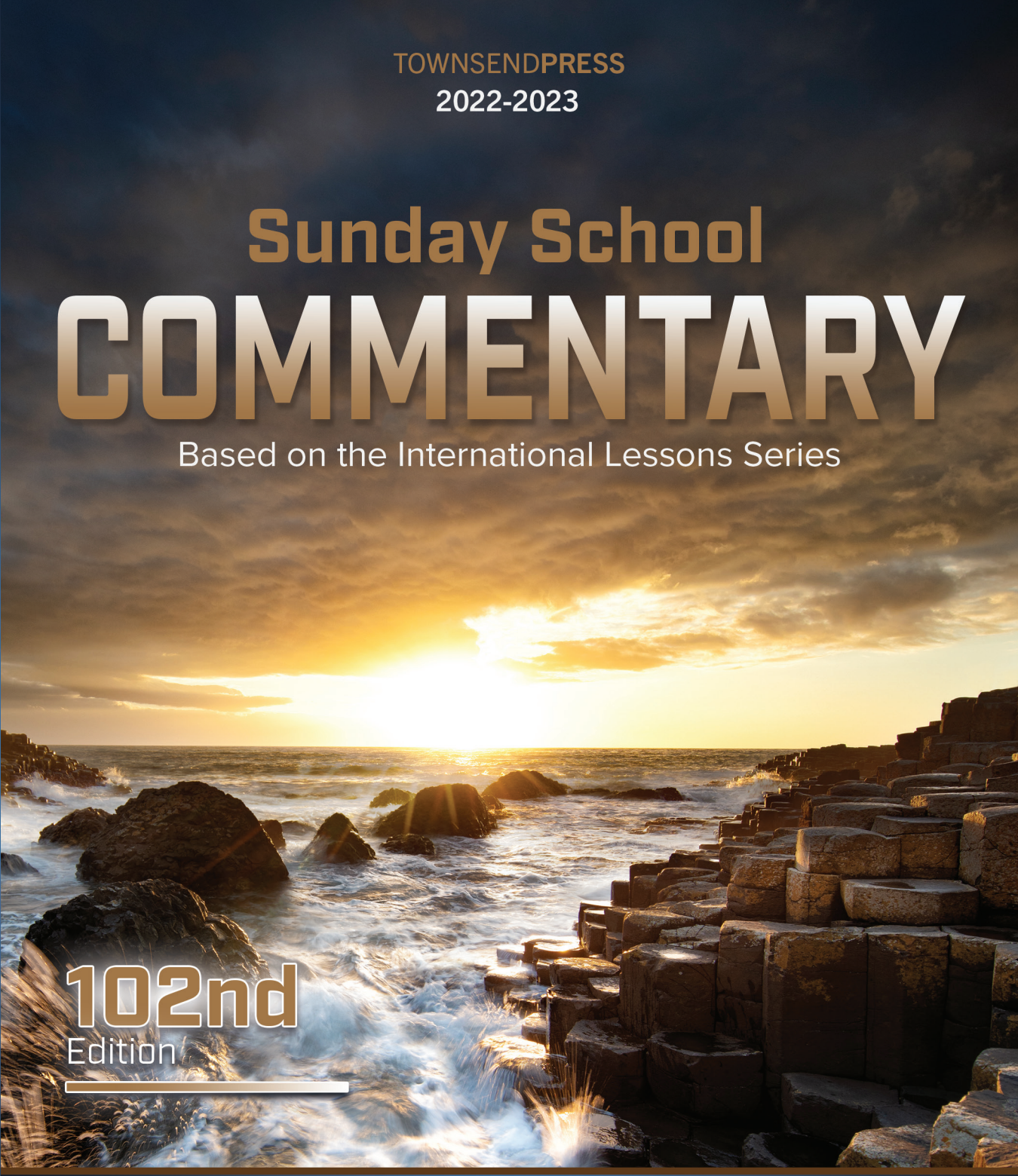
TOWNSENDPRESS

2022-2023

Sunday School COMMENTARY

Based on the International Lessons Series



102nd Edition

King James Version • New International Version

2022–2023 TOWNSEND **PRESS**

Sunday School
Commentary

Based on the International Lessons Series

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2022–2026 SCOPE AND SEQUENCE—CYCLE SPREAD

ARRANGEMENT OF QUARTERS ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH SCHOOL YEAR, SEPTEMBER THROUGH AUGUST

Fall 2022 **CHOSEN, NOT CHOICE** **God's Exceptional Choice** Genesis; Exodus; Deuteronomy; Judges; 1 Samuel; Ephesians	**Winter 2022–2023** **CHOSEN, NOT CHOICE** **From Darkness to Light** 2 Chronicles; Isaiah; Joel; Luke; 1 Corinthians; 2 Timothy; James; 1 Peter	**Spring 2023** **CHOSEN, NOT CHOICE** **Jesus Calls Us** Mathew; Mark; Luke; John; Acts	**Summer 2023** **GOD'S KINGDOM COME** **The Righteous Reign of God** Isaiah; Ezekiel; Zephaniah; Zechariah; Matthew; Romans; Galatians; 1 Corinthians
Fall 2023 **FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE** **God's Law Is Love** Luke; John; Acts; Romans; 1 Corinthians; Galatians; Colossians	**Winter 2023–2024** **FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE** **Faith that Pleases God** Ruth; 1 Samuel; 2 Chronicles; Proverbs; Isaiah; Daniel; Habakkuk; Matthew; Luke; Romans; Hebrews	**Spring 2024** **FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE** **Examining Our Faith** Matthew; Mark; Luke; Acts; Romans; 2 Corinthians; 1 Peter; Jude	**Summer 2024** **FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE** **Hope in the Lord** Psalms; Lamentations; Acts; Romans; 2 Corinthians; Colossians; Hebrews; 1 Thessalonians; Titus; 1 John
Fall 2024 **WORSHIP: ALTARS, SONGS, AND SACRIFICES** **Worship in the Covenant Community** Genesis; Exodus; 2 Samuel;1 Kings; 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles; Isaiah; Psalms; John	**Winter 2024–2025** **GOD'S KINGDOM COME** **A King Forever and Ever** Ruth; 2 Samuel; Psalms; Matthew; Luke	**Spring 2025** **WORSHIP: ALTARS, SONGS, AND SACRIFICES** **Costly Sacrifices** Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; 1 Chronicles; 2 Chronicles; Ezra; Matthew; Hebrews; 1 John; Revelation	**Summer 2025** **WORSHIP: ALTARS, SONGS, AND SACRIFICES** **Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings** Genesis; Matthew; Luke; John; Romans; 1 Corinthians; Ephesians; Hebrews; 1 Peter
Fall 2025 **LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD** **Judah: From Isaiah to Exile** Isaiah; 2 Chronicles; Jeremiah; 2 Kings; Ezekiel	**Winter 2025–2026** **LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD** **Enduring Beliefs of the Church** Exodus; Psalms; Matthew; Mark; Luke/Acts; John; Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Ephesians; 2 Timothy; 1 John; Revelation	**Spring 2026** **LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD** **Social Teachings of the Church** Genesis; Exodus; Deuteronomy; Nehemiah; Isaiah; Daniel; Jonah; Psalms; Matthew; Mark; John; Luke/Acts; Romans; 1 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Hebrews; 1 Timothy; 2 Thessalonians; James	**Summer 2026** **LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD** **Faithful Witnesses** Judges; 1 Samuel; Amos; Matthew; Mark; Luke; John; Acts; 2 Timothy; Philemon

LIST OF PRINTED TEXTS

The Printed Scriptural Texts used in the 2022–2023 *Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary* are arranged here in the order in which they appear in the Bible. Opposite each reference is the page number on which Scriptures appear in this edition of the *Commentary*.

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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, and 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 lesson.

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. Geoffrey Guns, expositor for the Fall Quarter, Rev. H. Gregory Haygood, expositor for the Winter Quarter, and Dr. Derrick Jackson, expositor for the Spring and Summer Quarters, for their devotion to the development of the respective lessons. These three 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.

KNOW YOUR WRITERS

Reverend Dr. Geoffrey V. Guns ▼
Fall Quarter

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 for the annual *Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary*, which is published by the Sunday School Publishing Board, from 2008 to 2015.

He is the author of four books: *Church Financial Management* (1997), published by Providence House Publishers; *Spiritual Leadership: A Practical Guide to Developing Spiritual Leaders in the Church* (2000), published by Orman Press, Inc.; *Introduction to the Bible: An Easy-to-Read Guide to Its Origin and Purpose* (2014), published by Townsend Press, Inc.; and *From Ruin to Restoration: A Study of the Prophetic Writings of Haggai* (2018), published by Townsend Press, Inc. He has also written numerous Bible studies and other training materials.

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 they have two granddaughters: Kennedy Nicole and Sydney Rae Cummings.

Reverend H. Gregory Haygood ▼
Winter Quarter

Rev. H. Gregory Haygood was born August 28, 1959, in Huntsville, Alabama, to the late John T. and Alma P. Haygood. He received Christ Jesus in the year 1972, and united with Hurricane Chapel M. B. Church in Brownsboro, Alabama. He accepted his call from God into the Gospel ministry in 1973, under Pastor W. P. Petty. He later joined First Missionary Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama, where he was further developed and cultivated in the ministry under the superb leadership and tutelage of Dr. Julius R. Scruggs.

Reverend Haygood is a graduate of the American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee (Bachelor of Arts Degree, 1983), and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (Master of Arts degree in Christian Education, 1985). From 1983 to 1985, he served as Minister of Music and Education at Canaan Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, under the superb leadership of Dr. Walter Malone Jr.

From 1985 to 1990, he pastored Friendship Baptist Church in Cross Plains, Tennessee. During this pastorate, he served as editor of religious literature for the National Baptist Publishing Board in Nashville, Tennessee, and as Dean of Chapel, Coordinator of Christian Service, and Professor of Pastoral Studies at the American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee.

He served as an instructor in the National Baptist Sunday Church School and B.T.U. Congress of the National Baptist Convention of America; and Professor of Biblical Hermeneutics for the Central Baptist Seminary of Indiana (South Bend extension).

Pastor Haygood has served as dean of the Congress of Christian Education for both the Northern Indiana District Association and the M.B. State Convention of Indiana, and president of the Congress for the Missionary Baptist State Convention of Indiana.

From 1990 to the present, he has pastored the Pilgrim Baptist Church in South Bend, Indiana. Under this pastorate, many new members have been added to the church, a Food/Clothing Ministry, and New Disciples' Orientation Program have been established. Also, a Praise Dance Troupe has been established. Weekly Worship and Bible study attendance and financial giving continue to increase; and God is consistently adding to the church. In November 2003, he led the church to begin a live radio broadcast of its worship services, which can be heard each Sunday, 12:00–1:00 p.m., on W.U.B.S. Radio, FM 89.7, South Bend, Indiana. In 2011, Pastor Haygood's vision for a men and women's ministry was implemented.

Reverend Haygood is presently an instructor for the National Baptist Congress of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Also, Pastor Haygood is a doctoral student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

On July 23, 1983, the Lord bestowed on him the honor of marrying Janice Marie Lockhart, who is a tremendous support to his ministry. Reverend and Sister Haygood have one daughter, Andriana Marie Haygood, who graduated with honors from Alabama A&M University in Huntsville, Alabama, and has graduated with a Master's degree in music from Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. She is a joy to her parents.

Reverend Derrick Jackson▼
Spring and Summer Quarters

Dr. Derrick Jackson is a native of Itta Bena, Mississippi, where he received his diploma as valedictorian of Leflore County High School. He is a licensed and ordained minister who received a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Accounting from Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, Texas. He received a Master of Business Administration degree from Keller Graduate School of Management. Dr. Jackson also received the Master of Theological Studies degree from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and the Doctor of Ministry degree from Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Dr. Jackson is the current pastor of the historic First Baptist Church of Gallatin, Tennessee. He is the sixth pastor in a series of strong men who made up the rich preaching, teaching, and pastoring legacy of First Baptist Church over the past 157 years. Dr. Jackson is a man of various gifts and talents; Dr. Jackson is the president of the Congress of Christian Education for the East Fork District Association and, the moderator of the Bledsoe Baptist Association. Pastor Jackson has also served as the vice president of the Middle Region of the Tennessee Baptist Missionary and Education Convention, dean of the East Fork District Association Congress of Christian Education, and president of the African-American Ministerial Fellowship in Gallatin, Tennessee. Dr. Jackson currently serves as the Executive Director of the Sunday School Publishing Board and editor of *The Voice* of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Possessing the entrepreneurial zeal of his father, Dr. Jackson is also co-owner of several business establishments.

Dr. Jackson has received several awards for his dynamic leadership, his unselfish devotion to the needs of his community, and his keen awareness of the importance of establishing a partnership between the government and the faith community. He is the author of three books published by Townsend Press: *God to His Sons*; *God to His Daughters*; and *Advancing the Conversation on Racism and Racial Reconciliation: A Liberational-Missional Theological Primer*. Because of his work in community racial healing, he was featured on the front cover of *Reader's Digest* with the Mayor and Chief of Police of Gallatin, Tennessee.

Dr. Jackson is married to Laurie Smith Jackson of Nashville, Tennessee, and he is the proud father of sons Jeffery and Joshua. He has been named one of the most influential persons of Sumner County, Tennessee, and he has received the Gallatin Citizen of the Year award. Dr. Jackson was recently honored with a street named after him in Gallatin. Dr. Jackson's life experiences have led him to choose a life motto based on an African-American spiritual: "If I can help someone along the way; If I can cheer someone with a word or song; If I can show someone that he or she is traveling wrong—then my living will not be in vain."

God's Exceptional Choice

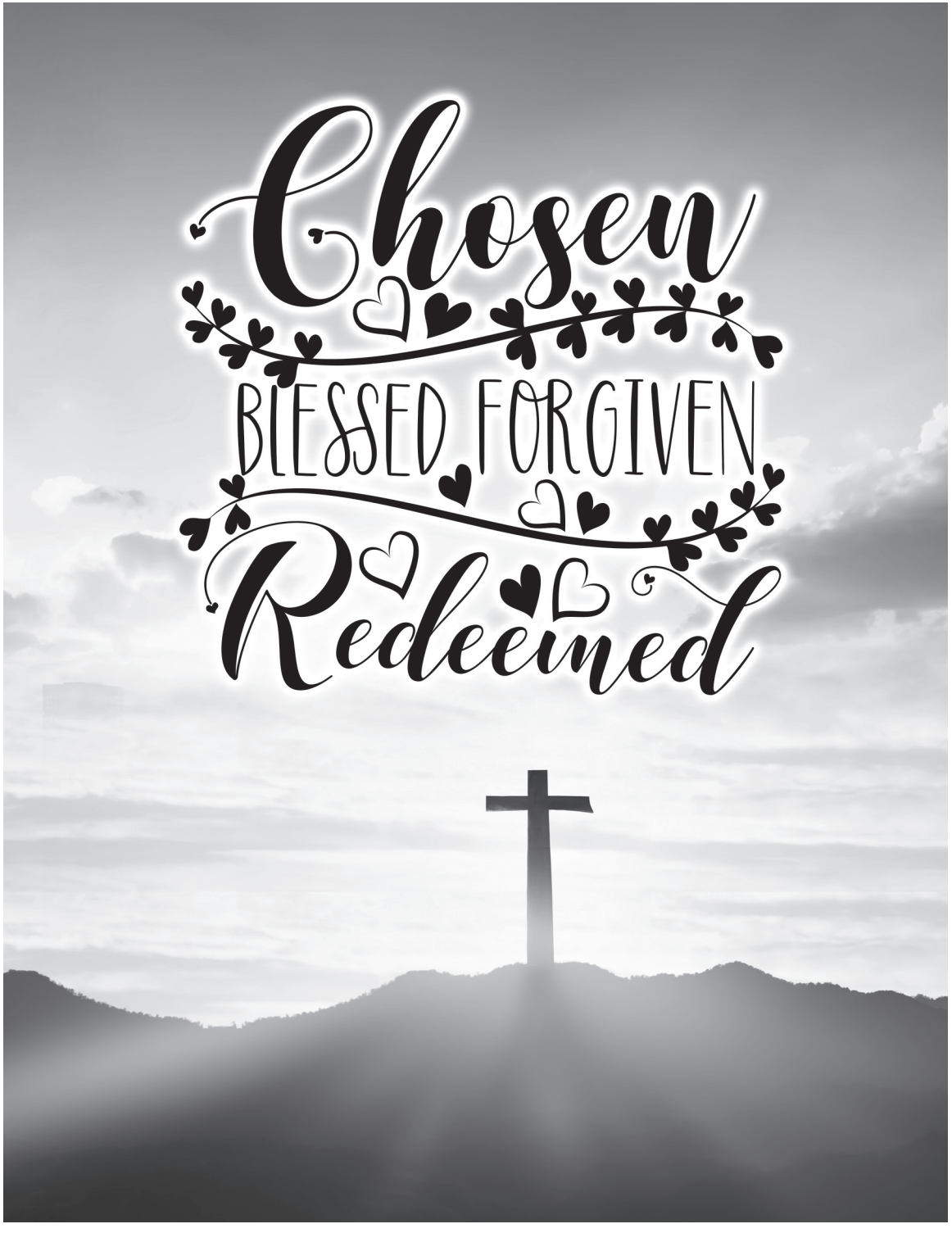
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Fall quarter traces the arc of salvation history from Abraham to Jesus and on to the early church. Unit I, "God Calls Abraham's Family," is drawn from the book of Genesis and chronicles the origin of the chosen people—Israel—from Abraham to Judah. Unit II journeys through the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, and 1 Samuel, showing the move to nationhood. Finally, Unit III explores the theme of chosenness through the perspective of the book of Ephesians.

Unit I, *"God Calls Abraham's Family,"* has four lessons from Genesis. Lesson 1 examines the call of Abraham, who was then known as Abram. Lesson 2 reveals how God chose the younger of Isaac's sons instead of the older, which would have been expected. Lesson 3 shows how Jacob received the name *Israel*—the same name that would later be associated with the nation that grew from Abraham's descendants. Lesson 4 offers yet another example of God's choosing apart from cultural norms when Judah, Jacob's fourth son, is called to head the family from which the Messiah would one day be born.

Unit II, *"Out of Slavery to Nationhood,"* has five lessons that explore the call of Israel's family out of Egypt to become a nation. Lesson 5, from the book of Exodus, highlights the birth of Moses, the women who preserved his life, and his call to lead the people out of Egypt. Lesson 6, from the book of Deuteronomy, tells part of the salvation story of the people of Israel so that they might remember and be thankful. Lesson 7, from the book of Judges, lifts up the period of Israel's history when it was governed by judges, particularly telling the story of Gideon. Lesson 8, from the book of 1 Samuel, chronicles the transition in Israel's history from the governance of judges to the selection of Saul as Israel's first king. Lesson 9 tells of the anointing of David as Saul's successor to the throne.

Unit III, *"We Are God's Artwork,"* is a four-lesson study on the book of Ephesians. Lesson 10 explores the beginning of the first chapter of Ephesians and the understanding that we are chosen and adopted as children by God through the redemption of Christ. Lesson 11 completes a study of Ephesians 1, with Paul's prayer that the believers in the Ephesian church might fully understand and access the power and blessings at their disposal because of God's adoption of them through the saving work of Christ. Lesson 12 shows how Paul reminds the Ephesians that because of their adoption and God's love and mercy, they are made alive through the saving power of Christ for the purpose of good works. In lesson 13, Paul encourages the believers in Ephesus to use their God-given spiritual resources (the armor of God) to persevere and stand against the evil forces of the world so that they might be Christ's ambassadors.


Chosen
BLESSED FORGIVEN
Redeemed

September 4, 2022 **Lesson 1**

THE CALL OF ABRAM

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Unbroken Promises
Youth Topic: Unbroken Promises

Children
General Lesson Title: God's Promise to Abram
Children's Topic: Unbroken Promises

Devotional Reading
Hebrews 11:8-19

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7
Print Passages: Genesis 12:1-5, 7; 15:1-7
Key Verse: Genesis 12:7

Children
Background Scriptures: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7
Print Passages: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7
Key Verse: Genesis 12:1

Genesis 12:1-5, 7; 15:1-7—KJV

NOW THE LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.
4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.
5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

. . . . .

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Genesis 12:1-5, 7; 15:1-7—NIV

THE LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.
2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
3 "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.
5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

. . . . .

7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

. . . . .

AFTER THESE things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.
2 And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?
3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.
4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.
5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.
6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.
7 And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

. . . . .

AFTER THIS, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."
2 But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"
3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."
4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir."
5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
7 He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: The reality of our circumstances does not always match our expectations. How do we respond when circumstances and expectations conflict? Abram put his confidence in God, and God reassured him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Trace the promises that God made to Abram/Abraham and their fulfillment.
2. Appreciate the frustration that comes with having to wait a long time for an expected good thing to happen.
3. Develop strategies to wait patiently for God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The cycle of invitation, obedience, promise, faith, and blessing that Abram experienced is repeated throughout Scripture (i.e., Jacob, David, Deborah, Mary, Paul) and the history of the church. We experience this same cycle in a continual spiral of spiritual growth as God grows us up in His image (see Romans 5:1-5; 2 Peter 1:4-9).

—God made a promise before Abram asked for

anything. This is unlike any other religious system in Abraham's day or in our own. God takes the first step, so proving that He is unlike any other person or power in existence. God's power and kindness in initiating this promise are matched only by His patience and faithfulness in finally fulfilling it.

—Even though Abram trusted God, he impatiently tried to force God's hand (see Genesis 16). God rejected Abram's efforts to "help" Him fulfill His promise, knowing that His plan was better than Abram's efforts.

—The three phases of God's call on Abram identify the spheres of influence in his life that Abram must leave behind. They move from broad strokes to specific areas: from "your country," from "your people," and from "your father's household." God progressively removes every security from Abram, except Himself, forcing Abram to rely completely on Him. (See Matthew 16:24-26 for a similar challenge from Jesus.)

—God identifies Himself to Abram (see 15:1, 7) in terms of Abram's experience of Him. It is Abram's experience with God that should be his rationale for continued faith in God's promises. Paul uses these Scriptures to defend the doctrine of justification by faith (see Galatians 2–4). God declared Abram righteous on the basis of his faith in God's promise and not on the basis of Abram's obedient actions.

—The blessing that God promised Abram set the themes for the rest of Genesis: land, family, and name. And while the promise that Abram would "be a blessing" (12:2) refers to Abram's influence (in these spheres) over those around him, it also parallels the prophetic words in Zechariah 8:16, in which Israel's role as a blessing is primarily in attracting others toward the God who blesses.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The history of the Hebrew patriarchs begins in the twenty-first century BC. This would place the patriarchs in the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1500). These dates are all imprecise and are based upon a reading of the biblical text, especially Genesis 12–50. One of the most commonly accepted dates for Abram's arrival in Canaan is 2091 BC. Walter C. Kaiser asserted that this date is based upon the reading of 1 Kings 6:1, detailing when Solomon began the construction work on the Temple, some 480 years after the Exodus from Egypt.[1] "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD" (1 Kings 6:1). It is generally accepted that Solomon began the work on the Temple in 967 BC, which would put the date of the Exodus at 1447 BC.[2] Israel spent 430 years in Egyptian bondage, which means that Jacob's family migrated into Egypt around 1887 BC. Kaiser noted that the patriarchs spent a total of 215 years living in the land of Canaan, which would date the beginning of Abram's journey to around 2092, when he was seventy-five years old.[3]

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Abram's family originated in southern Mesopotamia in a place known as Ur of the Chaldees (see Genesis 11:27-28). Mesopotamia is home to some of the world's oldest civilizations, dating back nearly twelve thousand years. The name *Mesopotamia* is from two Greek words meaning "between the rivers."[4] The Euphrates and Tigris ("Hiddekel," KJV) rivers are

the most prominent topographical features in this region and are mentioned in the Creation narratives (see Genesis 2:10-14). These rivers flow from north to south, emptying into the Persian Gulf. They were the primary reason that urban life developed in this part of the Ancient Near East (ANE), where the great empires of the Assyrians and later Babylonians flourished.

Ur was the capital of ancient Sumer, a prosperous trading and commercial center which was strategically located on the main trade routes in Mesopotamia.[5] According to Genesis 11:27, Abram was the oldest son of Terah; his brothers were named Nahor and Haran, who died while the family lived in Ur. Abram and Nahor were both married, and Abram's wife was named Sarai; she was described as "barren," meaning she was unable to give birth to children (see Genesis 11:30). After the death of Haran, Terah moved his family north, along the Euphrates River valley to Haran, which was located about 600 miles north of Ur. Terah's plan was to enter the land of Canaan; however, when they reached Haran, they settled down and remained there for several years. While the family was in Haran, Terah died, after living 205 years. We are not told how long Abram and his family remained in Haran before departing for Canaan. At some point during his stay, Abram heard the call of God to leave and travel to Canaan.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Abram: the chief patriarch of the Hebrew people. His life and the lives of his descendants began at Genesis 11:27 and continues through Genesis 50:20. Abram's name was changed to Abraham, one of the signs of God's unique covenant relationship with his family (see Genesis 17:5).

Eliezer: a descendant of Damascus's; a servant of Abram's and the designated heir of Abram's possessions, should he and Sarai not have a son (see Genesis 15:2-5).

Lot: the nephew of Abram.

Sarai: the wife of Abram. Her name was changed to Sarah in Genesis 17:15.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Altar (12:7)—Hebrew: *mizbeach* (miz-bay'-akh): a place of slaughter, sacrifice.

Blessing (12:2)—Hebrew: *berakah* (ber-aw-kaw'): a benefit, present.

Families (12:3)—Hebrew: *mishpachah* (mish-paw-khaw'): clans; tribes; relatives; "peoples" (NIV).

Land (12:1)—Hebrew: *erets* (eh'-rets): earth; country.

Nation (12:2)—Hebrew: *goy* (go'-ee): people; herds.

Vision (15:1)—Hebrew: *machazeh* (makh-az-eh'): a sight, appearance.

Yahweh (12:1)—Hebrew: *Yhvh* (yeh-ho-vee'): the proper name of the God of Israel; "Lord" (KJV/NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Double Blessing
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. God's Call to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3)
B. Abram's Act of Obedience (Genesis 12:4-5, 7)
C. God's Promise of Posterity (Genesis 15:1-5)
D. Abram Believed the Lord (Genesis 15:6-7)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Double Blessing

In the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* Walter Ewell states that "God's intention and desire to bless humanity is a central focus of his covenant relationships. For this reason, the concept of blessing pervades the biblical record"; he goes on to say that there are "two distinct ideas . . . . First, a blessing was a public declaration of a favored status with God. Second, the blessing endowed power for prosperity and success."[6] When God has blessed your life, it informs, invigorates, and determines every phase and step of your life. Hence, when we are living in an overflow of God's favor, we should embrace and enjoy the journey, even when it is difficult.

The word *bless* is a key biblical concept and is used more than 330 times in the Bible. The word as well as a variation of it ("blessing") appears five times in Genesis 12:1-3, which suggests that it is a central focus of the covenant between God and Abram.

The word *bless* is translated from the Hebrew word *Barak*, which literally means "to kneel" and implies an act of adoration toward God. The word *bless* appears first in Genesis 1:22, when God blesses the sea creatures, birds, and every living thing: "And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply." The very first word of God to Adam was blessed: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis 1:28a).

Throughout the Scriptures we are reminded that the whole of creation depends upon God for its continued existence and function. Blessing is the central tenet of the covenant that is expressed through the word *Barak*. Abram was blessed and his life took on a different tone and direction when God declared that He would bless him and he in turn would be a blessing. There is a double blessing in this statement: Abram would be blessed and in turn he would be a blessing.

B. Biblical Background

Abram experienced the grace and favor of God in an amazing way. God made a promise to Abram before he asked for anything. God took the first step and showed to Abram and future generations that He alone is sovereign and is unlike any power in the universe. In these actions of God, we see repeatedly the patience and kindness of God in initiating His promise and in fulfilling it. Regarding Abram's life and the lives of his descendants, we see the repeated cycle of God's favor in the life of this family. The cycle of invitation, obedience, promise, faith, and blessing that Abram experienced is repeated throughout Scripture. We see it in the lives of Jacob, David, Deborah, Mary, and Paul, and throughout the history of the church. As we grow in grace, we experience the miraculous power of God in the same way (see Romans 5:1-5; 2 Peter 1:4-9).

Even though Abram trusted God, he impatiently tried to force God to move when He was not ready (see Genesis 16). Scripture reminds us that God's ways are not like our ways, and His thoughts are not like our thoughts (see Isaiah 55:8-9). God called Abram to separate himself from the three primary influences in his life—from "your country," from "your people," and from "your father's house." God removed every obstacle from the life of Abram that would stand in the way of his putting complete trust in God (see Matthew 16:24-26). Our faith in God, just as in Abram's experience, grows and matures as we align our lives with God's plan and purpose. God's self-revelation of Himself to Abram became the framework for Abram's relationship with God (see Genesis 15:1, 7). Abram came to see God as not only the source of his provision but also as the preserver of his legacy. The remainder of the book of Genesis is anchored in the blessing that God promised Abram and the subsequent fulfillment throughout the generations in the lives of his descendants.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God's Call to Abram

(Genesis 12:1-3)

NOW THE LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Verse 1. The passage begins with the call of Abram to leave and follow God (see Nehemiah 9:7; Isaiah 41:9; 51:2; Hebrews 11:8). There are two imperative commands in the passage. An *imperative* command in the Bible is one that absolutely must be obeyed. The first imperative is found in verse 1a: "Get thee out . . ." This was a command to leave everyone and everything behind. The second imperative is found at the end of verse 2: "and thou shalt be a blessing." The biblical writer does not inform us how Abram received the revelation of God, nor are we given any other details regarding the time period that this occurred. Nor are we told how Abram came to know who God was, given that he had lived in a pagan land. He simply received the command to *go*. "Now the Lord said unto Abram, 'Get thee out . . .'" The call of God was a threefold call for Abram to separate from his country, kindred, and father's house. "Country" (Hebrew: *eres*) is in reference to a specific place—in this case, the land of Haran. "Kindred" (Hebrew: *moledet*) denotes the relatives of Abram who continued to live in Haran. The reference to his father's house was not to a physical structure or tent; rather, it denoted his leaving the presence and influence of his father, Terah.

Abram was called to leave everything familiar so that God could bring about something new in his life. He was commanded to leave Haran and travel to a land that the Lord would show him. He had no knowledge of where this place was, only that he would be shown—which implied that God would direct him. God called Abram, not because he was better or more righteous than any other man or woman, but simply out of His own prerogative and grace.

Verses 2–3. God offered a threefold blessing to Abram. First, God promised to make him a great nation, even though he was one man with no children and was married to a woman who could not have children (see Genesis 18:18; 22:17; 24:35; 26:4; Exodus 1:17; Deuteronomy 26:5). Second, God promised Abram that he would be blessed (see Genesis 28:4; Galatians 3:14). For one to be blessed means that he or she lives under God's protection and experiences the unmerited favor of God. Third, God promised to make Abram's name great and that he, ultimately, would be a blessing to others.

All who blessed Abram would be blessed, and all who cursed him would be cursed by God. *Cursed* (Hebrew: *qallel*) means "to diminish, speak ill against, or do things to belittle that person." It is not only the case that men and women are able to curse others; God retains that right to curse those who refuse to obey (see 2 Samuel 16:12; Psalm 90:17; also, Genesis 27:12-13; Deuteronomy 11:28; 28:25; Jeremiah 44:8).

God declared, in no uncertain terms, "I will bless you." In what way did God bless Abram? As one reads Genesis 13:1–25:8—which covers the entire life of Abraham—one sees a man who is blessed in everything that he does. All throughout his life, Abram walked in God's gracious favor. When he and his family left Haran, he had no children because his wife was barren. But at the end of his life, he had many sons and daughters. The last thing that is said about Abraham in Genesis 25:8 is that he died at a ripe-old age as an old man who was satisfied with life.

Notice that in this passage, God is the one who made the promise to Abram, and He was the one who guaranteed its fulfillment. That God is the one who blesses is amplified by the number of times the word "I" is used in reference to God in the call of Abram: *I* will show you a land, *I* will make you a great nation, *I* bless you, *I* bless those who bless you . . . *I* will cause you to be a blessing to the whole earth . . . ." It is the emphatic "I" of God's presence that is the key to Abram's being blessed. God stood behind His word. God guaranteed it with His name.

These promises were not dependent upon anything that Abram had earned; rather, they were all gracious gifts bestowed out of the graciousness of God's love. All that God promised Abram, He delivered. God made his name great. He provided (in abundance) the gold, silver, herds, and flocks that made Abram a very wealthy man, along with his generations after him. He protected Abram from his enemies and those who sought to shatter his dreams.

B. Abram's Act of Obedience (Genesis 12:4-5, 7)

So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. . . . And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

Verses 4-5. Abram responded to the call of God with complete obedience. While living in Haran, Abram had accumulated a great deal of possessions, both material and human. According to Genesis 14:14, Abram

had a small army of 318 trained men who had been born in his house. At the time he departed Haran, he was seventy-five years old, and he took Lot, his nephew, with him. Abram faced two obstacles to realizing the promise of God. He was an old man when he left Haran and his wife was barren (see Genesis 11:30). It would take a tremendous depth of faith to trust God, given these two limiting factors. The mention of his age set the stage for what would be a twenty-five-year wait for the promise of God to come to fruition (see Genesis 16:16; 17:1, 24; 21:5; 25:7). As previously stated, Abram had acquired much in Haran, and he was accompanied by Sarai, his wife, and all the servants and slaves he had acquired while living in Haran. There is no travel log given; the narrator simply states that Abram departed Haran to go to Canaan—and the very next line states that he arrived in Canaan. The distance between Canaan and Haran was more than three hundred miles across very rugged and arid land.

Verses 6-7. The very first place Abram reached in Canaan was Sichem (Shechem), which was located on the plains of Moreh, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. This area would become part of Samaria during the time of Jesus and was the site of Jacob's well at Sychar (see John 4:7, 20-22). After crossing the Jordan, the Israelites were to gather at Ebal and Gerizim and there recite the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28:1-49 (see Deuteronomy 27:1-9, 11-14). Shechem would figure prominently throughout Israel's history, both as a place of remembrance and as a rallying place for major events in their history (see Genesis 33:18; 34:4-6; Joshua 20:7; 24:1, 32; 1 Kings 12:1, 25; also compare Deuteronomy 11:30). In a postscript to the verse, we are told that Abram faced a more menacing obstacle to settling the land—Canaanites. The land promised to him by God was occupied by another nation of people who had lived in that region for nearly a thousand years.

In verse 7, the Lord appeared to Abram again; this time, God appeared in a theophany. *Theophany* comes from two Greek words: *theo*, which means "God"; and *phany*, which means "manifestation" or "appearance." The appearance of the Lord to Abram was not a human appearance; rather, it was a physical appearance of some sort that was clearly something he had never seen. Throughout the Bible, there have been manifestations of the presence of God in some visible form (see Genesis 3:8; 17:1; 18:1-3; Judges 13:3-6; Joshua 5:13-15; 2 Samuel 24:16). We cannot always explain the ways of God and how God moves in the lives of His people. We are not told what this appearance looked like nor are we given any other details about the appearance of the Lord. What is central to the experience of Abram is the reaffirmation of the promise of land and seed. Abram did what all men and women should do when in the presence of the Lord—he worshipped. Out of a deep sense of reverence and gratitude, Abram built an altar and there worshipped and may have offered sacrifices to the Lord.

C. God's Promise of Posterity (Genesis 15:1-5)

AFTER THESE things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the

steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

Verses 1-7 contain a conversation between Abram and God. This conversation begins with an imperative command from God and ends with the affirmation of land and seed in verse 5. There is no reference to the amount of time that elapsed between the initial promise in Genesis 12:1-3 and the reaffirmation of that promise in these verses. In the dialogue, God speaks in verses 1, 4-5, 7—and Abram speaks in verses 2-3. The passage begins with a transitional statement referring to the events of chapters 13–14. In chapters 13–14, a series of life-altering events happened to Abram. He returned to Canaan after a near-disastrous trip to Egypt. The family wealth began to lead to strife between the herdsmen of Lot and Abram and the two ultimately split, with Lot going to live in Sodom. Abram rescued Lot and his family, who had been captured in a regional conflict. As the chapter ended, Abram met with Melchizedek the priest of Salem and gave him a tithe (see 14:17-24).

The conversation began with Abram's receiving a divine revelation in the form of a vision. The Hebrew word *mahazeh* denotes a supernatural experience with the presence of God. There were other occasions in the Old and New Testaments where individuals experienced visions of God's presence (see Genesis 46:2; Numbers 12:6; 1 Samuel 9:9; Ezekiel 1:1; 3:4; Daniel 10:1-16; Acts 10:10-17). These were always occasions in which a message was conveyed, a promised made, or a task given.

In the vision, Abram heard the voice of Yahweh saying, "Fear not, Abram," which was an unmistakable summons not to be apprehensive about his future. Age and the barrenness of Sarai had been at the forefront of his mind. How would this promise come to pass when there were limiting obstacles to the fulfillment of the promise? Abram was challenged to trust God even when the promises looked more like an illusion than a reality. Yet, the voice of God spoke to the uncertainty that Abram faced. God will comfort His people in moments of deep stress (see Genesis 26:24; 46:3; Numbers 21:34; Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalm 27:1; Matthew 10:28-31). Yahweh would be his shield (Hebrew: *magen*), literally a weapon of warfare used to protect the soldier in battle. "Shield" is used as a metaphor in Scripture to reinforce God's protection of His people (see Deuteronomy 33:29; Psalms 3:3; 18:35; 84:9). Yahweh concludes the reaffirmation of the promise with hyperbolic language of being Abram's "exceeding great reward." This was not a prize; moreover, it denoted God's great blessings to be bestowed upon Abram for believing God when his circumstances stated otherwise (see Ruth 2:12; Psalm 16:5).

Verses 2–3. Abram responded to Yahweh by calling Him by both divine names *Adonai Yahweh*, a sure sign of his deep respect for God (see Deuteronomy 3:24; 9:26). The use of both divine names signified the recognition that Yahweh is the Sovereign One, whose power is unlimited. The question of Abram is couched in the reality of his circumstances. *What will you do for me? I am old and I have no children, specifically no son.* According to

some ancient Near East customs, heirs could be slaves or servants. Abram may have been thinking about how to ensure that he had an heir that he wanted to inherit his possessions. Eliezer was a steward whom Abram hired to manage his vast wealth. But he was not his first choice to be his heir.

Abram pleaded with God, but not out of anger; rather, he was desperate for a son because his and Sarai's time was running out. "Behold, to me thou has given no seed"; these were words that acknowledged that his life and future were in the hands of God. The reference to "one born in his house" may or may not have been an additional reference to Eliezer. Abram laid the matter of the promise and its fulfillment before God. Is this not what we should do when we are faced with circumstances that seek to negate the promises of God?

The Lord was patient with Abram. Yahweh spoke again and reminded Abram that neither Eliezer nor anyone else born in his house would be his heir. Abram's heir, though yet unborn, would come from his bowels (see 2 Samuel 7:12). Yahweh led Abram out into the darkness of the night and invited him to look toward the heavens. As he gazed at the vastness of the universe, all he could see were twinkling stars silhouetted against the black canvas of the heavens. Yahweh challenged Abram to count the stars—an impossible task. As innumerable as the stars are, so would be his descendants (see Deuteronomy 1:10; 10:22). The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:29).

D. Abram Believed the Lord (Genesis 15:6-7)

And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

The lesson concludes with one of the most important theological statements in the Bible. Abram believed the Lord—that is, he believed everything that had been told and promised to him by Yahweh. He trusted the Lord even though he could not see how the promise would come to fruition. "Counted" (Hebrew: *hasad*) means "to declare to be so" and denotes that one is making a determination about someone or something. What was counted to Abram? His unswerving faith in the Lord. He did not just believe the words of the Lord; rather, he placed his trust in the Lord. The Lord declared Abram to be righteous (Hebrew: *sedaqa*). The Hebrew word can mean both righteous and justice; however, in this context, it means "to be morally and ethically right." These words form the bedrock of the biblical doctrine of justification, wherein we are declared righteous before God based purely on our faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 4:3-6, 9, 20-25; Galatians 3:6-14; Hebrews 11:8; James 2:23; see also Psalm 106:31). We are all saved by grace through our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary (see Ephesians 2:8-10). The Lord spoke again and reminded Abram that all that he had received and been blessed to possess came purely from an act of grace. It was Yahweh who had brought him and his family out of Ur of the Chaldees and had given them the land to inherit (see Genesis 11:27-31; Nehemiah 9:7-8; Acts 7:2-4).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

For twenty-five years Abram lived with God's promise that one day his (Abram's) seed would be as numerous as the stars. When he first heard those words of promise he was an old man with an old and barren wife. The reality of his circumstances was in complete conflict with the words that he heard from God. Despite all the obstacles to the fulfillment of God's Word, Abram persevered. Throughout those twenty-five years God reaffirmed the words spoken and reassured Abram that He had not forgotten him and Sarai. There are times when we too are called to live between the promise and the fulfillment of that promise. How do we handle those days of delay without allowing doubt to creep in and rob us of the joy of waiting? Abram shows us that even when we cannot see the end, God is still sovereign, and His Word will never fail. As we wait upon the Lord, He renews our faith, reminding us that often our darkest days are periods of "momentary light afflictions." We can trust God because He has never failed us and never will.

PRAYER

God of grace and mercy, may we in the deepest moments of affliction learn to trust You without wavering. Grant us the serenity in knowing that You will never leave us or forsake us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 29–September 4, 2022)

The Call of Abram

MONDAY, August 29: "The Faith of Abraham" (Hebrews 11:8-19)
TUESDAY, August 30: "'How Lovely Is Your Dwelling Place!'" (Psalm 84)
WEDNESDAY, August 31: "God Reckons Righteousness Apart from Works" (Romans 4:1-12)
THURSDAY, September 1: "A Promised Inheritance" (Romans 4:13-25)
FRIDAY, September 2: "Abraham Rejoices in Christ" (John 8:51-59)
SATURDAY, September 3: "First Steps of Faith" (Genesis 11:27-32)
SUNDAY, September 4: "Called to Be a Blessing" (Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7)

Notes

1. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 55.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. J. Carl Laney, *Concise Bible Atlas: A Geographical Survey of Bible History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 23.
5. Ibid., 29.
6. Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 70.

September 11, 2022 **Lesson 2**

GOD CHOOSES THE YOUNGER TWIN

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: An Unexpected Choice
Youth Topic: An Unexpected Choice

Children
General Lesson Title: God Chooses the Younger Twin
Children's Topic: Jacob Took Advantage of Esau

Devotional Reading
Psalm 75

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Genesis 25:19-34
Print Passage: Genesis 25:19b-34
Key Verse: Genesis 25:23

Children
Background Scripture: Genesis 25:19-34
Print Passage: Genesis 25:21, 24-34
Key Verse: Genesis 25:23

Genesis 25:19b-34—KJV

19 Abraham begat Isaac:
20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.
21 And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.
22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.
23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.
24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.
25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

Genesis 25:19b-34—NIV

19 Abraham became the father of Isaac,
20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.
21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.
22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.
23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."
24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.
25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.

26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.
27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.
28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.
29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:
30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.
31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.
32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?
33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.
34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.
27 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents.
28 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.
29 Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished.
30 He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)
31 Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."
32 "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"
33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.
34 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We sometimes make rash decisions that are not in our best long-term interest. How do we respond when life doesn't go the way we think it should? God's plans supersede ours.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Reflect on the long-term impact of decisions made by the characters in the story.
2. Empathize with the temptation to manipulate situations to one's own benefit.
3. Commit to practicing restraint to support the flourishing of others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In both Judaism and the history of Christianity, this story demonstrates God's unmerited grace and love: although Jacob clearly wronged his brother, God chose Jacob to continue working out God's salvation plan through Jacob's family, and God did not renege on this choice even after Jacob's cataclysmic efforts to ensure the birthright for himself.

—In ancient Semitic cultures, birthright in general referred to the right of children to inherit from the father. However, the eldest son would receive a special inheritance upon the death

of the father. Often, this would be double the inheritance of other siblings. The birthright, then, was an official mark of the son's rightful place in the legacy of his father and ancestors.

—This passage describes a dysfunctional family: extreme favoritism, competition instead of cooperation, badly misaligned priorities, and deliberate manipulation for selfish gain. The ethical lessons to be learned from Jacob's family are really in the negative. However, when we remember that this is the family God chose to carry out His plan of salvation, God's unconditional love, patience, and grace emerge as the true ethical highlights of the passage.

—The prophecy of Genesis 25:23 demonstrates that Jacob's manipulation of Esau was unnecessary: God had already foretold that Jacob would receive the birthright. Instead, Jacob did not trust God's promise or timing—and by trying to force God's hand, Jacob ended up creating a family tragedy that had him escaping for his life to distant relatives.

—Jacob's experience with God highlights not only God's patience but also God's determination to fulfill His words. God does not give up on us, nor do God's redemptive plans go awry. God proves His words reliable and His character trustworthy.

—Although Jacob's manipulation of Esau is clearly wrong, it is equally clear that Scripture judges Esau harshly for his actions as well. From God's perspective, the spiritual birthright Isaac would pass on involved his family's role in God's plan of salvation. By treating his birthright in such a cavalier manner, Esau showed that he did not take this aspect of his heritage seriously.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Old Testament scholars are not sure of the exact dates of the events covered in this week's lesson. In Genesis 23:1-2 and 24:47, we have two records of Sarah's death. One possible explanation is that one is a recapitulation of Sarah's life. Given these factors, the most we can do is speculate about the dates of the span of Isaac's life, believed to be somewhere around 1895–1715 BC. Based upon the reading of the biblical text in Genesis 24–25, Isaac married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son (see Genesis 24:47; also 24:15). Shortly after his marriage Isaac introduced Rebekah to his mother, Sarah, who died shortly afterward at the age of 127.

Genesis 25 contains the record of Abraham's marriage to Keturah (see verse 1). In his old age, Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac (see verse 5), and he gave his other sons and sent them away. Abraham died at the age of 175 years old and was buried by Isaac and Ishmael (see verses 7-9). Verses 12-18 list the descendants of Ishmael and where they all settled. Genesis 25:19 begins the generations of Isaac, who married Rebekah when he was forty years of age. We have no way of knowing whether Abraham met or knew Rebekah. There is no mention of this in the biblical record.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

After his marriage to Rebekah, Isaac settled in the region of the Negev (sometimes spelled Negeb). This area was in the southern regions of Canaan, west of the southern portion of the Dead Sea and east of the land of the Philistines. The region is characterized by its dry and arid terrain. According to Genesis 25:11b, Isaac lived in a place called "Beer Lahai Roi" (NKJV). Archaeologists and biblical scholars have struggled to correctly identify the location of Beer Lahai Roi

(see Genesis 24:62), where Isaac was reported to have lived. Further, Isaac did migrate to the land of the Philistines during the course of famine in the Negev (see Genesis 26:1). Unlike Isaac's father, Abraham, God commanded Isaac not to travel to Egypt to escape the famine. Isaac and Rebekah were blessed with two sons. In ancient Semitic cultures, "birthright" referred to the right of the firstborn son to receive a special inheritance upon the death of his father. In most cases, it was a double portion of all the father's possessions, which would mark the oldest son as heir of his father's legacy. The birthright was one of the most prominent gifts that a father could bequeath to a son. It not only gave the oldest son physical wealth, but also, it bestowed the goodwill and reputation of the father upon the son. This could be most valuable when dealing with other families in the region. Becoming the next patriarch in the family implied continuing the family legacy through the next generation and beyond.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Esau: the oldest of the fraternal twins (Esau and Jacob) born to Isaac and Rebekah. He later became the father of the Edomites.

Isaac: the second generation of the patriarchs. He was the firstborn son of Abraham and Sarah.

Jacob: the youngest of the fraternal twins born to Isaac and Rebekah.

Rebekah: the wife of Isaac. Her father was named Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram; she was the sister of Laban (see Genesis 25:20).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Barren (verse 21a)—Hebrew: *aqar* (aw-kawr'): sterile; "childless" (NIV).

Conceived (verse 21b)— Hebrew: *harah* (haw-raw'): "became pregnant" (NIV).

Inquire (verse 22)—Hebrew: *darash* (daw-rash'): to resort to, seek; ask; question; "enquire" (KJV).

Serve (verse 23)—Hebrew: *abad* (aw-bad'): to work; become a slave.

Took hold (verse 26)—Hebrew: *achaz* (aw-khaz'): to grasp, take hold, take possession; grip; "grasping" (NIV).

Were fulfilled (verse 24)—Hebrew: *male* or *mala* (maw-lay'): was full; filled; accomplished; became full; finished; "time came" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Decisions, Decisions, Decisions!
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Isaac Prays for Rebekah (Genesis 25:19b-21)
- B. Rebekah Gives Birth (Genesis 25:22-26)
- C. The Difference between the Brothers (Genesis 25:27-28)
- D. Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Decisions, Decisions, Decisions!

Over the course of our lives, we will make tens of thousands of decisions. Some of these decisions are minute and we may give little regard to them. Then there are times when the decisions we make can have far-reaching consequences that will last a lifetime.

These decisions may not only impact us personally, but they can also have far-reaching consequences that can span generations.

Today, we remember the 9/11 attack on America. On September 11, 2001, the United States experienced a carefully crafted plan to terrorize the American people. Terrorists highjacked airplanes and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York City and into the Pentagon near Washington, D.C. Thousands of people were killed and untold damage was inflicted upon the minds and hearts of the American people. President George Bush made the decision to bring the perpetrators to justice. He ordered the U.S. military to invade Afghanistan and bring the mastermind of this sinister plot to justice. Little did anyone know that it would be nearly ten years before Osama Bin Laden would be found and killed by Navy Seals.

The killing of Bin Laden did not bring an end to the presence of American forces in Afghanistan. It would be another ten years before all the American troops would be withdrawn. The decision by President Bush to bring Bin Laden to justice was a decision whose consequences spanned more than twenty years and four presidents, eventually becoming America's longest war.

There are times when we, too, make decisions that may seem to be inconsequential. Yet, they can have long-term effects that last even beyond our lifetimes. Throughout the Scriptures we are reminded to weigh our decisions against the plan and purpose of God.

B. Biblical Background

The sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau is one of the well-known stories of the Bible. Jacob clearly cheated and swindled his brother out of his birthright. Yet, the irony of the account is that throughout the story we see the love, unmerited favor, and grace of God at work in Jacob's life. Without any explanation, God chose Jacob to continue working out His plan of salvation through the family of Abraham. One of the telling truths of the narrative is that despite all that Jacob did, his actions had no bearing on God's promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's family.

This passage describes a dysfunctional family: extreme favoritism, competition instead of cooperation, badly misaligned priorities, and deliberate manipulation for selfish gain. When one examines the actions of Jacob's family, there are few positive lessons to be gained. Yet, even in this we see God's patience, unconditional love, and forgiveness. Further, we see that the redemptive plan of God cannot be thwarted by human efforts that are driven by personal ambition.

The Key Verse, Genesis 25:23, reminds us that all of Jacob's plans and schemes were unnecessary. God already foretold that Jacob would be the heir of Isaac's legacy and blessing. In the end, Jacob destroyed the trust and love between he and his brother, ultimately having to flee for his life. The passage further highlights that God is longsuffering toward us and that nothing we do changes His love toward us. While Jacob was the initiator of the plot, Esau was not without blame. He sold what was rightfully his to satisfy a momentary desire for food. In doing this, Esau showed that he did not take this aspect of his heritage seriously.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Isaac Prays for Rebekah
(Genesis 25:19b-21)

Abraham begat Isaac: and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah. At that time, he did not know that she would be barren—unable to conceive and give birth. Just as Sarah was barren, so Rebekah was afflicted with the same condition. One would hardly expect that the wife chosen by God would be barren (see Genesis 24:10-14). We do not know when Isaac realized that Rebekah was unable to bear children.

When Abraham and Sarah were faced with the same situation, rather than pray, they sought to resolve the crisis themselves. In contrast to the actions of his father, Isaac intreated (Hebrew: *atar*) the Lord for his wife. *Atar* means "to pray, plead on behalf of someone or some situation" (see 1 Samuel 1:11, 27). Throughout the Scriptures we are reminded to bring our concerns, anxieties, and trouble before the throne of grace (see Psalms 50:15; 91:5; Isaiah 58:9; 65:24; Philippians 4:6-8; Hebrews 4:16). There is no indication in the text regarding the length of time that Isaac prayed. The suggestion of the text is that this was an active, ongoing laying of his request before the Lord.

Isaac's prayers were not prayed in vain. He and Rebekah waited twenty years for the Lord to answer his prayer. Here, we have a clear demonstration of Isaac's faith and confidence in God. The Lord heard his prayer and Rebekah conceived. Prayer is our most powerful weapon against stress, anxiety, and the rising tide of struggle (see 1 Chronicles 5:20; 2 Chronicles 33:13).

B. Rebekah Gives Birth
(Genesis 25:22-26)

And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

Verse 24. Rebekah had been told by God that she was pregnant with twins (verse 23). Even before their births, the twins struggled within her womb (verse 22). Rebekah had been told by God that there were two nations in her womb. One would be stronger than the other, and the older would serve the younger. This tension between the unborn sons caused Rebekah a great deal of pain. When the term of her pregnancy had reached its fullness the boys were born, just as it had been foretold.

Verse 25 gives us a description of the twins, who were not identical in any way. The first to be born had two unique characteristics. First, he had a reddish (Hebrew: *admoni*) complexion that covered his entire body. Second, his body was covered with hair, resembling a garment. Children are rarely, if ever, born with hair on their bodies. They named him Esau, which reflected these unique characteristics.

Verse 26. After Esau's birth, his brother came out of the womb grasping Esau's heel. He was named Jacob. Victor Hamilton noted that "the older brother is named in accordance with his appearance, and the younger brother in accordance with his actions."[1] The actions of the younger twin, even before their births, was an indication of what the relationship between the two brothers would be like as they grew older. Esau saw Jacob as a supplanter, whose scheming and selfishness were always on display (see Genesis 27:36).

C. The Difference between the Brothers (Genesis 25:27-28)

And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Verse 27. Victor Hamilton noted that the fraternal rivalry between Jacob and Esau was like that of Cain and Abel's, and Ishmael and Isaac's.[2] "Both times the elder brother (as in the NT parable, Luke 15:25-32) emerges in a less than desirable light."[3] We are not told how much time had passed since the twins were born. The writer simply stated that they grew, obviously to the point where they had developed unique skills. Esau was described as a "cunning hunter," a man who understood the ways of the field. Here is a reference to someone who was thoroughly familiar with the ways of animals, and he knew how to track and kill them. Jacob, on the other hand, was identified as a plain (Hebrew: *tam*) man living in tents. The Hebrew word *tam* denotes someone who is calm, relaxed, upright, without sin, or is honest. These words hardly describe Jacob, who was shrewd and deeply selfish. It may be that the proper interpretation is intended to show the difference between the two brothers. One is a fearless, rugged outdoorsman. The other is a homebody, content to remain around the tent, taking care of simple chores.

Verse 28. In this verse, we see one of the reasons for the sibling rivalry. Isaac loved Esau because he was a hunter and he brought meat to his father. Rebekah loved Jacob for reasons that are left unexplained. This favoritism by the parents may have been a leading reason for why the animosity between the brothers was so fierce at times. Parents can play a huge role in helping their children to learn to love others in the family, especially their siblings.

D. Esau Sells His Birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34)

And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: and Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

Verse 29. The writer of Genesis rarely provides information relating to the passage of time. We have no way of knowing how much time passed between the events of the previous verses and those of this passage. The narrative is written to provide the details of how Jacob came to possess the rights of the firstborn son. It further explains how Esau came to bear the term *Edom*; thus, this is also a naming story. Accordingly, Jacob was home, cooking and preparing stew (Hebrew: *zid*), when Esau came in from a long day of hunting, exhausted and famished. The Hebrew word *zid* denotes

a range of meanings and usages in the Old Testament, such as to boil or cook something or to be proud—or it can express an act of presumption (see Deuteronomy 17:12-13; 18:20-22). Allen Ross has suggested, "Jacob's boiling the pottage seemed a simple act, but by the choice of this word the narrator implies that Jacob was hunting his prey and that he was acting presumptuously."[4]

Verse 30. Esau insisted that Jacob give him some of the stew he was preparing. The language of the text expresses in hyperbolic speech Esau's state of mind and physical state. He was near exhaustion and thought that his life was ending for a lack of food. It would be the same as someone saying, "I am so hungry I can eat a cow." Obviously, one cannot eat an entire cow, but the statement expresses the depth of one's hunger. Here, again, we have the repetition of the Hebrew word *admoni* (reddish), which explains how Edomites came to be associated with the color of red. Allen Ross noted that in using this word the writer sought to paint the Edomites, Esau's descendants, as impulsive and profane.[5]

Verses 31-33. One assumption that can be implied from the reading of the passage is the possibility that Jacob and Esau had had previous conversations about the rights of the firstborn. Did Jacob know about the patriarchal promise of God and therefore wanted to claim rights to the promise? Is it possible that Rebekah told Jacob that God had promised that the older son would be subservient to the younger son? We have no definitive way of knowing what Jacob knew about the promise made to Abraham and passed along to Isaac. Without a moment of hesitation, Jacob used the stew as a bargaining chip to acquire the birthright. Had Jacob planned this day, knowing the time that Esau normally returned from hunting? It is conceivable that this was all planned.

