The leaders wanted to put Jeremiah to death because of the nature of his prophecies concerning the city’s fate (see Jeremiah 36:4-19). It took tremendous courage for Jeremiah to remain in Jerusalem during this period. The leading officials in the city wanted him dead and the king was not trustworthy.

**B. Jeremiah’s Message to Zedekiah**

(Proverbs 1:5; 9:9; 14:6)

In verses 17-18, King Zedekiah faced the prospect of a total defeat at the hands of the Babylonians. The city was already surrounded by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, food was in short supply, and it would not be long before they would breach the city walls (see Jeremiah 34:7; 38:21; compare 2 Kings 25:3). Jeremiah began speaking, “Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel.” Jeremiah advised Zedekiah that if he would surrender the city to the Babylonians, all would be spared and saved. His surrender would save the city and quite possibly Solomon’s Temple from destruction. Surrendering would mitigate the hostile seizure and the people would be spared further humiliation and starvation. The Babylonians had a reputation of burning conquered cities to the ground and killing the occupants.
Jeremiah cautioned that if King Zedekiah refused to surrender then the city would be given into the hands of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). Jeremiah made it clear that the conquest was actually the wrath of God falling upon Jerusalem. Resisting the threat was futile because God Himself was delivering Judah into the hands of their enemies (see Jeremiah 24:8-10; 32:3-5; 38:3; compare 2 Kings 25:4-10). The alternatives were pretty clear: surrender and live, or remain trapped behind the walls of Jerusalem and face total annihilation and certain death.

C. Zedekiah’s Fear of the Jews (Jeremiah 38:19)

And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me.

Verse 19 provides the real reason why King Zedekiah was so hesitant to take Jeremiah’s advice—his fear of the Jews. There were people who had already surrendered and were in the custody of the Babylonians. “As for the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had gone over to him and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard carried them into exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 39:9, NASB).” Zedekiah was afraid that the people who had already surrendered would demand that he be given to them. They in turn would mock, ridicule, and eventually execute him. This would be a worst fate than simply giving up to the Babylonians. Here, we see a leader who was filled with the spirit of fear and intimidation. He was terrified of his own officials, yet these were the very ones who had counseled him to not surrender.

D. Jeremiah’s Second Message to Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38:20-23)

But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver thee. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live. But if thou refuse to go forth, this is the word that the Lord hath shewed me: And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah’s house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon’s princes, and those women shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, and they are turned away back. So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire.

Verses 20-23 comprise the final paragraph to this sad story detailing the demise of the Davidic dynasty and legacy in Jerusalem. King Zedekiah would be the last of the Davidic kings, until the coming of the Messiah. Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah to listen to him and obey the Lord. He assured him that the officials who have deserted would be in no position to hand him over to the Babylonians. If Zedekiah would listen, Jeremiah assured that things would go well for him and he would live through the ordeal. But if he continued to remain sidelined by his own fears and the perceived false threats of the deserters, it would end poorly for him.

Verse 22 spells out the consequences of King Zedekiah’s decision to disobey God. The people who suffered most would be the women remaining in the king’s house and in the city. Zedekiah’s own wives, concubines, and children would suffer rape, humiliation, and degradation at the hands of Babylonian soldiers. Jeremiah uttered a lament that the women would probably speak. They would
accuse Zedekiah of being more concerned about what his friends and advisors thought—the very ones who misled and misinformed him. The lament further describes Jeremiah as stuck in the mire, unable to move forward or in any direction. He was completely stuck and incapable of doing anything. Jeremiah prophesied emphatically that Zedekiah would not escape the wrath of the Babylonians and closed his words by saying that when the city was burned to the ground, it would be because of Zedekiah’s reluctance to obey the Lord and surrender the city. There are times when leaders make decisions that impact the most vulnerable in negative ways. Zedekiah holds the distinction of being the last king of Israel and the reason why the Temple was destroyed, and the city of Jerusalem burned to the ground.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Throughout the Scriptures, there is a constant summons to hear the Word of God. Note Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (NASB). This is known as the Shema and it formed the theological foundation of Israel’s faith in God. Jeremiah appealed to King Zedekiah to hear the Word of the Lord and obey.

Hearing God’s Word accomplishes three important things: first, hearing produces faith in God. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Faith is made strong and alive at the hearing of God’s Word through preaching and teaching. Personal faith rests upon the solid foundation of God’s Word. Second, hearing brings believers into obedience to God: “And why do you call Me, Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46ff). Those who hear the Word of God and obey it acknowledge God’s sovereignty and lordship in their lives.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, grant that we may learn to trust You even in the darkest moments of life. Thank You for saving us and keeping us from the power of sin. Grant that we will never go astray. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(May 10-16, 2021)*

**Jeremiah: The Suffering Preacher of Doom**


**TUESDAY**, May 11: “Prophet Jeremiah Is Arrested and Imprisoned” (Jeremiah 37:11-16)


**THURSDAY**, May 13: “Jeremiah Reaffirms the Prophecy of Zedekiah” (Jeremiah 37:17-21)

**FRIDAY**, May 14: “Jeremiah’s Last Days in Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 38:24-28)

**SATURDAY**, May 15: “Jerusalem Is Destroyed; the People Are Exiled” (2 Kings 25:1-12)

**SUNDAY**, May 16: “Zedekiah Must Submit to Babylonian Conquest” (Jeremiah 38:14-23)
May 23, 2021 Lesson 12

EZKIEL: STREET PREACHER TO THE EXILES

ADULT/YOUTH
 ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Take Responsibility!
 YOUTH TOPIC: Take a Look at Yourself

CHILDREN
 GENERAL LESSON TITLE: A Street Preacher Says, “Repent”
 CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Make a Change, Now!

DEVOOTIONAL READING
Psalm 147

ADULT/ YOUTH
 BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 18
 PRINT PASSAGE: Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32
 ADULT KEY VERSE: Ezekiel 18:4
 YOUTH KEY VERSE: Ezekiel 18:31

Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32—KJV
THE WORD of the LORD came unto me again, saying,
2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?
3 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.
4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.
5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right,
6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour’s wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman,

Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32—NIV
THE WORD of the LORD came to me:
2 “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?’
3 “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel.
4 “For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.
5 “Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right.
6 “He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor’s wife or have sexual relations with a woman during her period.
7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment;
8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man,
9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD.

30 Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.
31 Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?
32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: It is easy to blame our background or upbringing for the misfortunes we face. What is the role of personal responsibility? Ezekiel warned Israel that each person is accountable to repent of his/her sinful ways and obey God’s commands to find favor with Him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Examine behavior in which we blame others as the cause.
2. Desire to take responsibility for their own behavior.
3. Engage in responsible behavior that finds favor with God.
AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The proverb cited in verse 2 (also quoted and refuted in Jeremiah 31:29-30) is from the targumim (singular: targum), a collection of spoken paraphrases, explanations, and expansions of the Jewish Scriptures that a rabbi would give in the vernacular of the listeners, often Aramaic.

—The people had convinced themselves that they were victims and that their sufferings and persecutions were the result of their forebears’ disobedience.

—Yahweh makes an oath in verse 3, swearing by God’s own life that from that day on, all people would be held accountable for their own disobedience.

—Other passages that alluded to children’s bearing their forebears’ sins were used as justification of the “sour grapes” proverb (see Exodus 20:5; 2 Kings 24:3; Jeremiah 15:4; Lamentations 5:7).

—The chapter ends with an appeal to a sinful nation to take responsibility and seize the opportunity to make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit. Through their repentance, they would live.

—God takes no pleasure in earthly human calamities but, rather, that people would repent and reform, and enjoy the goodness of life in obedience.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Ezekiel was a younger prophet during the time of Jeremiah. He prophesied to the Israelites that were exiled in Babylon.

—The Israelites thought their sins were because of the past generations. Ezekiel informed them that God was judging them based on their own sin.

—Ezekiel proclaimed that those who lived under the blessings of their parents would not receive blessings because they were evil and wicked.

—The Israelites believed that God was unfair for making them responsible for their own actions.

—Ezekiel told each person to repent of sin and worship only God.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk all lived and preached during some of the most turbulent times in ancient Israel’s history. They were contemporaries during the period leading up to and including the early days of the Babylonian Exile.

Ezekiel states that the Word of the Lord came to him “in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month” as he was among the exiles near the river of Chebar. It was the fifth year of the captivity of King Jehoiachin, who was taken with the first group of exiles in 598/07 BC (see 2 Kings 24:10-16). In addition to the king, the Babylonians carried away all the precious treasures of the Temple, all the princes and nobles, and all the craftsmen and smiths, and left the poorest people in the land (see 2 Kings 24:14-15). This would make this about 593 BC, almost six years before the final destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC (see 2 Kings 25). He was probably thirty years old when he began his ministry, given that most priests began their service at that age (see Numbers 4:30). Ezekiel indicates that he was a priest and that his father’s name was Buzi, a man about whom there is no additional information (see Ezekiel 1:3). At the time of Ezekiel’s prophetic calling, he was living in Babylon among the exiles. The message of Ezekiel is addressed to the exiles...
living in Babylon who had become disillusioned by their situation. Some of the exiles believed that they would only be there for a short period of time and Ezekiel corrected their beliefs. He informed them that soon, Jerusalem would fall and be completely destroyed.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Usury was the practice of lending money with the intention of earning a return on the loan. Financial transactions involving lending and borrowing were common in many of the societies of the ancient Near East. However, within ancient Hebrew society, such financial transactions were prohibited by law.

Why did God prohibit Israel from lending to each other for profit? The reasoning was based on God’s gracious act of redemption and blessing extended to His people. The law specified that Hebrews could not charge another Hebrew for what God had blessed them to acquire. In other words, if a man became wealthy, he was not free to charge or take interest from a poor Hebrew. It was God who had made it possible for him to acquire his wealth. One of the ways that gratitude was expressed was by providing food, shelter, and some of the basic necessities of life to the poor. Ezekiel holds this up as one of the standards by which a man or a woman was measured and determined to be just and righteous. Excessive usury was seen as a form of oppression of the poor. In post-exilic Jerusalem, Nehemiah ended the practice of demanding usury after hearing complaints of how people were having to borrow money just to pay taxes (see Nehemiah 5:1-9). In that day, the just or righteous man was one whose business dealings were honest and free of corruption. The people were responsible for their neighbor and brother to ensure that no one was left behind. There laws and social norms were intended to help lift others out of poverty and not reinforce a society with wide gaps between socio-economic classes.

PROFICIENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ezekiel: an ancient Hebrew prophet who lived in the sixth century. He was among the exiles in Babylon. Ezekiel descended from a priestly family, but little else is known about his life or family.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Live (verse 32)—Hebrew: chayah (khaw-yaw’): to be alive; let live.

Repent (verse 32)—Hebrew: shub (shoob): turn away from; return; “turn” (KJV).

Righteous (verse 5)—Hebrew: tsaddiq (tsad-deek’): “just” (KJV); blameless.

Sins (verse 4)—Hebrew: chata (khaw-taw’): goes wrong; misses the mark; trespasses; “sinneth” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. What Is Justice?
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Misuse of an Ancient Proverb (Ezekiel 18:1-4)
   B. Portrait of the Just Man (Ezekiel 18:5-9)
   C. Repent before It Is Too Late (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. What Is Justice?

Ezekiel made it clear that justice and righteousness were not holy options but, rather, were actual requirements of God. Ezekiel ministered to a people who were largely focused on what they could get for themselves. They lived and conducted business as though justice was not a major topic in the law of God. What is justice? Simply stated, justice is a right social relationship between people based upon God’s view of what is appropriate.

Justice is equal employment with fair pay, regardless of race and gender. It is the right to receive a good education or access to health care regardless of the neighborhood in which one lives. Furthermore, justice is living out the meaning of fairness and equality in every sphere of our lives.

God commands the fair, honest, and just treatment of others. When God blesses people to rise to the top of their professions, He expects them to remember where they come from and how they arrived at the top. When God gives promotion, He expects those whom He blesses to remember that there are people behind them who need an advocate and an ally—someone to speak for them.

B. Biblical Background

In this chapter, Ezekiel addresses the long-held belief that children should not be held responsible for the sins of their parents. The use of the proverb “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” was no longer valid. This proverb was widely used in Jerusalem and by the exiles to justify their beliefs that God had been unjust and unfair to the current generation (see Jeremiah 31:29).

This belief was deeply etched into the religious history and culture of Israel (see Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Deuteronomy 5:8-10). The people failed to acknowledge that there were additional promises in those verses that stated that God’s blessings upon a generation were for those who keep the commandments. Throughout Israel’s early history, the people embraced the idea of corporate responsibility, understanding that punishment was measured out to entire families for the sin of one. This was the case with Achan, who took the forbidden spoils of war after the fall of Jericho. His entire family was killed, along with his livestock and servants, and everyone in his household (see Joshua 7:1-26; compare Numbers 14:17-19).

Ezekiel took a different approach to corporate sin, asserting that God was not interested in making one generation pay for the misdeeds and sins of an earlier generation. All souls belong to God and therefore each person is accountable to Him. Throughout the chapter, Ezekiel laid out the argument that God holds each person responsible for his/her own sins. He provided a portrait of the man that the Lord considers to be just—a man who would live and prosper because he had done the things required by the Law.
Ezekiel stressed that what was ultimately needed was not meticulous adherence to the Law, but regeneration of the heart and mind (see Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31; 36:26).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Misuse of an Ancient Proverb
   (Ezekiel 18:1-4)

THE WORD of the Lord came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Ezekiel followed the typical form of prophetic utterances. He prophesied from Babylon near Chebar at Tel-abib (see Ezekiel 1:3; 3:15). The Lord raised a question with the exiles living in Babylon regarding a proverb that was in use in Israel and among the exiles: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (verse 2). The proverb indicated the children’s accountability for the mistakes, failures, and sins of their parents. This belief, derived from several Old Testament passages (see Exodus 20:5; Numbers 14:18; 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 7:9-10), held that God would always hold the next generation responsible for what the previous generation had done. In some sense, there is always the possibility that coming generations will bear the consequences for what the previous generation had done. In some sense, there is always the possibility that coming generations will bear the consequences for what the previous generations have done. Sin does have consequences and it may be that the sins of the fathers can be visited upon their children. In this instance, however, the exiles used the premise to excuse and explain their exile in Babylon. The Lord swore by Himself that in the future they would not be able to make this claim. This was a radical shift in how the ancient Hebrews thought about personal responsibility. Previously, they believed in corporate responsibility, which held that the whole could be held responsible for the actions of the one.

In verse 4, the Lord provided a threefold response to the misuse of the proverb. First, souls belonged to Him. The Hebrew word for “soul” is nephesh and it refers to the totality of a human being. God created Adam and he became a living human being (see Genesis 2:7). Second, the being of the father as well as the being of the son both belong to the Lord. Third, the soul that sins shall die. Each person would pay for his/her own sins. The son shall not be responsible for the sins of the father, and the father shall not be responsible for the sins of the son. This is foundational teaching in the New Testament that each person will give an account of his/her own life and actions and not those of family members’ (see Romans 6:21; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27).

B. Portrait of the Just Man
   (Ezekiel 18:5-9)

But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; He that hath not given forth upon usury,
neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn
his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment
between man and man, Hath walked in my statutes,
and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he
shall surely live, saith the Lord God.

Verses 5-9 present a portrait of the just man. Ezekiel describes a person whom God considers to be just. In contrast to one who wants to blame others, there are those who seek to live according to the moral and ethical teachings of the Scriptures (see Habakkuk 2:4c; compare Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). The Hebrew word for “just” (saddiq) denotes one who lives by a moral standard of justice (see Micah 6:8). The verb be indicates that the just man seeks to manifest the traits of a just life in all he does. He or she not only lives justly, but also practices the requirements of the Law. Do indicates that the just person practices the teachings of the Law. He or she does what is lawful, as translated from the Hebrew word mispat, denoting someone who is free from prejudice and bias. This is the man or woman who practices equity. Mispat is closely linked to the word righteousness (see Genesis 18:19; 2 Samuel 8:15; Isaiah 1:27).

In verse 6, the first thing we learn about the just is that they have not eaten upon the mountains, nor lifted their eyes to worship idols. This phrase is unique to Ezekiel and may be best understood as a reference to worship and sacrifice on the high places, a practice that was strictly forbidden (see Leviticus 26:30).

Verse 7 begins with what the just man does not do, which is oppress the poor, widows, or orphans. One of the great paradoxes of ancient Israel was the gross hypocrisy prevalent among the wealthy classes. Often, they would profess religious faith while yet denying a worker his/her wages or dragging the weak into court to deprive them of their rights. The prophets preached that God was against those who oppressed the poor and the stranger (see Leviticus 19:33; 25:14,17; Amos 2:6; Malachi 3:5). “Restoring the pledge of a debtor” referred to returning a man’s cloak or other possessions after the debt had been paid (see Exodus 22:26; Deuteronomy 24:6; Amos 2:8). Sometimes, the most valuable possession may have been a cloak—which was used to keep warm in the cold winter months—or a millstone, which was a source of income. There were occasions when the poor were defrauded out of their possessions and the law was intended to prevent this. The just were expected to live by moral and ethical standards that compel them to give food to the hungry and clothes to the naked (see Matthew 25:31-42). The poor were not to be neglected or mistreated, but cared for and assisted (see Deuteronomy 10:18; 15:7-11; Leviticus 19:9).

In verse 8, the just are further identified by how they conduct business with the poor and how they treat others in the justice system. First, they do not lend to the poor at interest. Second, they do not lend for the purpose of earning a profit. Third, they do not commit acts of iniquity against others. Fourth, they practice equal justice by ensuring that everyone they deal with is treated fairly.

The Law of Moses did not allow for the practice of charging interest to a fellow Israelite. Usury (Hebrew: nesek) is interest that is charged on borrowed money. In Leviticus 25:35-37, there are several laws concerning how to deal with the poor. If an Israelite became poor, individuals were commanded by the Law to help the person so that he or she could remain in the
community. If one needed financial assistance and borrowed money, no one was allowed to charge the person interest. In some instances, the money could be seen as a donation to help the fellow Israelite recover from a financial disaster. There was no restriction against lending and collecting interest payments from foreigners (see Deuteronomy 23:19-20; compare Proverbs 6:1-2; 28:8).

The exercise and execution of justice and equity was a major theme of prophetic preaching (see Isaiah 1:16-17; Jeremiah 22:3; Zephaniah 2:3; Amos 5:23-25). The just are those who practice mispat (justice) and seek shalom (peace) for others. They do not inflict unwarranted pain and suffering upon others and they ensure that justice is equal and fair to all.

The passage concludes (at verse 9) with the Lord’s declaration that those who practice all these things are just, and their lives are ordered by a moral standard. They walk in the statutes of the Lord, living according to the established laws governing life in the community (see Psalm 1). “Walked” implies a meticulous commitment and unfailing adherence to these laws. This is not a form of legalism, common in the New Testament; rather, it was a basic allegiance to the Word of God. “Keeping the judgment of God” means following the laws and process for settling disagreements and disputes among the people, according to the Holiness Code, Leviticus 17–25, and the Book of the Covenant, Exodus 21–23. Those who kept these judgments and ordered their lives according the Word of God would live. The word live denotes an exemption from God’s wrath. It further denotes a life blessed to experience God’s gracious gifts of abundance and prosperity. Ezekiel closed this section by declaring it to be the Word of the Lord.

Ezekiel clearly taught that God commands a specified standard of conduct. These were the standards that God’s people were to follow in the context of their communities.

C. Repent before It Is Too Late
(Ezekiel 18:30-32)

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so, iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

Verses 30-32 bring to a close the long rebuttal regarding Israel’s misuse of an ancient proverb. “Therefore,” points back to everything from all previous statements regarding God’s standards of judgment. He Himself will judge those who fail to follow His Word and honor their covenant. Israel refers to the whole nation and is not a reference to the tribes in the north, who had long since been conquered (see 2 Kings 17:1-6). Every individual will be judged for his actions.

In verses 30b-31a, there are three imperative commands: “repent, turn, and cast away.” All three commands imply an immediate urgency for turning away from the sins of the present. The day of God’s wrath was swiftly approaching, and Israel could avert the kind of catastrophe that befell their parents by repenting of their sins. Those who turned from all of their transgressions would avoid becoming the cause of their ruin (see 2 Chronicles 28:23; Proverbs 24:22; 26:28). The Lord
called upon the people to make a new heart and new spirit—not self-reformation, but a mandate for inward spiritual change.

Ezekiel called for the kind of change that would have averted the calamity that fell upon Israel and Judah. The passage ends on a note of hope and grace. The Lord takes no delight in needless death; rather, He delights in mercy and compassion (see Micah 7:19-20).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is easy to blame someone else or something beyond our control for personal and community failures. All of us have used some form of excuse to absolve ourselves of responsibility for something we should have done in our role as either a leader or follower. In local church ministry, members often make excuses when confronted for patterns of unfaithfulness—tardiness, absences, and failure to carry out important tasks. Sometimes the most difficult person to face is the one in the mirror—one’s self. It is far easier to cast doubt upon someone else’s character than to see ourselves as the cause for why the ministry we serve in may struggle. Jesus said before we look for faults in others, we must first look in the mirror and clear our own character flaws first. Just as Ezekiel declared so long ago, all of us remain accountable to God for our actions.

PRAYER

Lord God of creation, give us the minds and the will to be responsible for our lives and our service. May we never look to others to find reasons for why we fail to carry out our assignments. Forgive us, we pray. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(May 17-23, 2021)

Ezekiel: Street Preacher to the Exiles

MONDAY, May 17: “Treat Each Other Fairly” (Deuteronomy 24:14-18)
THURSDAY, May 20: “The Righteous Child Is Rewarded” (Ezekiel 18:14-18)
FRIDAY, May 21: “All Are Accountable for Their Sins” (Ezekiel 18:19-24)
SATURDAY, May 22: “God Is Compassionate and Fair” (Ezekiel 18:25-29)
SUNDAY, May 23: “Repent and Live Righteous Lives” (Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32)
May 30, 2021

Lesson 13

JONAH: FIERY HARBINGER OF DOOM

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Changing for the Better
YOUTH TOPIC: A Change for the Better

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Do Right by God
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Do Right!

DEVOtIONAL READING
Jonah 2

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jonah 3
PRINT PASSAGE: Jonah 3:1-10
ADULT KEY VERSE: Jonah 3:10
YOUTH KEY VERSE: Jonah 3:5

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jonah 3
PRINT PASSAGE: Jonah 3:1-10
KEY VERSE: Jonah 3:5

Jonah 3:1-10—KJV
AND THE word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,
2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.
3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.
4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.
5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.
6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor

Jonah 3:1-10—NIV
THEN THE word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:
2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”
3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.
4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”
5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.
6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.
7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let
flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:
8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth,
and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every
one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in
their hands.
9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn
away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?
10 And God saw their works, that they turned from
their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he
had said that he would do unto them; and he did it
not.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Living in peace with others often requires personal change. What can we do about threatening life situations? After hearing God’s warning of judgment from Jonah, the people of Nineveh repented, and God forgave their sin.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Survey Nineveh’s response to Jonah’s message.
2. Sense how the people of Nineveh felt after hearing Jonah’s message.
3. Engage in repentance and right behavior after hearing God’s warning.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Jonah is unique among the books of the prophets in that it centers around Jonah’s own responses to God rather than focusing on the content of his prophetic message. Jonah is also unique in that his prophetic message was exclusively for a single non-Israelite nation.
—The Ninevites had a terrible reputation: Nahum describes Nineveh as a city of bloodshed, lies, and plunder (3:1). Zephaniah calls it a “soiled, defiled, oppressing city” (3:1). The Ninevites were crude and carnal, cruel in war, and excessively self-indulgent.
—Although God extended mercy toward Jonah by giving him another opportunity to obey Him, Jonah objected to God’s showing mercy to the Ninevites and giving them a chance to repent and be spared of His judgment.
—God’s desire was to redeem the city of Nineveh, not to destroy it.
—God may relent and change His mind based on the sincerity of human repentance (see Jeremiah 18:7-8; Exodus 32:12-14; 2 Samuel 24:15-17; Ezra 8:21-23).
Teachers of CHILDREN
—Jonah is unique among the books of the prophets in that it is primarily a story of his experiences rather than a detailed record of his message. Jonah is also unique in that his prophecy is totally directed at a nation other than his own. —Jonah ran away from his prophetic responsibility to preach God’s message to the people of Nineveh. —Jonah’s unwillingness to serve did not move God to change His mind. God intervened very dramatically to compel Jonah to go to Nineveh.

The Ninevites were widely known for their evil ways—idolatry, witchcraft, and extreme cruelty. —Jonah proclaimed God’s message of repentance in Nineveh, and the people repented. —The king decreed a fast for everyone and for the animals. Every person and every animal wore sackcloth to demonstrate their repentance. God saw the sincerity of the people and did not bring catastrophe upon the land. —Jonah did not want to share God’s grace and mercy with the people of Nineveh. Yet, God’s grace and mercy were available to Jonah and anyone else who will repent and receive it.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
Jonah is one of the twelve Minor Prophets, so called simply because of the shorter length of their writings. There is nothing minor about their messages nor the times in which they lived. The book of Jonah contains one of the most memorable and well-known stories in biblical and literary history. Many people immediately identify Jonah as the man who was swallowed by the great fish. He remained in the belly of the fish for three full days before receiving a second chance to carry out his assignment from God. The narrative of the fish’s swallowing Jonah has caused considerable disagreement among many interpreters, causing them to question the historicity of the book. It stands to reason that the same God who created everything out of nothing could easily sustain a man in a fish’s belly for three days.

The Ninevites were widely known for their evil ways—idolatry, witchcraft, and extreme cruelty. —Jonah proclaimed God’s message of repentance in Nineveh, and the people repented. —The king decreed a fast for everyone and for the animals. Every person and every animal wore sackcloth to demonstrate their repentance. God saw the sincerity of the people and did not bring catastrophe upon the land. —Jonah did not want to share God’s grace and mercy with the people of Nineveh. Yet, God’s grace and mercy were available to Jonah and anyone else who will repent and receive it.

One of the challenges readers must overcome in the study of Jonah is the absence of historical markers indicating the time period of his prophetic ministry. The prophet Amos notes that his ministry was conducted during the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel (see Amos 1:1). Jonah does not mention the name of a single king in the opening verses of his book. Second Kings 14:25c mentions a servant of the Lord named Jonah, son of Amittai, from Gath-hepher. According to 2 Kings 14:25, it was this Jonah who prophesied that Jeroboam II would expand his kingdom from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah. Outside of these minor details, there are no other details concerning Jonah’s personal background and ministry. To be clear, however, the lack of additional information concerning Jonah does not compromise the historicity of the account.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The history of Nineveh goes back nearly six thousand years, making it one of the oldest cities in history. The city was the capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire, making it the most important city in the Ancient Near East. Nineveh was established on the eastern bank of the Tigris River. Genesis 10:11 states that Nineveh was founded by Nimrod, the son of Cush (see Genesis 10:8-11). There is some disagreement among
English translations regarding how to translate Genesis 10:11. The NRSV and NASB agree that the rendering of the verse indicates that the city was founded by Nimrod. The city is mentioned seventeen times in the Old and New Testaments, including a reference by Jesus in Matthew 12:41. The archaeological remains of Nineveh were found near the modern-day city of Mosul in Iraq. Many of the ancient walls of the city were destroyed in recent history, during the ISIS occupation of Iraq.

The Assyrian empire played a pivotal role in the power struggles that dominated the Ancient Near East in the ninth and eighth centuries. Primarily, the Assyrians competed with Egypt for control and domination of Israel, the valuable trade route between Africa and Asia. Control of Israel’s land was vital to creating wealth by opening new markets for trade and commerce.

During the fourteenth year of the reign of Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them (see 2 Kings 18:13). Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah demanding that he surrender Jerusalem. Rather than comply, Hezekiah took the letter to the Temple and laid it before the Lord (see 2 Kings 19:14). According to 2 Kings 19:35, the angel of the Lord devastated the Assyrian army, striking down more 185,000 soldiers. Afterward, Sennacherib returned to his home in Nineveh (see 2 Kings 19:36; compare Isaiah 37:37). During the time of the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser I and Tiglath-pileser I, Nineveh grew and prospered. It was during the reign of Shalmaneser I that the Northern Kingdom fell and was swallowed up by the Assyrians (see 2 Kings 17:1-3). In 612 BCE, the Assyrian empire was overrun and conquered by the Babylonians and Medes. The Assyrian Empire never again regained prominence in the region.

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

**Jonah:** a prophet of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the eighth century BC. He is the central figure of the book of Jonah, in which he is sent by God to Nineveh with a prophetic warning of impending divine wrath.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Ninevites (verse 5)**—Hebrew: *Nineveh* (nee-nev-ay’): inhabitants of “Nineveh” (KJV), which is the capital of Assyria.

**Relented (verse 10)**—Hebrew: *nacham* (naw-kham’): was sorry, compassionate, moved to pity; consoled oneself; “repented” (KJV).

**Sackcloth (verse 5)**—Hebrew: *saq* (sak): a sack made of cloth worn in mourning and humiliation.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. The Call to Ministry

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. God Gives Jonah a Second Chance (Jonah 3:1-4)

B. The People of Nineveh Believe God (Jonah 3:5-9)

C. God Was Moved to Compassion (Jonah 3:10)

**III. Concluding Reflection**
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Call to Ministry

Jonah was called by God to go to the great city of Nineveh (see Jonah 1:2). He resisted God’s assignment and attempted to flee to Tarshish (see Jonah 1:3). Jonah is perhaps the best-known example of someone who blatantly refused God’s calling. God directed Jonah to go and preach to a nation of people he hated (see Jonah 4:1-11). Eventually, with considerable intervention by God, Jonah was convinced to obey and go to Nineveh. Jonah preached for forty days in Nineveh before the people repented and judgment was averted.

Many men and women know the pressure of being called to ministry. The absolute conviction of a personal call by God to the work of the ministry is the key that determines whether a person will remain faithful to the call. The conviction that God calls persons for His own purpose undergirds the work of teaching, preaching, and evangelism, as well as the broader context of congregational and parachurch ministry. All believers are called to serve the larger purpose of God in the world, which is the expansion and spread of the Gospel to the farthest reaches of the earth (see Matthew 28:19-20). One of the critical aspects of our call to ministry is having a grasp of God’s purpose for our lives.

The personal affirmation that God has called one to a noble work empowers him or her for the trials and triumphs of ministry. Without a deep conviction of the call of God, the work can become burdensome and disheartening to the point that many grow discouraged enough to quit the ministry completely. No one should come to the work of ministry without a clear personal calling, and an honest, thorough examination of the real challenges of church ministry. People of all ages have announced a call to ministry without a careful, critical evaluation of the seriousness of the work. Failing to critically examine one’s calling to ministry can result in thorough disillusionment with the many setbacks that often accompany such a demanding labor of love. Often, men and women enter the ministry filled with high ambitions of greatness or overwhelming optimism that they can change the world, only to be met by a plethora of hardships, obstructionist church leaders, apathetic church members, obstacles, and other challenges that leave many questioning the validity of their personal walk with God.