Esau replied to Jacob that he was at the point of starving to death. What good would a birthright do him in death? he reasoned. Not to be deterred, Jacob demanded that Esau take an oath and swear that he was trading all his birthrights for the stew. Esau swore to Jacob that the birthrights were his and that he was relinquishing any claims to them.

Verse 34. After agreeing to give his birthright to Jacob, Esau received the bread and stew prepared by his younger brother. He ate the meal and afterwards departed. Esau satisfied his craving and then departed without a word. The writer said that this action showed how little Esau regarded his birthright. Allen Ross stated, "The report that he despised the birthright seems to summarize the entire event."[6] In the mind and actions of Esau the birthright was worthless—it was of no tangible value to him.

In some ways this passage teaches us how many people devalue the gifts of God. The greatest gifts are those of salvation and eternal life. Yet, so often they are seen as worthless to those who are perishing in sin.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The saga of how Jacob swindled Esau out of his birthright offers several valuable lessons for Christians living in the twenty-first century. First, we see how delicate can be the relationships that exist within a family. Isaac loved Esau for his rugged individualism and his skills as a hunter. Rebekah loved the quiet demeanor of Jacob and she no doubt nurtured him and had to have shared the vision she

received from the Lord regarding the younger being served by the elder brother. Each parent bears some responsibility for what ultimately happened in their family between their sons. It is critical that parents be impartial when dealing with their children.

Second, we come face-to-face with a man who lacked appreciation for the things that are important in life. Within the ancient culture and in some African cultures today, there was/is nothing more valuable than the rights of the firstborn son. Esau allowed his momentary light affliction of hunger and thirst to cast aside the most precious gift that his father could have bequeathed to him. How often does this attitude rear its ugly head in African-American communities across America? Third, over all of this was the sovereign will and plan of God who, despite Jacob's trickery, acted to carry out His will. While we would consider this to be an affront to justice, God's plans do not always align with our expectations. His ways are beyond our comprehension and beyond our capacity to alter what He has purposed. Jacob schemed, but God was working out His will during the lives of Esau and Jacob.

PRAYER

God of grace and mercy, we pray that we may love our neighbor as we love ourselves and You. Grant that we may never engage in activities that will shame Your name. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 5-11, 2022)

God Chooses the Younger Twin

MONDAY, September 5: "The First Will Be Last" (Luke 13:23-30)
TUESDAY, September 6: "God Is Great and Gracious" (Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20)
WEDNESDAY, September 7: "God Judges Rightly" (Psalm 75)
THURSDAY, September 8: "God's Word Does Not Fail" (Romans 9:6-16)
FRIDAY, September 9: "Who Can Argue with God?" (Romans 9:17-29)
SATURDAY, September 10: "God Blesses Jacob" (Genesis 28:10-22)
SUNDAY, September 11: "God Is Free to Choose" (Genesis 25:19-34)

Notes

1. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 178.
2. Ibid., 181.
3. Ibid.
4. Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 449–50.
5. Ibid., 450.
6. Ibid., 451.

September 18, 2022 **Lesson 3**

JACOB IS CALLED ISRAEL

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Persevere in Times of Difficulty
Youth Topic: Persevere in Times of Difficulty

Children
General Lesson Title: A New Name for Jacob
Children's Topic: Keep a-Pluggin' Away

Devotional Reading
Romans 11:25-32

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32
Print Passage: Genesis 32:22-32
Key Verse: Genesis 32:28

Children
Background Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32
Print Passage: Genesis 32:22-31
Key Verse: Genesis 32:28

Genesis 32:22-32—KJV

22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.
23 And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.
24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.
25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.
26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.
27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.
28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

Genesis 32:22-32—NIV

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.
23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions.
24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.
25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.
26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."
27 The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.
28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.
30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.
31 And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.
32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.
30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."
31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.
32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We often feel alone in our struggles. How do we persist in times of struggle? Jacob persevered in his struggle and experienced blessing.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand how Jacob experienced blessing as the result of an exhausting and extended struggle with the stranger.
2. Anticipate blessings to emerge from struggles in life.
3. Persevere in life's struggles and wrestle with them until blessings result.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The fact that God initiated this wrestling match with Jacob—when Jacob was alone, without distractions, and unable to avoid facing his issues—demonstrates that not only is God accepting of our struggles with him, but God actively encourages us to face them, and Him, head-on, rewarding our struggle for understanding and faith with God's blessings of relationship and mission.

—Jacob's grandfather Abraham received the first covenant blessing from God, and Jacob tried to trick Esau out of their family heritage. Jacob's demand for a blessing indicates that he finally understood that God's blessing cannot be usurped but only given freely and comes only through a personal relationship with God (and thus the renaming).

—In the ancient Near East, fathers and occasionally kings renamed individuals. These new names were always descriptive of some newly emerged/demonstrated quality of character. God renames Jacob, simultaneously

expressing a new relationship with Jacob and highlighting a significant change in Jacob's character from being a deceiver to engaging with God.

—Naming Jacob "Israel" foreshadowed the nation of Israel, telling the reader that Jacob was now a recipient, with Abraham, of God's blessing that his descendants would be a great nation (see Genesis 12:1-5).

—Wrestling all night would be an intense struggle by any measure; Jacob gave this match everything he had and would not give up until God responded. God's response was life-changing blessing.

—God's blessing came when Jacob was finally ready to acknowledge God's power and submit to God (asking for a blessing acknowledges God as the superior), as did God's reminder of God's ultimate power (easily dislocated Jacob's hip).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Biblical chronology, particularly that of the Old Testament, is an inexact science, especially the pre-history of Genesis 1–11. We have no way of accurately pinpointing the date of Creation or the Flood. Scholars have sought to establish event timelines based upon the information provided in the biblical text. In some instances, for example, the Babylonian Exile and the period of restoration can be dated with reasonable assurance. When it comes to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—we encounter the same uncertainty as with biblical pre-history. Often the dates established for the patriarchs are tied to other events outside of the biblical text. We are not sure of the dates when the patriarchs lived. Thus, determining the exact dates that Jacob traveled between Canaan (Beer-sheba) and Haran is, at best, an educated guess. What is certain from Genesis is that he was away from Canaan for at least twenty years. When Jacob left the home of his father-in-law, Laban, he reminded him that he had served him for twenty years. "These twenty years I have been with you . . . ." (Genesis 31:38a, NASB).

After enticing Esau to sell his birthright, Jacob next tricked his father into giving him his blessing (see Genesis 27:1-29). This act by Jacob infuriated Esau, who vowed to kill Jacob. Consequently, Jacob was forced to flee his father's tent because of the fury and anger of Esau. Rebekah sent him away to her ancestral home in Haran, where he would spend the next twenty years living with his mother's brother, Laban. During the time when Jacob was away from Canaan his life underwent a dramatic change. In addition to marrying Leah and Rachel, he also had a dream at a place he named Bethel (see Genesis 28:10-19). There, he made a vow that if the Lord would be with him, keep him on his journey, and allow him to return to Canaan, then the Lord would be his God (see Genesis 28:20-22). Jacob returned to Canaan with great wealth and a large family: eleven sons and one daughter. God had blessed Jacob and he was beginning to see the fulfillment of the promise first made to Abraham and passed along to Isaac (see Genesis 12:1-3; 28:10-15).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Laban lived in Haran, a city in the northern part of Mesopotamia. During the patriarchal period, it was a prosperous commercial center. It was also the place where Abram settled after leaving Ur of the Chaldeans and from where he left to journey to Canaan (see Genesis 11:31-32). When Jacob secretly left the home of his father-in-law, he and his family would have traveled along the traditional trade routes that ran from the upper regions of Mesopotamia, through Gilead, Ammon, and into the area where the Jordan River fording point is located.

Geographically, two main roads ran from Mesopotamia into Canaan and then on to Egypt. Jacob would have begun on the International Coastal Highway and near Damascus, taking the southern route known as the King's Highway. This ancient road ran from Damascus to the Gulf of Aqaba. Along this route, Jacob and his family would cross the Jabbok (Hebrew: *yabboq*), meaning "emptying or pouring out." The Jabbok flows from the Amman to the north before heading west to the Jordan River.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jacob: the youngest fraternal twin born to Isaac and Rebekah (see Genesis 25:21-26). According to the biblical text, Jacob and Esau struggled in their mother's womb and at birth, Jacob came forth grabbing his brother's heel. Jacob's name was changed to Israel after he wrestled with God. His sons became the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Alone (verse 24)—Hebrew: *bad* (bad): a separation; apart; separate.

Break(s) (verse 26)—Hebrew: *alah* (aw-law'): go(es) up, ascend(s); approach(es); come(s); "breaketh" (KJV).

Hip (verse 25)—Hebrew: *yarek* (yaw-rake'): thigh; loin; side; base; "hollow of . . . thigh" (KJV).

Prevail(ed) (verse 25)—Hebrew: *yakol* (yaw-kole'): to be (was) able, have (had) power; "overpower" (NIV).

Wrestled (verse 24)—Hebrew: *abaq* (aw-bak'): grappled with; struggled.

Wrestled (verse 25)—Hebrew: *sarah* (saw-raw'): persisted; exerted oneself; persevered; contended.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. At the Jabbok All Alone

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Jacob Reached the Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-23)

B. Alone at the Jabbok (Genesis 32:24-26)

C. Jacob Receives a New Name (Genesis 32:27-29)

D. Jacob Names Peniel (Genesis 32:30-32)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. At the Jabbok All Alone

Throughout his life, Jacob was able to devise a plan or scheme that would get him what he wanted. Beginning with the day he was born, Jacob looked for ways to achieve his ambitions, even at the expense of his own family. In this lesson, the story of Jacob has come full circle. He had been away from home for more than twenty years. Now he had reached a point in his life when he must confront his past, which meant coming face-to-face with his brother, Esau. Jacob was haunted by the prospects that Esau could exact revenge for Jacob's tricking him out of his birthright and then stealing his father's blessing. We have no way of knowing whether he spent much time pondering his past while he lived in Paddan-aram. What is certain is that when he decided to return to Canaan, he was terrified by the prospects of meeting up with Esau (see Genesis 32:7).

Throughout his life, Jacob had been a man without a conscience. Nothing he did ever brought him to the point of apologizing for his actions. Jacob preyed upon his father, who was old, half-blind, and feeble, and tricked him into giving him Esau's blessing. He showed no regret or remorse, nor did he take responsibility for what he had done. Right was what he thought it to be if it served his purpose. We see this attitude today, which is one of the dominant rationales used by people today to justify their actions.

When Jacob reached the boundary of the land of Canaan, he decided to send his family, flocks, and herds ahead of him. We are never told the reason for why he remained behind his entourage. But he found himself alone at the Jabbok. He had acquired wealth beyond his wildest imaginations—but what good would it be if he were dead? He stayed alone and away from the family. He could have had servants remain with him, or even several of his sons. Rather, he remained at the Jabbok alone. And it was here that he spent the night wrestling with a man whom he did not know.

There are times in life when we must be apart from others. It may be that we are contemplating some major decision, or we are struggling with some past actions. These are moments when the Lord can speak to us in ways that get our attention. There are days when we need to be alone to hear God and sense His presence in ways that crowds can impede.

B. Biblical Background

The account of Jacob's wrestling with the angel is one of the most widely known stories in the Old Testament. The account of Jacob's wrestling with an angel has been the subject of many interpretations. One interpretation posits that God initiated the wrestling match with Jacob, while he was alone and without distractions. The narrative in the text has one central purpose, with two ancillary purposes: First, Jacob is forced to confront himself and his relationship with his brother, Esau. He had avoided this

confrontation for twenty years and now he was on the verge of meeting Esau face-to-face. Throughout the journey, Jacob had come to realize that the blessings of God cannot be usurped or gained via trickery. He had been within the sovereign will and plan of God all along; therefore, he needed not to do anything to gain what God had already determined.

Second, the passage centers around the renaming of Jacob to Israel. In the ancient Near East, fathers and occasionally kings renamed individuals (see 2 Kings 24:17; Daniel 1:5-7). Naming Jacob "Israel" foreshadowed the nation of Israel, telling the readers that Jacob was now a recipient with Abraham of God's blessing that his descendants would be a great nation (see Genesis 12:1-5).

Third, Jacob's contest with the heavenly being attests to his willingness to endure until God blessed him. The blessing of God came when Jacob finally acknowledged God's power and submitted his will to God. Ultimately, the dislocated hip was a constant reminder of what happened that evening and how Jacob had contended with God and come away to tell about it.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jacob Reached the Jabbok
(Genesis 32:22-23)

And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

Verses 22-23. Jacob and his family arrived at the Jabbok during the night. He wanted to cross under the cover of darkness so as not to bring attention to himself and his large family and flocks. The first time Jacob crossed the Jabbok he had only his staff (see Genesis 32:10). Upon his return from Haran, he had vast wealth, two wives, eleven sons and a daughter, two concubines, and many flocks and herds. Although we are not told anything about the number of servants he owned, they, too, must have numbered dozens. However, all these possessions would be worthless if Esau were to exact revenge for what had happened in the past. Although Jacob had escaped twenty years earlier, the reality of his actions still haunted his conscience. Was Jacob afraid? Even though the Lord had sent angels to meet him, Jacob was filled with fear and was greatly distressed (see Genesis 32:1, 7). "Ford" (ford of Jabbok) (Hebrew: *maabar*) denotes a location along the river or stream where the water is shallow and safe to cross. Under the cover of darkness, Jacob sent his wives, concubines, and children across the fording point. What happened in verse 23 does not mean that he crossed with them and then returned to the other side; rather, it implies that wherever they had been encamped, he took them down to the fording point and sent them across, along with everything he owned.

B. Alone at the Jabbok
(Genesis 32:24-26)

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Verse 24. In this verse, the stage was set for the most dramatic moments of Jacob's life. We are not told the reason for why he remained at the Jabbok by himself. The writer does not gradually introduce the situation that faced Jacob. It is instantaneous—"and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of day." *Man* (Hebrew: *ish*) is the word used to denote a man, as opposed to "adam," which is the word for a human being. Some interpreters have sought to explain this encounter by saying that Jacob wrestled in his sleep with his conscience and in some strange way injured his hip. There is nothing in the text that supports such an interpretation. Thus, our understanding of the passage has to be taken at face value. Jacob had a physical encounter with someone, who was not identified by name or origin. This physical altercation went on through the night until the breaking of the day.

Verse 25. The man recognized that he would not be able to prevail against Jacob. While we remember Jacob as a plain man who loved to hang around the tent, he was also a rather strong man (see Genesis 29:10). Jacob's opponent, recognizing that he would not prevail against Jacob, touched Jacob's inner thigh, throwing Jacob's hip joint out of place. As they continued to tussle, the man wanted Jacob to release him because the day was breaking. We have no way of knowing why this request was made. The suggestions offered for the man's request have proven to be more speculation than facts. Whatever the case, Jacob knew that he was in close proximity of someone. He asked the man to bless him. He would not turn him loose until he blessed Jacob. Is it possible that Jacob knew that he was in the presence of deity? Throughout his life, he had schemed to gain favor. Here, he realized that there are some things that only God can give or provide. This was one of those monumental moments in his life. Indeed, there are similar moments in the lives of all Christians when they come face-to-face with the power and presence of God in unusual ways. The prophet Hosea saw at a similar moment a *theophany*, which is an appearance of God or an angel of God (see Hosea 12:2-4).

C. Jacob Receives a New Name (Genesis 32:27-29)

And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

Verse 27. Jacob and his unknown, unnamed assailant had wrestled until the breaking of the day. Jacob had stood the test and his assailant was not able to prevail. He asked Jacob a question—"What is your name?" He responded that his name was Jacob. Jacob's name has been associated with treachery, trickery, deceit, and selfishness. Even at birth, he grabbed the heel of his brother. The mentioning of his name was a confession that he was who Esau and others thought him to be. Victor Hamilton noted, "In disclosing his name Jacob is doing more than sharing information. He is making a confession about the appropriateness of his name."[1] One's name always served to define who he or she was. It spoke of one's character or lack of character. We are always reminded of the importance of protecting our name, which is inextricably connected to our reputations.

Verse 28. This verse provides one of the principal purposes of this text; it explains how

Jacob came to be called Israel. Thus, it is a naming story upon which the people of Israel could look back. Essentially, the man said to Jacob, "From this day forward you will have a new name. You will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel." The name *Israel* (Hebrew: *yisrael*) means "one who struggles with God." One of the traditional interpretations is that Jacob had wrestled with God all night and prevailed. Jacob is referred to as a prince who was able to come face-to-face with deity and prevail. Often, names were attached to momentous events in the life of the Hebrew people (see 1 Samuel 4:21; also compare Genesis 17:5, 15; 2 Samuel 12:25; Isaiah 62:2-4).

Verse 29. This is the conclusion to this paragraph wherein Jacob inquired as to the name of his assailant. Jacob's question is met by a question. *Why are you asking for my name?* Jacob did not learn the man's name. However, the man blessed Jacob, showing favor and grace.

D. Jacob Names Peniel
(Genesis 32:30-32)

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

Verses 30-31. This was the third time that Jacob had named a location where he had a significant encounter with God (see Genesis 28:18-19 [Bethel] and Genesis 32:2 [Mahanaim]). In this instance, he called the name of the place Peniel, which in Hebrew means the "face *of God."* Throughout the night, Jacob had no idea who he was contending with, and he could not see his face. But in the morning when the sun rose, he came to the realization that he had contended with deity and survived. Victor Hamilton noted that Jacob's statement is "all the more remarkable given that it happened during the night at the bottom of a dark gorge."[2] We are not told how Jacob concluded that he had been in the presence of God. It may have resulted from the cumulative total of previous experiences of God's self-disclosure and expressions regarding the Abrahamic blessing and covenant. Yet, he knew that this encounter could have turned out badly—for no human can look into the face of God and survive (verse 30; see Exodus 3:6). His life (Hebrew: *nephesh*) sometimes translated as "soul has been preserved." What did he mean by this statement? Victor Hamilton noted that "Jacob's recognition that none other than God himself stands before him gives to Jacob the assurance that Esau shall not destroy him."[3]

There are moments in life when the Holy Spirit assures us that the trials we face are but "momentary light afflictions" that shall work for our benefit (see 2 Corinthians 4:17). Jacob continued his journey to his face-to-face meeting with his brother, Esau. His faith had been buoyed by the presence of the Lord God, thus he crossed the Jabbok and passed through Penuel with confidence.

Verse 32. The chapter concludes with a statement of explanation regarding the dietary habits of the Hebrew people. It explained why they did not eat a certain portion of the thigh. The words "unto this day" are a reflection back into the text by the person who recorded the account. The main thrust of this passage is not just the dietary restrictions—which are not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament.[4] Rather, it is about the new Jacob who returned to Canaan. He left as a man with little regard for integrity, yet he returned

completely different as evidenced by the new name. The passage clearly points out that when one encounters and struggles with the purpose and plan of God, it is transformative (see Luke 19:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:8-10).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the questions at the center of this narrative and in the entire story of Jacob is, why? Why would God choose someone whom He knew was, from birth, a schemer? Why would God choose someone who would take advantage of his own father and would conspire with his mother to steal what rightfully belonged to his brother? From the perspective of a twenty-first-century mind, God seems to make decisions about whom He will bless in an arbitrary manner. God has always reserved the right and prerogative to choose whom He wills to bless. The entire patriarchal saga reminds us that God is sovereign and He chooses based upon His plans and purposes. Why would God choose Abraham? Why would God choose Isaac? Why would God choose Jacob? Why would God choose Saul to be the first king of Israel? Because God is free to choose whomever He wills to choose. Paul reminded the Corinthians that not many of those who were wise and considered to be among the elite of their society were chosen by God. God often chooses in ways that confound the wise. He chose you and me to be members of the household of faith—not on the merits of our accomplishments, but out of His sovereignty (see Ephesians 2:8-10).

PRAYER

Lord God of grace and mercy, we give You praise for choosing us—not because we deserve to be called by You, but because of Your love and grace shown toward us. May we seek to live in ways that glorify Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 12-18, 2022)

Jacob Is Called Israel

MONDAY, September 12: "Don't Reject God's Grace" (Hebrews 12:7-17)
TUESDAY, September 13: "A Blessing Bestowed" (Genesis 27:18-29)
WEDNESDAY, September 14: "A Blessing Forsaken" (Genesis 27:30-41)
THURSDAY, September 15: "God Will Be Merciful to All" (Romans 11:25-32)
FRIDAY, September 16: "Praise for God's Wonderful Works" (Psalm 105:1-11)
SATURDAY, September 17: "Seeking Favor in God's Sight" (Genesis 32:3-12)
SUNDAY, September 18: "Wrestling for a Blessing" (Genesis 32:22-32)

Notes

1. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 333.
2. Ibid., 336.
3. Ibid., 337.
4. Ibid., 339.

September 25, 2022 **Lesson 4**

THE SCEPTER IS GIVEN TO JUDAH

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Dynamics of Family Leadership
Youth Topic: Dynamics of Family Leadership

Children
General Lesson Title: The Scepter Is Given to Judah
Children's Topic: Choosing a Family Leader

Devotional Reading
Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:12-19, 24-26; 49:8-12
Print Passages: Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12
Key Verse: Genesis 49:10

Children
Background Scriptures: Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:12-19, 24-26; 49:8-12
Print Passages: Genesis 35:22b-26; 49:8-12
Key Verse: Genesis 49:10

Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12 —KJV

22 Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:
23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun:
24 The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:
25 And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali:
26 And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram.

. . . . .

24 And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12 —NIV

22 Jacob had twelve sons:
23 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.
24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.
25 The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.
26 The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

. . . . .

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!"
25 As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who

25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.
26 And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

. . . . .

10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.
11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:
12 His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are."
26 Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again.

. . . . .

10 "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.
11 "He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.
12 "His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often link the family challenges they face in the present to the challenges faced in previous generations. How do we overcome the problems we inherited from our families of origin? God called Jacob's fourth son, Judah, to lead a dysfunctional family from whose family would emerge the nation of Israel and, one day, God's chosen Messiah.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explain Jacob's complicated family dynamics that led to Judah's becoming the leader of his family.
2. Sense the emotions in the story as those emotions spark their own feelings.
3. Seek wholeness and love amidst challenging family dynamics.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—God's concern for leadership here involves the submitted and repentant heart of a leader: Reuben showed no remorse for his sexual misconduct, while Judah acknowledged his sin, both in his intentional infidelity and in his reluctance to accede to Tamar's legally appropriate demand for a husband.

—As a widow, Tamar had the legal right in the ancient Near East to continue her husband's line and ensure her place in his family clan by bearing a son in his name (with his bloodline). (See also Genesis 19:30-38.)

—The images of the lion and the scepter and the imagery of domination support not only

Judah's preeminence among his brothers, but also his new role in the future Davidic line and God's plan of salvation.

—Judah's blessing has been traditionally applied to the Messiah by the Jews and to David and Jesus by the church.

—Blessings in the ancient Near East are traditionally poetic and frequently address current concerns and future possibilities or fulfillments, such as Genesis 49:10 ("he comes to whom [the scepter] belongs" [footnote in NRSV])—promising a current role of leadership for Judah while pointing ahead toward David and, ultimately, to the Messiah.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Scholars have not always agreed as to how to calculate the various stages of the life of the patriarchs. Nor have they been able to establish with absolute certainty their ages during which certain events took place. That is the case with today's lesson. This lesson covers an extended period of time that encompasses the middle and later years of Jacob's life, beginning with his return to Canaan and his subsequent journey into Egypt (see Genesis 46:1-4). From the biblical text we learn that Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years and he was 147 years old when he died in Egypt (see Genesis 47:28-31; also 49:33).

Genesis 35:22-26; 38:24-26; and 49:10-12 provide a panoramic view of the later days of Jacob's life and the saga surrounding his family. We are again introduced to the sons of Jacob, and we are provided the names of their mothers. The second text takes place years later at a point in time that has garnered more debate than answers. The biblical text in the lesson takes place three months after Judah, Jacob's fourth-born son, had engaged in illicit sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, who was found to be with child (see Genesis 38:1-24). The final passage, Genesis 49:10-12, covers the period when Jacob blessed his fourth-born son (Judah), giving to him the position of primacy in the family.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In the previous lesson, Jacob returned to the land of his birth and crossed the Jabbok River. He went out empty and returned full. For twenty years he had carried deep guilt over what he had done to Esau and the dread for what would happen when they finally met. According to Genesis 33:1-15, Jacob and Esau came face-to-face near Peniel. Here, Jacob declared that when he looked into his brother's face, he saw the face of God. The two estranged brothers reconciled and kissed each other, and Jacob gave gifts to his brother. After a while, Jacob and Esau parted ways—with Jacob heading west, eventually settling in Succoth, and Esau returning to Seir in the south (see Genesis 33:17a; see also https://www.bible-history.com/maps/8b-jacobs-journeys).

We are not told how long Jacob remained in Succoth, where he built a house and stall for his livestock (see Genesis 33:17b). Eventually, Jacob made his way across the Jordan River into Canaan and settled in the hill country of Shechem, where he purchased land and began to build a new life for himself and his family (see Genesis 33:18-20; see also Genesis 12:6).

The story of Jacob covers many years and takes

him through the region of southern Canaan—beginning with Shechem (see Genesis 33:18-20); Bethel (see Genesis 35:1-15); Bethlehem (see Genesis 35:16-20); Hebron (see Genesis 37:1-36); Beersheba (see Genesis 46:1-5); and eventually leading into Egypt (see Genesis 46:6–50:13). The lesson concludes with Jacob's blessing each of his sons and grandsons and bestowing upon them the blessings of Abraham and Isaac.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jacob: the son of Isaac and Rebekah. He was the father of the sons who became the family heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judah: the fourth son of Jacob whose mother was named Leah (see Genesis 29:35; 35:23). He was the father of the tribe of Judah.

Tamar: the daughter-in-law of Judah and wife to his two sons Er and Onan. Tamar devised a plot and enticed Judah into having sex with her. She gave birth to twin boys, naming them Perez and Zamar.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Binding (49:11)—Hebrew: *asar* (aw-sar'): to tie, bind, imprison; "tether" (NIV).

Born (35:26)—Hebrew: *yalad* (yaw-lad'): to bear, bring forth, beget.

Depart (49:10)—Hebrew: *sur* (soor): to turn aside; go away; leave; pass away.

Feet (49:10)—Hebrew: *regel* (reh'-gel): foot; part of the body; step; toes.

Maidservant (35:26)—Hebrew: *shiphchah* (shif-khaw'): maid; female servant; "handmaid" (KJV); "servant" (NIV).

Sons (35:23)—Hebrew: *ben* (bane): offspring; children; brothers.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. The Genesis of Family Dysfunction
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Sons of Jacob (Genesis 35:22b-26)
- B. Judah's Infidelity Is Revealed (Genesis 38:24-26)
- C. Jacob's Blessing to Judah (Genesis 49:10-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Genesis of Family Dysfunction

The global pandemic brought to light the horrors of widespread family dysfunction in America and around the world. A dysfunctional family is one in which there is an absence of genuine love, commitment, and relational harmony. Often, dysfunctional families are characterized by violence, neglect, abuse, poverty, and marital conflict—if a marriage exists at all. The problems of family dysfunction and disintegration have been a long-standing reality for many African-American families, going back to the period of chattel slavery.

A great deal of research has been done on the plight of the African-American family. We have been analyzed, scrutinized, examined, investigated, dissected, and studied more

than any other group of people in America. Social scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, family experts, and others have come up with a list of reasons for why the plight of the African-American family is in its current state of disarray, disaffection, and disorder. I would surmise that the problems of African-American families are historically, culturally, economically, socially, and spiritually based. They are more complex than many of us realize and cannot be easily resolved.

However, based upon my personal experience as a pastor/counselor, I conclude that the problems are relational. There is a real breakdown in the relationships between men and women, husbands and wives which leads to a breakdown in the family structure. This is a problem I see all too often even among Christians who are regular church attendees. Clarence Walker, in his book *Biblical Counseling with African-Americans*, has noted that the more closely religious faith is held, the more likely the couple is to survive marital problems. Many people are so pressured by the demands of the job, home, community, and church that they simply have not developed adequate coping mechanisms. And one of the ways that we cope is by lashing out at each other, blaming each other, and criticizing our children for failure to live up to expectations that we cannot even meet ourselves. These reactions can be a leading cause of family dysfunction.

In today's lesson, we see family dysfunction on full display in the very family that God called to be His chosen people. We are introduced to the sons and daughter of Jacob and his extended family, his daughter-in-law Tamar. Jacob's sons were the cause of a great deal of family conflict and dysfunction. The sons of Jacob were filled with jealousy, anger, resentment, and hostility, all of which led to a host of grievous sins. Yet, God's gracious favor upon this family ensured that the plan of redemption would be carried through to fulfillment.

B. Biblical Background

Throughout the Scriptures, we see where God holds leaders to a higher ethical standard. Leaders are required to serve God and the people with sincerity. In this lesson, God's concern for leadership involves the submitted and repentant heart of a leader. Jacob's firstborn son, Reuben, showed no remorse for his sexual misconduct, while Judah acknowledged his sin, both in his intentional infidelity and in his reluctance to accede to Tamar's legally appropriate demand for a husband. Tamar played the role of a harlot, enticing Judah—only for him to discover later that she was his daughter-in-law.

According to ancient Near East tradition, a widow had the legal right to continue her husband's line and ensure her place in his family clan by bearing a son in his name, with his bloodline (see Genesis 19:30-38). It was the obligation of Judah to see that this tradition was carried out—but he failed to act.

In the final passage from Genesis 49:10-12, we have the final blessing of Jacob bestowed upon Judah and his brothers. The images of the lion and the scepter and the imagery of domination support not only Judah's preeminence among his brothers, but also his new role in the future Davidic line and God's plan of salvation. Reference to the foal (see Genesis 49:11) has traditionally been applied

by the church to Jesus in His triumphal entry (see Luke 19:30-34). Judah's blessing has been traditionally applied to the Messiah by the Jews and to David and Jesus by the church. The one who bears the scepter comes to announce the inbreaking of God's kingdom.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Sons of Jacob

(Genesis 35:22b-26)

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun: the sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin: and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali: and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram.

Verses 22b-26. These verses contain the first listing of the sons of Jacob after he reentered Canaan. This list lays the foundation for the recognition of the twelve tribes of Israel as the fulfillment of God's promise (of a great nation) to Abraham. The list is not a chronological list by order of birth (see Genesis 29–30). Rather, they are listed according to their mother's name—with Leah being first, followed by Rachel (verse 24), Bilhah (verse 25), and Zilpah, Rachel's maid (verse 26). Throughout the Old Testament there are lists of the sons of Israel and their descendants (see Genesis 48:8-22; 49:1-28; Exodus 1:1-5; 6:14-16; Numbers 1:5-15; 1 Chronicles 2:1). Reuben is always listed as Jacob's firstborn despite his failure and incestuous actions. What is apparent in the record is the absence of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, from the list; there is no given reason for the omission (see Genesis 30:21; 34:1). The writer noted in verse 26 that these were the sons born to Jacob in Padan-aram. Benjamin was born in Canaan during the journey from Bethel to Bethlehem (see Genesis 35:18-19).

Some interpreters believe that the purpose of the text is to highlight the faithfulness of God to His promises to Abraham and Isaac, and then to Jacob (see Genesis 35:9-12, 18). Each of the patriarchs committed acts that we would say disqualify them from receiving the promise of God. Yet, God does not act according to human standards, but chooses His own based upon His prerogatives. The list also makes it plain that the promises of God are greater than the sins of men and women. Jacob's family would be a perfect example of a dysfunctional family (see Genesis 35:22a). Nothing in Jacob's past or in the lives of his children separated him from the promises of God that included many offspring and much land (see Genesis 35:12, 27). Here, there is hope for every family that regardless of our sins, grace and hope are always present and active with God.

B. Judah's Infidelity Is Revealed

(Genesis 38:24-26)

And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt. When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff. And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

Allen Ross stated that Genesis 38 seems to

intrude upon the story of Joseph and that it is a self-contained family narrative that deals with a case of family law.[1] In Genesis 37:36, Joseph is sold to Potiphar in Egypt by the Midianites. Genesis 38 breaks up the natural flow of the story, which picks up again at Genesis 39:1 with Joseph's being taken down to Egypt.

The story of Tamar and Judah revolves around a childless widow named Tamar, who just happened to be the daughter-in-law of Judah, Jacob's fourth son. Judah had three sons; the first two died, one being the husband of Tamar. Judah betrothed Tamar to Shelah, Judah's youngest and sole surviving son. When it was time for this marriage to take place, Judah failed to follow through and Tamar took matters into her own hands. The ancient Hebrew custom of "levirate marriage" sanctioned the marriage of a widow to her deceased husband's brother (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 3:10, 13; see also Luke 20:27-33). Deuteronomy 25:6 provides the rationale for this practice: "The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother *so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel*" (NIV, emphasis added).

Verse 24. Three months is the amount of time that had elapsed between Judah's sexual liaison with Tamar and the point at which her pregnancy was revealed (see Genesis 38:13-19). We are not told who informed Judah about Tamar's pregnancy; he simply received word that Tamar had become pregnant while playing a harlot. "Such news would readily be passed along to Judah, for she evidently still had marital obligations to Judah's family. He had not released her to marry another, which later was an option provided in Deut 25:5-10."[2] As head of the family, Judah had the right and obligation to see that justice was done. What is noticeable is that the accuser is never identified, just the accusation. Judah did not request to see Tamar or interrogate her regarding the accusations of the identity of the purported father. He announced judgment and punishment: "bring her forth and let her be burnt." This was a very severe sentencing, given that the Hebrew punishment for acts of adultery or illicit sexual acts was stoning (see Deuteronomy 22:21, 24). The execution was to take place outside of the camp or the city walls.

Verse 25. When Tamar was brought forth—probably to the place of execution—she still had in her possession the items given to her by Judah that served as a promissory note of payment for the sexual liaison (see Genesis 38:16-18). The pledge consisted of his signet, bracelets, and staff, all particularly important items for the head of a household. Tamar did not offer a defense for her sentence. She had staked her whole defense on the items in her possession, saying that the father of her child was the very man to whom the items belonged.

Verse 26. When Judah received the items sent by Tamar, his conscience was pricked, and he knew that he was the father of Tamar's unborn child. Judah did not attempt to justify or deny the reality of what had happened. He publicly acknowledged that he had failed Tamar by not ensuring that she was properly married to his youngest son, Shelah. Although he may have been within his rights to continue the relationship with Tamar, Judah had no further sexual contact with her.

One question at the center of this narrative is, who was to blame for what transpired? Clearly, it is Judah who failed on several fronts.

He failed to follow through on the custom of ensuring that his youngest son, Shelah, fulfilled the levirate duty to his deceased brother. He failed morally when he believed that he was secretly consorting with a temple prostitute. In the end, God's will and plan were still carried forth. We have seen that the chosen family was fraught with acts of intentional sin, yet God's grace surpasses even the greatest wickedness that the human heart can devise.

C. Jacob's Blessing to Judah
(Genesis 49:10-12)

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

Genesis 49 ends the patriarchal history as Jacob is gathered in death to his forebears (see Genesis 49:29-33). The chapter contains the final blessings or testaments of Jacob to his twelve sons (see Genesis 49:3-27). Prior to his death and the pronouncement of blessings upon his sons, Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, giving to Joseph a double portion (see Genesis 48:8-22; also 1 Chronicles 5:1). This blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh meant that Reuben would not occupy the place of primacy in the family despite his being the firstborn son.

Verse 10. Jacob announced that Judah would replace Reuben as the leader of the family. Reuben had defiled the bed of his father when he had sexual intercourse with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (see Genesis 35:22). Simeon and Levi had acted out of rage and anger and killed innocent people (see Genesis 34:1-31). In one sense, Jacob did pass along to his first three sons the blessings received from Abraham and Isaac. The scepter or "sceptre" (KJV) (Hebrew: *shebet*) denotes a symbol of authority or leadership—usually a staff or rod (see Numbers 24:17; Psalm 45:6; Isaiah 14:5; Zechariah 10:11). Jacob declared that from Judah would come a line of perpetual rulers who would exercise authority over his brothers, beginning with David, who was from the tribe of Judah (see 2 Samuel 7:12-14 for the Davidic covenant and promise). David was not the first king; it was Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, who was the first king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 9:1-2). The words "nor a lawgiver from between his feet" are a further expansion of the announcement regarding a ruler from Judah. Shiloh was a place in Israel, located a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. Here in this verse, the context suggests that it refers to a person because the word *Shiloh* can mean "peace" or "one who brings peace." He is the One to whom the people would gather and pay homage. The early Christians saw in these words a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. That prophecy was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 5:5).

Verses 11-12. These verses are filled with figurative language that describes a time of great prosperity that would come to the sons of Israel. Some interpreters have seen in these verses the image of Jesus' washing His clothes in the blood spilled on Calvary; however, the context does not lend itself to that interpretation. It is better understood as a period of great prosperity that would result from the rule of the Judean kings. Such prosperity developed during the reigns of David and Solomon. Wine and milk were seen as symbols of wealth and prosperity. All of this would be realized as the descendants of Israel obeyed the God of Abraham and Isaac.

Here in these verses, we have yet another example of God's gracious favor being shown to the chosen people. He raised up leaders from among them—and not those who would be considered leaders by birthright, but those whom He willed to lead His people. God continues to raise up a new generation of leaders for His people. Just as Judah's name provoked praise to God, so the name of Jesus Christ provokes our praise and adoration today.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Throughout the history of Israel there was an expectation that God would one day bring to pass a glorious future for His people. Even today, men and women continue to look for that time when the kingdom of God will be realized on Earth as it is in heaven. The past two years have been a time of widespread despair, discouragement, and dismay throughout America and around the world. The global pandemic has crippled millions of people, some who see no hope for a brighter and better future. Life for them is fragile and tenuous. Jacob looked forward to a time when the Lord would raise a new leader from among the sons of Israel. He did not know what and who this unknown ruler would be, yet he saw coming out of the loins of Judah. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In Him, God has come near and brought the abundant life to all who believe. Jacob's pronouncement to Judah reminds us that God's future, although distant and afar off, will be a time of great rejoicing.

PRAYER

Lord God, may we always look for that day when the Lion of Judah will reign in Your kingdom forever. Grant that we may live in a way that will honor You through our words and deeds. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 19-25, 2022)

The Scepter Is Given to Judah

MONDAY, September 19: "Tamar Asserts Her Rights" (Genesis 38:12-19, 24-26)
TUESDAY, September 20: "Ruth Gives Birth to Obed" (Ruth 4:9-17)
WEDNESDAY, September 21: "God's Blessings for Israel" (Numbers 23:18-26)
THURSDAY, September 22: "A Scepter Shall Rise from Israel" (Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17)
FRIDAY, September 23: "The Heavenly Throne" (Revelation 4)
SATURDAY, September 24: "The Conquering Lion of Judah" (Revelation 5)
SUNDAY, September 25: "Judah Is Destined to Reign" (Genesis 49:8-12)

Notes

1. Allen P. Ross; *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 661.
2. K. A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary, Volume 1B: Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 722.

October 2, 2022 **Lesson 5**

THE BIRTH OF MOSES

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: A Protective Family
Youth Topic: A Protective Family

Children
General Lesson Title: Moses' Family Protects Him
Children's Topic: Precious Baby in a Boat

Devotional Reading
Acts 7:17-29

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Exodus 1:15-22; 2:1-10, 15-22
Print Passage: Exodus 2:1-10
Key Verse: Exodus 2:2

Children
Background Scriptures: Exodus 1:15-22; 2:1-10, 15-22
Print Passage: Exodus 2:1-10
Key Verse: Exodus 2:3

Exodus 2:1-10—KJV

AND THERE went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.
2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.
3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.
4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.
5 And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.
6 And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

Exodus 2:1-10—NIV

NOW A man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman,
2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.
3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.
4 His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.
5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it.
6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?
8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.
9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the women took the child, and nursed it.
10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"
8 "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother.
9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him.
10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: The tumultuous world can endanger our well-being in many ways. How do we survive in a chaotic world? Moses' family went to great lengths to save him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Identify the deep injustices that imperiled Moses' life and prompted his family's clever and creative care for him.
2. Empathize with the struggles of families today who find themselves in seemingly impossible situations due to brokenness and societal injustices.
3. Address structural injustice on behalf of loved ones who are endangered.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Mesopotamian tablets note a legal adoption of an abandoned baby: the wet nurse acted as a legal guardian, and the formal adoption occurred once the child was weaned. This story appears to reflect the same situation.

—The one characteristic shared by all three women in this story is their ability to make creative, quick-witted, and selfless decisions that protect the most vulnerable among them (compare Exodus 1).

—Moses' family enacted a tense drama of protection and care against a much larger backdrop of God's own protection and care: He rewarded their hope and trust with a protection that transcended the injustice of their own family situation.

—Moses' heritage as a Levite on both his maternal and paternal sides demonstrates God's planning and care for him: although the Law had not yet been given, Moses was born into the only family appropriate for his future calling as a prophet and priest.

—The term used for Moses' baby basket is identical to that used for Noah's ark (Genesis 6–8), and

the overt link points to God's care and provision for His people and His plans in the midst of catastrophic destruction.

—Moses' attempt to extend the same protection he had experienced foreshadowed his future role as deliverer to a people he had already claimed as his own (see Exodus 2:11). God did not excuse the action but honored the motivation—developing that motivation further until Moses was ready to take on the role as God defined it.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

This lesson begins Unit II: "Out of Slavery to Nationhood." In this Unit there are five lessons that explore the call of Israel's family out of Egypt to become a nation. Each week, we will journey with God's people (who were liberated by Moses), eventually settling in the Promised Land—where they became an established nation. At the center of all these events is the account of how God came to live among His people and bring to fulfillment the promises first made to Abraham and passed along to Isaac and Jacob.

In today's lesson, we explore the circumstances surrounding the birth of Moses and how God saved him from the wicked plan of the pharaoh of Egypt to kill all the male Hebrew babies (see Exodus 1:15-19).

The life of Moses is set within the Middle Bronze Age, a period that lasted from about 3000 until 300 BC. It is believed that the Hebrews came to Egypt in the Middle Bronze II period (2000–1550 BC).[1] The Hebrew people would remain in Egypt for more than four hundred years, living in slavery and being forced to build the great cities of Pithom and Raamses (see Exodus 1:11). There is no definitive agreement among scholars as to when Moses was born and when he died. The most widely accepted dates are 1526–1405/4 BC. While the Old Testament does not provide the kind of historical data we often cherish, it does tell us that Moses lived 120 years (see Deuteronomy 34:7). Just as God chose Abraham to be the father of His chosen people, so too was Moses chosen to lead them from slavery to freedom.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events of Exodus 2:1-10 took place in Egypt, probably near Raamses and Pithom. These are the locations mentioned in Exodus 1:11—where the children of Israel were forced to build the storage cities for Pharaoh of Egypt. Some scholars have identified the location where Moses was most likely born near these locations and where the capital of Egypt may have been located. Desmond Alexander noted that "if the birth of Moses occurred during the reign of Ahmose I (1550–1525 BC), the location of his birth is likely to be the city of Perunefer, where Ahmose I constructed a palace beside an eastern distributary of the Nile."[2] The archaeological evidence to support these locations is inconclusive, with some archaeologists saying that Rameses "has been positively identified with the sprawling site of Qantir in the northeastern Delta and may include Tell el-Dab'a, the site of the old Hyksos capital, Avaris, in its suburbs."[3]

According to the biblical narrative, Moses was placed in a papyrus basket to save him from the diabolical plan of Pharaoh to kill the Hebrew baby boys. Accordingly, Moses was rescued from certain death by the daughter of Pharaoh, who adopted Moses and treated him as her own son.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Moses: the son of Amram and Jochebed, who were members of the tribe of Levi. He was the younger brother of Aaron and Miriam, both of whom were

instrumental in helping to lead Israel during the wilderness wandering. Moses is one of the most important persons in the Old Testament.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Beautiful (verse 2)—Hebrew: *towb* (tobe): pleasant, agreeable, good, fair; "goodly" (KJV); "fine" (NIV).
Child (verse 3b)—Hebrew: *yeled* (yeh'-led): son; boy; lad; youth.
Hid (verse 2)—Hebrew: *tsaphan* (tsaw-fan'): treasured up; concealed; kept.
Reeds (verse 3)—Hebrew: *suph* (soof): rushes; weeds; "bulrushes" (KJV).
Stood (verse 4)—Hebrew: *yatsab* (yaw-tsab'): set or stationed oneself; took one's stand; stood forth.
Walked (verse 5)—Hebrew: *halak* (haw-lak'): went; came; "were walking" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Building Healthy and Resilient Families
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Tribe of Levi (Exodus 2:1-2)
- B. Hidden in the Bulrushes (Exodus 2:3-4)
- C. Rescued by the Daughter of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:5-8)
- D. The Naming of Moses (Exodus 2:9-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Building Healthy and Resilient Families

The family is at the center of God's creative work. In Genesis 1, we read that God created the heavens and the earth and that it was all good. Lastly, in Genesis 1:26-27, God created man in His own image—male and female—and it was very good. Human beings stand at the apex of creation (see Psalm 8). The creation of Adam and Eve was the high point and crown jewel of God's creative power. In all the universe there is nothing like the human race—for humankind is the only species created in the image of God and who can be in perfect relationship with God. We can only know our true selves when we live in a right relationship to God. When we read the Bible, we are presented with a picture of humanity that depicts man's magnificence and his misery, both his possibilities and failures. The Bible presents a picture of man that depicts his importance and impotence. Man both has a spark of divinity yet needs a savior.

At the apex of God's creation of Adam and Eve is the family, which is the basic unit of society. God's intention for the family is that the man and woman would be fruitful and multiply. The early family would be termed a dysfunctional family today, given the presence of sin and the sibling rivalry that resulted in Cain's murdering Abel. Throughout the Scriptures we see images of families that abound with problems, challenges and situations that leave them groping for answers.

How do we build strong, healthy, resilient families that will mirror the teachings of Scripture? First, parents are to remember that they are accountable to God for teaching their sons and daughters the Word of God (see Deuteronomy 6:4-8). Our teaching diligently the Word of God lays a foundation that builds godly character. What is character? It is the essence of who we are and how we live. Character comprises those traits and habits that are based on sound moral teachings and principles.

Second, we build healthy, resilient families by empowering our sons and daughters to endure the hardness as good soldiers. We build resilience by giving our children the intellectual, emotional, and practical skills they need to make good decisions. Resilience is the capacity to endure and overcome the trials that come our way.

Third, we sow into the hearts and minds of our children faith in the God of our forefathers. Paul reminded Timothy that the faith he saw in him, he saw first in his grandmother and mother. As we teach our children the story of our journey in America and how we made it through, it builds resilience and self-determination. Just as Moses' family stood by and watched to see what would happen to him, so, too, are we called to stand by our children to ensure that they can live a life that is well-pleasing to God.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Exodus covers one of the most important periods of ancient Hebrew history. God's deliverance of the descendants of Abraham from the oppressive regime of Pharaoh is the high point of ancient Hebrew history (see Deuteronomy 7:8; 16:12; Joshua 24:32; 1 Samuel 10:18; Jeremiah 2:6). The book gets its name from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The word *exodus* literally means "going out" and comes from the words found in Exodus 19:1. According to the biblical text, the period of the Exodus follows the patriarchal period. While they were in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham grew and multiplied into a mighty nation (see Exodus 1:7).

The period of Israel's enslavement and liberation is found in the first fourteen chapters of the book. Hundreds of years passed between the time of their arrival as a family of seventy people and the point of their deliverance. Throughout the history of ancient Israel, the Exodus has been the single event that reminded them of their special place in God's plan of redemption (see Hosea 11:1; Amos 3:2).

In the account of the rescue of Moses we meet three women who share one common characteristic—the ability to make creative, quick-witted, and selfless decisions that protect the most vulnerable among them. The family of Moses enacted a tense drama of protection and care against a much larger backdrop of God's protection and care: He rewarded their hope and trust with a protection that transcended the injustice of their own family situation. In the story, we see that Moses' heritage as a Levite on both his maternal and paternal sides demonstrates God's planning and care for his future calling as a prophet and priest.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Tribe of Levi

(Exodus 2:1-2)

AND THERE went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

Verses 1-2. These verses provide us with several vital facts about the life of Moses. First, we are introduced to the lineage of Moses, which set the stage for God's plan to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 3:1–13:7). It would be eighty years later before Moses would assume the role of Israel's deliverer. He would need to be sharpened for the task of leading millions of people to freedom.

Second, we are told that the parents of Moses were both members of the tribe of Levi. Today's biblical text does not provide their names; these will be revealed later as will the names of their other children, Aaron and Miriam (see Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59). Levi was the third son born to Jacob and Leah (see Genesis 29:34). Levi and Simeon brought a great deal of shame and disgrace to the name of Jacob when they went out and slew Hamor. In the years to come, the tribe of Levi would figure prominently in the life of Israel. The Lord directed Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons to be the priests, who would preside over the religious life of the people (see Exodus 28–30). Further, the sons of Levi proved to be among the most loyal supporters of Moses throughout his forty-year tenure as leader of God's people (see Exodus 32:26-29; Numbers 3:12; 8:6-26; Deuteronomy 10:8-9).

Third, Moses is described as having been a "goodly" (Hebrew: *tob*) child. This word conveys the idea that Moses was a baby who was pleasant to look upon and filled with the attributes of beauty. The final detail in verse 2 concerns the mother of Moses' attempting to conceal his birth from the Egyptian authorities. Pharaoh had decreed that all Hebrew male newborn babies were to be thrown into the Nile (see Exodus 1:22). We are told neither how she hid the child nor whether she was assisted by other Hebrew women. While these facts are not provided, we can safely assume that the other women provided help in concealing Moses for the first three months of his life.

The birth of Moses serves as a constant reminder that the plans of God are not thwarted by time or circumstances. Moses could not have been born at a more perilous time, yet it was the right time according to God's plans.

B. Hidden in the Bulrushes

(Exodus 2:3-4)

And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

Verses 3-4. These verses continue the story of the early days of Moses' life. Three months into his young life, the situation grew increasingly desperate. The pressure of hiding a newborn grew increasingly difficult and Moses' mother was no longer able to hide him. There are no explanations or reasons given that explain what happened. More than likely, the crying of a newborn baby and the likely presence of Egyptian security guards looking for newborn babies made the task perilous.

The text noted that the woman made an

ark of bulrushes. The Hebrew word for "ark" is the same word used to describe the large craft made by Noah. The Hebrew term is better translated into English by the words "she made a basket of papyrus reeds." These reeds were quite common along the Nile and would be readily accessible to the mother of Moses. It is also possible that she had someone else to make the basket for her child. In their book *Manners & Customs of the Bible,* James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick noted, "Moses' basket was ma[d]e of the leaf of the papyrus, which is a reedy plant that in those days grew plentifully on the banks of the Nile, and which was used by the Egyptians for making garments, shoes, cords, baskets, boats, sails, and a variety of other things."[4] The mother of Moses went a step further: she coated the outside of the basket with a tar-like substance that would seal the small life craft from taking on water.

Verse 4 provides a few more details about how Moses survived. His sister, who is not named, provided the daily surveillance that would keep the child safe in the water. After the little basket was placed in the water and floated along the banks, the reeds would provide some cover for the young child. Second, we see that the protection of Moses was a family affair. We are not told the age of his sister, but she was old enough to perform a particularly important task. Moses was not alone—his sister stood to watch at a distance. Third, she did not allow the basket to drift too far out of her sight. It was important for her to see what was going to happen to the child. Perhaps the sister of Moses wanted to be in position to intervene if the need arose. Moreover, it may also be that she tried to provide some nourishment for the child.

These verses provide a clear picture of how God often uses others to assist us in our times of need. We also see the importance of family and how family members can those who help us through challenging times.

C. Rescued by the Daughter of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:5-8)

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.

Verses 5–8. There are periods of time specified in these verses. We have no way of knowing how long it was between the time that Moses was placed in the basket and when he was discovered by the daughter of Pharaoh. We are not told the name of the daughter nor the name of the pharaoh. There are several ancient Jewish and Islamic traditions that identify her with Bithiah, who is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 4:18 as a daughter of Pharaoh. The real identity of the woman has never been known and any attempt to give her name is speculative. What we know from the passage is that she followed what must have been the normal custom—bathing in the waters of the Nile River. She was accompanied by her retinue of maidens, tending to her every need. There are no numbers given, nor are we told their ethnicity. Some were likely Hebrew young women who would have made it easy for the

sister of Moses to blend in. As she bathed, her maids stood along the shoreline, looking out for any signs of danger. As she kept watch herself, she saw the basket floating in the water, probably bobbing up and down in the current. Without hesitation, one of her maids was dispatched to bring the basket to her.

After opening the basket or removing the top she saw a baby boy, who was crying. It may have been fear, hunger, or just the fact that he had been discovered. With the heart of a parent, she felt compassion for the young child. He had done nothing to deserve this and certainly not the violence that her father perpetrated against all the Hebrew baby boys. She readily identified Moses as a Hebrew. How she came to this conclusion is not stated. But more than likely his physical features gave him away. Yet, this did not deter her from wanting to keep the baby safe.

In verse 7, the sister of Moses stepped forward and offered to find a Hebrew woman who could come and nurse the child for the daughter of Pharaoh. How she was able to blend in and make this proposal is not known. Is it possible that the other maids accompanying the daughter of Pharaoh knew of this birth and they knew the sister of Moses? They did not interfere with her proposal and may have even endorsed the idea.

The daughter of Pharaoh did not hesitate but commanded Moses' sister to go and immediately find a Hebrew woman to come and nurse the baby boy. In a strange twist of divine providence, Moses' sister went home and brought back his mother, who was able to nurture him until he was weaned from her breast milk.

In many ways, this passage depicts how what looks to be an impossible situation can be orchestrated by God to work out in marvelous ways. In our own lives, we have seen the impossible become reality.

D. The Naming of Moses
(Exodus 2:9-10)

And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the women took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Verses 9-10. The passage concludes with the life of the baby being preserved. Pharaoh's daughter instructed the mother of Moses to take him to her home and nurse him. In this act, we see the hand of God bringing to fruition His divine will and plan. Pharaoh sought to stamp out the Hebrew males, yet the Lord sidetracked the plan of Pharaoh. What he meant for evil, God reversed. Moses' mother was not only blessed to receive her newborn son but also was compensated for a task that she would have done for free.

Verse 10 assumes the passage of time and does not provide any details of the early years of Moses' life. We are simply told that when Moses was at the proper age, he was returned to the home of Pharaoh's daughter. At that point, he became her son and the grandson of the Pharaoh of Egypt. She named him Moses, which means "Because I drew him out of the water." In these early years of the life of Moses we see God's divine providence at work. God provided protection and provision for Moses to grow and be nurtured in the very shadow of the one whom he would confront about Israel's freedom. Thus, Moses came to know and understand the mind of Pharaoh.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the central questions of Bible study is what am/are I/we to take away from the Word of God? How does such an ancient story about a baby born in an obscure community speak to us in the twenty-first century? First, we see the triumph of faith in God. Although Pharaoh had given orders for all Hebrew baby boys to be cast into the Nile, the mother of Moses refused to allow her son to meet such an untimely fate. When we trust God, we do so on the basis that He is faithful to His promise even when we cannot see the outcome. Second, in the family of Moses, we see a family willing to take extraordinary steps to save the life of a boy. African-American boys are at significant risk of dying prematurely, often at the hands of another young male. Communities must be willing to take extraordinary steps to save the lives of young men and boys from the violence that surrounds them every day. Third, we see the unfailing love of a family that surrounded Moses with protection and provisions for his survival. That his oldest sibling would not leave him alone is a reminder that when the dark days come, our family may be our sole source of support and strength.