The call to Christian ministry begins with an understanding of the mission of God as manifested through the ministry of Jesus Christ. Christian ministry is an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 19:10; Acts 1:8). When Jesus offered Zacchaeus the message of salvation and call to repentance, He revealed His own personal mission: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). On the occasion when Jesus corrected and calmed an argument between His disciples over the question of seats in the kingdom, He reiterated His purpose: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, NIV).
B. Biblical Background

Jonah is one of the most unique prophetic books in the Bible, primarily because it focuses on the man and not the message. The book gives an account of the exploits of the prophet and how he came to be in Nineveh. Another distinguishing feature of Jonah is that the message in the book is addressed to a nation that is neither Israel nor Judah. The book begins with Jonah’s receiving a commission to go to Nineveh and cry out against its wickedness. Rather than obey, Jonah attempted to go in the opposite direction, as far away from Nineveh as he could get (see Jonah 1:3). After encountering a fierce storm at sea, Jonah was forced to confess to the men aboard the ship and convince them to throw him overboard. As an act of grace, the Lord had appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. After three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah up onto the dry land. The Lord then repeated the command to prophesy to Nineveh—the second time, Jonah obeyed God (see Jonah 3:1-2). Jonah 3:4 summarizes God’s message to Nineveh: in forty days the Lord would overthrow the city unless the people repented of their sins. Jonah never revealed how the Lord planned to overthrow the city. Within a matter of days, the people of Nineveh, from the wealthiest to the poorest (including the animals), joined together to fast. The people repented, and, for a while, likely refrained from evil. However, in 722 BCE the armies of Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom and deported the people to Assyria (see 2 Kings 17:23). The prophet Nahum, however, repeated the message of Jonah about Nineveh. That time, there was no mercy from God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God Gives Jonah a Second Chance (Jonah 3:1-4)

AND THE word of the L ORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the L ORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

The chapter begins with the Word of the Lord coming to Jonah a second time (see Jonah 1:1). Jonah had a calling upon his life that he had initially tried to escape. Initially, the Lord had commanded him to go to Nineveh; instead, he went to Joppa and tried to flee to a place called Tarshish, believed to have been on the east coast of Spain or the island of Crete. God had called him and there was no running away. The Lord had been slow to anger and very patient with Jonah. God calls men and women to specific assignments that they cannot elude or escape.

In verse 2, Jonah received a commission and a divine mission from God (see Jeremiah 1:4-10; Amos 7:14-16; Matthew 10:1-15; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The verse contains three imperative commands: arise, go, and preach. This time, Jonah did not evade the call; rather, he responded in absolute obedience and went to Nineveh. Joppa (the city where Jonah boarded the ship, attempting to escape God’s will) was on the Mediterranean coast of Israel.
It would have taken a few days, maybe even two to three weeks, to travel to Nineveh. This time, Jonah was ready to deliver the message that the Lord had given him for Nineveh (see Isaiah 6:7; compare Jeremiah 20:7-13).

In verse 3, Jonah obeyed the Word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. In this verse, Nineveh is described as an exceeding great city. At that time, it was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River in what is now modern-day Mosul, Iraq. According to Genesis 10:11, the city was founded and built by Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord (see Isaiah 37:37; compare Nahum 1:1; 2:9). There are no context clues to indicate the denotation of the phrase “exceeding great city.” It may be that Nineveh was either a large city with respect to land mass or population; or perhaps a wealthy place, teeming with grand palaces and bustling trade and commercial areas. The mention of “three days’ journey” could mean that it took Jonah three days to walk around or to the city or through the city. This would support the belief that Nineveh was a very large city.

In verse 4, Jonah finally entered the city and went a day’s journey, more than likely to the city center. In many ancient cities, the marketplace is where one would find the largest number of people gathered. The apostle Paul used a similar strategy of going into the city marketplaces to preach and minister in the public squares (see Acts 17:17; compare Acts 16:19; Matthew 23:7). Jonah’s message was simple and direct. He cried out in a loud voice that in forty days this city shall be overthrown. The once-reluctant prophet preached effectively to a hostile people who could have utterly rejected him.

B. The People of Nineveh Believe God (Jonah 3:5-9)

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

The response of the people of Nineveh was almost instantaneous. Verse 5 cites two reactions to Jonah’s message. First, the people believed God, which simply means that the message of God through Jonah produced a powerful reaction (see 1 Samuel 7:3-14; Ezra 8:21-23; Jeremiah 36:1-5). “Believed” derives from a Hebrew word which means to be firmly convinced of a matter (see Genesis 15:6; compare also Genesis 45:26; Exodus 4:31; 14:31 with Hebrews 11:1). Whatever else Jonah said or did convinced the people to take God seriously.

Second, the people proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, a coarsely woven fabric made of black goat’s hair. Fasting was the practice of not eating and/or drinking over a set period. The normal fast would last from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. In most contexts, fasting was typically seen as an expression of great humility. In Nineveh, everyone committed to
fasting and repentance, from the very least in the city to the greatest. At some point, news of Jonah’s preaching reached the king of Nineveh. The text records that the king himself was struck by Jonah’s message; he arose from his throne and put on the clothes of mourners, sackcloth, and ashes. He went a step further and sat in the ashes, a sign of deep inner agony and regret. Jonah’s preaching touched the heart of the king and stirred within him the need to repent and pray. The king and his nobles issued a proclamation that everyone was to begin fasting. They were to eat no food nor drink any water. This was a total fast that included all the people, herds, and flocks. That the nobles joined the kings suggests that there was harmony and cooperation between the king and his leaders.

In verses 8-9, Jonah’s preachings set off a period of mourning and repentance of sin. No one or any living creature was excluded from the fast. The king announced that everyone was to cry out to God in deep agony and sincerity. God objected to the personal and corporate evil in the city and set the date for every man and every woman to bow before Him. The king believed that if the people genuinely repented, then God might be persuaded to change His mind about whether to unleash His wrath upon this wicked nation.

C. God Was Moved to Compassion (Jonah 3:10)

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

God paid attention to the people’s response to His word through Jonah. They changed their ways. God saw their acts of repentance and heard their pleas for mercy. God sees beyond the physical appearance and outward emotion; He sees the heart. The Lord knew that the Ninevites’ displays of humility were genuine. The people of Nineveh turned from their evil ways. This moved God to change His mind. The word repent does not mean that God had committed some wrong that needed to be addressed. Rather, it means that God was moved with compassion for the people of Nineveh and decided not to execute His fierce wrath upon them. God is merciful and full of compassion. He delights in forgiveness and mercy.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The book of Jonah provides three lessons that are relevant in every generation. The first lesson is that it is impossible to flee from God—with success. There are no distances or secret caves that will conceal our presence from the Lord God. In Psalm 139:7 (NASB), the psalmist asked, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” Nineveh was likely filled with anxiety and stress as the inhabitants waited for God’s judgment. The possibility remained that disaster could be averted, but it depended upon the God whom Jonah proclaimed. God was free to pardon Nineveh and lift the cloud of their impending destruction. Just as God was free to give Jonah a second chance, He was just as free to give Nineveh a second chance.
to an assignment, there is no escape. The book of Jonah reveals the loving compassion of God for a man who hated the people to whom he was sent. Many times, our first answer to the call of God is to lay out our inadequacies and shortcomings. Moses responded to God’s call by inquiring about what would happen if the people would not believe him or listen to him (see Exodus 4:1-17). Moses had a second objection—namely, his inability to speak with eloquence. In each instance, the Lord reassured him that he was the right person for the task.

Second, we see the power of prophetic preaching and how it can change the direction of an entire city. The church in this generation is often silent on many of the cultural issues that have gripped the nation. God calls today’s preachers to deliver a message that is often viewed with sarcasm, skepticism, and derision. God is still calling people to repentance, as the wages of sin is death (see Romans 6). America and the world need prophetic preaching. Prophetic preaching goes to the very heart of the human condition, convicting people of their sins. Such preaching is driven by the deep sense of the urgency in this hour for a message that promotes God’s agenda rather than a worldly one.

Third, Jonah reminds us that the Lord God is free to do whatever He wishes to do. Jonah features the sovereignty of God on full display. God is not bound by human prejudices and hatred. He is free to love, bless, and forgive whomever He wishes. This, then, is the great lesson from Jonah: love one another, even your enemies.

**PRAYER**

*Lord God, may we learn to love and forgive as You have loved and forgiven us. Grant that we will never take for granted the grace that has been extended to each of us. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

(May 24-30, 2021)

**Jonah: Fiery Harbinger of Doom**

**MONDAY,** May 24: “Jonah’s Experience Foreshadows Christ’s” (Matthew 12:38-42)


**WEDNESDAY,** May 26: “Jonah Turns Away from God’s Call” (Jonah 1:1-12)

**THURSDAY,** May 27: “Sailors Make Vows to the Lord” (Jonah 1:13-16)

**FRIDAY,** May 28: “Jonah Resents God’s Grace toward Others” (Jonah 4:1-5)

**SATURDAY,** May 29: “God’s Compassion Overrides Jonah’s Personal Comfort” (Jonah 4:6-11)

**SUNDAY,** May 30: “God’s Mercy Prevails” (Jonah 3)
Confident Hope

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The study this quarter looks at God’s gift of faith as the source of hope. Lessons from the Gospels illuminate hope and faith in the teachings and miracles of Jesus. Lessons from the Epistles show how the early church understood God’s gift of salvation through faith in Christ as the source of hope.

Unit I, “Jesus Teaches about Faith,” is comprised of five lessons that reveal the hope and faith that come through Jesus’ teachings and miracles. The lessons from the book of Matthew demonstrate that faith in God is the primary source of hope and confidence. The miracles in the books of Mark and Luke illustrate the power of faith.

Unit II, “Faith and Salvation,” has four lessons that explore in Paul’s letter to the Romans his understanding about the hope of salvation through faith. The letter teaches that God’s righteousness is revealed in those who live by faith. Paul illustrates faith through the example of Abraham. He unpacks the teaching about being reconciled to God by justification through faith and teaches that salvation is for all.

Unit III, “Faith Gives Us Hope,” has four lessons that focus on faith as being essential for the hope of eternal life. Hebrews defines faith in Christ as a basis for hope and tells how faith in Christ gives hope that helps people persevere in all circumstances. The book of 1 John promises that faith conquers the world. The book of 2 Corinthians teaches about hope in God’s gift of eternal life.
Lesson 1

“WHY DO YOU WORRY?”

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** No Worries
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Keep Calm and Carry On

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Do Not Worry
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Why Worry?

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
Ezekiel 34:11-16

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 6:19-34
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 6:25-34
**ADULT KEY VERSES:** Matthew 6:32b-33
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Matthew 6:34

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 6:19-34
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 6:25-34
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 6:31

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**Matthew 6:25-34—KJV**
25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?
31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we

**Matthew 6:25-34—NIV**
25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?
26 “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?
27 “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?
28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.
29 “Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.
30 “If that is how God clothes 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?
“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Life’s uncertainties can lead people to worry about how to obtain their basic needs. Whom can we trust to meet all our needs? The gospel of Matthew points out that our God (who is truly sovereign) will fulfill our needs.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Contrast Jesus’ teachings about worry with their own anxieties.
2. Appreciate God’s care for everything in nature.
3. Embrace the opportunity to trust God in everyday life.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Jesus used His teachings to shift the ancient understanding of riches from strictly temporal to those that are eternal (see verses 19-20).
—Jesus presents four arguments to teach His disciples about the dangers of greed for material gain and highlights the power of divine providence: (1) how God provides for the birds (verse 26); (2) trusting God is more life-giving than worrying (verse 27); (3) trusting God for our daily needs (verses 28-31), and (4) a lack of trust in God is living as if we don’t know God (verse 32).
—Since the eyes regulate the motion of the human body, Jesus challenged His disciples to keep their eyes focused on kingdom issues.
—Mammon (verse 24, KJV; translated “wealth” in NRSV) is a rabbinic technical term found in the Talmud denoting wealth.
—Jesus does not say “be like the birds” but rather “look at the birds.” The natural order provides a means to reflect upon God’s providence, but not necessarily role models for human behavior. Other Scripture passages highlight the human obligation to engage in
productive work. (See, for example, 2 Thessalonians 3:10.)

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Matthew 5–7 highlights Jesus’ teachings on the values that believers cultivate.
—Jesus admonished believers to trust God first and not to worry about the future.

—Jesus compared God’s care for nature to the delicate and intricate details of God’s care for humanity.
—Jesus urged believers to trust first “the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” not other humans.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The gospel of Matthew is the first of the four gospels found in the canon of the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because their messages are very similar. Matthew is not the oldest of the canonical gospels—that distinction belongs to the gospel of Mark, which is believed to have been written around AD 70. Matthew, on the other hand, is believed to have been written around 85 C.E. Christian tradition ascribes the authorship to Matthew, who was one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus. He was a tax collector and was called by Jesus early during his Galilean ministry (see Matthew 9:9). Matthew is called the “church gospel because it instructs believers on how to live in the world and in community with other believers. And it is the only gospel to mention the word church (ekklesia) (Matthew 16:18; 18:17). Matthew was written to a largely Jewish Christian audience and this is reflected in the text by the numerous references to the Jewish Law (see Matthew 5:21;27; 31; 38; 43) and Prophets (see Matthew 1:23; 2:6, 18; 3:3).

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is the Great Lawgiver, whose pronouncements exceed those of even Moses’. Whereas Moses goes to the mountaintop to receive the Law, Jesus redefines the Law from a mountaintop. He is the Master Teacher that attracts large crowds of people, who are amazed by His words. The one overarching theme of the gospel of Matthew is that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah, who came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
According to Matthew 4:12-25, Jesus began His active ministry in the region of Galilee shortly after John had been put into prison (verse 12). Galilee is in the northern region of Israel and situated about eighty miles from Jerusalem. After leaving Nazareth, Jesus settled in the town of Capernaum, a fishing community located along the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. It was here, along the shores of the lake, where He met and called His first disciples—Simon, Andrew, and two brothers named James and John (verses 18-21). Shortly after calling these young men, Jesus began His first ministry tour of Galilee preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. He spent time teaching in the synagogues and healing all manner of sickness and diseases among the people (verses 23-24).

Matthew 6:25-34 follows a series of pronouncements that covered a range of subjects. In Matthew 6:1-18, Jesus gave clear instructions about true piety and heavenly rewards. He taught the disciples about the folly of making earthly treasures a focal point of their lives and reminded them that they could not serve two masters. They
must decide that it is either God or mammon. In verses 19-24, Jesus deals with the human lust after possessions—and in verses 25-34, He confronted their concerns about how they would provide for their daily needs.

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

**Heavenly Father:** God is often referred to as “Father.”

**Solomon:** the second son born to King David and Bathsheba. He was the third king of the united Israel. Solomon’s wealth, fame, and wisdom far exceeded that of David’s. He led in the building of the first Temple of Israel.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Arrayed (verse 29)**—Greek: *enduo* (en-doo’-o): to have put on; clothed; decorated; “dressed” (NIV).

**Knows (verse 32)**—Greek: *eidó* (i’-do): is aware; beholds; considers; perceives; “knoweth” (KJV).

**Life (verse 25)**—Greek: *psuché* (psoo-khay’): the vital breath; breath of life; the human soul.

**Observe (verse 28, NASB)**—Greek: *katamanthanó* (kat-am-an-than’-o): to learn thoroughly; examine carefully; “consider” (KJV); “see” (NIV).

**Sow (verse 26)**—Greek: *speiró* (spi’-ro): seed; spread; scatter.

**Worry (verse 25)**—Greek: *merimnaó* (mer-im-nah’-o): to be anxious; to care for; “take . . . thought” (KJV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. God Cares for Us

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. Daily Life
   (Matthew 6:25-26)

B. Divine Logic
   (Matthew 6:27-32)

C. Different Laws
   (Matthew 6:33-34)

**III. Concluding Reflection**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. God Cares for Us**

Anxiety is the most prevalent cause of emotional distress. *Anxiety* can be defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension, particularly about future uncertainties. It suggests feelings of fear, doubt, worry, helplessness, distress, tension, care, deep concern, and solicitude. (Solicitude is active and sometimes excessive concern for another’s well-being.) Anxiety is that inner anguish over a matter that may or may not happen.

There is a multitude of reasons why anxiety is such a major medical, psychological, and social issue. The treatment and development of drugs and therapies for anxiety and its attendant illnesses is a $250 billion-dollar global business. There are a lot of fearful, distressed, and worried people in the world today.
This lesson makes it clear that Jesus cared about people and their problems. Our Lord reveals His sensitivity to the problems and concerns that the people of His day felt. The people of Jesus' day lived with tremendous economic challenge, social unrest, Roman occupation, and political uncertainty. They were never sure of what would happen from one day to the next. The wealthy business owners and the politically well-connected lived and dined in sumptuous luxury, while the poor and those on the margins of society tried to scrape out a daily subsistence. When the multitudes heard these words of Jesus, they must have brought great comfort to the hearts and minds of those who had left everything to follow Him.

B. Biblical Background

In these verses, Jesus drew a distinction between those who put their trust in earthly riches and those who completely trusted God. He shifted the ancient understanding of riches from strictly temporal things to things that are eternal. Jesus stated that it was futile to store up treasures on the earth where they can decay, be stolen, or be eaten by moths (see Isaiah 50:9; 51:8; James 5:2). It is far better to store up treasures in heaven—where they can never be stolen, rusted, or eaten by moths (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). Jesus stated that wherever one's treasure was, there would that person's heart be also. Jesus challenged His disciples to keep their attention and eyes focused on kingdom issues.

When Jesus said, “You cannot serve two masters,” He used the strongest possible word found in the Greek language. It is the absolute negative. Jesus said it is simply impossible to serve God and mammon. When it comes to our service, loyalty, and devotion to the work of the kingdom of God, it is absolutely impossible to have divided loyalties. There is no middle ground with God.

Mammon is an Aramaic word and it refers to material possessions and gains of every kind. Mammon is not just money, land, and buildings—it includes our attitudes toward the acquisition of these things as well. Rather than working to acquire things, Jesus said for believers to be committed to the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Daily Life

(Matthew 6:25-26)

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they.

This section begins with the words, “Therefore, I say unto you”—which looks back on everything that has been said previously about putting one’s trust in earthly riches. Jesus reminded His disciples that their first duty was to serve God and not mammon. The KJV’s use of the phrase “Take no thought” is better expressed by the words, “do not worry or do not be anxious.” There is a place for genuine concern, but in this case, Jesus said they were not to spend time being concerned or being anxious about things God would provide.
This was an imperative command indicating that they must not (under any circumstance) worry about things in God’s prerogative to provide. Jesus understood that the life of the typical person in Galilee was quite difficult. There were limited opportunities for work, with the primary industries being fishing and some farming. Jesus said that they must not be anxious about their lives despite the hardships they faced (Greek: ψυχή [psou-khay]). *Psuche* is the word that is sometimes translated as “soul.” Here, it does not refer to some esoteric abstract part of a person’s being. It is the very essence of being alive, a living human being. It is the same idea expressed in the creation when God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul or living human being (see Genesis 2:7). The disciples were to take no thought for four necessities of life—food, water, health, clothing. The point is this: if God created you, then it stands to reason that He will provide every basic necessity for sustaining your life. Jesus followed up His statement with the first of three rhetorical questions: “Is not life more meat and the body than raiment?” (See Matthew 4:4; compare with Deuteronomy 8:3.)

In verse 26, Jesus pointed to nature and how God takes care of what is considered insignificant: “Behold the birds of the air”—they have no gardens, no tools with which to reap crops, and no barns with which to store crops. Does that mean that the birds of the air will starve? Of course not! God takes care of them. Are you not better than a bird in the eyes of God? The pronoun “you” is emphatic and emphasizes the greatness of human worth in the eyes of God. You, not the birds, are the objects of God’s love. This is an important lesson for believers to learn.

**B. Divine Logic**

*(Matthew 6:27-32)*

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, 0 ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Verse 27 is the second of the three rhetorical questions. The word *thought* again refers to anxiety or concern. *Cubit* referred to a unit of measurement, equal to about eighteen inches. A cubit was measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. Exactly what did Jesus mean by adding a single cubit to one’s life? Clearly, Jesus was not making a statement about adding height to one’s stature (Greek: ἡλικία [hay-lik-ee-ah]). *Helikia* refers to one’s age or the length of life or time of life (see Psalm 39:5). Jesus said that it is pure foolishness to worry because it will not add a single day to the length of your life.

In the third rhetorical question (verse 28), Jesus again returned to an earlier statement about clothes: “Why take ye thought for raiment?” These verses suggest that Jesus spoke these words probably in the early spring (around March–early April), when the wild flowers are in full bloom. The hills around Galilee are full of the vibrant colors of flowers
and would have provided an excellent backdrop for Jesus’ teaching on God’s providential care. In verse 28b, Jesus says, “[Look at] the lilies of the field.” No one plants them and no one waters them. No one cultivates them. Look at how beautiful they are and how wonderfully they grow. They do not toil (labor excessively) or spin—that is, weave their own garments of beauty. Jesus pointed to them and said, *Look at these flowers, how they grow and multiply.*

In verse 29, Jesus again speaks with the voice of authority: “And yet I say unto you.” There was no king like Solomon, but not even Solomon in his greatest garments of magnificence and glory could compare to the beauty of these lilies. Jesus said to His disciples, “Consider” (Greek: *katamanthano* [kat-am-an-than-o]), a word which implies that one is to give serious consideration to what is being said, based upon the evidence presented. One need not speculate about these beautiful flowers; it was plain to see that God was taking care of them.

Jesus drew a further delineation between God’s lavish care of nature and the blessings heaped upon King Solomon. There was no king comparable to Solomon in terms of wealth, fame, and stature on the global stage.

In these words of Jesus there is movement from the lesser to the Greater. Verse 30 prompts this thought: If God takes care of the grass—which blossoms today and is thrown into a furnace the next—then doesn’t it stand to reason that because we are of greater value in His eyes that He will take care of us? Why are you so worried about the things that God can handle for you? Jesus’ question seems to suggest something along these lines: Is your faith in God that small? Is your confidence in God the Father measured by the moments you will spend worrying about food, drink, clothing, and all these other things? These are the things that the Gentiles are seeking. Here, Jesus was referring to the Gentiles who lived throughout Galilee, particularly in the ten cities of the Decapolis when He said, “O ye of little faith (Greek: *oligospistos*).

Verse 31 begins with the word “Therefore,” which implies that in light of everything that has been stated, this should be your attitude. Jesus repeated in the form of three questions the chief concern of most of the people of that day: “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” He pointed out the difference between them and Gentiles. This is what the Gentiles do. Jesus implied that He expected more out of His disciples when it came to trust and confidence in God. And to live with a sense of doubt about the future provision of God would render them no more spiritual than the Gentiles, who neither worshipped nor served God. God was completely aware of their needs. Just as an earthly father provides for the needs of his family, so does our heavenly Father provide for those things of which we have need (see Philippians 4:19; compare with 2 Corinthians 9:8).

**C. Different Laws**

(Matthew 6:33-34)

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Verse 33 begins with a contrasting conjunction—“but”—which indicates that
one’s actions are to be just the opposite of what has been previously stated. Instead of seeking food, water, or clothing, seek something more enduring. The kingdom of God operates under a different set of laws. They are not earthly; they are based upon the wisdom that is from above. Jesus stated that the number-one priority of His disciples is to seek the purposes of our heavenly Father. Rather than spend your time worrying about how you will survive, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things will be added unto you. Don’t be anxious about life; establish your primary purpose for living, which is the expansion and promotion of the great purpose of God in Jesus Christ. His purpose is that the world might be saved and know the true and living God, and that all men and women might come to the knowledge of salvation in Him. Ask God to anoint you for ministry and mission on your job. Seek God for ways to lead family members to salvation.

Jesus would not have us spend time being anxious about how we are going to make ends meet; rather, we must trust God for our provision. Do not be anxious—seek first His kingdom and God will provide all the things you need.

The words of Jesus are shaped into a present command and a future promise. The word seek expresses the present command and means “to look diligently.” It means to crave and yearn for a thing so much that it literally consumes your life. In the Greek language, “seek” is in the present imperative tense, which means we are to make it a matter of grave urgency now.

The future promise states that because we have made the Lord’s purpose our primary goal and principal priority, He will provide for all our future needs as they arise.

Jesus directs every believer to seek the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not a spatial, geographical, fixed location. It has no borders and boundaries like the United States. Rather, it is wherever God reigns as King and Jesus Christ is Lord. God’s kingdom is not defined and built upon the foundation of bricks, marble, and fine stones. It is not built upon the foundation of earthly power. Rather, it exists wherever God is acknowledged as Creator and Sustainer of all life. The kingdom is where God is obeyed and trusted as King of Kings. Because we have made God’s purpose our main goal, we need not worry or be anxious about what we will eat, drink, or wear. He knows and will provide.

What are we to seek in this kingdom? We are to seek the righteousness of God. We are to seek the will of God and the ways of God, and live by the Word of God. We are to seek to do good to all men and women, especially those of the household of faith.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

These teachings of our Lord are relevant today. There are so many of the Lord’s people who are consumed with how things are going to work out tomorrow that they have done very little with today. Lest I be gravely misunderstood here, let me point out what Jesus is not saying. Jesus is not saying that we should be flippant about life. We do need to take seriously planning for our futures. Of course, you should plan for a future retirement by setting aside something for the
latter days of your life. Of course, you should consider that your children will grow up and may want to go to college or trade school and that will take money. Of course, you should consider that you or a working spouse could lose a job, become ill, or die, and it is better to have a rainy-day fund than to be in need of one and not have one. Of course, you should consider that you may not get married any time soon and, therefore, will still need a plan for making it in the world alone.

Jesus is not saying that we should not be prudent. Rather, He is saying, “Don’t spend a lot of time worrying about stuff that may or may not ever come.” We can spend so much time consumed by the possibility that things are wrong and may go wrong that we lose sight of God.

The principles Jesus teaches us will fare us well in the days to come. How do we deal with the moments of anxiety and worry? Jesus said that we must always live in the confidence of our security and salvation.

Jesus tried to instill in His first disciples that their worrying about their needs was not going to help them at all. The disciples were so consumed with how they were going to survive that they were losing sight of the mission. Remember, these were not poor men who followed Jesus. They were independent, small-business owners who made a pretty good living fishing and collecting taxes. And they were not accustomed to missing paydays.

Jesus had to remind them of who they were and what they had been called to do. They were God’s very elect—chosen and anointed—and as such, God would take care of them.

**PRAYER**

God of grace and mercy, teach us to trust You without reservations. We are thankful that during the difficult times in our lives You have been our Provider. May we never take for granted peace that frees us from anxiety over the necessities of life. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**  
*(May 31–June 6, 2021)*

**Why Do You Worry?**

**MONDAY,** May 31: “Worried? Seek God’s Counsel” (1 Samuel 9:5-10)  
**TUESDAY,** June 1: “God Cares for His People” (Ezekiel 34:11-16)  
**WEDNESDAY,** June 2: “Rich? Set Your Hope on God” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)  
**THURSDAY,** June 3: “Enlarge Your Faith Practices” (Matthew 17:14-20)  
**FRIDAY,** June 4: “Overcome Worry through Faith” (Luke 12:22-34)  
**SATURDAY,** June 5: “Serve God with Your Whole Heart” (Matthew 6:19-24)  
**SUNDAY,** June 6: “Live Worry-free Every Day” (Matthew 6:25-34)
“WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?”

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Calming the Storm  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** It’s Only a Storm

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** “Why Are You Afraid?”  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** Stay Calm

**DEVOOTIONAL READING**
Psalm 107:23-32

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 8:23-27  
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 8:26

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 8:23-27  
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 8:27

**Matthew 8:23-27—KJV**
23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.  
24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.  
25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.  
26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.  
27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

**Matthew 8:23-27—NIV**
23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.  
24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.  
25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”  
26 He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.  
27 The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often lose their confidence during times of personal crisis. Where can we find assurance when beset by the storms of life? Fearing they would not survive the storm on the sea, the disciples turned to Jesus to save them.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Relate to the disciples’ feelings when a storm overtook their boat while Jesus was asleep.
2. Identify the crises that cause adults to worry about themselves and their families.
3. Respond to the promised presence of Jesus in bad times as well as good times.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—The disciples showed a measure of trust by running to Jesus for help, yet Jesus rebuked them for not realizing that the situation was under control even as He slept.
—Some versions translate that the boat was filled with water, while others interpret the passage as that the ship “almost sank” or capsized.
—The disciples were not novices; they were well acquainted with the sea and knew the dangers of the water.
—Jesus demonstrated His divine authority by speaking a word to calm the earth’s elements.
—The repetition of “Master” (Luke) indicates the sense of urgency felt by the men on board.
—Jesus’ calm attitude and ability to rest during the storm is a model of trust in God for believers facing difficult times.

—The disciples were seasoned fishermen who were familiar with bad weather and the dangers of the sea, yet they were deathly afraid.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—Much of life for Jesus and the disciples revolved around the Sea of Galilee, a relatively small body of water subject to sudden, intense storms.
—Jesus was asleep when a storm arose, so the disciples woke Him, fearing that they would all drown.
—The disciples were amazed when the wind and sea became calm at Jesus’ command.
—Though the disciples had been with Jesus for some time, they still wondered who He was when they observed His power over nature.
—The men were amazed at how Jesus said, “Peace! Be still!” and the winds and waves obeyed His command. Those who witnessed Jesus’ miracles often expressed awe or praise.
THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events recorded in Matthew 8:1-34 occurred within a few days of the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–7). In 8:1, Jesus came down from the mountain, a reference to the Mount of the Beatitudes. He was followed by large crowds of people who had been amazed at His teaching (see Matthew 7:28–29). As Jesus and His disciples headed toward Capernaum, a leper came up, bowed before Jesus, and asked Jesus to heal him. When Jesus touched the leper, his leprosy was immediately healed. Afterward, Jesus commanded the man to go and show himself to the priest and give the appropriate offering (see Leviticus 13:49; 14:1-9). Only the priest could officially declare a person healed and free of the scourge of leprosy.

Matthew 8:5 indicates that Jesus’ entourage arrived in Capernaum, the major fishing town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. As the crowd grew around the small home of Peter, Jesus decided that they needed to go someplace where they could have some peace from the crowds. He gave the order that they should go to the other side of the sea (8:18). The “other side” is a reference to Geresa, an area occupied by Gentiles. It was here where Jesus cast the demons out of two demon-possessed men in the Gadarenes (Gergesenes).

As they headed to the shoreline where they would take the small boat to the other side, Jesus was met by two people each wanting to follow Him (verses 18-22). The first was a scribe and the second was another of the disciples, apparently not one of the Twelve. Jesus invited the two to leave their former lives and come follow Him. He made it clear that following Him required an unwavering commitment and the sacrifice of worldly attachments. Neither of the men were willing to make the kind of commitment that Jesus called for in His disciples.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Jesus spent most of His earthly life and ministry in Galilee and Perea. However, He did travel between Galilee and Jerusalem for the three annual feast days. These historical markers are mentioned in the gospel of John (see John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 11:55). The village of Nazareth and the seaside fishing towns of Capernaum and Bethsaida figured very prominently in the ministry of Jesus.

The most prominent topographical feature in Galilee is the large body of fresh water known as the Sea of Galilee. It is eight miles across at its widest point and thirteen miles in length. The Sea of Galilee is 685 feet below sea level and is more than 140 feet deep. It is located approximately 100 km (60 miles) north of Jerusalem. The primary cities in the region were Capernaum, Bethsaida, Korazim, Nazareth, Cana, Tiberias (not mentioned in the New Testament), and Caesarea Philippi.