PRAYER

Lord God, may we learn to appreciate those in our families who protect us and provide for our welfare. Grant that we may love one another as You have loved us. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 26–October 2, 2022)

The Birth of Moses

MONDAY, September 26: "God Preserves the People" (Psalm 105:12-25)
TUESDAY, September 27: "From Lack to Abundance" (Genesis 47:1-12)
WEDNESDAY, September 28: "Thriving in Spite of Adversity" (Exodus 1:8-22)
THURSDAY, September 29: "God Prepares Moses" (Acts 7:17-29)
FRIDAY, September 30: "The Challenges of Heeding God's Call" (Acts 7:30-41)
SATURDAY, October 1: "Awaiting a Heavenly Reward by Faith" (Hebrews 11:23-29)
SUNDAY, October 2: "God Raises Up a Deliverer" (Exodus 2:1-15)

Notes

1. John D. Currid and David P. Barrett, *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 81.
2. T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus (Teach the Text Commentary Series)*, Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Books, 2016), 15.
3. Thomas V. Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas: A Complete Guide to the Expansive Geography of Biblical History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 64.
4. James M. Freeman, *The New Manners & Customs of the Bible,* Harold Chadwick, ed. (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 99.

October 9, 2022 **Lesson 6**

SONG OF MOSES

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Expressing Thankfulness
Youth Topic: Expressing Thankfulness

Children
General Lesson Title: Song of Moses
Children's Topic: Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart

Devotional Reading
Exodus 14:21-31

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Deuteronomy 31:30–32:47
Print Passage: Deuteronomy 32:3-6, 10-14, 18
Key Verse: Deuteronomy 32:46

Children
Background Scriptures: Deuteronomy 31:30–32:15
Print Passages: Deuteronomy 31:30; 32:1-9
Key Verse: Deuteronomy 32:3

Deuteronomy 32:3-6, 10-14, 18—KJV

3 Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.
4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.
5 They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.
6 Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

. . . . .

10 He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Deuteronomy 32:3-6, 10-14, 18—NIV

3 I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.
5 They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.
6 Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

. . . . .

10 In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye,
11 like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over

11 As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings:
12 So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.
13 He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock;
14 Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.

. . . . .

18 Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft.
12 The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him.
13 He made him ride on the heights of the land and fed him with the fruit of the fields. He nourished him with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crag,
14 with curds and milk from herd and flock and with fattened lambs and goats, with choice rams of Bashan and the finest kernels of wheat. You drank the foaming blood of the grape.

. . . . .

18 You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We sometimes fail to remember what others have done for us. How can we maintain an attitude of appreciation and gratitude? Moses instructed Israel to remember God's blessings and to teach their children about the promises that God fulfilled on their behalf.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the Israelites' responses to God's faithful care and love.
2. Remember times when they felt ungrateful and/or experienced ungratefulness from others.
3. Express gratitude daily.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Moses called the Israelites to remember God's actions—in fact, their own experiences of God in action—and how these activities reminded them that God is faithful, trustworthy, and just.

—Deuteronomy 32:1-3 reflects the format of legal documents commonly used during this period in the ancient Near East. Here (through Moses), God charges Israel with a lawsuit—a breach of contract—in light of God's own faithfulness to the covenant.

—In addition, Moses' Song serves as a witness to the renewal of the legal contract between Israel and God. Two witnesses were required; here, Moses is the first, and the people themselves are the second witness, bearing testimony against themselves in Moses' recitation of their experiences with God.

—Not only is the proper response to God's actions worship and praise, but also, it is clear that such a reaction is the natural, sincere response to seeing

God at work. Worship and praise flow out of our experience with God.

—Our remembering God's actions leads us to ponder God's character as revealed by His actions. Here, God is a parent, demonstrating His love through both caring for and disciplining His children (see 32:19ff).

—The image of a mother eagle (see 32:11) shows her preparing her eaglet to fly by agitating it out of its comfortable, safe nest. The mother both challenges and protects the eaglet—flying under it in case it falters on its first flight—in a perfect picture of God's relationship to Israel and of parenthood in every age.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Deuteronomy is historically set within the final sixty days of Israel's wilderness wandering. The most likely dates are 1407/1406 BC. Deuteronomy must be read within the context of the Exodus and the formation and agreement of the Sinai Covenant (see Exodus 19:1-7). Israel had been called out of slavery in Egypt to be God's unique and special people. The fledgling nation had agreed to abide by the terms of the covenant and to obey God without reservation. Furthermore, they had been witnesses to God's mighty acts of power, none greater than the drowning of Pharaoh's army. Moreover, they were recipients of God's miraculous acts of grace wherein for forty years they had received their daily bread from heaven.

Deuteronomy is also a reminder that Moses had served his specific purpose within the redemptive plan of God. He had been the called-out deliverer. Thus, the forty-year tenure of Moses was ending, and Israel was poised to finally enter the Promised Land. Joshua had been designated as Moses' successor (see Numbers 27:16, 22; Deuteronomy 31:3, 7; Joshua 1:1-7). The long and arduous years in the wilderness were ending. For forty years, Moses had led a people who had been stubborn and prone to fits of unfaithfulness to God. They had on many occasions acted in ways that portrayed their lack of gratitude for God's providential care and protection. Yet, they were repeatedly reminded of the faithfulness of God.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Tradition holds that Moses is the author of Deuteronomy and the other four books of the Pentateuch—namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The book of Deuteronomy is not a historical narrative; rather, it is a collection of the final speeches of Moses delivered to the children of Israel. The opening verses, often referred to as the preamble to the entire book, state that "these are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel across the Jordan in the wilderness" (Deuteronomy 1:1, NASB). The children of Israel were emerging from nearly forty years in the wilderness, and they were poised to cross the Jordan and enter the land promised first to Abraham, and then to Isaac and Jacob. According to Numbers 36:13 (NASB), "These are the commandments and the ordinances which the LORD commanded to the sons of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan opposite Jericho." As previously stated, these speeches were delivered within a few weeks of Israel's crossing the Jordan into Canaan.

Deuteronomy has been compared to ancient Near Eastern treaties in which a benefactor offers to provide protection and provision for the loyalty of a vassal nation. These types of treaties were common

in the ancient Near East and are mentioned throughout the Scriptures. Dating back to the second and first millennia, they have been verified through archaeological discoveries.[1] "The format followed in these treaties shows striking similarity to the format of a number of covenant documents in the Bible, most notably, Deuteronomy."[2] At its core, Deuteronomy is a renewal of the covenant between God and Israel that was first made at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:1-7). As Joshua assumed the helm of leading Israel, the people would need to be clear about their relationship to the Lord, who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Moses: he is not mentioned by name in the biblical text; however, he is believed to have been the writer of Deuteronomy. Moses was the leader of the children of Israel during the formative years of their history. He led the people to the threshold of the Promised Land.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Corrupt(ed) (verse 5)—Hebrew: *shechath* (shekh-ath'): perhaps go (went) to ruin; act(ed) corruptly.

Establish(ed) (verse 6)—Hebrew: *kun* (koon): to be (made) firm; appointed; confirmed; "formed" (NIV).

Foolish (verse 6)—Hebrew: *nabal* (naw-bawl'): senseless; disgraceful.

Greatness (verse 3)—Hebrew: *godel* (go'-del): magnificence; magnitude.

Name (verse 3)—Hebrew: *shem* (shame): memorial; reputation.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   - A. Remember
   - B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   - A. The Lord Is Great and Faithful (Deuteronomy 32:3-6)
   - B. God's Protection and Provision (Deuteronomy 32:10-14)
   - C. Israel Failed to Remember (Deuteronomy 32:18)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Remember

Between 1961 and 1964, I was a student at James Madison Junior High School in Norfolk, Virginia. At that time, junior high school was seventh through ninth grades. The same building stands there today in the Lamberts Point section of Norfolk, Virginia. My eighth-grade history teacher was a woman by the name of Mrs. Terry. (I have forgotten her first name.) Mrs. Terry had a great love for history, and she could make history come alive. She instilled in me an appreciation and love for history and geography, which I appreciate to this very day.

When I ask children if they study history, many of them reply that they don't like history or geography, because they feel that history and geography are boring subjects.

The study of history is important because it gives us the opportunity to remember our story and our journey. We remember

- the challenges we have overcome to reach this point in our lives.
- the people who played a particularly significant role in our lives, who encouraged us and pushed us forward.
- the living and dead examples of the men and women who touched our lives and permanently shaped them.
- the events that helped shape our story and those that changed the course of history.

When we remember the past we pay respect to our ancestors whose legacies, both good and bad, live in and through us today. This is the primary point of Deuteronomy; it was a call for Israel to *remember*. They were the words of Moses to the ancient Israelites, spoken just before entering the Promised Land. The ancient Israelites were to remember the days of their affliction in Egypt, their deliverance by God at the Red Sea, and the bountiful blessings they received when they entered the Promised Land.

In Deuteronomy 16:1-17, we have the establishment of the three primary feast days or annual celebrations of the ancient Hebrew faith. They are Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths).

Verses 1-8 define the purpose and plan for how the people were to celebrate Passover, which commemorated their deliverance from Egypt. Verses 9-12 established the Feast of Weeks or, as it is called by its Greek name, Pentecost. It took place seven weeks after Passover. The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost was a commemoration of the affliction the people suffered when they were slaves in Egypt.

Verses 13-15 established the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. This is a harvest celebration, and it occurs in the fall of the year. It remembers Israel's first harvest of wheat when they entered the Promised Land. For forty years they ate manna, but the manna ceased when they entered the Promised Land of Canaan (see Joshua 5:12).

Verses 16-17 mandated that all Hebrew males must appear annually at the place the Lord chose. They were not to come with empty hands but must give as they were able.

Why did God want Israel to remember their story? So that future generations would appreciate what their ancestors went through and how God brought them out. Remembering is the sacred act of connecting to our past and helping our children and future generations remember the story of our people in America and of our families.

B. Biblical Background

Throughout the book of Deuteronomy Israel is called to remember the mighty acts of God's grace on their behalf. They were to remember that they were slaves in a foreign land and by the sheer might of God's power they were liberated from bondage. Moses called upon the Israelites to remember God's activities among them, which reminded them that God is faithful, trustworthy, and just.

Deuteronomy 32:1-43 is called the "Song of Moses" because it was written using a poetic literary style, which is characteristic of prophetic speech. Whether or not Moses sang these words has been debated and is not important. What is important are the contents of the song that express God's displeasure with the unfaithfulness of Israel. Deuteronomy

32:1-3 reflects a legal format common to the ancient Near East, especially with regards to breaches in contractual arrangements. Here, God summoned the people to hear the charges against them.

In addition to bringing a legal case against His people, the Song of Moses is a call for Israel to renew her covenant with God. The Sinai Covenant was the basis of the relationship between God and Israel (see Exodus 19:1-7). Throughout the passage, there are images of God as the faithful one, which is expressed through the metaphor of the Rock. Further, God is pictured as a protective mother eagle who stirs her nest. In all the passages that comprise the lesson, God is at the center; He is the one who never changes and upon whom we can always rely.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Lord Is Great and Faithful
(Deuteronomy 32:3-6)

Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

Verse 3. In the opening lines of the song (verses 1-2), Moses calls upon the heavens and the earth to stand as witnesses to what was about to be spoken. His words were as the refreshing rain that falls upon the earth. The word *publish* (Hebrew: *qara*) means "to declare or to call out." Moses stated that he would call out the name of the Lord. Moses came to know the Lord when he met Him on Mount Horeb after coming upon the bush that burned but was not consumed (see Exodus 3:2, 13-16). Throughout the Old Testament, the name of the Lord is associated with His attributes of being merciful and His infinite loving-kindness (see Exodus 34:5-7; Psalms 29:1-2; 89:16-18; 105:1-5). The word *ascribe* (Hebrew: *yahab*) is written in Hebrew as an imperative command, denoting that one should give to God the glory due His name. What are we to ascribe to God? It is His greatness (see Deuteronomy 5:24; 1 Chronicles 17:19, 21; 29:11). "Greatness" is a word often trivialized in the Western context, but in Scripture, there is nothing or anyone greater than Yahweh.

Verse 4 begins with the description of God as the "Rock." This metaphor is common throughout the Old Testament as a word that denotes God's strength, stability, and faithfulness. This declaration is followed by a string of four descriptive terms that modify the nature of God as a Rock (see 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:2-3; Psalms 18:2-3, 46; 61:2-4; Isaiah 17:10; 51:1). His works are perfect (Hebrew: *tamin*), denoting completeness and being without flaw. The word *judgment* (Hebrew: *mispat*) is better translated by the word *justice*. Israel was freed from slavery because God is just, and He demands that His people act in ways that are just (see Micah 6:8). He is the God of truth (Hebrew: *emunah*), connoting that He is trustworthy and without iniquity, a word that connotes that God cannot act wrongly. And He is right (Hebrew: *saddiq*), meaning within His very nature is the capacity to always act in a morally right way.

Verses 5-6. These verses draw a distinction between God and His people. Whereas God is perfect and uncorrupted, the people of Israel had corrupted themselves. Everything that God is, Israel was just the opposite. God was perfect in His work—Israel was corrupt. God was just and righteous; Israel, on the other hand, was unjust, morally unclean, and filled with iniquity.

Verse 6 is best translated with a question—"Is this how you repay the Lord? How foolish and unwise!" Moses followed this first statement with a series of two rhetorical questions: *Is not the Lord your father who redeemed you from the bondage of slavery? Has not the Lord made you and established you?* The questions evoke a positive response because Israel did not create herself. She was the product of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The generation that emerged from the forty years in the wilderness had been witnesses to the mighty acts of God. Moses exhorted them to give God the glory due His name. When we as Christians look at the mighty work of God at Calvary, we, too, should extol the greatness of God's work on our behalf. In contrast to how the world around us lives and looks, Christians are to be models of justice, righteousness, morality, honesty, and integrity.

B. God's Protection and Provision (Deuteronomy 32:10-14)

He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.

God had been Israel's protector from the very calling of Abraham and her tumultuous years in Egyptian bondage. This part of the song rehearses in the ears of the people how the Lord showed them His greatness.

Verse 10. Moses reminded the children of Israel that they did not create themselves. Here, the emphasis is on what God had done for Israel. God found him, used here as a personification of the entire people of Israel. He found him in a desert land and kept him in the howling wastelands of the Sinai wilderness (see Deuteronomy 8:15-16; Nehemiah 9:19-21; Jeremiah 2:6; Hosea 13:5). The Lord led him (Israel) from slavery to freedom. The word *instructed* (Hebrew: *byn*) is better translated by the words "cared for," "perceived," "understood," and "to pay or give one the utmost attention." This is further expanded with the words "he kept him as the apple of his eye." Here, *apple* is not used as fruit but is a Hebrew idiom that denotes something special and precious. The Hebrew word *ison* is better translated by the word *pupil*. In the Old Testament, the pupil or the apple of the eye is seen as that which is precious and most valuable. Moses wanted the people who were coming out of the wilderness to know that the trials and hardships they experienced were not intended to hurt them. They served to purge the nation of its disobedience and idolatrous ways.

Verse 11. In this verse, Moses draws upon nature, using the eagle as a metaphor for God (see Exodus 19:4; Isaiah 31:5; 40:31). Just as

an eagle protects her nest and provides for her young, so the Lord did that for Israel. The stirring of the nest is the image of the mother pushing her young out to try their wings, yet always hovering—prepared to catch one should it fail to fly and to bear it on her wings.

Verse 12. Moses reminded the children of Israel that all they had experienced was the Lord's doing. They had not been assisted by any foreign gods (which are not gods at all). He alone had brought them to the brink of the Promised Land.

Verses 13-14. These verses look forward to a future filled with the trappings of prosperity and blessing. The time in the wilderness had been one of just manna and water, but the future would be filled with the fruitfulness of Canaan, often described as flowing with "milk and honey." The high places of the earth can refer to the geography or that the Lord had given them victory over their enemies. The oil from the rock and honey from the rock are images of the land's producing in the most unlikely places. Canaan would be a land in which the cows produce butter and give fresh milk and the flocks are the choicest, which is expressed by the reference to Bashan, where the choice cows lived. The land would yield fine wheat and the purest and sweetest red wine.

God's people would experience a level of prosperity that they could have only imagined in the wilderness. These verses remind us that God is always going to act in the best interest of His people. Just as Jesus reminded His disciples that they were not to worry about what they would wear or what they would eat, our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things, and He will provide.

C. Israel Failed to Remember (Deuteronomy 32:18)

Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

In verse 18, Moses used metaphors to describe the loving care and strength of Yahweh. First, He is the Rock. Second, He is seen again as a mother, who begat (Hebrew: *yid*) in the direst circumstances. Rather than receiving love and respect from her child, she was completely ignored and disrespected.

The word *forgotten* (Hebrew: *sakah*) means "to dismiss, stop thinking about, or is the antithesis of remembering." From the very beginning of her existence, Israel was exhorted to remember the Lord God who brought them out of bondage in Egypt. Yet, in the infancy of her existence, Israel tended to forget God. Moses had forewarned them not to forget God when they reached the land of Canaan and had become settled in their own houses (see Deuteronomy 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19). The summons to remember God is found throughout the Psalms and in the preaching of the prophets (see Psalm 9:17; 44:20-22; Isaiah 17:10; 22:10-11; Jeremiah 2:32; 3:21; Hosea 8:14). It was only until Israel experienced the trauma of the Babylonian Exile that idolatry was finally rooted out of their culture and life. These ancient words of Moses remind us that prosperity and a worry-free life can lead us to forsake and forget the One who saved us. Remembering the Lord is how we live by faith, recognizing that all our help has come from Him.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This lesson sets the stage for the continuing story of Israel's rise from

slavery to nationhood. The birth of Moses marked the beginning of a transition from slavery to freedom. After forty years in the wilderness, Moses reminded the descendants of those who died in the wilderness that they must remember the Lord God who brought them out of bondage. Once a new generation settled into the Promised Land, it would be easy to forget the struggle it took to reach the Promised Land. Thus, throughout Deuteronomy, there are calls to remember, with their feast days being how they remember. In Deuteronomy 16:3, every time they celebrated Passover it would be a reminder to remember the days of affliction. "You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt" (ESV).

Bread was and remains today a main staple of the diet of ancient and Near Eastern people. When they left Egypt, they did not have time to properly prepare the bread, giving time for the yeast to take effect and cause the dough to rise. It was unleavened bread (or bread without yeast). Every time they ate unleavened bread then (and eat it today), it reminded them of the bitterness of the ordeal their ancestors faced in Egypt. It was not just a holiday recipe, but a stark reminder that their slavery in Egypt was a horrific ordeal.

Each year in February, we remember the sojourn of our foreparents, particularly those who lived during the period of American slavery and throughout the Jim Crow era. Memories, though painful, do not have to evoke pain; rather, they can serve as a vehicle for the celebration of the resilience of people and the presence and power of God.

PRAYER

Lord God, may we always remember the loving care that You have shown toward us. May we remember also the actions of those who went before us and left us a legacy of faith and prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 3-9, 2022)

Song of Moses

MONDAY, October 3: "God Calls and Equips" (Exodus 3:1-15)
TUESDAY, October 4: "God Brings Victory" (Exodus 14:21-31)
WEDNESDAY, October 5: "God Saves and Provides, and We Follow" (Psalm 105:26-27, 37-45)
THURSDAY, October 6: "God Expects Obedience" (Hebrews 3:7-19)
FRIDAY, October 7: "God Offers Eternal Rest" (Hebrews 4:1-11)
SATURDAY, October 8: "God Promises a Homeland" (Deuteronomy 1:1-8)
SUNDAY, October 9: "God Is Perfect and Just" (Deuteronomy 32:3-14, 18)

Notes

1. John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 172.
2. Ibid.

October 16, 2022 **Lesson 7**

THE CALL OF GIDEON

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Confidence Provides Necessary Courage
Youth Topic: Confidence Provides Necessary Courage

Children
General Lesson Title: The Call of Gideon
Children's Topic: Believe in Yourself

Devotional Reading
2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Judges 6:1-27
Print Passage: Judges 6:1-2, 7-16
Key Verse: Judges 6:23

Children
Background Scripture: Judges 6:1-24
Print Passage: Judges 6:1-16
Key Verse: Judges 6:23

Judges 6:1-2, 7-16—KJV

AND THE children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.
2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.
. . . . .
7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,
8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;
9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

Judges 6:1-2, 7-16—NIV

THE ISRAELITES did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.
2 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.
. . . . .
7 When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian,
8 he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
9 "I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land.
10 "I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not

10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.
11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.
12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.
13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.
14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?
15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.
16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee.

worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."
11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.
12 When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."
13 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."
14 The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"
15 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."
16 The LORD answered, "I will be with you."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We sometimes feel inadequate to fulfill the task to which God calls us. How do we overcome feelings of fear and insecurity? Gideon received divine reassurance of God's continued presence for the task at hand.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand how Gideon's feelings of inadequacy were no impediment to God's using him to save Israel in a time of trial.
2. Experience awe at God's confidence in them, even when they struggle to believe in themselves.
3. Answer God's call confidently, trusting that God will be with them.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Hiding in caves, creating strongholds, and beating out wheat in a winepress (which was an area sunken into the ground and thus hidden) are all indications of a refugee lifestyle.

—Gideon's calling strongly reflects Moses' calling (see Exodus 3–4), suggesting that the author wants the reader to see Gideon as a potential type of Moses.

—Judges 6:6 states that Israel was "greatly impoverished," reflecting not only their economic plight but their emotional and psychological state at the depredations of the Midianites; yet, even this low estate is not an indication of repentance but only of their pain in the situation.

—When Gideon accused God of abandoning His people, it was the people who had, in fact, abandoned God, demonstrating that his perspective was so internally focused that he had lost sight of the truth of the situation.

—Gideon's call is the longest and most formal calling narrative in the book of Judges, revealing the significance of Gideon's call as well as the author's view of Israel (forgetful) and of Gideon (insecure).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Judges covers the period between the death of Joshua and the establishment of the Hebrew monarchy. Moses brought the children of Israel to the threshold of the Promised Land and Joshua led them across the Jordan. Under Joshua the children of Israel divided the land and began the lengthy process of trying to conquer the land by defeating the Canaanites. After Joshua died, there was no principal leader of the Israelites. They became a people who had no one chosen by the Lord to lead them. When the generation that began the settlement of the land died, there arose a new generation who neither knew the Lord nor the things which He had done for Israel (see Judges 2:10). The absence of a strong, central leader plunged the nation into a time of chaos, confusion, and conflict. It was a time of tremendous internal turmoil, disobedience, and infidelity toward God. During the time of Joshua, Israel was a blessed nation who was finally realizing the fulfillment of the covenant promise first made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. During this period, the Israelites were a loosely organized confederation that consisted largely of families, clans, and tribes, each with their own set of elders and leaders doing as they saw fit.

The title of the book, "Judges," comes from the Hebrew word *shophet,* which means "to judge." A *shophet* is described as one who defends a just or right cause, whether as someone who hears cases and renders judgments or as a military leader who delivers an oppressed people. There were twelve individuals who served as judges in the book of Judges: Othniel (40 years); Ehud (80 years); Shamgar (unknown); Deborah (40 years); Gideon (40 years); Tola (23 years); Jair (22 years); Jephthah (6 years); Ibzan (7 years); Elon (10 years); Abdon (8 years); and Samson (20 (years).

John Phillips remarked, "In Judges we go round and round—rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration."[1] When Israel repented, God raised up a spiritual leader who would rally the nation's people and lead them to victory over their oppressors. The book of Judges depicts Israel as a nation who refused to recognize that God had called them to be separate and holy. They repeatedly adopted the idolatrous ways of the nations around them. They did evil in the

sight of the Lord and served the Baals, forsaking the God of their fathers and mothers.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The story of Gideon is set against the backdrop of the period of the Judges. Gideon lived in northern Israel in the tribal area of Manasseh. Some biblical archaeologists place him in the region that bordered the tribal areas of Issachar, Ephraim, and Zebulun, although we are not exactly certain of the location. The tribe of Manasseh was comprised of descendants of Joseph and the grandson of Jacob. Manasseh was the firstborn son of Joseph and Asenath (see Genesis 41:51). Joseph took considerable pride in his son because the Lord had caused him to forget his hardship and pain. When Israel prepared to cross the Jordan to enter the land of Canaan, half the tribe of Manasseh chose to remain east of the Jordan because they believed the land to be better suited for the raising of their flocks (see Numbers 32:1, 4, 16, 33; Joshua 13:29-32). The remainder of the tribe of Manasseh settled in the land of Canaan in a region occupied by Canaanites.

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by his second wife, Keturah, with whom he had six sons—one named Midian (see Genesis 25:2). Prior to his death, Abraham gave all six of his sons gifts and sent them away to the east, which would have taken them into the region east of the Jordan. Most scholars believe they settled in a region south of the Dead Sea near the Gulf of Aqaba and southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It was in this region where Midian founded the nation of the Midianites.

The land of Midian and the Midianites were not strangers to the children of Israel. They were distant relatives of the Israelites. After slaying the Egyptian, Moses fled to Midian to escape the wrath of Pharaoh (see Exodus 2:15-21). While in Midian Moses married the daughter of Jethro, priest of Midian. During the children of Israel's flight from Egypt, the Moabites and Midianites (see Numbers 22) attacked them.

During the period of the Judges, the Midianites may have migrated north to the region of Gilead, which would explain the frequent attacks into tribal lands of Manasseh. The Lord raised up Gideon to save the children of Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, who had plundered their crops for seven years. The battle between the army of Israel—led by Gideon—and the Midianites and the Amalekites took place in the Jezreel Valley (see Judges 6:33). The defeat of the Midianites and Amalekites by Gideon made him one of the greatest of the judges, whose influence and impact was felt for forty years.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Gideon: the youngest of Joash, the family of Abiezer, who was a member of the tribe of Manasseh. He was called to be a judge and was responsible for delivering the Israelites from the Midianites. He is also called Jerubbaal.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Bondage (verse 8)—Hebrew: *ebed* (eh'-bed): servanthood; "slavery" (NIV).

Cried out (verse 7)—Hebrew: *zaaq* (zaw-ak'): cried to; called; wailed; "cried" (KJV).

Delivered (verse 1)—Hebrew: *nathan* (naw-than'): "gave" (NIV); put; set; placed; designated.

Made (verse 2)—Hebrew: *asah* (aw-saw'): accomplished; brought about; "prepared" (NIV).

Strongholds (verse 2)—Hebrew: *metsad* (mets-ad'): fastness; impregnable things; forts; "strong holds" (KJV).

Threshed (verse 11)—Hebrew: *chabat* (khaw-bat'): beat off; beat out; "was threshing" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Courageous Faith

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Israel Rebels against the Lord (Judges 6:1-2)

B. The Reasons for Israel's Oppression (Judges 6:7-10)

C. The Angel of the Lord Appears to Gideon (Judges 6:11-13)

D. The Lord Sends Gideon Forth (Judges 6:14-16)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Courageous Faith

Having courageous faith means believing God for deliverance and salvation regardless of how the situation looks. Courageous faith is walking in the absolute assurance that what God has promised He will deliver. Courageous faith is clinging to the promise that God will neither leave nor forsake us. Courageous faith is our most potent and powerful weapon against defeat when we face a desperate set of circumstances. Having courageous faith is how we achieve the ends of realizing the kingdom of God.

God has infused all His children with courage to press our way through the most challenging circumstances. Deeply embedded in us is the resolve to move forward. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love, power, and a sound mind. God is doing something new in our spirits right now. We must listen to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit and how He builds us up. Our faith in God was made for such a time as this. We are always reminded that our trials are but momentary, light afflictions.

When God calls us to a task, regardless of how insurmountable it may look, He equips us for the work. Just as God equipped Joshua, who followed Moses, even so He equips us. He gives to us a sterling word of promise: "I will not leave you or forsake you. As I was with Moses, so shall I be with you" (see Joshua 1:5). Herein lies the source of our confidence and courage.

B. Biblical Background

Ancient Jewish tradition holds that Samuel wrote the book of Judges sometime during the period 1045–1000 BC. Judges is an important book because it lays out the social, religious, historical, and cultural context that illumines our understanding of how and why the monarchy rose during the time of Samuel. The book of Judges begins with the children of Israel's being on a downward trajectory, and it concludes with the young nation's going in the same direction (see Judges 1:1–2:12; 21:25). Early on they failed

to completely conquer and subdue the land and the people who inhabited Canaan—and things only grew worse. Rather than influence the people around them to embrace the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the children of Israel became worshippers of Baal and Asherah. These were the god and goddess of the Canaanites (see https://www.gotquestions.org/Baal-and-Asherah.html).

After the death of Joshua there began a cycle of rebellion, repentance, and restoration. The people never learned the lesson—with each subsequent generation's repeating the same errors as the one before them. Throughout the book of Judges, we see this pattern of rebellion, then oppression through subjugation, followed by a time when the people would cry out and the Lord would send a deliverer. Prior to the Lord's raising up Gideon there had been four previous judges anointed by God to deliver the people (see Judges 3:9–5:31).

The story of Gideon's call and service occupies three chapters (6–8), making it the longest account of the Judges narratives. At the center of the book of Judges is the foundational theological theme that God is faithful. Within the Gideon narrative the theme of God's faithfulness overshadows even the cowardice and fear of the one whom He called to lead the people to another era of peace and prosperity.

The Midianites had instilled so much fear into the hearts of the people that they were forced to live in caves and to hide their crops to prevent them from being seized by the Midianites. God's calling of Gideon is reminiscent of the calling of Moses in Exodus 3–4. Some scholars have suggested that the writer wanted to show Gideon as a type of Moses. Throughout the Gideon narrative we see God's raising up the least likely person to deliver the people from oppression. The irony of the story of Gideon is seen in his accusation that God had abandoned His people when, in fact, the opposite was true—Israel had abandoned God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Israel Rebels against the Lord

(Judges 6:1-2)

AND THE children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

Verses 1-2. After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel were still fighting to conquer and subdue Canaan (see Judges 1:21-36). The tenure of Deborah was followed by a period of more than forty years of stability, peace, and prosperity (see Judges 5:31).

Verse 1 begins with a pattern of rebellion, repression, repentance, and restoration that was repeated again and again over a period of several hundred years. After a brief period of obedience to the Torah and honoring the covenant, Israel would turn and begin to practice idolatry—"the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD." The children of Israel made no attempt to hide their sins and apostasy. Again, the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and He delivered them into the hands of the Midianites (see https://www.gotquestions.org/Midianites.html). The Lord allowed the children of Israel to be

conquered, their land plundered, and their crops stolen for seven years.

Verse 2 points out that the children of Israel were no match for the military might of the Midianites. The constant presence of fear, anxiety, and an imposing invader drove the people to hide in caves and dens and along the mountaintops, where they created strongholds. Verses 3-6 describe the devastation heaped upon the children of Israel by their oppressors.

B. The Reasons for Israel's Oppression (Judges 6:7-10)

And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Verse 7. The oppression of the Midianites pushed the children of Israel to the brink of despair. Their oppressors were wreaking havoc and creating great fear among the people. They cried out to the Lord because there was no one else on which to call. Deborah—who had led them and delivered them from the hands of their previous oppressors—was deceased.

Verses 8-10. The Lord's response to their cries was to send a prophet and not a new judge. We are not told the name of the prophet because he is incidental to his assignment, which was to remind the children of Israel why the Midianites were oppressing them. This is the first recorded passage of prophetic speech in the Old Testament. The prophet began with the words, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel." In these words, there is a reminder that Israel's God is not the god of the land or of the Amorites. The prophet spoke for the Lord God, saying that He and He alone had brought them up from Egypt and out of the house of bondage. He had been their deliverer from the hands of the Egyptians. Here, Egypt represents the horror of their lived experience of bondage and oppression. The Lord God had delivered them from all who oppressed them. Not only had the Lord delivered them, but also, He gave them the land in which they were currently residing. While the children of Israel set out to conquer the land, it was the Lord who drove out the Canaanites and gave them the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Verse 10 defines the one requirement of the Lord: they were to be loyal to Yahweh. They were not to fear the gods of the Amorites (who were not even gods). Rather than comply with the demands of the covenant agreement at Sinai, they disobeyed the Lord and worshipped and bowed down to other gods.

Here again, as with previous judges, the children of Israel were prone to forget the experiences of previous generations. They fell back into their old pattern of forgetting the Lord God and returning to their old idolatrous ways. Yet, they wondered why the Lord allowed their enemies to oppress them.

C. The Angel of the Lord Appears to Gideon (Judges 6:11-13)

And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us

up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

Verse 11. The prophet had delivered the message, confronting the children of Israel about their sin. In this verse, the Lord sent an angel to announce His intention to deliver His people from the hands of the Midianites. Oak trees were usually prominent meeting places that could be readily identified because of their size. Prominent tree locations were often sites where divine messages were received from the Lord. The location of the oak in Ophrah has never really been identified and much of the discussion about its location is speculation. We are certain that it was in the tribal territory of Manasseh. Some scholars have suggested that it may have been near ancient Shechem or in the Jezreel Valley. We are told that Gideon's father was named Joash and that their family was from the clan of Abiezrite (see Joshua 17:2).

Gideon was in the winepress threshing out the grain. These were usually located in depressions where the grapes could be crushed, and the juice saved. Threshing floors were above ground to allow the wind to carry away the chaff. Gideon used that location to protect his crops from the Midianites.

Verses 12-13. The angel of the Lord addressed Gideon as the mighty man of valor, declaring that "the LORD is with you." Gideon's response was one of resignation and defeat. *How could the Lord say that He is for us, and we are held in bondage?* Gideon's response was not one of joy; rather, he offered a complaint to the angel of the Lord: *Why have so many bad things happened to the children of Israel?* He recalled the lessons of the elders who shared how the Lord had brought them out of Egypt with mighty manifestations of power. But in his lifetime, God seemed remote and disinterested in their plight. Gideon was disappointed that he had not seen the great miracles of the past. He along with his generation complained that God had abandoned them. "Where is the God who had brought them up out of bondage in Egypt?" It was not the Lord who had forsaken them; rather, it was the children of Israel who had forsaken the Lord. Often when things begin to unravel in the lives of the people of God, we assume that someone has sinned or that God is exacting punishment upon them.

D. The Lord Sends Gideon Forth

(Judges 6:14-16)

And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee.

Verse 14. Gideon had no idea who was speaking with him. Just as Moses before him complained that he was not the man for such an important task, so, too, did Gideon seek reasons for not responding to the call (see Exodus 4:1-18). The Lord knew more about Gideon than he realized. The Lord knew what tribe he was from and who was his father. The Lord commanded that he "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites." Gideon, the one who considered himself to be from a poor family and the least of the tribe of Manasseh, would be the vessel used by the Lord to bring about deliverance for Israel. The Lord had already given Gideon the victory and a solemn promise of His presence (see Joshua 1:5; see also Matthew 28:19-20). Gideon devalued himself and considered himself to be unqualified and unfit for the task at hand. Is this not how the Lord works? He

often uses and chooses people who are among the least qualified and who lack qualities deemed vital in leaders (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Verse 16 contains the solemn promise of the Lord's presence: "Surely, I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." This latter phrase means that Gideon, despite his self-deprecation, would raise an army of Israelites that would marshal themselves together as one man. Under his leadership, they would overcome and defeat the enemies of his people.

The Lord often uses people whom men and women would consider to be the least qualified. Just as Jesus called twelve young men to follow Him, be with Him, and be His disciples, so the Lord calls us even today.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Gideon was God's chosen vessel for an assignment that only he could fulfill. When he looked at his family background there was nothing that would commend him for such an important task. Yet, this is how God works; He chooses based upon His plans and prerogatives. We must all remember that when the Lord calls us to a task, He equips and empowers us with the Holy Spirit. He will neither leave us nor forsake us. Our response to God's call must always be yes, without reservation. There were three assurances given to Gideon by the Lord. First, the Lord said that he was a mighty man of valor. This is an affirmation of courage. Second, the Lord told Gideon to go in his strength. This was an affirmation that the Lord had empowered him for the assignment. Third, there was the promise of presence. The Lord's presence would guarantee victory over the Midianites. When we consider the odds that are in our favor, there should be nothing that holds us back from carrying out the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant that Your servants may never stoop to cowardice or fear. May we live in the full acknowledgment that You are always with us. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 10-16, 2022)

The Call of Gideon

MONDAY, October 10: "'God Is My Portion Forever'" (Psalm 73:1-5, 16-17, 21-28)
TUESDAY, October 11: "Israel Struggles to Remain Faithful" (Judges 2:7-8, 11-19)
WEDNESDAY, October 12: "Treasure in Clay Jars" (2 Corinthians 4:1-7)
THURSDAY, October 13: "Afflicted but Renewed Daily" (2 Corinthians 4:8-18)
FRIDAY, October 14: "God's Grace Is Sufficient" (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)
SATURDAY, October 15: "Deliverance Comes from God's Hand" (Judges 7:1-8, 16-22)
SUNDAY, October 16: "God Calls Gideon" (Judges 6:1-2, 7-16a)

Note

1. John Phillips, *Exploring the Old Testament Book by Book: An Expository Survey* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009), 83.

October 23, 2022 **Lesson 8**

WHO IS KING?

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: We Want a Human King
Youth Topic: We Want a Human King

Children
General Lesson Title: Who Will Be King?
Children's Topic: Israel Asks for a King

Devotional Reading
Psalm 93

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 10:17-26
Print Passages: 1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24
Key Verse: 1 Samuel 10:19a

Children
Background Scriptures: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 10:17-26
Print Passages: 1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24
Key Verse: 1 Samuel 10:19

1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24—KJV

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,
5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.
6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.
7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

. . . . .

17 And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh;
18 And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith

1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24—NIV

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.
5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."
6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.
7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."

. . . . .

17 Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah
18 and said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and

the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you:
19 And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.
20 And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.
21 When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found.
22 Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff.
23 And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.
24 And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.'
19 "But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you have said, 'No, appoint a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans."
20 When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot.
21 Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found.
22 So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies."
23 They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others.
24 Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We tend to be influenced by the people around us, for good or for ill. How do we discern the voice to which to listen? The elders chose to listen to the people rather than following the leadership of God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand why the Israelites rejected God as their king and sought a human king whom they could see.
2. Sense their selfishness in seeking a quick solution to life's problems instead of trusting God.
3. Pray for God's help to trust Him as their only true King and ruler.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The only other time we see this method of elimination in the Old Testament (see 1 Samuel 10:20-21) is when God singled out Achan as the source of rebellion against Him (see Joshua 7:16-18), suggesting that Saul's appointment should be seen as a judgment on Israel for abandoning God's spiritual leadership by choosing a political king.

—Even more so than today, a man's height in the ancient Near East was seen as an indication of his physical prowess and power, both good external qualities for a king.

—Samuel's warning combined with Saul's later failures as a king demonstrates that when God gives His people what they choose, it ends poorly: the power of self-determination, the power to choose, is not so much a blessing as a learning opportunity, a chance to let God rule our lives.

—Where the story proves that God's character is patient, faithful, and caring, Saul's original characterization suggests a man who appears ideal on the outside but internally is irresponsible and undisciplined (see 10:21-24).

—The need for leadership in Israel was undeniable (see 8:1-3), but the political solution that God's people chose could never solve the spiritual problem they faced and would only take them further away from following God.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Samuel was the last and greatest judge of Israel and the first of Israel's great prophets (see Acts 13:20). He lived during a period of tremendous turmoil in Israel. He was the first recognized prophet in Israel and the transitional leader between the period of the judges and the beginning of the Hebrew monarchy. The life, ministry, and career of Samuel are found in 1 Samuel 1:20–25:1. God chose Samuel to anoint the first two kings of Israel—Saul and David. His name means "heard of God." We are not sure of the exact date that Samuel was born nor are we certain of the year he died. The most likely dates of his birth are between 1100 and 1090 BC. He lived long enough to have grown sons to have seen the forty-year reign of Saul and still anoint David as king after Saul.

Samuel was the son of Elkanah and Hannah (see 1 Samuel 1:19-21). His parents were from Ramathaimzophim, which was in the hill country of Ephraim (see 1 Samuel 1:1). His father was a very pious man who would travel to the central sanctuary (which was in Shiloh) to offer sacrifices to the Lord (see 1 Samuel 1:3a). Elkanah had two wives—one named Peninnah and the other named Hannah, who was barren. Peninnah would often provoke Hannah because she could not have children (see 1 Samuel 1:6). On one occasion, as Hannah earnestly prayed and wept near the doorstep of the Temple, she was observed by Eli—who thought she was drunk (see 1 Samuel 1:12-18). Hannah vowed that if the Lord would open her womb and bless her with a son, then she would dedicate him to the Lord (see 1 Samuel 1:11, 28). After he had been weaned, Samuel lived with Eli the priest and upon the death of Eli, he later assumed the roles of judge and leader of Israel. Samuel rose to prominence after leading the Israelites to a decisive victory over the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 7:7-17).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Samuel spent his life living and working out of Ramath, the place of his birth. In the book of 1 Samuel, it is called Ramathaimzophim, located in the hill country of Ephraim—which

was located about nine miles from the central sanctuary in Shiloh. Each year, Samuel would visit Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah to judge the people and quite possibly conduct religious services. It is probable that Samuel's role as judge was typically and traditionally performed by judges (see Exodus 18:13-27; Deuteronomy 16:18-20). It was in Ramath where Samuel met Saul and anointed him as king over Israel (see 1 Samuel 9:15–10:1).

The selection of Saul as king was one of the most challenging periods in Samuel's life. Samuel had been sole judge of the nation for a number of years and the request for a king did not rest well with the aged prophet/judge.

Samuel was disheartened by the Israelite request and told the elders and people that a king would bring a new order to how life would be lived in Israel. He would take their sons and place them in his army (see 1 Samuel 8:11). Samuel stated that the king would change Hebrew life as they knew it, replacing it with a monarchy (see 1 Samuel 8:12-18). After pleading with the people (to no avail), he relented and obeyed the Lord—who granted their request (see 1 Samuel 9:21-22).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Kish: the father of Saul.
Samuel: the son of Hannah and Elkanah, a descendant of the Levi.
Saul: the son of Kish and the first king of Israel.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Give (8:6)—Hebrew: *nathan* (naw-than'): to put, set; add; bear.
Hearken (8:7)—Hebrew: *qāšaḇ* (kaw-shab'): hear; heed; be attentive; pay attention; "listen to" (NIV).
Judge (8:5)—Hebrew: *shaphat* (shaw-fat'): to govern, decide, "lead" (NIV).
Look (8:5)—Hebrew: *hinneh* (hin-nay'): "lo! behold!"; indeed; "Behold" (KJV); (no NIV equivalent).
Prayed (8:6)—Hebrew: *palal* (paw-lal'): intervened; interposed; mediated; interceded.
Saved (10:19)—Hebrew: *yasha* (yaw-shah'): delivered; brought salvation; helped; "saves" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Another Man or Woman
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The People Demand a King (1 Samuel 8:4-7)
   B. Samuel Reminds Israel of What the Lord Has Done (1 Samuel 10:17-19)
   C. The Lord's Choice (1 Samuel 10:20-24)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Another Man or Woman

The story of the rise and fall of Saul is one of both triumph and tragedy. His life began with great promise, but it ended in total ruin. Saul was the son of a wealthy farmer. According to 1 Samuel 9:1, Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of the twelve tribes of Israel. Further, the listing of his family's genealogy suggests that he came from a lengthy line of important and impressive people. His father's name was Kish, who

is described as having been a mighty man of valor. In verse 2, we learn a few things about the young Saul: "[Kish] had a son whose name was Saul, a young and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome man than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9:2, NASB).

Three signs were given to validate Samuel's word in 1 Samuel 10:2-6: first, in verse 2, two men at the tomb of Rachel would tell him that the donkeys had been found and that his father was more concerned about him than the donkeys.

Second, in verses 3-4, he would be greeted by three men from Tabor who were going to Bethel for worship. Each would be carrying something for the sacrifice. One would have three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a jug of wine. They would give Saul two of the loaves of bread.

Third, in verses 5-6, he would come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison was encamped. They would be carrying a harp, a tambourine, a flute, and a lyre, and they would be prophesying. At that very moment, the Spirit of the Lord would come upon Saul mightily and he, too, would prophesy with them. Consider 1 Samuel 10:6—"Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man" (NKJV). God was going to equip him for his assignment and service to the Lord God. A radical change was going to take place in Saul's life.

Whenever God has called men and women to serve His purposes, they are equipped to do the work. Just as Saul was anointed with the power of the Spirit of God, so, too, are we anointed today with the Holy Spirit. He equips us with the power and authority of God so that we will be effective and successful in our work of missions and ministry.

B. Biblical Background

In 1 Samuel 8:1, Samuel is described as an old man, and he had appointed his sons as his successors to be judges in Israel. The problem was that his sons were not following in his footsteps (verse 3). The elders came to Samuel and demanded that a king be set to lead them so that they would be like the other nations. This would eventually lead to the selection and anointing of Saul of the tribe of Benjamin to become the first king of Israel.

The irony of the reign of Saul is Samuel's pronouncement at the outset that a king would bring new challenges into the lives of the people of Israel. In 1 Samuel 8:10-18, Samuel warned the people of the consequences of their request and that their desire to be like the other nations would end poorly. Saul possessed the outward qualities that people admire, but inwardly he was irresponsible and undisciplined (see 1 Samuel 10:21-24).

The selection process of Saul to be king over Israel covers nearly three chapters, beginning with the demand of the people to give them a king and culminating in the eventual public anointing of Saul and declaration by Samuel at Mizpah in 1 Samuel 10:17-25.

The events that led up to the actual anointing of Saul to be king over Israel are described in a detailed account in 1 Samuel 9:1–10:24. Saul was given the assignment to search for his father's donkeys. After three days of futility, Saul's servant suggested that they go to the house of the Seer (Samuel), who would

be able to tell them where the donkeys were located. Samuel invited Saul to be the guest of honor at a dinner later that day and just prior to sending him back to Benjamin, Samuel told Saul that God had selected him to be the ruler over his heritage. In the selection of Saul to be king, the people got what they wanted—but in the end, it was a failure.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The People Demand a King

(1 Samuel 8:4-7)

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

Verses 4-5. Samuel had become an old man. The peaceful and prosperous days described in 1 Samuel 7:12-14 were long gone. Several years had elapsed between the events recorded in chapters 7 and 8. The appointment of Samuel's sons to be judges over Israel had been a disaster. They lacked his charisma and on top of everything else they were corrupt—they took brides, perverted justice, and were dishonest. The elders of the people had seen enough and came to Samuel's home to denounce his sons. They accused Samuel's sons of failing to live up to the standards of their father. In many ways, Samuel's age had more than likely robbed him of the stamina to bring his sons under subjection. The elders demanded that Samuel make them a king to judge them like the other nations around them. Herein lay a great danger. The nations around them were idol worshippers, whose practices had already found fertile ground among the Israelites (see verse 3).

Verses 6-7. Samuel was sorely displeased with the request of the elders. He saw this as a personal attack on his leadership. The request of the elders was a sign that the people had lost confidence in Samuel and the corruption of his sons did not help matters. In response to the elders, Samuel prayed to the Lord for guidance and support.

The Lord's answer was not according to Samuel's prayer. Samuel was told to hearken to the voice of the people and grant their request. How strange this must have sounded for a man who had been a servant of the Lord from the day of his birth. The Lord reminded Samuel that it was not him whom they had rejected—it was the Lord Himself whom they cast aside from being their King. Their memory of the stories of their ancestors had faded and they no longer clung to the accounts of how the Lord had delivered them in the past. During the time of Gideon, the people wanted to make Gideon king, but he reminded them that the Lord was their king (see Judges 8:23). For several hundred years, Israel had been called and set aside to be God's covenant people—holy and blameless. This event effectively ended the covenant relationship they had with God.

B. Samuel Reminds Israel of What the Lord Has Done

(1 Samuel 10:17-19)

And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh; and said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: and ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.

Verse 17. Mizpeh was the central gathering place for Israel during the tenure of Samuel as judge over Israel. The exact location is not known; however, it was near or on the main road that ran from Ramah to Bethel, in the central highlands of Israel. It was Mizpeh where Samuel first gathered Israel to pray and to organize themselves to fight against the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 7:6-11). The town was also one of the places visited annually by Samuel as he made his rounds to judge Israel (see 1 Samuel 7:15-16). Once again, he assembled the children of Israel to Mizpeh to confirm their desire for a king.

Verses 18-19. Samuel began with the traditional prophetic speech formula: "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel." Each reference to the name of Israel was a reminder of the long history of the children of Israel that went back to the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The name *Israel* connected them to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that was ratified again at Sinai (see Exodus 19:1-7). Furthermore, in these words there is the declaration that the gods of the Amorites and the Baals were not the God of Israel. Israel's God is known by His mighty works of deliverance and acts of loving-kindness. He is the One who had brought them out of the more than four hundred years of bondage in Egypt. Not only had God brought them out, but also, throughout their history as they journeyed toward Canaan and even after the settlement, He had delivered them. Egypt was one of the nations that He fought against—and throughout the period of the judges and even in the current context, the Lord was still their deliverer. He is the One who had saved them from the hands of their oppressors. We see this throughout the book of Judges and early in the career of Samuel.

Verse 19. In this verse, Samuel made three strong, stinging statements regarding the demands of the children of Israel. First, in verse 19a, their request indicated their desire to reject the love and mercy of their God. Israel's rejection of the Lord God was a complete denunciation and denial of their covenant relationship. Second, Samuel pointed out that it was the Lord God who had personally saved them from all their adversities and tribulations. Whatever they had faced from the wilderness to that present moment, God had been their mainstay. Third, the request for a king was a declaration that they no longer desired to have the Lord God as their king. Israel was not like the other nations that were ruled by monarchs; rather, they were a theocracy. The Lord God was their king. In this one act they rejected everything that had been done by the Lord God and, indicative of their actions, they no longer wanted to be the people of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Samuel employed a tradition that had been used for hundreds of years, wherein the people would

come before the Lord by tribes, clans, and families (see Numbers 17:2; Joshua 7:14).

How often it is (yet how true it is to this very day) that the people of God can become enamored with the world around them and forget who they are called to be. Just as Israel was delivered to be a kingdom of priests, so, too, have we been saved to proclaim to the world the redemptive work of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

C. The Lord's Choice

(1 Samuel 10:20-24)

And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

Verses 20-21. According to verse 17, Samuel assembled all the tribes together at Mizpeh. We have no idea how long it took to bring the people together. It may have taken several weeks to get the word out to everyone and then for the people to meet with him at Mizpeh. Samuel employed a practice that had been used by Joshua in Joshua 7:16-19 to determine who had sinned against the Lord, thus causing Israel to suffer a humiliating defeat at Ai (see Joshua 7:1-5).

Although the text does not specifically mention the practice Samuel used, it was more than likely the casting of lots. The casting of lots was used in ancient Hebrew society as a means to determine what the will of God was in a particular matter (see Proverbs 16:33). The practice consisted of placing marked stones within a jar and the order in which they fell determined the nature of the decision. This was the practice for determining which goat would be the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:5-10). The casting of lots was not confined to the Old Testament; it was also a customary practice used in the New Testament era and by the early Christians to determine God's will in a matter (see Luke 1:9; John 19:24; Acts 1:15-26). The Scriptures do not provide details on what was used or how the practice of casting lots developed.

As the tribes passed by, the tribe of Benjamin was selected—and as the tribe of Benjamin passed by (according to their families), the family of Matri and finally Saul the son of Kish was chosen. This is the only mention of the family of Matri in the Scriptures. How the decision was made to select Saul is not known, since Saul was not present for the selection process. More than likely, Samuel knew what the outcome would be, and that Saul had been chosen by God and anointed by himself to become the first king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 10:1).

Verses 22–23. Saul was missing! "They enquired of the Lord" may be a reference to asking Samuel to seek an explanation from the Lord. The Lord answered that Saul had "hid himself among the stuff." There is a firm explanation for the stuff; more than likely it was an area within the camp used for storage. Was it out of fear that Saul hid, fearing some

dreadful outcome because the practice of casting lots was used to select him to be king? Once they knew where he was hiding, they ran and brought him forward to Samuel. Saul is described as a young man who stood head and shoulders above the rest of the people assembled. Was this the person whom they wanted to be their king—someone who stood out among the people physically? There was no mention made of Saul's character, his personality, or his loyalty to Yahweh and the covenant. He was just taller than everyone else. Leaders in congregations are often chosen based upon some superficial quality that may not reflect the will of God.

Verse 24. Samuel made the public declaration that their desire for a king had been decided by the Lord. Saul was not their choice; rather, "See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen . . . ?" In all of Israel, there was none like him. Was this based upon character or physical qualities? At this announcement, the people shouted, "God save the king." They wanted the Lord to affirm their decision and what would soon become a national disaster. As a king and leader, what began with great hope and expectation fizzled into despair and the continuation of the same divisive ways that had characterized life for the children of Israel.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The one glaring reality of the selection of Saul to be king over Israel centers around the expectation of the people. The children of Israel wanted someone to lead who would enable them to identify with the nations around them. There are times when the people of God are driven more by their own desires than the Word or will of God. How often have congregations demanded that a certain direction be taken, or a particular decision be adopted, and it ends in disaster for the congregation? There are decisions that we make to meet a short-term desire that have long-term consequences. This was the case when the children of Israel made Saul their king.

PRAYER

Lord God, give us the determination to follow Your will in all things. May we choose leaders whose words and deeds are guided by the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 17-23, 2022)

Who Is King?

MONDAY, October 17: "A Prayer for Protection and Boldness" (Acts 4:23-31)
TUESDAY, October 18: "A Desire to Be like Others" (1 Samuel 8:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, October 19: "God Is the King of Nations" (Revelation 11:15-19; 15:2-4)
THURSDAY, October 20: "The Lord Is Robed in Majesty" (Psalm 93)
FRIDAY, October 21: "God Chooses Saul" (1 Samuel 9:3-17)
SATURDAY, October 22: "God's Spirit Will Possess You" (1 Samuel 9:27–10:8)
SUNDAY, October 23: "Behold Your King!" (1 Samuel 10:17-27)

October 30, 2022 **Lesson 9**

DAVID IS ANOINTED AS KING

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: The Heart of a Leader
Youth Topic: The Heart of a Leader

Children
General Lesson Title: David Is Anointed as King
Children's Topic: The Heart of a Leader

Devotional Reading
Acts 13:21-31

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
Print Passage: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
Key Verse: 1 Samuel 16:7

Children
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
Print Passage: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
Key Verse: 1 Samuel 16:7c

1 Samuel 16:1-13—KJV

AND THE LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.
2 And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD.
3 And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.
4 And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?
5 And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

1 Samuel 16:1-13—NIV

THE LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."
2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'
3 "Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate."
4 Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"
5 Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.
6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought,

6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.
7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.
8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.
9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.
10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.
11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.
12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.
13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

"Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."
7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."
8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either."
9 Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one."
10 Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these."
11 So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."
12 So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one."
13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Most people tend to choose leaders based on human standards. How should those who rule be chosen? According to 1 Samuel, God selects leaders based on a person's heart rather than by human standards.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Compare humans standards of choosing a leader with God's standards.
2. Value living with a heart that is pleasing to God.
3. Practice living with a heart that is pleasing to God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In ancient narrative, the initial introduction of an individual should give insight into his or her character—but here, the only description is God's dismissal of the outer appearance of David's brothers in favor of David's unidentified quality of the heart (16:7). The point of the story is that God's assessment is to be our model, not our own list of qualifications.

—God's approval of David's character is not explained here but should be understood in light of David's own words in Psalm 40:6-8, where David expresses his understanding that God wants wholehearted loyalty and sincere obedience, not religious observance without love.

—Although the eyes of most are on David's character, Samuel's role reminds us of his experience as a child (see 1 Samuel 3) in learning to listen to God's voice with the intent to obey.

—This entire account is presented as a series of contrasts to Saul's selection as king and should be read against 1 Samuel 10: God chooses this king versus the people's choice; the external versus the internal qualities; and the presence of God versus the absence of God in the chosen individual.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

One of the difficulties associated with the study of the Old Testament is determining the exact dates that some events took place. Biblical historians did not record the events narrated in their writings according to how we would expect them. They did not indicate that an event took place in a particular year. Rather, there may have been specific cosmic or seismic events by which they determined the dates of events (see Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5). We are reasonably sure of some dates; for example, we are confident that the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 BC and that the Southern Kingdom, specifically Jerusalem, fell to the Babylonians between 597 and 587/86 BC. However, when it comes to making determinations about the year that Samuel anointed David as king in Saul's stead, we are not sure. The Scriptures do not provide us with any information about the ages of David, his brothers, and his father, Jesse. There are no historical indicators that would give us a clue; hence, we are left to speculate based upon certain customs in place at the time.

In 1 Samuel 16:1, the Lord instructed Samuel to stop grieving over Saul and to go to Bethlehem to the home of a man named Jesse. After the seven oldest sons of Jesse had paraded before Samuel, Samuel then asked if there were any others; Jesse responded by saying that there was one other that was his youngest son, who was in the fields tending the sheep. Accordingly, this practice of having the youngest son tend the sheep would have meant that David was between the ages of 12 and 16. This was a chore that was usually given to the young child in the family. It is common to see adolescent children tending the family flock across Africa and in some parts of the Middle East.