What were the people like? There was an obvious difference between the Jews, who lived in the south (Judea), and those who lived in the north (Galilee). The Judeans of southern Israel held the Galileans in disdain and considered them to be untutored and unlearned. The Galileans were less inclined to willingly accept Rome’s authority and would engage in armed conflict with the Roman soldiers. The Galileans were extremely nationalistic and patriotic, very industrious and hard-working, less inclined to embrace religious traditionalism, and strict when it came to the practice of the Law of Moses. The Galileans were more open to new ideas and teachings, which made the region of Galilee fertile ground for the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus.
PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Disciples (Greek: mathetes): They are identified as the small group of intimate followers Jesus gathered around Himself. They were all from Galilee and held a variety of occupations. They were a diverse group of young men who left everything to pursue a life of ministry with Jesus.

Jesus: He is the central character and subject of the Gospels. He is the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures going back to the time of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:12–14). In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as the Son of God, who exercised authority over nature, demons, and human sickness. The Gospels record Jesus’ many miracles, proving that He was the Messiah sent from God.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Calm (verse 26)—Greek: galéné (gal-ay’-nay): a calmness; stillness; a state of being undisturbed, serene, or peaceful.

Followed (verse 23)—Greek: akoloutheó (ak-ol-oo-theh’-o): accompanied; attended to.

Obey (verse 27)—Greek: hupakouó (hoop-ak-oo’-o): to listen or harken to a command; submit to.

Rebuked (verse 26)—Greek: epitimaó (ep-ee-tee-mah’-o): chided; admonished; warned.

Save (verse 25)—Greek: sózó (sode’-zo): to deliver, preserve, or rescue from danger.

Storm (verse 24)—Greek: seismos (sice-mos’): a commotion, shaking (as an earthquake); a violent disturbance, usually with strong winds; “tempest” (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Jesus Has Power over Our Problems
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Furious Storm
      (Matthew 8:23-24)
   B. The Fearful Sailors
      (Matthew 8:25)
   C. The Faithful Savior
      (Matthew 8:26-27)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Jesus Has Power over Our Problems

   During His ministry, Jesus’ encountered many people who faced desperate challenges. He was surrounded by people whose lives and spirits had been broken by oppression at the hands of the Roman government. Jesus ministered to men and women who had been forced to serve as economic pawns of the rich and powerful. They lived in extreme poverty and were heavily taxed by their own countrymen, often taken for granted and overlooked by the religious leaders, and heavily burdened by sickness, demonic possession, pain,
hardship, ignorance, and heartache. Hence, when Jesus appeared preaching repentance and announcing that the messianic kingdom of God had dawned, people quickly embraced Him.

Jesus was surrounded by people who saw Him as the only option they had for coming up out of the valley of despair. Many in Galilee saw Him as their only hope for making their lives better and brighter. Jesus did not give them a reason to doubt His concern nor compassion for their situation. He saw them as sheep without shepherds, hopelessly lost and desperately in need of safety and security. When they came to Him, Jesus never let them down, nor did He fail to minister to their deepest spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.

B. Biblical Background

The account of the stilling of the storm has parallels in Mark 4:35-41 and Luke 8:22-25. Holding to the position that Mark was the first Gospel written, one might conclude that Matthew used an alternate source or made some editorial variations to the text for a specific theological reason. A reading of the three accounts of the miracle on the sea will reveal the obvious differences that need not detain us at this point. Matthew wanted to make it clear that being a disciple—that is, following Jesus—came with clear risks and costs. Throughout these chapters in Matthew, one sees the power of God at work in Jesus. Jesus has power and authority over the circumstances that people faced. Throughout these early chapters of Matthew, the authority of Jesus is on display. Authority (Greek: *exousia* [ex-OO-see-ah]) in the New Testament refers to the right to carry out a task or the freedom to exercise the power of one’s office. Jesus displayed authority through His teaching, and He had power to heal sickness and the power and authority to cast out demons. In this lesson, Jesus is presented as exercising authority over nature.

The Synoptic Gospels, particularly Matthew, teach that Jesus’ ministry was largely characterized by preaching, teaching, and healing (see Matthew 4:23-25; 9:35).

Chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew contain ten specific, yet different miracles performed by Jesus, not counting the ones that are summarized in Matthew 8:16-17: “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”

In each of these cases, Jesus recognized an individual’s faith. In His disciples, it was the lack of sufficient faith that bothered Jesus.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Furious Storm

*(Matthew 8:23-24)*

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.
crowds. Looking back across the passage, Jesus was busy from sunrise to sunset. There was hardly any time for rest or relaxation. Although Matthew did not mention the destination, the men were sailing toward Gergesa, a region occupied by Gentiles, some of whom were pig farmers (see 8:28-34). It was a short walk from the home of Simon to the docks where they embarked on the two-hour trip to the other side. Matthew recorded that Jesus entered into a ship. It was obviously large enough for the entire party that was travelling with Him. Ships in that day would have a sail, or positions for persons to row, while someone served as the helmsman. This would have been a routine trip on the lake for the very experienced fishermen—especially for Simon, Andrew, James and John. Fishing was what they were skilled at, and they knew this body of water very well.

There are two points that are important here. The first is that Jesus was followed by His disciples. Second, the word followed (Greek: *akoloutheo*) is a technical term for “discipleship.” It indicates that the men who joined Jesus in the boat were absolutely committed to being with Him. Matthew wanted to make it clear that those who follow Jesus must be prepared to relinquish their total lives to Him. This may mean that one faces uncertainty and even danger.

As they made their way across the lake, there arose a very great tempest (Greek: *seismos*). *Seismos* is the word often used to describe earthquakes in the Old and New Testaments (see Isaiah 29:6; Matthew 28:2; Acts 16:26; Revelation 8:5; 11:19). Matthew used the strongest word possible to describe the fury of the storm. This was an extremely violent storm, with howling winds and rising waters so intense that the small ship was threatened with being flooded.

Whatever this storm was, it was something that these seasoned fishermen had never experienced. While they struggled, trying to keep the ship afloat, Jesus was fast asleep. Jesus was exhausted from the busy day of teaching, preaching, and healing. Here, we have two images of Jesus: His humanity and His divinity. He was human enough to sleep in the bow of the ship, but God enough to quell the raging storm.

B. The Fearful Sailors
(Matthew 8:25)

*And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.*

Jesus was exhausted, seemingly unaware of anything that was going on. Some may question how Jesus could sleep with all the commotion going on. The wind was howling, white foam waves were beating up against the sides and splashing inside the ship, and the fishermen were shouting in panic. This was a serious situation that would require immediate action, but Jesus was asleep. It is not impossible for one to be so tired that he/she has no awareness of the immediate crisis that is taking place around him or her.

The disciples came to the one person they knew could help them. No one can be sure what they expected Jesus to do. Maybe they wanted Him to help them save the ship. They went to Jesus and awakened Him. First, they referred to Him as “Lord” (Greek: *Kyrios*), a word that denotes “master” or “superior one.” They knew that Jesus was able to perform miracles, but they were totally unprepared
for what was about to come. The disciples’ cry of “Lord, save us: we perish” was a desperate human plea for help from the Lord in the situation. The disciples expressed their anxiety in a way that said, “Do something, Jesus!” The word save came to be used in a more theological way to define the salvation that Jesus brought through His death on the Cross. In the narrative, the salvation the disciples seek is physical rather than spiritual (see Psalm 27:1-6). The disciples felt that their situation was so desperate and bleak that they were about to die: “we perish,” they declared. Nothing Jesus had previously done gave them peace in that immediate moment of urgent crisis.

C. The Faithful Savior
(Matthew 8:26-27)

And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

After waking from sleep, Jesus addressed His disciples with a question before He did anything. “Why are ye fearful (Greek: deilos)?” Deilos denotes one who is filled with timidity or who is cowardly. Paul reminded Timothy, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (see 2 Timothy 1:7). Those who serve in ministry can never operate out of a spirit of fear and intimidation. Instead of empathizing with their panic, Jesus raised a question about the disciples’ faith. He called them men of little faith (Greek: oligopistos). This was the second time He spoke to them about having little faith (see Matthew 6:30).

The first time had to do with their confidence in God’s power to provide. On the Sea of Galilee, Jesus challenged their faith in God’s power to save them from a fierce storm.

Evidently, Jesus spoke to them while still lying down. He arose and rebuked (Greek: epitimao)—that is, He literally put the winds and the sea in their proper places. Epitimao is a word that can be used to summon respect from someone. In speaking to the winds and sea, Jesus demanded that they respect His authority over them. The words of Jesus had hardly left His lips before there was an instant calm. There was no gradual dying down of the wind and sea—it was instantaneous. Jesus exhibited power and authority that is the express prerogative of God the Creator (see Psalms 65:7; 89:8-9; 104:7).

When the winds and waves instantly stopped raging, the disciples were dumbfounded and amazed at what they had witnessed. This was one of those events and times when there were no words to explain what they had just witnessed. Marvelled (Greek: thaumazo) means “to wonder at with sheer amazement.” Fear turned to wonderment. Who is this man? Where did He come from? Who is this that can speak to the winds and sea and they obey Him? They had witnessed Jesus demonstrate that He had power to heal leprosy, one of the most deadly and dreaded diseases in the ancient world (see Matthew 8:3). That very same day, Jesus had healed the servant of a Roman centurion (without even entering his home) (see Matthew 8:8-13) and Simon’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:15), and cast out demons and healed multitudes (see Matthew 8:16).

One may wonder why they were shocked at what Jesus did. This may be the very reason
why Jesus referred to them as men of little faith. Even though they had witnessed several mighty deeds by Jesus, they were still not convinced of His power over every situation. They would not fully realize who He was until after the Resurrection.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are several lessons one may take away from this passage. First is the importance of trusting God, especially in situations that create desperation and fear. Most adults and, in some cases, children and youth have faced periods when the odds were stacked against them. The disciples of Jesus faced a real life-and-death situation. Jesus rebuked them because they had failed to learn from the past that God will take care those who belong to Him.

Second, fear should never interfere with the work of missions and ministry. It is amazing to realize the number of Christians who are literally afraid to speak before a crowd or participate in local outreach efforts, short-term mission trips in the aftermath of regional disasters, or crises in areas of the Caribbean or the continent of Africa. Fear is a powerful emotion that can paralyze a person to the extent that he or she will walk away from or turn his or her back on real growth or service opportunities. God cannot use anyone in ministry who is locked in a shell by fear. God may want to use your life to reach others, but fear keeps you tongue-tied. Fear can be destructive to the life of faith in Christ Jesus. Satan uses fear to intimidate believers into being passive and uninvolved in the important work of God’s kingdom. Jesus helps us conquer our fears because He is always with us.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant that we may learn to trust You in every way. May we never doubt Your love for us. Keep us from doubt and fear. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 7-13, 2021)

Why Are You Afraid?
MONDAY, June 7: “Do Not Fear the Storm” (Mark 4:35-41)
TUESDAY, June 8: “Do Not Fear Persecution” (Matthew 24:9-14)
WEDNESDAY, June 9: “No Separation from God’s Love” (Romans 8:31-39)
THURSDAY, June 10: “I Have Overcome the World” (John 16:25-33)
FRIDAY, June 11: “Choose to Follow Me Now!” (Matthew 8:18-22)
SATURDAY, June 12: “Jesus Delivers the Demon-possessed” (Matthew 8:28-34)
SUNDAY, June 13: “Jesus Stills the Stormy Seas” (Matthew 8:23-27)
HEALED BY FAITH

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**ADULT TOPIC:** A Healing Touch  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** Just Believe

**CHILDREN**
**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** Healed by Faith  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** A Fresh Start

**DEVOTIONAL READING**
**Proverbs 3:1-8**

**ADULT/YOUTH**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 9:18-26  
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Matthew 9:22  
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Mark 5:36

**CHILDREN**
**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Matthew 9:18-26  
**KEY VERSE:** Matthew 9:22

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Matthew 9:18-26—KJV

18 While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.
19 And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.
20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:
21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his cloak, I shall be whole.
22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.
23 And when Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

Matthew 9:18-26—NIV

18 While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.”
19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.
20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.
21 She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”
22 Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.
23 When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes,
24 He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.
25 But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.
26 And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

24 he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.”
But they laughed at him.
25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.
26 News of this spread through all that region.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often feel hopeless in the face of health challenges. Where does healing come from? Jesus told the woman with the issue of blood that she was healed because of her faith—and He told Jairus that his daughter was healed and restored to life.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the nature of the faith involved in the healings of the woman and the girl in this passage.
2. Sense the power of God to bring life and healing to them and their loved ones.
3. Rejoice in the healing power of God as manifested in their own lives.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—It was customary for Jewish priests to lay hands on a person as they spoke a blessing over him or her. Jairus may have witnessed this practice at the synagogue or elsewhere in Jesus’ ministry.
—The presence of minstrels or musicians during times of grief (see Matthew 9:23) was a common Gentile custom. Their melancholy tunes helped establish an appropriate setting for mourners.
—The hemorrhaging woman touched the tassel (tzitzit) of Jesus’ prayer shawl, a symbol of God’s commandments and a reminder to be holy (see Numbers 15:37-39). Touching the fringe or tassel expressed the woman’s faith in the healing power of Israel’s God and in Jesus, as one sent from God.
—The woman’s condition involved ritual uncleanness and thus was a source of shame and physical discomfort. Instead of spreading her uncleanness to Jesus, her trusting touch invited Jesus to impart healing and transformation.
—Jesus’ action on behalf of the woman and Jairus’s daughter transcended the physical—it restored both of them to their community.

Teachers of CHILDREN

—A religious leader named Jairus interrupted Jesus’ teachings to ask Jesus to come to help his dying daughter.
—On the way to the leader’s home, Jesus was approached by a woman suffering from a long-term blood disease.
—The tassels of the rabbis were thought to have healing powers. Jesus attributes the healing miracles to faith—that of Jairus, the dying girl’s father; and the faith of the sick woman.
—Finally reaching Jairus’s home, Jesus took the dead girl’s hand and raised her to life, again proving the power of faith to conquer disease and death.
—According to Jewish religious law and tradition, both the woman with the blood disease and the
The girl’s dead body were considered ritually unclean. Anyone else would have been contaminated, but the purity and power of Jesus’ touch only delivered healing and new life.

The Chronological Setting of the Lesson

In Matthew 9, Jesus begins another series of miracles and sayings which demonstrate His power and authority. Matthew 9:18-31 contains the account of three miracles performed by Jesus. He raised the daughter of a certain leader from the dead (9:18, 23-26); healed the woman with the hemorrhage of blood (9:20-22); and restored the sight of two blind men (9:27-31). In each instance, Jesus physically touched the persons who were healed and raised from the dead. He also recognized their faith in Him. Throughout this section, beginning at Matthew 8:1, Jesus demonstrated authority and power over nature, demons, sickness, and even death.

The Geographical and Cultural Setting of the Lesson

The events in this passage took place in Capernaum, which was located on the northwest coastline of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was one of the three main cities in that area—the other two were Chorazin and Bethsaida, the home of Simon, Philip, and Andrew (see John 1:44). Jesus and His disciples had just returned from the region of the Gadarenes, a mostly Gentile region (see Matthew 8:28-34). Capernaum was the city that Simon Peter called home, and it was also the headquarters for the fishing industry in Galilee.

Matthew 9:9-10 records the call of Matthew to follow Jesus which is immediately followed by Jesus’ enjoying the fellowship of a group of tax collectors and sinners. Jesus was criticized for His association with sinners and tax collectors, two groups that the Pharisees considered unrighteous. Jesus’ friendly association with these groups led the religious leaders to doubt the integrity of Jesus’ ministry and His relationship with God.

In the text, Jesus is dealing with females, a young twelve-year-old girl and a woman who has borne the same illness for twelve years. In the first century, women were not highly regarded and in many cases a man would rather have a son than a daughter. The fact that Jesus devoted personal time to two females was a remarkable statement about the value He placed on all humans, male and female. Jesus did not treat either female as unworthy or as an intruder, but as a human being who had been created in the image of God.

Prominent Character(s) in the Lesson

Girl: This unnamed girl was the daughter of Jairus the synagogue ruler. When her father approaches Jesus, he seeks healing. While en route to his home, Jairus learns that the girl has died. No information is given regarding the medical condition from which she died. She is the recipient of Jesus’ life-giving power over death.

Jesus: In the lesson narrative, Jesus is the widely popular rabbi whom Jairus and an unnamed sick woman approach for a healing miracle.

Ruler: Jairus, a leading member of the community and a leader in the local synagogue. He approached Jesus about his daughter who was at the point of death.

Woman: In the lesson, this is an unnamed woman, often referred to simply as “the woman with the issue of blood.” She had a chronic blood disorder. It was her faith in the healing power of Jesus that makes her stand out in the lesson and in the Gospels.

Key Terms in the Lesson

Asleep (verse 24)—Greek: katheudó
(kath-yoo’-do): to sleep; Jesus referred to death as sleep; “sleeppeth” (KJV).

Faith (verse 22)—Greek: pístis (pis’-tis): belief; trust; confidence; fidelity; faithfulness.

Followed (verse 19)—Greek: akoloutheó (ak-ol-o-otech’-o): accompanied; attended to; “went with” (NIV).

Healed (verse 21)—Greek: sózó (sode’-zo): to be saved, preserved, rescued; “whole” (KJV).

Ruler (verse 18)—Greek: archón (ar’-khone): chief; “leader” (NIV).

Take courage (verse 22, NASB)—Greek: thar-seó (thar-seh’-o): be of good courage; be of good cheer; comfort; relief; “be of good comfort” (KJV); “take heart” (NIV).

Touched (verse 20)—Greek: haptomai (hap’-tom-ahee): adhered to; laid hold of.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
A. Jesus, Our Healer

Miracles served three purposes in the ministry of Jesus. First, they authenticated God’s power and presence in Jesus’ life and ministry. Second, they reinforced the teaching and preaching ministry of Jesus as proof that the kingdom of God had come near. Jesus’ messages of repentance and forgiveness are all reinforced through the miracles. Jesus often told those who came seeking healing that their sins had been forgiven. Third, the miracles of Jesus prepared the way for the sending of the Twelve on their first missionary journey. In Matthew 10, Jesus sends the disciples out in His name and the power of His spirit to preach, teach, and heal.

The single thread that connects each of Jesus’ miracles is personal faith in Jesus’ power to relieve suffering. In some instances, Jesus simply spoke, and the person was healed. In others, Jesus conveyed healing by physically touching the sick. Jesus was filled with so much power and virtue that the woman on the road to Capernaum believed that all she needed to be healed was to touch the hem of Jesus’ clothes.

B. Biblical Background

All three Synoptic Gospels record the events in this passage, with Matthew’s account being shorter than both Mark’s (5:21-43) and Luke’s (8:40-56). Matthew omits many of the smaller and finer details provided by Mark and Luke, such as the name of the synagogue leader—Jairus. There is no mention by Matthew of the large crowd that followed Jesus to the
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Request of a Desperate Father
(Matthew 9:18-19)

While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshiped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

Jesus has shared dinner or some form of fellowship with Matthew and his invited guests when a man approached him. There is no mention that Jesus had left the home of Matthew, although Mark and Luke indicate that the setting was outside along the seashore. Jesus was still talking to the disciples of John about why His disciples did not fast (verse 14). Into this gathering a man who was a local ruler (Greek: archon) came in and bowed before Jesus in a reverent and worshipful manner (Greek: proskyneon). The man paid homage to Jesus and prostrated himself in an act of pure humility. There are two things that make this an extraordinary encounter. First, the man was obviously respected within the community and would never allow himself to be seen at such a gathering or in the company of such people. Second, he entered the home of a tax collector, which was also something that would have been frowned upon by other prominent citizens and religious leaders.

Matthew does not mention the man’s name or his title. Mark and Luke tell us that his name was Jairus and that he was a local synagogue leader. For Matthew, it is not the man’s status that is central; rather, it is his faith in Jesus. He said to Jesus that his daughter “is even now dead.” At what point she died is not central for Matthew—she is dead, not waiting to die. The ruler makes a startling request of Jesus: “But come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.” The use of the word but introduces an element of hope that resides in the heart of the father. “She is dead, but if you come, this can be changed.” In contrast to what the situation was, he believed that with Jesus there was still hope. There is always an element of hope whenever Jesus is near.

In verse 19, Jesus offered no comments, asked no questions, nor pondered whether this was even possible. He simply rose from His seat and followed the man. There is no record of a conversation between Jesus and the
ruler. The disciples of Jesus, who had observed these miracles, were about to be treated to an act of the Master’s power that defied even death. They had seen Him heal a Roman centurion’s servant with just a word, heal Peter’s mother-in-law, speak to wind and waves, cast out demons, heal a paralytic, forgive sins—but nothing prior to this prepared them for what was to come.

Jesus taught His disciples not only in word but also through His actions. They had seen Him sit with social outcasts and sinners. His treatment of women and girls was a great departure from the social conventions of that day.

B. A Sick but Determined Woman
   (Matthew 9:20-22)

And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record this story in the same format, just with different details. Matthew gives the shortest of the three accounts. As Jesus was following the ruler to his residence, He is interrupted by another person living with a twelve-year chronic health crisis. In the crowd following Jesus was a woman who had an “issue of blood.” The Greek word haimarroeo is better translated as the word hemorrhage, which better captures the woman’s condition. She was afflicted with a blood disorder. Scholars are not sure exactly what this blood condition was because it was neither fatal nor completely debilitating. It did render her ceremonially unclean according to Mosaic Law. Anyone she touched would become ceremonially unclean. Leviticus 15:19-30 contains the laws that give definition to ceremonial uncleanness and the process for becoming clean again. The woman was forced to wrestle with her condition for twelve years. In Mark and Luke, we learn that she had exhausted her money seeking help from physicians, all to no avail. In fact, her condition only worsened. She came up behind Jesus and touched the hem of His garment. Jesus’ garment was the traditional attire worn by Jewish males, which had tassels on the borders according to the Law. These were a reminder of the requirement to keep the Law of Moses (see Numbers 15:38-40; Deuteronomy 22:12). She believed that this simple act would make her whole and cure her blood disorder once and for all.

In verse 21, the woman reasoned within herself that if she could just get to the hem of Jesus’ clothes then she would be made well. Her faith was so strong that she did not even need Jesus to speak or touch her. The words “I shall be made whole” are translated from a single word in the Greek text, sothesomai, and they are written in the future passive tense. This word is derived from the word sozo, which means “to save,” which, in this instance, refers to being physically rescued or saved (see Matthew 8:25; 14:30; 24:22; 27:40; compare Matthew 1:21; 10:22; 16:25; 19:25 for instances of sozo as spiritual salvation). The woman likely had no idea when she would be healed after touching the hem of Jesus’ clothes.

During the events mentioned in verse 22, Mark and Luke describe the woman’s attempt to slip quietly back into the crowd without being noticed. Matthew omits the question of Je-
sus regarding who touched Him and the statement about power going out from Him. Rather, the focus is on the faith of the woman. Jesus stopped and turned around and when He saw the woman, He knew what had happened. It is interesting that given the gravity of the situation with the ruler’s daughter, Jesus stopped to focus on this woman. She had been hurting for twelve years, cut off from family and community. People in the crowd likely knew who she was and the nature of her condition. Jesus would not let her go without publicly demonstrating to all in the crowd that she was no longer unclean. Calling her “daughter,” a word of endearment, calmed the woman’s fears. She was uncertain of what Jesus might say or do. Rather than scold her, however, Jesus tenderly said to her, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” Jesus would not have her believe that there was something mystical or magical about His clothes. The healing power was not in His clothes—it was her faith in Jesus that made her well from that very moment. Through His actions Jesus publicly welcomed the woman back into the community.

In this simple act, Jesus taught His disciples a lesson about inclusion and compassion. People are sometimes excluded from the community of faith because of some identifiable difference, such as a medical condition (e.g., HIV/AIDS, disability, or physical deformity), a criminal conviction, or financial disadvantage. Jesus shows that the kingdom of God is open to all men and women regardless of how different they may be. Believers are called to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus.

C. Jesus Demonstrates His Authority over Death (Matthew 9:23-26)

And when Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

Mark and Luke report that as Jesus was nearing the home of the ruler, news came that the girl had died. They reported that there was no further need to trouble Jesus with coming to save the girl. Matthew, however, came directly to the point of why Jesus went to the ruler’s house. There was now the combination of two crowds—that which had followed Jesus from Matthew’s house, and that which had already gathered for the funeral. Burial usually occurred on the same day that a person died. In Matthew’s account, the girl was already dead, and the funeral preparations were in progress.

Jairus’s home was apparently large enough to accommodate a considerably large gathering of people (to include the professional mourners and funeral musicians). This common practice dated back hundreds of years to the time of Jeremiah and before (see 2 Chronicles 35:25; Jeremiah 9:17-18). Families traditionally summoned professional mourners to participate in funeral processions. The musicians were playing their flutes and the people were making a great deal of noise. These sounds could have been shouts of grief, wailing, or weeping.

In verse 24, Jesus said to the people who had gathered, “Give place,” which is translated from the Greek word anachoreo and can be translated as “get out, leave now.” The words of Jesus are expressed in the strongest possible terms. Jesus announced to the crowd, “For the
maid is not dead, but sleepeth.” In the Scriptures, sleep is used as an image of death (see Daniel 12:2; Matthew 27:52; John 11:11-12; Acts 13:36; 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). When the crowd heard Jesus’ words, they burst into loud laughter. As Jesus knew, none of them had faith for the miracle that was about to happen.

In verses 25-26, after the people had been put out of the house, Jesus went into the room where the girl was lying on the bed. Jesus did not say a single word. He offered no prayers. He merely took the young lady by the hand and she rose up from her bed of death. Theologically, Matthew lays the groundwork for the miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If Jesus, by His very presence, has the power to raise a dead girl, then what power does death have over Him? The response was almost instant. Word spread quickly about what had happened. “And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land” (verse 26). News of this miracle spread quickly throughout all Galilee and eventually to Jerusalem.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Three motifs converge in this lesson that decisively dramatize the meaning of Jesus’ ministry. While faith is a major motif in the miracles in this lesson, they are really part of a much larger theme—the eschatological kingdom of God. Remember that miracles were a sign of the kingdom, not an end or a purpose for which Jesus came.

Herein lies the great challenge of the modern church, which has become more consumed with numbers, attendance, offerings, marketing, and programs rather than true ministry. The kingdom comes as we preach the Gospel, a message that calls men and women to repentance and faith in the living Lord.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant that Your servants may be filled with boldness and courage to preach the truth of the Gospel. Take away from us any prejudices that would limit and hinder our willingness to interact with all people, regardless of who they are. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 14-20, 2021)

Healed by Faith

MONDAY, June 14: “The Fringe Aid to Remember God’s Commandments” (Numbers 15:37-41)  
WEDNESDAY, June 16: “A Woman Testifies to Jesus’ Healing Touch” (Luke 8:42b-48)  
THURSDAY, June 17: “Jesus Opens the Eyes of a Blind Man” (Matthew 9:27-31)  
FRIDAY, June 18: “Jesus Restores Speech to a Mute Man” (Matthew 9:32-34)  
SATURDAY, June 19: “Join the Lord’s Harvest Today” (Matthew 9:35–10:1)  
SUNDAY, June 20: “Faith in God Heals Many Ills” (Matthew 9:18-26)
June 27, 2021

Lesson 4

“WHY DO YOU DOUBT?”

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: An Amazing Feat

YOUTH TOPIC: No Need to Worry

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Peter Shows Doubt

CHILDREN’S TOPIC: “Why Do You Doubt?”

DEVOTIONAL READING

Isaiah 38:16-20

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14:22-33

PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 14:22-33

ADULT KEY VERSE: Matthew 14:31

YOUTH KEY VERSE: Matthew 14:27

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 14:22-33

PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 14:22-33

KEY VERSE: Matthew 14:31

Matthew 14:22-33—KJV

22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.
23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.
24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.
25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.
26 When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.
27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.
28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.
29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come

Matthew 14:22-33—NIV

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.
23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,
24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.
25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.
26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.
27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”
28 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”
down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go 
to Jesus.
30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was 
afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, 
save me.
31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, 
and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little 
faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?
32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind 
ceased.
33 Then they that were in the ship came and wor-
shipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of 
God.
29 “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the 
boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.
30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, be-
ginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”
31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and 
captured him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did 
you doubt?”
32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind 
died down.
33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, 
saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: In the depths of crisis, people are often caught 
between trust and doubt. How can we remain confident that help from God will come? By 
walking on water to save His disciples, Jesus demonstrated His remarkable ability to com-
fort, save, and help in any situation.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall the amazing story of the storm at sea followed by Jesus’ walking on the water.
2. Repent of their failure to trust in God when overcome in a crisis.
3. Develop habits of trust that enable them to overcome their doubts concerning God’s care.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The storm episode in Matthew 14 is the second 
time Jesus challenged His disciples’ lack of faith (see Matthew 8:23-27).
—Jesus’ walking on water in Matthew 14 and 
calming the storm in Matthew 8 illustrate the 
power of God over His creation.
—Peter’s momentary lapse in faith did not prevent 
Jesus from helping him when he cried out in 
fear.
—The disciples feared that they had seen a ghost 
or evil spirit that had come to destroy them.
—By faith, Peter walked on the water, trusting in 
Jesus; but facing a strong gust of wind, Peter’s 
confidence in Jesus gave way to fear and doubt, 
causing him to sink.
—Jesus’ presence in the boat brought immediate 
calm to the storm and to the disciples, convinc-
ing them of Jesus’ divinity.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—After feeding more than five thousand people, Jesus 
sent the disciples toward the other side of the sea.
—Jesus went away to pray alone.
—Early the next morning, the disciples saw Jesus 
walking on the water toward the boat.
—Mistaking Jesus for a ghost, the disciples were terrified until Jesus identified Himself.

—Peter wanted to meet Jesus on the water, but taking his eyes off Jesus, Peter began to sink.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events in today’s lesson take place during the final days of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Matthew’s narrative is set at the end of Jesus’ third teaching cycle (see Matthew 13:1-53). Jesus visited Nazareth only to experience rejection by the very people whom He had known since His childhood (see Matthew 13:54-58). He had travelled throughout lower Galilee—preaching, teaching, and healing the diseased and afflicted. He was still riding a wave of great popularity evidenced by the large crowds that followed His ministry. According to Matthew 14:1, even Herod the tetrarch heard of the extraordinary things that Jesus was doing and was extremely curious about the religious revival in his territory. He thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected from the dead, because he had John the Baptist beheaded to satisfy his wife, Herodias’s resentment of John (see Matthew 14:3-12).

Matthew was not reporting that the death of John the Baptist occurred at that moment. Rather, Matthew 14:1-2 is followed by 14:13 and verses 3-12 contain a flashback explaining what happened to John the Baptist and why he was arrested and killed. Matthew was explaining how Jesus responded to the news that Herod thought He was John the Baptist. When Jesus received the news that John had been killed by Herod, He withdrew to a secluded area, probably to grieve in private. He had high regard for John and his impact upon the nation of Israel. Jesus considered John to be the greatest prophet to have ever lived. At this point in Jesus’ ministry, the relationship between Him and the religious leaders of His day was starting to become more adversarial.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Matthew does not give a specific location for the events in today’s lesson. While the content of the Gospels is accurate, the placement of specific events or stories is not given in full chronological order. Additionally, some details are not provided for the modern reader. Mark places the events recorded in Matthew 14 as having occurred near Bethsaida, one of the three main cities in that region (see Mark 6:46).

Bethsaida, meaning “house of fishers,” is mentioned seven times in all four gospels (see Matthew 11:21; Mark 6:45; 8:22; Luke 9:10; 10:13; John 1:44; 12:21). The town was the home of three of the disciples of Jesus—Philip, Andrew, and Peter (see John 1:44; 12:21). The small fishing town was located about two miles east of Capernaum, and just east of the point where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee.

The feeding of the five thousand occurred in the wilderness near Bethsaida (see Matthew 14:15–21; Mark 8:1-10). It was in Bethsaida that Jesus healed a blind man brought to Him by a group of the man’s friends (see Mark 8:22-24). Jesus told the healed man not to go back into the town nor tell anyone of his miracle, but to return to his own home.

One may wonder how people would so easily follow Jesus as He travelled around Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by mountains on all sides and it is very easy to identify where a boat was headed. Thus, it is no surprise that Jesus was met by a large crowd when He stepped ashore (see Matthew 14:14). Throughout the afternoon, Jesus shared the Gospel and performed many miracles of healing. Here, we witness His love and compassion for the people,
turning none away. As evening approached, His disciples asked Jesus to send the people away because they were in an isolated place (see Matthew 14:15). Jesus commanded the disciples to make provisions to feed the crowd, which included five thousand men, besides the women and children (see Matthew 14:16-21).

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

**Jesus:** the Son of God who demonstrates power over the elements of nature, proving His divinity. He is the central character and subject of the Gospels and the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures (see Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:12-14).

**Peter:** considered the most prominent disciple of Jesus. He was originally referred to as Simon (Matthew 4:18). He and his brother, Andrew were from Bethsaida, a small fishing village near the Sea of Galilee. He was among the first followers of Jesus. He was the first to recognize Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) (see Matthew 16:16-19).

**The Multitude (Greek: ochlos):** refers to the large crowds that were drawn to Jesus’ ministry. They appear often in the Gospels from the very beginning of Jesus’ period of popularity (see Matthew 4:23; 8:18; Mark 7:23; 8:1; Luke 9:12).

**The Disciples (Greek: mathetes):** identifies the small group of twelve men who followed Jesus by special invitation as His constant companions and assistants in ministry. They were a diverse group of young men, all from Galilee, who held a variety of occupations (see Matthew 5:1; 8:23; 9:19, 37; 21:20; Mark 2:23; 5:31; Luke 12:22).

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Constrained (verse 22)—Greek: anagkazó (an-ang-kad’-zo):** necessitated; compelled; forced; urged; “made” (NIV).

**Fourth watch of the night (verse 25)—Greek: phulaké (foo-lak-ay’):** a watching, keeping guard; of the time (of night) during which guard was kept; “shortly before dawn” (NIV).

**Pray (verse 23)—Greek: proseuchomai (pros-yoo’-khom-ahee):** to pray to, pray for, offer prayer; to petition.

**Take courage (verse 27)—Greek: tharseó (thar-seh’-o):** be of good courage; “be of good cheer” (KJV).

**Walking (verse 26)—Greek: peripateó (per-ee-pat-eh’-o):** to walk, tread; movement.

**Waves (verse 24)—Greek: kuma (koo’-mah):** surges; billows.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. Overcoming Our Doubts and Fears
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Jesus Sends the Crowd Away (Matthew 14:22-23)
   B. Caught in a Storm (Matthew 14:24-25)
   C. Jesus Calms and Reassures the Disciples (Matthew 14:26-27)
   D. Peter’s Request (Matthew 14:28-31)
   E. The Disciples Worship Jesus (Matthew 14:32-33)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Overcoming Our Doubts and Fears

In today’s lesson, Peter demonstrates what it means to have absolute trust in Jesus only to see it evaporate when doubt and fear set in. Peter showed great courage and fearlessness when Jesus commanded him to get out of the boat to come meet Him. Peter walked on the water, just as Jesus did. As Peter stepped outside the boat, the winds continued to blow stronger. Peter became distracted by the wind, his courage faded, and he began to sink. His trust in Jesus was compromised by a fear of drowning. Fear is a powerful emotion. Fear and doubt can derail or undermine the sincerest intentions and spiritual goals. One’s potential to make great strides for the kingdom is always thwarted when fear is greater than faith.

Doubt is not always a sin. Every believer will struggle or has at some point struggled to understand and comprehend what God is doing in his or her life. Just think for a moment about a period in your life when the odds were clearly against you. It was probably during that very difficult moment that your faith began to shine as you watched God do the unlikely or the impossible. When facing enormous challenges in life, remember that God is always near. He remains a very present help in times of trouble (see Psalm 46:1).

B. Biblical Background

This is the second time that Jesus rescued His disciples from a potential disaster on the Sea of Galilee (see Matthew 8:23-27; parallel in Mark 4:35-41; John 6:16-21). The lesson text centers on details (as in verses 28-31) which are found only in Matthew. Each gospel writer had a very specific audience and theological interest in mind when recording his account of the ministry of Jesus. Luke omitted this second event of the storm at sea altogether. Although his reason is unclear, it may be that it did not serve a functional purpose in his presentation of Jesus’ ministry.

Matthew’s account of this event was intended to provide the early church with clarity about Jesus’ identity. The disciples had seen Him cast out demons, heal all kinds of sicknesses and diseases, and even raise the dead. Yet, nothing prepared them for what happened that night. Matthew wanted his readers to see Jesus as the Son of God. First, he presents Jesus as the one who meets with God alone on the mountain. Just as Moses met God, Jesus meets and communes with His heavenly Father on the mountain, apart from the people. Second, the narrative provides an image of Jesus as not only a preacher, but also a compassionate provider and healer. He gives food to those who are hungry and meets their need for physical healing. Third, Matthew presents Jesus as the one whose authority is greater than any earthly ruler’s. He commands even the wind to obey without saying a word. Fourth, Jesus defies the laws of nature by walking on water and even allowing Peter to join Him. Peter walks until he takes his eyes off of Jesus. Fifth, Jesus offers comfort to the church and His disciples, who may find themselves struggling against an assortment of storms and trials. He encourages the faith of His disciples, who may have little faith versus no faith at all.
A. Jesus Sends the Crowd Away
(Matthew 14:22-23)

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

The actions of Jesus conveyed a sense of deep urgency. “And straightway” (Greek: eutheos) means to send immediately away or at once and without hesitation. The disciples were “constrained” (Greek: anakazo) to leave, or to strongly urge someone to act in a specific manner. The disciples are compelled to get into their boat and head back to the other side of the lake at once. No destination is stated; the reader may assume they were likely headed to Capernaum. There were no explanations offered nor did Jesus take time to listen to their appeals to remain with Him. Once they had departed, Jesus sent the multitudes away. These were the five thousand men, besides the women and children, whom He fed that same afternoon (see Matthew 14:15-21).

Verse 23 reads, “When he had sent the multitudes away, [Jesus] went up into a mountain apart to pray.” The word pray (Greek: proseuxasthai) is written as an infinitive of purpose. The Greek verb suggests not just a time of prayer, but prayer with a specific intention. Jesus was aware of the growing tide of opposition from the religious leaders. His resistance to the crowd’s desire to make Him their king may soon turn even them against Him. There was just one thing on Jesus’ mind—prayer and communion with His Father. No distractions. No disciples. No doting, misguided crowds. Surely this was another moment of temptation similar to the wilderness temptation at the beginning of His ministry (see Matthew 4:1-11).

Matthew continues to point out the role of a disciple of Jesus. First, the narrative highlights the disciples’ response to Jesus’ command—they immediately get into the boat and head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Discipleship is about obedience to the Lord’s commands. Second, the text gives an implied warning that pride can pull a person away from God’s purpose for him or her. Rather than give in to the thoughts and desires of the people for an alternate task or promotion (one clearly unauthorized by God), Jesus retreated to a solitary place. Leaders and laypersons must be careful to never allow the adoration of followers to swell their heads to the point of being overcome by the sin of pride. Third, Matthew points out the need for disciples to see in Jesus’ model of prayer and communion the means for remaining focused on the priorities and mission of God.

B. Caught in a Storm
(Matthew 14:24-25)

But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

By sunset, the disciples still had not reached their destination in Capernaum (see John 6:17). While Jesus was praying, the disciples were struggling against a strong
storm. There is no mention of how long the storm had lasted. It was not a combination of wind and rain, just wind, which often occurs in that region. Because of the wind, the men had managed to only travel a few miles from their starting point. The words “in the midst of the sea” found in the KJV are a weak translation of Matthew’s original phrasing, “studious,” a distance equal to one-eighth of a mile or approximately six hundred meters. They were rowing against high winds and raging seas which were driven by the winds. No doubt they were exhausted, cold, wet, and hungry. The first time they had this experience, Jesus was with them—but this time, they are alone (or so it seemed).

According to verse 25, the disciples had been on the Sea of Galilee for nearly nine hours. It was the fourth watch of the night, the period between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. The Romans divided the day into four time periods, beginning with sunset: 6:00–9:00 p.m. (the first watch); 9:00 p.m.–12:00 a.m. (the second watch); 12:00–3:00 a.m. (the third watch); and 3:00–6:00 a.m. (the fourth watch). In the middle of the night, just before dawn, Jesus went out to meet the disciples, walking on the water. Hours earlier, Jesus had left the disciples to spend time in uninterrupted prayer (see Luke 6:12).

Matthew, as well as Mark and John, aimed to highlight Jesus’ divine nature. Only God can walk on water (see Job 9:8; Psalm 77:19). Here, Jesus demonstrates another attribute that is possessed only by deity. In the darkness of the night, Jesus approached the disciples as they struggled to manage their vessel against the high winds on the sea. God sees even in the darkness and He hears even above the noise of the winds. Jesus had not abandoned them in their struggle; rather, He appeared when they needed Him most.

C. Jesus Calms and Reassures the Disciples (Matthew 14:26-27)

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

As they struggled to overcome the wind and waves, the disciples saw the strange image of a figure walking on the sea. Jesus had apparently come close enough for the disciples to see Him, without fully recognizing who He was. The phrase “they were troubled” (Greek: etarachthesan) denotes that they were terrified, which heightened the anxiety they were already experiencing. They cried out that this was a “spirit” (Greek: phantasma), some sort of supernatural being. Tired and now frightened, the disciples were overcome to the point of crying out in desperation. They were experienced seamen and they had never seen anything like this—Nor did they imagine that it was Jesus.

In verse 27, true to who He is, Jesus immediately takes steps to calm their fears. He spoke to them and said, “Be of good cheer” (Greek: tharseo). Matthew wrote these words in the present-active imperative tense, which implied that Jesus wanted them to stop being afraid immediately. The sense is that they were to release themselves from any fears they had. This was no ghost; rather, He said, “it is I” or “this is Me.” There was no need for them to be afraid. The men obviously recognized Jesus’ voice.
D. Peter's Request
(Matthew 14:28-31)

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on them water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

These verses are unique to Matthew. Questions about the source of the material have been debated for centuries. Both Luke and Matthew had access to either oral or written material that was not available to Mark. Obviously, this account is from a source that was unique to Matthew. Peter's immediate response was with a question and then a request. “Lord, if it be thou” is better translated, “Lord, since it is You, let me come and be with You on the water.” In the presence of Jesus, Peter finds a courage and faith that the other disciples do not have. “Bid me come” is translated from the Greek word keleuo, which is not an invitation but, rather, is a command. Peter was saying, Command me to come to You. You alone have the authority to cause me to walk and stand upon the sea. Here lies a lesson for every believer: when Jesus gives a call or command to something, the ability and resources to accomplish the task are already provided. Jesus said, “Come” and Peter simply needed to step out of the boat upon the raging sea.

In verse 29, Peter did what he would have never imagined—he actually walked on the water. What were the other disciples thinking as they saw Peter making his way toward Jesus? Certainly, their faith and courage increased as they watched in amazement. And as he was moving toward Jesus, the reality of what he was doing gradually overcame the exhilaration of the moment. “He saw the wind” (verse 30a), meaning Peter saw the effects of the wind. He heard the howling of the wind and saw the effects of water blowing and creating huge waves. Peter became fearful and started to sink. Some interpreters have suggested that Peter took his eyes off Jesus and only saw the wind and waves. Maybe he forgot that the One who had called him to come to Him would also sustain him on the sea. Peter cried out “Lord, save me.” Lord is translated from Kuiros and is the designation, in this instance, for “deity.” Peter recognized that only Jesus could save (Greek: sozo) him from his present situation. The word save is not to be understood in a spiritual sense; rather, it was a literal request to be rescued. There are times when believers need to be saved out of real-life danger. Jesus put forth His hand and caught Peter and said that he was a man with small faith. “O thou of little faith” is translated from oligopistos. Peter had faith, but the winds and waves opened a window of doubt as to whether he could continue in faith, walking on the water. Jesus asked, “why did you doubt? The Greek word conveys a sense of uncertainty about a matter. Peter was not sure of himself, but He had no doubt about Jesus’ power to protect and save.

E. The Disciples Worship Jesus
(Matthew 14:32-33)

And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

As Jesus and Peter entered the ship, the
wind ceased, and the waves became calm. Jesus did not have to say a single word—the wind responded to His presence on the ship with the disciples. During a previous storm, Jesus verbally rebuked the wind and waves and they obeyed (see Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24). The remaining disciples (along with Peter) bowed down and worshipped Jesus. This is the first record of the disciples’ worshipping Jesus. In Matthew 2:2, 8, Jesus was worshipped by the Magi. In Matthew 8:2, He was worshipped by a leper, and in Matthew 9:18, the ruler of the synagogue comes and bows in worship before Him. The disciples had seen enough to convince them that this was no ordinary man. They proclaim Him to be the Son of God. These words convey Matthew’s Christological understanding that Jesus is Messiah, who has come in fulfillment of God’s eternal plan.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In studying the life of Jesus, one must always ask, what is the essential truth that lies at the center of this text? Clearly, there are a few key points to be gleaned from the text. First, there is a lesson to be learned from the prayer life of Jesus. Second, there is the implied warning against the lure of the limelight that occurs when people point to us and not to God the Father or try to redirect us away from God’s purpose. Third, there is the lesson from Peter’s failure to keep his focus on Jesus during the storm. All these ideas and thoughts are worthy of consideration. Yet, the main point of the passage is what it ultimately says about Jesus—that He is the Son of God. In Him, we come to know the true meaning of life. Jesus is the one who directs our work and then reminds us that even when there are storms, He will be right there with us. The point of the passage is not the storm, nor Peter’s walking by faith on the sea—it is Jesus Christ. He is the center of the passage.

PRAYER

Lord God of Creation, may we always keep our hearts and minds focused on You. May we never lose sight of Your calling upon our lives. Grant that we will never fear the challenges that will come our way. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 21-27, 2021)

Why Do You Doubt?
MONDAY, June 21: “Let’s Sing of the Lord’s Faithfulness” (Isaiah 38:16-20)
TUESDAY, June 22: “The Baptist Dies for the Faith” (Matthew 14:1-12)
WEDNESDAY, June 23: “The Crowd’s Hunger Is Satisfied” (Matthew 14:13-21)
THURSDAY, June 24: “Believe the One Sent to You” (John 6:22-29)
FRIDAY, June 25: “The Sick Are Healed” (Matthew 14:34-36)
SATURDAY, June 26: “Speak Confidently to Civil Authorities” (Mark 13:9-12)
SUNDAY, June 27: “Savior of the Fearful, Doubter, Needy” (Matthew 14:22-33)
**AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE**

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Expressing Thanks  
**YOUTH TOPIC:** An Attitude of Gratitude

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE:** An Attitude of Gratitude  
**CHILDREN’S TOPIC:** I Am Grateful

**DEVOTIONAL READING**  
*Isaiah 56:1-8*

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**ADULT/YOUTH**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Leviticus 13–14; Luke 5:12-16; 17:11-19  
**PRINT PASSAGES:** Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke 17:11-19  
**ADULT KEY VERSE:** Luke 17:15  
**YOUTH KEY VERSE:** Luke 17:16

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**CHILDREN**

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Leviticus 13–14; Luke 5:12-16; 17:11-19  
**PRINT PASSAGES:** Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke 17:11-19  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 17:15

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**Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke 17:11-19—KJV**

45 And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.

46 All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.

11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed,

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**Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke 17:11-19—NIV**

45 “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’

46 “As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.”

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance

13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.
turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.
16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.
17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?
18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.
19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.
17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
18 “Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”
19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often receive mercy but do not acknowledge the one who helped them. Do you show appreciation? Ten lepers, isolated by their skin diseases, were healed; but only one, who was a foreigner, was saved by his faith and offered thanks.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore reasons why only one of ten healed lepers turned back to Jesus in thanksgiving.
2. Be more mindful to respond appropriately to blessings that they might be tempted to take for granted.
3. Develop the daily discipline of expressing thanksgiving to God and others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Lepers were required by Jewish Law to take several precautionary steps to forewarn others of their condition and prevent the likelihood of infecting others (see Leviticus 13:45-46).
—The lepers’ common misery brought them together despite their religious and ethnic differences. In this light, the fact that Jesus finds them on the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee is suggestive of their transitional state. Marginalized from the community by their disease, the lepers create their own unclean community on the fringes of public society.
—Jesus showed no reservation regarding His proximity to the ceremonially unclean men. His openness is a model for extending themselves to engage those who are rejected by society.
—At least one of the ten lepers was a Samaritan. Jews ordinarily despised Samaritans (see John 4). Jesus showed no favoritism and healed all ten lepers.
—Unlike the other nine lepers, the Samaritan’s heart was filled with praise and thanksgiving for the blessing he received.
—The purpose of one’s showing himself to the priests was to have the priests certify that the leper had been cleansed (see Leviticus 13:6) and thus cleared to be restored to the community.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—in biblical times, those who suffered from leprosy
were required to wear torn clothes, leave their hair uncombed, shout that they were unclean, and live in isolation.

—As Jesus travelled to Jerusalem, He met ten lepers who recognized him and asked him for healing.
—Jesus told the lepers to go to the priests for the traditional proof of their healing, and as they went their way they were healed.

—Samaritans were hated by the Jews because they were considered idol worshippers and not true Jews.
—Only one man, a despoiled Samaritan, returned to thank and praise Jesus.
—Jesus seemed disappointed and incensed that only one person, a non-Jew, came back to give thanks.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Today’s lesson is from two books of the Bible: Leviticus (13:45-46) and the gospel of Luke (17:11-19). They are connected because the laws dealing with leprosy and the role of the priests in confirming one’s cleansing are all found in Leviticus 13–14. The book of Leviticus is the third book in the Old Testament; it prescribes the details concerning all the offerings, rituals, and requirements for purging the people of their sins.

The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Pentateuch, meaning “five books.” These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, often referred to as the “Law” or “Torah.” Biblical scholars hold varying opinions about the date these books were written and their authorship. The general consensus among most conservative scholars is that Moses is the author of the first five books and that they are a record of the words that the Lord gave Moses to give to Israel (see Exodus 19:1-7; 20:1; 24:12).

The second passage is from Luke 17:11-19 and it is part of a larger passage that is unique to Luke (see Luke 9:51–18:14). As a Jew living in the first century, Jesus adhered to and followed the requirements of the Law. Jesus never violated the teachings of the Law, nor did He encourage others to do so. We see this on full display in this lesson. In this passage, Jesus had concluded His Galilean ministry and was making His way to Jerusalem for the final act of God’s plan of redemption at Calvary. Luke 17:11 reads, “And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.” This would mean that there were just a few weeks remaining before Jesus would face the agony of the Cross. As they were travelling, a group of ten lepers appealed to Jesus to be healed. In accordance with the law of purification, Jesus told the men to go and show themselves to the priests, who were the only ones who could declare a person cleansed. He told the men to do exactly as the Law required.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

According to Exodus 19:1, Israel reached the Wilderness of Sinai three months after being delivered from slavery in Egypt. They would remain in that location for nearly a year (see Numbers 10:11). During that time, the tabernacle was constructed, the high priest was appointed, the priesthood was established (see Exodus 29), the three annual feast days were set (see Exodus 34:21-25)—and various laws regarding ritual purity and communal living were incorporated into their culture (see Exodus 25:1–40:17). Also, Moses gave detailed instructions regarding how the twelve tribes were to be encamped around the tabernacle (see Numbers 2:1-34).

During this critical period, the Hebrew people became a nation under God and the Torah was institutionalized as the standard for how they were
to relate to God and each other. All of the Levitical laws were written during this period. Among the laws established were those relating to animals that could and could not be eaten, motherhood, and regulations regarding uncleanness (see Leviticus 11–15). Leviticus chapters 13–14 are couched in this larger section and are specifically concerned with the laws regarding leprosy. Between the time of the Exodus and the first century, the laws and rules regarding leprosy became entrenched in Hebrew culture. Jews had no physical contact with lepers, who were largely confined to leper colonies or were forced to live alone outside the villages and cities.

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

**Jesus:** The name Jesus means “Savior.” It is derived from the ancient Hebrew Jehoshua. He was born in Bethlehem and was the Son of Mary through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit.

**Lepers:** those persons who were afflicted by the disease of leprosy and were considered unclean and were prohibited from coming into contact with “clean” people.

**Priests:** persons who preside over things related to God. The priesthood was a perpetual inheritance, passed down or transmitted from father to son.

**Samaritans:** natives of Samaria who are considered as outcasts by the Jews.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Compassion (Luke 17:13)—**Greek: *eleéó* (el-eh-eh’-o): “pity” (NIV) or mercy.

**Lepers (Luke 17:12)—**Greek: *lepros* (lep-ros’): persons afflicted with leprosy (a skin disease); “men who had leprosy” (NIV).

**Lifted (Luke 17:13 [KJV only])—**Greek: *airó* (ah’-ee-ro): to raise, take up, lift.

**Met (Luke 17:12)—**Greek: *apantaó* (ap-an-tah’-o): to have gone to meet; encountered.

**Show (Luke 17:14)—**Greek: *epideiknumi* (ep-ee-dike’-noo-mee): to show; to prove; display; “shew” (KJV).

**Unclean (Leviticus 13:45)—**Hebrew: *tame* (taw-may’): impure; contaminated.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

**I. Introduction**

A. Give Thanks

B. Biblical Background

**II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture**

A. The Plight of the Leper (Leviticus 13:45-46)

B. The Request of the Ten (Luke 17:11-14)

C. The Return of the One (Luke 17:15-19)

**III. Concluding Reflection**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Give Thanks**

One of the characteristics of ancient Hebrew worship was that its emphasis was on praise and giving thanks to God. Throughout the ancient Hebrew worship book, Psalms, there are numerous calls to worship the Lord and to celebrate His goodness by giving thanks to Him. One of the takeaways of this lesson deals with the believer’s response to God’s gracious benevolence. Israel was commanded to give thanks for all God’s blessings and especially for His mighty acts of salvation (see Psalms 103–107). One of the psalms
that soars to the height of unrestricted thanksgiving is Psalm 100. Psalm 100 is the only psalm that has been classified specifically as one whose primary purpose is about thanksgiving. This psalm is a hymn of praise that summons all the earth to worship, praise, and give thanks to YAHWEH, the Lord.

Who would better know and appreciate the wondrous grace and mercy of God than the Jews? They were God’s chosen people, whom He loved above all the families of the earth (see Amos 3:2b). After all, Jews had hundreds of years of God’s favor and blessings upon their lives. But when Jesus healed the ten lepers, the only one who felt compelled to glorify God and give Him thanks was a Samaritan, someone despised and viewed as outcasts by Jews. We can assume that the other nine were Jews, who felt no compulsion to offer thanks to God for His mercy. In this lesson, we learn that gratitude is among the foremost responses to God’s grace. Furthermore, Jesus teaches us how to love the stranger and what it means to do ministry even among the least of these.

B. Biblical Background

Having leprosy was the equivalent of a death sentence. There were no known cures or remedies for leprosy. It was only by the grace and mercy of God that a person was healed (see 2 Kings 5:1-14). Hebrew law was very strict when it came to leprosy. Lepers were required by Law to take several precautionary steps to preclude infecting someone else (see Leviticus 13:45-46). They could not (under any circumstance) associate with other people nor enter the area near the tabernacle. They were to live outside the camp. Most of them lived together in leper colonies, away from populated areas (see 2 Kings 7:3).

In today’s lesson, Jesus demonstrated to His disciples what it meant to be concerned for the foreigner, the outcasts, and those who have been marginalized by society. Jesus extended Himself to those who were hurting and without hope. He healed ten lepers, which would allow them to return to the communities they were forced to leave. One of the ten lepers was a Samaritan. He was the only one who returned to express gratitude and thankfulness to God for healing him. Jesus recognized the man for His humility and thankfulness. One would have thought that the other nine Jews who were also blessed by this miracle would have given thanks to God. They did not. How often have men and women been blessed by God in ways that defy human logic? Yet, they fail to give God praise and thanks. This lesson reminds us that we should never take God’s blessings for granted.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Plight of the Leper

(Leviticus 13:45-46)

And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.

Leviticus 13:1-14 lays out the various signs of leprosy and the tests that were to be used by the priests in making a determination of whether the person was clean or unclean.
The priest was required to examine the individual’s skin for signs of leprosy, and if it was confirmed the priest would declare the person unclean and quarantine him for seven days (see Leviticus 13:3-6). If there was no change after seven days, the person would be quarantined another seven days. If at the end of a second period of seven days the condition had not improved, then the priest would then declare the person to be unclean (see Leviticus 13:7-8). When there was a confirmation that a person had leprosy, the individual had to do four things. He must rent or tear his clothes, keep his hair in an unkempt state, cover his upper lip, and finally, he must cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” This cry of being unclean would alert anyone coming near that this person is contagious.

According to verse 45, as long as the person was afflicted with the condition, he must remain separate from others. He had to live outside the camp because he was unclean (Hebrew: tame [taw-may]). The camp was considered sacred ground—for it was the location of the tabernacle and the very presence of God. Nothing unclean or defiled was permitted in or near the tabernacle.

Consider the consequences of a declaration that you are unclean. One is prohibited from interacting with family and friends, cut off from any possible livelihood, and isolated from the very presence of God. Not only has the community cast you out, but the Lord has removed you from His sight. God does not share space with unholy things or people.

B. The Request of the Ten
(Luke 17:11-14)
And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

In verse 11, Jesus’ Galilean ministry has come to an end and He has turned His attention toward Jerusalem. The travelogue of Luke begins with Luke 9:51, when Jesus intentionally set His sights on Jerusalem and the Cross. Jesus was in a region of Galilee that bordered the region of Samaria, which was an area in Northern Israel. The name Samaria is derived from Shemer, who sold property to King Omri, who ruled the Northern Kingdom from 876–864 BC (see 1 Kings 16:24). The Samaritans originated shortly after the collapse of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC (see 2 Kings 17:7-18). After the conquest of the Northern Kingdom, the king of Assyria brought in people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim. They were settled in Samaria and over time adapted to the Hebrew religion and eventually intermarried with the remaining Hebrews, who continued to live in Samaria after the conquest (see 2 Kings 17:24-28). These people came to be known as the Samaritans, a mixed ethnic group.

Jesus was travelling from west to east, more than likely headed through the Jezreel Valley toward the Jordan Valley, which was the preferred route to Jerusalem from Galilee. Some scholars have argued that Luke may not have gotten his geography clear based upon the location of Samaria and its proximity to Galilee. Yet, having travelled to that region more than a dozen times, it is possible
that Jesus was near Samaria, travelling the valley route to the Jordan River. Caravans from the north heading south to Jerusalem would usually gather in or around the city of Beth Shean. Luke’s intention was not just geographical—it was also to highlight the power of Jesus over sickness and the greatness of faith found in people who were not always among the chosen people. Here, the stage is set for what happens with the Samaritan.

As they travelled, Jesus and His disciples entered a certain village (verse 12). The village was more than likely not just a leper colony, but an area where lepers more than likely congregated. Since it was impossible for lepers to find employment or engage in any other form of commercial activity, being near a village or city would give them opportunity to solicit alms. If the village had been purely for lepers, it is doubtful that Jesus would have entered the village. Why? Jesus would never expose His disciples or other people to a situation that would endanger their lives or possibly contaminate them with the disease of leprosy.

The text states that Jesus was met by ten men, all of whom were lepers. Leprosy was not confined to just men—remember that Miriam was afflicted with leprosy (see Numbers 12:10, 15). The men followed the Law regarding contact with healthy people. They stood at a distance and cried out to Jesus. They did not cry, “Unclean, unclean” as the Law required. Rather, they lifted their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (verse 13b). Mercy is translated from the Greek word ἔλεος and it means “to be moved with deep pity or intense compassion” (see Luke 16:24; 18:38). They wanted Jesus to feel their pain and be moved to action. The request for mercy was framed in the imperative tense, indicating that this was an urgent request. This was probably the one and only opportunity they would have to be healed. It is entirely possible that they had heard of the mighty miracles of Jesus and someone had told them that He was passing by. The men shouted out loudly, so as to attract Jesus’ attention. Jesus was surrounded by His disciples and there were other people in the party, so the noise level would have required a loud shout. We have no way of knowing how long these men had been lepers. However, this was their one opportunity to be healed and they were not going to let it pass by.

In verse 14, “When he saw them,” Jesus was deeply moved by their plight and commanded that they “go shew yourselves unto the priests.” “Shew” (Greek: ἐπειδικνυμί) denotes the presentation of someone or something as tangible proof. They could send word to the priest, but there would be no doubt of their healing once they presented themselves as having been healed by Jesus. Only the local priests could declare that a man or woman was free of leprosy (see Leviticus 14:1-11). Jesus never touched them nor did He announce that they had been healed. They were healed as they obeyed. They simply needed to show themselves to the priests.

C. The Return of the One
(Luke 17:15-19)

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save
this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

The ten men responded to the command of Jesus and began to make their way to the nearest priest. We have no way of knowing where that was; it may have been in the local synagogue, in the village where they currently were located. They no doubt rejoiced in disbelief that the scourge of leprosy was gone. Their hands were cleansed and their hair, scalps, and complexion began to sparkle with new life. The lone Samaritan would have gone to Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had built their own sacred worship center.

All of the lepers were healed, but only one of them realized that this was a miraculous act of God. One of the men felt that he could not go to the priest without first giving God thanks for his miracle of grace. He cried out with a loud voice, glorifying God, praising God, and thanking God. How appropriate to acknowledge God's grace with joyful sounds and loud shouts of praise. Imagine what the moment must have felt like—freedom from the pain of separation and the pain associated with a physical ailment. Healed (Greek: iaomai) means “to restore to wholeness and health.” Luke used this word in several places to denote the healing power of Jesus as something that had come to pass (see Luke 5:17; 6:19; 9:1; 14:4; 22:51).

Since the former leper was no longer bound by the restrictions of the Law, he could come near Jesus and even touch Him and be touched by the Master. He fell down at the feet of Jesus, an act of deep humility and gratitude. He gave Him thanks for what had happened. And Luke includes the fact that he was a Samaritan. Not only was the man an outsider because of his condition, but also, his race marked him with another strike. Jews and Samaritans had virtually no dealings with each other (see John 4:9). Some Jews hated Samaritans so much that they accused Jesus of being a Samaritan and having a demon (see John 8:48). Yet, according to John 4:39-42, Jesus had some of His biggest successes among the Samaritans, who were open to His preaching and teaching (see also Acts 8:4-8). Hence, it may not come as a surprise that the only one who would turn back to say thank you was a Samaritan.

In verses 17-18, Jesus asked the first of three rhetorical questions: “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” (NRSV). Those who definitely should have given thanks to God were the nine who were Jews, who more than likely knew of the signs of the coming kingdom of God. Yet, they turned and never looked back, never acknowledged anything.