Moreover, the biblical historian does not

provide a chronological timeline indicating the point or year in which the Lord rejected Saul as king over His heritage. One can assume that this may have occurred at the midpoint of his reign, given that several years would pass before Saul and his sons would be killed in battle on Mount Gilboa (see 1 Samuel 31:1-6).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The events detailed in 1 Samuel 16:1-13 took place in Bethlehem, the ancestral home of Jesse, the father of David (see Ruth 4:17-22). Bethlehem was located about six miles southeast of Jerusalem and it figured prominently in the history of ancient Israel. The name *Bethlehem* means "house of bread" and was the site of the events from the story of Ruth and Boaz. Samuel was sent by God to Bethlehem for the purpose of anointing David as king over Israel.

In the Old Testament, the act of anointing was used to dedicate people, places, or objects to the service of the Lord. It was a customary practice for priests, prophets, and kings to be anointed through a special ceremony of consecration. Moses was instructed by God to prepare a special oil for anointing (see Exodus 30:25-33). This oil was used to consecrate Aaron and his sons to the priesthood and to consecrate the holy utensils used in the daily sacrificial rituals of the tabernacle (see Exodus 28:41; 29:7; 30:25-33). The oil that Moses prepared could not be used for any other purpose or to anoint anyone for which it was not designated. Anyone using the holy oil for any other purpose faced the certain prospect of death.

A king was anointed with oil by a prophet as a sign that God had chosen him to be the ruler over His people (see 1 Samuel 9:16; 10:1; 15:1; 16:3, 13; 1 Kings 1:34; 2 Kings 9:3, 6). In ancient Hebrew culture, it was strictly forbidden to do harm to the Lord's anointed servant (see 1 Samuel 24:1-6, 10; 26:6-12; 2 Samuel 1:1-16). David was blessed by God because of his reverence and respect for the Lord's anointed leader. He would not raise a finger against Saul, nor would he allow his men to take revenge against King Saul—who attempted to kill David (see 1 Samuel 26:11).

During the time of Samuel, the act of anointing came to be associated with receiving the Spirit of God. Samuel was sent by the Lord to the home of Jesse to anoint David as king over Israel. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him amid his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah" (see 1 Samuel 16:13). The act of anointing symbolized the outpouring of God's Spirit upon an individual for leadership or service (see 1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18ff; Acts 10:38).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

David: the second and greatest king in the history of Israel. Seventy-three of the psalms list him as the writer.

Jesse: the son of Obed and grandson of Ruth and Boaz. He was the father of David.

Samuel: the last judge of Israel. He anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul, and David.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Anointed (verse 6)—Hebrew: *mashiach* (maw-shee'-akh): set apart; consecrated; person(s) or object(s) set apart for divine use.

Consecrated (verse 5)—Hebrew: *qadash* (kaw-dash'): set apart; became holy; "sanctified" (KJV).

Fill (verse 1)—Hebrew: *male* or *mala* (maw-lay'): to be or become full; to fill.

Heart (verse 7)—Hebrew: *lebab* (lay-bawb'): inner man, mind, will; courage; desire.

Name (verse 3)—Hebrew: *amar* (aw-mar'): to utter, say; declare; "indicate" (NIV).

Reigning (verse 1)—Hebrew: *malak* (maw-lak'): to be or become king or queen; ruling; "be king" (NIV).

Sacrifice (verse 2)—Hebrew: *zabach* (zaw-bakh'): to slaughter for sacrifice; to offer.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. New Leaders for a New Day
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Samuel Is Sent to Anoint David as King (1 Samuel 16:1-3)
- B. Samuel Obeyed the Lord (1 Samuel 16:4-5)
- C. Jesse Brings His Sons before Samuel (1 Samuel 16:6-10)
- D. David Is Anointed as King (1 Samuel 16:11-13)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. New Leaders for a New Day

Church leaders are living in a new era of social and economic disruption, characterized by massive cultural and political changes around the world. The church needs leaders who will not just focus on their worlds and ministries, but who will understand that God has called leaders to be intentional and proactive in the spread of the Gospel throughout our communities and around the world. Thus, the most crucial decision that congregations must make in this decade is in response to the question of who will lead and set the pace for the next decade. Why is it important for congregations to be intentional about new leaders for a new day? The reason is that we are facing enormous challenges today. These challenges test the creative energy and innovative mettle of pastors and often overwhelm the laity's ability to persevere. There are at least four major challenges that churches face today.

First, churches face the continuing challenge of recovering from the devastating blow inflicted upon the church by the global pandemic. Some congregations were able to pivot from in-person to virtual meetings and worship very rapidly—while others never did figure out what to do or how to do it.

Second, churches must grapple with the enormous challenge of fostering real spiritual growth among the people of God. Recent studies by the Barna Group indicate

that Christians today have no idea of what spiritual maturity is, let alone how to achieve it. Congregational leaders today are not sure how to help members reach the fullness of Christ.

Third, churches are confronted with the challenge of dwindling respect for our spiritual leaders. Many pastors face a growing cascade of cynicism, rebellion, and outright disregard for biblical authority.

Fourth, church leaders face the challenge of reaching the next generation with the Good News of the Gospel. Thousands of believers are quitting church every day. They are fed up with the constant bickering over minor issues, the absence of real community among God's people, and the continuing failure of church leaders to address the hunger for God that lies at the center of the human spirit. In other words, our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren increasingly see the church as being irrelevant and out of touch with the world.

How can we reach the next generation who are socially connected not by buildings and church traditions, but through social-media platforms? The church will need new leaders who recognize that this is a new day.

B. Biblical Background

In 1 Samuel 16:1-13, the end of Saul's reign as God's choice to lead the children of Israel happened without his knowledge or presence. At the heart of the passage is the selection and anointing of David to be the new king, with the ceremony taking place in front of his father and brothers. Throughout the narrative, times and dates are not given, nor are we told how long the reign of Saul lasted before it was abruptly terminated by God and this reality announced to him by Samuel in 13:13-14. Saul was accused by Samuel of disobeying the commandments of the Lord when he sacrificed an offering to see the favor of God for the upcoming battle against the Philistines. In the narrative of 1 Samuel 15:10-23, Samuel announced to Saul that the Lord had rejected him and would remove him from being king over Israel.

Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to the home of a man named Jesse to anoint the one whom God had chosen to succeed Saul as king over His heritage. The chapter is the inaugural rise of David to the throne and the genesis of the Davidic dynasty. Unlike Saul, who was praised by the people for his outstanding physical characteristics and towering presence, David was young, innocent, and rather small in stature. David was chosen because he had a heart that was after the heart of God. We are never told what that meant; one uncovers it as one reads the story of David's life. David would be a king who would seek the counsel of the Lord, whereas Saul admitted that he listened more to the people than to the Lord (see 1 Samuel 15:24). David would be a king who would care for the people, whereas Saul appeared to be mostly consumed with himself.

Saul was the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord departed, whereas when the Spirit came upon David, He never departed, but was always with him until the day he died.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Samuel Is Sent to Anoint David as King (1 Samuel 16:1-3)

AND THE LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.

Verse 1. Chapter 15 concluded with Samuel in deep agonizing sorrow over the failed kingship of Saul. We are not told how much time elapsed between the events of chapters 15 and 16. Saul had returned to his home in Gibeah, and Samuel had retired to Ramah. Saul's disastrous failure had caused Samuel a great deal of personal sorrow. Had he had a change of mind and heart about the prospects of Saul's reign, only to be disappointed by what had happened with the Amalekites (see 15:1–24)? Samuel may have forgotten that Saul was not his king nor his choice. Samuel had only been the vessel through whom God's choice was made public. Saul had been God's choice and in verse 1, we see God's sovereign prerogatives again surfacing front and center. God is free to accept or reject whomever He pleases.

Samuel was in mourning, but the Lord had moved on. Saul had been rejected from reigning over Israel. When Samuel anointed Saul as king, he poured the oil from a flask; here, he was instructed to take a horn of oil. These were sometimes used to carry oil or other liquids. The Lord God told Samuel to go; "I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite." Bethlehem was the home of Naomi and later of Ruth and Boaz. Jesse was the grandson of Ruth and Boaz (see Ruth 4:22). The distance between Ramath and Bethlehem was about ten miles and was on the main road that ran north to south, through the central highlands. Samuel was given specific instructions on where to go and whose home he was to visit. Just as it had been with Saul, the Lord had provided the one who would become king. The phrase "I have provided me a king" expressed God's sovereign will and choice of David. In David, God would choose one free from yielding to the influence and interference of men and women (see 1 Samuel 15:24). Samuel was not given a specific name of the person he was to anoint as king, just a family and location.

Samuel was filled with some apprehension since he and Saul had parted ways on very unfriendly terms. His fear was further heightened by the short distance between Bethlehem and Gibeah, the home of Saul. Samuel had announced to Saul that God had rejected him and chosen someone else. Would Saul be watching Samuel? If Saul found out what Samuel was doing, he could be killed. The Lord told him to take a heifer and tell the people that he had come to offer a sacrifice in the town. The sacrifice would be a burnt offering—a sacrifice for the purposes of purification from sin. A heifer is a young female cow which has never given birth or been used in plowing (see Genesis 15:9; Numbers 19:2). When he arrived in Bethlehem, Samuel was to call Jesse and his family to the sacrifice. How would he know

Jesse? It would not appear out of the ordinary that the man of God would call out a specific family. Samuel was highly regarded in Israel and his words carried weight. Bethlehem was then and is today a small town, situated about six miles southeast of Jerusalem. The Lord would show Samuel exactly what to do and who was to be anointed. Samuel simply needed to follow the instructions of God.

B. Samuel Obeyed the Lord
(1 Samuel 16:4-5)

And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

Verse 4. There was no hesitation in the heart of Samuel. Unlike Saul, who had demonstrated an unwillingness to obey, Samuel responded quickly to what the Lord commanded (see 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Exodus 40:16). His arrival in Bethlehem created fear and apprehension in the hearts of the elders of the town. Elders were usually older men in a family clan and figured prominently in the leading of the tribes (see Numbers 11:16-17; Exodus 18:13-17; Deuteronomy 1:9-13; also 1 Samuel 4:3; 8:4). The elders were gripped by fear. Joyce G. Baldwin suggested a reason behind their fear: "The fear with which the elders met Samuel is an indication of the prophet's reputation and of the loneliness of his position. Since the elders as well as Jesse and his household were invited to the sacrifice, a considerable number of people witnessed the anointing of David, and someone could have passed the information to Saul."[1]

Verse 5. Samuel assured the elders that he had come in peace. He had not come to Bethlehem to apprise them of some sin or to call into question their loyalty to the Lord. He indicated that he had come for the purpose of offering a sacrifice. This was one of his duties as he made his rounds annually to lead the people in the observance of the holy days of sacrifice and atonement. He told the elders to sanctify themselves, which was a process of ritual washing that included their bodies and clothing (see Exodus 19:10, 14-15; Leviticus 20:7-8; Numbers 11:18). People could not appear before the Lord without first consecrating themselves through the act of sanctification (see Exodus 28:41; 29:27, 44). More than likely, there was a designated location for community sacrifices. Samuel invited the elders to accompany him. At some point, Jesse and his sons arrived and Samuel called them to the sacrifice after sanctifying them. All of Jesse's sons were present, except David. We learn this later in the passage.

Samuel's arrival in Bethlehem speaks to us on so many levels. First, we are reminded that one never appears before the presence of the Lord without some form of purification. The intentions of our hearts must always be examined before the spotlight of the Word of God. Second, Samuel's immediate response to the command of God serves as an object lesson in obedience. Without hesitation or thought for his personal safety, Samuel went to Bethlehem to anoint David. The Lord had sent him, and the Lord would protect him from Saul's wrath, should it occur.

C. Jesse Brings His Sons before Samuel
(1 Samuel 16:6-10)

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before

him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

Verses 6-7. There was some order to the process of receiving the families one by one. When it was time for the family of Jesse to be received, Samuel looked upon Eliab and said, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before him." Eliab (as Jesse's firstborn son) would probably have been the one to be anointed as the new king (see 1 Samuel 17:13; 1 Chronicles 2:13). Samuel reasoned in his mind that the very appearance of Eliab suggested that he would be a likely candidate to replace Saul.

In verse 7, the Lord responded to the thoughts of Samuel—as He hears even the thoughts of a man or woman. Samuel looked outwardly, but the Lord sees the heart and mind, hears the thoughts, and knows the motives of an individual. Humans look at the person's physical presence, listen to his or her voice, and measure the individual's potential by what they see. God measures potential by the heart. Too often, major decisions are made in the selection of leaders without first weighing the motivations of their hearts.

Verses 8-10. One by one Jesse called all his sons to come and pass before Samuel. As Samuel looked, he no doubt thought that surely the Lord's anointed is this son of Jesse. In all, seven sons passed before Samuel—and in each instance, the Lord had not chosen him. God's ways of doing things are not the ways of man or woman. He chooses based upon His prerogatives and here we have a perfect demonstration. We can never assume that we have figured out what God will do in every circumstance—for, often, His answers are different from our prayers.

D. David Is Anointed as King (1 Samuel 16:11-13)

And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Verses 11-12. Samuel waited and watched as the procession of Jesse's sons went by. In these verses, we have the first conversation between Jesse and Samuel, who inquired as to whether Jesse had any more children. "Are these all of your children?" Jesse responded saying that there was the youngest, but he was in the fields tending the sheep. No one would have paid attention to the youngest child. He could not be the choice of God for such a significant role. Samuel requested that Jesse send for David and bring him to the site. No one would sit and dine until he arrived.

As with most Old Testament narratives, the passage of time is never given, it is merely assumed, as it was in this case. Jesse had David brought to the place of the gathering and sacrifice. He was young and *ruddy*, a word that denotes reddish in color. David was described as handsome—easy on the eyes. Would this

seem like a contradiction regarding Saul? David was good-looking and at the moment of David's appearing, the Lord spoke to Samuel and told him to arise and anoint him. This is he whom the Lord had chosen.

Verse 13. Samuel again did exactly as the Lord commanded, without question. He anointed David in the presence of his brothers and all who had gathered that day. The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. This meant that David was blessed with the Lord's presence all the days of his life. The coming of the Spirit of the Lord upon an individual was a sign of God's sanction of the individual and of His presence and protection. After this act, Samuel departed and returned to his home in Ramah. There is no record of a reaction from David's father or brothers. Samuel did not offer words of advice or make comparisons to Saul. His work was complete, and he returned—assured that the Lord was pleased. The Lord had made His choice known to the people and David's family. It would be more than two decades before David would assume the helm of leadership over Israel.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Throughout his life, David was blessed with the presence of the Lord. He was God's anointed, and he respected the fact that Saul was God's anointed as well. The election or appointment of leaders within the local church is an urgent matter. Just as Samuel looked at the outward appearance of Saul and Eliab, so do congregations look at superficial qualities, without considering the weightier matters of personal integrity, faithfulness, and the spiritual life of the individual. When we select those whom God wants, we make fewer mistakes and congregations make greater progress and achieve the greater works which Jesus said we would do.

PRAYER

Lord God, may we be always guided by Your Word and the Holy Spirit. Grant that we will never seek our will but always those things that are pleasing in Your sight. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 24-30, 2022)

David Is Anointed as King

MONDAY, October 24: "God Rejects Saul" (1 Samuel 15:1-11)
TUESDAY, October 25: "God's Kindness and Severity" (Romans 11:13-24)
WEDNESDAY, October 26: "God's Begotten Son" (Psalm 2)
THURSDAY, October 27: "Jesus, the Heir of David" (Acts 13:21-31)
FRIDAY, October 28: "The Bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:12-17)
SATURDAY, October 29: "Making Melody to God" (Psalm 89:20-29, 34-37)
SUNDAY, October 30: "A Higher Perspective" (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

Note

1. Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 8, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 130.

November 6, 2022 **Lesson 10**

GOD PICKED YOU!

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Chosen!
Youth Topic: Chosen!

Children
General Lesson Title: God Chooses Us
Children's Topic: Chosen!

Devotional Reading
Esther 4:5-17

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 1:1-14
Print Passage: Ephesians 1:1-14
Key Verse: Ephesians 1:3

Children
Background Scriptures: Acts 19; Ephesians 1:1-14
Print Passage: Ephesians 1:1-6
Key Verse: Ephesians 1:4a

Ephesians 1:1-14—KJV

PAUL, AN apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:
2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:
4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:
5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,
6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Ephesians 1:1-14—NIV

PAUL, AN apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:
2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love
5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—
6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;
8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;
9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:
10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:
11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:
12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.
13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,
14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace
8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,
9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,
10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,
12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.
13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,
14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: In a competitive climate, we strive to be selected and we desire the benefits of being chosen. How do we thrive in a culture where not everyone is chosen? In Christ, God has already chosen and gifted us to be holy, blameless, and forgiven.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the nature of God's blessing as described in the book of Ephesians.
2. Appreciate the benefits of being adopted into God's family.
3. Identify reasons to praise God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This first section of the Letter to the Ephesians is the traditional greeting plus prayer/thanksgiving, but it is expanded significantly: the writer uses it to set the stage for the whole letter, and the entire unit should be read and interpreted in light of its themes (the blessing of being chosen, adoption, redemption, and the fullness of restored creation in the end, all of this in Christ).

—Ephesus was the site of one the most popular religious cults in the first century. (The temple to Artemis/Diana is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.) Paul's praise of and expression of Christ's person and work were unpopular among people who strongly supported the cultic expressions of their local community. Paul was encouraging the church in Ephesus to remain strong in their faith despite opposition from their pagan neighbors (see Acts 19).

—Just as the remainder of the letter flows from the foundation laid in Ephesians 1, so the actions of the Ephesians were to flow naturally from their new identity as adopted heirs of God (see especially Ephesians 5).

—Paul consistently describes the church using terms applied to Israel in the OT; here, he uses "sons" (or "children"), presenting the church as the culmination of God's plan for redemption begun in the Garden of Eden and extended through Abraham's family, through Moses, through David, but only now through adoption gathered in to experience the fulfillment of promises made to these other chosen individuals.

—Paul draws on OT imagery of the sacrificial system in Ephesians 1:7, drawing the church into the story of God's interactions with His people by placing them into the Passover story (see Exodus 12) not as interlopers, but as legitimate children of God.

—Although Paul does not explicitly state it, the entire prayer functions to impress the reader with God's careful, loving, and inexorable will—especially on behalf of those chosen—and encouraging believers to trust in God's plan and in God's love for them.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Ephesians was written between AD 60 and 63, most likely while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Along with Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, Ephesians is one of the prison epistles. It is believed that the book of Ephesians would have been written during Paul's first two-year imprisonment in Rome (see Acts 28:16). During this period there would have been many opportunities for persons to visit and receive his letters and carry them back to the various congregations he founded. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul mentioned his imprisonment and how Jesus Christ had become known throughout the Praetorian guard (see Philippians 1:12-14).

Prior to Paul's visit there was no established Christian church in Ephesus. According to Acts 18:18-21, the Christian church in Ephesus may have come into existence during Paul's second missionary journey, more than likely through the work of Aquila and Priscilla, his missionary companions. When he departed after his first visit, he left the husband-and-wife team in place to carry on until his return. Upon his return, Paul spent three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey. It was during this trip that he had his greatest successes in Ephesus (see Acts 19).

Also during this time, he encountered some major challenges to his preaching of the Gospel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Ephesus was located on the Mediterranean Sea, at the mouth of the Cayster River. It was on the main highway that ran a circuitous route that connected the seven churches of Asia Minor (see Revelation 2–3). The city was one of the great commercial and academic centers of the ancient world. All the major trade routes from the Euphrates River valley flowed into the city of Ephesus. This strategic location also meant that the city was a collection point for men and women from all over the ancient world. The city had its share of criminals seeking to avoid capture; prostitution flourished, fugitives found it to be a haven, and about any kind of riffraff you can name found its way to Ephesus.

Religiously, Ephesus was the center of the worship of the pagan goddess Diana. The temple of Diana was so majestic that it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There was an ancient Greek saying that declared, "The sun sees nothing finer in his course than Diana's Temple." It was the pride of Ephesus. It was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high. Ephesus was noted for its overwhelming presence of superstition and paganism.

It was in Ephesus that the apostle Paul had some of his greatest spiritual successes and where he stayed longer than in any other city. Into this pagan city, with its idol worship, sophisticated lifestyle, and self-assured sense of pride, Paul preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The church in Ephesus became one of the most notable churches of the first century. Next to the church in Corinth, it is among the most well-known congregations of the ancient world. The letter to the church in Ephesus is one of the most beloved and important Christian treatises and letters written to the church.

Tradition has it that John the apostle was one of the elders of the congregation and that Mary the mother of Jesus eventually became one of the members of the church in Ephesus. Among the most notable Christian leaders associated with the church in Ephesus were Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, Luke, and Mary Magdalene.[1] "The first Christians of Ephesus may have been again found among the Jewish population of the city whose ancestors were probably those who were settled here by the Seleucid kings."[2] Today, the ancient ruins of the city are among the most impressive in the world.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: a Jewish rabbi and Pharisee who later converted to Christianity. He is credited with writing thirteen of the epistles in the canon of the New Testament. Paul was the most effective evangelist of the first century.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Adoption (verse 5)—Greek: *huiothesia* (hwee-oth-es-ee'-ah): adoption, as a son into the divine family; sonship.

Blessing(s) (verse 3)—Greek: *eulogia* (yoo-log-ee'-ah): praise(s); adulation; gift(s).

Chose (verse 4)—Greek: *eklegó* (ek-leg'-om-ahee): selected; "pick(ed) out for myself"; elected; "hath chosen" (KJV).

Faithful (verse 1)—Greek: *pistos* (pis-tos'): reliable; trustworthy; believing; fullness of faith.

Love (verse 4)—Greek: *agapé* (ag-ah'-pay): goodwill; benevolence; esteem; plur: love-feasts.

Peace (verse 2)—Greek: *eiréné* (i-ray'-nay): one; quietness; rest; peace of mind; wholeness.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. The Blessings of God

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Greetings and Salutations (Ephesians 1:1-2)

B. Chosen in Him (Ephesians 1:3-6)

C. Redemption through His Blood (Ephesians 1:7-12)

D. Sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Blessings of God

What does it mean to say that you have been blessed? What does it mean to be a blessing to someone else? God told Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (see Genesis 12:3b). What does it mean when the members of a local church proclaim that God has blessed their congregation? How do you measure the beneficent love and mercy of God? Can you objectively quantify what God has done in your life? How do congregations measure their blessings? Is there a correlation between the blessings bestowed upon the leader of the congregation and those received by the members of the congregation? What does it mean to be blessed by God?

Usually when we talk about the blessings of God, we think in terms of material possessions. We consider our jobs, houses, cars, money, portfolios, land, clothes, promotions on our jobs, or personal successes as blessings. These are things that we can see, touch, taste, feel, and use. We count our earthly treasures, often to the exclusion of our heavenly treasures. It is true that God does bless us materially. We see that in the prayer of Jabez (see 1 Chronicles 4:9-10) and in God's abundance bestowed upon Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The psalmist stated that God made him to be like trees planted by rivers of waters.

In today's lesson, the apostle Paul helps us to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be blessed by God. These words take us to a depth of understanding that transcends our ability to comprehend them. Look at what he wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3, NKJV). These words are so rich with meaning that it is almost impossible to fathom their depth. Throughout this passage we will explore what it means to be blessed by God and we will learn what are the blessings we receive through Jesus Christ.

B. Biblical Background

Today's lesson is the first of four lessons from Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. Ephesians has been called one of the greatest Christian writings because of its lofty Christology and intensely practical lessons on living out our faith. The letter provides a theological framework for understanding God's magnificent work of redemption, yet it has a practical focus on the Christian life. The Unit is entitled "We Are God's Artwork," based upon Ephesians 2:10. Lesson 10 explores the understanding that we are chosen and adopted by God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

The lesson begins with a greeting and salutation, which was typical of ancient letters—particularly the letters of Paul (see 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; Philippians 1:1-2). In the salutation, the writer identified himself and his audience and offered some form of a blessing or thanksgiving for the people addressed. Paul followed up his brief salutation with a barrage of blessings we receive in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence in the Greek text—as the apostle Paul lays one blessing upon another. All these blessings are the result of our new relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

In this passage, the apostle Paul helps us to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be blessed by God. These words take us to a depth of understanding that transcends our ability to comprehend them. Repeatedly throughout the passage we are reminded of the magnitude of what it means to be in Christ Jesus—being chosen, adopted, redeemed recipients of an inheritance are all part of the great throng of blessings that believers receive in Christ Jesus. In the text we see the work of the Trinity: God the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings (verses 3-6), God the Son has brought about our redemption (verses 7-12), and God the Holy Spirit has sealed us with the Gospel of our salvation (verses 13-14). Everything that follows in Ephesians has its foundation in chapter 1. The first three chapters form a doctrinal platform that is followed by chapters 4–6—which form the practical applications of how we live out our faith in Him. We are blessed and these blessings are shaped by our relationship in Jesus Christ.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Greetings and Salutations

(Ephesians 1:1-2)

PAUL, AN apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 1-2. The letter begins in a style that was typical of ancient letter writing in the first century. The writer identified himself and his recipients, and then offered some word of blessing or peace. Paul made two affirmations about himself. First, he was an apostle (Greek: *apostolos*), meaning one who is sent on an assignment. Second, his appointment was by the will of God, which indicated that he had neither called himself nor appointed himself (see Galatians 1:1, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1). The letter was addressed to the saints who were in Ephesus. The term *saints* (Greek: *hagios*) refers to those who are consecrated to the service of the Lord (see Romans 1:7; Philippians 1:1; Colossians

1:2). "Faithful in Christ Jesus" is an expression that identified the church or its leaders as being among those who have proven to be loyal to Jesus Christ.

Verse 2 continues the greetings with the expression of *grace* (Greek: *charis*) and peace (Greek: *eirene*). Grace is God's unmerited gift which reaches its fullness in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Peace is from the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which expresses God's gift of prosperity, wholeness, and well-being. Both blessings have their origin in God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Chosen in Him
(Ephesians 1:3-6)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

These verses are the beginning of a single sentence in the Greek text that begins at verse 3 and concludes at verse 14. The apostle Paul laid bare the magnitude of what it means to be a new creature in Jesus Christ.

Verse 3. The word *blessed* or *blessings* is used three times in verse 3. The English translation does not capture the subtle differences in the meaning of the word *blessed.* In the original language, all three words have a different meaning. The first word in the verse, "Blessed," is translates from a Greek word (*eulogia*) from which we get the English word *eulogy*. In the New Testament, *eulogia* means "to praise, to celebrate with praise, to acknowledge through words of adoration the one who is worthy to be praised." Therefore, what Paul essentially wrote was "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

The second use of the word *blessed* is translated by three words in English: "who hath blessed" (Greek: *eulogesas*). This word for "blessed" is used in the New Testament only when one refers to God (see Genesis 14:20; 1 Chronicles 29:20; Nehemiah 9:5; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3). It describes what God has done for His creation. It denotes the majestic creative power of the Almighty. He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. The third word, *blessings* (*eulogia),* introduced a new dimension to being blessed. These are blessings that transcend the physical realm. Spiritual blessings are the result of our new relationship in Jesus Christ. Curtis Vaughan was correct when he wrote, "We have no spiritual blessing that does not come from God. Whatever our spiritual lives require, God amply and abundantly provides."[3] All of the blessings and experiences of God's grace are in the realm of the heavenly places. "The phrase 'heavenly places' or 'heavenly realms' is used several times in the book of Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). This phrase is translated from the Greek word *epouranios,* meaning 'the sphere of spiritual activities.'"[4] What follows is a litany of these spiritual blessings.

Verses 4-6. In these verses, we have the beginning litany of the spiritual blessings and how they are received. Curtis Vaughan noted, "These blessings come to us in accordance with an eternal purpose of God."[5] Everything begins with what God has done—"He hath chosen us," which is translated from a single Greek word—*eklegomai.* This word is the theological basis for the doctrine of election, which means

that God has chosen Christians to be His own special possession (see 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1-2; also, Romans 8:33). God chooses based upon His prerogatives and will. This choosing is "in Him," a reference to Jesus Christ, which was done before the foundation of the world.

Verses 4b-5 give the reason for God's choice "that we should be holy and without blame before Him," which speaks to the peculiar nature of God's people (see Ephesians 5:27; Philippians 2:15; compare 1 Corinthians 1:8; Colossians 1:22; Jude 24). This does not mean that Christians are perfect; rather, the word *holy* denotes that Christians have been "separated" from the world. God has saved us for His purpose that we should show forth His praises and glory.

"In love" continues the explanation of the basis upon which God has chosen us. He loves us with an eternal love (see John 3:16). This same basis is the grounds upon which we have been predestinated (Greek: *proorizo*), which means "to pick out ahead of time to be adopted" (Greek: *huiothesia*)—which denotes a new relationship with God (see Romans 8:29-30; John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17, 23; Galatians 4:5-6; 1 John 3:1). All these things happen in Jesus Christ and according to God's good pleasure and will. There is nothing that anyone does to merit this adoption into the family of God. It is His good pleasure and will that make it possible.

Verse 6 brings to an end this initial thought that God has done everything for us according to His own good pleasure and will. The end goal is that we should give Him praise and glory for His grace. Why? Because "He hath made us accepted in the beloved." Again, the emphasis is on what God has done for us. He has made it possible for us to experience His grace and salvation. We did nothing!

C. Redemption through His Blood (Ephesians 1:7-12)

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

In verses 7-12, Paul continued to expound upon the magnitude and number of our spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ. These blessings all have their genesis in God because of His magnificent work through Jesus Christ. In verse 7, two of the great theological words of the New Testament are found: *redemption* and *forgiveness*. *Redemption* (Greek: *apolytrosin*) means "to release from bondage or the payment of a ransom" (see Matthew 20:28; 26:28; Mark 14:24; Acts 20:28; Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12-15). Redemption comes through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and it results in the forgiveness of sins (see 1 Peter 1:18-19). "Forgiveness" (Greek: *aphesin*) has in it the idea of being released from a burden or obligation. Forgiveness of sins is at the heart of God's act of grace (see Exodus 34:7; Psalms 32:1-2; 130:4; Isaiah 43:25; 55:6-7; Luke 1:77; Romans 4:6-9; 1 John 1:7-9). Both of these spiritual gifts are freely given in abundance and "according to the riches of his grace" (verse 7; see

Micah 7:18-19). Redemption makes it possible for us to experience God's forgiveness of our sins.

Verses 8-9. God has not just given us the gifts of redemption and forgiveness; moreover, they "abound," which means they are ever increasing to the point of overflowing.[6] Two additional spiritual gifts are listed: "wisdom and prudence." *Wisdom* is the practical application of knowledge, and *prudence* is the application of discernment. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, God has released us from the bondage to sin (see Romans 6:17-18). These are gifts that we cannot buy or give to ourselves. Only the grace of God makes it possible for us to know the depth of God's love. Verse 9 reminds us that these gifts enable us to know and comprehend the depth of the mystery of God's will (see Romans 11:25; 16:25; Ephesians 3:3; Colossians 1:27). Mystery denotes something that is hidden from view and cannot be known. However, in the New Testament "it signifies divine truth that has been fully made known in the gospel."[7]

Verse 10 states that the goal of God's redemption is for Him to gather to Himself a special people, both in heaven and on Earth (see Matthew 25:32; Philippians 2:9-10; Colossians 1:20; Revelation 7:4-12). The phrase "the dispensation of the fulness of times" points to a decisive moment in history when the plan of God will come to pass. God works in His own way and at His own pace (see Galatians 4:4).

Verses 11-12. In these verses, Paul stated that we have received an inheritance, which is an allusion to the distribution of the promised land among the twelve tribes of Israel. Here, the reference is to the inheritance that the saints receive because of their redemption and adoption into the family of God. In these verses, we also have the first allusion of the reconciliation that Jesus brought about between Jews and Gentiles which will be further highlighted in Ephesians 2:14. All these things have been done according to His own will and purpose. Together, they bring about the praise of His glory from those who first trusted in Christ. This is a reference to the first Christians who were Jews.

D. Sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14)

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Verse 13. This verse is a continuation of the discussion in verses 11-12. Here, Paul further expounds on the inclusiveness of God's act of redemption. The word *ye* is a specific reference to the Ephesians who were Gentiles. These also trusted in God when they heard the word of truth, which led to their salvation. When they heard the truth, they believed and were sealed with the Holy Spirit. The seal was always a sign of ownership. In this instance, it is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who is the seal of our inheritance. In verse 13, we have the penultimate spiritual blessing, the Holy Spirit, who was given on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-14). This gift is different from the spiritual gifts that all believers receive; it is also not a reference to the fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Ephesians 4:8; also, Galatians 5:22-24). The Holy Spirit Himself is the gift of God who is a down payment, which

is what "earnest" means. His presence in the world and in our lives reassures us that our inheritance is reserved for us until the day of redemption (see 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

Verse 14. We are a purchased possession of God, which was realized through the death of Jesus on the Cross. It is this death and Resurrection that brought forgiveness and redemption. The believer's hope in Jesus Christ is that we will redound to great praise and glory for the magnificent work that God has done.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Throughout this passage the apostle Paul pointed out what it means to be blessed by God. These blessings transcend anything else we acquire under our own strength. These gifts empower us to live lives that are well pleasing to the Lord. The power of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live above the world and free from the dominion and power of sin. Often, we are drawn to the worldly possessions (and God does indeed bless us with material possessions). Yet, the greatest of His spiritual blessings is the gift of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Those blessings cannot be bought with money or at a price.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for blessing us with so many spiritual blessings that we have received through Your Son, Jesus Christ. May we rejoice in the knowledge that we have been sealed through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 31–November 6, 2022)

God Picked You!

MONDAY, October 31: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:1-12)
TUESDAY, November 1: "Renounce Sinful Practices" (Acts 19:13-20)
WEDNESDAY, November 2: "'God Is My Light and Salvation'" (Psalm 27)
THURSDAY, November 3: "Chosen in God's Providence" (Esther 4:5-17)
FRIDAY, November 4: "'You Are God's Chosen People'" (Deuteronomy 7:1-11)
SATURDAY, November 5: "The Way, the Truth, the Life" (John 14:1-14)
SUNDAY, November 6: "God's Eternal Plan of Salvation" (Ephesians 1:1-14)

Notes

1. Fatih Cimok, *Biblical Anatolia: From Genesis to the Councils* (Istanbul, Turkey: A Turizm Yayinlari, 2002), 140.
2. Ibid.
3. Curtis Vaughan, *Ephesians: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 18.
4. https://www.gotquestions.org/heavenly-places-realms.html (This Web site has a fuller discussion of the meaning and purpose of the heavenly places.)
5. Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 19.
6. Ibid., 25.
7. Ibid.

November 13, 2022 **Lesson 11**

CHRIST IS WISDOM

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Wisdom as Enlightenment of Heart
Youth Topic: Wisdom as Enlightenment of Heart

Children
General Lesson Title: Thanking God for the Prayers of Others
Children's Topic: Someone Loves Me

Devotional Reading
Psalm 16

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 1:15-23
Print Passage: Ephesians 1:15-23
Key Verse: Ephesians 1:18

Children
Background Scriptures: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 1:15-23
Print Passage: Ephesians 1:15-19
Key Verse: Ephesians 1:16

Ephesians 1:15-23—KJV

15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him

Ephesians 1:15-23—NIV

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people,
16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.
17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.
18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,
19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength

from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,
21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:
22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,
23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,
21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.
22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,
23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: In our media age, we have access to multiple sources of information. Who or what can we trust as our source for wisdom? The opening prayer of the book of Ephesians proclaims Christ as the ultimate source of hope and wisdom.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Deepen their understanding of God's overall purpose for them as Christ's body, the church.
2. Experience the immeasurable gift of intercessory prayer.
3. Offer an intercessory prayer as an active demonstration of love for someone for whom they are thankful.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The outward working of the Ephesian church's faith is what draws Paul's praise (1:15), indicating that their faith had catalyzed a deep-rooted shift in their understanding of reality and expressing itself naturally in new behaviors (see also Ephesians 2:1ff; compare to Luke 13:18-21 for a pervasive life change in the kingdom of God).

—Paul continues to place the Ephesians within the whole arc of salvation, praying for a "spirit of wisdom" (literally), echoing Old Testament themes, particularly from Moses (see Exodus 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Deuteronomy 34:9; see also Isaiah 11:2, which the early and modern church read as messianic; compare to Luke 4:18-19).

—The love for which Paul praises the Ephesians is clearly an active love, not simply an attitude; Paul's concept of love frequently carries themes of social justice, compassion, and life shared together (see 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Timothy 1:5; compare 2 Thessalonians 1:3 with Acts 2:42).

—Paul again settles on faith, hope, and love (1:15, 18), echoing 1 Corinthians 13 (see

also 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8). Paul's prayer is couched primarily in the inner expressions (toward oneself and God), but this is only because it is his introduction of main themes that he will explore in the letter, and often in their outer expressions toward others.

—Paul's description of Jesus (1:20-23) here brings full circle the messianic promises explored in earlier units, particularly prophecies of the messianic king (see Genesis 12:1-5; 49:10-11; consider also the Davidic promises of 2 Samuel 7, hinted at in John 3:14-18; 16:14-15, 28; 17:1-5).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In the previous lesson, it was mentioned that Ephesians was written between AD 60 and AD 63, most likely while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Along with Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, it is one of the prison epistles. It is generally believed that Ephesians would have been written during his first two-year imprisonment in Rome (see Acts 28:16). During this period there would have been many opportunities for persons to visit and receive his letters and carry them back to the various congregations he founded. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul mentioned his imprisonment and how Jesus Christ had become known throughout the Praetorian guard (see Philippians 1:12-14). Prior to Paul's visit there was no established Christian church there. Paul visited Ephesus for the first time during his second missionary journey (see Acts 15:40–18:22). According to Acts 18:18-21, Paul had a brief stay in Ephesus, after spending eighteen months in Corinth (see Acts 18:11). During his brief stay in Ephesus, he was accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla, whom he left there. We know that Paul spent some time meeting with Jewish elders; however, there is no record that he started a church (see Acts 18:19-20). More than likely the church was started by Aquila and Priscilla, who remained after he departed for Caesarea. When he departed, Paul promised to return to Ephesus, if the Lord willed it to be so (see Acts 18:21). Upon his return, Paul spent three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (see Acts 19:1). It was during this trip that he had his greatest successes in Ephesus (see Acts 19). Also during this time he encountered some major challenges to his preaching of the Gospel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In the book of Revelation, there are seven letters written to seven churches (see Revelation 2–22). The letter to the church in Ephesus was written first because of the city's prominence in the region. The city of Ephesus had one of the greatest seaports of the ancient world. Located on the coast of the Aegean Sea in Asia Minor, it was the capital of industry and commerce for the region. Today, the once great harbor no longer exists because the land has been filled in with silk and today the ruins of the city are located about six miles from the coast of the Aegean Sea. Ephesus was a city with a population made up of people from around the Mediterranean world. The city was known for its magnificent architecture, which was so splendid that it rivaled even Greece's. Its chief temple was dedicated to the worship of the goddess Diana and was one of the seven great wonders of the world.

Ephesus was home to many wealthy, aristocratic people. The city was noted for its schools of philosophy and rhetoric, making it a center of education. Ephesus was at the center of paganism and idol worship, especially the worship of Artemis

(NIV) and Diana (see Acts 19:27-28). The people had a reputation for being very superstitious, immoral, and fickle.

The church in Ephesus was one of the most notable churches of the first century. Next to the church in Corinth it is among the most well-known congregations of the ancient world. One of the most beloved and important Christian treatises and letters was written to the church there—the letter of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: a Jewish rabbi and Pharisee who later converted to Christianity. He and Barnabas were ordained by the church in Antioch and sent forth to preach the Gospel. He was the founder of several churches which are found in the New Testament.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Inheritance (verse 18)—Greek: *kléronomia* (klay-ron-om-ee'-ah): a heritage, property received (or to be received); something awarded by divine lot.

Know (verse 18)—Greek: *eidó* (i'-do): be aware; behold; consider; perceive.

Knowledge (verse 17)—Greek: *epignósis* (ep-ig'-no-sis): recognition; perception; "revelation" (NIV).

Prayers (verse 16)—Greek: *proseuché* (pros-yoo-khay'): prayers (to God); petitions.

Thanks (verse 16)—Greek: *eucharistia* (yoo-khar-is-tee'-ah): thankfulness; gratitude; thanksgiving.

Wisdom (verse 17)—Greek: *sophia* (sof-ee'-ah): skill (human or divine); insight; intelligence.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Saints Praying for Saints
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving (Ephesians 1:15-16)
- B. Paul's Prayer of Intercession (Ephesians 1:17-18)
- C. Paul's Praise for God's Great Power (Ephesians 1:19-23)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Saints Praying for Saints

The most difficult thing to get the saints of God to come together and do is pray. Prayer is our greatest spiritual weapon, yet it is the least-used weapon by the corporate body. Great things begin to happen among God's people when we pray. The Bible is full of examples of men and women who knew the power of prayer. One such giant of the Christian faith was the apostle Paul.

In each of his letters to the various churches in the New Testament, it was characteristic of Paul to remind the people that he was praying for them. To the church in Rome he wrote, "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" (Romans 1:9).

To the church in Corinth he wrote, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:4). Throughout all his letters there resounds this single thread of a saint's praying for other saints. In Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:3-4; and 1 Thessalonians 1:2, Paul stated how he made mention of them in his prayers.

Indeed, prayer is the greatest spiritual weapon at the church's disposal. When Paul concluded his writing to the church in Ephesus about the need for putting on the whole armor of God, the last thing that he tolf the church to do is pray always. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18). No Christian will be fit for spiritual warfare who does not understand the necessity of prayer. Yet, many of us have tried to wage holy war against the devil without constant prayer and supplication made to God.

Jesus understood the power of prayer, especially intercessory prayer. In John 17, He prayed not only for Himself but also for His disciples—that they might all be one, as He and the Father are one. Jesus connected answered prayer to Himself: "Whatsoever you ask in my name, believing that you have received it, you shall have it" (see John 15:16; 16:23).

In this section of Ephesians, Paul reminded the believers of his continuous prayers on their behalf. Just as he had done in the opening verses, Paul lifted up more reasons for why we have been blessed through Christ Jesus. Not only had God raised Him from the dead, but also, Jesus is seated in the heavenly places and has the authority of heaven vested in Himself. He sits on the throne as Lord and Savior.

B. Biblical Background

Throughout verses 3-14, Paul has pointed to the great panoply of spiritual blessings that we have received through faith in Jesus Christ. This passage, as with the previous passage, is a single sentence in the Greek text. At times, it is difficult to discern where one thought ends and another begins. The King James Version preserves this structure; however, the NASB does not, with periods at verse 17 and verse 21. In verses 15-23, Paul turns his attention to prayer and the great manifestation of God's power when He raised Jesus from the dead. In these verses, we have one of the greatest prayers of the apostle Paul. In this section, he lays the foundation for establishing that the church is not only the body of Christ but also is the fullest manifestation of Jesus Christ in the world (see verse 23).

The lesson is divided into three paragraphs: Paul's thanksgiving for the Ephesians (verses 15-16); Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (verses 17-18); and Paul's praise for the greatness of God's power (verses 19-23). He began with a word of thanksgiving for the faith and the love that the Ephesians had shown to all the saints. Paul's prayers were not haphazard, occasional outbursts, but were directed at those whom he had given spiritual birth—and as often as he thought of them, he prayed for them.

In the writings of Paul, love is not just a passive emotion without any corresponding practice; rather, it is the linchpin that binds the believer to the will and purpose of God (see 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; compare with John 13:34-35).

Throughout the book of Ephesians, Paul holds up prayer in various ways: it is doctrinal (see 1:17-19), theological (see 3:14-19), and practical (see 6:18-20).

Paul described the greatness of God's power which was manifested through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1:19-20). Jesus was not just raised from the dead but raised with power and authority that transcends every other rule, authority, power, dominion, and name both now and in the age to come. God the Father has subjected all things under His feet and made Him to be Lord over the church.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving (Ephesians 1:15-16)

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

Verses 15-16. This is the beginning of a long, single sentence. In these verses, Paul indicated that he had been praying for the saints in Ephesus. "Wherefore" sets the stage for what Paul was about to write next and points back to what had been previously stated in verses 13 and 14. He had received a report that the Ephesians had heard the truth of the Gospel, believed, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit. We are not told when he received the news, how or from whom he received the report. We must remember that several years had passed between Paul's first and second visits to Ephesus, to say nothing of the time that had elapsed when he eventually wrote this letter. Curtis Vaughan noted that to make the assumption that Paul did not personally know the Ephesians is to read too much into the text.[1]

Paul often commended the churches for the positive reports he received about them (see Colossians 1:4; Philemon 5; Romans 1:5; compare 1 Corinthians 1:10-17). The Ephesians had demonstrated their faith in the Lord Jesus and that their hearts were filled with love for all the saints. Love for each is the one virtue that Jesus said would characterize His disciples (see John 13:34-35). Their acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord pointed to their submission to being His disciples (see Philippians 2:11). Paul made it clear that he was in constant prayer for them and their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 16, he reminded them that they were always the object of his prayers (see Colossians 1:9; Romans 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2). The greatest witness of the people of God to the redemptive power of God is love for the saints and faith in Him. Our love for each other reveals the depth of our faith in the transformative power of God.

B. Paul's Prayer of Intercession (Ephesians 1:17-18)

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

Verse 17 begins with a lofty statement about God. He is the God of our Lord Jesus

Christ, the Father of glory (see John 20:17). His glory is a reflection of His splendor, majesty, and power (see 1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalms 24:7, 10; 29:3). Starting with verse 17 and continuing into verse 18, Paul sets forth his petitions on the Ephesians' behalf. First, that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation. What did Paul mean by the spirit of wisdom and revelation? The "spirit of wisdom" is a disposition that enables the believer to comprehend divine truth.[2] *Revelation* is translated from a Greek word that means "to reveal what has been hidden." Some interpreters believe that this is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, who fills the heart and mind of the believer with divine truth and comprehension of His will (see Isaiah 11:2; Luke 21:15; Ephesians 3:3; Colossians 1:9). What is the purpose of this spirit of wisdom and revelation? It has but one goal: so that they would have knowledge of Him as He is revealed in the Word of God.

Second, Paul prayed that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened. "Enlightened" has in it the idea of illumination. Paul wanted the believers in Ephesus to have spiritual eyes so that they could see the manifestation of God's power and comprehend the blessed hope we have in Jesus Christ (see Psalm 119:18; Luke 24:45; Titus 2:13; compare 2 Kings 6:17). It is possible to be saved and not see the hand of God at work in the life of the local church. Satan can dull the senses and blind us to God's awesome power (see Hebrews 6:4; 10:32). Hope is one of the words often used by Paul to describe the believer's expectations for the future with Jesus Christ. "The hope of the Christian springs from the 'calling' of God."[3] Believers have a holy calling, and this calling is for God's purpose. The riches of the glory in the saints have been interpreted to mean that the saints are God's inheritance, each being precious in His sight.

C. Paul's Praise for God's Great Power (Ephesians 1:19-23)

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Verse 19 begins the third and final petition in his prayer. In this portion of the prayer, Paul turned from intercession to praise. He wanted the Ephesians to recognize how exceedingly great was the power of God working in those who believe. Paul uses four superlatives in his description of God's power, each one expressing a different aspect of his understanding of the power of God. *Exceeding* (Greek: *hyperballo*) means "to go beyond, surpassing" (see 2 Corinthians 3:10; 9:14; Ephesians 2:7; 3:19). *Greatness* (Greek: *megethos*) means "quality of exceeding a standard involving physical magnitude, size."[4] *Power* (Greek: *dynamis*) denotes the capacity to do anything, outward power, influence.[5] The power of God is not some abstract concept—it defies explanation and can only be experienced (see Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 4:7; Philippians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). *Working* (Greek: *energeia*) means "the state or quality of being active, working, operation, action." It is the

power of God that infuses the people of God with the capacity to do the great work of missions and ministry (see Matthew 25:31-46; 28:19-20). We experience God's power as we do the work of God. Often, we may wonder why our churches lack the power to effect change; we must realize that it is because they are not doing the work of God. Paul will say more about this in Ephesians 2:10.

Verse 20 states that God's power is at work and visible in the raising of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead (see Romans 6:5-11; Philippians 3:10). Curtis Vaughan noted concerning the Resurrection, "It authenticated the Lord's ministry, sealed His redemptive work, marked the beginning of His glorification, and was a public attestation of the Father's acceptance of His sacrifice."[6] Not only was Jesus raised from the dead, but also, after the Ascension, He was seated at the right hand of God, which is an allusion to Psalm 110:1 (see Mark 14:62; Acts 2:34-36; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3). The "heavenly places" denotes the location where God's sovereign rule over the universe takes place. According to Ephesians 1:3, it is the place where the believer's spiritual blessings originate.

Verses 21-23. These verses are the expression of the pinnacle of the power and authority that God has invested in Jesus Christ. He reigns supreme "above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named." Paul summed up in these words every possible power and dominion in the universe, noting that all these have been conquered and defeated by Jesus Christ. There is no power greater than the power of God. He supersedes all others and is beyond all principalities, powers, might, and dominion. All things have been made subject to Him and He is the Head of all things that pertain to the church (Greek: *ekklesia*), those who are the called-out ones. The power that God the Father has invested in Jesus is available to the church, which is the living incarnation of Jesus in the world today. The church is His body, a term often used by Paul to describe the organism of the church.

The English word *church* comes from the Greek compound word *ekklesia* (*ek*, "out"; and *klesia*, "to call"), and it refers to those who have been called out. Kevin Giles helps us to understand what the word *ekklesia* meant in classical Greek: "In classical Greek, *ekkesia* was the word used of the citizens of the state in assembly. It was an abstract noun that spoke of those actually gathered."[7] One of the ways to think about *ekklesia* is by comparing it to our Senate or Congress that gathers to enact laws for the country.

God's *ekklesia* are those who have been gathered by God for His purposes. The apostle Peter wrote that the church is made up of those whom God has called out of darkness: "But you are A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, NASB).

God has called us to be individual and corporate proclaimers of His goodness and mercy. Every time we witness or talk about God's importance in our lives, we are witnessing.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This lesson provides many practical lessons that can be applied to our day-to-day

activities as we seek to make a difference in the world. First, we are reminded that prayer is one of the principal responsibilities of every believer. Not only are we encouraged to use the Lord's Prayer as a model, but also, Paul has provided an additional model. We pray for each other and for the work that God is doing in the lives of others. Through our prayers of thanksgiving, we encourage and inspire each other to do good works. Second, Paul has pointed to the great power of God which is at work in the lives of all believers. The power that works in us is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Third, we see that the church is the product of the intentional workings of God the Father. The church, which is the body of Christ, is not a stand-alone entity without any corresponding obligations to follow and obey Jesus Christ. The church is subject to Jesus Christ in everything. He is her head and the One whose authority transcends all others.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You praise for indwelling us with Your power. Grant that we may more readily serve Your purpose and pursue those things that make for peace in our world. Forgive us of apathy and the unwillingness to always pray for one another. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 7-13, 2022)

Christ Is Wisdom

MONDAY, November 7: "The Gospel Threatens Vested Interests" (Acts 19:21-31)
TUESDAY, November 8: "Encouraging Disciples and Saying Farewell" (Acts 19:32–20:1)
WEDNESDAY, November 9: "The Gospel Bestows an Inheritance" (Acts 20:17-21, 26-35)
THURSDAY, November 10: "'The Lord Is My Chosen Portion'" (Psalm 16)
FRIDAY, November 11: "Be Strong and Courageous" (Joshua 1:1-9)
SATURDAY, November 12: "Rejoice in God's Salvation" (Isaiah 25)
SUNDAY, November 13: "A Glorious Inheritance" (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Notes

1. Curtis Vaughan, *Ephesians*: *Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 32.
2. Ibid., 34.
3. Ibid., 35.
4. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 624.
5. Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 452.
6. Vaughan, *Ephesians*, 38.
7. Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 24.

November 20, 2022 **Lesson 12**

WE ARE GOD'S HANDIWORK

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Made for a Purpose
Youth Topic: Made for a Purpose

Children
General Lesson Title: God Is an Artist
Children's Topic: He Made Us for Beautiful Work

Devotional Reading
1 Timothy 2:1-8

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 2
Print Passage: Ephesians 2:1-10
Key Verse: Ephesians 2:10

Children
Background Scripture: Ephesians 2
Print Passage: Ephesians 2:4-10
Key Verse: Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 2:1-10—KJV

AND YOU hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;
2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:
3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.
4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

Ephesians 2:1-10—NIV

AS FOR you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,
2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.
3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.
4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,
5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.
6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
9 not by works, so that no one can boast.
10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often look for a purpose in life. How do people find meaning and direction for their lives? The book of Ephesians reminds us that God's creative design is embedded in each of us and that through Christ we join in the good work which God prepares us to do.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognize the difference between a life of disobedience and trespass and a life of God's mercy and love.
2. Experience assurance in knowing that God offers love, mercy, and grace on His own initiative.
3. Respond to God's gifts of love, mercy, and grace with acts of service and compassion in the world.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Ephesians 2:8-9 has been used by the church historically to describe how we cannot earn our salvation through what we do; we simply accept what God has done and continues to do (God made a way through Jesus and chose us to participate in it and Jesus continues to sanctify us). Our role is to trust that God's way of salvation through Jesus is the only true way—the way back to peace and communion with the Father (see John 14:1-7).

—Jewish descriptions of the supernatural world frequently refer to Satan as the "ruler of the power/with the authority over the air." Here, Paul underscores his earlier theme from Ephesians 1 to describe the believers' freedom from the grasp of the world and its supernatural powers, including the cult of Artemis/Diana.

—"Salvation" in the first century was not a spiritual concept so much as a very real, physical idea of rescue from a detrimental situation (here, for Paul, subject to spiritual oppression by evil powers and destined for judgment) and deliverance into peace and prosperity (here, the reconciliation with God of which Paul speaks is found in 2:11-22).

—God's joy in this section is unmistakable and is centered entirely on the believer, without

regard for whether the believer deserves either the transformation or the joy that God takes in simply being generous with His love.

—The core of this section is the before-and-after: a complete transformation of the believer, not only in terms of allegiance but at an even deeper level, a transformation of identity that changes that person's understanding of reality, focus, response to experiences, and hope.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Ephesians was written between AD 60 and AD 63 and it is one of the greatest writings in the New Testament. Along with Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, Ephesians is one of the prison epistles. It is believed that Ephesians would have been written during his first two-year imprisonment in Rome (see Acts 28:16). During this period there would have been many opportunities for persons to visit and receive his letters and carry them back to the various congregations he founded. A few scholars believe that it may have been written while Paul was in prison in Caesarea, just prior to his being transferred to Rome. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul mentioned his imprisonment and how Jesus Christ had become known throughout the Praetorian guard (see Philippians 1:12-14).

Prior to Paul's visit there was no established Christian church there. Paul visited Ephesus for the first time during his second missionary journey (see Acts 15:40–18:22). According to Acts 18:18-21, Paul had a brief stay in Ephesus, after spending eighteen months in Corinth (see Acts 18:11). During his brief stay in Ephesus, he was accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla, whom he left there. We know that Paul spent some time meeting with Jewish elders; however, there is no record that he started a church (see Acts 18:19-20). More than likely the church was started by Aquila and Priscilla, who remained after Paul departed for Caesarea. When he departed, Paul promised to return to Ephesus, if the Lord willed it to be so (see Acts 18:21). Upon his return, Paul spent three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (see Acts 19:1). It was during this trip that he had his greatest successes in Ephesus (see Acts 19). Also during this time he encountered some major challenges to his preaching of the Gospel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Paul had some of his greatest successes and equally some of his greatest challenges during his two-year stay in Ephesus. The record of his work, along with that of several missionary partners, is described in Acts 19—near the end of his third missionary journey. In Acts 18:23–21:14, we have the chronological record of his travels during his third missionary journey. According to Acts 18:22, Paul spent a brief period with the church in Antioch before departing on his third and final missionary journey in Asia Minor. Acts 18:23 states that he departed Antioch and traveled west through the provinces of Cilicia, Galatia, and Phrygia—eventually arriving in Ephesus (the *Holman Bible Atlas* or any atlas is a big asset in the study of Paul's missionary travels). Along the way, he spent time strengthening the churches he had founded on his first missionary journey (see Acts 13:6-27) and second missionary journey (see Acts 15:22-40). Prior to leaving Ephesus, Paul stated that it was his intention to return to Ephesus, since he had promised Aquila and Pricilla that he would return to visit them (see Acts 18:18-21). We are not sure of how much time elapsed between his initial visit and the final visit (which begins in Acts 19:1).

When he arrived in Ephesus he found a small group of disciples, who more than likely had been converted to Christianity by Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos.