Jesus’ statement is not to be viewed as a sign of disbelief or bewilderment. Rather, He offers a word of rebuke: “Were not ten made clean? What happened to the other nine? Why is it that the only one who gives God any credit is the one they all hate? Jesus recognized the man’s faith and said to him that none of the others thought enough of what God had done to give Him His due honor. Jesus said to the Samaritan, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole (verse 19).” Here, the reference is not just to the wholeness of his physical healing, but to his spiritual healing as well. In acknowledging Jesus’ place in God’s act of healing, he experiences complete salvation.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Throughout this series of lessons from the Gospels, Jesus has reminded us that God is a healer, deliverer, and provider. The key to living the abundant life is faith—that confident, unswerving belief that God will always work things out for our benefit. We have heard Him teach about the importance of trusting God for our daily needs. We have seen Him save His disciples from the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee twice. And we have seen Him heal men and women of diseases and conditions from which there was little to no hope of healing. All these lessons are fine, and they speak to us across the chasm of time—but what really matters to all of us is how the Lord has shown us grace and mercy.

This lesson reminds us that God is not only interested in our being ceremonially clean and righteous, but also desires that we recognize and value the things that He does for us. There are times when we take for granted the small things that God does for us. In these lessons, we have seen people on the brink of disaster, without a shred of hope, save Jesus came by. He then comes to the paradigm for what it means to trust in God and what it means to work for God. Jesus was never put off by a person’s social status, economic condition, or racial identity. All of us are children of God and we have need of the same thing.

The Samaritan models what it means to worship God and give Him thanks for His deliverance and healing. Anyone who has ever faced the prospects of a life-threatening illness knows what it means to be told, “You are cured.”

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we never take for granted Your abounding love for us. Grant that we be bold in our proclamations of Your gracious goodness. May we always see even the small things and give You thanks. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 28–July 4, 2021)

An Attitude of Gratitude

MONDAY, June 28: “God Welcomes Foreigners” (Isaiah 56:1-8)
TUESDAY, June 29: “Naomi’s Sorrow Turns to Joy” (Ruth 4:3-6,13-15)
WEDNESDAY, June 30: “Symptoms and Treatment of Leprosy” (Leviticus 13:1-8)
THURSDAY, July 1: “Lepers Share Their Good News” (2 Kings 7:3-11)
FRIDAY, July 2: “Many Samaritans Believe in the Savior” (John 4:39-42)
THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A Gift to Strengthen You
YOUTH TOPIC: The Power to Save Everyone

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: The Power of the Gospel
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Strength and Power

DEVOOTIONAL READING
Psalm 71:1-6, 17-24

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 1
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 1:8-17
KEY VERSE: Romans 1:16

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 1
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 1:8-17
KEY VERSE: Romans 1:16

Romans 1:8-17—KJV
8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.
9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;
10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.
11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;
12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.
13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

Romans 1:8-17—NIV
8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.
9 God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you
10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.
11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—
12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.
13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.
14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People look for relationships that offer them strength and stability. Where do you look to find your strength? The message of the Gospel is a source of strength and salvation hope for anyone who believes.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Discern the power of God as illustrated.
2. Affirm the power of God’s salvation to family and friends.
3. Pray for the salvation of the world, believing that it is possible.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Paul teaches that the blessings of the Messiah were intended for both Jews and Gentiles (see Romans 3:29-30; 9:24, 30; etc.).
—Paul hoped eventually to preach in Spain (see Romans 15:22-29). To do this, he needed the support of the Roman church. He was eager to minister among them so that they might bless each other in their common work of the Gospel.
—The Roman church believed the Gospel and lived it. They were renowned for their strong faith. Paul was grateful for their example of faith to other believers.

—Paul understood that his commission to spread the Gospel was not confined to a single nation or group of people. He carried the Gospel to anyone who would receive it.
—“To the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (verse 16): the Gospel was first to be announced to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles, to whom Paul referred as Greeks (see Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). The apostles observed this order as well (see Acts 13:46).
—In verse 11, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4. In the original context of Habakkuk, the point may be God’s faithfulness in keeping the covenant despite Israel’s sin and punishment in the form of exile. God worked through people of faith
to reveal His righteousness (or justice) to the world. This reading also sheds light on the difficult phrase, “through faith for faith” (literally, “out of faith, toward faith”).

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Paul praises the Roman Christians for their good reputation for living out Christian beliefs.
—The Roman Empire, because of its widespread influence and power, became a center for the spread of Christianity in the ancient world.
—Paul lived and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ with boldness to both Jews and Gentiles.
—Paul believed and taught that humans are made righteous before God by faith alone.
—Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4 and to encourage believers that God’s plan of salvation can be trusted.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The epistle to the Romans stands at the pinnacle of the apostle Paul’s writings. Romans has been called one of the greatest Christian writings of all time because it spells out in clear language God’s plan to bring salvation through Jesus Christ to Jews and Gentiles. Scholars consistently agree that the author of this theological gem is Saul of Tarsus, better known as Paul.

When and why did Paul write Romans? There is no consensus regarding exact dates, but most scholars accept that the epistle was written sometime between 52 and 58 C.E. Although no one can pinpoint the exact year of its writing, it is certain that the letter of Paul to the Romans was written from Corinth, toward the end of his third missionary journey (see Acts 18:23–21:8).

What were the reasons for Paul’s writing to the church in Rome? There is no general agreement that satisfies the vast field of biblical scholarship. However, the contents of the epistle suggest several reasons for its writing. First, Paul wrote to inform the church of his desire to strengthen them through the impartation of spiritual gifts. Second, Paul wanted to share with them his understanding of the Gospel as the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16–8:39). Third, Paul wanted to solicit financial assistance and encouragement for his journey to Spain (see Romans 15:24).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON
The earliest writings in the New Testament are the thirteen letters of the apostle Paul to the various congregations he founded and to individuals with whom he had relationships (i.e., Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). First Thessalonians is widely accepted as the oldest New Testament writing, predating even the Gospels. Paul’s epistles were typically written to address some specific issues or pressing concerns in the life of the church. This is where Romans differs from 1 and 3 Corinthians in content and purpose. The Corinthian letters were written to address several problems and questions that had erupted within the congregation. Paul had never been to Rome and was only acquainted with the church by word of mouth. He had very few details about the church; hence, the epistle is more explanatory and teaching-oriented, rather than corrective. Paul solicits the church’s help in the expansion of the Gospel beyond the Mediterranean Basin. This study unit will
examine several of the key components of Paul’s message as they are expounded in Romans.

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

**Paul:** an apostle of Jesus Christ and missionary who established several churches as he carried the gospel message throughout Asia Minor, to both Jews and Gentiles; also the author of thirteen books of the New Testament.

**Greeks:** This word is used interchangeably to refer to Gentiles; also persons educated in the religion and language of Greece.

**Barbarian:** anyone who did not speak the Greek language.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Faith (verse 8)—Greek: pistis (pis’tis):** faithfulness; belief or trust.

**Gospel (verse 9)—Greek: euaggelion (yoo-ang-ghel’-ee-on):** the Good News of the coming of the Messiah; good tidings.

**Prayers (verse 9 [KJV]/verse 10 [NIV])—Greek: proseuché (pros-yoo-khay’):** requests; entreaties; pleas.

**Serve (verse 9)—Greek: latreuó (lat-ryoo’-o):** to serve, especially God (perhaps simply: “I worship”).

**Thank (verse 8)—Greek: eucharisteó (yoo-khar-is-teh’-o):** to be thankful; to give thanks, express gratitude.

**Witness (verse 9)—Greek: martus (mar’-toos):** a record; an eyewitness or ear-witness.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. **INTRODUCTION**

A. The Gospel Is the Power of God

Without God, humanity is totally depraved and unable to save itself. Humans are sinners by nature. Their biggest struggle is to overcome the indwelling presence and power of sin.

Most people, including many Christians, find sin to be an uncomfortable discussion topic. Why? The discussion of sin challenges personal lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors. Self-examination and conversations about sin force individuals to confront their personal shortcomings with respect to God’s holiness. The mission of the Gospel message is to deliver humanity from their greatest problem—sin.

Sin is the universal spiritual malady and malignity of mankind. Romans 3:23 (NIV) reads, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” There is no life, family, nation,
community, congregation, believer, or any heart or mind that has not been touched by sin. Everyone is born a sinner, outside of fellowship with God. Although born with the propensity to sin, humanity is not without hope. By faith in Jesus Christ, everyone can be reconciled to God through the substitutionary death and atoning work of Jesus on the Cross. God breaks the shackles that bind persons to sin (see Romans 7:24-25). Without God, no one can save themselves or merit God’s favor. Without God’s act of redeeming grace, humanity is lost and without hope (see Ephesians 2:1-4). Only God can save sinners. The hope of salvation is made possible not by human works, but by the great salvific work of God.

B. Biblical Background

The Bible passage that frames this week’s lesson is the second half of Paul’s salutation and greeting to the church in Rome (see Romans 1:1-15). In the opening of his letter to the Romans, Paul referred to himself as a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle—that is, one set apart for a given assignment (see Romans 1:1). Throughout his missionary work, Paul was very transparent regarding the details of his divine calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul indicated that he had desired to come to Rome but had been prevented by God from doing so. Paul had hoped to move beyond the east and head west to Spain and preach the Gospel in unchartered regions. Rome would be the stopover point along the journey to his final destination. Although he had never visited Rome, Paul acknowledged that the reputation of the believers there was well-documented. Their faith was known throughout the whole world. Paul offered a prayer of thanksgiving for their faith and work, reminding them that they were constantly in his prayers. He indicated his desire to preach and teach in Rome to their mutual encouragement and blessing.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Paul’s Thanksgiving

(Romans 1:8)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Paul expressed his deep sense of gratitude to God for the Roman believers and their strong witness (see 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2 2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Paul expressed thanks to God for three things. First, he offered general thanks “for you all.” He was grateful for everyone who was a part of the church. Second, he was thankful for their faith (Greek: pistis). Here, faith could mean the content of what they believed about Jesus Christ or their attentiveness to being faithful to the Lord. Either understanding is plausible. Faith is what really mattered to Paul, as it should matter to every believer. Personal actions are driven by faith—that is, the content of what we believe and the actions that follow. Third, Paul rejoiced that the faith of the Romans is spoken of throughout the whole world (see 1 Thessalonians 1:8 for a similar statement). Here, this is hyperbole or exaggerated speech. The reputation of
the Christians in Rome was being shared throughout the churches in Asia Minor. Word of the faith of the Romans was being spread abroad. Reputations matter!

B. Paul’s Prayer
(Romans 1:9-10)

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

“For” introduces Paul’s statement of defense regarding his prayer life. It is not that he has to defend what he has been saying; rather, he declared that the proof of all that he has said can be validated by God. “God is my witness” (see Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5).

For Paul, it was important for the Romans to know that his statement about praying on their behalf was not an empty one. “Serve” (Greek: latreuo) has been translated as either worship or the act of ministering to others. In this context, the idea of worship fits what Paul was saying. Not only was he praying for them constantly, but also, the verification is found in his private devotional life. He worshipped God with his spirit (Greek: pneuma). Prayer and worship go together. Worship begins with the human spirit, directed toward God. Paul served God as an apostle of Jesus, God’s Son. There is no question that Paul thought of Jesus as God’s beloved Son. The thought was at the very center of Paul’s understanding of Jesus as the means of God’s grace. Paul closes the section by affirming his frequent remembrance of the church in his prayers.

Verse 10 expresses the specific object of Paul’s prayer life. He had long desired to visit Rome, but he was a man under obligation to God. His agenda was determined by God’s direction rather than personal desire. Paul submitted every aspect of his life and apostolic mission to God’s timing and God’s will (Greek: thelemati).

C. Paul’s Longing and Purpose
(Romans 1:11-13)

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

Paul had a compelling desire to “see” the believers in Rome. In the three verses he lays out three reasons why he wanted to come to Rome. First, he wanted to impart a spiritual (Greek: pneumatikos) gift (Greek: chariama) to them. What did Paul mean by “spiritual gift”? It is not likely that he was referring to the whole range of spiritual gifts mentioned in letters to the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 12–14). Here, the most likely meaning is determined by the context. The noun charisma is singular and indicates that this was not about a range of gifts, but a single gift. While Paul did not identify a specific spiritual gift, he likely wanted to share his understanding of the Gospel. He considered salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ to be nothing less than the very gift of God (see Romans 6:23).

Second, Paul wanted time for mutual ex-change with the Romans. The words “comforted together” (Greek:
symparaklethenai) are found only in this passage. The idea expressed the notion of mutual sharing and encouraging. Paul acknowledged that their fellowship together would serve a mutual benefit.

Third, Paul expected that his visit would result in spiritual fruit. What did he mean? Paul was focused on developing stronger disciples and reaching new converts for Jesus Christ. Verse 13 conveys information about the demographics of the Roman church—it was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul hoped to reach other Gentiles with the Gospel.

D. Paul’s Indebtedness
(Romans 1:14-15)

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Paul felt a deep sense of commitment to the preaching of the Gospel. Debtor (Greek: opheiletes) refers to someone who has a moral obligation to perform or carry out a duty. Paul used this word in a figurative manner to convey his obligation to Greeks and to Barbarians (Greek: barbaros). “Barbarian” is not used in a negative sense here; rather, it refers to someone who is a foreigner and is unfamiliar with the local language. It can also mean someone who bears no loyalty to the country in which he or she resides. The use of the words Greek, Barbarian, wise, and unwise point out the universality of Paul’s desire to reach all people, regardless of their social or cultural standing.

In verse 15, Paul was ready to preach the Gospel anywhere and he specifically wanted to preach in Rome. The message of the Gospel is a preached message. It is both written and oral. Second, the message of the Gospel is a message to be received, collectively and individually. Those who receive it can pass it on to others. Third, the message of the Gospel is a foundation for faith and righteous living. The Gospel is the very foundation of new life in Jesus Christ. There is no stronger foundation than the Gospel. Fourth, the message of the Gospel is the message of hope and salvation. Paul possessed a readiness to deliver this message to the people of Spain.

E. Paul’s Confidence
(Romans 1:16-17)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

These verses have been identified as the theme of Romans. They are closely related to verse 15, in which Paul expressed his desire to preach the Gospel in Rome. Here, we have the unfolding of the rationale behind his intentions. He can preach in Rome—as he had done throughout Asia, Achaia, Macedonia, and Greece—because he is not afraid or ashamed of the Gospel. God’s power to save is contained within the message of the Gospel. We are saved through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel is nothing less than the message of the finished work of Jesus Christ, who died on a cross at Calvary. The Gospel represents the divine power and love demonstrated at the Cross. Those who embrace the Gospel receive salvation through faith in God’s work through Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:8-10).

When Paul wrote that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, he had in mind that God’s power to save is one that begins in the
present moment and proceeds into eternity. Paul made it clear that only those who believe will experience the salvific work of God. It begins with the Jews and incorporates “everyone,” Jews and Greeks (see Romans 1:16c).

Verse 17 contains what is one of the central themes of the message of Paul: “the righteousness of God” (Greek: dikaiosyne theou). What did Paul mean in saying that the Gospel revealed the righteousness of God? It is only through faith that one is made righteous before God. Anyone who has ever made a confession of faith and has tried to live a life that is pleasing to God has been faced with the question of how to become righteous before God. What is required to please God? What does it take to be justified in God’s sight? Here is where many people miss the point of Jesus’ substitutionary death for sinners. Jesus paid the penalty for sin and imputed His righteousness to all who accept Him by faith. His death at Calvary reveals His righteousness and makes us righteous (see 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:5), not because of human effort, but by the righteousness of God applied to human benefit.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16, NASB). “For in it . . .” is the key phrase. What is the “it” to which Paul was referring? The “it” is the Gospel. In the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. The path to righteousness is by way of the simple teachings of the Gospel. The Gospel reveals the divine origin, identity, mission, sufferings of Jesus, and His victory over sin. Righteousness before God can never be earned or merited without Christ. No one is made righteous by participation in religious activities or pious living. Righteousness transcends doctrinal creed, ethnicity, and social standing.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You that Your grace covers our sins and Jesus’ shed blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness. May we never take the Cross lightly. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 5-11, 2021)

The Power of the Gospel

TUESDAY, July 6: “Entrusted to Take the Gospel to Gentiles” (Galatians 2:1-10)
WEDNESDAY, July 7: “Grace and Peace to All” (Romans 1:1-7)
THURSDAY, July 8: “God’s Righteous Wrath” (Romans 1:18-23)
FRIDAY, July 9: “God’s Actions Are Fair and Just” (Romans 1:24-32)
SATURDAY, July 10: “God’s Righteous Actions for Saints, Sinners” (2 Peter 2:4-9)
SUNDAY, July 11: “The Gospel Changes Jews and Gentiles” (Romans 1:8-17)
THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

**Devotional Reading**

**Genesis 15:1-6**

**Adult/Youth**

**Background Scripture:** Romans 4

**Print Passage:** Romans 4:1-12

**Adult Key Verse:** Romans 4:3

**Youth Key Verse:** Romans 4:18

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** The Faith of Abraham

**Children’s Topic:** Stay Committed

**Adult/Youth**

**Topic:** Seeking Assurance

**Youth Topic:** Faith that Is for Real

**Romans 4:1-12—KJV**

WHAT SHALL we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.
3 For what saith the scripture? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”
4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

**Romans 4:1-12—NIV**

WHAT THEN shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?
2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.
3 What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”
4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.
5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.
6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:
7 “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
8 “Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never
9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. 10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: 12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often look to those older than they are for assurance. Who is an example one can trust? Through faith, Abraham, the father of all who believe, proved he was in right relationship with God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Study the difference between faith and works as manifested in the life of Abraham. 2. Reflect on Paul’s use of Old Testament examples to explain justification by faith. 3. Examine evidence of faith that others can see in their relationship with God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Paul wrote about human acceptance before God primarily as justification. We are made acceptable to God because the requirements of the Law have been fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus (see Romans 3:21-26; 8:3-5). —Paul’s key objective here is to demonstrate that the doctrine of justification by faith, which he defends, is found in the Old Testament.

—Paul poses the question, “What does the scripture say?” This phrase was commonly used by the Jews when anything was proposed that seemed contrary to Scripture. Paul produces verification from Scripture (see Genesis 15:6), proving that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works. —The Jews place great value on the fact that Abraham was the father and founder of Israel. Paul knew that an argument drawn from his example or conduct would be especially powerful. —The Jews believed that all males should be circumcised. Paul showed that by believing God,
Abraham enjoyed the favor of God prior to his being circumcised, and argued that this could be true for others as well.
—Paul asserts that Abraham was justified by faith, and his faith was counted as righteousness. Further, Paul shows that if people were to be justified by works, faith would be of no use and the promises of God would have no effect.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—God considered Abraham as righteous because of his faith.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
Romans is Paul’s longest and most theologically important writing. Prior to writing Romans, Paul had begun to work through his understanding of the importance of faith in Jesus Christ as the only means by which a person is saved (see Galatians 3:6–4:31).

The question of the inclusion of Gentiles within the Christian church was an early source of contention and strife that dated back to the first Jerusalem Conference (see Acts 15). What would Gentiles have to do in order to be saved? Would they also have to submit to the tenets of the Mosaic Law, or would they be excluded from the ethnic requirements placed upon Jews (see Acts 15:5)? The council concluded that they would not make things difficult for Gentiles to come to God by requiring them to conform to the Law. Instead, the only requirements for Gentile believers were abstinence from sexual immorality, and from eating meats sacrificed to idols or things strangled from blood (see Acts 15:19–20).

Today’s lesson is set within the context of Paul’s discussion about faith versus works (see Romans 3:27–4:25). In Romans 3:1, Paul raised two rhetorical questions about the place of the Jew and his advantage because of circumcision. The NRSV reads, “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?” In Romans 4:1-8, Paul made it clear that he saw no advantage for the Jew when it came to righteousness. Abraham was not made righteous because of anything that he had done, but purely on the merits of God’s grace.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
The church in Rome was an ethnically diverse group of congregations made up of Jews and Gentiles.

Scholars are not certain how the church in Rome originated—there are several schools of thought regarding this. First, Roman Catholic tradition holds that Peter began the church during his stay in Rome and some interpreters have even suggested Paul as the founder. However, there is very little concrete evidence to support either position. Paul did not reach Rome until after 62 C.E. It is possible that Peter may have been indirectly involved with the founding of the church; however, there is no biblical evidence to support the claim that he visited Rome prior to writing his epistle to the Roman church.
Second, given Rome’s prominence as the capital of the empire, there may have been travelers who could have helped establish a church there. There were many flourishing Christian communities throughout Asia Minor, any of which could have been the source of information about the new faith. What is certain is that Paul received word of a thriving Christian community in Rome and hoped to visit and share the Gospel there.

Third, the best possible solution is that “visitors from Rome” heard the Gospel message and were converted. Upon their return to Rome, they carried the message of Jesus’ ministry and resurrection back to their synagogues in and around Rome. This seems to be the most likely scenario. According to Acts 18:1-2, during his second missionary, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, two Jewish Christians who had recently come from Rome: “After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them” (NRSV). We know from these references that there was at least a thriving Christian community in Rome several years prior to Paul’s letter and visit.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON
Believed (verse 3)—Greek: pisteúō (pist-yoo’-o): trusted or relied upon; had faith in.
Grace (verse 4)—Greek: charis (khar’-ece): unmerited kindness or favor; mercy extended by God; “gift” (NIV).
Justified (verse 2)—Greek: dikaióō (dik-ah-yo’-o): shown to be righteous; declared righteous.
Reward (verse 4)—Greek: misthos (mis-thos’): “wages” (NIV); recompense for service or achievement.
Righteousness (verse 3)—Greek: dikaiosuné (dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay): justice or the virtue which gives each his due; being morally right.
Works (verse 2)—Greek: ergon (er’-gon): deeds; actions; generosity or benevolent actions.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. More than Works Alone
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Abraham Was Justified by Faith (Romans 4:1-8)
   B. Abraham’s Faith, Not Circumcision (Romans 4:9-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON
Abraham: he is first mentioned in Genesis 11:26. The patriarch of the nation of Israel, Abraham was called “a friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8*; James 2:23). Though advanced in age and married to a barren woman, Abraham believed God’s promise to make a great nation out of his family. Paul celebrates the faith of Abraham in his letter to the Romans.

David: a descendant of Abraham’s and the second king of Israel. Despite His shortcomings, David was considered as Israel’s most beloved and revered king. The Scriptures refer to Him as “a man after God’s own heart” (see 1 Samuel 13:14).
I. INTRODUCTION
A. More than Works Alone

There is no shortage of available information on how to identify a good church volunteer or employee. Congregations are in constant search of the right person for various ministry assignments. Faithful, available, teachable, generous, adaptable, and flexible are among some of the most commonly desired traits for church workers. Sometimes, church members mistakenly believe that their church work is the means by which they achieve salvation—that is, the busier, the better. While it is true that God expects believers to do good works and serve actively in the local church, this must never be confused as a pathway to eternal salvation. It is a mistake to believe that time spent serving in a ministry earns credits or bonus points with God or, worse, that it equates to or substitutes for a consecrated life of faith. This is the fundamental argument that Paul was making in Romans 4. Abraham was justified before God, not because of what he did but because he believed the promise of God.

Paul assured the Romans that there was nothing a man or woman could do to make himself or herself righteous before God. Believers are made righteous before God because Jesus Christ took on sin and fulfilled all the requirements of the Law (see Romans 3:21-26; 8:3-5). This lesson opens a window to see that great purpose of God in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17, 19, 21). God has saved His people and called them for His purpose by grace through faith, not by works.

B. Biblical Background

Romans 4:1-25 is Paul’s argument that Jews and Gentiles are included in the covenant of grace purely because of faith. The chapter can divided into four paragraphs: 4:1-8—Abraham was justified by faith and not works, thus he had no reason to boast; 4:9-12—Circumcision was not the basis for Abraham’s justification because he received the promise prior to the Law; 4:13-15—Abraham was justified apart from the Law, which came nearly four hundred years later; 4:16-25—Abraham’s faith in God is the model for all who believe, apart from the Law and works.

Abraham and David were Israel’s most revered national and religious figures. Abraham is the beloved patriarch and father of the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 41:8, Abraham is called the friend of God. David is revered as a king without equal—a descendant of Abraham’s who restored Israel to its lofty peak of global respect. Through the lineage of David, the Messiah and His throne would be established forever (see 2 Samuel 12–14). Paul used these two Jewish heroes as the basis for defending the argument that a person is not saved because of his/her works. Rather, salvation is a gift of God, granted by God’s justification. Paul introduced the concept of justification in the opening paragraph of the letter in Romans 1:17 and he expanded upon it in Romans 3:19, 20, 21-26, 27-31.
A. Abraham Was Justified by Faith
(Romans 4:1-8)

WHAT SHALL we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Paul begins this section with a rhetorical question that frames his entire argument. “What shall we say then . . . ? The question goes back to 3:27-31, where Paul lays out the case that all are justified by faith, not by works of the Law or by circumcision. Jews considered Abraham to be not only the founder of their nation, but also the father of how to achieve righteousness before God. “As pertaining to the flesh” is translated from kata sarka, which in some instances has a negative spiritual use (see Galatians 5:16-21). Here, “flesh” refers to Abraham as the ancestor of the Jews by ethnic heritage. The question could be framed something like this: What did Abraham discover about being righteous?

Verse 2 begins with a conditional statement: for if Abraham were justified by works, then he would have a great deal to boast about. However, not before God. Justified (Greek: edikaiiothe) means “to be vindicated, exonerated, freed from the penalty of the law, even though one is guilty, to be declared innocent.” Work (Greek: ergon) refers to deeds, actions, doing something, or activity. In this instance, it still refers to works of the Law.

Abraham is the father of the faithful; he lived a righteous life before God. In the mind of the traditional, highly religious Jew, it was Abraham’s faithfulness to keeping the Law that made him righteous. The point that Paul made is that if the only thing that mattered were works of Abraham, then he could clearly brag about how good he had been. Unfortunately, he could not brag about himself before God. Paul taught that because of God’s grace, believers have no basis for such bragging.

In verse 3, Paul turns to Scripture for support of his position. He quoted Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Here, there is a recounting of the promised blessings of Genesis 12:1-3. Abraham became the patriarch of a great nation, not because he had done something, but purely on God’s grace. Abraham had faith to believe God’s promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. It was the faith that caused God to declare him righteous. All Abraham had to do was believe what God told him would happen. This is all that the Lord desires of His people—that they believe Him and trust His Word.

Verses 4-5 explain the preceding assertion concerning the faith of Abraham. Paul writes that the compensation for working is not a gift, but is a debt owed by the employer. The interpretation of the verse is obvious. Abraham did not earn anything; it was given to him. Paul then presents the case of one who does not work but believes on the one who
justifies the ungodly, stating that he, too, shall receive the gift of righteousness. Here, Paul includes the Jew and Gentile. “The one who does not work” is a reference to the Gentile who has not done the works of the Law. Both are made righteous by the same gift of God.

In verses 6–8, Paul highlights the second-most prominent figure in Jewish history, David. In these verses, David is presented as further proof that righteousness before God is mutually exclusive of one’s works. Those who receive this gift of grace are blessed. David is an additional witness to the truth that God imputes righteousness without regard to sins or saintliness. He quoted Psalm 32:1-2 with one exception. In verse 1 of Psalm 32, David is likely speaking of himself: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Paul makes the application universal in verse 7 of this pericope: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” Paul clarifies that God forgives all people, whether Jew or Gentile.

B. Abraham’s Faith, Not Circumcision
(Romans 4:9-12)

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

In verse 9, Paul raises another rhetorical question: “Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision?” Paul asks whether the blessing of forgiveness and grace is just for those who are Abraham’s descendants—identified by circumcision—or for everyone, even those who are uncircumcised. The answer is found in the third portion of the verse, which is a repeat of the quote from Genesis 15:6—that it was the faith of Abraham that led to his being declared righteous before God. Paul drives home the point that righteousness is not the result of one thing, then something else being added to complete the process. Once a man or woman commits to Jesus Christ, he or she is complete in Him (see Colossian 2:8-10).

Verse 10 is a second rhetorical question on the subject of circumcision (Greek: peritome) versus uncircumcision (Greek: akrobystia). Circumcision was the identifying marker of all Jewish males and involved the removal of the foreskin on the male organ. Paul presents the question, “How then was it reckoned?” The “it” refers to the righteousness of God. If Abraham was declared righteous by God, how did it happen? Paul continues to logically press the case that Abraham was declared to be righteous, not after he was circumcised, but prior to circumcision (see Genesis 17:9-12). Abraham had been reckoned righteous by God fourteen years before circumcision was introduced.

In verse 11, Paul reminded the Roman Christians that Abraham had received the sign of the covenant—circumcision—which became the seal of his righteousness. God gave the command to Abraham to be circumcised. He did not offer it to God as a token of his loyalty. This act of circumcision was a public
declaration for subsequent generations that God had approved of Abraham and made important promises to him. All of this he had received before he submitted to circumcision (see Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:1-6, 17). By faith in God’s promise, Abraham became the father of all who, in faith, believe God and trust Jesus as Savior, without circumcision. The righteousness of God is attributed to the uncircumcised as a result of the faith of Abraham. Abraham is, then, the father of all who believe, both the circumcised and the uncircumcised.

In verse 12, Paul does not say that the Jews are no longer to be considered as the people of God. Paul explained that Abraham is the father of those who are of the circumcision, and he is the father of those who walk in the same faith Abraham had when he was uncircumcised.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

A few years ago, I opened savings accounts for my granddaughters at a local credit union. I explained to the girls that they had no pressure or obligation to earn or repay the periodic deposits I would make into their accounts. Each deposit would be a gift, from me to them. This is what God did for every believer at Calvary. His Son, Jesus Christ, freely paid the debt we owed for sin—a debt we could not pay.

This week’s lesson introduces Paul’s theological basis for the important Christian doctrine of justification. The leaders of the Protestant Reformation understood that salvation and eternal life were not blessings to be earned: rather, they were gifts from God, whose only requirement was having faith in Him. The Latin phrases *sola grati* (“grace alone” and *sola fide* (“faith alone”) expressed their belief in the foundational cornerstones of God’s great act of redemption. You cannot do enough good deeds or church work to make yourself acceptable before God. Salvation begins with the simple act of confessing Jesus Christ, believing that God has raised Him from the dead, and following Him along the lifelong journey toward perfection and holiness.

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, we submit our ways to You. Cleanse us by the inspiration of Your Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. May we strive to live each day to please You and glorify Your name. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.*

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

*(July 12-18, 2021)*

**The Faith of Abraham**

**MONDAY,** July 12: “God’s Covenant with Abraham” (Genesis 15:1-8)

**TUESDAY,** July 13: “All the World’s Families Are Blessed through Abraham” (Genesis 12:1-9)

**WEDNESDAY,** July 14: “A Promise Realized by Faith, Not Law” (Romans 4:13-15)

**THURSDAY,** July 15: “For All Who Share Abraham’s Faith” (Romans 4:16-18)

**FRIDAY,** July 16: “Abraham Believed despite Impossible Odds” (Romans 4:19-21)

**SATURDAY,** July 17: “In Christ, Believers Share Abraham’s Faith” (Romans 4:22-25)

**SUNDAY,** July 18: “Abraham, Father of the Faithful” (Romans 4:1-12)
JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

**ADULT/YOUTH**

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC**: Seeking Reconciliation

**YOUTH TOPIC**: Faith Makes It Right

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE**: Romans 5:1-11

**PRINT PASSAGE**: Romans 5:1-11

**KEY VERSE**: Romans 5:1

**CHILDREN**

**GENERAL LESSON TITLE**: Justified by Faith

**CHILDREN’S TOPIC**: Confidence in Love

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE**: Romans 5:1-11

**PRINT PASSAGE**: Romans 5:1-11

**KEY VERSE**: Romans 5:1

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**Romans 5:1-11—KJV**

THEREFORE BEING justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

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**Romans 5:1-11—NIV**

THEREFORE, SINCE we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 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.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.
8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.
10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often struggle with fractured relationships that they may or may not have caused. How can these relationships be reconciled? Only justification by faith in Jesus Christ reconciles the ultimate ruptured relationship between God and humanity.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Identify the relationship between faith in Christ and justification in the sight of God.
2. Repent of personal failures to obtain the peace that God gives.
3. Celebrate their justification through faith in Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Justification gives believers peace with God. As believers, we are no longer enemies of God (see Romans 5:10) and have no need to fear God’s wrath (see Romans 5:9). Through Christ’s sacrifice we have peace, hope, love, and power over sin.
—Through Christ, we as believers are adopted into the family of God, which gives us the right to eternal life. God reaches down to humanity to become our Friend, and also our heavenly Parent.
—Believers have joy because we live in a continual state of peace with God on earth and enjoy the assurance of maintaining this relationship with God throughout eternity.
—Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we have been justified before God, or pronounced “guiltless.”
Teachers of CHILDREN

—The peace of God is the reconciliation believers have through Christ with God because the penalty of sin has been paid by Christ.

—Paul reminds believers that the grace of Christ is available to us through the Holy Spirit that leads and guides us.

—Christians are tempted to make choices that move them away from the love of God, but Paul reminds believers that their sufferings are overcome through trust in Christ.

—All humans are weak and have sinned, yet God’s love justifies us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God’s love and justification for humanity are evidenced through Christ.

—Because God’s holiness and human sin cannot dwell together, we rejoice that our reconciliation with God has been made possible in Jesus Christ.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Today, we come to a new section in Paul’s letter to the Christian church in Rome. This section begins at Romans 5:1 and concludes at 8:39. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans sometime during his three-month stay in Corinth—about AD 57–58. Paul had neither founded nor visited the church in Rome. The purpose of the letter was to inform them of his intention to pass through Rome, visit for a short spell, and then go on to Spain to preach the Gospel there. In Romans 15:22-25, Paul laid out the details of his travel plans. In Romans, he shares with them the fundamentals of his message about Jesus Christ and what God had accomplished through His death and resurrection.

In the first lesson from Romans, we learned that the theme of the letter is found in Romans 1:16-17. Paul quotes a passage out of Habakkuk 2:4 that he uses to support his position of the righteousness of God and that the just shall live by faith.

Romans 1:18–3:21 reveals that all men and women have rebelled against God and are helpless under the power of sin, unable of themselves to do anything to escape God’s impartial judgement (Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans: TNICNT. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), p. 290.) In Romans 3:21-26, Paul stated that God put forth His Son, Jesus Christ, to be a sacrifice for our sins, which enabled God to rescue us from our sins and the eternal damnation that was sure to follow.

In Roman 3:27–4:25, Paul meticulously argues that we are saved purely by our faith and not because of any ritual or association with a religion. Our faith in the finished work of Jesus at Calvary brings us into a new relationship with God through the Lord, Jesus Christ. Righteousness cannot be attained by our works, keeping the Law, or by any ritual of circumcision.

We have now arrived at another turning point that is the summation of everything that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ means. In this lesson, we come to the practical blessings of being justified by faith. God has justified us through the death of His Son and given us a new standing or a new relationship with Him through our Lord, Jesus Christ—this is justification. We stand before God forgiven of our sins.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Death and what comes after it have been
humankind’s most baffling enigma. Throughout the ancient world there were varying ways to think about death. The ancient Hebrews believed that death was the end of life after which one would be reunited with his or her ancestors. The Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians all held to some belief that life continued in some form or another after death. In life and in the Scriptures, death is the one inescapable reality from which there is no rescue. There were only two men in the Scriptures who did not taste death: Enoch (see Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5) and Elijah (see 2 Kings 2:11). Some say Moses never died, but we have no clear record of that fact in the Scriptures. Even Jesus accepted the reality of death as He prepared for the Cross (see Mark 14:8; 15:42-47).

The ultimate and final conquest of death came with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the underlying thematic thrust of the next larger section of Romans 5:1–8:39. Not only do believers stand in a new relationship with God, but also the one nemesis of all life has been finally defeated. For Paul and all New Testament writers, death was the menacing foe that cast all men and women into a common grave. There was no way around it—until Jesus defeated death and the grave one time for all time. The victory of Jesus was the reason why believers could and can “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Paul preached that “Christ died for us.” His victory over death and the grave becomes the victory of all who, in faith, believe in Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior. Through His sacrifice we not only have victory over death, but we also gain peace, grace, hope, and power over sin.

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

**Paul:** the most important Christian missionary in the first century. He founded churches in Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus. He is credited with writing thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

- **Access (verse 2)**—Greek: *prosagógé* (pros-ag-ogue-ay’): a bringing to; to have contact with.
- **Glory (verse 2)**—Greek: *doxa* (dox’-ah): praise; honor; the unspoken manifestation of God.
- **Grace (verse 2)**—Greek: *charis* (khar’-ece): a gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ; kindness.
- **Hope (verse 2)**—Greek: *elpis* (el-pece’): expectation; trust; confidence.
- **Justified (verse 1)**—Greek: *dikaioó* (dik-ah-yo’-o): shown to be righteous; declared righteous.
- **Peace (verse 1)**—Greek: *eiréné* (i-ray’-nay): oneness; quietness; rest; peace of mind.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. **Introduction**
   A. The Blessing of Justification
   B. Biblical Background

II. **Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
   A. We Have Peace with God
      (Romans 5:1-4)
   B. God Showed Us His Love
      (Romans 5:5-8)
   C. Justified and Saved by His Blood
      (Romans 5:9-11)

III. **Concluding Reflection**
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Blessing of Justification

In the Bible, justification is a legal word. It refers exclusively to the believer’s standing before God.

Justification is God’s declaration that you and I are completely innocent and forgiven of all our sins, rebelliousness, transgressions, iniquities, and unrighteousness. We stand before Him totally righteous. What happened to our sins? God took them and placed them upon Jesus and made us righteous—He imputed righteousness to us. Whatever we may feel is hanging over our heads, the slate is wiped clean in the eyes of God. We are forgiven! There is a practical dimension to being justified and it has to do with our lives. There has to be a discernible difference between who you were and who you are now.

We think of this act of newness as being born again or converted. The Scriptures use a variety of examples or symbols with which to equate Christian conversion—becoming a new creation—2 Corinthians 5:17: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature . . . .” In Ephesians 4:22, 24, it is taking off the self and putting on the new self. In Ephesians 4:23, it is the renewal of the spirit of our minds. In Romans 6:4, conversion is equated to being buried with Christ into His death in baptism and being raised to new life.

This is one central point that the apostle Paul is expressing in this passage. He is pointing out the blessings of being made right with God. It is a past action of God’s grace that took place at Calvary. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ."

B. Biblical Background

In those verses, Paul spells out the three primary blessings we received as a result of being justified by our faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ. Let me remind us of what they are. First, we have peace with God. This peace ended forever enmity between God and humanity. Our peace with God brings us to a state of peace with each other. Second, we have attained access into this grace in which we now stand. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross validated our spiritual credentials, opening up everything that God has for us. Third, we can rejoice in the hope of glory which we will one day share with God, our heavenly Father.

Now the apostle takes us a step further; he writes, “And not only this . . . .”—as if to say, “I have more to add to what I have just told you.” “Not only this, but we also exult (“boast,” NRSV) in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4, NASB).

Paul reminded them that when those times of trial and tribulation come, one can rejoice and exult in them because trials do not bring us down; rather, they are periods of great growth and strengthening. Jesus forewarned His disciples that they would be persecuted for the sake of righteousness (see Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:12-16).
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. We Have Peace with God  
(Romans 5:1-4)

THEREFORE BEING justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

In this paragraph, Paul enumerates several blessings that result from our being justified by faith: peace, access, hope, and patience. The word Therefore points back to chapter 4 and declares that what follows is the outcome of what it means to be justified by faith. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We have peace—the wording of this phrase means that this blessing of peace is a past act of God’s grace. When Jesus died on the Cross, He made peace between those who live in faith and God.

Paul used a word for “peace” (Greek: eirenen) that came from the LXX (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). In this translation, peace comes from the Hebrew idea of “shalom.” Shalom means the end of hostilities and more; it denotes a new era, condition, a new state of well-being and blessing. It points to a time when there will be no more war, no more hostilities, and no more sorrow.

Peace with God means that a state of harmony exists between God and humanity. No sin stands in the way of our relationship. There is nothing in your past that gets in the way. Nothing hinders us from a fresh start with God. There is nothing that interferes with our new standing. We have peace with God. We do not live in fear of the final judgment but in expectant hope, because the wall that separates us from God has been broken down (see Matthew 27:51a). It is this new state of peace with God that gives us the peace of God (see Philippians 4:7).

Verse 2 points to a second blessing that results from our justification—we have obtained access. To what have we gained access? We have gained access to this grace, which enables us to stand.

We have obtained access to this grace. Before we came to faith in Christ, our spiritual credentials were not in order. Our passport to God’s blessed grace was not valid. We were living with an invalid license. But through Christ, we obtained access and the door has been opened.

Note that it is through Christ that we have access to this grace. The word access (Greek: prosagogen) means “to bring to, to move to, to introduce, to present.” The thought is that of being in a royal court and being presented and introduced to the King of Kings. Here, Paul paints a picture depicting how the door of God’s grace has been swung wide open. Jesus Christ is the one who throws open the door into God’s presence. He is the one who presents us to God, the Sovereign Majesty of the universe (see John 10:9; Ephesians 2:13; 1 Peter 3:18).

Paul continues in verse 2c that we can “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Rejoice (Greek: kauchometha) is better translated by the word “boast or brag.” We boast and brag about what God has planned for us when this journey is over. Our hope (Greek: elpis) is an
expectation of something great happening in the future, an expectancy grounded in God's work. When Scripture speaks of the believer’s hope, it does not mean what the world means. The hope of the believer is a surety: it is perfect assurance, confidence, and knowledge. How can hope be so absolute and assured? By being an inward possession. The believer’s hope is based upon the presence of God’s Spirit, who dwells within the believer. In fact, the believer possesses the hope of glory only by the Spirit of God who dwells within, which Paul mentions in verse 5. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross validated our spiritual credentials, opening up everything that God has for us.

In verses 3 and 4, the apostle takes his argument a step further; he writes, “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.”

Why would Paul tell the believers in Rome that they were called to rejoice, exult, or boast in their tribulations? From history we know that the earliest Christians were often persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. The book of Acts is a documented biblical history of the challenges faced by the first Christians to live for Jesus and then to preach the Gospel of salvation to others. Paul reminded them that when those times of trial and tribulation come, we can rejoice and exult in them because they do not bring us down, rather they are periods of great growth and strengthening.

Paul wrote that tribulations (Greek: thlipsesin) may come in a variety of ways, yet they make the believer more resilient. Patience (Greek: hypomonen) implies that one has the quality of endurance, that steadfastness that refuses to bind under pressure. Patience produces experience (Greek: dokimen) character, integrity, strength. The idea is that of being proven through experience, of gaining strength through the trials of life; therefore, the word is more accurately translated “character.” When a justified man or woman endures trials, he or she comes out of it stronger than ever before. He or she is much stronger in character and integrity. One knows much more about the presence and strength of God.

B. God Showed Us His Love
(Romans 5:5-8)

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

In these verses, we see the magnitude of the love of God. It is a love that far surpasses human love. Indeed, it is the greatest manifestation of love. In this paragraph, particularly in verse 6, Paul tells us why the love of God is unbelievable.

In verse 5, Paul builds upon the theme of hope. It is the expectation that God will save His people from the wrath to come. To say this hope “maketh not ashamed” (Greek: kataischynei) means that God will never disappoint or bring disgrace upon His people. Why? It is because of God’s love, which is planted into the deepest inner recesses of our being—the heart. The heart is the center of human emotions. God has shown His love
and the manifestation of that love is through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who is given to all believers (see Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:7,13; compare Acts 2:17-18 with Joel 2:28-29). Love is the first gift listed of the nine fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Here, Paul is not referencing the believer’s love for God, but God’s love for the believer (see John 3:16).

Verse 6 states that when men and women were unable to save or do anything about their condition, God did so in due time that Christ died on the Cross for our sins. The Greeks had two primary definitions of “time”: chronos, which refers to time that moves in a straight line. Chronos gives us the word chronology; the other word for “time” is the one used by Paul—kairos. This is time that is decisive. It is the right time to do something. It has nothing to do with the day, month, or the year; it is when the clock strikes at the most decisive moment. It is when all of the factors and the conditions have come together to produce the right moment for something powerful to happen (see Galatians 4:4).

In verse 6c, we read that Christ died for the ungodly (Greek: asebon). Also in verse 6, Paul used the same word for “ungodly” that is used in Romans 1:18 to describe those upon whom the wrath of God is poured out: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”

God sent His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners. Christ’s dying for the ungodly is a major motif in Romans (see Romans 3:25; 4:25; 6:10; 7:4; 8:32). It is the very blood of Jesus that covers sin. It is the Cross and the preaching of that message that reveals the power of God to save sinners. Paul drives home this fact: Christ died (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 15:1-4). This is the essence of the gospel—Christ died! Christ was crucified on a barren hilltop, just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Christ died for the very people who pierced Him in the side.

In verse 7, Paul distinguishes between human love and God’s love. Human love rarely pays the supreme sacrifice, though perhaps you might come across someone who would die to save an exceptional person. Every war produces men and women who reach the pinnacle of bravery—they sacrifice their lives for fellow soldiers or sailors, or marines.

Yet, in contradistinction to this God gave His Son the very ungodly, those most unlike Himself. It is reiterated in verse 8: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Paul made sure that we do not miss the fact that it was for all of us—Christ died for us, Jews and Gentile, all those who live in faith. The proof and the measure of God’s love is that while we were still sinners (with all that means), Christ died for us. The Cross is a demonstration of love which is without parallel and without analogy.

C. Justified and Saved by His Blood
(Romans 5:9-11)

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

In this section, Paul gives a brief summation of his argument regarding justification and reconciliation as works of God. The
person who accepts in faith that Jesus Christ shed His blood for his/her sins has no need to worry about the final Day of Judgment. We are saved from the wrath that is certain. Again, the theme of enmity between God and humanity is brought up in verse 10. Even at the point of being enemies with God, this was not a hindrance, because the death of Jesus was the means by which we were reconciled to God. His death saved our lives.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Peace is the greatest and deepest longing of men and women around the world. Just to live a day without turmoil is all some people want. Think of the children of Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, and Afghanistan who have never known a day without violence, death, bomb blasts, and untold ways of dying unexpectedly. They long for peace. Think of the people in major metropolitan cities in neighborhoods where there is a constant barrage of gunfire and a steady stream of premature deaths by violence.

*How did the world get to this point? When Adam and Eve sinned and fell from grace, they created a situation of hostility between the Creator and the created. They went beyond the boundaries set by God. They disobeyed the very Word of God. Through their transgression, all men and women became sinners. Their sin changed the course of human history. But we are reminded by the apostle Paul that the simple act of faith—that is, believing that God has sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins—is the means by which we gain access to this peace. Herein is the mandate of the church: to proclaim that there will never be any real peace until we enthrone Jesus Christ as Lord.*

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, may we learn to live in the glow of Your amazing grace. Grant that through the power of the Holy Spirit we will stand firm against the wiles of the devil and be able to resist every temptation. In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(July 19-25, 2021)*

**Justification through Faith**

**MONDAY,** July 19: “Blessed Are Persecuted Believers” (Matthew 5:9-12)

**TUESDAY,** July 20: “Jesus, Not Suffering, Matters” (Philippians 1:12-20)

**WEDNESDAY,** July 21: “Suffering for Christ and the Church” (2 Corinthians 11:21b-30)

**THURSDAY,** July 22: “In Hope, Our Salvation Is Secure” (Romans 8:18-25)

**FRIDAY,** July 23: “The Free Gift of Jesus Brings Justification” (Romans 5:12-17)

**SATURDAY,** July 24: “Grace Leads to Eternal Life” (Romans 5:18-21)

**SUNDAY,** July 25: “Justified through Faith in Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1-11)
August 1, 2021

Lesson 9

SALVATION FOR ALL WHO BELIEVE

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Seeking Confidence
YOUTH TOPIC: A Gift for Everyone

CHILDREN
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Salvation for All Who Believe
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: A Gift for All

DEVOTIONAL READING
Psalm 19:1-14

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:5-17
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 10:5-17
KEY VERSE: Romans 10:13

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:5-17
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 10:5-17
KEY VERSE: Romans 10:13

Romans 10:5-17—KJV
5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.
6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)
7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.)
8 But what saith it? “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;
9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:5-17—NIV
5 Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”
6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)
7 “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
8 But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:
9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.
11 As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”
11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.
13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?
17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,
13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”
16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”
17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Many people are uncertain about the strength of their relationship with God. How can one find spiritual confidence? Salvation comes to committed souls who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and believe in Him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explain Paul’s confidence in the salvation offered in Christ.
2. Feel secure in being justified before God through their faith in Christ.
3. Pray for and seek the salvation of lost loved ones and acquaintances.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Paul was deeply concerned that many Jews were ignorant of how to become righteous in the sight of God.
—Paul worried that many Jews had rejected Christ, humanity’s only hope of salvation, choosing in vain to seek justification through the Law.
—The purpose of the Law was to bring people to believe in Christ so they could receive justification and salvation. Only Christ can grant this; the Law cannot.
—God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is available to both Jew and Gentile.
—Through a chain of reasoning, Paul surmises that the apostles were sent by God to preach to the Gentiles also (see Isaiah 52:7). Paul regarded this as his duty as well.
—Paul comments on Isaiah to show the universality of its application to Jew and Gentile alike. The one God is the same to all who call upon him, as Joel also testified (Joel 2:32).

**Teachers of CHILDREN**
—Paul contrasts trying to earn righteousness by obeying the Mosaic Law with trusting God’s free gift of righteousness in Christ.
—Paul proclaims Jesus’ sacrifice of His life as giving Him the authority to forgive sin through belief in Him.
—Religious leaders rebelled against Jesus’ having the power and authority to forgive sin and speak with power and authority for God. Paul proclaimed that Jesus reconciled humanity with God.
—Paul makes the invitation to Christ clear and simple, noting that belief in Christ comes to persons in various ways.
—Paul stresses sharing the Good News of Christ with all, giving them an opportunity to receive salvation through the gift of grace.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
Today’s lesson is set within the context of Romans 9–11. It would be almost impossible to interpret Romans 10:5–17 without first understanding how Paul arrived at this point in the letter. The central theme of Romans 9–11 is Paul’s concern about the salvation of his kinsmen, the Jews.

In chapters 9–11, Paul grapples with the place of Israel in the plan and purpose of God. When Jesus came into the world, He was not well received by many Jews (see John 1:10-11). Fifty years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Christian church was made up largely of Gentiles. This transition and rejection deeply troubled Paul to bare his heart in these chapters.

In Romans 9:6-33, Paul stated that God has a plan for the salvation of both Gentiles and Jews, and that the rejection of Jesus Christ by Jews did not change God’s mind nor nullify His covenant. In Romans 10:1-3, Paul expressed concern that his people were driven to serve God, but for the wrong reasons. In verse 1, Paul appealed to the Romans, a largely Gentile congregation, that his desire for the Jews was to see them saved—their salvation was the object of his prayers. In verse 2, Paul observed the Jews’ zeal for God. To be zealous is to burn with a deep inner passion. Paul noted that the Jews were zealous, but for the wrong reasons. The manner in which they pursued righteousness was misguided. Paul wrote that in their pursuit of God’s righteousness, they had unwittingly put their own plan in place. They had not pursued the purposes of God with full knowledge of what God was presently doing in the world and had done through Jesus Christ. Rather than buying into God’s ongoing plan and purpose, they sought to establish a legalistic form of righteousness and remained unwilling to submit themselves to God. These chapters further amplify Paul’s position as stated in Romans 1:16-17.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**
It was Paul’s deepest desire that his kinsmen would come to salvation. No one could match the zeal of the Jews for God; yet, Paul felt that their zeal had been misdirected.

The Jews misread, misunderstood, and totally missed the fact that God was doing something new in the world. This new thing, as it were, was not in the form of a new doctrine, a new law, or a new teaching, but was in a living person—God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God Himself assumed the form of humanity to redeem the
world from sin and death. This is referred to as the Incarnation.

Here, then, is the irony of it all: the people who had a history of having God's presence in their lives were the very ones who were no longer open to God's new self-revelation in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God came in the fullness of time to redeem, reconcile, and restore the world.

PROTRANANT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: the most prolific prophet of the Old Testament. He lived in the latter years of the eighth century BC. He was the son of Amoz, a virtually anonymous person in the Old Testament. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would one day come (see Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 53). His ministry spanned the reigns of four kings in Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He is one of the most quoted prophets in the New Testament.

Jesus: the central character and subject of the Gospels. He is the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures, going back to the time of Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:12–14). In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as the very Son of God, who exercised authority over nature, demons, and human sickness. In the Gospels, Jesus performs many miracles, proving that He was the Messiah who was to come.

Moses: the first great leader of the Hebrew people. He first appears in Exodus 2 as the son of a descendant of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. He led Israel out of bondage in Egypt (see Exodus 14–15). The account of his life and accomplishments are found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Paul: considered to be the second most important person in the New Testament. Thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are attributed to him. Romans is his most important epistle because of its systematic treatment of the motif of righteousness. He was a Jewish rabbi, a member of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, and one of the leading persecutors of the early Christian church. He is responsible for helping to plant the Christian faith throughout Asia Minor and portions of eastern Europe.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Ascend (verse 6)—Greek: anabainó (an-ab-ah’-ee-no): to go up; to rise.

Descend (verse 7)—Greek: katabainó (kat-ab-ah’-ee-no): to go or come down.

Heart (verse 6)—Greek: kardia (kar-dee’-ah): the heart, mind, character, inner self.

Live (verse 5)—Greek: zaó (dzah’-o): to live; to be animated; breathing.

Proclaim (verse 8)—Greek: kérussó (kay-roos’-so): to be a herald; to “preach” (KJV).

Righteousness (verse 5)—Greek: dikaiosuné (dik-ah-yos-oo’-nay): justice, justness; righteousness of which God is the source or author, but practically: a divine righteousness.

Word (verse 8)—Greek: rhéma (hray’-mah): a thing spoken; a word or saying of any kind, as a command, report, promise.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Committed to the Salvation of All
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Source of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:5)
   B. The Availability of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:6-8)
   C. The Reception of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:9-10)
   D. The Scope of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:11-13)
   E. The Presentation of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:14-17)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Committed to the Salvation of All

Paul’s one great desire was that his kinsmen would come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord, just as he had. Romans 10:1 (NKJV) reads, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” Paul was not speaking to strangers or about strangers. He was talking to people about whom he was intimately acquainted. He said that they were the object of his most fervent prayers. His prayer is based upon God’s irrevocable promise that Israel would be saved.

One of the most impressive aspects of Paul’s life was his driving determination to make Jesus Christ known throughout the Roman Empire. The book of Acts details his missionary travels and describes some of the obstacles, challenges, and difficulties he and others faced in preaching and teaching the Gospel. Oftentimes, it was among his own people that he faced the greatest opposition. Yet, he was never deterred or ever felt like giving up.

Believers are saved to grow to maturity in the kingdom of God. One of the signs of a mature believer is his or her having a desire to lead others to a saving relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul stated in Romans 10:13, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The Gospel challenges every believer to be committed to the salvation of all men and women.

B. Biblical Background

Throughout the previous three lessons, Paul had expounded upon God’s great act of human redemption through Jesus Christ (see Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-22; 4:2-3; 5:1-11; compare with Ephesians 2:8-10). Paul argues that the just live by faith, which requires no human effort or work to achieve a state of righteousness before God. In Romans 9–11, one of Paul’s primary concerns centered around the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah. This was not all Jews, but primarily the legalists, those who insisted that righteousness before God resulted from observing and meticulously following the Law as Moses wrote it. In Romans 10:5-17, Paul quotes freely from the Law to reinforce his position that salvation cannot be achieved through human effort. He pointed out that the Law as defined by Moses was impossible to keep (verse 5; compare Leviticus 18:5). In verses 6-8, Paul draws a contrast between the righteousness that is obtained through faith and that which comes from attempting to keep the Law. He stated that a person did not have to go to extremes, such as trying to bring Christ from heaven or cause Him to rise from the dead (verses 6-7).

How, then, is salvation achieved? Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 30:12-14 to support his interpretation and understanding to show how Jesus is the final answer to the human predicament of sin and separation from God. For Paul, the very words were near—it was the word faith that he preached, the Gospel of God’s grace. In verses 9-13, Paul spelled out that salvation begins with one’s confession and the acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus. Faith comes through hearing the Word of the Gospel.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Source of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:5)

For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

Throughout this paragraph, Paul appealed to the authority of Scripture to support the position that righteousness was by faith and not works. He first quotes from Leviticus 18:5—“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them; I am the LORD.” The Law required that a person had to keep every word in order to achieve a right relationship with God. Paul believed that the Law was a sign pointing to Jesus. The Law was a tutor, instructing in the ways of righteousness until Jesus came (see Galatians 3:24).

B. The Availability of God’s Righteousness (Romans 10:6-8)

But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.

In verse 6, faith is the speaker, a technique known as “personification.” Righteousness speaks, saying, “Say not in thine heart,” a quote from Deuteronomy 9:4a. No one is in a position to make boastful claims about what they have done. Righteousness raises the question of who will act on our behalf to bring Christ down from heaven (see Deuteronomy 30:12).

In verse 7, Paul again quoted from Deuteronomy 30:13, essentially asking who was going to go down into the deep. Paul interpreted this text to be a reference to bringing Christ up from the grave. The point in verses 6 and 7 is that these things are impossible to do. No one can bring Christ down from heaven, any more than they could raise Him from the dead. What the Jews were attempting to do through tediously keeping the Law, God had already done through the sending of His Son into the world. Given the futility of pursuing a form of righteousness that was impossible to achieve, Paul encouraged the verbal confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 8 is a quote from Deuteronomy 30:14 and is not introduced with the words, what does Scripture say? This is the third rhetorical question in this section. Jews who knew the Law would know what Paul was referring to. One did not have to go far, nor search across the vastness of the universe. Achieving a right relationship with God is near—in fact, it is in your mouth and heart. What did Paul mean by “the word of faith, which we preach”? It is the message of the Gospel. It is the preaching of this message that elicits faith in what God has done in
C. The Reception of God’s Righteousness  
(Romans 10:9-10)
That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Verse 9 is the means by which one becomes saved in a nutshell. Confess (Greek: ἐπηλογίζῃς) means “to make an open and public freewill declaration in the validity or veracity of something.” In this instance, confession is a vocal proclamation that Jesus is “Lord” (Greek: Κύριος). The offer of salvation is to those who not only acknowledge Jesus’ divinity, but also receive Him as their personal Lord and Savior. Belief and faith are used in the same way. Faith is an inner response of the heart to what God has done in Christ. It is faith in the resurrection of Jesus that is the key to being saved and right with God. The central message of the New Testament for every believer is that Christ lives. God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead. No other religion can make such a claim.

Christians proclaim that Jesus Christ is the risen, living Lord, who has conquered both death and the grave. The very first message that the women received at the tomb of Jesus was a question: “Why do you seek Jesus of Nazareth in this place? He is not here; He has risen, just as He said” (see Luke 24:5-6). If the Cross is the horizontal beam of our faith that reaches out to all men and women, then the Resurrection is the vertical beam that reaches up to heaven. Verse 10 states that righteousness begins in the heart and culminates with a personal confession, which points back to verse 9—the Lordship of Jesus. This is what leads to salvation. For Paul, righteousness is not the result of anything one does; it is always a matter of the heart and trust in Jesus.

D. The Scope of God’s Righteousness  
(Romans 10:11-13)
For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

That God’s righteousness encompasses all men and women is the point of verses 11-13. In verse 11, Paul reverts to Scripture as the authority for what he has just said and for what he is about to say. The question is, how does this passage function in Paul’s thinking about faith and the grounds for being made righteous? Paul substitutes the word whosoever in the KJV for “him,” which is in the Septuagint. For Paul, salvation is not a matter just for Jews, but for everyone—for whosoever will believe in his or her heart and confess with his or her mouth that Jesus is Lord. Faith in Jesus as Lord will not be in vain. This is the sense of the words “put to shame.”

Paul reiterated that Jesus is not just the Savior of Jews or a certain exclusive group. God does not make distinctions between people when it comes to who can be saved. His grace is abundant because He lavishly distributes to all who believe and call upon His name. God treats all men and women as the same when it comes to righteousness. Verse 13 is a summation of the promise and reinforces the argument that
Paul has been making throughout Romans—that everyone who has faith in the Resurrection and believes that God has raised Jesus from the dead will be saved.

E. The Presentation of God’s Righteousness  
(Romans 10:14-17)

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Verses 14-17 are concerned with the proclamation and reception of the message of the Gospel. Preaching must always be taken seriously, both by the preacher and the hearer. Paul began with a series of rhetorical questions all aimed at one goal: to get men and women to hear the message of salvation and to accept it in faith. In verse 14, the questioning begins with Paul’s assertion that it is impossible for persons to call upon the name of the Lord if they have never believed. Here, again, faith is at the center of his argument. The pronoun “they” is a clear reference to the Jews who rejected Jesus, although it can have applications in every age and generation. The second question pertains to faith in a different vain. How can men and women believe the message if they have never heard it? This leads to the next question of how persons can hear the message without a preacher. Here, the emphasis on the preacher is not as one who basks in the adulation and esteem often afforded to preachers in this generation; rather, Paul is referring to someone who has first been saved and then sent by the originator of the message. How can men and women hear the message without a preacher?

Verse 15 contains the fourth question emphasizing that the preacher must be sent (Greek: apostolos), which is from the same root word as “apostle.” This is someone who was sent by a higher authority on a specific assignment with a specific message. God is always sending people in every generation with the message of salvation. The call is not gender-restrictive but is inclusive of all who believe and confess.

Verse 16 sounds a somber note. Even though men and women may sense that the messenger is sent by God, they still may not receive the message. Here, Paul quotes from Isaiah 53:1, in which the prophet declared that Israel had failed to acknowledge the message of salvation sent through the Suffering Servant. Paul interpreted Isaiah’s words to fit the current context—that just as it was in Isaiah’s day, so it was in his day. Historically, many Jews had failed to believe the report of God’s messenger; accordingly, in Paul’s day, many continued to reject the message of the Gospel regarding Jesus Christ.

Verse 17 sums up the passage and Paul’s points throughout the text that righteousness before God is a matter of faith. How does one receive faith? It is in the hearing of the message, which is the Word of God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

At the very heart of Paul’s message is the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the foundation of faith. Our lives should mirror His, not just in
word, but also in behavior. Paul said that believers are saved not by works, but through their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is this declaration that has caused some Christians to believe that faith is all that is necessary without any corresponding requirement to engage in good works. On the other hand, there are those who believe that God only requires good deeds and/or faithful church work to achieve redemption. The belief that works are the only requirement for salvation is a misinterpretation of James 2:14-26. In verse 14, James wrote, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” The verse begins with two rhetorical questions: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” The answers to the questions are naturally “no,” there is no profit to faith without works and a man cannot be truly saved who produces no concrete works as a result of his faith (see Ephesians 2:10).