Once he settled down, Paul continued to pursue his strategy of reaching out to the Jews—first in the local synagogues (see Acts 19:8). Paul's initial efforts with Jews met with stern resistance, so he withdrew and began teaching a small number of disciples in the school of Tyrannus, which was comprised of a mix of Jews and Gentiles (see Acts 19:9). It was during this two-year stay that the Gospel expanded throughout the region of Asia, being the bridge leading to the founding of what became the seven churches of Asia Minor (see Acts 19:10).

Paul had such extraordinary success that his preaching and teaching became a threat to the practice of sorcery and the worship of Artemis (NIV), the patron goddess of Ephesus (see Acts 19:17-41). Ephesus was the home of the largest marble temple of Artemis in the world. Artemis was the Greek goddess of hunting and the wilderness. She was worshipped throughout the ancient world and was called Diana by the Romans. The temple in Ephesus was so magnificent that it was one of the seven wonders of the world. People would come from across the Mediterranean world to worship and behold the beauty of the temple. During his stay in Ephesus Paul nearly destroyed the worship of Artemis and the businesses of those who made their living peddling Artemis artifacts.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: a Jewish rabbi and Pharisee who later converted to Christianity. He and Barnabas were ordained by the church at Antioch and sent forth to preach the Gospel. He was the founder of several churches which are found in the New Testament.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Authority (verse 2)—Greek: *exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah): power to act; weight; "power" (KJV); "ruler" (NIV).

Flesh (verse 3)—Greek: *sarx* (sarx): body; human nature; materiality; kindred.

Kindness (verse 7)—Greek: *chréstotés* (khray-stot'-ace): goodness; excellence; uprightness; gentleness.

Mercy (verse 4)—Greek: *eleos* (el'-eh-os): pity; compassion.

Saved (verse 5)—Greek: *sózó* (sode'-zo): healed; preserved; rescued.

Trespasses (verse 1)—Greek: *paraptóma* (par-ap'-to-mah): false steps; fallings away; lapses; slips; sins; "transgressions" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. The Purpose of God's Grace
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Dead in Trespasses and Sins (Ephesians 2:1-3)
B. Made Alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)
C. Created in Jesus Christ for Good Works (Ephesians 2:8-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Purpose of God's Grace

Article IV in the Baptist Articles of Faith states that "we believe that the Scriptures teach that the salvation of sinners is wholly of grace; through the mediatorial offices of the Son of God." If there is one passage in the New Testament that explains the way and purpose of God's salvation, it is the passage that is the basis of today's lesson. The central truth of these verses is that God has saved us according to His own plan and purpose. And we see this truth laid out in noticeably clear and succinct language in this passage. Ephesians 2:8-10 lays out the great theological truth that salvation is by grace and grace alone. Theological truth is the foundational message that is rooted in the very character and nature of God. It is truth that embodies the essence of the eternal God.

We believe that salvation is by grace. What is grace? The Greek word is *charis*, which denotes favor, loving-kindness, goodwill, and service. The common definition used is "Grace is God's unearned and unmerited favor." It is God's generosity being bestowed freely and without limit upon each of us. We have done and can do nothing to deserve the blessings of God. It is of His own free will and love for us that God chooses to bless and save us. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul wrote, "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."

Thus, salvation is a complete and sole act of God's grace. In Ephesians 2, grace is mentioned three times in verses 5, 7, and 8. In verses 5 and 8, we note that "we are saved by grace." In verses 8-9, we see how this great salvation occurs—it is through faith. *Faith is the instrument and channel through which we are saved, and God is the cause.* Faith is simply believing (without reservation) that your life can be different. Faith is trusting Jesus Christ and committing your life to Him. It is through faith (and that not of yourselves). It is the gift of God (not because of works), so that no one may boast.

Verse 10 gives us the purpose for which we are saved: "For we are his workmanship"; God re-created us to be His instruments of service. He did this in the Lord Jesus Christ—for good works. We have no grounds upon which to boast or brag about our individual righteousness before God. It is all filthy rags. This passage reminds us that we are the product of God's creative power.

B. Biblical Background

In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul begins a discussion of the spiritual history of the Ephesians and the depth out of which God lifted them from their sins. The defeat or death of the demonic spiritual powers of darkness opened the door for God to create a new people, holy and blameless before Him. This was in fulfillment of His divine will which was predestined in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2 is an extension of Paul's discussion of the surpassing greatness of the power of God, which was at work when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul reminded them that they had been adopted into the family of God and had received the forgiveness of their sins. It was not because of anything they had done, but it was all the results of God's mercy and grace.

The chapter can be divided into three paragraphs. In verses 1-3, the Ephesians were dead in their sins and lived according to the prince of the power of this world. In verses 4-7, the tone changes with the contrasting conjunction "but." Paul continued to point to God's great mercy and power which were on full display—both when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and when He made them alive together with Him. Verses 8-10 bring the passage to a fitting conclusion with one of the single-most important theological truths in the Bible. Here, Paul broke with traditional Jewish belief that salvation was a matter of keeping the Law of Moses. Instead, one is saved by God's grace, through our faith in Jesus Christ, and not by works of the Law. These verses reveal that God's great purpose was to create a people of His own choosing who would seek to live lives that are pleasing in His sight.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Dead in Trespasses and Sins

(Ephesians 2:1-3)

AND YOU hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Verse 1. Paul began with a realistic assessment of the Ephesians' spiritual life. They were dead in their trespasses and sins. The reference to "you" is a specific reference to the Gentiles and not the Jews. "And you *hath he quickened,* who were dead in trespasses . . . ." If you take out the words "and you hath he quickened," you are left with the words "and you who were dead in trespasses and sins." This is the language of the original Greek text. Here, the apostle was talking to the Ephesians about their lives before they met Jesus Christ. They were dead—not physically dead but dead to the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ. "Death" in the Scriptures is a reference not just to physical death, but to spiritual and moral death as well. The worst death that one can experience is eternal death, which is total separation from God. A person who chooses to remain in sin throughout his or her life accepts the penalty of the second death (see Matthew 10:28; 25:41; Revelation 2:11; 14:9-11; 20:11-15; 21:8; also Isaiah 66:22-24). The word *trespasses* (Greek: *paraptoma*) literally means "a slip or a fall." Here, we have the picture of a man or woman who loses his or her way and strays from the right road. In the Scriptures, it refers to a deliberate breaking of the laws of God and going in the wrong direction. The word for "sin" is *harmatia*, and it refers to missing the mark for which we aimed. There is no more tragic death than spiritual death. When one is spiritually dead, he or she is, in

essence, out of fellowship with God. God is the source of all life, and not to know Him is to be dead spiritually.

Verses 2-3. In these verses, Paul pointed to the signs that mark the man or woman who is spiritually dead. The word *walk* (Greek: *peripateo*) means "to walk" or denotes the path one takes. Here, it is used figuratively to denote the conduct of one's life or the behavior that characterizes how one lives. The reference to "ye" indicated that Paul was still referring to the Gentiles in Ephesus. In these verses, Paul identified five characteristics of those who were spiritually dead. First, they lived according to the standards of the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (see 1 John 2:14-15).

This word *world* (Greek: *kosmos*) does not refer to the physical environment in which we live. The physical world as God created it is good. The *world* is figurative language that expresses what human society is without God as the guiding compass, which assumes that humanity is the measure of all things. Subscribing to worldliness is seeking to live without a recognition and respect for God. To love the world is to get caught up in things that have no permanence. When our whole life is governed by unholy ambitions, selfishness, greed, and the constant lust for things, we are being guided by the world's standards (see Romans 12:2).

Second, spiritual death is characterized by a life controlled by Satan. The phrase "the prince of the power of the air" refers to Satan's powers that are at work in the universe. Satan is the one who stands over and for everything that God is against. The whole purpose of Satan is to destroy every life that he can (see 1 Peter 5:8). It is the presence of Satan, the prince of the air, that is producing the spirit of disobedience in the lives of people.

In verse 3, Paul moves from referring to just the Gentiles to referring to the Jews as well. "We" is inclusive language that refers to all people, both Jew and Gentile. We are all driven by the lusts of the flesh. The word *Conversation* refers to the manner of one's life, which is described as being driven by lust and the desires of the mind. The Greek word for "flesh," *sarx,* refers to the whole man that is orientated away from God toward its own selfish concerns (see Galatians 5:16-21; also Romans 8:4; 13:14; compare Colossians 3:5-10; 1 John 2:15-17). Consequently, the unsaved Jews and Gentiles were destined to experience the wrath of God. This represented a hopeless situation without divine intervention.

B. Made Alive in Christ
(Ephesians 2:4-7)

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Verse 4 brings a shift from wrath to grace, from hopelessness to redemption and life. The section begins with the contrasting conjunction "but." That word *but* is the dividing line between what we once were and what we are now by grace. Paul pointed out that it was God's great love that was experienced by all. In verse 5b, which is the central theme of the passage, those who were

once dead have now been made alive in Jesus Christ. How has this happened? It was all an act of God's grace. The word *grace* (Greek: *charis)* is a word that denotes God's gift. All these things are the result of God's great act of mercy (see 2 Corinthians 4:1). Salvation begins with God. It has its foundation in God. God alone is the author of salvation, and no man or woman can ever be what he or she can be apart from God.

Verse 6. Paul returned to the theme of resurrection, this time noting that those who believe have been raised with Him and have been given seats of honor in the heavenly places (see Ephesians 1:20-21). All these things are the result of our new relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Verse 7. In the ages to come, those who have been seated in the heavenly places with Jesus Christ will see the exceeding great riches of His grace. Not only will believers see God's grace, but also, they will experience His kindness through Jesus Christ.

C. Created in Jesus Christ for Good Works (Ephesians 2:8-10)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Verses 8-10 form the heart of this section. Paul stated that salvation was purely an act of God's grace. *Grace* was one of his favorite words and meant "God's undeserved favor." It is the act of God's grace based upon our faith that saves us. There are no people who can save themselves (see Romans 10:8-13). Salvation comes to us as a gift from God. Since salvation is a gift, it cannot be earned by doing good works (verse 9). Here, we are faced with a paradox of works versus faith. The issue is resolved when we understand that that there is no contradiction between what Paul taught and what James said regarding works. Works play no part in salvation; however, Christians will show evidence of the change in their lives by the good works they do (see James 2:14-26). We were created as new persons in Christ to do good works. The word *ordained* in Greek is *proetoimazo* and refers to God's preparation of us to do good works through regeneration (see Romans 9:23). Every believer is a unique masterpiece shaped and fashioned by God. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (verse 10). In the first part of the verse, the emphasis in the Greek text is on the pronoun "his," a reference to the fact that it is God who made us who we are as believers. We are created in the image of God (see Psalm 139:14). The word *workmanship* is a poor translation of the Greek word *poiema*; it is from this word that the English word *poem* is derived. It means "that which has been made, something created, a masterpiece, a work of art." When God looked at all that He had made, He knew that there was still something greater to be done. Humanity is the crown jewel of God's creative genius. The zenith of God's power is fully displayed when we come to faith in Him.

God takes messed-up, wretched, worn-out, and beaten people and refashions them into new creatures who are His workmanship. The transformation in the inner nature takes place within the context of our faith in Jesus Christ, who is our model. Therefore, the text can be worded this way: God has made each of us as a work of art, a creative masterpiece, a one of a kind, because of the sacrificial death

of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead. This passage helps us understand why each of us is uniquely gifted to do what we do in His service.

According to verse 10b, we are created in Jesus Christ. This points to the instrumental means by which God has done this magnificent work in our lives. Here, we see the connection of the believer and Jesus Christ. When we come to God through our faith in the finished work of Jesus at Calvary, we enter the realm of a new relationship. Jesus is now Lord of our lives. In Romans 10:9, we find the confessional statement that leads to faith in Jesus Christ—that one who confesses with his/her mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in his/her heart that God raised Jesus from the dead will be saved.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the remarkable lessons from this passage is the truth that God is Savior. There is no sin from which God cannot save us. Herein is the motivation for Christians to continue the magnificent work of evangelism and discipleship. When we think about it, God has done a great work in each of us—and we must believe that He can do it in others. He can use each of us to reach others who are hell-bound and draw them into a new relationship with Him. God can take anyone's life and do something miraculous in and with it. We must never give up on the lost men and women of our community. We must never give up on those who are down and out in our community. We must never see evangelism as a failed effort at church growth. Since God saved us, He can save anyone.

PRAYER

Lord God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant that we may never lose sight of the great gift of salvation. May we see Your power, which was dramatically demonstrated at the empty tomb when You raised Jesus from the dead. May that same power be at work in us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 14-20, 2022)

We Are God's Handiwork

MONDAY, November 14: "Grace Overflowed for Service" (1 Timothy 1:1-4, 12-17)
TUESDAY, November 15: "Live in Peace, Godliness, and Dignity" (1 Timothy 2:1-8)
WEDNESDAY, November 16: "Qualifications for Church Servant Leaders" (1 Timothy 3:1-13)
THURSDAY, November 17: "Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly" (Micah 6:1-8)
FRIDAY, November 18: "Trust in God and Do Good" (Psalm 37:1-9, 37-40)
SATURDAY, November 19: "'Speak, for Your Servant Is Listening'" (1 Samuel 3:1-10)
SUNDAY, November 20: "Created for Good Works" (Ephesians 2:1-10)

November 27, 2022 **Lesson 13**

GOD GIVES TOOLS FOR OUR PROTECTION

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Tools Available to Withstand Injustice and Evil
Youth Topic: Tools Available to Withstand Injustice and Evil

Children
General Lesson Title: The Armor of God
Children's Topic: The Right Tools for the Job

Devotional Reading
Psalm 91

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Revelation 2:1-7; Acts 19; Ephesians 6:10-24
Print Passage: Ephesians 6:10-18
Key Verse: Ephesians 6:13

Children
Background Scriptures: Ephesians 2:19-22; 6:10, 13-18
Print Passage: Ephesians 6:10, 13-18
Key Verse: Ephesians 6:10

Ephesians 6:10-18—KJV

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.
11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

Ephesians 6:10-18—NIV

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.
11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.
12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.
17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:
18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.
16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We live in a violent world. How do we resist the forces that undermine peace and unity? The armor of God strengthens believers to withstand the forces of evil that daily threaten peace on Earth.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognize the need for Christians to stand firm in God.
2. Value wearing the spiritual armor of God as protection in a world of oppression and injustice.
3. Use God's tools to promote a more just and peaceful world.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The language of the armor of God echoes that of Isaiah 59:17, but Paul's predominantly Gentile readers would have interpreted it in the context of the equipment of a Roman soldier and of Roman military tactics (that the Roman military was trained to hold their ground, not retreat).

—The descriptions of supernatural powers (see 6:12) echo common Jewish terms for pagan deities and evil spirits, which would be particularly applicable to the Christians in Ephesus, the heart of the Diana/Artemis cult.

—It is essential in considering the choice of God in the salvation of believers to recognize that God not only calls but also equips those called: the entire context of Ephesians demonstrates that God calls in generosity, delights in the loving transformation of believers, and equips and protects them for the realities facing them.

—Lists in the first century placed the most important items first and last, with the idea that the last and first items would be most easily remembered. This practice makes prayer (see 6:18) and trust/reliance on God's power (see 6:10) the entire context of Paul's discussion on spiritual warfare.

—Similarly, all verbs in this section are active except for the first ("be strengthened," a passive verb in 6:10), indicating that the believer is to accept the strength that God will provide and, out of this strength, to act (in reliance on God and in constant communication with God).

—In addition, the verbs (almost all active indicative) themselves indicate that Paul considers his words to reflect the reality of his audience: we do (and will continue to) find ourselves in spiritual battle as we serve God, and we need God's resources to successfully navigate the opposition.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In the previous lesson, we noted so many of the details regarding the historical setting that are still applicable in this lesson. Ephesus was the major cosmopolitan city in Asia Minor. There has been some discussion among scholars as to when Paul wrote Ephesians. The consensus is that Ephesians was written between AD 60 and AD 63, and it is one of the greatest writings in the New Testament.

It is generally believed that Ephesians would have been written during Paul's first two-year imprisonment in Rome. There is no firsthand account of that period in Paul's life because the account in Acts concludes stating that Paul remained under house arrest in his own rented quarters, being free to preach and teach the Gospel unhindered (see Acts 28:30-31). During this period there would have been many opportunities for persons to visit and receive his letters and carry them back to the various congregations he founded. A few scholars believe that Ephesians may have been written while Paul was in prison in Caesarea, just prior to his being transferred to Rome. In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul mentioned his imprisonment and how Jesus Christ had become known throughout the Praetorian guard (see Philippians 1:12-14). Here again, the exact location is inconclusive. What is certain is that the Holy Spirit used Paul to leave a legacy of encouragement that endures to this day.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Throughout his nearly twenty-five years as a missionary, Paul would have had many opportunities to see Roman soldiers. When he was arrested in Jerusalem and confined to Herod's Praetorium in Caesarea, he was surrounded by and protected by Roman soldiers (see Acts 23:35). Thus, he had many opportunities to see the armor of the Roman soldiers up-close. It is reasonable to assume that during the time he spent with Roman soldiers Paul spent some time preaching to them and trying to persuade them to make Jesus Christ Lord of their lives.

Some scholars believe that the language of Ephesians 6:10-20 was borrowed by Paul from some of the ancient rhetorical traditions of that day—specifically, that Paul may have used as a model the prebattle speeches of generals who were preparing their men for battle.[1] It is highly likely that Paul may have engaged in conversation with the soldiers about how they prepared for battle and the encouragement given by their leaders. In these words of Paul, there is a clear call to prepare for the most important battle of the believer's life—conflict against the spiritual forces of wickedness. The Roman soldier and the armor he wore were fitting examples for the believer who finds himself or herself facing a formidable foe, yet one who is not invincible.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: a Jewish rabbi and Pharisee who later converted to Christianity. He and Barnabas were ordained by the church at Antioch and sent

forth to preach the Gospel. He was the founder of several churches that are found in the New Testament.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Armor (verse 11)—Greek: *panoplia* (pan-op-lee'-ah): full armor; complete armor; panoply; "armour" (KJV).

Authorities (verse 12)—Greek: *exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah): powers, influences; "principalities" (KJV).

Empowered (verse 10)—Greek: *endunamoó* (en-doo-nam-o'-o): filled with power; strengthened; made strong; "strong" (KJV/NIV).

Stand (verse 11)—Greek: *histémi* (his'-tay-mee): to make to stand; set; to set up.

Strength (verse 10)—Greek: *kratos* (krat'-os): dominion; power; "might" (KJV); "mighty power" (NIV).

Truth (verse 14)—Greek: *alétheia* (al-ay'-thi-a): truth of idea; reality; sincerity; divine truth revealed to man; straightforwardness.

Withstand (verse 13)—Greek: *anthistémi* (anth-is'-tay-mee): to set or stand against; resist; oppose; "stand your ground" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. A Call to Arms
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Call to Be Strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10)
- B. Put On the Whole Armor of God (Ephesians 6:11)
- C. The Source of Our Spiritual Conflict (Ephesians 6:12)
- D. Stand with the Armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17)
- E. Pray Always (Ephesians 6:18)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Call to Arms

Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is a meticulous discussion of what it means to be a Christian and a member of the body of Christ. In the letter, he taught the Ephesians who they were in Christ Jesus and about the magnitude of the spiritual blessings they had received in Christ Jesus (see Ephesians 1:3-14). Paul made it clear about the interrelatedness of the saints within the church, reminding them that Jesus had broken down the middle wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles (see Ephesians 2:14). He challenged them to live a life that is worthy of the vocation wherein they had been called (see Ephesians 4:1). He told how God had called the church to the work of the ministry, giving various leadership gifts that equip and prepare the saints for Christian service (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Further, he encouraged the saints to cultivate healthy relationships within their families and among themselves (see Ephesians 6:1-4). Throughout this letter, he guided, instructed, and enlightened the saints regarding their new faith in the Lord Jesus.

In Ephesians 6:10, Paul has reached his concluding exhortations, which begin with the word *finally*. It is as though everything he had said had been leading up to this point. *Finally, considering all that I have said, here are my concluding words of exhortation.*

In the closing verses of this letter, all that remained was for Paul to tell the Ephesians of the intense, unrelenting, and violent spiritual conflict in which each believer finds himself or herself involved:

[10] Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

[11] Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

[12] For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

[13] Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Paul comes across like a military commander who is about to lead his troops in the biggest battle of their lives—and indeed so, for we, too, are engaged in warfare. This is not a conflict against radical and extremist terrorists, nor rogue governments. No, this is a spiritual conflict of cosmic dimensions. The outcome of this conflict will have grave and profound consequences for all of life. Just as he exhorted and encouraged the saints in Ephesus, Paul is urging us—he is pleading earnestly with us, he is warning us with all he knows—to be prepared for a major fight against the diabolical powers of darkness in becoming Christians. *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*

B. Biblical Background

The Letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two parts. In chapters 1–3, Paul lays out a theological framework for understanding the Christian life. Believers have been blessed with all spiritual blessings and have received the forgiveness of sins (see 1:3-7). Until the day of redemption, the Christian is sealed with the Holy Spirit and lives in the exceeding greatness of God's power (see 1:14, 19-20). The new life is the result of God's great power when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead (see 1:19-20). This same power is at work in Jesus Christ, who is above all other powers, principalities, and authorities in the universe. All things have been put under His feet and He has been made Head over all things that pertain to the church (see 1:20-21). Christians are not saved for themselves; instead, they live out their faith by doing good works (see 2:8-10).

The transition from theology to practical application begins at Ephesians 4:1 and is introduced by the word *therefore*. Chapters 4–6 are the ethical exhortations regarding how to live in a way that is worthy of the vocation or calling with which Christians have been called. The technical term for these chapters is *paraenesis*, which refers to moral or ethical instruction and is found throughout the writings of Paul (see Romans 12–13; Philippians 2–4; 1 Thessalonians 4–5). Throughout Ephesians 4:1–6:9, Paul called upon his readers to be imitators of himself and to live or walk in love in every sphere and relationship setting, including in their marriages, in their roles as parents, and how masters were to relate to their slaves.

The final exhortation begins at Ephesians 6:10 with the word *finally*. At the heart of this passage from Ephesians 6:10-20 is the exhortation to stand courageously in battle. The word *stand* is at the heart of the passage. It is used in some form in four separate places in the text—verses 11, 13-14. In verse 11, we are told to put on the full armor of God, so that we will be able *to stand* against the wiles of the devil. In verse 13, we take up the armor *to withstand* in the evil day and *having done all, we are to stand*. After having done everything humanly and spiritually possible, the believer is to stand. Everything is summarized in the thoughts of verse 14: "Stand, therefore." Considering everything they had heard, witnessed, and received—"stand." These words are followed by a description of the believer's spiritual armor (see 6:14-17) and a final appeal for prayer (see 6:18-20).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Call to Be Strong in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

The concluding section began with the word *finally* (Greek: *tou loipou*), meaning "for the rest" or "what remains for you to do." He appealed to them as "brethren," indicating that they all shared the same struggles and spiritual conflicts. This contrasts with how he referenced them in 2:1-4. After having received all the blessings of the Lord, enumerated throughout the letter, what remains is preparation for the conflict. The verse is a call for valor and firm resolve on the part of the believer, to prepare by being strengthened. The word that is used for "strengthened" (Greek: *endynamousthe*) means "to make strong" or "be strong" or "cause to become strong." Paul may have had in view the charge of God to Joshua (see 1:6-7, 9) to be strong in preparation for the battle to conquer the land of Canaan. Paul used the similar thought in Ephesians 3:16 and in 1 Corinthians 16:13—"be strong."

The exhortation to be strong has its source in the Lord (Greek: *en Kurios*). The prepositional phrase "in the Lord" has been repeatedly used throughout Ephesians to remind the believers that everything that they have received, need, and desire has its source in the Lord. (See the entire letter for references to use of the phrase "in Him, in Christ"—which is used nearly thirty-five times.) Thus, the strengthening of the believer begins not with the individual but with the Lord. It is the power of God that operates in the life of the believer that makes him/her strong. "In Him" there is not only freedom from condemnation (see Romans 8:1), but also the operative power to do great and mighty works (see John 15:4-7). Apart from Christ the believer becomes impotent (see John 15:5). In Ephesians 6:10, the source of the power is "in the Lord."

B. Put On the Whole Armor of God (Ephesians 6:11)

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Verse 11 continues the instructions of preparation with an imperative command: "Put on the whole armour of God." This

phrase has its roots in Isaiah 52:1, which describes the coming messianic age and how the Jews returning from Babylonian exile were to prepare for it. Paul used the word *endysathe* ("put on"), also found in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, to describe putting on spiritual graces and equipment (see also Romans 13:12, 14; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54; 2 Corinthians 5:3; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24).

The word Paul used for "armor" is *panoplia,* which referred to the armor worn by a heavily armed soldier. It denoted full armor. The soldier would never enter a battle half clothed in his armor. In the spiritual realm, it has reference to being armed for overcoming the attacks, tricks, schemes, and temptations of Satan. Paul more than likely borrowed this language from Isaiah 59:15-17, wherein the Lord puts on His armor to defeat the enemies of Judah. The purpose for being fully armed is so that the believer may be able to *stand against the wiles of the devil.* It is the follow-through with being fully clothed in his or her armor that gives the believer the power to stand firm. We are clothed to be "able" (Greek: *dunamai*), which is the main word for "power" in the New Testament. The Ephesians had received the same power that God used to raise Jesus Christ from the dead. Thus, one stands, not alone, but clothed in the fullness of the power of God.

Stand (Greek: *stete)* is a key word in this entire passage. It is used in verses 13 and 14 to describe the position that the Christian soldier takes in combat. Prior to launching any offensive operations, an army must establish a solid defensive position. It must be able not just to take ground but, more importantly, to hold its ground as well. An army that cannot hold its position will be overrun and defeated. Paul exhorted the Ephesians that they had to be able to stand against the chief opponent of the church—Satan, or the devil. The word for "wiles" is *methodeas*, which denotes strategies and craftiness. We get the English word *methods* from this word. Satan is a master of deception and trickery. The believer has to be aware of his/her methods and how they are employed against him or her and the church (see 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12).

C. The Source of Our Spiritual Conflict (Ephesians 6:12)

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Verse 12 introduces the reason for why believers need to be strong in the Lord. They are fighting a formidable spiritual foe, whose realm is the spiritual high places. Paul's language is inclusive; "we wrestle" denotes a struggle that is hand-to-hand combat. It also denotes that the battle was not just the Ephesians alone, but that all believers are engaged in this cosmic spiritual struggle against an enemy who is not flesh and blood. Paul used an athletic metaphor to compare the intense struggle of the believer's fight. He often used athletic metaphors to describe the Christian life as a contest that requires discipline (see 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; 2 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 12:1-4).

Paul described the believer's foe using a wide array of terms that define the nature of the foe who is spiritual (Greek: *pneumatika*) and wicked (Greek: *ponerias*). They consist of the principalities (Greek: *arche*), powers (Greek: *exousia*), and rulers (Greek: *kosmokratos*). (See Romans 8:38; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22.) This is the same power who is "working in

the sons of disobedience" (see Ephesians 2:2). These words are a stark reminder that believers are not engaged in a battle against other human beings (who are flesh and blood). We recognize that humans can be the tool and instrument of Satan. The phrase "the darkness of this world" denotes the origin of the world's ills and that these rulers dwell in high places, where darkness and evil originate. Jesus often referred to Satan as the ruler ("prince") of this world and father of all evil (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; compare 2 Corinthians 4:4; 10:1-4).

D. Stand with the Armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17)

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Verses 13-17 describe the various pieces of the believer's armor mentioned in verse 11. In these verses, Paul used the Roman soldier's armor as a metaphor for how the believer must be equipped for the spiritual battle against a cosmic foe.

Verse 13 begins with "wherefore," which is a reference back to everything that has been previously stated regarding the believer's enemy. It points forward to why the believer needs to be thoroughly prepared and equipped for this battle. He or she is to "take unto you" (Greek: *analambano*). This word is written in the imperative tense, meaning that the believer must take up with the fullest intention of using what has been given to him or her, which is the full armor of God. In verse 13b, Paul cited the reason why this was necessary—"that ye may be able to withstand" (Greek: *dynamai*). Without the armor of God, the believer's strength is insufficient for this battle when the day of evil approaches.

In verse 13c, after doing all that is required, the believer is to "stand" (Greek: *histemi*)—which is written in the imperative tense, implying that one is to endure in the battle because God has given him or her the means to achieve the victory over the powers of darkness. Kenneth Wuest noted, "Thus, the Christian is to take up and put on all the armor of God as a once-for-all act and keep that armor on during the entire course of his life, not relaxing the discipline necessary for the constant use of such protection."[2]

Verse 14 begins with the final exhortation for one to stand fully clothed in his/her armor. There are several individual pieces of this spiritual armor. Frank Thielman points out in his commentary on Ephesians, "Each piece is identified with an element of Christian existence that has played an important part in the rest of the letter: truth (1:13; 4:15, 21-25; 5:9), righteousness (4:24; 5:9; 6:1), gospel preparation (1:13; 2:17; 3:6, 8; 4:11), faith (1:1, 13, 15, 19; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13), and salvation (1:13; 2:5, 8; 5:23)."[3]

In verse 14a, the first piece of armor focused on the loins that were to be girded up (Greek: *perionnymi*)—a reference to the soldier's belt, which Paul said was the truth (Greek: *aletheia*). The belt held up the other pieces of the soldier's armor. Every believer must be armed with truth, which here refers to honesty and integrity (see Isaiah 11:5; 2 Corinthians 6:7; 1 Peter 1:13). In order to fight against the lies of

the devil, we must not allow untruth into our lives to trip us up.

Verse 14b details the second piece of armor, which is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate (Greek: *thorax*) protected the vital organs of the heart and the lungs. We overcome the power of Satan when we abhor evil and cling to righteousness in our personal conduct (see Isaiah 59:17; compare with 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Revelation 9:9, 17).

Verse 15 contains the third piece of armor, which were the shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of peace (see Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; compare with Habakkuk 3:19). Here, the reference is to the Gospel message that was to be delivered. Shoes were important in ancient warfare, for it gave the soldier greater mobility. He could run and not worry about the sharp rocks and stones on the battlefield.

Verse 16 contains a description of the fourth piece of armor, which was the shield of faith. The wording of the text suggests that this was a vital piece of the soldier's armor: *Above all else take up the shield of faith.* Here, the reference is to the large shield used by the Roman soldier for protection. The shield would protect the soldier from the fiery darts—which were highly lethal weapons. In this instance, Paul was referring to the believer's faith in God in the finished work of God at calvary. Nothing the enemy hurls against the believer will harm him when his faith is strong.

In verse 17, we are told to put on the helmet of salvation (see 1 Samuel 17:5, 38; Isaiah 59:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). The helmet protected the head from dangerous blows and piercing arrows. Here, the reference must be to protecting the cognitive understanding of our salvation. It is the full knowledge that we have been saved by grace through faith and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Also in verse 17, Paul said to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (see Isaiah 49:2; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15). This is the only offensive weapon that a believer has. All the believer has to stand upon is the Word of God. His Word is sharper than any two-edged sword. It is the strength of the believer's life and power; it is the source book for all matters of belief and practice in the church.

E. Pray Always
(Ephesians 6:18)

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

These words convey the importance of praying with fervor and conviction—all prayer, all petition, all times, all perseverance, for all the saints. We are to make prayer a priority and take our prayer time seriously. This means that when we think about it, and when it crosses our minds, we should pray. Pray walking, pray driving, pray while running, walking, or exercising. Pray all the time. Perseverance (Greek: *prokarteresis*) denotes a state of mind or spirit wherein one persists or continues with a matter regardless of the opposition. Thus, to persevere in prayer is to continue praying even when the foes arrayed against the believer appear to be winning.

The prepositional phrase "in the Spirit" denotes that our prayers are to be in concert with the will of the Holy Spirit. It denotes that when we pray, we are so in tune with God the Holy Spirit and what God wills that we pray with the mind of the Spirit.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Every Christian faces the possibility of spiritual failure. Hence, the exhortation to be strong in the Lord is still relevant today. Why do we need strength? First, so that we can stand firm against the wiles of the devil. Second, because our struggle is not against flesh and blood. Every military commander who is planning an attack wants to review the intelligence report about their enemy's strength, tactics, capabilities, equipment, troop morale, and troop size before making his or her plans. The commander wants to know the strength of the enemy, how his forces are organized, where his defenses are, and about his heavy weapons and his likely courses of action. He considers the experience and reputation of the commander of the opposing forces. No good commander would ever think of attacking without assessing thoroughly the situation he or she is facing.

And so it is with the Christian life: we must understand that there is a whole army of demons headed by Satan whose chief aim is to destroy the church—you, me, and every believer in the world today. When you have a problem on your job, in your neighborhood, in your home, in your school, in your club or group, or even in the church with evil men and women, it is not them but the demonic powers behind them that we must battle.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we be strong and empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 21-27, 2022)

God Gives Tools for Our Protection

MONDAY, November 21: "Remembrance and Repentance" (Revelation 2:1-7)
TUESDAY, November 22: "The Mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:1-13)
WEDNESDAY, November 23: "Live Worthy" (Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16)
THURSDAY, November 24: "Living as God's People" (Ephesians 4:17-27)
FRIDAY, November 25: "God as a Refuge and Fortress" (Psalm 91)
SATURDAY, November 26: "God as the Defender of the Afflicted" (Isaiah 54:6-17)
SUNDAY, November 27: "Strength in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:10-24)

Notes

1. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2010), 413.
2. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 142.
3. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 415.

From Darkness to Light

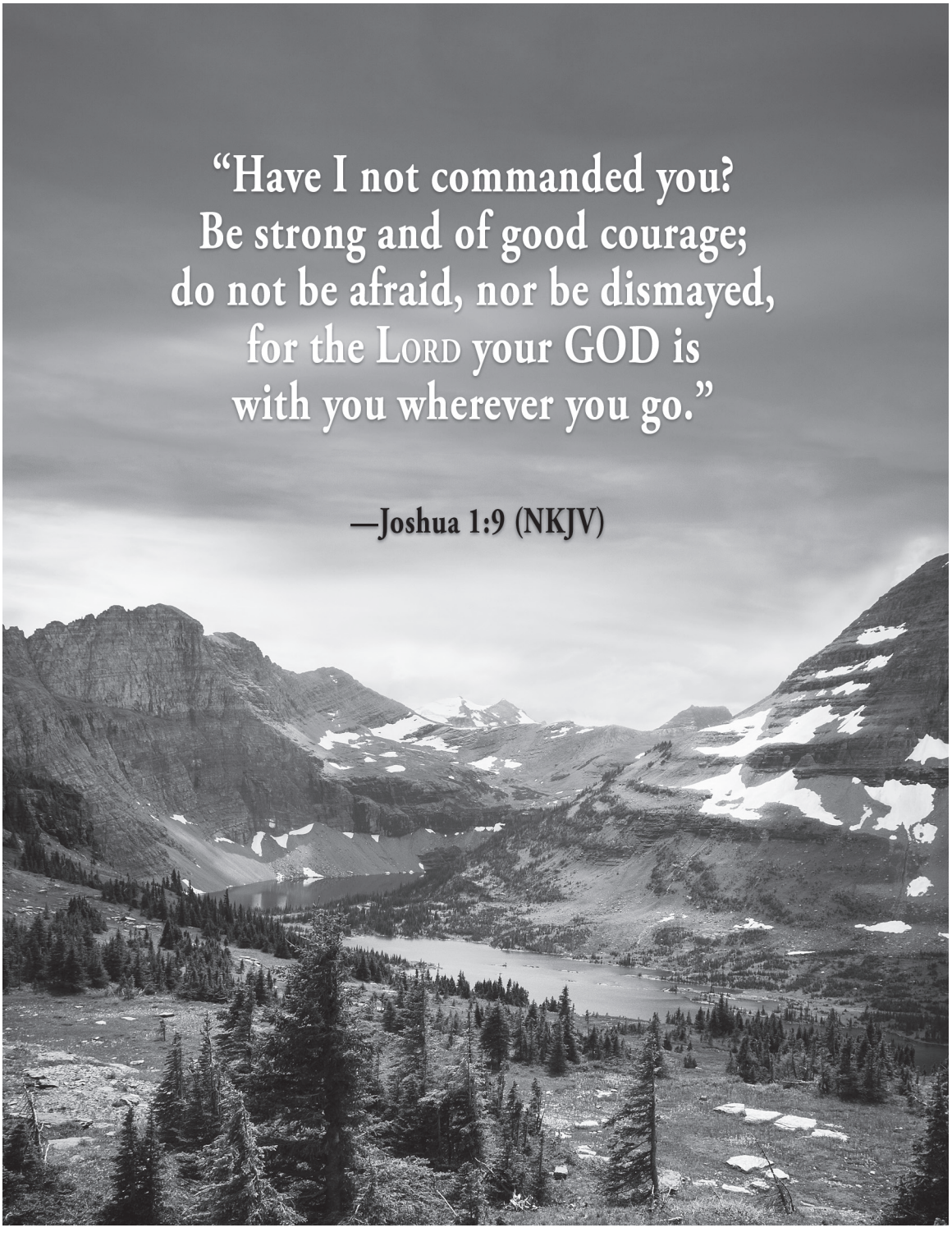
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter continues the identification of "Chosen, Not Choice," and the peculiarity of God's calling—which is rooted in grace rather than in humankind's merit.

Unit I, *"God Prepares the Way,"* begins with two lessons on Zechariah from the opening chapters of Luke's gospel. Disappointment and doubt clouded Zechariah's perspective until the promise of a son became reality. This extraordinary experience is the backdrop for lesson 3—the entrance of John the Baptist, God's chosen voice to prepare the way for the Messiah. Lesson 4 (on Christmas Day) celebrates Advent with Mary's Song as she rejoices in the news that God has chosen the humble.

Unit II, *"God's Promises,"* contains five lessons from the books of 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, and Joel that remind us that we can trust God to keep His word. In lesson 5, as Solomon's Temple is being dedicated in 2 Chronicles, God promises to hear the people (from His position in heaven) and forgive them in response to their prayers of repentance. The next three lessons are from Isaiah. Lesson 6 is the celebrated passage that proclaims that God's people are waterproof and fireproof because of His promised protection. Lesson 7 speaks to an obstinate people whose future God knows and declares. The final lesson from Isaiah contrasts ritual performance with true penitence coupled with acts of justice. The unit concludes with lesson 9, in which the prophet Joel declares God's promise to be present and restore the chosen people after a time of distress.

Unit III, *"God's Call and Its Responsibilities,"* has four lessons from the books of 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, and 1 Peter. These lessons teach us that God's call and the responsibilities of that call are without regard to an individual's past. Lesson 10 reminds us that God's wisdom is foolishness to people because God chooses those who are neither wise nor powerful nor of noble birth. In lesson 11, Paul's final letter brims with emotion as he encourages Timothy to embrace the suffering that accompanies the Gospel, which is the responsibility of those who are called with a holy calling. Lesson 12 warns against showing favoritism to those wearing fine clothes because in God's economy, the poor receive God's blessing. Finally, lesson 13 challenges us to check our attitudes and live as chosen, royal, holy people who have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light.


"Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and of good courage;
do not be afraid, nor be dismayed,
for the LORD your GOD is
with you wherever you go."
—Joshua 1:9 (NKJV)

December 4, 2022 **Lesson 1**

ZECHARIAH HEARS FROM GOD

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **A Special Promise**
Youth Topic: **A Special Promise**

Children
General Lesson Title: **An Angel Visits Zechariah**
Children's Topic: **The Special Promise**

Devotional Reading
John 10:22-30

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: **Luke 1:5-23**
Print Passage: **Luke 1:8-20**
Key Verse: **Luke 1:13**

Children
Background Scripture: **Luke 1:5-23**
Print Passage: **Luke 1:8-20**
Key Verse: **Luke 1:13a**

Luke 1:8-20—KJV

8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,
9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.
11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.
13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.
15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and

Luke 1:8-20—NIV

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,
9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.
10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.
11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.
12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.
13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.
14 "He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth,
15 "for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He

he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.
16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.
17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.
19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.
20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.
16 "He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.
17 "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."
18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."
19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.
20 "And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People struggle with doubts and fears that limit their ability to hope. What impact do our doubts and fears have on our lives? While there was a consequence to Zechariah's doubt, it did not nullify God's hope-filled promise.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand the pronouncement of John's birth in the context of the coming Messiah.
2. Examine Zechariah's mixed emotions and identify with his feelings.
3. Wait expectantly on God, confident that He answers prayer.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The account of the birth of John the Baptist as well as the mention of the names of his parents—Elisabeth ("Elizabeth," NIV) and Zacharias ("Zechariah, NIV)—are unique to Luke among the canonical Gospels.

—Priestly duties were divided among many due to the large number of priests available. That Zechariah was chosen "by lot" does not indicate chance or happenstance; rather, in the ancient world it was believed that this indicated divine

providence. Zechariah was specially chosen by God to enter the Temple at this moment.

—Centering the narrative in the Temple is not arbitrary. This was considered the central focal point of God's presence. That only Zechariah enters the Temple on this day is indicative of the holiness/separateness associated with the sanctuary of the Lord.

—The infertility of the aged Elizabeth is a motif familiar from stories of Old Testament matriarchs. The unexpected conception of John to the elderly couple foreshadows the miraculous conception of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. The lesser miracle precedes the greater. When the Bible calls attention to a "barren woman," it is often a sure sign that God is about to do something wonderful.

—The command that John refrain from wine and strong drink may indicate that he was to be a Nazirite, though this is only an inference. Nazirites were to set themselves apart as holy to the Lord (see Numbers 6:1-4). The judge Samson was also a Nazirite (see Judges 13:4).

—Zechariah's disbelief results in muteness. This is portrayed as a punishment for his disbelief. At the same time, the return of his speech would later function as a miracle that would accompany his coming to belief in the promises of God.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

To gain insight into the historical setting of the lesson, it is necessary to take note of Luke 1:5a. It is established that this event involving Zacharias (or Zechariah) took place "In the days of Herod, the king of Judaea." The Herod referred to here was the infamous Herod the Great. It was a time of great tension and fear—for Herod the Great sat in a position of tremendous power, and he was ruthless, evil, and paranoid. He was a notorious murderer.

Herod the Great was not a descendant of Israel's but of Jacob's brother, Esau—therefore, he was an Edomite or an Idumean. He was known for his spectacular building programs, but even more so for his paranoid cruelty, which drove him to execute many, including members of his own family.

Although Zechariah (along with his wife, Elizabeth) was "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6), most of the people to whom he ministered were only religiously ritualistic and superficial.

Zechariah was a priest. Because all male descendants of Aaron were priests, there were too many priests for the quantity of work to be done even in Old Testament times. David, therefore, divided them into twenty-four divisions, and each division served for two weeks each year. Zechariah belonged to the division of Abia ("Abijah," NIV) (see Luke 1:5; cf. 1 Chronicles 24:1-19).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

While Zechariah carried out his priestly duties, God showed him that his prayers would now be answered. Elizabeth would have a child—to be named John—who would become a special messenger from God to His people. John would be equipped by God's Spirit for his ministry and would live under the restrictions of a person set apart for God.

Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel occurred in the Temple in Jerusalem. That is significant because Jerusalem was the religious

headquarters of the Jews. Many Jews and Jewish proselytes made their yearly pilgrimage to the Holy City, regardless of where they were in the world.

Devout Jews were rigid in their beliefs. However, the problem was that in some cases, they were rigid but wrong. This truth was seen in how they viewed a wife's childbearing capability. It was a traditional belief that a wife's inability to give birth was a sure sign that God had cursed her. Not only was the barren woman shunned, but also, her family was shamed.

The angel's announcement to Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son was joyful news. But it pierced Zechariah's heart and dampened his spirit because he was focused on the fact that he and Elizabeth were in their old age, and for her to bear a child would be humanly impossible. He should have remembered that with God, nothing is impossible.

Although Zechariah had the faith to pray, he did not have the faith to believe the answer to his prayer. As chastisement for his lack of faith, he became dumb for a period (see Luke 1:18-22). God did not, however, withdraw His promise. When Zechariah's time of service at the Temple was over, he returned to his home, and soon Elizabeth became pregnant (see Luke 1:23-25).

From the very beginning of his gospel, Luke reminds us of an even earlier beginning: the beginning of the story of God's relationship with His people, Israel. Luke places his story within this larger story of faith—the story that began when God called Abram (Abraham) and Sarai (Sarah) to leave their homeland and go to the place that God would show them; He promised them a child and many descendants.

Despite Abraham and Sarah's skepticism and their attempts to take matters into their own hands, God's promise proved true. Sarah conceived in her old age and gave birth to a son, who was named Isaac, which means (in Hebrew), "he laughs." Sarah exclaimed, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me" (Genesis 21:6, NRSV).

Similarly, Zechariah and Elizabeth were rather unlikely candidates to play a crucial role in fulfilling God's promises. They, too, were old and childless, and Elizabeth was thought to be barren. (In biblical times, the absence of children in a marriage was always assumed to be due to the wife's "barrenness.")

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Elizabeth (Elisabeth): Zechariah's (Zacharias's) wife, cousin of Mary (the mother of Jesus), a God-fearing woman, and the mother of John the Baptist.
Gabriel: a unique angel within the angelic company. In the Bible and throughout human history, Gabriel has made only a few earthly appearances. He brought glorious, life-changing news each time he appeared.
Zechariah (Zacharias): a committed servant of God, a devoted priest, and the father of John the Baptist.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Believe (verse 20)—Greek: *pisteuō* (pist-yoo'-o): to have faith in, trust in; to think to be true, place confidence in; "believest" (KJV).
Gabriel (verse 19)—Greek: *Gabriél* (gab-ree-ale'): a messenger of God; an archangel.
Zechariah (verse 13)— Greek: *Zacharias* (dzakh-ar-ee'-as): the father of John the Baptist; "Zacharias" (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. A Priest and a Promise
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. As We Serve, God Will Bless (Luke 1:8-10)

B. God's Promise Prolonged, but Not Precluded (Luke 1:11-14)

C. God's Promises Always Have Purpose (Luke 1:15-17)

D. Obstacles Should Never Obstruct Our Faith (Luke 1:18-20)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Priest and a Promise

In the religious life of the Jewish people, priests and their religious duties played a pivotal role. People within the Jewish community depended on the priests to carry out religious rituals, perform sacred ceremonies, and offer prayers to God—all on the people's behalf.

As Zechariah the priest was executing his priestly duties, he had a unique encounter with the angel Gabriel, who appeared bearing some amazingly wonderful news. The news was that God had heard Zechariah's prayer, and that Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. But there was a significant problem in the human realm: Zechariah and Elizabeth were well past the age of producing a child. However, in the spiritual realm, what is humanly impossible is possible with God. Because of the human obstacle of old age, Zechariah had given up on his prayer's becoming a reality.

B. Biblical Background

Chapter 1 of the gospel of Luke is one of the longest chapters in the New Testament—with eighty verses. This chapter describes the birth of John the Baptist and the events leading up to the birth of Jesus.

Zechariah, the central character in this scene, was a priest. He belonged to the section of Abia. Every direct descendant of Aaron's was automatically a priest; that meant that there were far too many priests for all ordinary purposes. They were, therefore, divided into twenty-four sections. All the priests served only at the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. For the rest of the year, each course served two periods of one week each.

Foundational to Jewish tradition was worship at the Temple. The priest had a prominent role in the exercise of Jewish worship. Devout Jews made their way to the Temple with the expectation that they would have a rare, once-in-a-lifetime encounter with God.

The Temple refers to the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of God's Temple in the inner area where few men ever entered and into which an ordinary priest entered only once in a lifetime.

Both Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, came out of rich priestly backgrounds: Zechariah from Abijah's line, and Elizabeth from Aaron's line. It is fitting that Zechariah's name meant "Jehovah has remembered"—because God heard his prayers, was mindful of his faithfulness, and blessed him and his wife with a son.

It is interesting to note that in Zechariah's life, there was a misfortune. He and Elizabeth were childless. Not unnaturally, Zechariah, even on his great day, was thinking of his personal and domestic misfortune and was praying about it. Then came the wondrous vision and the glad message that Zechariah would have a son even when hope was dead.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. As We Serve, God Will Bless
(Luke 1:8-10)

And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

The Print Passage opens with Zechariah's conducting his assignment as the priest designated to carry out the sacred task of burning incense in the Temple. As was the custom, while the appointed priest was in the Temple burning the incense before the Lord, the worshippers were outside the Temple, engaging in prayer. An angel of the Lord came and stood at the right side of the altar where the incense was burning.

Scholars tell us that though entering the Holy Place to light incense was not nearly as serious as entering the Holy of Holies, it nevertheless required great caution in its execution. The priests were always to maintain personal holiness. This was especially true when they ministered before the Lord and approached the veil (see Leviticus 21:23). It is assumed that every priest who entered the Holy Place remembered what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they approached in an unprescribed manner—fire came out from the Most Holy Place and consumed them (see Leviticus 10:1-2).

As Zechariah entered the Holy Place to burn the incense, he likely felt some apprehension. All priests naturally experienced the fear of the Lord as they entered, but Zechariah probably felt some extra concern because his wife remained barren. If there were a sin that God was judging them for and of which Zechariah was unaware, then entering the Holy Place without being cleansed of that sin would be a death sentence.

It is telling that the angel appeared as Zechariah was implementing his priestly duties. The blessed news came to him through the angel while he was serving. We can learn quite a lesson from *what* happened to Zechariah and *when* it happened. There are blessings in store for persons who will serve the Lord faithfully. God has set a season for those who serve to reap (see Psalm 1:3; Galatians 6:9).

B. God's Promise Prolonged, but Not Precluded
(Luke 1:11-14)

And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And

when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

Each morning and evening, a priest was chosen by lot to go into the Temple and burn incense while the people outside prayed. Priests valued this duty as something they would probably do only once in a lifetime. Still, for Zechariah, the joy of the occasion was mixed with personal disappointment—as his prayers had not been answered. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had prayed for many years that God would give them a child, but they were still childless.

While Zechariah was carrying out his priestly duties, God showed him that his prayers would now be answered. Elizabeth would have a child—to be named John—who would become a special messenger from God to His people. The child would be equipped by God's Spirit for his ministry and would live under the restrictions of a person set apart for God.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah with fantastic, life-changing news. But before the angel could deliver the good news, he had to reassure Zechariah that all was well. Zechariah was "troubled" by such an unusual situation, with fear taking him in its grip (verse 12). The angel said to Zechariah (Zacharias), "Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John" (verse 13, NIV).

The angel told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and that Elizabeth would bear him a son; this act reminds us that he had previously prayed for a son. The reaction that Zechariah would give the angel later would indicate that he had given up hope that God would answer that prayer.

Although Zechariah had the faith to pray, he did not have the faith to believe the answer to his prayer. As a chastisement for his lack of faith, he became mute (unable to speak) for a period (see Luke 1:18-22). God did not, however, withdraw His promise. When Zechariah's time of service at the Temple concluded, he returned to his home, and soon Elizabeth became pregnant.

When God makes a promise or determines something to be within the context of His absolute will, it will be; it *must* be. God's promises may seem to be prolonged (according to *our* schedule), but His promises are never precluded; nothing can cancel God's promise. What we may call "too late" is God's "on time." There are times when God will deliberately delay before He delivers and wait before He works—so that when He does come through, we will eagerly and earnestly give *Him* the glory.

C. God's Promises Always Have Purpose (Luke 1:15-17)

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

God is a God of purpose! He never does anything aimlessly or haphazardly. In verses 15-17, the angel clarified that God had a most holy purpose for John. John would be great in the sight of the Lord. Such a designation is far

different from being considered great in the sight of men. God's estimation of greatness is different from the standards we have set for who can be regarded as great. When John's life is considered against the backdrop of his divine assignment, we can see the fulfillment of this prophetic utterance. John's greatness should be interpreted in the context of his relationship to the greatest person to ever walk the face of this earth: Jesus Christ.

Additionally, the prophetic announcement concerning John specifies that he was not to consume wine or strong drink. This prohibited not merely wine, but all intoxicants, and supports the view that John the Baptist—like Samuel, Samson, and the Rechabites in the Old Testament—was a Nazarite for life (see Numbers 6:1-21). However, as one scholar noted, not specified here were some aspects of the Nazarite vow (for instance, allowing the hair to grow). The type of ascetic piety exhibited by John had its proper place in the purpose of God, although John, strictly speaking, was not *in* the kingdom because he preceded it. Nevertheless, God used John within the context of his peculiar ways of living and being, despite the dramatic contrast with Jesus' lifestyle.

For John to consistently carry out God's sacred cause entailed God forbidding him from any consumption of intoxicating beverages that might cloud his thinking or interfere with his witness. Before he even came out of the womb, he would be filled with the Holy Spirit; he would be empowered for his God-given purpose (verse 15).

Gabriel declared that John would bring individuals and families back into fellowship with God. He would, most importantly, pave the way for Jesus Christ and His ministry—as he would "go before the Lord" in the tradition and with the spiritual power of the great prophet Elijah. What a high honor to be the parents of the forerunner of Christ!

D. Obstacles Should Never Obstruct Our Faith (Luke 1:18-20)

And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

In this section of the printed Scripture, the angel Gabriel first identified himself during his communication with Zechariah. When Zechariah heard that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear him a son, he allowed doubt to set up camp in his heart. He said to the angel (essentially), "I don't see that happening. How can I be sure that this is the truth?" (See verse 18a.) Zechariah's problem was that he was thinking with the mind of reason, minus seeing with the eyes of faith. For, he said, "I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years" (verse 18).

The angel revealed his name and said, "I am Gabriel, and I just left the presence of God, as He sent me to give you this good news" (see verse 19). Now, the angel Gabriel does not show up often in the Scriptures—but whenever he does, he comes bringing extraordinarily good, life-changing, history-making news (see Daniel 8:16f; 9:21f; Luke 1:26-38). Zechariah allowed the obstacles of old age and faithless reason to rob him of his belief in God's promise.

One prominent commentator said that Gabriel reminded Zechariah of who he was and where he had come from to affirm the authenticity of his message definitively. There is a big contrast between *I am an old man* and *I am Gabriel*; which held more weight? Gabriel also "preache[d] the gospel" to Zechariah —that is, he brought good news (or glad tidings) to Zechariah.

Unbelief is the enemy of faith and an insult to God. As a result of Zechariah's doubting God, he was sentenced to silence; he would not be able to speak until God's promise came to pass (verse 20). Whenever we experience our faith's drooping beneath the weight of doubt and fear, that is the time to recenter our focus and "[look] unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2a).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is a sweet consolation and blessed assurance to know that God's promises are faithful and steadfast. People may be unpredictable, unstable, or unreliable, but we can trust God and His promises without reservations. Often, God's promises take time to come to pass, but we can be confident that God is reliable and certain with every promise that He makes.

It is a reality that sometimes, we pray for something for a long, long time. We pray for the salvation of a spouse or a child. We pray for a calling or a ministry. We pray that God will bring that special person to us. But after years of heartfelt prayer, we give up out of discouragement. Throughout the usual childbearing years, Zechariah and Elizabeth had likely prayed many passionate prayers for a son. It had probably been years since they had given up hope and stopped believing that God would grant their request.

When we are in a situation like Zechariah and Elizabeth's, we sometimes begin, in the smallest of ways, to doubt the love and care of God for us. But we must remember and affirm that God always loves, and His care never stops.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for being a faithful God who is always true to Your Word. Please help us lose our doubts and fears in the security of Your promises. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 28–December 4, 2022)

Zechariah Hears from God

MONDAY, November 28: "'My Sheep Hear My Voice'" (John 10:22-30)
TUESDAY, November 29: "Guided by the Spirit" (John 16:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, November 30: "God Will Rise Up with Mercy" (Isaiah 30:18-26)
THURSDAY, December 1: "Recounting God's Goodness" (Psalm 103:1-12)
FRIDAY, December 2: "God's Everlasting Love" (Psalm 103:13-22)
SATURDAY, December 3: "Zechariah's Prayer Is Answered" (Luke 1:5-17)
SUNDAY, December 4: "Hear and Believe" (Luke 1:18-25)

December 11, 2022 **Lesson 2**

ZECHARIAH SPEAKS

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Zechariah Is Redeemed**
Youth Topic: **Zechariah Is Redeemed**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Zechariah Obeys God**
Children's Topic: **A New Baby**

Devotional Reading
Malachi 4:1-6

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: **Luke 1:57-80**
Print Passage: **Luke 1:57-66, 76-79**
Adult Key Verse: **Luke 1:76**
Youth Key Verse: **Luke 1:64**

Children
Background Scripture: **Luke 1:57-80**
Print Passage: **Luke 1:57-68, 76, 80**
Key Verse: **Luke 1:76a**

Luke 1:57-66, 76-79—KJV

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.
58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.
59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.
60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.
61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.
62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.
63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.
64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

Luke 1:57-66, 76-79—NIV

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.
58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.
59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,
60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."
61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."
62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.
63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John."
64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.
65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and

65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.
66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

. . . . .