It is critical to our interpretation to clear up the possible misinterpretation that faith is not necessary for salvation. Some Christians argue, falsely, that there is a disagreement between Paul and James regarding the use of the words “faith and works.” In fact, there is no disagreement between the two. James did not say that salvation requires works alone and no faith. This is not his point at all. James spoke about counterfeit faith—that which looks real and sounds real, but fails the acid test of works that bring glory to the name of God (see Matthew 23). What good is worship without works? There is the added dimension of living a life that is well-pleasing to the Father and bears evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-25; Colossians 1:9-11).

PRAYER
Gracious God, we humbly thank You for the marvelous gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Forgive us of our sins and grant that we may continue to know the joy that comes through our faith in Jesus. It is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 26–August 1, 2021)

Salvation for All Who Believe
MONDAY, July 26: “Obey God with Heart and Voice” (Deuteronomy 30:6-14)
TUESDAY, July 27: “God’s Salvation Is Announced” (Isaiah 52:1-10)
WEDNESDAY, July 28: “Call on the Name of the Lord” (Joel 2:28-32)
THURSDAY, July 29: “Gentiles Believe by Faith” (Galatians 3:6-14)
FRIDAY, July 30: “For the Salvation of the Gentiles” (Romans 10:1-4)
SATURDAY, July 31: “Regret for Not Hearing Christ’s Word” (Romans 10:18-21)
SUNDAY, August 1: “Salvation Is for All People” (Romans 10:5-17)
August 8, 2021

Lesson 10

THE MEANING OF FAITH

**Adult/Youth**

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** The Example of Heroes

**Youth Topic:** Real-live Faith

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** The Meaning of Faith

**Children’s Topic:** True Heroes

**Devotional Reading**

Hebrews 11:32-40

**Adult/Youth**

**Background Scriptures:** Hebrews 11; 13:1-19

**Print Passage:** Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16

**Adult Key Verse:** Hebrews 11:1

**Youth Verse:** Hebrews 11:2

Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16—KJV

NOW FAITH is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.
3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.
4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.
5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.
6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.
7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the

Hebrews 11:1-8, 13-16—NIV

NOW FAITH is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
2 This is what the ancients were commended for.
3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.
4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.
5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.
6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet
saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.
8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.
14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.
15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.
16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.
14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.
15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.
16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: In hard times, many people struggle through their misery without hope. Where can they find encouragement to keep them from losing hope? Faith in God provides the assurance of hope, even in adversity.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Identify the faith contributions of the heroes in Hebrews 11.
2. Value the people in their lives who act heroically through faith.
3. Grow in their determination to demonstrate incredible faith.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—The authorship of Hebrews is unknown. Some have speculated that Paul wrote Hebrews, but modern theologians and scholars reject this assertion. Other scholars have postulated that the author is Barnabas, which would explain certain theological similarities to Paul’s letters.
—Hebrews 11:1-2 serves as an introduction to the author’s doctrinal discourse on faith that perseveres through divine service.
—The twofold definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 is typical of ancient Hebrew (or Jewish)
thought. Its parallelism is a form of Hebrew poetry in which two statements reflect the same or similar ideas.

—No matter how excellent the works of the saints, it was from faith that they derived their value, their worthiness, and all their excellences—thus giving concrete example to what has already been intimated: the forebears of the faith pleased God by faith alone.

—While in Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham was commanded to go to a place where God would lead him. In obedience to this call, he obeyed through faith, a striking example of faith in action (see Genesis 11:31; 12:1-4).

—This section on faith concludes with the declaration that all of these witnesses died in faith. They left this life without having received all that was promised, but the promises became very real to them, and they claimed them. And because of these promises, they confessed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—The writer of Hebrews 11 declares that faith is reliable by recalling various heroes from Israel’s history.

—Israel’s ancient heroes believed in God’s creation of the universe out of nothing; likewise, Christians believe in God’s creation of a new beginning in Jesus Christ.

—God chose Abraham as a man of faith through whom all future generations would be blessed.

—Faith requires trusting God and living with the certainty of God’s presence even when facing the unknown.

—Hebrews reminds believers that God’s promise is always trustworthy, even though it may not be manifested during their lifetimes.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

The epistle to the Hebrews is one of the general epistles. In the canon of Scripture, they are called general epistles because they were not addressed to a particular church or individual. Among this group of New Testament writings are the books of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. They differ from the Pauline epistles in structure and purpose. They are referred to as general epistles because they provide a broad scope of teachings and doctrine about the church and the Christian life. Hebrews is often is referred to as the “Letter to the Hebrews.” However, Hebrews does not fit the genre of a New Testament letter, primarily because it does not have the form and structure of an ancient first-century letter (see lesson 6, July 11, 2021, for a more detailed discussion about ancient letters). It lacks an addressee, sender, and the general structure of an ancient first-century letter. There are many other features of ancient biblical letters that are not present in Hebrews.

No one knows who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews. There was speculation at one time that maybe the apostle Paul had written it. It is certain that the writer of Hebrews may have had some connection to Paul and may have been familiar with his teachings. Even the best scholars conclude that Hebrews remains a largely anonymous writing because the writer never identified himself.

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

Hebrews is filled with words of exhortation and encouragement for second-generation Christians grappling with a host of external and internal problems (see Hebrews 5:12–6:4). The epistle suggests that its intended audience was extremely
pressed and challenged by persecution (see Hebrews 10:32–33). Consequently, many had started drifting away from their faith in Jesus Christ because of the pressure (see Hebrews 2:1). Throughout the epistle, the writer exhorts believers to hold fast to their faith in Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 3:6; 10:23; 12:3).

Many scholars believe that the epistle was written to persons living in Rome. Hebrews 13:24 bears the salutation, “Those from Italy greet you.” This geographical marker provides some evidence that the epistle may have originated in Rome to help believers face the challenges of the times. There are no other indicators that it could have come from a church in Asia Minor or that it may have been addressed to believers in that region. If this is true, then the writing may be dated to sometime before 49 C.E., which is when Claudius Caesar expelled the Christians from Rome. It would be one of the earliest Christian writings.

Lastly, the author of Hebrews was moved by the Holy Spirit to share with the believers how much better was God’s revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ than were the traditional Jewish practices that they so firmly embraced. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a far superior sacrifice for sin than the annual sacrifice of the bull on the Day of Atonement. The letter was written to encourage them to remain steadfast in the fast of all the trials they were experiencing. The writer exhorts the church again and again to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

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

**Abel:** a son of Adam and Eve who was killed by his brother Cain (see Genesis 4:2-4, 8).

**Abraham:** the great patriarch of the Hebrew people. He received the promise from God that he would be the patriarch of a great nation. He was the father of Isaac and Esau.

**Cain:** the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. He committed the first murder in Scripture when he killed his brother Abel (see Genesis 4:1,8, 9-14).

**Enoch:** lived many years and never faced death because he “pleased God.” Enoch lived to be 365 before he was taken by God (see Genesis 5:24).

**Noah:** built the ark at the command of God and saved human civilization from being totally destroyed (see Genesis 6–9).

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Assurance (verse 1)—Greek: hupostasis (hoop-os’tas-is):** a support, “substance” (KJV), steadiness; confidence.

**Faith (verse 1)—Greek: pístis (pis’tis):** belief; trust.

**Gifts (verse 4)—Greek: dórón (do’ron):** things presented freely to another; presents; sacrifices; “offerings” (NIV).

**Righteous (verse 4)—Greek: dikaios (dik’-ah-yos):** correct; just; upright; by implication, innocent.

**Sacrifice (verse 4)—Greek: thúsia (thoo-see’-ah):** victim; an “offering” (NIV) to God.

**Visible (verse 3)—Greek: phainó (fah’-ee-no):** able to be seen; brought forth into the light; to meet the eyes; to “appear” (KJV).

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction
   A. The Meaning of Faith
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Definition of Faith (Hebrews 11:1)
   B. The Description of Faith (Hebrews 11:2-3)
   C. The Demonstration of Faith (Hebrews 11:4-8)
   D. The Destination of Faith (Hebrews 11:13-16)

III. Concluding Reflection
I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Meaning of Faith

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is the highwater mark in the epistle to the Hebrews. There is no other chapter in the Bible that defines and discusses faith in the same way as this chapter. The writer begins with a description of faith and moves to the spiritual résumés of some of the Bible’s most faithful personalities. The writer of Hebrews exhorted and encouraged the saints to continue the journey of faith.

In this lesson, faith is the foundation for living a courageous life in a world opposed to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Faith is the greatest virtue that any believer can cultivate. Someone has said that “Faith is the hinge that holds the believer to a personal relationship with God.” The writer holds up a mirror and challenges the believers to model themselves after the great heroes of the past. These were the men and women who defied the odds and trusted God in spite of the challenges before them. The writer reminds us of the faith of Abel and how he obtained a righteous testimony before God. He tells of Enoch and how he walked with God until God took him, sparing him of death. Noah was warned by God to prepare for rain by building an ark. Abraham was called to go out from his family and look for a city whose architect and builder was God. All of these spiritual giants were moved by their faith in God and His promises.

B. Biblical Background

Hebrews 11 is part of a larger unit of the epistle that begins at 10:19 and concludes at 12:29. Throughout these verses, the writer of Hebrews appealed to the saints to live out the meaning of their faith and confidence in Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 11:1, the writer begins with a twofold definition of faith. He used a literary method in biblical writings called synonymous parallelism. This technique is common in Hebrew poetry and wisdom in which the first clause of the verse is repeated in the second clause, just stated a different way. The goal of the passage is to encourage the saints to persevere in the race. In verse 2, the writer indicated that those who had gone before the current generation obtained a good report because of their faithfulness.

The writer used another literary method throughout the chapter to highlight the faithfulness of past generations. He wrote, “By faith,” which demonstrates that all of the heroes of the past were not persons endowed with supernatural ability; rather, they were men and women of faith. They were moved and driven by their faith in the promises of God. They trusted God even though some died without ever realizing the promise in this life. Thus, they proved to be pilgrims on the earth, looking for a better city and place in the world and life to come.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Definition of Faith
(Hebrews 11:1)

NOW FAITH is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The chapter begins with a definition of faith that is perhaps the most quoted definition of the word. The word now (Greek: de) introduces the passage about faith and the heroes that will follow. It is not a reference to time or to something different; rather, it is a transitional conjunction that reinforces the connection to 10:37-39. “Faith” (Greek: pistis) in this instance refers to belief or that confident trust in God. Faith has content, it is the substance (Greek: hypostasis)—a word with a rich history of interpretations and meanings. It can denote the basic essence of a thing or the foundation of trust. Faith instills a confident expectation that all that we can look for is the blessed hope and appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Titus 2:13).

Verse 1b is a restatement of the point in the first clause. Faith is the “evidence” (Greek: elenchos), a word that denotes proof or verification of a matter. It was used in legal ways to describe the act of bringing forth corroborating proof of a matter. The evidence will be cited in the following verses with the great cloud of witnesses. The fact that one cannot always see what God is doing does not mean that God is not working. Here, then, is where faith functions as the witness to that which eyes have not seen. The Holy Spirit produces faith in the life of a believer and reveals that which can only be known by the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-14; compare with Galatians 5:22).

B. The Description of Faith
(Hebrews 11:2-3)

For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Verse 2 begins with the simple instrumental statement that the “elders” (Greek: presbyteroi) obtained a good report by faith. “Elders” in this context refers to persons of a prior generation. Later, the word came to be used of individuals who lead in a local church. Here, it refers to the ancestors of the Hebrew people, several of whom are listed in the verses that follow. There is a great deal that can be gained from the lives of the saints who have preceded us. “Obtained a good report” is conveyed by a single Greek word, emartyrethesan. It derives from the same root word that gives us the word martyr or witness. The writer lists believers who lived such that God bore witness to their impeccable faith.

Verse 3 asserts that faith is the means by which the creative order may be understood. Nothing in creation happens without God, who is the architect of the universe. Here, the writer alludes to the narrative in Genesis 1—God’s creation of the entire universe by the simplicity of His own spoken word. Believers can only understand and appropriate the Creation event through the eyes of faith. That which is seen only appears because it rests upon the power of God’s Word to bring it into reality. Genesis 1:3 states, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” So much that happens in the visible, physical world requires faith. Here, the greatest test of
faith comes forward to acknowledge that all that is seen comes from God.

C. The Demonstration of Faith
(Hebrews 11:4-8)

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Verse 4 begins an extended discourse celebrating great men and women of faith. It concludes at 11:40. The author uses a repetitive literary device to introduce these giants—“by faith” they all exhibited a love and obedience to God that set them apart. Faith in this context is absolute confidence and trust in God. It is that unwavering belief in the reality of God. Abel is the first on this list of elders who all obtained a good report. The story of Cain and Abel is found in Genesis 4:1-8. Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. The writer states that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice to God. Genesis 4:4 states that Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and the fat portion of the sacrifice. He brought his best and offered it before the Lord. The text offers no details to explain why God regarded Abel’s offering as more excellent than Cain’s. In bringing his sacrifice Abel obtained righteousness before God, who bore witness to his sacrifice. Abel was murdered by his brother, but the example of his faith in God still speaks, even from the grave. Abel’s witness continues to be an example to people in every generation. First John 3:12 suggests that Cain’s offering was rejected because he was evil. It is the condition of the heart rather than the substance of one’s material sacrifice that moves God.

Enoch is the next elder of faith who impressed God with his obedience and life. The account of the life of Enoch is found in Genesis 5:21-24. Not much is known about Enoch’s life, outside of his being the son of Jared (see Genesis 5:18) and the father of Methuselah (see Genesis 5:21). Enoch walked with God and lived to be 365 years old (see Genesis 5:24) before he was translated—that is, transferred—from the earthly realm of existence to the very presence of God. Enoch joins Elijah as the only two persons in Scripture to live and never die (see 2 Kings 2:11). Enoch was translated because of his faith and because he lived a life that was pleasing before God. The words “that he pleased God” are found in the Septuagint (LXX) version of Genesis 5:24. How does one live a life that is well-pleasing to God? First, by believing God. Second, by living a life of complete obedience to Him. Third, by bearing fruit and doing good works. And fourth, by increasing in the knowledge of God (see Colossians 1:10).

Verse 6 reminds us that without faith, a right relationship with God is impossible.
Enoch pleased God through obedience and his belief that God rewards those who pursue Him. This is what it means to make God the number-one priority (see Matthew 6:33; compare with Colossians 1:18). There are two of the most important beliefs that Christians must hold: first, that God is real, and not a figment of the imagination; and second, that one must believe that God will bless those who trust and have confidence in Him.

Noah is the third elder to obtain a good report. Genesis 6:9 indicates that Noah was righteous and blameless, and that he walked with God. Verse 7 states that Noah was warned by God of coming judgment upon the face of the whole earth. He was “warned of things not seen as yet.” The notion of a worldwide flood was inconceivable, yet Noah acted on what the Lord God revealed to him. Noah was moved by “fear” (Greek: eulabeomai), which is better translated as reverence or respect for what God revealed to him. No detail explains how God conveyed His message to Noah. The emphasis is placed on Noah's response—which was one of faith. Noah's faithful response to God's Word brought condemnation upon those who ridiculed Noah, mocked his warnings, and refused to repent of their sins as Noah continued building the ark. In obeying God, Noah saved himself, his entire household, and the animals that God directed to be saved. In his act of obedience, Noah became the heir of the righteousness which is by faith. His actions preceded those of even Abraham's.

Verse 8 highlights the father of the Hebrew nation, Abraham (see Hebrews 11:9-12, 17-22 for the account of the rest of his family). The biblical account of the life of Abraham begins at Genesis 11:24, concluding at 25:7-8, when he died at the age of 175 years old. At the time of his death, Abraham had lived a fruitful, satisfying life. Abraham heard the call of God to leave his father's house and travel to an unknown country that the Lord would show him. God promised that in that place he would receive an inheritance (see Genesis 12:1-4). By faith, Abraham departed and went to a country where he had no roots, no reputation, no associates. Abraham had no idea what to expect—his response was purely based on strong confidence in God's Word to him.

The lives of each of these four heroes of faith reveal a compelling faith in God. God is gracious and full of love. His grace is enough to satisfy every human need. One's response to the call of God must always be one of responsive faith that trusts God's leading without fear or hesitation.

D. The Destination of Faith
(Hebrews 11:13-16)

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Verse 13 begins a new section about the faithful. Exactly who are the persons that “all died in faith”? Such persons include the patriarchs of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see verses 9-10, 17-22). They did not die as a result of their faith (i.e., as martyrs); rather,
they died before the promise was realized. They died with the expectant hope that what God had promised would one day be realized. The writer makes four observations concerning the patriarchs and the promise: (1) they had the vision to “see” the promise; (2) they were persuaded of the reality of the promise; (3) they embraced and clung to the promises of God; and (4) they were willing to be strangers and aliens in a place not their home.

In verses 14-16, the writer reminds the saints that they are strangers and aliens in a foreign land. Just as the patriarchs looked for a country, readers of the epistle, likewise, would look for a heavenly city made by God. Their willingness to cling to the promise in each new generation endeared them to God. And God was ashamed to be called their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The writer encouraged his readers with the assurance that God’s promises are not invalidated by hostile and dire circumstances. What God has promised will come to fruition, no matter what. Thus, the writer encourages holding fast the profession of faith, knowing that one who was promised is faithful (see Hebrews 10:23).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

God desires that we trust Him more. Trusting God strengthens our witness and drives us to live in ways that please God. Through the exercise of faith in adversity, the men and women listed in Hebrews 11 gained approval from God. The word approval derives from a Greek word that means “witness.” Men and women of faith are a living witness that God is trustworthy. Have you found God to be faithful in your own life? It is through robust faith in God and His promises that we become candidates for God’s grace and mercy.

PRAYER

Lord God, may we, like the saints of old, trust You even in adversity. Be our light in dark days when the way looks dim. Grant that we will never grow weary in doing Your will. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 2-8, 2021)

The Meaning of Faith
MONDAY, August 2: “Love of Money Is the Root of Evil” (1 Timothy 6:6-10)
TUESDAY, August 3: “Control Your Own Body” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-7)
WEDNESDAY, August 4: “Abraham, Father of the Faithful” (Acts 7:2-7)
THURSDAY, August 5: “Worthy Examples of the Faithful” (Hebrews 11:4-7, 17-27)
SATURDAY, August 7: “Like Jesus, Offer Sacrifices to God” (Hebrews 13:10-16)
SUNDAY, August 8: “The Living Actions of Faith” (Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16)
A PERSEVERING FAITH

ADULT/YOUTH
 ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Keep Going
 YOUTH TOPIC: Hold On to Your Faith

CHILDREN
 GENERAL LESSON TITLE: A Persevering Faith
 CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Hold On

DEVOTIONAL READING
 Psalm 40:1-13

ADULT/YOUTH
 BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-39
 PRINT PASSAGE: Hebrews 10:23-36
 KEY VERSE: Hebrews 10:23

CHILDREN
 BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-39
 PRINT PASSAGE: Hebrews 10:23-36
 KEY VERSE: Hebrews 10:24

Hebrews 10:23-36—KJV
 23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)
 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:
 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.
 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,
 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.
 28 He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses:
 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 10:23-36—NIV
 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,
 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
 26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,
 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.
 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.
 29 How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?
30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.
31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;
33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.
34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.
35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.
36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People lacking self-assurance feel overwhelmed by life’s challenges. What can enable one to face life confidently? Those who persevere in hope and encourage others in love and good works develop faith for difficult times.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the stories of early believers who suffered for the sake of their faith.
2. Resolve to endure any suffering that results from their faithful witness.
3. Determine to be more prayerful and mindful of the suffering of Christians around the world.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Hebrews 10 explains that the Law that had governed the Jewish faith was merely a shadow of the good things to come. The sacrifices made under the Law could not justify those who presented them.
—The unknown author of Hebrews compares the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice to any animal offering and the superiority of Christ’s priesthood to that of any other priest.
—The Jewish system of sacrifices for sin atonement is inferior to Christ’s atoning sacrifice to reconcile humanity to God.
—The high priest lifted the curtain (veil) that separated the Holy of Holies from the Most Holy Place.

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Place, in order to have access to the divine majesty. The curtain (veil) of the Temple was torn from top to bottom at the crucifixion of Christ, to demonstrate that access to God is now open to all and believers may enter with boldness.

—In verse 22, the author alludes to the practice of the high priest’s washing his body in water before putting on his holy garments to enter the inner tabernacle (see Leviticus 16:4). The Levites were to be cleansed the same way (see Numbers 8:7).

—The Greek word rendered “meet together” is used here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 as a noun and means “a gathering.” The command refers to the important duty of Christians to come together for worship and fellowship. Christians are not to forsake this mandate.

**Teachers of CHILDREN**

—Jesus’ sacrifice makes God available for all to seek and know Him without a mediator.

—Believers’ relationship to God through Christ enables them to encourage others and to worship with them.

—Understanding and accepting the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice gives assurance of forgiveness for sin.

—The writer of Hebrews declares that God’s judgment is on those who reject Christ and the Holy Spirit, both of whom are integral parts of God’s plan for salvation.

—In spite of suffering, believers are encouraged to stand strong in the hope of Christ’s return.

**THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON**

Hebrews 10:19-39 follows a lengthy section that begins at Hebrews 7:1 and concludes at Hebrews 10:18. Throughout these chapters, the writer of Hebrews lays out a very methodical and theological doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He carefully articulates why Jesus Christ is a better high priest than Melchizedek and Aaron, the first high priest of Israel (see Hebrews 7:1-25; compare with Exodus 9:1-46). The first priests were limited in their time of service by death, but not so with Jesus. His priesthood is permanent because He continues His priesthood forever (see Hebrews 7:23-24).

The writer delineates why the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was a better sacrifice than one offered on the annual Day of Atonement. The annual sacrifice for the people’s sins indicated the perpetual need to cleanse the people of their sins so they could maintain their relationship with God. Without a permanent way to be cleansed of sin, no one could ever escape the bondage of sin.

The writer clarifies that sacrifices made under the Law could never achieve what God did through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

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

The high priest was the most important religious leader in ancient Israel. His role is especially highlighted in Hebrews. Jesus Christ is a greater high priest than Aaron and Melchizedek were. In Hebrews 3:1, Jesus is called “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” He is the one who was greater than Moses, who was faithful to God in every way (see Hebrews 3:2). One of the keys to understanding and interpreting Hebrews is recognizing the role and place of the high priest, the sacrificial offerings, and the importance of the tabernacle/Temple.

The first high priest and all subsequent high priests came from the tribe of Levi, Jacob’s third oldest son by his wife Leah (see Genesis 29:31-35). Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest selected by God and he was assisted by his four sons—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and
Ithamar. The primary responsibilities of the priest were to lead in the services and sacrifices of the tabernacle, officiate at the altar of incense, and lead in the special celebrations and feast days. As has been previously pointed out, the office of high priest was limited by time and herein lies the great difference between Aaron and Jesus Christ. When God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, Jesus ascended to heaven to be seated next to God’s throne (see Hebrews 1:1-3).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Moses: the Hebrew who led the exodus of Israel from Egyptian slavery to freedom. Moses was directed by God to erect the first tabernacle and establish an orderly practice of worship for the Israelite nation.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Confession (verse 23, NASB)—Greek: homo-logia (hom-ol-og-ee’-ah): what one professes (confesses); acknowledgment; “profession” (KJV); “profess” (NIV).

Encouraging (verse 25)—Greek: parakaleó (par-ak-al-eh’-o): calling to or for; positive persuading; strengthening; “exhorting” (KJV).

Forsaking (verse 25)—Greek: egtkataleipó (eng-kat-al-i’-po): leaving behind; abandoning; deserting; “giving up” (NIV).

Good (verse 24)—Greek: kalos (kal-os’): beautiful, as an outward sign of the inward good; commendable, pleasing, or honorable.

Love (verse 24)—Greek: agapé (ag-ah’-pay): affection; goodwill; benevolence; compassion.

Truth (verse 26)—Greek: álētheia (al-ay’-thi-a): facts related to God’s will; divine revelation.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Encouraging One Another
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Exhorting the People of God (Hebrews 10:23-25)
   B. Avoiding the Judgment of God (Hebrews 10:26-31)
   C. Remember the Former Days (Hebrews 10:32-36)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION
   A. Encouraging One Another

   Have you ever been discouraged? Have you ever felt as though your best efforts were never quite good enough? Everyone faces discouraging seasons and situations in life. Even Jesus experienced moments of discouragement, as on the night that He was betrayed and struggled to face the inevitable horrors of His arrest and crucifixion (see Luke 22:39-46).

   Nothing is more important in the life of a believer than our having an advocate to spur us on to reach our potential.

   The writer of Hebrews reminded believers to encourage one another in love and good deeds. He further admonished them to remain committed to Christ and not forsake joining
with others in worship. In public worship, believers find encouragement, strength, and instruction for living as Christians.

B. Biblical Background

Hebrews 10:19 begins with the word therefore, indicating that what follows is connected to preceding content. Because of the great and perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the writer says, “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus” (NASB). Here is an allusion to the tearing of the curtain of the Temple on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion (see Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38). The writer compares the superiority of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to the blood sacrifice of bulls and goats. Now all believers can approach God for themselves and seek forgiveness of their sins.

The second paragraph, Hebrews 10:26-31, was a reminder of the dangers of apostasy and turning away from God. Twice in this section, the writer charges believers to be mindful of the Lord’s wrath lest they fall into harsh judgment (see Hebrews 10:27, 31). Those who despised the Law of Moses and disregarded the commandments died without mercy.

The final paragraph, Hebrews 10:32-36, is a call to remember what they had already endured.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Exhorting the People of God

(Hebrews 10:23-25)

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Verse 23 is the second exhortation in the passage—the first is verse 22. The writer appealed to the saints, not as individuals but as community. “Let us hold fast” is translated from a single Greek word, katechumen, which means to grab and clutch with a strong grip. It has the sense of being restrained. They were to hold on to the profession, translated from the word homologian, which refers to a system or set of beliefs. Faith (Greek: elpis) is better translated as the word hope, which means to have an expectation of something better to come. “For he that promised is faithful” is a reference to Hebrews 6:15 and 9:15, indicating that those who remain true to their profession will receive the promised inheritance.

Verses 24-25 are the third of the triad of exhortations beginning with the words “Let us . . . .” Believers were exhorted to move each other to love, do good deeds, and not forsake the weekly assembly of worship. The community was exhorted to give serious thought as to how to stimulate love among themselves, while motivating each other to do the works of good deeds. “Consider” denotes concentrated thinking about others. The writer was saying, in essence, “Try encouraging others rather than always thinking about your own struggles.” The word provoke (Greek: paroxysmon) in this context means “to stir up or encourage.” Public worship gatherings give believers the opportunity to encourage one another and be encouraged. The reason for these actions was the approaching of the Day of the Lord. Here, the Day of the Lord
refers to the second coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The epistle admonished believers facing adversity to encourage each other to persevere in faith that none would be lost.

B. Avoiding the Judgment of God
(Hebrews 10:26-31)

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Verse 26 begins a warning for the believers who willfully turn aside from following Jesus Christ. One might conclude that some were neglecting to gather for worship and fellowship, and that others were turning away from the Christian faith altogether. The writer stated that willful engagement in deliberate sin forfeited the sacrifice that could atone for one's sins. Here, the writer refers to the distinction between deliberate and unintentional commission of sin (see Numbers 15:22-31). According to the Law of Moses, there were clear remedies when a man or woman committed sin unintentionally. However, there was absolutely no remedy for when a person defiantly committed a deliberate sin. He or she was to be cut off from the community for despising the Word of God (see Hebrews 6:4-8; 2 Peter 2:20-22). The key to the interpretation of this verse is the word willful (Greek: hekousios), which denotes a purposeful, deliberate act of the will, and suggests a heart filled with rebellion and disobedience.

Does this mean that there is never any way for a man or woman to be forgiven or restored to the fellowship when he or she has committed sin? The writer quoted Isaiah 26:11, which states that the adversaries of the Lord would face a fiery punishment (verse 27). This is a reference to the final judgment when those who rejected God and have turned away from the gift of grace will face the prospects of eternal damnation and separation from God.

Verse 28 is a reference to Deuteronomy 17:2-6, which states that anyone who committed the sin of idolatry was to be stoned to death. In verses 28-31, the writer moves from the lesser to the greater—the lesser (in this case) being the punishment under the Law of Moses for those who deliberately turned away from God. Under the Law of Moses there was to be no mercy shown to the man or woman who was identified as violating the Law. It was one thing to reject the Law of Moses, but a different thing entirely to have known Jesus but then turn away from Him. In verse 29, the writer explains that if the punishment with Moses was severe, then the punishment would be even more severe for those who knew the truth of God’s grace and were cleansed of sin by the blood of Jesus.

The writer cited three acts of willful intent which would negate restoration to the faith. First, they have trampled or disregarded the Son of God. This is suggestive of one’s demonstrating total disdain for Christ’s
holiness (see Isaiah 14:19; 25:10; Matthew 5:13). Second, they counted the blood of the covenant as unholy. The blood of Jesus was holy. To treat it otherwise is to declare it as worthless. Third, there is no available restoration for anyone who disrespects the Spirit of grace. Disrespect (Greek: enbrizo) means “to insult or to speak words of hatred against.” Here, the reference is to dishonoring the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and the church.

Verses 30 and 31 conclude this paragraph, both with a stern warning about the judgment of those who turn away. The writer quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35-36, which are from the Septuagint. In these passages, Moses reminded the Israelites that they would not need to bring judgment upon those who wandered from the covenant. God would do that. It is a stark reminder that those who have strayed, continued in willful sin, and made a mockery of the name of Jesus Christ will face the wrath of God. The writer stated, “We know Him that hath said, ‘Vengeance belongeth unto Me’” (see Romans 12:19).

C. Remember the Former Days
(Hebrews 10:32-36)

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

The closing verses are a call to “remembrance” (Greek: anamneskesthe), which means to call to mind or to be reminded of someone or something. It expresses an intentional and deliberate action. The believers were urged to remember the early days of their conversion, which is expressed by the word illuminated (Greek: photisthentes). They had come out of the darkness of sin into the light of God’s grace in Jesus Christ and knew the implications of following Jesus. This new life was not without cost—they faced a mountain of afflictions and persecutions and endured them all. Verse 33 points to the dual nature of their trials: “Whilst ye were made a gazingstock” is translated from a single Greek word, theatrizo, from which the word theater is derived. It portrays the image of someone standing on a stage before people. The word had a negative connotation and literally meant “to be disgraced, humiliated, or belittled.” Jews were persecuted and publicly humiliated for their faith. Yet, even while they were facing their own trials and afflictions, they stood courageously with other believers who were going through similar trials.

Verse 34 has been cited by some interpreters as proof that Paul was the writer of Hebrews. The King James Version implies that the writer was referring to himself as being in bonds. However, most modern translations (i.e., NASB, NIV, and NRSV) indicate that the reference was to others who were imprisoned. They stood “compassionately” (Greek: synepathesate) with believers who had been imprisoned. They came along with them and shared their pain and heartache.

In verses 35-36, the writer called upon the believers not to cast aside their “confidence”
(Greek: *parresian*), which means to remain courageous or to be filled with boldness. *Parresian* connotes a willingness to take risks in the face of difficult circumstances. These believers were not novices and were experienced in fighting for their faith. The writer encouraged them to remain steadfast in expectation of a lasting reward. Yet, he pointed to their need for “patience” (Greek: *hypomones*), the capacity to withstand extreme conditions and/or circumstances. Patience would strengthen them to do the will of God and ultimately receive God’s eternal reward.

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

Throughout the lesson, the writer offered words of encouragement and support to a group of believers who were struggling against oppression and persecution. Many may never face the extreme circumstances that confronted first-century believers; yet, sooner or later, every believer is troubled by something. Thus, we all need to practice the grace of encouraging one another. There are literally thousands of Christians who leave the faith every year. Why? Because when they encountered a rocky period, and no one stepped forward to help them through it. As Christians, we have a mutual responsibility to help others who struggle and stumble. We must be mindful of the family struggling to make ends meet, the student who may not be able to afford a computer, the couple going through a tough season of marriage or parenting, or persons battling an overwhelming health crisis. We must be intentional about concentrating on the needs of others rather than being preoccupied with ourselves. Hebrews calls us to lead others to practical expressions of love and a pleasing display of unselfishness.

**PRAYER**

*Lord God of heaven, grant that we will remain true to the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

(*August 9-15, 2021*)

**A Persevering Faith**

**MONDAY,** August 9: “Save Your Life by Losing It” (Mark 8:31-37)

**TUESDAY,** August 10: “Respond to Abusers with Blessings” (1 Peter 3:9-19)

**WEDNESDAY,** August 11: “Be Faithful until Death” (Revelation 2:8-11)

**THURSDAY,** August 12: “Sanctified by Christ’s Sacrifice” (Hebrews 10:1-10)

**FRIDAY,** August 13: “The Inner Life of New Believers” (Hebrews 10:11-18)

**SATURDAY,** August 14: “Approach God with a Pure Heart” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

**SUNDAY,** August 15: “Act in Ways that Preserve the Faith” (Hebrews 10:23-36)
A CONQUERING FAITH

ADULT/YOUTH
ADULT TOPIC: Perfect Love
YOUTH TOPIC: More than a Feeling

Children
GENERAL LESSON TITLE: A Conquering Faith
CHILDREN’S TOPIC: Walk the Talk

DEVO CNAL READING
John 14:15-24

ADULT/YOUTH
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 John 4–5
PRINT PASSAGES: 1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5
ADULT KEY VERSE: 1 John 4:16b
YOUTH KEY VERSE: 1 John 4:7

CHILDREN
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 John 4–5
PRINT PASSAGES: 1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5
KEY VERSE: 1 John 4:16b

1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5—KJV
2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:
3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.
14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.
15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.
16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.
17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have

1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5—NIV
2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,
3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.
14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.
15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.
16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.
17 This is how love is made complete among
boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.
5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.

4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.
5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Many people struggle to resist the world’s alluring temptations. How can one resist the compelling appeal of sin and deception? Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers overcome the world and its seductions with the hope of victory.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Examine the love of God described by the writer of 1 John.
2. Reflect on the various expressions of God’s love in their personal lives.
3. Be more intentional about responding to others with the love of God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—John cautioned believers to avoid false teachers who claimed to be sent by God (see 1 John 4:1-3). Only those who were truly inspired by the Spirit of God would openly confess the crucified, resurrected Christ.
—John and the other apostles had witnessed and verified that Jesus Christ was the incarnate Word sent from heaven to bring salvation through His death on the Cross. This doctrine is of the Spirit of God.
—Believers are members of the family of God who have embraced God’s truth. By the Spirit, they have power to triumph over the deceptions and trickery of false teachers (see Matthew 7:22).
—First John 4:13 provides a significant connection between 1 John and the fourth gospel. In the Gospel, Jesus spoke of the Spirit (or Advocate) as one who would come to maintain continuity and intimacy of relationship between the disciples and the Master (see John 14:15-31; 15:26-27; 16:5-15).
—First John 4:13-14 is one of the rare places in Scripture where the Father, Son, and Spirit are mentioned as distinct persons of the Godhead who share a relationship with believers and with one another.
—The “day of judgment” (see 1 John 4:17) is a New Testament expression comparable to “the day of the Lord,” a phrase found throughout the Old Testament.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Christians can be confident of the love of God and victory to confront hard times and false teachings.
—Christians should recognize the difference between true and false teaching.
—The power of God leads and guides believers through the power of the Holy Spirit.
—God gives Christians confidence and power to respond to others in loving ways.
—The victory of Christ enables believers to overcome troubles in their lives.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

First John is one of four New Testament writings that are referred to as the Johannine Writings; these include the gospel of John and 1, 2, and 3 John. They are a part of the genre referred to as the “General Epistles.” The earliest Christian traditions assign the writing of these documents to John, the son of Zebedee, who was one of the original twelve apostles and the brother of James (see Mark 1:19). Since the second century BC, the church has widely accepted the belief that the author of the Johannine writings is John the apostle, son of Zebedee. Another reason for the adoption of John the apostle as the writer is that statement that he was an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus (see 1 John 1:1-2). As an eyewitness, he would have firsthand knowledge of the ministry of Jesus.

First John is believed to have been written in Ephesus, sometime between AD 80 and AD 100. This late date for the writing is attributed to the late date for the appearance of the gospel of John, which was sometime around AD 70–85. There is no way to confirm the exact date of the writing. The epistles are merely presumed to have been written after the gospel of John. The epistle was addressed to churches throughout Asia and those in the area of Ephesus.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The biggest problem facing the early Christian church was heresy—that is, false teachings about the person, work and divinity of Jesus Christ. Marianne Meye Thompson asserts that there were possibly three forms of religious heresy that were circulating in John's church and quite possibly throughout the churches in Asia Minor (1–3 John: The IVP New Testament Commentary, pages 16-17). This would have been the geographical region as the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2–3.

The first of these heresies was promoted by a man named Cerinthus, who believed and taught that there was a distinct difference between the human Jesus and the resurrected, incarnate Christ. In his teaching, Cerinthus asserted that Christ was a heavenly being who descended upon Jesus at His baptism and departed at His crucifixion. This heresy created a storm of controversy in the church. One would need to read the writings of Irenaeus to ascertain how he confronted the false doctrine of Cerinthus.

The second false doctrine was known as Docetism (Greek: dokein), meaning “to seem like.” There is very little known about the origin of the docetist movement and its founders. They believed that the death of Jesus on the Cross was not a real event, but an illusion. They claimed that Jesus was not a real man, that He only seemed human—thus, when He died on the Cross, He merely swooned and played to be dead. There were early signs of this doctrine in the church at Colossae, and it is addressed by Paul in Colossians 2:22; compare with 1 John 2:23; 4:15.

The third heresy that confronted the early church was called Gnosticism (Greek: gnosis), meaning “to know.” This was a belief that taught
that salvation was the result of having secret, special knowledge. There was some element of each of these heresies in the churches led by the apostle John. They are in some way addressed throughout the Johannine writings. These heresies posed a serious threat to the life and spiritual vitality of the church.

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

**John** (Hebrew: Yohanan): believed to be the writer of the gospel of John and the books of 1, 2, and 3 John. He was one of the original twelve apostles (see Matthew 4:21; 10:2; Mark 10:35; 14:33; Luke 22:8). He was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James, another of the original apostles. He was believed to be the disciple whom Jesus loved (see John 19:26-27). At some point he left Jerusalem and settled in Ephesus, where he lived out his remaining days.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Abide** (4:13, NASB)—Greek: *menó* (men’-o): to stay, remain; “dwell” (KJV); “live” (NIV).

**Confesses** (4:2, NASB)—Greek: *homologeó* (hom-ol-og-eh’-o): speaks the same thing as another; agrees with; “confeseth” (KJV); “acknowledges” (NIV).

**Flesh** (4:2)—Greek: *sarx* (sarx): the soft substance of the living body; denotes mere human nature—being prone to sin and opposed to God; opposite of spirit.

**Know** (4:2)—Greek: *ginóskó* (ghin-oce’-ko): to come to know, “recognize” (NIV), perceive.

**Love** (4:16)—Greek: *agapé* (ag-ah’-pay): to entreat with kind affection, compassion, or goodwill.

**Testify** (4:14)—Greek: *martureó* (mar-too-reh’-o): to bear witness to, attest to.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. **Introduction**
   A. Love One Another
   B. Biblical Background

II. **Exposition and Application of the Scripture**
   A. Confessing Jesus Christ
      (1 John 4:2-3)
   B. The Witness of the Spirit
      (1 John 4:13-17)
   C. The Victory that Overcomes
      (1 John 5:4-5)

III. **Concluding Reflection**
that His followers should love their enemies and even those who persecute them (see Matthew 5:43-45). Apostle John emphasized the importance of loving those within the community of faith.

The church can serve many functions and be many things, but if it fails to be a community where love is found, then it is nothing. God does not measure the beauty of the worship edifice, the splendor and melody of songs of praise, the eloquence of preaching and teaching, nor the plaudits and praises of men and women—rather, God seeks a church that is known by its compassion and devotion toward one another (see Romans 12:10).

B. Biblical Background

The book of 1 John was written to a church that was in deep trouble. There were three causes of the church’s trouble. The first concerned the teaching taking place in the church. John cautioned the members to be careful when accepting persons who claimed to be sent by God. They should test the spirit to see if a person was really from God (see 1 John 4:1-3). Some of the members had become spiritually infected by unsound doctrine and false beliefs and they began to spread this teaching among the congregation. Specifically, there were questions swirling around the person of Jesus Christ. Some scholars believe that this may have been the early stages of Gnosticism or Docetism. There were teachers who denied the humanity of Jesus and denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the incarnate Word of God, and the only begotten Son of the Father. John declared that anyone who opposes the person of Jesus Christ is, in effect, the antichrist.

The second issue troubling the church was unethical and immoral conduct among some of the believers. Some of the members of the church believed that they could be spiritual and still sin (see 1 John 3:8-10). Early Christianity had to contend with religious syncretism—which is the false idea that believers could rub shoulders with paganism, idolatry, and worldliness and not be impacted by it. John spoke to this issue in 1 John 1:6: “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”

The third cause of trouble was relational or social. The members had become fragmented, isolated, segregated, and separate from each other. In 1 John 2:19, there is the mention of division within the body that led to a group’s leaving the church. At some point, the remaining members began to form cliques, private social groups that impacted the church in a very negative way. Throughout this short epistle, John confronts those who would sow false teachings and division in the church. He reminded them that there was a day of judgment coming and believers could have confidence because of the love God has shown to us.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Confessing Jesus Christ

(1 John 4:2-3)

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.
Verse 2 begins with the answer to the question of how to recognize when one is confronted with false teachers. It has been previously stated that the early church was confronted by a tidal wave of false doctrines and teachers. More than likely, the church in Ephesus and throughout the region were contending with many of these teachers, some of whom had been members of the church (see 1 John 2:19). John provided a test for determining if the person speaking was from God or was a false teacher: “Hereby know (Greek: ginoskete) ye the Spirit of God”—he or she confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Ginoskete denotes a form of knowledge that is based upon personal experience and close observation. John had previously pointed out that believers have the Spirit of the God living in them (see 1 John 3:24). The witness of the Spirit of God bears witness through the human spirit that Jesus Christ is the very one who was the living incarnation of the presence of God in the world (see 1 John 4:1; John 1:14; compare with Philippians 2:5-11).

In verse 3, John pointed out that those who do not acknowledge the humanity of Jesus do not possess the Spirit of God. This is not just a false teacher; moreover, it is the spirit of the antichrist. The spirit of the antichrist is the spirit that refuses to acknowledge the sonship, lordship, and humanity of Jesus Christ. John asserted that they were already at work in the world.

B. The Witness of the Spirit

(1 John 4:13-17)

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Verse 13 states that the evidence of the abiding presence of God in the life of the believer is manifested through the Spirit of God. The indwelling presence of God’s Spirit has been given to us. John used the Greek word ginoskomen, which is translated as “know” in English. In this context, the word is written as a present-active indicative, which means that it is a statement of fact that John continuously holds to be true. The Spirit of God dwells within and produces the fruit of love.

Verse 14 begins with the words “And we have seen”; this phrase is translated from a single Greek word, tetheametha. This word literally means “to be moved by what one sees.” It denotes a sense of astonishment and amazement, which is how Jesus was received by the people of His day (see Matthew 12:23; 18:25; Mark 1:27; 6:51; 10:32). John is not just referring to something he alone was a witness to; the other apostles saw the mighty demonstrations of power and heard the profound teachings of Jesus as well (see 1 John 1:1-3; 5:9; compare with John 1:14; 3:11; 5:39; Acts 18:5). Not only did John see, but what he saw moved him to speak on behalf of God—that is, to testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Here, John addresses in a way those who were espousing a doctrine contrary to what he knew to be fact. Jesus Christ lived among them not only as man, but also as the Son of God, which was
evidenced by His mighty works (see John 5:36-37). Jesus was fully God and fully human, at the same time. Jesus was not just some being sent from an unknown God, as some in the community of Cerinthus believed; rather, He was the very Son of God who had come as the Savior of the world (see John 3:16-17; 10:36; compare Matthew 16:16).

Verse 15 begins with an inclusive declaration, “whosoever,” which includes people of all ethnic groups. John may have been refuting those who held gnostic beliefs that one needed special knowledge to be saved. The very declaration that Jesus is the Son of God is an indication that God dwells in him or her and he or she dwells in God.

In verses 16-17, John returns to what he knows to be fact—and this time, it is supported by faith. Everything hinges on what we have believed about the Son. Faith says that God loves us because He gave Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins (see 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The statement that “God is love” is an affirmation about the nature and character of God (see Psalm 36:7-9). There is no hate or resentment by God toward even those who are sinners or who reject Him (see Matthew 5:45). “God is love” repeats a statement made in verse 8. John stated that to abide in love is to abide in God. It is a sign of God’s presence and that one has acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, to love God is to love Jesus, and to love Jesus is to love God. God lives within the believer through His Spirit.

Verse 17 begins with the words “By this love is perfected with us.” Perfect (Greek: teteleiotai) means “to reach a point of completion, maturity, or perfection.” It does not denote flawlessness. Rather, it points to a condition in which the believer lives in the full assurance of God’s love. He or she knows that God loves him or her because of the indwelling presence of the Spirit and the presence of God’s love. The knowledge that God loves us gives boldness. Believers can have confidence that in the last day, those who have confessed Jesus as Lord and lived in obedience to His Word will have nothing to fear. Before the judgment seat of Christ, those who have lived in love will have no need to fear the Lord’s presence. The phrase “He is, so also are we in this world” looks back to the statement about overcoming the world and those who are false teachers and prophets. Just as Jesus overcame the demonic powers of Satan, so, too, do believers (see 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4). Just as Jesus was victorious, so, too, are we—for we are like Him.

C. The Victory that Overcomes
(1 John 5:4-5)

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

This final paragraph is connected to the preceding four verses and serves as an introduction to what follows, beginning with verse 6. The new birth not only guarantees the believer eternal life, but also gives victory over the world. John made it clear that anyone in whom the Spirit of God dwells has the inherent capacity to “overcome” (Greek: nika) the “world” (Greek: cosmon). The “world” is not a reference to the physical environment: rather, it denotes all that stands in opposition to God. It is that spirit of rebellion and disobedience that characterizes those who are not born of God.
Verse 5 is a reiteration and summary of the lesson theme. The person who overcomes the world and all of its lures is the one who firmly believes that Jesus is the Son of God. In these verses, John emphasizes his conclusions regarding false doctrine among the churches. We overcome the power of Satan, temptation, and lure of lust because “greater is He who is in us than he that is in the world.”

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This lesson challenges each of us to give serious consideration to our relationships with other believers. Our churches are often characterized by superficial connections and relationships that are more perfunctory than authentic. John reminds us that love is not something we must compel ourselves to do. It is the mandate of the new birth. Love is what we become because we bear in our bodies the DNA of our Savior. Just as He is love and is loved by the Father, so are we to love and be loved by the Father. Love fosters openness and honesty in our relationships. Love builds the spirit of collaboration among the members and leaders. Love will always make a difference in the social life of the church. This is the chief message of the apostle John and must be ours as well.

PRAYER

Lord of grace and mercy, please grant that we will learn to love as You love. Give us the spirit of patience that we will never grow weary of each other and the work You have called us to do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 16-22, 2021)

A Conquering Faith

MONDAY, August 16: “Testing Our Love for God” (Deuteronomy 13:1-4)
TUESDAY, August 17: “Love God by Keeping His Commandments” (John 14:15-24)
WEDNESDAY, August 18: “Discerning the Spirit of Truth and Error” (1 John 4:1, 4-6)
THURSDAY, August 19: “Knowing God, We Can Love Others” (1 John 4:7-12)
FRIDAY, August 20: “Faith Is the Victory” (1 John 5:1-3)
SATURDAY, August 21: “Believers in Jesus Have Life” (1 John 5:6-12)
SUNDAY, August 22: “Faith that Loves Overcomes Obstacles” (1 John 4:2-3, 13-17; 5:4-5)
August 29, 2021

Lesson 13

HOPE ETERNAL

**Adult/Youth**

**General Lesson Title:** Hope Eternal

**Adult Topic:** Be Confident

**Youth Topic:** Always Confident

**Children**

**General Lesson Title:** Hope Eternal

**Children’s Topic:** A Forever Promise

**Devotional Reading**

Romans 7:14-26

**Adult/Youth**

**Background Scriptures:** 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10

**Print Passages:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-10

**Adult Key Verse:** 2 Corinthians 5:1

**Youth Key Verse:** 2 Corinthians 5:7

2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-10—KJV

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-10—NIV

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

FOR WE know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling,

3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are
3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.
4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being
burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed
upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.
5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing
is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the
Spirit.
6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that,
whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from
the Lord:
7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)
8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be
absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.
9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or
absent, we may be accepted of him.
10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of
Christ; that every one may receive the things done in
his body, according to that he hath done, whether it
be good or bad.

burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but
to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so
that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.
5 Now the one who has fashioned us for this very
purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a
deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as
long as we are at home in the body we are away from
the Lord.
7 For we live by faith, not by sight.
8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away
from the body and at home with the Lord.
9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we
are at home in the body or away from it.
10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of
Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for
the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People fear the fragility of life and the meaning
of death. How does one find hope and comfort in moments of weakness or impending death?
God has prepared for those who trust Him an eternal, unseen place with Him guaranteed
by the Spirit.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Acknowledge the hope in God’s promise that Paul embraced even in facing death.
2. Identify with the faith of those who confront their mortality with joy and confidence.
3. Develop a growing trust in God’s promise of eternal life through faith.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE
EMPHASIZED
Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH
—Paul cautioned the Corinthians to remain vigi-
lant because of the temporary nature of their
present troubles. They were to remain focused
on their true and eternal destiny with Christ
in glory.

—When believers rise again, they leave behind all
earthly attachments. Their bodies are renewed as
a spiritual body fashioned by God—permanent,
indestructible, and celestial.
—Believers are guaranteed a glorious future be-
cause God has created them for it (Philippians
3:21), working in them to will and to do God’s
good pleasure in ways beyond understanding
(see Philippians 2:13).
—The Holy Spirit serves as the guarantee of a future promise, a foretaste of the glory that believers shall one day know.

—The judgment seat is like the reward position at the Olympic Games. Those who belong to the family of God shall receive the reward for good things done in the body and experience the sadness at reward lost because of the useless things. (Compare 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:4; Romans 14:10-12.)

—Many will not experience death but, rather, will be caught up in the “Second Coming” (Parousia) (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and escape “destruction” of the body.

Teachers of CHILDREN
—Paul encourages believers not to give up or become discouraged—for God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit to direct and strengthen believers.

—Some of the Corinthian Christians were confused about the concept of the Resurrection.

—Gentiles (non-Jews) are welcomed into God’s family through Christ Jesus.

—When they are saved, Christians experience spiritual transformation and change of heart that leads them to life in the eternal home of God.

—After death, believers will experience the gift of eternal life in God’s presence.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

There is no question that the apostle Paul wrote the letters to the church in Corinth (see 1 and 2 Corinthians). However, there is disagreement among scholars about the exact number of letters and the dates of the correspondence between Paul and the church in Corinth. What follows is a brief summary of the chronology of the founding of the church and the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church.

The church in Corinth was founded during Paul’s second missionary journey (see Acts 18:1-18). During this time, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, two Jewish Christians who had recently arrived from Rome. Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth before leaving to return to Antioch (see Acts 18:18-22).

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul departed for what became his third missionary journey (see Acts 19:23–20:8). It was during this third trip that the canonical 2 Corinthians was written, near 56 C.E. Second Corinthians is often referred to as the second canonical letter because in 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul refers to a previous letter written about separating from immoral members—therefore, scholars conclude that Paul wrote more than the two letters that appear in the canon of New Testament Scripture.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The city of Corinth was the economic and commercial hub of ancient Greece. Corinth was an old city going back as far as 800 BC, when it was part of the Achaian League before being destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. Julius Caesar established the city as a Roman colony in 44 BC. In 27 BC, Augustus designated Corinth as the capital of the Roman province Achaia. The primary languages would have been Latin (given the number of Romans who lived in the city) along with a Greek-speaking population. Corinth was also home to a large number of Jews, which is evidenced by the presence of an active synagogue (see Acts 18:4).

Religiously, Corinth was a pagan city and was a center of the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love. There was a large, elaborately
adorned temple dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite. There were Jews and followers of the Jewish faith. Into this cosmopolitan city, Paul came, preached, and established a Christian congregation. Given the economic prosperity of the city, it is safe to assume that some of the members of the church in Corinth were people with some wealth. This may explain Paul’s urgent appeal to give their offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8–9).

**PROMINENT CHARACTER(S)**

**IN THE LESSON**

**Paul:** Paul was the most important Christian missionary in the first century. He founded churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, and Philippi. He was a Jewish Pharisee who was converted while travelling to Damascus to arrest disciples of Jesus (see Acts 9:1-10; Philippians 3:5-6). He is credited with writing thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

**KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON**

**Affliction (4:17)—Greek: thlipsis (thlip’-sis):** persecution; oppression; distress; tribulation; “troubles” (NIV).

**Eternal (4:18)—Greek: aiónios (ahee-o’-nee-os):** agelong; everlasting; endless.

**Glory (4:17)—Greek: doxa (dox’-ah):** praise; honor; splendor; majesty; magnificence, as in God’s presence.

**Outward (4:16)—Greek: exó (ex’-o):** outside; without; “outwardly” (NIV).

**Renewed (4:16)—Greek: anakainóó (an-ak-ahee-no’-o):** made new or restored.

**Seen (4:18)—Greek: blepó (blep’-o):** to be looked at or upon; perceived; discerned.

**TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON**

I. Introduction

A. Don’t Give Up!

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Confidence in Ministry
   (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

B. Contemplation of the New Life
   (2 Corinthians 5:1-4)

C. Confidence through the Spirit
   (2 Corinthians 5:5-9)

D. The Day of Reckoning
   (2 Corinthians 5:10)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Don’t Give Up!

   When we consider the legacy upon which we stand, it is clear that we must never give up the fight for justice, income equality, and equal rights for every citizen. What would have happened had the leaders of the Montgomery Improvement Association given up after a few days or weeks? Segregation would have persisted longer. Believers must never give up in the face of overwhelming challenges. They must not run from the fight when it appears that the enemy has the upper hand. They must never turn aside when the way is dark and murky. They must resist defeat and pessimism. They must reject feelings of abandonment.
God is our strength and a very present help in our struggles. This was the message of the apostle Paul to the Christians living in ancient Corinth. He reminded them that they must never lose heart and become discouraged by the realization that their ministry results do not always match the effort.

B. Biblical Background

This passage is part of a larger unit that begins at 2 Corinthians 2:14 and concludes at 7:4. Throughout these chapters, Paul reviews the reasons why he remained hopeful in the midst of searing challenges from those who opposed him at every turn. The relationship that Paul had with the Corinthians was turbulent at times and on other occasions it could be compared to that of a loving parent to his child (see 1 Corinthians 4:1-15). The church had caused him great pain, yet they were also a source of great pride (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 7:4-5). He reminded them that they must remain vigilant because the trials they had to endure were only temporary, light afflictions when weighed against glory of eternity.

The believer may be assured that when life reaches its conclusion, God has a more glorious future in store—an eternal future that will never fade away. The Holy Spirit is the earnest payment of our future glory (see Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 1:22). Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we are always reminded of the presence of God in every situation (see Romans 8:26-27).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Confidence in Ministry

(2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Verse 16 is a backwards glance at all that has been previously stated in verses 7-12. In verse 1, Paul stated that the trials of his ministry did not push him to the point of despair—the reason being that he had received the mercy of God. In verse 16, Paul began using the same Greek word, διό, which is better translated “therefore,” or “for this reason.” In verses 16-17, Paul offered words of encouragement to his children in the faith. He reminded them that although believers, at times, face opposition in the work of ministry, they must never lose heart. Paul maintained that instead of losing hope through constant turmoil, the Corinthians could experience ongoing renewal by God (see Isaiah 40:13; Romans 12:2). Although the human body begins to fade and grow weary with time and stress, the inner being is being renewed day by day (see Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 1:10-11). The word renewed denotes restoration and invigoration of the spirit. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit revives one’s hope and reminds believers that they have never been deserted by God (see Joshua 1:5; Psalms 27:1-2; 46:1).

Verse 17 is the second reason for Paul’s optimism and hope. Here, Paul draws a distinction between present afflictions and...
the greater glory that awaited him in the next life. This is not false optimism nor an opioid that soothes pain but provides no hope. Paul acknowledged that believers face trials and trouble. He had faced many trials and struggles as he preached the Gospel across Asia Minor (see 2 Corinthians 11:22-33). But Paul described the nature of his struggles not as burdensome, but as “light afflictions.” While the Christian’s struggles may appear to be serious and ominous, they are relatively light and momentary, not permanent or lasting.

Verse 18 is the third reason for Paul’s optimism and hope. In this verse, Paul draws a distinction between the earthly and the heavenly, between that which is temporary and that which is eternal. The believer is exhorted to look beyond this present age and world to that which is to come (see Romans 8:24-25; Hebrews 11:2, 25, 27; 12:2-3; compare with Matthew 6:25-34). The “things which are seen” and experienced are our trials, tribulations, pain, and oppression. There is also implied the things of this world which can be blinding, causing one to lose sight of the Lord Jesus Christ (see John 12:40; compare with 2 Corinthians 3:14, 4; 1 John 2:11).

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to look at the things which are not seen. These cannot be physically viewed; rather, they are spiritually discerned (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

B. Contemplation of the New Life
(2 Corinthians 5:1-4)

FOR WE know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

This passage expounds Paul’s understanding of eschatology and what he believed was the final destiny of all believers. In these verses, Paul continues to articulate why he had no thoughts of giving up in ministry, despite the hardships and trials he experienced. He expressed reasons for his hope and why he looked forward to the day of his final redemption. His days in the ministry would not go unnoticed by the Lord, Jesus Christ. Everyone will one day stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ to give an account of their deeds.

Verse 1 begins with Paul’s expression of certainty about what he knows to be the final destiny of the believer. Concerning our earthly “house” (Greek: epigeios), this word does not pertain to the physical earth but to that which is characteristic of life on the earth versus life in heaven. This life is brief, a vapor, it is but a moment. When this life ends, God has a building for us, one that is not man-made but that is reserved in heaven for all who love the Lord.

Verse 2 provides further explanation of what has been previously stated in verse 1—that is, Paul’s earnest desire and expectation to receive his heavenly body. The words “desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” points to the change that Paul believed that every believer will come to know at death (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-49, where Paul has a lengthy discussion about the new body). Jesus was physically raised, but not with a flesh-and-blood body; His new body
was heavenly and not earthly. Paul envisioned this when the believer is “clothed” with a new heavenly body.

Verse 3 expands on the thought of verse 2. Paul did not want to die before the Lord returned; hence, he would be unclothed. This is the sense of the verse: death before the parousia would mean that he would be found “naked” (Greek: gymnoi).

Verse 4 sums up the desire of Paul and all believers that they would be alive when the Lord comes so that they can participate in the great day of the Lord’s second coming. “Being burdened” expresses the reality that although his ministry has been fulfilling, it has not been without countless hardships.

C. Confidence through the Spirit

(2 Corinthians 5:5-9)

Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

Verse 5 continues the thought of the previous verses. All that has happened and will happen is the work of God. The believer has the assurance of this promise because of the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit is the earnest (Greek: arrabona), a word that means “down payment.” He is the first installment on the believer’s hope of eternity (see Romans 8:16; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14).

This section (verses 6-8) begins with the word therefore, which points back to all that has been previously mentioned. In light of the gift of the Spirit who is the guarantor of the believer’s hope of immortality, Paul declares with buoyant hope that he has confidence in the promise. Being at home in the body connotes life in this present reality. It is absence from the Lord. Verse 7 is a parenthetical statement that undergirds the believer’s hope of immortality, which is grounded in our faith. Death for Paul becomes the gateway to eternal life. He does not hold the ancient Greek belief of a disembodied, immortal soul that lives in some abstract space until the Second Coming. Death is the immediate entry into the presence of the Lord—for to be absent in the body is not to be separated from the Lord; rather, it is to be in His presence (verse 8). This is what Paul labored for, that crown of righteousness that the Lord would reward to all who love His appearing (verse 9; see 2 Timothy 4:8).

D. The Day of Reckoning

(2 Corinthians 5:10)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Why does the believer live to please God? Because at some point we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. A “judgment seat” (Greek: bema) was a raised platform upon which sat either a judge or an assembly of judges. They were usually located in the center of the city, in a public square. Here, everyone could attend and observe the proceedings. At the heavenly tribunal, everyone great and small will be held personally accountable.
for the work he or she has done. Everyone’s actions, words, and deeds will be judged according to the standards of God’s Word.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the more sobering realities of the Scriptures is that there will be a final day of reckoning. Paul looked ahead to the time when everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. Revelation 20:11-14 refers to the Great White Throne Judgement that will be based on evidence written by the life deeds of every person. The record will be opened, and the dead will be judged based on what they have done as recorded therein. The teaching of judgment by works runs throughout the Old and New Testaments. To be clear, the issue is not salvation by works but works as the indisputable evidence of a person’s actual relationship with God (see Matthew 25:31-46).

Revelation 20:13 states that even the sea, death, and Hades will all give up their dead and they will be judged as well. Hades represents that intermediate state of the unrighteous dead who die outside of the Lord and await their day of destiny before the eternal tribunal of God.

The final two verses (14-15) sum up the last gasp of the enemies of God. Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, where they will join Satan, the dragon, and the beast. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul speaks of death as the last enemy that will be destroyed. Death was defeated at Calvary, but in these final moments of time, death is cast into the lake of fire there to never rise again.

Not only are the enemies of God thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, but also, those whose names were not written in the Book of life will join them. There, together, they will face eternal torment.

PRAYER

Lord, teach us to number our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. May the Holy Spirit correct our actions and soften our words. Grant that we will always live in hope of eternal life with You. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 23-29, 2021)

Hope Eternal

MONDAY, August 23: “From Death to Life in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:16-23)
TUESDAY, August 24: “Strengthening the Inner Being” (Ephesians 3:14-21)
WEDNESDAY, August 25: “Every Deed, Good or Evil, Judges” (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14)
THURSDAY, August 26: “God’s Judgment of Human Behavior Is Impartial” (Romans 2:4b-11)
FRIDAY, August 27: “Paul, Confident in the Ministry” (2 Corinthians 4:1-6)
SATURDAY, August 28: “Entering the Presence of Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:7-15)
SUNDAY, August 29: “Live the Faith with Confidence” (2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10)