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;
77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,
78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.
66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

. . . . .

76 "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 "to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 "because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 "to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: The birth of a child is a transformative experience. How does the birth of a child bring hope to a community? With John's birth, God fulfilled a promise to Zechariah who proclaimed a larger promise to all the world.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Rejoice in God's promise's being fulfilled.
2. Relate to the impact of the birth of a child.
3. Reflect on the prophecy regarding the ministry of John.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Up until this point it had only been stated that Elizabeth ("Elisabeth," KJV) was expecting a "child" (Greek: *brephos*); now it was revealed that she had had a son (Greek: *huios*). In the ancient context of this text, the birth of a son was considered particularly fortunate.

—Muteness and deafness were thought to go hand in hand in antiquity. This may explain the need for the people to motion to Zechariah ("Zacharias," KJV) in verse 62. It also recalls that Zechariah's loss of speech (literal muteness) was a direct result of his failure to listen (spiritual deafness). Zechariah's newfound faith brought healing to him so that he regained the gift of speech. The gift of speech was particularly significant here, given John's future role as a prophet who proclaims the word of the Lord.

—In accordance with Jewish practice, the circumcision takes place on the eighth day (see also the circumcision of Jesus in Luke 2:21). By fulfilling this commandment, Zechariah and Elizabeth demonstrated that they were exemplars of their faith. For the commandment to practice this rite, see Genesis 17:9-14 and Leviticus 12:3. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

—The song of Zechariah (known as the "Benedictus") stands parallel to the song of Mary (the "Magnificat"; see Luke 1:46-55). Both prophetically proclaim the future works of the newborn child.

—Zechariah's song prophesies John's role as the forerunner of Jesus. He had come to prepare the way for the One who would bring light to the darkness.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Elizabeth (Zechariah's wife) had carried John for the full term, and now it was time for the actual birth. Most biblical scholars date the birth of John the Baptizer to 6 BC. According to that day's cultural and religious tradition, upon the eighth day after a male Jewish child's birth, the parents were to have the child circumcised. According to Jewish law, the eighth day was significant because the mother was considered unclean for seven days after she gave birth. Since the newborn child had physical contact with the mother, the child was deemed unclean by contact and, thus, not suitable for the sacred rite of circumcision (see Leviticus 12:1-3).

The duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy, even up until eight days after John's birth, was a bittersweet period. The anticipation of John's birth was a joyful time for both Elizabeth and Zechariah. But because of his unbelief in the promise of God that was delivered by the angel Gabriel, Zechariah was sentenced to muteness (the inability to speak) until eight days after John was born. However, the joy concerning the promised child (John) was greater than the grief associated with Zechariah's temporary muteness.

At John's circumcision eight days after his birth, Zechariah confirmed that the name of his and Elizabeth's child would be John, in obedience to God's command through Gabriel. Up to this point, Zechariah had been unable to speak. When he confirmed his son's name, his tongue was loosened; he could talk again. When his speech was restored, he gave praise to God.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

When a Jewish male was born, neighbors and relatives celebrated the child's parents. The birth of John was a most joyous event. The joy of Elizabeth, Zechariah, and their neighbors and relatives was multiplied because Elizabeth had been barren, and both Elizabeth and Zechariah were in their old age. This was indeed a unique miracle on God's part. In Luke 1:14, the angel Gabriel declared, "Many shall rejoice at his [John's] birth." Now, at the birth of John, Gabriel's words came to pass (see Luke 1:58).

In keeping with the common custom of some Jewish families, the neighbors and relatives were prepared to call the newborn child Zechariah (Zacharias) after his father's name. When a child was born into a Jewish household (especially a male child), he could be named after his father or another male relative on his father's side of the family. But

even before the child was born, the angel Gabriel made it clear that it was in God's will that the child be named John. Against the customary Jewish practice, Zechariah and Elizabeth named their child John, in obedience to God's instruction.

It was appropriate for the angel to declare that Elizabeth and Zechariah's child would be named John. John's name is derived from the Hebrew name *Yohanan*, meaning "graced by God." It is a solid, traditional name that exudes strength, smarts, and kindness. John would be the herald, the forerunner, of Christ.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Elizabeth (Elisabeth): the mother of John the Baptizer.

Neighbors and Relatives: in this lesson, persons who came to celebrate with Elizabeth and Zechariah the birth of their child.

Zechariah (Zacharias): a priest; the father of John the Baptizer.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Forgiveness (verse 77)—Greek: *aphesis* (af'-es-is): a sending away; a dismissal, pardon, release; "remission" (KJV).

Praising (verse 64)—Greek: *eneulogeó* (en-yoo-log-eh'-o): to confer a benefit on; to bless; to speak well (of); "praised" (KJV).

Prophet (verse 76)—Greek: *prophétés* (prof-ay'-tace): one who speaks forth; one through whom God speaks; a person gifted at expositing divine truth.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. The Absolute Will of God Will Be Done

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The Announced Promise Actualized (Luke 1:57-58)

B. What God Resolves Cannot Be Dissolved (Luke 1:59-61)

C. Blessings Are Embedded in Obedience (Luke 1:62-66)

D. The Forerunner Is to Carry Out His Calling (Luke 1:76-79)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Absolute Will of God Will Be Done

At the outset (beginning) of this introduction, a distinction needs to be made between God's *absolute will* and God's *permissive will*. Simply put, God's permissive will is what He *allows* to happen. There are some things that God does not sanction, endorse, or cause, but He permits (allows); and He allows them to happen for reasons that are often only known to Him. Conversely, the absolute will of God will come to pass regardless of what or who tries to derail or stop it.

God's absolute will can be detected in every line of the biblical account of John the

Baptizer's birth. From the naming of John to his birth and beyond, God's absolute will was at work. Even before the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and told him of John's birth, the prophets were divinely inspired to predict his coming and purpose (see Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1).

B. Biblical Background

Although Jesus' and John's spiritual status and roles were drastically different, their births have some similarities. They both had vital missions. Jesus was born to save, and John was born to herald or announce the Savior, Jesus. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John, and he made another rare appearance to the Virgin Mary to announce the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:26-37). Mary and Elizabeth were cousins. Hence, on the human side, Jesus and John were cousins. Age-wise, John was six months older than Jesus. But on the spiritual side, John honored Jesus as the Messiah and, thus, his superior.

In Zechariah and Elizabeth's day, a wife who could not give birth was falsely considered disfavored by God. A barren wife was also considered a disgrace by her husband and other relatives. Neighbors and relatives rallied around Elizabeth because her pregnancy and her giving birth became the talk of the town. Just as she was shunned in her barrenness, she was now showered with adulation in her pregnancy. For many, many years, Elizabeth was perceived by the masses as being displeasing in God's sight. Now that she was with child (and in her old age, at that), people considered her doubly favored by God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Announced Promise Actualized (Luke 1:57-58)

Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to announce to Zechariah that, notwithstanding Elizabeth's history of barrenness and his and Elizabeth's old ages, she would bear him a child (see Luke 1:11-13). Finally, the time came when the angel's announcement was actualized; she gave birth to a son (verse 57). The neighbors and relatives shared in her joy and celebrated God's mercy on her (verse 58).

The fact that the promise of John's birth came to pass shows that God is faithful to His word. He delivers on every promise that He makes. Because God is perfectly reliable, He cannot break a promise. The Bible states (in no uncertain terms) that "God is not a man, that he should lie" (Numbers 23:19a). God did not just decide that Elizabeth and Zechariah would have a son during the time of Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah. God determined Elizabeth's conception and John's birth even long before Zechariah and Elizabeth were born. Long before they were born, the prophets Isaiah and Malachi foretold John's existence and role. When Gabriel came to Zechariah, he said that God had heard his prayer (see Luke 1:13). The response of unbelief given by Zechariah shows that he had given up hope of ever having

a child. He had evidently prayed for a child in the past—but he was convinced that because he and Elizabeth were too old to have a child, having a child was now impossible. When God makes a promise, no person or power can stop His promise from being actualized.

One of the incredible insights into God's revelatory nature is that He answers prayers in His own time and in His own way. When He does answer prayer, it is always the right time.

B. What God Resolves Cannot Be Dissolved (Luke 1:59-61)

And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

Simply put, whatever God decrees cannot be defeated; what God has done cannot be undone; what God resolves cannot be dissolved. In keeping with the time-honored tradition of that day, the male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. On the day of John's circumcision, Zechariah and Elizabeth's relatives and neighbors assumed that the child would bear the father's name, so they wanted to name the child Zechariah (Zacharias).

Names are important in most cultures and are supposed to embody something of the importance or character of the person, make some sort of statement, or express faith of some kind. The naming of a child would typically be a parental function, but these neighbors and relatives tried to influence this naming—to honor Zechariah by naming the child after him.

According to some scholars, it would be unusual (in that culture) to name a son after his father because sons are usually known by their given name plus "son" of their father's name—as in "Simon son of Jonah" (Matthew 16:17, NIV). If Elizabeth were to name the baby Zechariah, then he would be known as Zechariah, son of Zechariah, which would be an awkward wording. These neighbors and relatives were willing to ignore that problem to honor Zechariah, probably out of their pity at his muteness.

In this case, Gabriel had made it clear to Zechariah that his child would be named John (see Luke 1:13). Zechariah communicated to Elizabeth (more than likely in writing since he was unable to speak) Gabriel's message concerning the naming of the child. When the people were prepared to call the child Zechariah (Zacharias), Elizabeth said, "No! He is to be called John" (verse 60, NIV). The people were puzzled by her response, and they said, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name [John]" (verse 61, NIV).

God made it clear through the angel Gabriel that He resolved/determined that Zechariah and Elizabeth's child would be named John. And what God decided could not be dissolved; what He ordered had to be honored. Cultural customs or time-honored traditions do not bind God; He exercises His prerogative however He deems fit according to the confines of His will.

C. Blessings Are Embedded in Obedience (Luke 1:62-66)

And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on

all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

After Elizabeth let the people in her company know that her newborn son was to be named John—and not Zechariah (Zacharias) after his father—they made signs to Zechariah as though to ask, "What is your decision on the matter?" (see verse 62). Zechariah gestured for a writing tablet, on which he wrote, "His name is John" (verse 63). Everyone was surprised that he would want his son to have a name other than his name or one of his relative's names. Zechariah did not hesitate to name his child that which had been given to him by the angel Gabriel. Zechariah wrote, "His name *is* John" (no question about it; it is nonnegotiable—end of story). Zechariah was adamant about the naming of his son. He clearly put aside personal preferences and acquiesced to the divine mandate as declared by the angel Gabriel.

When Zechariah wrote that his and Elizabeth's child was named John, "Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God" (verse 64, NIV). It is enlightening and instructive that God restored Zechariah's speech when he confirmed that the child would be called what God ordained him to be called. Zechariah received the blessing of his ability to talk when he obeyed God's will. The conventional thing would have been to name the child after himself or one of his relatives. But he chose to follow God's will instead of complying with manmade tradition.

Often, obeying God will demand that we step out of the routine, convenient, and traditional jurisdiction. There are always embedded, built-in blessings to be realized when we obey God. When we obey God, we win—and we win **BIG!** It is noteworthy that when God restored Zechariah's speech, Zechariah immediately praised God. As God takes the time to bless us, we should take the time to praise Him.

D. The Forerunner Is to Carry Out His Calling (Luke 1:76-79)

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Zechariah opens this portion of his praise narrative by echoing the words of Isaiah (verse 76; see Isaiah 40:3). John was to prepare the way for Jesus and His ministry by cultivating people's hearts to receive Christ and the light and salvation that He would bring. John's calling would be to highlight Jesus Christ and decrease so that Jesus Christ may increase (see John 3:30).

In the past, Zechariah had praised God for the things that God had done. Now, he praised God for what God will do through this child, who will be a prophet. Zechariah affirmed that the child would "go before the face of the Lord (*Kurios*) to prepare his ways." *Kurios* could mean Yahweh, but we have the advantage of hindsight to know that *Kurios,* in this case, means Jesus, the Messiah. Luke makes this clear by his statement that John fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Luke 3:4). Later, Jesus made it clear by stating that John fulfilled this Isaiah prophecy (see Luke 7:27).

John's mission would include the following: "to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins" (verse 77, NRSV). Once again, Zechariah stated several themes common to the Old Testament: God's tender mercy (verse 78); the gift of light to those in darkness (verse 79); guidance (verse 79); and peace (verse 79).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In studying this lesson, we should be affirmed that God is a gracious, redeeming God. As human beings, we cannot be perfect. We sin either by commission or omission. But in those times when we sincerely try to do the right thing but fail in our trying, it is comforting to know that if we genuinely repent, then God will let us make up for our mess-ups. That said, we must be careful not to misuse God's mercy nor take His grace for granted.

One man who was changed was Zechariah. To start with, he did not believe the angel that had been sent to him, despite seeing him with his own eyes; later, however, we see that Zechariah put his trust in the God who would fulfill His promises and would go even further than that. Zechariah put his trust in the God who had already fulfilled His promises—because he knew that it is as though it has already happened when God speaks. God calls those things that are not as though they are.

This lesson should encourage us to trust God, be a people dependent upon God, be those who are set apart to God, leave behind the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and live out our lives in continual repentance. To live godly before God is not just being pure—it is being separated for God and His purposes.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we ask that You would deepen our desire to obey You and to praise You. We thank You for being a loving, merciful, gracious, and redeeming Lord. Please help us to demonstrate our thanks by being our best for You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 5-11, 2022)

Zechariah Speaks

MONDAY, December 5: "God's Messenger Is Coming" (Malachi 3:1-6)
TUESDAY, December 6: "God Calls Israel to Return" (Malachi 3:7-18)
WEDNESDAY, December 7: "The Prophet Elijah Is Coming" (Malachi 4:1-6)
THURSDAY, December 8: "Prophets Speak God's Word" (2 Peter 1:16-21)
FRIDAY, December 9: "God Will Preserve David's House" (Zechariah 12:1-10)
SATURDAY, December 10: "God Opens Zechariah's Mouth" (Luke 1:57-66)
SUNDAY, December 11: "Blessed Be the God of Israel" (Luke 1:67-80)

December 18, 2022 **Lesson 3**

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: John Prepares the Way
Youth Topic: John Prepares the Way

Children
General Lesson Title: John Tells Others about Jesus
Children's Topic: John Prepares the People

Devotional Reading
John 1:29-42

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Luke 3:1-20; John 1
Print Passage: Luke 3:2-6, 15-18
Adult Key Verse: Luke 3:3
Youth Key Verse: Luke 3:16

Children
Background Scriptures: Luke 3:1-18; John 1
Print Passages: John 1:6-8; Luke 3:15-18
Key Verse: John 1:6

Luke 3:2-6, 15-18—KJV

2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.
3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;
4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

. . . . .

15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men

Luke 3:2-6, 15-18—NIV

2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.
3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.
5 "'Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.
6 "'And all people will see God's salvation.'"

. . . . .

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all

mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;
16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:
17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.
18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah.
16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
17 "His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."
18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People are looking for someone with power, authority, and compassion to lead them out from under the weight of oppression. Where can such a leader be found? John proclaimed the Good News of one more powerful than he, who was coming and would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognize the ministry of John as the fulfillment of prophecy in preparing the way for Jesus' ministry.
2. Value ways in which John was obedient to God's call on his life.
3. Compare the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Luke situates his narrative in the context of Roman rule, here marking the beginning of John's ministry as occurring alongside the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius (note the similar concern in Luke 2:1-2). Locating his narrative in this broader context is reflective of Luke's overall concern for demonstrating that Jesus came not just for His own people, but for all the nations (Gentiles).

—The reference to the wilderness in verses 2 and 4 recalls Israel's formative experience in the wilderness during the Exodus and subsequent period of wandering. John's presence in the wilderness suggests that a new formative experience for those waiting/wandering was at hand.

—The practice of Christian baptism today, while distinct, has its origins in the baptisms that

John performed, which were associated with the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of the individual's life.

—John's baptism with water is contrasted with the Coming One's baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire; the Holy Spirit and fire anticipate the gift of the Holy Spirit and the tongues of fire at Pentecost in Acts 2 (Acts is the sequel to Luke's gospel).

—Even though John baptized Jesus, John acknowledged the superiority of Jesus when he stated, "I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals" (Luke 3:16a, NRSV), which was the task of a slave.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

John the Baptizer was born into a prosperous religious pedigree. His father and mother came from respectable priestly lines (see Luke 1:5). John's ministry commenced about AD 26 or 27. This conclusion can be responsibly reached based on the year offered by Luke (the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign [see Luke 3:1]), and the people in particular positions around that time (i.e., Herod, Herod's brother Philip, Annas, Caiaphas, etc. [see Luke 3:1-2]).

The phrase "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1, NIV) should be interpreted in the context of the prevailing historical records. Biblical chronology can be a complicated matter. We know with certainty the general time of this event from secular historical records, but it is not easy to be sure exactly when this was. The best reckonings set it anywhere from AD 27 to 29.

In his gospel, Luke gave more than a chronological picture of events going on; he also told us something of the tenor of the times. Here is a picture of what was happening during that period: (1) Tiberius was an emperor known for his cruelty and severity. (2) Pontius Pilate was also notorious for his brutal massacres of the Jewish people in Judea and his insensitivity toward the Jews. (3) The rulers from the family of Herod the Great (Herod, Philip, and Lysanias) were known for their corruption and cruelty.

John's God-given mission was to spread the message that the Messiah (Jesus) was here. People must be spiritually prepared to receive Him by repenting for the remission of sins and being baptized outwardly, indicating their inward repentance.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In many respects, John the Baptizer was an unusual preacher. He was unique because he was radically different from the ordinary, conventional preacher with which the people were familiar. Preachers who were certified and credible in the eyes of humanity and by their estimation preached in temples and synagogues. But John the Baptizer's pulpit was the open air in the wilderness, in the regions of Jordan and Judaea. The people were accustomed to preachers who merged philosophy with theology, swimming in dazzling eloquence. But John had a simple message—one sermon that he preached over and again: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

John spent his time in the desert until he emerged as a public figure (see Luke 1:80). He was not in the wilderness/desert wasting time or without purpose. On the contrary, John was in the wilderness, spending quality time with God and getting spiritually prepared for his ministry. His preaching started in the wilderness as he loudly proclaimed the age of repentance. John became

popular before he went public. People heard his voice crying out in the wilderness, and they flocked to the wilderness to listen to what he had to say.

One Bible scholar states that Luke carefully set the work of John in a historical context because "To Luke, the emergence of John the Baptist was one of the hinges on which history turned." The details of John's work are identified as follows:

- The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias [Zechariah] in the wilderness: John lived in the desert since his youth (Luke 1:80). But now, prompted by the word of God, John began to fulfill his ultimate calling: to be a forerunner of the Messiah.
- Preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins: The idea behind remission is not only forgiveness, but also liberty and deliverance (as in *to preach deliverance . . . to set at liberty* in Luke 4:18). Repentance could bring true liberty in the Messiah for those who received it.
- Baptism of repentance: There was nothing strange in the ceremony of baptism (a ceremonial immersion) itself. The strange thing was that *Jews* submitted to baptism. This was a common ritual for Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. For a Jew to submit to baptism was to say something like, "I'm as bad as a heathen Gentile." This was a true mark of humble repentance, a radical rededication to the Lord.[1]

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

John: the prophet of God and forerunner of Christ, charged with preparing the way for Christ's ministry.

Multitude/People: those who heard John's voice in the wilderness and came to hear his message. While many people opened their hearts to John's message and were baptized, others were nothing more than curious bystanders.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Good News (verse 18, NIV)—Greek: *euaggelion* (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on): the good news of the coming of the Messiah; the Gospel.

Repentance (verse 3)—Greek: *metanoia* (met-an'-oy-ah): a change of mind, change in the inner person.

Winnowing fork (verse 17)—Greek: *ptuon* (ptoo'-on): "fan" (KJV); a simple wooden pitchfork; a winnowing-shovel or fan used to throw up the grain against the wind—leaving the wheat in the middle while the chaff is driven to the outskirts of the field to be swept up and burnt. *(Source: Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers)*

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Called to Herald the Christ
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. A Meaningful Message (Luke 3:2-3)
B. An Old Testament Prophecy Concerning a New Testament Prophet (Luke 3:4-6)
C. Magnifying the Singular Savior (Luke 3:15-16)
D. The Task(s) Implemented by the Messiah (Luke 3:17-18)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Called to Herald the Christ

Properly defined, a *herald* is someone authorized to bring news, especially news about something imminent, at hand, about to happen. More straightforward still, a *herald* is an official messenger commissioned to bring news. John the Baptizer was anointed and appointed by God to be the chief messenger who would usher in Christ's ministry and present Him as the true Messiah.

The core of John's message emphasized Christ as the Redeemer and the essential nature of repentance. It is worth noting that there is a stark distinction between repentance and regret. As defined in the "Key Terms" section of this lesson, *repentance* is a change of mind and purpose for the better, a turning from sin, and a turning to God. On the other hand, *regret* is a feeling of sorrow or sadness over a wrong committed. Repentance is a spiritual experience; it is a turning away from sin and to God out of a desire to please God. Regret is more of a human emotion than a spiritual experience. Regret causes sadness based on repercussions, present or impending. Repentance will include regret, but regret will not necessarily lead to repentance.

B. Biblical Background

It is impossible to thoroughly address John the Baptizer's ministry (in general) and the printed Scripture for this lesson (in particular) without considering the prophet Isaiah's prophecy concerning John. John's role and implementation of ministry were foretold, precisely, by the prophet Isaiah long before John was born (see Luke 3:4-6; compare Isaiah 40:3-5). Not only was John prophesied about by Isaiah, but also, that prophecy was verified by the angel Gabriel (see Luke 1:13-17). Luke 3 records the beginning of the fulfillment of John the Baptizer's ministry.

Because of the importance of John's message and ministry, he is a prominent personality in the four gospels. Including (or in addition to) Luke's gospel, John is celebrated in Mark (the gospel that was written first, (Mark 1:2-8), Matthew (chapter 3), and John (1:6-8, 15, 19-30). All four gospels make it clear that John recognized his role as forerunner of Christ, and that he understood and gladly embraced that Christ and Christ's ministry were superior to him and his ministry.

An essential function of John's ministry was to baptize "with water" those who accepted his message of repentance. Dr. Steven Barbaras disclosed that John's call to repentance accompanied by water baptism would have been an unusual message to the Jewish audience to whom John preached. Dr. Barbaras wrote, "The Jews baptized only Gentiles, but he [John] called on Jews themselves to be baptized; and his baptism was a baptism of water only in preparation for the messianic baptism of the Spirit anticipated by the prophets."[2] John also deviated from prophetic protocol by preaching in the wilderness—wearing clothes made of camel's hair (accessorized with a leather belt) and feasting on locusts and wild honey (see Matthew 3:3-4).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Meaningful Message
(Luke 3:2-3)

Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

The printed Scripture text opens by stating, "The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (verse 2). Then, verse 3 states that John "went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (NIV). Attention needs to be paid to the fact that John went preaching only after the Word of God came to him. The message that John was to preach was confirmed in the wilderness, and he emerged from the wilderness to preach the Word that came to him. Whether we are clergy or laity, it is essential that we proclaim what is confirmed/substantiated by the Word of God. There is power built into God's Word. Hence, God's Word takes precedence over our personal opinions and popular viewpoints of the day.

The theme of John's message was the "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3, NIV). The matter of repentance deserves some attention, as it was a foundational element of John's message. Repentance is a change of mind, heart, and purpose—a turning from sin and a turning to God. Many people often ask for forgiveness but seldom repent.

There is an inseparable link between "godly sorrow" and repentance. The apostle Paul dealt with godly sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. Having godly sorrow for our sins is not feeling sad or guilty because others found out (or may find out) about our sins. Godly sorrow is righteous, sincere grief because of our sins, and a strong sense that our sins offend God. Godly sorrow compels us to repent. Godly sorrow causes us to be grieved by our sins and eventually repent because God hates sin and sin offends God.

John preached "a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." While some translations of the Bible verse Luke 3:3 use the phrase "forgiveness of sins" (NIV), the King James Version renders it "the remission of sins." The term *remission* includes forgiveness, but it is more than forgiveness. In the Greek language, the word *remission* is defined as "a release; a dismissal" (*aphesis*). We are released from our sin condition through the remission of sins, along with sin's dreadful end, which is eternal separation from God and never-ending punishment in hell.

John commanded all people to repent, no matter who they were/are. Those who were descendants of Abraham were no more privileged in the eyes of God than the stones on the ground. Regardless of nationality, religion, or social status, all people were to leave their selfish and sinful ways and produce results in their daily lives that would prove their repentance to be genuine.

B. An Old Testament Prophecy Concerning a New Testament Prophet
(Luke 3:4-6)

As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his

paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

This portion of the Print Passage is a repeat of Isaiah 40:3-5. John's role as the forerunner of Jesus Christ fulfilled prophecy. John was the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." The word *crying* is a strong word, and it was used by divine design. It indicates that John spoke with a strong voice and firm conviction. It also shows the grave nature of the message he preached and his passion for the people to receive the message and the Messiah.

The statement "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him" (verse 4b, NIV) is rich in historical tradition. Whenever a king was to travel a course or road, much preparation was made before he came. The route that the king and his entourage traveled had to be made suitable for safe travel. John was not just preparing the way for a king—he was paving the way for the King of Kings.

In those days, when the king was to visit a particular area, there would always be couriers that would go out in advance of the king. The couriers would tell the people, "The king is going to be visiting on such and such a day; clean up your yards, get the trash and all taken care of, repair the roads and all, for the king's coming." This was all so that when the king arrived, he would see everything in excellent condition: the yards were clean, the trash was all out, and all the roads were repaired—no chuckholes—so that the king saw that everything was going well. And so it was with John as a courier, telling the people, "Make your path straight, the King is coming."

Luke 3:4b refers to the path to be prepared for the Lord's ministry. Luke 3:5-6 is directed at the people whose hearts need to be prepared to receive Christ and His ministry. Notice the metaphorical descriptions: "Every valley filled, every mountain and hill brought low, crooked made straight, rough ways made smooth" (see verse 5). John was saying, in essence, "The high and lofty will be humbled, and the lowly will be lifted." Hindrances to receiving Christ can be, by grace, removed! Verse 6 confirms that Christ is accessible and available to all.

The preparation needed for the coming of the Son of righteousness (Jesus Christ) was a moral improvement of the people. And so, it was no small task that challenged John, the son of Zechariah (Zacharias)!

C. Magnifying the Singular Savior (Luke 3:15-16)

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

As the people wondered, "Can this be the Messiah?" John declared that he was truly not the Messiah. There was one coming after him who is mightier than he was. John was unworthy to untie His shoes. And though John was baptizing with water, the One to come would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John called the people to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins to be part of the coming new world. To repent is to turn away from collaboration with the old age and

its values and behaviors and to turn toward the future realm. Baptism gave those baptized a physical assurance that their final destiny was no longer determined by the brokenness of the old age (and its heinous rulers)—it would be the realm of God. Baptism was an invisible mark initiating those who received it into a community anticipating the kingdom of God.

According to Luke 3:15-17, however, John was not the one through whom the apocalyptic transformation will take place. The coming one, whose name is Jesus, would baptize the community with the Holy Spirit and fire and carry out the final judgment (separate the wheat and chaff). What does this mean? The coming One would be the catalyst for the new community and would leave the Holy Spirit to empower the community to continue to witness to the community after Jesus ascended.

Jesus Christ is the "Singular Savior" in that He is the only begotten of the Father, the only one of His kind, the one and only true Messiah. He has no equal or comparison. John's message and delivery of that message were so powerful that many people wondered if he might be the Messiah (verse 15). But faithful to his calling and ministry, John proclaimed Christ to be the Messiah, without hesitation. He made it clear that he "baptized with water"; that indicated that his baptism was an outward symbol of an inward change.

By contrast, John declared that Christ, whom he magnified, is so great, so divine, that he was not worthy even to untie the straps of His sandals (verse 16). This Savior, Messiah, would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (verse 16b). John's baptism was symbolic; Christ's baptism would be transformational. John's baptism was external; Christ's baptism would be internal.

D. The Task(s) Implemented by the Messiah (Luke 3:17-18)

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

Along with baptizing people with the Holy Spirit and fire ("fire," meaning God's judgment visited on all who reject Christ), Jesus would "purge his floor" (verse 17). This was a term related to the harvest. "Purging the floor" was the process of separating the wheat from the chaff. The wheat (the good grain) would be preserved and used, but the chaff (the useless straw, stubble, weeds) would be destroyed in fire. Christ is responsible for our being saved, but He is not responsible for the destruction of those who reject Him. If we do not accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, then we are responsible for our own destruction.

The fire of the Holy Spirit is always a purging fire, a cleansing fire. The purpose of that fire is the purging of the dross or rubbish. Purification is what it always has as its result. And in the context here, as John speaks of Jesus' baptizing with fire, he declares, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor" (verse 17). Now, this references the threshing floor; they would just wait for a windy day and then go down to their threshing floor. The fan was the large, wide wooden shovel that they would use to take the wheat and throw the wheat into the air. The wind would carry off

the chaff, and the wheat would fall back down onto the floor. This was their way of threshing the wheat. They would continue this process until they had separated that little rough bran from the kernel of wheat itself.

John declared that the Christ would thoroughly cleanse (purge) His floor and gather the wheat into His silo, into His garner—but He would burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John's signature message that included repentance, baptism, remission of sin, and magnifying the Messiah was not all that he preached. Luke 3:18 (NIV) reads, "And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them."

John was quite sure that he was only the forerunner. The King was still to come, and with Him would come judgment. The winnowing fan was a great, flat wooden shovel; with it, the grain was tossed into the air; the heavy grain fell to the ground, and the chaff was blown away. And just as the chaff was separated from the grain, so the King would separate the good and bad.

John painted a picture of judgment, but it was a judgment which people could meet with confidence if they had discharged their duty to their neighbor and if they had faithfully done their day's work.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

John the Baptizer was born to be the forerunner of Christ. He was called to proclaim the Prince of Peace, the one and only Messiah—Jesus Christ. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, preaching with such passion because he was convinced that Jesus, and no one else, is the Christ.

PRAYER

Lord, we thank You for giving us the privilege and responsibility of winning souls to Christ. Please help us to proclaim Christ without delay. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 12-18, 2022)

John the Baptist

MONDAY, December 12: "The Word Became Flesh" (John 1:1-14)
TUESDAY, December 13: "John's Testimony" (John 1:15-28)
WEDNESDAY, December 14: "Here Is the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29-42)
THURSDAY, December 15: "Come and See!" (John 1:43-51)
FRIDAY, December 16: "Prepare the Way of the Lord" (Isaiah 40:1-11)
SATURDAY, December 17: "Wait on the Lord" (Isaiah 40:21-31)
SUNDAY, December 18: "John's Confession of Faith" (Luke 3:2b-6, 15-18)

Notes

1. Enduring Word, "Luke 3—The Work of John the Baptist," https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-3/.
2. *Zondervan All-in-One Bible Reference Guide*, Kevin Green, Compiler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), 354.

December 25, 2022 **Lesson 4**

MARY MARVELS AT GOD'S CHOICE

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Open to Being Chosen**
Youth Topic: **Open to Being Chosen**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Mary Rejoices for Having Been Chosen**
Children's Topic: **Open to Being Chosen!**

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 9:1-7

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: **Luke 1:46-55**
Print Passage: **Luke 1:46-55**
Adult Key Verses: **Luke 1:46-47**
Youth Key Verse: **Luke 1:49**

Children
Background Scripture: **Luke 1:46-55**
Print Passage: **Luke 1:46-55**
Key Verse: **Luke 1:46**

Luke 1:46-55—KJV

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.
54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

Luke 1:46-55—NIV

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord
47 "and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 "for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 "for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.
50 "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.
51 "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
53 "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
54 "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

55 "to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People may be chosen to serve based on their power, wealth, and authority. How should we view those who are chosen to serve? According to Luke, Mary was chosen to become the mother of Jesus because of her humble servant attitude.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the significance of Mary's being chosen by God to bear God's Son.
2. Consider Mary's response to being chosen.
3. Accept God's calling with an attitude of humility.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Mary's Song, traditionally called the "Magnificat," recalls "Hannah's Prayer" in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, which she sang at the dedication of her son, Samuel.

—The Magnificat celebrates the fact that "he has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty" (verse 53, NIV). This foreshadows Luke's beatitudes, which exalt the poor and hungry—and woes, which condemn those who are rich and comfortable (see Luke 6:20-26); Matthew's version only expresses the blessings, not the woes.

—Mary herself identifies with the lowly. It is her "lowliness" as a "servant" that attracts the Lord's favor. The word *lowliness* (Greek: *tapeinosis*) is a term that relates to the "poor," who receive special attention in Luke's gospel.

—Mary's description of God's having shown "strength with his arm" recalls God's saving activity in leading His people out of captivity and bondage through the Exodus. Exodus 6:1 speaks of God's "mighty hand"; and in Exodus 6:6, God promises to redeem His people with an "outstretched arm." Most significantly, in Moses' Song, Moses attributes the defeat of the Egyptians to "the might of your [God's] arm" (Exodus 15:16a, NRSV). Mary's "lowliness" is contrasted with God's "strength," demonstrating a relationship of dependence and trust.

—This appeal to God's activity in the Exodus recalls the "Divine Warrior" dimension of God's character, yet it is strikingly juxtaposed with the portrayal of God as being characterized by "mercy" (verses 50, 54). God defends those who cannot defend themselves. To borrow a term from Catholic social teaching, Mary envisions God as showing a "preferential option for the poor."

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Although most events in the New Testament Scriptures are not given specific dates/times, it is speculated that the chronology for Mary's song called the Magnificat is dated around 5 BC.

Luke, the writer of this gospel and a companion of Paul's, was called the beloved physician. Because Luke was a doctor, he was a man of science and research, and this is reflected in his history of the life of Jesus. Bible scholars tell us that by every indication, Luke was a Gentile. Verses 10-11, 14 of Colossians 4 show that Luke was not Jewish, because he was not included in the group referred to as those who are "of the circumcision." This makes Luke unique in that he is the only New Testament writer who was a Gentile.

The gospel of Luke is the most comprehensive gospel. Luke documents the story of Jesus all the way from the annunciation of John the Baptist to Jesus' ascension. His gospel is also the most universal gospel.

Luke 1:46-55 records Mary's (the mother of Jesus') praise song. This song honored God for the imminent earthly arrival of the Messiah (the hope of Israel) and expressed Mary's humility and gratitude related to God's having chosen her as the one to give birth to the long-awaited Messiah. Mary's song has come to be titled "The Magnificat," taken from the first line of the song: "My soul doth magnify . . ." (Luke 1:46).

The same angel, Gabriel—who had informed Zechariah (Zacharias) that Elizabeth (Elisabeth) would give birth to John—also informed Mary that she would give birth to Jesus (see Luke 1:26-37). Gabriel's appearances in the Bible are rare. His appearances are only noted when events of great significance were to occur. There were no occurrences of greater significance than the birth of Jesus Christ and that of His forerunner, John the Baptist!

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It appears that Gabriel's words about Elizabeth's pregnancy prompted Mary to undertake the long trip to Judea to see her relative. Since a day's journey by foot would have been about twenty miles, it may have taken Mary about four days to reach the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. When Mary entered the home and greeted Elizabeth, the infant in Elizabeth's womb leaped (see Luke 1:39-41). This confirmed the angel Gabriel's words that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (see Luke 1:15). His joyous leaping, under the apparent impulse of the Holy Spirit, served to acknowledge the superiority of the Son to whom Mary would give birth.

Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John when Mary went to visit her. Mary left from Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to travel to a town in Judea to see Elizabeth. Along with the fact that Mary went to visit Elizabeth to share in the joy of her pregnancy, she went to be of assistance to her cousin as well. These women were about to give birth to two of the most significant persons in human history. Although Jesus was far beyond comparison to John (or anybody else), still, John was a significant personality in the redemptive purpose and plans of God.

Childbearing in ancient Jewish culture was a celebrative affair. In the minds of the people, to be pregnant and consequently have a child were signs of God's exceeding favor upon the woman giving birth. Mary and Elizabeth bonded on two levels: they were related (cousins), and they were both about to give birth under unusual and divinely exceptional circumstances. Elizabeth became

pregnant with John when she was well past childbearing age, and Mary became pregnant as a virgin (without conjugal relations, nor any other human intervention).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Elizabeth: the mother of John the Baptist.
Mary: the mother of Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Glorifies (verse 46)—Greek: *doxazō* (dox-ad'-zo): honors; esteems as glorious; magnifies; extols; "doth magnify" (KJV).
Israel (verse 54)—Greek: *Israél* (is-rah-ale'): the name of the Jewish people and their land.
Mercy (verse 50)—Greek: *eleos* (el'-eh-os): pity; compassion; that of God toward sinners.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
A. The Right Response to Being Chosen
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. Being Grateful for Being Chosen (Luke 1:46-47)
B. Being Faithful with God's Favor (Luke 1:48-49)
C. The Divine Connection between Mercy and Lowliness (Luke 1:50-53)
D. God's Mercy and Promises Are Generational and Unforgettable (Luke 1:54-55)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Right Response to Being Chosen

Mary—from the small, nondescript village called Nazareth—was chosen to be the young girl to give birth to the Messiah. Mary was indeed blessed and highly favored by almighty God to have been chosen for such a great, unprecedented honor. Mary could have responded to such a blessing by being arrogant and aloof; but, to her credit, she responded with humility, thanksgiving, and praise.

How should a believer respond to the awesomeness of being chosen by God for a task? It would be tempting to feel a sense of privilege, which is natural because it is a privilege to be identified by divinity as a channel through which others will be blessed. However, it is important to avoid pride or self-aggrandizement. Those whom God calls should exhibit a sense of humility and unpretentiousness.

All Christians are blessed and favored by God. There are occasions, however, when God may choose a person for a specific task above and beyond the position of being blessed and favored. It is important to remember that God never blesses or favors people for their own selfish glorification, but always for His glory and the good of others. With God's blessings and favor come the responsibility to stay humble and give God all the glory.

B. Biblical Background

Nothing can compare to Mary's giving birth to Jesus. The nature of her pregnancy and the child to whom she gave birth are amazingly miraculous. Mary became pregnant without having intercourse with Joseph (her fiancé) or any other man. She did not have the option of artificial insemination which women have in this day and time. Jesus was planted in her womb by the Spirit of God—end of story! The child planted in Mary's womb has no comparison—for He is the Messiah.

While the nature of Mary's pregnancy and the child to whom she gave birth cannot be compared to any experience or persons, the song of Mary's is like that of Hannah's in the Old Testament. Hannah was a God-fearing woman who was unable to give birth. She prayed for a child, and God miraculously enabled her to give birth to Samuel, who grew up to be a great prophet and judge in Israel. The elements/themes of Hannah's and Mary's songs were quite similar (see Luke 1:46-55; compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10). Both songs begin by praising and rejoicing in God. Both Hannah's song and Mary's song address how God brings down the high and mighty and elevates the poor and humble. In terms of their commendable dispositions, both Hannah and Mary were humble and grateful.

Mary was a religious Jewish girl who was committed to God and had faith in His promises; her story touches on the mercy and blessings promised to Israel, Abraham, and Abraham's seed. She saw in the birth of Jesus the fulfillment of God's promises (in her generation).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Being Grateful for Being Chosen (Luke 1:46-47)

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Mary begins her song of praise with the words "My soul doth magnify the Lord." We can better appreciate what Mary is conveying in this line of her song when we understand that the word *magnify* comes from the Greek word *megaluno*, from which we get our term *mega*. Mary was saying (in essence), "In the deepest, innermost part of me, I acknowledge and honor (as much as is humanly possible) how great God is." Recognizing the divine greatness of God, Mary goes on to say, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." The high privilege of being chosen by God to give birth to Jesus Christ caused gratitude to flood Mary's soul, and she expressed an outpouring of praise to God.

Mary recognized, as should we, that she was blessed; and blessings are bestowed, not earned. We must be careful not to confuse blessings with entitlements. An entitlement presupposes that one has earned, or is owed, something. The concept of entitlement assumes that one has done something worthy of special privileges or treatment. On the other hand, blessings are divine benefits—expressions of kindness bestowed on us by God. Mary was grateful, and out of that gratitude she magnified and rejoiced in God, because she

knew that the blessing of being chosen to give birth to Christ was rooted in God's goodness and not her merit.

B. Being Faithful with God's Favor (Luke 1:48-49)

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

It is noteworthy that in Luke 1:46-47, Mary praises God for who He is (i.e., "The Lord, . . . my Saviour"). Here in verse 48, Mary praises God for what He had done and would do. Mary's praising God for what He has done is indicated by the opening word "For" in verse 48. We must be ever mindful of the fact that who God is takes precedence over what God does. What God does is connected to, and in keeping with, who God is. But we must never honor God's *doing* above God's *being*. This is an important point, especially considering that many believers and churches are emphasizing the temporal over the spiritual, materialism over spiritual maturity.

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible renders Luke 1:48-49 as follows: "for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." The term "looked with favor" is an appropriate one—because that is exactly what God did. Mary knew that she had been shown favor by God, and she was faithful with His favor.

Many believers relish in the fact that they are shown favor by God, but they fail to consider that they are to be responsible with God's favor. Mary proved that she was faithful with God's favor by being humble. The fact that God shows us favor should make us meek and lowly, not arrogant and uppity. We have no reason or right to be anything but humble. God's favor bestowed on us is not an earned right but an undeserved honor. Pride and self-righteousness have no place in our experience with God's favor. God's favor is designed for God to be glorified, not for our egos to be inflated. The bottom line is that divine favor should make us humble, not haughty.

C. The Divine Connection between Mercy and Lowliness (Luke 1:50-53)

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

Verse 50 reads, "His [God's] mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (NIV). This verse is confirming that in every generation, God pours out His mercy upon all who fear Him. The mercy mentioned in this verse applies to the people of low degree whom the Lord exalts (verse 52), and the hungry whom He fills with good things (verse 53).

In these verses, we encounter a contrast between how God deals with the lowly (or the humble), and how He deals with the proud. God scattered the proud, brought down rulers from their thrones, and sent the rich away empty (see verses 51-53). In the same verses, and by contrast, God "lifted up the humble" and "filled the hungry with good things"

(NIV). Simply put, the lowly receive mercy, but the haughty receive judgment.

This third section of Mary's Magnificat reflects on God's power in reversing certain social conditions. God's favor toward Israel is embedded in this section. God had dealt with Mary as He had dealt with His people. God had reversed their conditions politically and socially. Jesus' coming and messianic reign would continue these divine works on a universal scale.

One biblical scholar wrote that in the ancient world, it was accepted that the rich would be well cared for. Poor people must expect to be hungry. But Mary sang of a God who is not bound by what men do. He turns human attitudes and orders of society upside-down. In essence, Mary affirmed that there is a connection between mercy and lowliness. God is concerned about the downcast and the low.

Our modern world, in many instances, treats the downcast with derision and contempt. The rich and mighty are honored and celebrated. We can thank God that He has a record of "turning the tables" on the status quo. He will make wrong things right. He will lift the downtrodden and humble the mighty.

Judith Jones (with *Working Preacher*) states the following regarding Mary's "prophetic utterance":

> When God empties the rich of their excess and fills the hungry with good things, the result is not social reversal—with the powerless and the powerful changing places—as much as it is social leveling. The rich and powerful are stripped of their arrogance and taught to love their neighbors as they love themselves. Thus God provides for the poor and honors the humiliated. When the arrogant are scattered and the powerful brought down, then every person has access to enough of the world's resources, and no one has too much. Every person is treated with dignity and respect, and no one uses power to harm.[1]

D. God's Mercy and Promises Are Generational and Unforgettable

(Luke 1:54-55)

He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

In these two verses, Mary states that God will act to fulfill the promises which had been spoken to the fathers—specifically, the covenant promises to Abraham and to his seed forever. By mentioning Abraham and his seed we are reminded of God's promise to send the Messiah through the seed of Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3; 17:19; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Mary believed that God would fulfill this covenant promise through the baby in her womb.

The mention of "Israel," "Abraham," and Abraham's "seed" (or descendants) confirms that the promises God had made to Israel, His people, and Abraham (His servant) would be fulfilled through Christ. God extends His mercy and fulfills His promises in every generation. God does not forget or neglect His promises. Though His promises may take a while to come to pass, they *will* come to

pass. And praise God that His promises are sure, and His mercy endures forever.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest of God's promises and the greatest expression of His mercy. The Word of God makes it clear that "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

God chose Mary to give birth to the Messiah. By human estimation, Mary would not have fit the profile of the person to bear the Son of God. She was young, came from a modest place (to put it mildly), and was far from rich or elite. But God is not impressed with high and mighty worldly status, nor is He impressed with what one has materially. Mary was humble, God-fearing, and willing to give God glory for His wonderful works. The Lord our God has the right to choose whomever He desires, to do whatever He wants to be done. We should always be grateful and full of praise that God chooses to use us. And we should stay humble, knowing that it is an honor to be used by God.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us favor, and for using us for Your glory. Help us to grow in humility and thanksgiving. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 19-25, 2022)

Mary Marvels at God's Choice

MONDAY, December 19: "The Birth of Jesus" (Matthew 1:18-25)
TUESDAY, December 20: "The Ruler from Bethlehem" (Micah 5:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, December 21: "A Son Is Given" (Isaiah 9:1-7)
THURSDAY, December 22: "A Shoot from Jesse's Stump" (Isaiah 11:1-10)
FRIDAY, December 23: "'The Lord Is with You'" (Luke 1:26-38)
SATURDAY, December 24: "Blessed among Women" (Luke 1:39-45)
SUNDAY, December 25: "'My Soul Magnifies the Lord'" (Luke 1:46-55)

Note

1. Working Preacher, "Commentary on Luke 1:46-55," by Judith Jones, December 23, 2018, https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-146-55-2.

January 1, 2023 **Lesson 5**

GOD PROMISES TO HEAR AND FORGIVE

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Promises and Consequences
Youth Topic: Promises and Consequences

Children
General Lesson Title: God Promises to Hear and Forgive
Children's Topic: Keeping a Special Promise

Devotional Reading
Deuteronomy 30:1-10

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-22
Print Passage: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22
Key Verse: 2 Chronicles 7:14

Children
Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1-22
Print Passage: 2 Chronicles 7:12-22
Key Verse: 2 Chronicles 7:14

2 Chronicles 7:12-22—KJV

12 And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.
13 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;
14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.
15 Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.
16 For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.
17 And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments;

2 Chronicles 7:12-22—NIV

12 the Lord appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.
13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people,
14 "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.
15 "Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.
16 "I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.
17 "As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws,

18 Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.
19 But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them;
20 Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations.
21 And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house?
22 And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

18 "I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.'
19 "But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them,
20 "then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.
21 "This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'
22 "People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them.'"

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Relationships involve blessings, expectations, and consequences. How do we honor and maintain good relationships with other people? When God declared Solomon's Temple as home, the honor came with obligations and promises.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the significance of God's choosing Solomon's Temple as His own house.
2. Appreciate the blessings and the relationship of God's presence in the everyday realities of their lives.
3. Develop a ritual showing humility, prayer, and a seeking and turning to God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This account details the second appearance of the Lord (theophany) to Solomon in the book of 2 Chronicles. The first took place amid a dream (1:7), during which Solomon requested that the Lord bless him with wisdom. For the Chronicler, the Lord's continued blessing was contingent upon Israel's faithfulness. Perhaps the Lord's decision to inhabit Solomon's Temple is related in some way to Solomon's exceeding wisdom.

—In 2 Chronicles 6:14-42, Solomon expressed his desire to construct a temple for the Lord. This text represents the fulfillment of that ambition. Significantly, however, the Lord emphasizes, "I have heard your prayer and *have chosen* this place for myself" (7:12, NIV [emphasis added]). This is no mere honoring of Solomon's desires, but a reflection of the divine will as well (see also 7:16—"chosen and consecrated," NIV).

—In the ancient Near East, it was commonly believed that temples were the physical dwelling places of gods. Second Chronicles critiques this view. When Solomon dedicates the Temple, he urges that while the people pray toward the Temple, God hears their prayers from heaven, His true dwelling place (6:18, 39). In 7:16 (NIV), the Lord states that He has chosen the Temple "so that [His] *Name* may be there forever. [His] eyes and [His] heart will always be there" (emphasis added). God is not bound to one location and the Temple does/did not confine Him; rather, it serves as a sacred place for ritual practices such as prayer and sacrifice to worship God's name.

—In 587/586 BC, Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Many commentators believe that 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after that cataclysmic event (probably fourth century BC), and that they reflect Israel's struggle to make sense of the fact that their enemies had destroyed the Lord's dwelling place. This text attributes the destruction of the Temple to the waywardness of God's people (see especially verses 19-22).

—In 2 Chronicles 7:18b, God reminds Solomon of the covenant that God made with David, stating, "You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel." Since the line of Davidic kingship came to an end during the Babylonian exile with the demise of Zedekiah (see 2 Kings 25:1-8; 2 Chronicles 36:11-14)—due to Israel's unfaithfulness—this covenant becomes foundational for the expectation of a coming Messiah to fulfill God's promises.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Biblical historians tell us that the neglected book of 2 Chronicles contains numerous hidden riches. As the book of 1 Chronicles focuses on the life and reign of King David, 2 Chronicles focuses on the house (lineage) of David. The nation of Israel, comprised of the ten tribes in the north, is primarily viewed in relation to the kingdom of Judah in the south. This book follows only the course of the kings of Judah, the descendants of David. Both 1 and 2 Chronicles center on the Temple, distinguishing these two books from the parallel historical passages recorded in the collective books of Kings and Samuel. This book gives us a picture of God's chosen king's walking in the light of God's house. That is the secret of blessings in the kingdom.

Solomon (as the son of David) succeeded his father as king of Israel. David was arguably the most revered king in Hebrew history. This text, or the event recorded therein, took place well after David had died. God had appointed King Solomon to build the Temple in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. In the year 957 BC, the Temple was completed. After the Temple's dedication, which was a national affair, God appeared to Solomon during the night to deliver a promise relating to him, personally, and the nation of Israel as a whole.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Solomon was the king of Israel. Being the king of Israel, he resided in ancient Israel's capital city, Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, God spoke to Solomon the words recorded in the Print Passage. It was not unusual for God to speak directly to Solomon. In fact, God spoke audibly and often to Israel's kings. For the most part, God spoke through His prophets to the reigning king, and they would convey God's message to the congregation.

The religious life of ancient Israel was highly ceremonial. The dedication of Solomon's Temple was a high spiritual time in the national life of Israel. It was a time of celebration and consecration. Along with the king's presiding over the ceremony/celebration, the priests would perform elaborate, sophisticated religious rituals.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Israelites: they are identified as God's chosen people.

Solomon: king of Israel, and son of David.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Consecrated (verse 16)—Hebrew: *qadash* (kaw-dash'): set apart; sanctified; made holy.

Forsake (verse 19)—Hebrew*: azab* (aw-zab'): to leave, abandon, desert; neglect.

Prayer (verse 12)—Hebrew: *tephillah* (tef-il-law'): intercession; supplication.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. The Blessings of Going God's Way
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. A Praying King and a Prayer-hearing God (2 Chronicles 7:12)
- B. The Premise and the Promise (2 Chronicles 7:13-14)
- C. God's People Have the Holy Hookup (2 Chronicles 7:15-16)
- D. The Consequences of Noncompliance (2 Chronicles 7:17-22)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Blessings of Going God's Way

The Scripture passage for this lesson includes a verse familiar to many—namely, 2 Chronicles 7:14. The passage of Scripture on which we are shining the theological spotlight sets forth the good that will result should the people of God go His way—and the disasters that will result should they forsake His way. God's way is the right and best way, and any way other than God's way is the wrong way and leads to death. Whichever way we take is a choice that we make. God will help and guide those who desire to follow His way, but He never forces anyone to do His will.

In response to a prayer rendered by Solomon on behalf of the people of Israel, God promised to show the Israelites mercy should they stray from Him (as they tended to do).

The Lord pointed out that suffering would result if the people abandoned Him and His way by following other gods and disobeying Him. But if they sincerely turned to Him then He would bless them, individually and as a nation.

B. Biblical Background

This chapter (2 Chronicles 7) is an account of the Lord's acceptance of the sacrifices offered at the dedication of the Temple by fire—to the great surprise and encouragement of the people (see verse 1)—and of the feast kept on that account, and of the Feast of Tabernacles (see verse 8), and of the Lord's appearance to Solomon, answering his prayer.

David, Solomon's father, was given the vision to build a temple unto the Lord while he was king. However, God determined that the building of the Temple would take place during Solomon's reign as king. The Lord did allow David to develop the blueprint for the Temple before he died; however, Solomon was God's appointed leader to oversee the holy undertaking of building and dedicating the Temple.

In God's honor and in honor of his father's legacy, Solomon put all his effort and energy into building the Temple just right. He supplied it with the best furnishings and used superior construction materials. Although God is omnipresent (present everywhere), He promised to be present in the Temple in a most intimate way.

As the people came together for the dedication service, they were in a celebratory mood. This occasion was extraordinary because God made His presence known most uniquely (see 2 Chronicles 7:1-3). In the stillness of the night, God came to King Solomon with a promise and a warning for him to heed and to pass on to the people of Israel.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Praying King and a Prayer-hearing God
(2 Chronicles 7:12)

And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice.

After the celebration related to the dedication of the house of the Lord had concluded, the Lord then appeared to Solomon by night and said to him, "I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice" (verse 12).

God responded to Solomon's prayer with a special revelation. He promised to grant the people's petitions—as Solomon had requested—if the people manifested a genuine heart for Him.

Like his father, David, Solomon was a praying king. The words that God spoke to Solomon in the Print Passage answered a prayer that Solomon had prayed earlier. In 2 Chronicles 6, a lengthy prayer prayed by Solomon is recorded (see 2 Chronicles 6:12-42). A portion of God's answer to Solomon is identical to the prayer he prayed (compare 2 Chronicles 7:13-15 with 6:20, 26-27).

B. The Premise and the Promise
(2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are called by my

name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

At the outset of this section, we need to clarify that the word *premise* is defined as "terms/conditions." The Lord presented the promise: "Then I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways" (see verse 14). God (in His omniscience) knew well in advance that Israel would do something that would warrant His withholding rain, commanding locusts to devour the land, or sending a plague among them (verse 13). But whenever God's people come to their spiritual senses and return to Him, He is faithful to restore them and not destroy them.

This promise of God was an answer to Solomon's prayer. Solomon may have foreseen the calamities that could occur if Israel continued to sin against God—for he prayed that if the people turned, repented, and prayed, then God would hear them from His dwelling place in heaven. God answered Solomon's prayer, saying (in essence), "If these things come, and if my people who are called by my name will just humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land."

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, notice the sentence pattern: "If . . . then." That construction confirms that God based this promise on a premise (condition). What a timely word for our time! It is a troubling trend that at present, God's people are becoming more conformed to the world than transformed by the Word of God (see Romans 12:2). Among an alarming number of professing Christians and religious organizations, hatred, racism, combativeness, and the "us against them" mentality are playing out with a vengeance. If this nation is to experience spiritual and moral healing, then the people of God must obey the terms outlined in this Scripture: humility, prayer, seeking God's face, and turning from wickedness.

C. God's People Have the Holy Hookup (2 Chronicles 7:15-16)

Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.

In this section of the Print Passage, God states that His "eyes will be open and [His] ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place [the Temple]" (verse 15, NIV). Then, in verse 16, the Lord declared, "I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there" (NIV). Were we to glance at these verses solely, we might get the impression that God was focusing on the Temple. However, the truth is that God promised His presence in the Temple because of what the Temple represented. The Temple was a visible representation of the people's honor and worship for God. Hence, the proper emphasis was on the people and the fear of God that motivated them to build the Temple unto the Lord.

God promised to pay special attention to the prayers offered from the Temple that Solomon, David's son, had built. That promise had profound implications, and it suggested that God established for His people

a direct "pipeline" to His presence. What an awesome God!

God further said, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (verse 16). That statement affirmed God's desire to be near His people. The idea of God's "having a heart" is scarce in the Bible. The only other explicit reference speaks of God's suffering heart pains because of the evil of humanity (see Genesis 6:6; cf. also Genesis 8:21; 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). It is hard to think of a more intimate way to indicate God's nearness or a tremendous encouragement to prayer.

We need to distinguish God's people from others. We do not make this distinction in a spirit of arrogance, and it is just a fact that there is a difference between the human family and the family of God. Everyone in the family of God is part of the human family, but not everyone who is part of the human family is a member of the family of God. To be a part of the family of God, individuals must receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and receive the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their God. Unless Christ is our Savior and the God of creation is our God, we are not His children (see Colossians 1:21; John 1:12; 8:42-44).

D. The Consequences of Noncompliance (2 Chronicles 7:17-22)

And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments; then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and unto this house? And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

Verse 17 opens with God's speaking personally to Solomon. God says, "As for you, . . ."—then He goes on to instruct Solomon to walk before Him faithfully (as did his father, David), do all that He commands, and observe (honor) His laws and decrees. Should Solomon comply with God's commands, his compliance (obedience) would result in blessings for him and his posterity (verse 18).

God issued a severe warning to Solomon; however, God prefaced the warning with a promise: "Solomon, if you walk in my ways, I'll keep the covenant of David, and I'll prosper you on the throne. But if you forsake Me, Solomon, then I'm going to forsake you. You're going to be cut off, and these calamities are going to come. This beautiful house that you've built is going to be ruined. People will say, 'How in the world did God allow such desolation to come?'—and the answer will be simple: 'Because they forsook God'" (verses 17-22 paraphrased).

In verses 19-22, God warns Solomon that if he turned away and forsook God's way and Word, and served and worshipped other gods, then God would uproot Israel from the land, reject the Temple, and make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. The

Temple, once admired and held sacred, would be destroyed. People from all over would see the ruined remains of the Temple and ask, "Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?" (verse 21b, NIV). People would tell the sad story of how the catastrophe brought upon the Israelites was self-inflicted: "They have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them" (verse 22, NIV).

A careful examination of this section of the Print Passage will reveal that the same "if-then" pattern found in 7:14 reoccurs in 7:17-18. In the latter verses, God spoke to Solomon regarding his responsibility not to go astray. God indicated that Solomon and the nation would suffer if Solomon went wrong.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Like never before, we need to be aware that there are consequences to our actions. As God's people, we must honor God and choose His way. When we get off course as it pertains to traveling the path that is pleasing to God, we should humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways—and we should do it without delay.

When we, the children of God, pray in faith, God will answer our prayers. God never promised always to answer our prayers with the desired response. But, being the loving, caring Father that He is, He will always respond with what is best for us and with what will bring Him glory. It is also vital to remember that our prayers and conduct affect others. We can rejoice in the assurance that God will always keep His promises. Are we faithful in living by His terms?

PRAYER

Loving Father, give us a deeper desire and the help to carry ourselves (in Word and deed) according to Your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 26, 2022–January 1, 2023)

God Promises to Hear and Forgive

MONDAY, December 26: "God Will Bless the Faithful" (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)
TUESDAY, December 27: "Choose Life" (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)
WEDNESDAY, December 28: "God Forgives the Penitent" (1 John 1:1-10)
THURSDAY, December 29: "Christ, the Atoning Sacrifice" (1 John 2:1-11)
FRIDAY, December 30: "We Are God's Children" (1 John 3:1-10)
SATURDAY, December 31: "Solomon Dedicates the Temple" (2 Chronicles 7:1-11)
SUNDAY, January 1: "A Call to Walk Faithfully" (2 Chronicles 7:12-22)

January 8, 2023 **Lesson 6**

GOD PROMISES RESTORATION AND PROTECTION

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Fear Not!**
Youth Topic: **Fear Not!**

Children
General Lesson Title: **God Promises Restoration and Protection**
Children's Topic: **Always There**

Devotional Reading
2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, 13-17

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: **Isaiah 43:1-21**
Print Passage: **Isaiah 43:1-4, 10-12**
Key Verse: **Isaiah 43:1**

Children
Background Scripture: **Isaiah 43:1-21**
Print Passage: **Isaiah 43:1-4, 10-12**
Key Verse: **Isaiah 43:1**

Isaiah 43:1-4, 10-12—KJV

BUT NOW thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

3 For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

4 Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

. . . . .

Isaiah 43:1-4, 10-12—NIV

BUT NOW, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

3 "For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

4 "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life."

. . . . .

10 Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.
11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.
12 I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

10 "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.
11 "I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.
12 "I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People struggle through challenges and trouble. How do we have hope amid life's difficulties? Isaiah reminds us that even when circumstances seem hopeless, God offers help and hope.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore examples of when God has led people through challenges and troubles.
2. Embrace God's ongoing promise of making a way in the "wilderness."
3. Thank God for the help and hope that He has provided in times of trial.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The historical context of this text is the period after Israel's exile in Babylon had been fulfilled.

—The verbs "created" (Hebrew: *bara*) and "formed" (Hebrew: *yatzar*) recall the language of Genesis 1–2, where God "*created* the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, italics added) and "*formed* man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7, italics added). This is significant, for in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55) Israel is seen as a new creation. The "created/formed" language appears again in verse 7, creating an *inclusio* (where a word or concept at the beginning and end appears to bookend a passage) between verse 1 and verse 7.

—The elements of fire and water (43:2), essentially opposite one another, give expression to the fact that God would protect Israel from danger, whatever form it takes. The "passing through waters" also recalls the parting of the Red Sea (see Exodus 14) as well as the crossing of the Jordan River (see Joshua 3). The sacrifice of children in fire was practiced during the time of the kings but would no longer be acceptable in the new creation.

—The four corners of creation are referenced in 43:5-6. God promised to gather all those who had been scattered abroad in the Exile.

—In verses 16-17a, we hear clear echoes of the

Exodus: "the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior" (NRSV). The return from exile is thus portrayed as a new exodus. The contrast of the "former things" (43:18) and the "new thing" (43:19) suggests that the new Exodus will be greater than the first.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophet whose name the book bears (Isaiah) began his ministry around 740 BC, with the death of the popular King Uzziah. Isaiah's ministry spanned four administrations, as Isaiah 1:1 confirms. Significantly, the book of Isaiah is truly a book of "prophecy." Much of what is written therein had not happened at the time of Isaiah's preaching. As God inspired and spoke to him, Isaiah predicted/foretold events with amazing precision (i.e., the fall of Assyria, the defeat of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians, the restoration of God's people after the Exile, etc.). Although Isaiah's prophecies were yet to come, he preached as though they had already happened or were happening at that time.

Isaiah's preaching looked toward and beyond the people of Judah's being in exile. He predicted that God would be with His chosen people in their crises, and the assurance of God's presence with them would make what they must endure easier to bear. In God's own time, He would deliver His people out of their trouble (trouble that they were in of their own doing). The promise of deliverance would serve to keep God's people encouraged.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

God's chosen people (the Hebrew people) were divided into the Southern and Northern kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom was Israel, and the Southern Kingdom was Judah. Isaiah preached in the Southern Kingdom. It is noteworthy that the great prophet Micah preached in Judah (the Southern Kingdom) around the same time.

Isaiah preached to people who were comfortable in their sins and to a government that was glorying in its corruption. The age-old atrocity was in full swing: the rich were getting richer at the expense of the poor's getting poorer. The poor were losing their land and homes at the hands of the rich and powerful. No doubt that Isaiah's preaching fell on deaf ears—for most folks will not heed warnings until it is too late.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: God's prophet. His name means "salvation of Jehovah."

Judah: the Southern Kingdom of the Hebrew people (God's chosen people).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Chosen (verse 10)—Hebrew: *bachir* (baw-kheer'): chosen ones; divinely elected, selected.

Honored (verse 4)—Hebrew: *kabad* (kaw-bad'): distinguished; glorified; respected; "honourable" (KJV).

Redeemed (verse 1)—Hebrew: *gaal* (gaw-al'): acted as a kinsman; bought back; claimed.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. The Fix for Fearfulness

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. The Blessing of Belonging (Isaiah 43:1)
B. Good News about God's Presence (Isaiah 43:2)
C. God: The Divine Difference Maker (Isaiah 43:3-4)
D. Called for a Sacred Cause (Isaiah 43:10-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Fix for Fearfulness

One definition for the word *fix* is "a remedy or a cure." This lesson is titled "Fear Not," which is the same command that God gives to His people through His prophet Isaiah in verse 1 of the Print Passage. Fear has gained a stranglehold on the minds, hearts, and even the faith of many of God's people. These people spend much of their time fretting over conditions and circumstances and not nearly enough time trusting in God.

The remedy for fearfulness starts with a rightly rooted faith. A rightly rooted faith is one that is grounded (firmly planted) in God, the right Source. Everyone has faith in something or someone. Hence, the pressing question is not "Do we have faith?" but "in what/whom is our faith?" Our faith must be placed in God because faith in God will chase away fear. Faith and fear are foes of the most combative kind, and they cannot simultaneously set up camp in the same heart.

In the lives of God's people in every age, trials and tribulations will come. Forces and foes beyond our control will cause some trials, and other trials will be self-inflicted. But, either way, they will come into our lives. As we live in close fellowship with God, we will be able to master whatever comes our way with the help of God. The power and consoling effect of God's presence with us will strengthen us as we encounter our mountains and valleys.

B. Biblical Background

Isaiah preached during a time when the government, society, and religious order in Judah were in moral and spiritual shambles. The leaders and the elite had become complacent in their evil ways. But while the people thought that things would continue, as usual, God revealed to the prophet Isaiah that the day would come when they would have to suffer for their sins. Isaiah prophesied in the present tense as though what was coming had already arrived.

It is impossible to truly appreciate Isaiah and his ministry without addressing his defining, life-changing moment with God in the Temple as recorded in Isaiah 6. In that chapter, Isaiah was in the Temple; it was a time of mourning for him because King Uzziah (the man Isaiah looked up to) had died. He saw the Lord "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isaiah 6:1) and attended by heavenly beings (see 6:2). God called Isaiah, and

Isaiah answered God's call in the affirmative. This powerful, unforgettable experience with God in the Temple served as Isaiah's ultimate inspiration as he ministered to the people of Judah faithfully, lovingly, and boldly.

Isaiah 43 is placed in the book's section described as the *Comfort Section*. In this chapter, Isaiah preached a message of God's comforting presence with His people as they went through trying times. One of the precious truths that we can extract from Isaiah's message in this chapter is that we can endure the bad times much easier when we stay conscious of God's presence.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Blessing of Belonging
(Isaiah 43:1)

BUT NOW thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

The Lord confirms in verse 1 that the Hebrew nation is His people. God stated this concerning the people of Judah: "I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name" (verse 1b, NKJV). That indicates that the relationship between God and His people is uniquely personal. It is essential to point out that there is a significant difference between God's creation and God's children. Not everyone whom God has created is His child. To be God's child, one must have an intimate spiritual connection with Him. God said that He "created Jacob" and "formed Israel," which is significant. It is reminiscent of Jacob, out of whom came a nation. God formed Israel in that He made a new creation, a new person, a person who had a spiritual relationship with God through personal, shared fellowship. (Remember when God changed Jacob's name to Israel.)

The fact that God had called His people by name and they, thus, belong to Him should cause them to break free from the clutches of fear. The blessing is not so much in belonging—for there are many things that we can belong to that can be detrimental: some folks belong to gangs and some to organizations that downplay and even dishonor the necessity of cultivating genuine fellowship with God. Some folks will even pledge themselves to a person who does not enhance, encourage, or add to their spiritual growth. But belonging to such things is destructive, not constructive. To belong to God is the greatest blessing and highest honor that anyone can experience.

B. Good News about God's Presence
(Isaiah 43:2)

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

In Isaiah 43:2 (NIV), the Lord said to His people, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." In this verse, the Lord mentions waters and fire; both elements can bring about danger and even death. Water can drown us and sweep us away when it is troubled (unruly; out of control). When it is blazing out of control, fire can severely burn us at best and kill us at worst.

The heart of this verse is the promise made

by God: "I will be with you." It is on this promise that the entire verse hinges. The Lord was saying to His people in Isaiah's day—just as He speaks to His people today—*Regardless of how deep, troubled, and unruly the waters may be, and regardless of how out of control the fire may be, I will be with you. And because I am with you, none of what you go through will harm or destroy you.* In all that we endure, we have the comfort of God's presence.

It is still more good news that God's presence is constant. God promised never to leave us or forsake us (see Hebrews 13:5). This promise from God confirms His constant presence with us and His continuous faithfulness to us. God's presence is all-encompassing.

C. God: The Divine Difference Maker (Isaiah 43:3-4)

For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

The Lord opens verse 3 by declaring, "I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (NIV). Then He states what He has done (and will do) on His people's behalf. God declared, "I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place" (verse 3b). Here, God causes the people to look back on certain instances in the history of the Hebrew people when He intervened for them (see Exodus 12:29-33; 14:8-30; 2 Chronicles 14). What God said here was not only a review of what God had done but also a preview of what God will do to intervene for His people.

God is the ultimate difference maker. That means He can do what nobody else can do because He is what nobody else can be. God is the Lord our God, the holy one of Israel, our Savior. Furthermore, the Lord stated, "Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no Savior" (Isaiah 43:10b-11, NIV). The German theologian Rudolf Otto fittingly referred to God as "Wholly Other." Otto used this term to point out that God is entirely other than, greater than—different from anyone and everyone who ever existed. There is no one equal or superior to Him.

D. Called for a Sacred Cause (Isaiah 43:10-12)

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

In verse 1 of Isaiah 43, the Lord made it clear that the prophet preached to a people who were divinely called. In verse 10, God declares that His people are His witnesses and chosen servants. They were servants chosen to be God's witnesses (people who would represent God in the world and make Him known in the world). That is where God's people (Israel and Judah) fell short. Instead of declaring the true God to other nations of the world, they became "holier than thou" and withdrew themselves from non-Jews. Unfortunately, some Christians today feel that communicating with lost sinners/people who are not on their level is beneath them. We all should stay humble and remember that were it not for the grace of God, we all would be lost. God did not call us to isolate but to communicate.

God called His people to be His witnesses and chose them to be His servants, "that [they] may know . . . that I am He: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (verse 10). The way God words His statement in verse 10 is ever so important—for it confirms the truth that to be witnesses for God, the witnesses must know (not guess) that God is the one and only true God. Those who are not convinced that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the true God will be timid and tentative in their attempt to function as His witnesses. But those who know that God is the true God and have had a genuine salvation experience will witness with holy boldness and passion.

In verses 11-12a, the Lord declares in no uncertain terms, "I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved." God proves that He is the Lord who saves, not just by declaring it but by literally saving and delivering His people.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The topic of this lesson is "Fear Not." When we stay focused on who God is and what God can do, we will realize that we have every reason to trust Him and no reason to fear. In God, we have more than insurance—we have assurance. Insurance is earthly and can lapse, but assurance is spiritual and lasting.

We do not have to fear because if we are saved, then we are called and kept by God, who cannot fail us and will never leave or forsake us. Isaiah 40:11 states this of God: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom." What a beautiful portrait of God, our loving Shepherd. During the times when we need God to carry us and not just walk with us, He does just that.

PRAYER

Loving Father, thank You for Your constant presence that chases away our fears. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 2-8, 2023)

God Promises Restoration and Protection

MONDAY, January 2: "God Will Make a Way" (Isaiah 43:14-28)
TUESDAY, January 3: "Dry Bones Shall Live" (Ezekiel 37:1-14)
WEDNESDAY, January 4: "Israel Will Be God's People" (Ezekiel 37:15-28)
THURSDAY, January 5: "God's Restoring Love" (Hosea 11)
FRIDAY, January 6: "Stand Firm in the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-15)
SATURDAY, January 7: "The Lord Is a Faithful Protector" (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, 13-17)
SUNDAY, January 8: "God Restores His People" (Isaiah 43:1-13)

January 15, 2023 **Lesson 7**

GOD PROMISES TO GUIDE OUR WAY

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Not by Our Own Devices
Youth Topic: Not by Our Own Devices

Children
General Lesson Title: God Promises New Things
Children's Topic: Not by Our Own Devices

Devotional Reading
Psalm 119:81-96

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Isaiah 48:1-22
Print Passage: Isaiah 48:3-8a, 17
Key Verse: Isaiah 48:17

Children
Background Scripture: Isaiah 48:1-22
Print Passage: Isaiah 48:3-8a, 17
Key Verse: Isaiah 48:17b

Isaiah 48:3-8a, 17—KJV

3 I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass.
4 Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;
5 I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them.
6 Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them.
7 They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them.
8 Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened.

Isaiah 48:3-8a, 17—NIV

3 "I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.
4 "For I knew how stubborn you were; your neck muscles were iron, your forehead was bronze.
5 "Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, 'My images brought them about; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'
6 "You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you.
7 "They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.'
8 "You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ears have not been open."

. . . . .

17 Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.

. . . . .

17 This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People want to know what the future holds. Can they figure it out on their own? Isaiah tells us that God alone knows the future and revealed it to the Israelites despite their obstinance and stubbornness.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Acknowledge God's hand in His continuing to guide His people.
2. Recognize human stubbornness and appreciate God's continuing faithfulness.
3. Commit to humble reliance on God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In this passage, God called Israel to task for placing her trust in idols and for believing that false deities have brought her deliverance.

—The description of the people's necks' being like iron and their heads like brass (48:4) indicated the stubbornness and obstinacy of Israel. The metaphorical reference to these baser metals (brass and iron) poses an interesting contrast to the later mention of the precious metal silver (verse 10). That the Lord refines Israel but "*not like* silver" (NRSV, italics added) indicates that the refining and testing were spiritual.

—Verse 6 offers an interesting movement from *hearing* to *seeing* to *declaring*: "You have *heard*; now *see* all this; and will you not *declare* it?" (NRSV, italics added). The verse moves also from past (heard) to present (see) to future (will . . . declare). The Lord had spoken to His people in the past, but from this time forward they would hear "new things," which no doubt relates to the deliverance from the Babylonian exile. Later, verse 8 ("You have never heard, you have never known," NRSV) at first appears to contradict verse 6 but, in fact, both verses refer to the *newness* of what God is revealing.

—The Lord was emphatic that the deliverance of Israel was not on account of her own merit; rather, it was for the Lord's own sake, on account of His name and His glory.

—Verse 13 refers to God's summoning of heaven and earth. This verse is reminiscent of Genesis 1, where, through His word, God calls the heavens and the earth into being. The *new* revelation comes from the God of old, who created the heavens and the earth and who had established His covenant with Israel's ancestors.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Isaiah was the eighth-century BC Israelite prophet after whom the book of Isaiah is named. Within the text of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah himself is referred to as "the prophet." Still, the exact relationship between the book of Isaiah and the Prophet Isaiah is complicated. The traditional view is that all sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah were written by one man, Isaiah—possibly in two periods between 740 BC and c. 686 BC, separated by approximately fifteen years—and that the book includes dramatic prophetic declarations of Cyrus the Great in the Bible, acting to restore the nation of Israel from Babylonian captivity.[1]

Isaiah was called to prophetic ministry "in the year that king Uzziah died" (Isaiah 6:1), around 740 BC. He lived long enough to record the death of Sennacherib (see 37:37-38) in 681 BC. However, most of the book can be dated only in general terms because few specific dates are given.

The message from God recorded in this lesson was directed at the people of Judah who were (or would be) in Babylonian captivity. God's chosen people had developed the sinful habit of being stubborn toward God and His will. This chapter of Isaiah (chapter 48) is part of the prophecy's section that emphasizes comfort for God's people (chapters 40–48). Although this chapter is intended to provide comfort for God's people in exile, the message therein does not shrink from holding the people accountable for their stubbornness and sins.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Isaiah 48 is a part of that section that refers to encouragement for God's exiles: Isaiah 40:1–55:13. This lesson considers the setting of Babylonian captivity. Babylon would have been a different environment; to them, it was a nation of heathens that was well known for practicing idolatry. Making a mockery of God's people and the true God that they worshipped was a sport for the Babylonian people (see Psalm 137:1-3).

The people of Babylon worshipped multiple false gods, including the kings of Babylon. God's people, however, were established by God as a monotheistic nation—a nation that believed in worshipping the one true God, Yahweh. Idolatry was so prevalent in Babylon that in every direction in which the people of God turned, they were met with the presence and practice of idolatry. Being in exile posed a new test of faith for God's people. Unfortunately, they had failed their test when they should have passed with flying colors.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

GOD: the divine Being who is speaking.
Isaiah: the prophet who was God's mouthpiece during the events of this lesson.
Judah: the people of God to whom God's message was addressed in this lesson.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Directs (verse 17)—Hebrew: *darak* (daw-rak'): aims; guides; leads forth; "leadeth" (KJV).
Stubborn (verse 4)—Hebrew: *qasheh* (kaw-sheh'): hard; cruel; hardhearted; impudent; "obstinate" (KJV).
Teaches (verse 17)—Hebrew: *lamad* (law-mad'): exercises in; instructs; trains; "teacheth" (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Giving God His Due
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. What God Announces Is Actualized (Isaiah 48:3-4)

B. God and His Declarations Are Unmistakable (Isaiah 48:5-8a)

C. God's Guidance Is for Our Good (Isaiah 48:17)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Giving God His Due

The initial matter that needs to be addressed in this introduction is that giving God His due means giving God that to which He is entitled and of which He is deserving. Giving God His due is not doing Him a favor; instead, we are giving Him what we owe Him.

Throughout the history of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament, they often failed to give God the glory and credit for their victories and blessings due to Him—typically giving God His due only when their backs were against the wall, everything else had failed, and they realized that they had only God to turn to and on whom to rely.

In this lesson, God shows His people yet again that He is omniscient/all-knowing; He knows everything. There is no limit to God's wisdom and knowledge. He can see and tell what will happen long before it happens. When He describes what will happen, He does so with divine, detailed, and flawless accuracy. Whatever God declares will happen exactly as He said it will. Simply put, God knows the end from the beginning. Only God is omniscient, and only God can give those whom He chooses the gift to predict certain things that are yet to come to pass.

B. Biblical Background

Before returning to their homeland, Judah was reminded of the sins that led the nation into captivity. They must not repeat former errors. The people's chief failing was that they honored God with their words but not their conduct (see Isaiah 48:1-2). Knowing their tendency toward idolatry, God gave His people advance revelations of His will to prevent them from turning to idols for guidance. But they still stubbornly rejected His teaching (see verses 3-5).

Nevertheless, God once again gave them a heads-up regarding His plans—namely, that He would lead them back to their homeland. He waited to announce this at the last minute (as it were), for Judah's previous history had shown that they could not be trusted. God refused to give them the chance to claim that idols had brought them this deliverance (see verses 6-8).

God had been very patient with His people, and He equated His work with them to that of a refiner who puts silver in the fire to burn up the rubbish and leave the metal pure.

In the same way, God had "refined" the people of Israel, but they had proved worthless. However, God did not destroy them for the sake of His honor (see verses 9-11).

The God who called the descendants of Abraham as His people still looks after them. The God who made the world still controls its history. He brought Cyrus to Babylon to conquer Judah's oppressor and free the captive people (see verses 12-15). God had/has always spoken openly with His people, and now He did so again by sending the prophet (His messenger) to make His plans known to them (see verse 16).

Because God wanted only the best for His people, He was saddened to see the suffering they had brought upon themselves through their stubborn disobedience. If they had paid attention to His instruction, then they would have enjoyed unbroken peace and prosperity (see verses 17-19). God was now delighted that they were about to leave Babylon and return to their land. He would protect and provide for them, but they must live uprightly if they desired to enjoy peace in their land (see verses 20-22).

From time to time, God's people had to be reminded that He is the only true God. Because they allowed themselves to be influenced by pagan nations, they were susceptible to worshipping false gods. God made it clear to His people that He was the only true God and that it was an insulting sin for His people to recognize or regard anyone but Him as God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. What God Announces Is Actualized

(Isaiah 48:3-4)

I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;

We have declarations and demonstrations in these verses, announcements made, and announcements actualized. The Lord alludes to the times in the past when He predicted, in detail, things that had not yet happened. Then He verified that what He predicted in detail came to pass with meticulous accuracy (verse 3). He spoke in advance of the events, and what He spoke did come to pass. God's advance knowledge of events is essential to understand and remember. It is comforting to know that God and His Word will not fail in a world where so much is unreliable and unpredictable.

God is the only being who knows everything in the past, present, and future—He knows everything perfectly (without mistakes or inaccuracies). What is unknowable to human beings is thoroughly known to God. The God we serve never has to guess, assume, or suspect. He knows all, which applies to things, events, and even people. God knows us through and through. He knows our thoughts even before they enter our minds, our words even before we speak them, and, according to Jesus, God knows the number of hairs on our heads (see Luke 12:7).

In verse 4, the Lord disclosed why He needed to announce what had yet to come to pass: the people were "stubborn," their "neck

muscles were iron," and their "forehead was bronze" (NIV). These terms confirmed that God's people were stubborn and hardened in their unbelief, disobedience, and inclination toward idolatry. And what is worse is that they took pride in their sins. One of the worst vices that any Christian can possess is stubbornness. When we dare to be stubborn toward God and His will, we shut and lock the door on repentance, spiritual growth, and honest self-examination. Whenever we are obstinate toward God and His will, we should acknowledge it and sincerely pray it away.

B. God and His Declarations Are Unmistakable (Isaiah 48:5-8a)

I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning; even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened.

God opens verse 5 by saying to His people, "I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you" (NIV). As the KJV renders it, a key word follows—and that word is "lest." Then the Lord goes on to say, in essence, "If I hadn't approached you the way I did (announcing what would happen before it happened), you would have given your idol gods credit." In verse 6, God reprimands His children and says (my paraphrase), "You have seen that I have a perfect record of declaring things and those things' coming to pass. Don't you get it yet that I'm totally trustworthy and greater than worthless, idol gods?"

God said that He would tell them of "new things," things that were unprecedented and that would take place in the most recent future. This is another way of God's giving evidence to His status and ability as the Supreme Being—for, when what He has foretold comes to pass, the people neither would be able to say they knew it all along, nor say that their idol gods made it happen (verses 6b-8a).

It is sinful to attribute God's responsibility to any other source but God. Put more bluntly; it is blatant blasphemy! God is always our Source; anything or anybody else is a resource. We should acknowledge and be thankful for the resource, but the Source is always greater than the resource. God, our Source, is ultimately responsible for our blessings, protection, victories, and successes. We must also avoid the tendency to make gods out of ourselves, which is a real temptation (as outlandish as that may sound to some). Whenever we put all our confidence in ourselves and the emphasis on ourselves, we have made ourselves God.

C. God's Guidance Is for Our Good (Isaiah 48:17)

Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.

In this verse, God reaffirms that to the Israelites He is the Lord, their Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel—the Lord their God. That verse is significant—as God goes on to confirm that He "teaches you what is best for you" and "directs you in the way you should go" (NIV). Because of who God is, His people can be confident that what He teaches them will be what is best for them, and He will guide them for their good and His glory.

God knows what it is that we need to know and when we need to know it. He also knows

where we need to go, and He knows how to get us there. Even when we are clueless, God knows perfectly why He leads us and where He leads us (see Exodus 13:17-18). Since God is our Father, Redeemer, and Lord, we can be sure that He will always lead us right and never wrong. Many Christians pray for God's guidance, and that is commendable. However, we prove that we are serious and sincere about such a prayer when we make every effort to go where God guides us.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The people to whom God spoke (like we all) inherited a sinful nature. Sin started with Adam and spread to the whole of humanity. We cannot blame Adam for our sins because all have sinned, and all must take responsibility for their sins. What we learn from the events of this lesson is that sin manifested itself in the forms of stubbornness, disobedience, and idolatry. These are some of the key sins that we need to guard against and ward off through prayer, even today.

Some people feel as though idolatry is a thing of the past and, thus, is nonexistent. This can be due to the misconception that idol gods are defined only in terms of statues, relics, or visible images. The truth is that idols/false gods can come in various forms and personalities. But to keep it simple, idols can be possessions, loved ones, friends, and even ourselves. Our idols/false gods are any persons or things that we love, honor, and/or cherish more than God.

God constantly reminds His people to put their complete trust in Him. When we wholly lean on anything or anybody other than God, we are beckoning our own disaster. God is the only being who is fail-proof; He is incapable of failing. The divinely inspired counsel of the writer of Proverbs will serve us well if we follow it: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to acknowledge You, honor You, obey You, and trust You in all that we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 9-15, 2023)

God Promises to Guide Our Way

MONDAY, January 9: "'The Lord Is My Shepherd'" (Psalm 23)
TUESDAY, January 10: "Guided by God's Word" (Psalm 119:81-96)
WEDNESDAY, January 11: "Trust and Acknowledge the Lord" (Proverbs 3:1-15)
THURSDAY, January 12: "Tested Faith" (1 Peter 1:3-12)
FRIDAY, January 13: "God's Word Endures" (1 Peter 1:13-25)
SATURDAY, January 14: "God Guides and Refines" (Isaiah 48:1-11)
SUNDAY, January 15: "God Leads and Directs" (Isaiah 48:12-22)

Note

1. Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Latter Prophets," in *The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues*, Steven L. McKenzie and Matt Patrick Graham, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 75-80.

January 22, 2023 **Lesson 8**

GOD PROMISES LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Living Right over Empty Rituals
Youth Topic: Living Right over Empty Rituals

Children
General Lesson Title: God Promises Good Things
Children's Topic: Honoring One Who Does What Is Right

Devotional Reading
Ephesians 5:11-20

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-14
Print Passage: Isaiah 58:6-10
Key Verse: Isaiah 58:10

Children
Background Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-14
Print Passage: Isaiah 58:6-10
Key Verse: Isaiah 58:9a

Isaiah 58:6-10—KJV

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?
7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.
9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

Isaiah 58:6-10—NIV

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
7 "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
8 "Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
9 "Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

10 And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

10 "and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Some people want to manipulate tradition or customs for their own selfish ends. How can we avoid empty ritual and tradition? Isaiah tells us that God cares more about a person's sincere prayer than about his or her performing empty rites.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Summarize Isaiah 58 to determine the actions that God wants His people to take.
2. Repent of ways and times when they have offered false rituals and prayers to God.
3. Enact God's justice and mercy as an affirmation of God's will on Earth as it is in heaven.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This passage belongs to that part of Isaiah frequently identified as Trito-Isaiah or Third Isaiah (chapters 56–66), composed sometime after the exiles returned to the land of Judah. Whereas Deutero-Isaiah's (chapters 40–55) conceptualization of salvation focused on the key event of the return from exile, for Trito-Isaiah the central focus is the comforting of those who are in mourning.

—The command "Shout it aloud, do not hold back" (58:1a, NIV) indicates that the prophet had the full backing of divine authority in his condemnation of the rebellion and sins of God's people.

—The true "fast" in which the Lord chooses for His people to partake is to be found in the acts of mercy listed in 58:6-7. Ritual actions, even those that appear to be directed toward God, are of less value than demonstrating mercy and compassion toward other people. This teaching has a distinct echo in Matthew 25:31-46 (the judgment of the nations).

—The effect of these acts of true piety is the reestablishment of communication between God and Israel. "You shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am'" (verse 9, NKJV).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Within the context of the book of Isaiah, the prophet whose name has been identified with this book is referred to as "the prophet." Many biblical scholars suggest that "the exact relationship between the book of Isaiah and the actual prophet Isaiah is complicated. The traditional view," which most conservative biblical scholars accept, "is that

all 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah were written by one man, Isaiah, possibly in two periods between 740 BC and c. 686 BC, separated by approximately 15 years, and that the book includes dramatic prophetic declarations of Cyrus the Great in the Bible"; he was instrumental in restoring the nation of Israel from Babylonian captivity. "Another widely held view is that parts of the first half of the book (chapters 1–39) originated with the historical prophet," sprinkled with prose annotations "written in the time of King Josiah a hundred years later, and that the remainder of the book dates from immediately before and immediately after the end of the exile in Babylon, almost two centuries after the time of the historical prophet."[1]

This passage of Isaiah, chapter 58, belongs to that part of Isaiah frequently identified as Trito-Isaiah or Third Isaiah (chapters 56–66), composed sometime after the exiles returned to the land of Judah. In comparison, Deutero-Isaiah's or Second Isaiah's (chapters 40–55) depiction of salvation focused on the key event of the return from exile. In Trito-Isaiah, the central focus is the comforting of those who are in mourning.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Many biblical scholars widely regard the prophet Isaiah as one of the greatest prophets of the Bible. His name means "YHWH (the LORD) is salvation." Historical records tell us that he lived in Jerusalem, and the prophecies God gave him were directed toward Israel, Judah, and other nations. Jewish tradition tells us that he was of royal descent and may have been a cousin of King Uzziah's. That relationship may have entitled him to access to the kings of Judah in Jerusalem.

Chapter 1, verse 1 of this book states that Isaiah received visions from God during the reigns of four kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The time covered is from the end of King Uzziah's reign (see Isaiah 6:1) to the Assyrian King Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. This suggests that Isaiah's ministry was at least forty years during the last half of the eighth century BC.

During Isaiah's lifetime, the nation of Assyria was the major power in the Middle East. In the year 721 BC, Assyria captured Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and deported the Israelites to other lands.

Isaiah apparently lived in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and he and his nation soon had to face the ruthless Assyrian Empire as well. Because of the sins of the people of both Israel and Judah, God said that He was using the Assyrians as "the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation" (Isaiah 10:5, NKJV).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: the son of Amoz, who was a member of the royal family. He made his first public appearance as the divinely inspired prophet in the year of Uzziah's affliction with leprosy. He ministered to the people for about ninety years during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Fasted (verse 3 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: *tsum* (tsoom): abstained from (did not consume) food.

Righteousness (verse 8)—*Hebrew: tsedeq* (tseh'-dek): rightness; justice; what is right.

Sackcloth (verse 5)—Hebrew: *saq* (sak): course, loose cloth or sacking; sacks.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. You Will Need True Religion
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Anatomy of True Worship (Isaiah 58:6-7)
- B. True Worship Results in Salvation, Protection, and Access to God (Isaiah 58:8-9a)
- C. True Worship Leads to Loving Actions (Isaiah 58:9b-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. You Will Need True Religion

A song titled "True Religion" by a group called Hot Tuna, an American blues-rock band formed by bassist Jack Casady and guitarist Jorma Kaukonen has in one of its verses the following words: "Momma take the pillow from under my head, now / Allelu / Said take the pillow from under my head / Allelu / Now, take the pillow from under my head / Jesus's gonna make up my dyin' bed / Then you'll need that true religion / Allelu."

The basic idea behind that song is that a person will need true religion when it comes time to die. Such a premise is sound theology; however, a more critical principle regarding true religion is the need for one to practice it in his or her daily life. It is no secret that God requires us to live lives that reflect His compassion and concern for the least, the lost, and the left out. True religion mandates that we recognize what makes true religion true.

True religion does have rules and rituals, but there is a crucial difference. In true religion, the rules and rituals are observed out of gratitude for the salvation that God has provided—NOT to obtain that salvation. True religion, which is biblical Christianity, has rules to obey (such as *do not murder*, *do not commit adultery*, *do not lie*, etc.) and rituals to observe (such as water baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper/Communion). Observance of these rules and rituals is not what makes a person right with God. Instead, these rules and rituals result from the relationship with God, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone as the Savior. False religion is doing things (rules and rituals) in order to try to earn God's favor. True religion is receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and thereby having a right relationship with God—and then doing things (rules and rituals) out of love for God and desire to grow closer to Him. In order to live a life that pleases God and that is of benefit to fellow human beings, true religion is essential.

True religion is neither rule-based nor ritual-based. Engaging in true religion means having a relationship with God. Many religions hold that humanity is somehow separated

from God and needs to be reconciled to Him. False religion seeks to solve this problem by observing rules and rituals. True religion solves the problem by recognizing that only God could rectify the separation, and He has done so.

B. Biblical Background

Jim Haeffele, in his article titled "Isaiah the Prophet" on the Web site *Life, Hope & Truth*, states that "Isaiah's writing style reveals a well-educated background. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states, 'For versatility of expression and brilliance of imagery Isaiah had no superior, not even a rival. His style marks the climax of Hebrew literary art' ('Isaiah,' vol. II, p. 885). The style of writing of epigrams, metaphors, interrogation, dialogue, hyperbole and parables 'characterize[s] Isaiah's book as the great masterpiece of Hebrew literature' (ibid.)."[2]

Many of the prophecies in the book of Isaiah begin with the historical conditions and prophecies for his day and then move forward to a far greater fulfillment before the return of Jesus Christ. This is the dualism seen in many of the prophecies of the Bible. The first (historical) fulfillment is lesser in scope and is followed by the greater future fulfillment at the end of this present age. The dualism in Isaiah usually pertains to the prophecies about Jesus Christ, Israel, Judah, or other nations.

The book of Isaiah presents more insights into the nature of God than any other book in the Old Testament. In fact, when we recall Isaiah's call to the prophetic ministry, God's holiness was the first thing that impressed the prophet when he saw God in all His glory in the Temple (see Isaiah 6:1-8).

One of the fundamental theological contributions of Isaiah is his revelatory insight informing us that God is interested in the salvation of His people. God is the sovereign ruler in history and the only one who has the power to deliver and save. Isaiah also informs us that God's ultimate purpose of salvation will be realized through the coming Messiah, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus alluded to this when He began His public ministry in Nazareth by quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Anatomy of True Worship

(Isaiah 58:6-7)

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

In his declarations regarding true worship, the prophet Isaiah focused on the practice of fasting. In his presentation, Isaiah rebuked God's people for practicing bad religion. What is considered bad religion? It is a religion that consists of empty, unprofitable rituals that offend the Lord. Isaiah focused specifically on fasting in his pronouncements, and he pointed out the people's abuse of this spiritual discipline.

Before considering Isaiah's criticism of the people's use of fasting, it is appropriate to

ask, what is fasting? "When the Bible refers to fasting, it refers to abstaining from food and drink for a specific period (the Day of Atonement establishes the precedent for a 24-hour period). Fasting is designed to humble us and help us draw closer to God. It is not a form of penance or a way to attain favor with God through self-imposed suffering."[3]

Chapter 58 addresses the blessing of true worship; however, in verses 1-5 (part of the Background Scripture), the people of Israel questioned why their prayers were not being answered. The people seemed to take great pleasure in going through the "prescribed" daily fasting ritual, acting as if they were a genuinely obedient nation. The people accused God of being indifferent to their fasts and other acts of so-called contrition. They did not understand the true meaning of fasting, and perhaps they saw it as a way to gain God's favor. However, through the prophet, God exposed the shallow worship being practiced by the people. Today's session picks up here as God explains the kind of worship and fasting acceptable to Him.

The prophet prefaced the fast that God desires with the words, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" (verse 6). Isaiah then goes into a litany of the elements that comprise true fasting.

It is important to note that neither Isaiah nor the Lord were criticizing fasting. However, they were critical of any empty religious ritual. The answer was not for the people to stop fasting but for them to get right with God and make their fasting more than superficial.

God wants the fast/worship that is accompanied by the following:

1. ***The loosing of the shackles/bonds of wickedness***. Adam Clarke, in his commentary on verse 6, states, "How can any nation pretend to fast or worship God at all, or dare to profess that they believe in the existence of such a Being, while they carry on the *slave trade*, and traffic in the souls, blood, and bodies, of men!"[4]
2. ***The lifting of the yoke of oppression***. It is against the very nature of God for any people to be illegally oppressed and burdened with oppressive rules and regulations that are not designed for leading to righteous living. God's vision for true worship involves establishing freedom for those suffering injustice, oppression, or bondage. True worship includes the command to give freedom to those whom we have oppressed—to break yokes that bind people to servitude. When we look at our current economic system within our western society, much of the system is designed to keep people in oppressive impoverishment. God wants those yokes to be lifted through compassionate legislation. If every Christian took injustice and oppression seriously, then God would enable us to make a mighty dent in the problem of societal injustice.
3. ***Feeding the hungry***. One of the hallmarks of living a life that is pleasing to God is to show concern for those living in distressing conditions and situations of impoverishment. One of the commands of Scripture is for us to show kindness to the hungry and not simply say that we will pray for them. We are to back up our prayers with concrete actions of generosity. Instead of emphasizing fasting

(denying ourselves bread) as an act of religious discipline, God emphasizes our sharing bread with those who are hungry.

4. ***Providing shelter for the poor***. True worship includes finding ways to house the homeless.
5. ***Clothing the naked***. True worship includes providing clothing to cover those who are naked.
6. ***Helping one's needy neighbor***. True worship includes one's not turning his or her back to his or her neighbor who is in a position of material need or lack.

When fasting, persons with the right spirit would share their bread with the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless and poor, and clothe those without essential garments. Instead of the traditional fast days, "the fast that I choose," says God, is a whole new way of life.

Isaiah reframes fasting as a practice. It is no longer the periodic fast days that serve to punctuate ongoing life. Instead, fasting is a new set of relationships within ongoing life. The fasting acceptable to God is a daily fast from domination, blaming others, evil speech, self-satisfaction, entitlement, and blindness to one's privilege. The fast that God seeks calls for vigilance for justice and generosity day in and day out. Those who practice social justice are assured of guidance, healing, and a protective escort.

B. True Worship Results in Salvation, Protection, and Access to God
(Isaiah 58:8-9a)

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.

In Isaiah 58:3-5 (not part of the Print Passage), God made it clear that the people's fasting was flawed and was therefore unsatisfactory. Then, in verses 6-7, God clarified the fasting/worshipping that He demanded. The fasting that God seeks requires and promises a great deal.

Now, in verse 8, God outlines what the people could expect if they did, indeed, remedy injustice, free the oppressed, and feed the hungry. First, they could expect that "light shall break forth as the morning." To appreciate the light, one must have stumbled through the darkness (and the people had done plenty of that during their long exile experience). Second, they could expect physical healing. Third, they could expect that "[their] righteousness shall go before [them]" and "the glory of the LORD will be [their] rear guard" (NIV). It is a promise of protection, front and rear. It is reminiscent of the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night that led the Israelites on their wilderness journey—but that switched to their rear to protect them from the Egyptian army when it pursued them (see Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-20).

Finally, and most importantly, if these people established justice, set the oppressed free, and fed the hungry, then God would answer their prayers for help. If they helped others, then God would help them.

C. True Worship Leads to Loving Actions
(Isaiah 58:9b-10)

If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if

thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day:

The "if-then" pattern of verses 9b-10 sets forth the consequences of the right kind of fast. *If* the people chose the fast that God set before them, *then* they would have the blessing they sought—light, healing, help, protection, the satisfying of needs, and, most importantly, the presence and guidance of God among them.

In verse 9b, we find the first "if" statement. We will find another "if" statement in verse 10a. Verses 9b and 10a, then, outlined what God wanted them to do. Verses 10b and 11 provide the "then" statement, outlining what these people could expect if they lived up to God's expectations.

First, God called these people to remedy three facets of unjust or oppressive behavior. The first remedy was to remove the yoke of bondage from those who were not free. The second was to stop finger pointing, which could be either a gesture of contempt or a way of casting blame. The third was to stop speaking evil of others.

Verse 10a reads, "And if thou draw out thou soul (*nap·se·ka*—"your soul") to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul . . . ." This is the second "if" statement. God expected these people to feed the hungry and satisfy the afflicted's needs. They were not only to feed the hungry but were also to give them *nap·se·ka*—their souls—or, as we would say, "their hearts." Passionless giving at a distance isn't enough!

Here is the "then" statement: *"then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day"* (verse 10b). This is the beginning of the "then" statement—God's promises. If the people did what God outlined in the two "if" statements (verses 9b and 10a), then they could expect light to dispel their darkness. The "then" is contingent upon the "if."

Light, in this context, is a metaphor for many positive things, such as blessings (see Psalm 112:4; Isaiah 9:2), the Word of God (see Psalms 43:3; 119:105), and God Himself (see Psalm 27:1). Darkness is a metaphor for negative things, such as wickedness (see 1 Samuel 2:9), imprisonment (see Psalm 107:10), and death (see Ecclesiastes 11:8). God promises those who are righteous that light will drive out their darkness, and the noonday sun will drive out their gloom.

When upright and compassionate persons call out to Yahweh for assistance, they can expect to receive an answer. He will not be distant from them but will respond as if saying, "Here I am"—eager and willing to render assistance.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

If God's people would couple their fasting with lives of righteousness and love, then they would see their prayers answered. They would have lives full of light, full of healing, full of righteousness, and full of the glory of the Lord. When they called out to God, the Lord would answer.

This lesson teaches that those who respond compassionately to the hungry and the afflicted are assured of God's blessing. Even when they may experience darkness in the form of personal troubles or distress, they can rest assured that the situation will change. God will sustain them or provide relief, causing them to

experience light or brightness in what would otherwise be darkness. Thus, the thick darkness or gloom would be as bright as midday or noon.

God desires us to live upright lives and not participate in empty rituals that do no good for ourselves or others, and that definitely do not please Him.

PRAYER

Our Father, help us to have a compassionate spirit toward those who are oppressed and may be living in situations that stifle their individuality. Please give us generous hearts and a willingness to help those who are hungry, homeless, and destitute. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 16-22, 2023)

God Promises Light in the Darkness

MONDAY, January 16: "Passing from Death to Life" (1 John 3:14-24)

TUESDAY, January 17: "You Are Light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:1-10)

WEDNESDAY, January 18: "Christ Will Shine upon You" (Ephesians 5:11-20)

THURSDAY, January 19: "'God's Word Lights My Path'" (Psalm 119:97-112)

FRIDAY, January 20: "Your Light Has Come" (Isaiah 60:1-8)

SATURDAY, January 21: "Jesus, the Light of the World" (John 8:12-20)

SUNDAY, January 22: "Joy in Obeying God" (Isaiah 58:1-14)

Notes

1. Wikipedia, "Isaiah," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah#:~:text=The%20traditional%20view%20is%20that,to%20restore%20the%20nation%20of.
2. Jim Haeffele, "Isaiah the Prophet," *Life, Hope & Truth*, https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/prophets/prophets-of-the-bible/isaiah-the-prophet/.
3. Tom Clark, "What Is Biblical Fasting?" *Life, Hope & Truth*, https://lifehopeandtruth.com/god/prayer-fasting-and-meditation/what-is-fasting/.
4. Adam Clarke, "Commentary on Isaiah 58:6," in *The Adam Clarke Commentary*, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/isaiah-58.html.

January 29, 2023 **Lesson 9**

GOD PROMISES TO BE PRESENT

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Promises of Restoration and Gladness
Youth Topic: Promises of Restoration and Gladness

Children
General Lesson Title: God Promises to Be Present
Children's Topic: Promises! Promises! Promises!

Devotional Reading
Exodus 33:12-23

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Joel 1:1-4; 2:18-31
Print Passage: Joel 2:21-27
Key Verse: Joel 2:27

Children
Background Scriptures: Joel 1:1-4; 2:18-31
Print Passage: Joel 2:21-27
Key Verse: Joel 2:27

Joel 2:21-27—KJV

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.
22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength.
23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.
24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.
25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.
26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and

Joel 2:21-27—NIV

21 Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things!
22 Do not be afraid, you wild animals, for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.
23 Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.
24 The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.
25 "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you.
26 "You will have plenty to eat, until you are full,

praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.
27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.
27 "Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People tend to mess up the world and their lives. Will the world and human life ever be better than they are? God promises to restore what has been ruined due to human actions and inactions.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Contrast the prophet's threats with God's promised restoration.
2. Explore feelings that accompany words of threat and words of restoration.
3. Offer a prayer of thanks for God's restorations.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The character attribute of jealousy is often ascribed to God in the Old Testament and is especially present in the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy–2 Kings). There, it frequently refers to God's strict prohibition of worshipping other deities. In other instances, it can mean something closer to *zealous*, indicating God's absolute commitment to His covenant people, as it means here in 2:18 (Background Scripture).

—Strikingly, the Lord's commitment is to both "his land" and "his people" (2:18). Salvation is holistic, not limited to humanity or the individual soul. The direct addresses "Do not fear, O soil" (2:21, NRSV), "Do not fear, you animals of the field" (2:22, NRSV), and ultimately "O children of Zion, be glad" (2:23, NRSV) demonstrate God's faithfulness to creation and humanity and may provide a biblical foundation for environmental ethics. Human flourishing is bound up with environmental sustainability.

—Much of the restoration of the land, fields, pastures, and so forth is understood as the repayment for what had been lost through the curse of locusts, which was also alluded to in Joel 1:4. Four types of locusts are mentioned: cutting, swarming, hopping, and destroying (see 1:4; 2:25). According to some commentaries, this detail may indicate four different species of locusts or four distinct invasions, but most agree that the effect is rhetorical/symbolic, indicating the culminating and completely devastating effect of the curse of divine judgment.

—In Joel 2:27, in order to assure Israel of His presence "in the midst of Israel," the Lord invokes covenantal language, referring to His distinct statement "I am the LORD your

God and there is no other" (NKJV) and His identifying Israel as "my people."

—Many emotions are summoned through this passage: in addition to the Lord's jealousy, God's children are told to be glad and rejoice and they are given the double assurance (in 2:26-27) that they will "never again be put to shame."

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Dating the writing of the book of Joel remains one of the most challenging tasks for Old Testament scholars because, unlike most prophetic writers, Joel gave no explicit indication of his timeline. In particular, Joel refrained from mentioning the current ruling kings. One of the most compelling arguments for dating the writing of the book of Joel explains this omission by suggesting that the prophecy occurred in the aftermath of Judah's only ruling queen, Athaliah (around 835 BC). Her young grandson Joash succeeded Athaliah upon her death. But because Joash was too young to rule, the priest Jehoiada ruled in his place until he came of age. So, if Joel prophesied during this caretaking period, then it would make sense that he mentioned no official king.

The book of Joel also makes several references to priests, temple rituals, and nations (such as Phoenicia, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom) that were prominent in the late ninth century BC. This points to approximately 835 BC or soon after, making Joel one of the earliest writing prophets and a contemporary of the prophet Elisha.

However, there is another view concerning the timing of the writing of this book. Some biblical historians suggest that Joel wrote his book around 600 BC, which would place him in the frantic final years of the nation of Judah. In 587/586 BC, the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and carried many of the leading citizens of Judah into captivity in Babylon. It is widely agreed that Joel is the author of this book that bears his name. In chapter 1, verse 1 of his book, the prophet Joel identified himself as the son of Pethuel. Many scholars believe that Joel was a farmer or a herdsman due to his many references to agriculture. One of the notable features of this prophetic book is that Joel does not mention any kings of Judah or Israel. Neither does he share any historical events that would provide us with a conclusive indication of when he wrote his book. Scholars also believe that Joel was a contemporary of the prophet Zephaniah's due to the similarity in their usage of the phrase "the day of the Lord." Zephaniah prophesied just before the fall of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah in 587 BC.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The nation of Judah, which is the setting for the book, was devastated by a vast swarm of locusts. This invasion of locusts destroyed everything—the grain fields, the vineyards, the gardens, and the trees. Joel used this natural phenomenon to teach his readers/listeners an object lesson. He symbolically describes the locusts as a marching human army and views all of this as divine judgment coming against the nation for her sins. Two significant events highlight this prophetic book: one is the invasion of locusts, and the other the outpouring of the Spirit.

The prophet Joel spoke to the Southern Kingdom of Judah without referring to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It is hard to know the exact time of his writing because Joel does

not mention any other kings or prophets. Many scholars date the book of Joel to 835 BC. If the date of 835 BC is accepted, then Joel would have been a *pre-exilic* prophet who served before the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (which occurred in 721 BC) and that of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (which took place in 586 BC). Other pre-exilic prophets include Obadiah, Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Joel is one of the earliest prophets—only Obadiah prophesied before his time (845 BC).

Historians have noted that the year of 835 BC was a time of tumult and transition in Judah, marked by the end of the reign of the Queen Mother Athaliah and the beginning of the reign of King Joash. Athaliah seized power at the sudden death (in battle) of her son Ahaziah, who only reigned one year (see 2 Kings 8:26; 11:1). Athaliah killed all her sons' heirs (her grandsons), except for one who was hidden in the Temple and escaped—one-year-old Joash (see 2 Kings 11:3). Her six-year reign of terror ended in 835 BC when the High Priest Jehoiada overthrew Athaliah and set the seven-year-old Joash on the throne (see 2 Kings 11:4-21).

Additionally, historians indicate that during her six years as queen over Judah, Athaliah reigned wickedly. She was the granddaughter of the ungodly King Omri of Israel, making her the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, all of whom culminated into one of Israel's worst royal families (see 2 Kings 8:26). Athaliah raised her son Ahaziah to reign in the wicked pattern of Ahab and even brought in Ahab's counselors to advise him (see 2 Chronicles 22:2-4). When Ahaziah was killed in battle, Athaliah seized power and set her other sons to do evil, even desecrating the Temple and its sacred things (see 2 Chronicles 24:7).

And so, if we are accurate in assuming that Joel prophesied in 835 BC, then the judgment he described came toward the end of the six-year reign of godlessness and evil under Queen Athaliah. No wonder God brought a heavy hand down on Judah!

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Joel: a prophet of ancient Israel, the second of the twelve minor prophets and, according to the book itself, he was the author of the book of Joel. He is mentioned by name only once in the Hebrew Bible—in the introduction to that book, as the son of Pethuel.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Locust (verse 25)—Hebrew: *arbeh* (ar-beh'): (a kind of) locust, grasshopper; an insect that devastates and invades.

Shamed (verse 27)—Hebrew: *bosh* (boosh): to be ashamed, put to shame; utterly dejected; "ashamed" (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. The Power of a Promise
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Rejoice because of God's Past Acts (Joel 2:21)
B. Rejoice because of God's Provision of Food (Joel 2:22-26)
C. Rejoice because of God's Presence (Joel 2:27)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Power of a Promise

The interesting thing about a promise is its power to change us long before any of the promises are even realized. Because a promise gives something to look forward to, hope for, and anticipate, it holds great power in the present without even being realized until much later.

In a sermon titled "Power of Promises," the Rev. Dennis Marquardt stated the following: "One of those exciting moments as a young child is when your parents promise you something special. The moment the promise was made everything was different . . . even though the actual fulfillment of the promise was a ways off. It had the power of changing the entire atmosphere for the moment, and even your behavior. There was anticipation, and sometimes there was even greater obedience when the promise was conditional . . . like 'I promise . . . if you are good.'"[1]

God uses promises in much the same way to change us in the present, give us hope amid despair, and anticipate something more significant and better when we have little to base any joy on in the moment. God's promises alone can empower us to live in such a way as to confound the world, and it also has the power to keep us moving in the right direction against tremendous odds.

B. Biblical Background

In this chapter, we see a very desperate situation. Locusts and other insects had swarmed to such a degree that there is no vegetation left. All the crops were gone, and the people of God were facing famine. In our world today, things are getting desperate; people are hurting, fearful, and overwhelmed with the trials of life. God will send a revival, but it won't come easy.

A close review of this section of Joel's prophecy suggests that much of the restoration of the land, fields, pastures, and so forth is understood as the repayment for what had been lost through the curse of locusts, which was also alluded to in Joel 1:4. Four types of locusts are mentioned: cutting, swarming, hopping, and destroying locusts (see 1:4; 2:25). According to some commentaries, this detail may indicate four different species of locusts or four distinct invasions. Still, most agree that the effect is rhetorical/symbolic, indicating (through a spiritual lens) the culminating and completely devastating effect of the curse of divine judgment.

Locusts are destructive creatures. A swarm may have a population of billions, and wherever they go, they devour and destroy all vegetation. They are speedy creatures who appear suddenly and disappear just as quickly.

A severe famine throughout the land followed this terrible plague of locusts. Joel used these happenings as the catalyst to send words of warning to Judah. Unless the

people repented wholly and quickly, enemy armies would devour the land as natural elements did. Joel appealed to all the people and the priests of the land to fast and humble themselves as they sought God's forgiveness. If they responded, then there would be renewed material and spiritual blessings for the nation. But the Day of the Lord was coming. At that time, the dreaded locusts would seem as gnats in comparison, as all nations receive His judgment.

The overriding theme of the book of Joel is the Day of the Lord—a day of God's wrath and judgment. This is the day in which God reveals His attributes of wrath, power, and holiness, and it is a terrifying day to His enemies. In the first chapter of the book of Joel, the Day of the Lord is experienced historically by the plague of locusts upon the land. Joel 2:1-17 is a transitional group of verses in which Joel uses the metaphor of the locust plague and drought to renew a call to repentance. Joel 2:18–3:21 describes the Day of the Lord in eschatological terms and answers the call to repentance with prophecies of physical restoration (see 2:21-27), spiritual restoration (see 2:28-32), and national restoration see (3:1-21). This lesson focuses on the prophetic utterance regarding physical restoration.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Rejoice because of God's Past Acts (Joel 2:21)

Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.

The prophet Joel called on the land—personified to represent its people—to rejoice because the Lord had done great things (in contrast to the enemy army; see Joel 2:20). The NIV, RSV, and NRSV interpret the last line of Joel 2:20 as referring to the Lord, but it probably refers to the invading army—as the NASB and ASV translate it. Specifically, God had delivered His people from a much larger and more powerful enemy invasion, assuming the people of Judah's repentance. The animals, too, could stop fearing because God's blessing had returned to the land. Green pastures replaced brown, and trees and vines had become abundantly fruitful rather than dry and lifeless.

Verse 21 should be interpreted in light of the preceding verses 12-20. Although God is the one who sent the judgment of locusts, it was not too late for the people to ask for His mercy. However, this must be accompanied by genuine inward repentance, not just by the outward show of torn clothing, sackcloth, and ashes. God may then restore their fields and vineyards, and they would be able to worship Him with their grain and wine offerings again.

It is significant to recognize that the present rejoicing over God's actions is invariably connected to His past acts. We can irrefutably state that God has an excellent track record, and His past actions of protection provide the context for present-day rejoicing.

If the people genuinely repented, then God would accept their repentance and promise to remove the locusts. He would drive them out to perish in the desert regions to the south, the Dead Sea to the east, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. At first, there may be some unpleasantness because of the smell from the millions of decaying locust carcasses—with some lying in heaps on the ground and others

washed up onto the shores. But after this, the land would become productive again.

The first words of verse 21, "Fear not," are words that carry profound weight because God spoke them. The land could rejoice, just as we can, because the Creator of the universe had spoken, and He would "do great things." The people and the land had gone through lots of turmoil, but now God was about to bring about restoration, giving a reason for all to rejoice.

Into this maze of fear that surrounded life when this text was written, it is helpful to remember that some form of "fear not" is one of the common addresses (if not the most common address) to humanity in Scripture.

At the time of the writing of this lesson, Russia, under its president Vladimir Putin, led an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Millions of people fled the nation to escape bombardment by Russian artillery. Civilians who remained in the country were shot down in the streets and bombed in shopping malls, hospitals, and residential complexes. Major cities have been reduced to rubble. Fear is widespread throughout Ukraine and in the hearts of Ukraine's allies and neighbors. Our world needs to hear this reassuring word from the Lord: *Fear not!*

B. Rejoice because of God's Provision of Food (Joel 2:22-26)

Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpiller, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

In 2:22, the prophet addressed the field's beasts, admonishing them not to be afraid because the pastures were restored. It is noteworthy that the present tense is the context of this verse. Joel says that the pastures ARE green, the tree IS BEARING its fruit, and the fig tree and vine ARE GIVING their full yield. One of the phenomenal insights from Scripture is that God can call those things that are not as though they are. What may be in the future for us is already God's present. Isaiah 46:10 highlights this phenomenon: "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (NKJV).

Understand that this would be a stunning miracle according to nature's timetable. Why? Because the restoration of these crops would typically take time. However, God can call into existence right now what would take years to come to fruition.

In verse 23, the children of Zion or God's people are encouraged to "be glad." The productivity of the land would return to normal, and this would be the result of the former and the latter rains' returning to water the earth on schedule. The mention of the "former rain" implies that God would give it not merely for the demands of that season when Joel spake but also for the future in the regular course of nature—the Autumn and the spring rain. The former rain is required for the sowing in Autumn, as the latter is necessary in Spring to mature the young crop. This is a sign of God's

faithfulness to His people and the covenant He made with His people.

The seasonal rains mentioned in verse 23 would result in an abundance of all food articles (verse 24). Wheat would be abundant, and new wine and oil would overflow their vats or containers. This was another sign of God's favor and His actions to return the land to normalcy.

Scripture states in verse 25 that God would restore what had been lost to the full-grown consuming locusts and what had been lost to the less-destructive licking locusts, swarming locusts, and gnawing locusts. The *locusts* did not just destroy the produce of *that year* but so completely ate up all the *buds* and the barks of the *trees* that they would not recover for *some years*. Here, God promises that He would either *prevent* or *remedy* that evil, for He would *restore the years'* worth of crops that the *locusts, canker-worms, caterpillars*, and *palmerworms* had eaten.

The phrase at the end of verse 25, "my great army which I sent among you," refers to the locusts, since that is the subject being discussed. This isolated use of the expression here does not deny its symbolic and figurative use, and it is a reminder of the greater disaster symbolized by the locusts.

John Calvin says the following about this ending phrase of verse 25: "By calling this army great, he shows that God has no need of strong forces to subdue men; for when he prepares locusts and insects, which are but little things, they snatch food from the mouths of men and leave them in want; though no one puts forth a sword against them, they yet pine away with hunger. The Prophet then derides here the arrogance of men, and shows that God needs not do much, when he intends to reduce them to nothing."[2]

In verse 26, the following assurance is given to God's people: "The people would have plenty to eat and would feel satisfied physically. They would also be full spiritually and praise Yahweh their God for working wonders for them. . . . They would never be put to shame, again assuming that they continued in their attitude of humble trust and obedience (cf. Joel 2:19). God's blessings would evidence His presence among them and the intimacy of their fellowship with Him. . . . They would realize in their experience that He is the only true God . . . , and they would abide in that shameless condition (as long as they remained faithful to Him)."[3]

The results of God's restoration of the land would be both physical and spiritual. Physically, God's people shall eat in plenty and be satisfied. Spiritually, they would "praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you." God's restoration would be complete. God never leaves anything incomplete, and He always completes whatever He starts.

C. Rejoice because of God's Presence (Joel 2:27)

And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

The conclusion of this section of Joel's prophecy summarizes God's intention for His acts of restoration. God declares, "And My people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the LORD your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame" (verses 26b-27, NKJV). God must deal with sin, but when His people repent, they find abundant blessings that more than compensate for what was lost in the judgment. His grace abounds.

Notice in verse 27 that the promise of restoration was only made to those to whom God referred as "my people." That does not just mean people who were born Jews; rather, it refers to those who had chosen to obey God's command to repent. Not everyone gets to experience the benefit of restoration.

Whatever is broken in our lives, God can use that to bring blessings to us: "I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, ... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God" (Joel 2:25, 26a, NRSV).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Without repentance, judgment would be harsh, thorough, and certain. Our trust should not be in our possessions but in the Lord our God. God, at times, may use nature, sorrow, loss, or calamity to draw us closer to Him. But in His mercy and grace God has provided the definitive plan for our salvation—Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and exchanging our sin for His perfect righteousness.

God is a God of redemption and restoration. He can redeem and make use of any situation. We see it here with His promise to the nation of Israel, and we see it in His faithfulness to believers today. Look at this beautiful promise of God: "I will repay you for the years that the locusts have eaten" (see Joel 2:25). You may have had years of devastation—but He can redeem it! He can repay you for the years that the locusts have eaten. Can you think of a situation that devastated your life? Always trust and believe that God can turn a situation around and make something good come out of that which is bad.

PRAYER

Father, for many people, life has been ravaged by destroying locusts. Many of us have faced oppressive conditions; however, we know that You are a restorer. Thank You for restoring the years the locusts have taken. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 23-29, 2023)

God Promises to Be Present

MONDAY, January 23: "Christ Has Come in the Flesh" (1 John 4:1-8)
TUESDAY, January 24: "God's Love Is Revealed among Us" (1 John 4:9-21)
WEDNESDAY, January 25: "The Testimony in Our Hearts" (1 John 5:10-21)
THURSDAY, January 26: "God Will Go with You" (Exodus 33:12-23)
FRIDAY, January 27: "The Lord, Merciful and Gracious" (Exodus 34:5-17)
SATURDAY, January 28: "God Is Near despite Adversity" (Joel 1:1-4, 14-20)
SUNDAY, January 29: "God Will Pour Out the Spirit" (Joel 2:18-31)

Notes

1. Rev. Dennis Marquardt, "Power of Promises," Introduction, nnedaog.org/sermons/SERPROM.HTM.
2. John Calvin, "Commentary on Joel 2:25," in *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible,* https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/joel-2.html.
3. Thomas Constable, "Commentary on Joel 2:26," in *Dr. Constable's Expository Notes,* https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/joel-2.html?print=yes.

February 5, 2023 **Lesson 10**

NOT MANY ELITE CALLED

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Wisdom and Foolishness
Youth Topic: Wisdom and Foolishness

Children
General Lesson Title: God Chooses Us
Children's Topic: Called into a Special Relationship

Devotional Reading
Psalm 25:1-15

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Print Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Adult Key Verses: 1 Corinthians 1:28-29
Youth Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:27

Children
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Print Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:27

1 Corinthians 1:18-31—KJV

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.
19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.
20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?
21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.
22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:
23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;
24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and

1 Corinthians 1:18-31—NIV

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."
20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.
22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,
23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and

Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.
25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
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:
31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.
26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,
29 so that no one may boast before him.
30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Humans can be strengthened through maintaining daily relationships with those who provide good counsel. Where do we find true wisdom when facing life's challenges? God calls us into relationship with Jesus—who is the source of wisdom, understanding, and guidance.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Contrast God's wisdom with the foolishness of people.
2. Affirm the wisdom in following Jesus Christ.
3. Perform actions accordingly as they are strengthened by Jesus.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In this passage, Paul addresses a very significant concern or problem of the early church: the scandal of a crucified Messiah.

—Paul's Jewish contemporaries did not expect the Messiah to suffer and die. Rather, as made clear in a Jewish text from that period called the *Psalms of Solomon* 17, the Messiah was expected to conquer and oust the forces that occupied Jerusalem—not be crucified by them.

—Paul cites Isaiah 29:14 in verse 19 to demonstrate

from Scripture that God confounds human wisdom and expectations.

—Paul stresses that Christ crucified is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (verse 23, NIV). The Greek word here translated "stumbling block" is *skandalon*, from which we get the English word *scandal*. This message was scandalous because whereas the Messiah was expected to be triumphant, powerful, and conquering, the death that Christ suffered was considered shameful and a sign of defeat and weakness.

—The difference of perspective is seen in Paul's contrast between "God's foolishness" and "human wisdom" (see verse 25). There is an interesting parallel to this in Matthew 16, where immediately after Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah, Peter insists that Jesus not be crucified. Jesus responds, saying to Peter, "You are a stumbling block (*skandalon*) to me" (verse 23b, NIV) and Jesus likewise contrasts "divine things" and "human things." For both Matthew and Paul, the "scandal" of the crucified Messiah was only comprehensible as divine revelation, not through human understanding.

—The foolishness of the Greeks/Gentiles/human community is contrasted with the wisdom of God. Paul contends that God has turned the "wisdom of the world" on its head, making it foolish with the Cross. The "wisdom of the world" is the kind that refuses to know God through the crucified Christ, Israel's Messiah.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is commonly agreed upon by most biblical scholars that the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians bear the unmistakable marks of Pauline authorship. This first epistle was written from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey, believed to be around AD 56. In the book of Acts, chapter 18, verses 1-8, we find the record of the founding of the Corinthian church. During Paul's second missionary journey, he traveled alone from Athens to Corinth around AD 51. While there in Corinth, he developed a partnership with a Jewish-Christian couple named Aquila and Priscilla. Apparently, Emperor Claudius expelled them from Rome because they were Jewish Christians. When Paul left Corinth eighteen months later, a Christian congregation was flourishing. That congregation consisted primarily of former pagans converted to Christianity.

During Paul's third missionary journey, he received word about immorality among the congregation at Corinth. Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthian church in response to that news. That letter has apparently been lost. That letter failed to correct the problem in the church. Paul then wrote a second letter, which is 1 Corinthians; however, that letter also failed to correct the problem.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Corinth was an important and wealthy city on the isthmus (narrow strip of land) separating northern and southern Greece. The apostle Paul spent eighteen months there on his second missionary journey and established a church there.

"Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from the city of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia (16:8, 19) sometime before the final day of Pentecost . . . , and therefore in the spring. It is unclear whether this was the spring of AD 53, 54, or 55. He wrote, in any case, near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:5-9; cf. Acts 19:21-22). Both Corinth and Ephesus were wealthy port cities steeped in pagan idolatry and philosophy. Corinth benefited both militarily and economically from its strategic location at one end of the isthmus that

connected the southern Greek peninsula to the mainland."[1]

The following is more information regarding the geographical and cultural atmosphere of the time of Paul's writing:

> Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth, a large commercial city with around 500,000 people, the capital of Achaia. It was very religious and very immoral. Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos helped Paul establish the church. Corinth sat on the isthmus connecting the Greek mainland with the Peloponnesian peninsula. This location made it a flourishing crossroads for sea traffic between the Aegean region and the western Mediterranean. It was a place where many cultures and religions mingled. Since it was a Roman colony, Roman law and customs were important, particularly among the upper classes, but "many 'gods' and many 'lords'" found a home in Corinth (8:5). The worship of these gods was fully integrated into governmental affairs, civic festivals, trade guilds, social clubs, and everyday life in general. Corinth was also a destination for traveling professional orators who charged a fee for attendance at their entertaining rhetorical displays and advised people on how to advance socially.[2]

Paul's contemporaries did not expect the Messiah to suffer and die. Instead, as made clear in a Jewish text from that period called the *Psalms of Solomon* 17, the Messiah was expected to conquer and oust the forces that occupied Jerusalem, not be crucified by them.

Paul cites Isaiah 29:14 in verse 19 to demonstrate from Scripture that God confounds human wisdom and expectations.

Paul stresses that Christ crucified is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (verse 23, NIV). The Greek word here translated "stumbling block" is *skandalon*, from which we get the English word *scandal*. This message was scandalous because whereas the Messiah was expected to be triumphant, powerful, and conquering, the death that Christ suffered was considered shameful and a sign of defeat and weakness.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: a Diaspora Jew, a member of the party of the Pharisees, who experienced a revelation of the resurrected Jesus. After this experience, he traveled widely throughout the eastern Roman Empire, spreading the "good news" that Jesus would soon return from heaven and usher in the reign of God ("the kingdom").

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Foolishness (verse 18)—Greek: *mória* (mo-ree'-ah): folly; absurdity.
Weak (verse 27)—Greek: *asthenés* (as-then-ace'): without strength; feeble; sick; helpless.
Wise (verse 19)—Greek: *sophos* (sof-os'): learned; skilled; clever; cultivated.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Words of Wisdom
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Message of the Cross: Foolishness versus Power (1 Corinthians 1:18)
- B. The Results of God's Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:19-21)
- C. Human Response to the Message of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)
- D. The Reason for God's Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Words of Wisdom

As we meander through this life, we will encounter many words of wisdom by persons motivated by an effort to provide life-changing and life-affirming insights to help others along life's road. Here are some of those words of wisdom:

"*Doubt is the origin of wisdom.*"—Augustine of Hippo

"*The truest wisdom is a resolute determination.*"—Napoleon Bonaparte

"*Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life.*"—Immanuel Kant

"*Foolishness is a twin sister of wisdom.*"—Witold Gombrowicz

"*Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.*"—Albert Einstein

"*Wisdom is the power to put our time and our knowledge to the proper use.*"—Thomas J. Watson Jr.

"*It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, that is poor.*"—Seneca

"*A wise man never loses anything, if he has himself.*"—Michel de Montaigne

"*Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom.*"—Francis Bacon

"*A symptom of wisdom is curiosity. The evidence is calmness and perseverance. The causes are experimentation and understanding.*"—Maxime Lagace

Many people are guided by colloquial expressions and words of parental wisdom that may have been short on intellectual savvy but rich in profundity. Some of those words of wisdom are as follows:

- *Nothing in life is free. You have to work hard to get what you want in life; you can't skip the 'work hard' part.*
- *Always have "two hands on the broom." If you are going to do a job, do it properly and with effort.*
- *Buy land. It's the one thing they are not making more of.*
- *If a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well.*

Without a doubt, the greatest words of wisdom come from God. This lesson will explore Paul's teachings concerning the wisdom of God, which, to some, is considered foolishness.

B. Biblical Background

Paul wrote this letter in response to a report from the household of a woman in Corinth, Chloe, concerning problems and improprieties in the Corinthian church (see 1 Corinthians 1:11). The problems that Paul faced in the Corinthian church were multifaceted and volatile. This letter—which served as a rebuttal to what was

going on in the Corinthian church—is rich and profound in theological insight. Like its neighbor Athens, Corinth symbolized Greek culture in its desire for wisdom and power.

In this letter, Paul provides apostolic guidance for dealing with those problems. The first of those problems concerned divisions in the church, which he dealt with in verses 10-17—and which he will deal with in greater detail in chapter 3.

Now Paul turned his attention to the Cross of Christ. The Cross raises issues for both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles). Ancient Corinth was a Greek city with a substantial Jewish population. While living in Corinth, Paul worked among both Jews and Greeks, and both were represented in the Corinthian church. The Cross of Christ seemed like foolishness both to the Jews—who expected a powerful Messiah—and to the Greeks, who placed a high value on human wisdom (Greek: *sophia*). To the Jews, the cross appeared to be weakness, not strength. To the Greeks, the cross appeared to be foolishness, not wisdom. Paul addresses both perceptions in these verses.

In the assigned text for this lesson, Paul addresses the very significant concern or problem of the early church: the scandal of a crucified Messiah—the reality of the Cross. The foolishness of the Greeks/Gentiles/human community is contrasted with the wisdom of God. Paul contends that God has turned the world's "wisdom" on its head, making it foolish by the Cross. The "wisdom of the world" is the kind that refuses to know God through the crucified Christ, Israel's Messiah.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Message of the Cross: Foolishness versus Power

(1 Corinthians 1:18)

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

What is the "preaching of the cross"? Adam Clarke, in his commentary, says that it is the following: "The doctrine of the cross; or the doctrine that is of or concerning the cross; that is, the doctrine that proclaims salvation to a lost world through the crucifixion of Christ."[3]

The preaching of the Cross was the distinctive message of the apostle Paul, and it was the Gospel he preached—that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead for our salvation. Indeed, we can declare that it is a simple message yet profound in its implication. Its explanation is simple; however, its ramifications are complex.

R. L. Hymers Jr. says the following: "'The preaching of the cross' is preaching that shows you that you are 'dead in your sins' (Colossians 2:13), and that only the substitutionary death of Christ in your place, could pay vicariously for your sins, cancelling your sins, and giving you new life by Christ's resurrection from the dead."[4]

Verse 18a—***Here is the "foolishness"****: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness."* This verse introduces the rest of this chapter, where Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world (human wisdom) with the wisdom of God. God's wisdom finds its highest expression in the apparent foolishness of the Cross of Jesus

Christ. The Cross appears to be foolishness—nonsense for those who pride themselves on their wisdom. Those who are under the banner of foolishness may ask, "Why would God send His Son to die on a cross?" By the standards of human wisdom, it makes no sense! But human wisdom, attractive as it might seem on the surface, has no saving power. No matter how intelligent they might be, people who depend on human wisdom alone are perishing. They are like people whose ship has gone down in the middle of a great ocean. Even if they have Olympic swimming skills, those people will have no hope of reaching shore independently. They need a lifeboat or, better yet, a ship to save them. The ultimate foolishness for such people would be to refuse help from a rescue vessel.

Verse 18b—*Here is the "power":* *"but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."* Those who are being saved have acknowledged their powerlessness and God's power. They understand that they cannot defeat the sin that threatens to dominate their lives, so they have learned to trust in the grace of God. That grace was manifested most fully at the Cross of Christ, where Christ not only prayed that God would forgive those who crucified Him but also opened the door to forgiveness for all who would come to believe in Him. Thus, the Cross, which seems like foolishness to those immersed in human wisdom, is the instrument of salvation for those who are being saved. The whole idea of salvation from sin through the death of Christ on the cross appears foolish to the average person, but to believers, it shows God's power.

B. The Results of God's Wisdom

(1 Corinthians 1:19-21)

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

In the previous verse, Paul argued that salvation is based upon God's power, not upon the wise words of philosophers. Here, he appealed to the Old Testament to prove his point ("For it is written"). It is evident from the words of the prophet Isaiah that humanity's opinion is regarded as nothing in God's estimation. The passage quoted in verse 19 is taken from Isaiah 29:14, where the Lord threatens that He will avenge Himself upon the hypocrisy of the people by this kind of punishment—that wisdom will perish from the wise. The Lord decided to punish the arrogance of those who, depending on their own judgment, thought/think themselves to be wise leaders of others when, really, they simply harbored human arrogance. And so, among the Israelite people, God decided to destroy the wisdom of those who were the leaders of the people.

One does not have to hold a theology degree to recognize that God's way has always been different from the ways of the world. One writer wrote, "God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm." Whether persons be Greek philosophers, Jewish scholars, or just ordinary citizens, they are inclined to think that their schemes and ideas are full of wisdom; but God shows them up to be foolish.

Paul affirms that God, in His wisdom, saves people by way of the Cross and no other way. Salvation is not gained through

the accumulation of knowledge or through seminary courses. Salvation only comes by faith—through accepting the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and confessing that God raised Jesus from the dead. Some people may think the claims of the Cross's message to be foolish, but no matter how much they try to know God through their wisdom, they will never succeed. God cannot be scientifically "discovered." He can only be known through His initiative of revelation.

In the *Forerunner Commentary*, an article on 1 Corinthians 1:19-21 states the following:

> God has purposely chosen this means to put proud and stiff-necked man totally in debt to Him for the most important achievement in all of life. Men have accomplished much and will continue to do many great things. However, verses 19-21 expose why the wise of this world will not submit to God. The reason becomes evident in the phrase, "the foolishness of preaching" (verse 21, King James Version [KJV]). This translation is somewhat misleading in the King James; it should [perhaps] read "the foolishness of the message preached," as in the New King James Version (NKJV). Paul is not saying that the wise of this world reject the act of preaching but that they consider the content of the message preached to be foolish. In other words, the wise will not believe the gospel, most specifically that God in the flesh has died for the sins of the world.[5]

It is noteworthy to recognize the following through preaching that God is revealed to man that man might believe. Now, notice that it is the "foolishness of preaching," not the preaching of foolishness—so be careful of that.

C. Human Response to the Message of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Verse 22a—*For the Jews require a sign.*

The Jews wanted miraculous signs to prove that Jesus is the mighty Messiah, but instead, they saw Him crucified. To them, this did not show power but weakness. In their view, a crucified Messiah is a stumbling block, something that they would not believe and that consequently prevented them from receiving God's salvation.

Adam Clarke, in his commentary on verse 22, wrote the following:

> There never was a people in the universe more difficult to be persuaded of the truth than the Jews: and had not their religion been incontestably proved by the most striking and indubitable miracles, they never would have received it. This slowness of heart to believe, added to their fear of being deceived, induced them to require miracles to attest every thing that professed to come from God. They were a wicked and adulterous generation, continually seeking signs, and never saying, It is enough. But the sign which seems particularly referred to here is the assumption of secular power, which they expected in the Messiah; and because this sign did not

appear in Christ, therefore they rejected him.[6]

Verse 22b—*and the Greeks seek after wisdom.*

As for the Greeks, they considered the whole idea to be mere foolishness. It was the characteristic of the Greek philosophers to seek schemes of philosophy and religion that depend on human wisdom. Therefore, they despised the Gospel because it did not make philosophical sense, and they could not wrap their human minds around the tenets of the Gospel's message.

The Greeks paid attention to philosophy. They were enamored by wisdom and the so-called profundity of philosophical arguments. Thus, if Jesus had come and proclaimed a new type of wisdom, then the Greeks would have found His teachings appealing. Instead of coming with a new philosophy, Jesus came with a message that involved a cross and death by crucifixion. This message did not have a lot of appeal to either the Greeks or the Hebrews.

As alluded to in verse 23, the message of the Cross did not sit well with many in Paul's day; however, Paul and others preached it anyway. One scholar stated that Paul argued that finite, sinful men could not dictate to an infinite, holy God what they want from God before they will believe—unlike today, when many will "preach what the people want" (Paul once called this having "itching ears" [see 2 Timothy 4:3]). Paul preached the Gospel that is God's power to salvation. Instead of working miracles to satisfy the Jews or advocating a philosophy to entertain the Greeks, he said that we preach Christ crucified (which, to the Jews, is a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, foolishness). Paul preached the only message that he could preach—the message God gave—that Jesus is the "propitiation" for the sins of humanity.

Paul's gospel to believers, whether Jews or Greeks, gives proof of God's power and wisdom. The Cross alone can conquer sin and bring salvation. That which the Greeks thought to be foolish proved to be wiser than anything people could/can imagine. That which the Jews thought to be weak proved to be stronger than anything that people could accomplish.

Verse 25 reminds us of Isaiah 55:8-9, in which Isaiah said that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not ours. God is far superior to man. He is so far above us that His "foolishness" (*moros*) is far "wiser" (*sophos*, the same word used in verses 19 and 20) than our best plans and ideas. Foolishness describes God's plan of redemption, and He did what many in the world believe to be foolish. God is far superior to man, no matter how advanced the human race becomes.

D. The Reason for God's Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

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: 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: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

James Coffman, in his commentary on verse 26, wrote the following:

> Many of the earliest Christians were slaves, a majority were poor, most were

> uneducated; and few of them had any claim to distinction in the wretched world of their day; but they were the roots from which all that is holy and beautiful has blossomed in succeeding centuries. . . . Look at that congregation in Corinth, rescued from the dens of vice and debauchery, gleaned from the dregs of a cruel and heartless society, recruited from the hopeless ranks of slaves, delivered from the treadmills of commerce and industry; but Christ redeemed them, named upon them the eternal name, announced from heaven the plenary discharge of their sins, and made them partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Thank God for the church at Corinth and everywhere.[7]

"According to verse 26, most members of the Corinthian congregation were not from the upper class of society (the socially elite). Neither were these Christian philosophers. The Christians at Corinth were from the lower strata of society (common people) who did not hold positions of power and did not have wealth and influence. The Expositor's Greek Testament (2:771) said the names of the first Christians prove that most of the first converts were either slaves or people who had formerly been slaves."[8]

As proof that this salvation has nothing to do with human wisdom, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the types of people who made up their church. Few of them held important academic, political, or social positions. Yet, God had taken them and made them His people to prove that He does not accept anyone based on natural ability or worldly status. No one can therefore boast before Him. Wisdom is found not in personal achievement but in what God has done in Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God has made believers right with Himself, declared them holy, and set them free from the power of sin. Everything centers on Christ. As believers, we have the privilege of boasting in Him alone.

God's unique approach in verse 27 is interesting from another perspective, too. Wise intellectuals are usually not concerned about those they consider to be illiterate or uneducated. But God takes the foolish things and confounds the wise. Strong men are often unconcerned about those who are weak, and the weak are often ignored and even despised. In the spiritual realm, God uses the "weak things of the world" to put to shame the things that are "strong." Whatever person, nation, system, object, etc., seems to be very powerful to us will never be any match for God.

God does not want any flesh to glory in His sight, and so He uses the foolishness of preaching—and He uses simple people, ordinary people—to do His work because He wants the glory for the work that He does.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, humans have been exalting themselves against God by choosing to do things their way. However, there is only one way that works eternally: all human beings must see their weaknesses and recognize their need for salvation by grace. This realization does wonders for a person's self-assessment, making humility possible. This, in turn, makes it possible for him or her to yield to God, which makes it possible to deal with other human beings, not with a high hand or as a master to a slave, but as a friend—as an understanding

brother or sister who has gone through similar experiences and seen his or her failures, and who can commiserate with, sympathize with, show compassion and mercy toward, encourage, and inspire the one who has failed.

God will work in each person and do it so that the person will realize that merely knowing the truth and believing it—and even acting on it—are not enough. God must save them by grace.

This is not to say that works are unimportant. They are vital to maintaining and developing a relationship with God. They are essential in building character, and in this sense, we will have difficulty showing our salvation without works. If nothing else, one's doing good works shows that a relationship exists between that person and God. So, works are essential to earning rewards, building character, and providing a witness for God, but they still will not save us in and of themselves—because since we are imperfect, then our works are also terribly flawed.

PRAYER

Eternal Father, thank You for showing us that human wisdom is incapable of meeting Your requirements in terms of salvation. You continually confound even the smartest among us because You are omniscient. Help us to rely more on Your wisdom each day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(January 30–February 5, 2023)

Not Many Elite Called

MONDAY, January 30: "The Last Will Be First" (Matthew 20:1, 6-16)
TUESDAY, January 31: "'God, Teach and Guide Me'" (Psalm 25:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, February 1: "How Majestic Is God's Name!" (Psalm 8)
THURSDAY, February 2: "God Will Build You a House" (2 Samuel 7:1, 4-17)
FRIDAY, February 3: "'Who Am I before God?'" (2 Samuel 7:18-29)
SATURDAY, February 4: "God Confounds the Wise" (1 Corinthians 1:18-24)
SUNDAY, February 5: "God Chooses the Lowly and Despised" (1 Corinthians 1:25-31)

Notes

1. "The Setting of 1 Corinthians," http://www.tcbchurch.org/sites/tcbchurch.com/files/pictures/Messages/Other/The%20Setting%20of%201%20Corinthians.pdf
2. Ibid.
3. Adam Clarke, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:18," in *The Adam Clarke Commentary,* https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/1-corinthians-1.html.
4. sermonsfortheworld.com, www.rlhymersjr.com/Online_Sermons/2007/042907AM_PreachingTheCross.html.
5. https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/6106/Foolishness-Preaching.htm/
6. Adam Clarke, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:22," in *The Adam Clarke Commentary,* https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/1-corinthians-1.html.
7. James Coffman, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:26," in *Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible,* https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bcc/1-corinthians-1.html.
8. Brad Price, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:26," in *Living By Faith: Commentary on Romans & 1st Corinthians,* https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bpc/1-corinthians-1.html.

February 12, 2023 **Lesson 11**

CALLED WITH A HOLY CALLING

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Trust and Encouragement
Youth Topic: Trust and Encouragement

Children
General Lesson Title: Called with a Holy Calling
Children's Topic: Called and Encouraged

Devotional Reading
John 15:1-14

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:3-14
Print Passage: 2 Timothy 1:3-14
Adult Key Verse: 2 Timothy 1:13
Youth Key Verse: 2 Timothy 1:9a

Children
Background Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:3-14
Print Passage: 2 Timothy 1:3-14
Key Verse: 2 Timothy 1:9a

2 Timothy 1:3-14—KJV

3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;
4 Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy;
5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.
6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.
7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.
8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

2 Timothy 1:3-14—NIV

3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.
4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy.
5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.
6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.
8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in

9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,
10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:
11 Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.
12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.
13 Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.
14 That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.
9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,
10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.
12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.
13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.
14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We sometimes struggle with trusting our own abilities. How do we know that we have what is required to succeed in life? When we put our trust in Jesus, we have assurance that we can accomplish what He has called us to do.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the holy callings of Paul and Timothy.
2. Sense the reassurance that is given to those whom God calls.
3. Identify and receive the good treasure that God entrusts.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Many modern biblical scholars believe that the book of 2 Timothy was written pseudonymously—that is, not by Paul himself, but in Paul's name by one of his disciples. Those who take this view posit a relatively late date for this text—sometime in the early second century.

—Contextually, 2 Timothy 1:8 depicts Paul as having written from prison, and as 2 Timothy 1:17 indicates, he was in Rome. This letter was written from the perspective of Paul as he was nearing his death (see 4:6-8).

—Paul emphasizes that the faith had been handed

down from the ancestors. Paul worshipped the same God that his ancestors worshipped (see verse 3), just as Timothy received his faith from his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice (see verse 5; compare Acts 16:1). Similarly, Paul entrusted Timothy with the Gospel (see verses 12-14).

—Timothy was regarded as a Gentile even though his mother and grandmother were probably Jewish. His father was Greek, and his multiethnic background was significant for Timothy's work among new believers, some of whom were Jews and some Gentiles.

—In verse 9, Paul stresses that God "saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace." This clearly ties in with this quarter's theme of "chosen, not choice" and the notion that our salvation is rooted in grace, not human merit.

—As in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, there is here a contrast between the "shame" associated with "suffering" on the one hand, and "the power of God" on the other hand (see verses 8, 12). Here, the shame is associated with Paul's imprisonment. Elsewhere, Paul boasts in his suffering (see 2 Corinthians 11:16-33).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

"The letters of 1 and 2 Timothy are written to Timothy while he served as Paul's appointed leader of the church of Ephesus, probably in the mid-60s AD"; what was the historical situation of the church in Ephesus? "Ephesus was a wealthy city located on [the] west coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), on the banks of the Cayster River as it enters the Mediterranean, forming an ample harbor. It was an important city, serving as the capital of proconsular Asia, a Roman province. It probably had a population of about half a million."[1]

The apostle Paul is believed to have written this very intense and personal letter to his "beloved son" in the faith, Timothy, sometime between AD 66 and AD 67. Paul was in his second imprisonment in Rome (see 2 Timothy 1:8). Paul's final imprisonment was apparently much more severe than his first stint in prison there. He was in bonds with few visitors, and he felt that his death was imminent (see 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Paul is said to have written the book of 2 Timothy from a dark and damp Roman prison cell, just before his death in AD 67. The Roman emperor Nero had been slowly descending into madness since his ascent to the throne in AD 54, a process exacerbated by the great fire of Rome in AD 64 that burned up half the city.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, the young pastor had been ministering to the church in Ephesus for four years, and it had been almost that long since he had received his first letter from Paul. Timothy had been a faithful servant to Paul since he had left home with the apostle more than a decade earlier. Since then, Timothy had ministered alongside Paul for the duration of both the second and third missionary journeys in places such as Troas, Philippi, and Corinth. Timothy was known to the Ephesians when he settled in Ephesus to minister, having served alongside Paul for close to three years on Paul's third missionary journey. Paul wrote again to this young leader in the church in Ephesus to provide him encouragement and fortitude in the face of difficulties and trials.

Author and pastor John MacArthur wrote the following concerning the historical context of 2 Timothy:

> It seems that Paul may have had reason to fear that Timothy was in danger of weakening spiritually. This would have been a grave concern for Paul since Timothy needed to carry on Paul's work (cf. 2:2). While there are no historical indications elsewhere in the NT as to why Paul was so concerned, there is evidence in the epistle itself from what he wrote. This concern is evident, for example, in Paul's exhortation to "stir up" his gift ([see 2 Timothy] 1:6), to replace fear with power, love, and a sound mind (1:7), to not be ashamed of Paul and the Lord, but willingly suffer for the gospel (1:8), and to hold on to the truth (1:13, 14). Summing up the potential problem of Timothy, who might be weakening under the pressure of the church and the persecution of the world, Paul calls him to (1) generally "be strong" (2:11) . . . and to (2) continue to "preach the word" (4:2), ... These final words to Timothy include few commendations but many admonitions, including about 25 imperatives.[2]

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: born Saul of Tarsus, he was commonly known as Paul the apostle. He was a Christian apostle (although not one of the original twelve apostles) who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. He is generally regarded as one of the most important figures of the Apostolic Age. He founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-40s to the mid-50s AD.

Timothy: the recipient of the two New Testament letters bearing his name. He was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. He joined Paul during one of Paul's later missionary journeys. Paul addressed Timothy as "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2, NIV). Timothy served as Paul's representative to several churches (see 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19), and he was later a pastor in Ephesus (see 1 Timothy 1:3).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Called (verse 9)—Greek: *metakaleó* (met-ak-al-eh'-o): called from one place to another; summoned; invited; sent for.

Faith (verse 5)—Greek: *pistis* (pis'-tis): belief; trust; confidence; fidelity; faithfulness.

Power (verse 7)—Greek: *dunamis* (doo'-nam-is): (miraculous) might, strength; force; ability.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Trust and Obey

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Paul's Reflections and Remembrance (2 Timothy 1:3-7)

B. Timothy: Don't Be Ashamed of the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:8-12)

C. Timothy: Be Loyal to the Faith (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Trust and Obey

An "old school" hymn is perhaps applicable to Paul's charge to Timothy; that song is "Trust and Obey." The chorus of the song is as follows: "Trust and obey, / For there's no other way / To be happy in Jesus, / But to trust and obey."

When we review the apostle Paul's life, we discover that he saw characteristics of trust and obedience in young Timothy. Timothy could be trusted to carry the mantle of faith inherited from his mother and grandmother. Paul also saw that Timothy showed obedience to God. Paul affirmed and encouraged Timothy's trust in the Lord and obedience to the commands of the Lord.

Timothy grew up in the town of Lystra as the son of a Jewish woman named Eunice, who was a believer, and a Greek (Gentile) father (who is not mentioned by name). Timothy was raised as a Gentile and was spiritually adopted by the apostle Paul. Timothy accompanied Paul throughout the Mediterranean Sea area, where Timothy eventually became an ordained evangelistic minister.

Throughout Timothy's life, we can assume that he took to heart the teachings of his mentor, Paul. Trust and obedience undoubtedly became the hallmark of his life as he ministered to the believers in Ephesus. He maintained his trust in the Lord and lived in obedience to the teachings given to him by Paul.

B. Biblical Background

The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles. They consist primarily of pastoral advice on dealing with problems in churches both in Ephesus and in Crete. These three epistles have a lot in common with each other.

Paul understood that the ministry would only become more difficult for Timothy with the apostle's impending death. (Indeed, after this letter from Paul, Timothy was imprisoned for his faith [see Hebrews 13:23].) Paul knew that Timothy's task of keeping the church within the bounds of sound doctrine while encouraging believers to live their lives well for the sake of Christ would be often thankless and difficult. Though hardship would come, Paul wanted Timothy to continue in those things he had learned, drawing on the rich heritage of faith that had been passed down to the young pastor, not just from Paul but also from his mother and grandmother (see 2 Timothy 1:5-6; 3:14-15).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Paul's Reflections and Remembrance (2 Timothy 1:3-7)

I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in

thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Verse 3—It is noteworthy that there is so much profound theological substance packed into this verse. First, Paul began by thanking God. Here it is—Paul breaks into thanksgiving as he opens his heart to his young apprentice, Timothy. We must remember that Paul was not writing from a pastoral office attached to a beautiful church edifice. Instead, Paul was writing from a Roman dungeon. He had been imprisoned for preaching the Gospel and was now being treated as a common criminal. Yet, amid this predicament, Paul had an attitude of praise and thanksgiving. The cultural context tells us that the Roman government actively suppressed the Christian faith. Many believers had already been put to death. Despite such a dire scenario, Paul could begin this letter with "I thank God!" Even in prison, Paul could say, "I thank God!"

Paul leaves an incredible example for us concerning how to face trials and tribulations. We must never forget that God is still God in the good times and in the bad times; and He is God on the mountains and in the valleys of life.

Second, Paul reflected on his service to the Lord. He affirmed that his service to God came out of the context of a pure conscience, as was the case with his forefathers. However, even though they were not Christians, they were believers in the one true God. Paul's ancestors worshipped and sought to serve God. So, Paul could (with a clear conscience) state that his service for the Lord was according to the example of his ancestors.

Third, Paul now focused on his unceasing remembrance of Timothy in his prayers, night and day. Undoubtedly, Paul knew of Timothy's challenges as pastor of the church in Ephesus. Additionally, Paul knew that his time of service was rapidly closing. Paul also reflected on the fact that Timothy would be left alone, humanly speaking, to carry on his witness and work for Jesus Christ. Being aware of Timothy's difficulties, Paul recognized the need to "cover" Timothy in prayer.

Verse 4—The loneliness Paul was experiencing can be felt in this verse. Paul (alone in a prison cell) and Timothy (alone on the mission field) had a unique spiritual connection. Many biblical scholars suggest that Timothy shed tears at their separation during their last meeting. This is what Paul was alluding to in this verse when he mentioned that he was mindful of Timothy's tears. Paul had a yearning to see his young apprentice again so as to experience the joy of having that spiritual fellowship.

Verse 5—This verse is another verse of remembrance. Paul reflected on and remembered Timothy's faith and described it as sincere and authentic. Paul used the term *genuine* in reference to Timothy's faith. There was no fakery in the faith that Timothy displayed. Timothy's faith directly connected with that of his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice. Both Lois and Eunice became Christians, having accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is correctly assumed that Timothy had come to learn the great truths of the Christian faith from his mother and grandmother.

Verse 6—This verse is a powerful admonition by the apostle Paul to his young apprentice. Because of his family's godly background

and his own faith, Timothy was urged to stir up the gift of God which was in him. We are not privy to knowledge of the exact nature of the gift that Timothy was urged to stir up. We know that Timothy was called into Christian service and had been given special enablement. It is not far-fetched to assume that Timothy was given the gift to be an evangelist, pastor, or teacher. The details of that gift were known between Paul and his son in the ministry. The gift was in Timothy through the laying on of the apostle's hands. This gift was given to Timothy when Paul laid his hands upon him—thus, the apostle was the channel through which the gift was conferred.

Verse 7—Paul, soon facing martyrdom, reminded Timothy that God has not given us a spirit of fear or cowardice. There is no time for fearfulness or timidity. But God has given us a spirit of power. Unlimited strength is at our disposal through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Through that power, believers can serve valiantly, endure patiently, suffer triumphantly, and, if need be, die gloriously.

God has also given us a spirit of love. Our love for God casts out fear and makes us willing to give ourselves for Christ.

Finally, God has given us a spirit of a sound mind. This part of the verse teaches that God has given us a spirit of self-control or self-mastery. We are to use discretion and not act rashly, hastily, or foolishly. Regardless of our circumstances, we should maintain balanced judgment and act soberly.

B. Timothy: Don't Be Ashamed of the Gospel (2 Timothy 1:8-12)

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

The NIV begins this section of the biblical passage (verse 8) with the word "So" (the NKJV uses the term "Therefore"). The idea being projected here is that based upon the fact that God has not given us the spirit of fear—but of power and of love and of a sound mind (verse 7)—Paul admonished Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. During this period, preaching the Gospel was a crime, and those who attempted to witness publicly for their Lord and Savior were persecuted. However, this reality should not deter or daunt Timothy. He should not be ashamed of the Gospel, even though it may entail suffering. Neither should he be ashamed of the apostle Paul in prison. Apparently, many religious/church leaders had turned their backs on Paul, thinking that if they showed any affiliation with him, then they may come under persecution and possibly death.

Paul affirmed that the Spirit gives us the power to be bold with our words, love those who mock and persecute us, and discipline our lives unto holiness. Through the Spirit, we can stand against temptation and persecution.

Paul said to Timothy that he must not

give up, quit, or quiet his witness because he had the Spirit, and the Spirit of God would empower him.

Notice how Paul referred to himself: he did not call himself a prisoner of Rome but a prisoner for Christ's sake. Paul saw his imprisonment as being under God's sovereign control, and Rome could do nothing apart from God's permission. He saw his suffering as part of God's sovereign plan.

Paul mentions his imprisonment, then calls on Timothy to accept his share of suffering for the Gospel (verse 8). Paul's mention of his suffering was meant to encourage Timothy to accept suffering willingly. This is also the case for believers today. According to Bible.org, "Our sufferings are not unique to us; they are also experienced by Christians throughout the world—many times in a greater way than us"(https://bible.org/seriespage/2-being-unashamed-our-faith-2-timothy-18-14).

Paul reminded Timothy of the greatness of the Gospel to encourage him to suffer for it. It is so awesome that we should never be afraid to spread the word about it to others. We should never try to alter or hide the Gospel. It is too awesome! The Gospel is great because it is the message of salvation.

In verse 9, Paul states that God "saved us." Saved us from what? We are saved from eternal death (eternal punishment in hell) through the Gospel. We are also saved from slavery to sin, the world, and Satan. We are now slaves of Christ and righteousness. The Gospel is the message of salvation.

God saves sinners and makes them His people exclusively by His grace—and not because of anything they have done. Before the world was created, God planned to give people eternal life, but this gift becomes theirs only through Christ's victory over death on the Cross. Jesus not only annulled death, but He also brought life and immortality through the Gospel. Immortality refers to the resurrection of the body. Paul referred to this when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:53 that the corruptible must put on incorruption (see verses 9-10).

In verses 11-12, Paul shares how God uniquely called him to proclaim the Gospel as a herald (or preacher), an apostle, and a teacher. This description of Paul's divine duty reminded both Timothy and us of our duty to faithfully proclaim the Gospel. If we do not share it, then nobody else will.

Paul said that his suffering for the Gospel was no cause for shame because he knew that God was able to protect what He had entrusted with him until that day—the day of Christ's coming. Paul used the word *know*, which carries the idea of knowing with certainty. Paul knew with certainty that God was the best person in whom to trust and invest. Paul, therefore, would never suffer ultimate loss or shame—and neither will we.

C. Timothy: Be Loyal to the Faith (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

Verse 13—Some scholars suggest that we can understand this verse in two ways. First, Paul encourages Timothy to hold fast to the pattern of sound words. The idea here is that Timothy must not just be loyal to the truth of God's Word, but he is to adhere to the proper way to communicate God's Word. Second, this

verse also suggests that Paul's words were to serve as a model or pattern to Timothy. Everything that Timothy would teach should harmonize with the outline given to him by Paul.

Verse 14—Paul's expression "that good thing" at the beginning of verse 14 refers to the Gospel. That message of God's redeeming love had been committed to or entrusted to Timothy, and he was not to add to it or "improve" on it in any way—and his responsibility was to guard it through the Holy Spirit who dwelled in him. Paul was admonishing Timothy to stand true to the Word of God. The indwelling Holy Spirit would supply all that Timothy needed for that task.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The book of 2 Timothy brings us to the brink of death, forcing us to consider its reality and how we might react when faced with it. Paul's response still instructs us today. His mind was not on himself, dwelling on the injustice that had come against him. Instead of trusting that God had him right where He wanted him, the aging apostle turned his attention to others, specifically the church and his young protégé, Timothy. Paul's admonishment to Timothy to keep sound teaching is relevant today because many people have "itching ears." To keep sound teaching, we must rely on the Holy Spirit. Only God's Spirit can enable us to keep the pattern of sound words. We must depend on the Holy Spirit through prayer and a deepening relationship with Christ and His body, the church. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to help us discern what is false. We must rely on Him to enable us to teach God's Word and correct misinterpretations of it.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the living example that Your servant the apostle Paul was to the church. May we live in such a way that when death draws close to us, we would be concerned to see that Your Gospel continues to be proclaimed. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 6-12, 2023)

Called with a Holy Calling

MONDAY, February 6: "God's Children and Heirs" (Galatians 4:1-7)
TUESDAY, February 7: "A Holy Nation" (Exodus 19:1-8)
WEDNESDAY, February 8: "Abide in Christ" (John 15:1-14)
THURSDAY, February 9: "Chosen by Christ" (John 15:15-27)
FRIDAY, February 10: "Be Holy" (Leviticus 19:2-4, 9-18)
SATURDAY, February 11: "Keep God's Statutes in Holiness" (Leviticus 20:22-26)
SUNDAY, February 12: "Kindle God's Gift within You" (2 Timothy 1:3-14)

Notes

1. Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, *"Introduction to 1 and 2 Timothy," JesusWalk Bible Study Series,* http://www.jesuswalk.com/timothy/0_intro.htm.
2. *Grace to You: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time Since 1969,* "Second Timothy," https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB55/second-timothy.

February 19, 2023 **Lesson 12**

GOD CHOOSES THE POOR

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: The Rich and the Poor
Youth Topic: The Rich and the Poor

Children
General Lesson Title: God Has Chosen the Poor
Children's Topic: Love All People

Devotional Reading
Amos 5:7-15

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: James 2:1-12
Print Passage: James 2:1-12
Adult Key Verse: James 2:5
Youth Key Verse: James 2:9a

Children
Background Scripture: James 2:1-12
Print Passage: James 2:1-12
Key Verse: James 2:8

James 2:1-12—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?

James 2:1-12—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

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?
7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?
8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:
9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.
10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.
11 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.
12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

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 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People make judgments about one another. What is our standard for valuing some people more than others? God directs us to value people based on their God-given value and not on our own standards.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore the dangers of showing partiality and favoritism.
2. Imagine what it feels like to be poor in the world yet rich in faith—and the benefits and challenges of such.
3. Identify and celebrate the God-given value of one another.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Certain aspects of the book of James appear to indicate a Jewish audience: the address "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1, NRSV) and the use of the Greek word *synagogue* (translated as "assembly" in the NRSV) in 2:2. The dominant perspective, however, is that the author is addressing a Christian community seen as the spiritual heirs of Israel, or it may be a Jewish-Christian community.

—Surprisingly, Jesus is rarely mentioned in the epistle of James. Only 1:1 and 2:1 mention Him by name. The letter seems more concerned with ethics than with Christology. The epistle

of James was written to impart wisdom for enduring trials, promoting peace, living justly and mercifully, caring for the poor, and being "doers of the word." For James, wisdom "from above" serves as the bridge between faith and works—works "done with gentleness born of wisdom" (3:13, NRSV).

—Several times, James echoes teachings of Jesus—particularly those from the Sermon on the Mount—without explicitly citing them. For instance, "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom . . . ?" (2:5, NRSV) sounds very much like, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). And the condemnation of murder and adultery (2:11) recalls the antitheses (see Matthew 5:21, 27).

—The concern over favoritism is prominent. Favoritism is rejected elsewhere in Scripture as well (e.g., Leviticus 19:15; Psalm 82:2; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11). Here, the notion of favoritism that is rejected is that which takes place along the lines of social class. There is no preference for the rich over the poor. In fact, "God [has] chosen the poor" (verse 5).

—The law that is upheld here as "the royal law" (verse 8) and "the law of liberty" (verse 12) is the law of love. As much as James is sometimes thought to have been in tension with the apostle Paul over questions of works, one finds a very similar sentiment in Galatians 5:14. Works, for Paul, are ritualistic in nature, such as circumcision. For James, works have all to do with exercising compassion, such as caring for the poor.

—The law of liberty also seems to reflect Paul's emphasis on freedom in Christ from the restraints/limitations of the Mosaic Law.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

As one of the chief leaders in the church at Jerusalem, James wrote from that city before the meeting of the Jerusalem Council, which Luke recorded in Acts 15. At that council, James, Peter, and Paul affirmed the decision to take the gospel message to the Gentiles. This council met in AD 49, meaning James likely wrote his letter in AD 45–48. Such a significant event as the Jerusalem Council warranted comment from James, as he was writing to a Jewish-Christian audience. But James did not mention Gentile Christians, most likely making an early date for the letter. In fact, the book of James was probably the first New Testament book written.[1]

Certain aspects of the book of James appear to indicate a Jewish audience: the address "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (1:1, NRSV) and the use of the Greek word *synagogue* (translated as "assembly" in the NRSV) in 2:2. However, the dominant perspective is that the author addresses a Christian community seen as the spiritual heirs of Israel, or it may be a Jewish-Christian community.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of James was written by Jesus' half-brother James, who initially did not accept Jesus as the Messiah (see John 7:5) but later became a pillar in the early church (see 1 Corinthians 15:7). The book is dated between AD 45–48, making it the first book written in the New Testament. The audience for this book was Jewish, as James

addresses the letter "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1).

The epistle of James, the letter of James, or simply James, is a general epistle and one of the twenty-one epistles in the New Testament. The author identifies himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" who is writing to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). The epistle is traditionally attributed to James, the brother of Jesus, and the audience is generally considered to be Jewish Christians who were dispersed outside of Israel.

James identifies himself as a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. This immediately shows his humility—as he might well have said, "the earthly brother of Jesus Christ." But James knew it was his spiritual, not physical, relationship that counted.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

James: the half-brother of Jesus who wrote the book of James and was an early church leader (see Acts 15). James was not a follower of Jesus during the Savior's time on Earth (see Mark 3:21-35; John 7:5) but eventually became an apostle in the vein of Paul, as one who had seen and believed the Lord post-Resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). After witnessing the resurrected body of Jesus, James became one of the Jerusalem church's leaders.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

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

Judges (verse 4)—Greek: *krités* (kree-tace'): magistrates; rulers.

Poor (verse 2)—Greek: *ptóchos* (pto-khos'): beggarly; destitute.

Royal law (verse 8)—Greek: *basilikos* (bas-il-ee-kos') and *nomos* (nom'-os): compounded, it means "law" in general as connected with a king; kingly law, divine law.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   - A. The Problem with Favoritism
   - B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   - A. The Command against Favoritism (James 2:1-8)
   - B. The Consequences of Favoritism (James 2:9-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem with Favoritism

Interestingly, this issue of favoritism is not a twenty-first-century phenomenon, and it seems as if this is a problem ingrained in human beings' psyche. Favoritism takes on many forms and comes disguised in many ways, and it has infiltrated race relations, gender dealings, economic connections, etc.

What is the biblical view of favoritism? *Favoritism* is showing a bias or partiality for

one person or people group over another, even when they have equal claims. The Bible makes it clear that God does not show favoritism (see Romans 2:11). Since all human beings were created in His image, then neither should we practice favoritism. Instead, the Bible instructs us to show no partiality (see James 2:1).

In an article on Compelling Truth (a ministry of GotQuestions.org) titled, "What is a biblical view of favoritism?" (compellingtruth.org), the following was written concerning favoritism: "God has created all people equal in worth. A person's physical appearance, gender, possessions, skills, intelligence level, or even religious affiliation do not determine his/her value. Treating people differently based on things like their ethnicity, social status, or wealth is wrong."[2]

B. Biblical Background

The epistle of James is one of the general epistles, including 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. Scholars tell us that these letters were sent out as circular epistles to be passed around and read in several locations.

> "The book of James looks a bit like the Old Testament book of Proverbs dressed up in New Testament clothes. Its consistent focus on practical action in the life of faith is reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, encouraging God's people to act like God's people. The pages of James are filled with direct commands to pursue a life of holiness. He makes no excuses for those who do not measure up. In the mind of this early church leader, Christians evidence [or display] their faith by walking in specific ways and not others. For James, a faith that does not produce real-life change is a faith that is worthless (James 2:17)."[3]

In the opening of his letter, James called himself a bondservant of God, an appropriate name given the practical, servant-oriented emphasis of the book. Throughout his epistle, James contended that faith produces authentic deeds. In other words, if those who call themselves God's people truly belong to Him, their lives will produce deeds or fruit. In language and themes that sound much like Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, James forcefully speaks out against the hypocritical believer who says one thing but does another.

The book of James, in general, challenges us to live out our faith. That is James's central message, and he calls us to learn more about God intellectually and put that knowledge into practice. Yes, we want to know how God sees the world, but we want to live according to that new knowledge, and we want to live the way God wants us to live.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Command against Favoritism

(James 2:1-8)

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 raiment; 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?

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? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

The first half of chapter 2 denounces the practice of showing respect of persons. Favoritism is foreign to the example of our Lord or the teachings of the New Testament, and there is no place for snobbishness or discrimination.

Verse 1—In the King James Version of this first verse, the reading of that verse may present some confusion. The NASB renders that verse as follows: "My brothers and sisters, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." Notice that this admonition regarding favoritism is directed to believers. James uses the term "My brethren" (KJV), clearly addressing his remarks to the household of faith. James was saying in essence, *My brethren, in your practice of the Christian faith, do not show partiality.* Apparently, there was a problem with favoritism in the early church; otherwise, James would not have addressed the issue. Snobbery and caste distinctions are inconsistent with true Christianity. Contempt for others because of birth, race, sex, or poverty is a practical denial of the Christian faith. A true Christian does not "look down" on another person because of skin color, social standing, or economic position.

What was happening in the early church? Persons showed sycophantic or ingratiating deference to people because of their expensive clothing or other artificial distinctions.

Verses 2-4—James undergirds his presentation in verse 1 with a vivid illustration. The illustration focuses on the treatment accorded to two persons visiting the assembly. The first person is a distinguished-looking individual with fashionable clothes and expensive gold rings, and he is immediately escorted to a prominent seat near the front of the assembly. The second person who is poorly dressed is relegated to a "lowly" seat near the back of the assembly. Clearly, this is blatant favoritism based upon the outward appearance of the individuals. According to James's admonition, this ought not to be!

Today, perhaps the most glaring example of this kind of favoritism is the discrimination shown against people of other races. However, this writer must admit that many of those walls and barriers are being torn down; to God be the glory!

Verses 5-7—God welcomes people into His kingdom regardless of wealth or social position and gives His riches to them equally. James notes how strange it is that the Christians should show special favor to the rich because the rich are from the class that oppresses Christians most cruelly. In the society in which James lived, the rich oppressed the poor. They dragged them to the law courts. No doubt this was for debt. People were so poor at the bottom of the social scale that they could hardly live, and moneylenders were plentiful and absurd. In the ancient world, there was a custom of what was called summary arrest. If a creditor met a debtor on the street, he could seize him by the neck of his robe and literally drag him to the law courts. That is what the rich did to the poor. They had no sympathy; all they wanted was the debtor's last coin. It is

not riches that James is condemning; it is the conduct of riches without compassion.

Verse 8—James's final argument in this verse is that showing deference to the rich violates the law of love, which states, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (NIV). If we really loved our neighbors as ourselves, then we would treat them the way we want to be treated. We would certainly not want to be despised and looked down upon because we were poor. This means we should not show contempt to others for that reason. This is called the "Royal Law" because it belongs to the King and is the king of all laws.

B. The Consequences of Favoritism (James 2:9-12)

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. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Verse 9—James continued his thesis by stating that to" show partiality" is a violation of the royal law, and it is both a sin and transgression. *Sin* is defined as any lack of conformity to the will of God, a failure to meet His standards, and a "missing of the mark." *Transgression* is the breaking of a known law. Certain acts are sinful because they are basically and inherently wrong, but they become transgressions when there is a specific law that forbids them. Partiality is sinful because it is essentially wrong. But it is also a transgression because there is a law against it.

Verse 10—James perhaps breaks new ground at this point with his contention that to violate one part of the law is to be guilty of violating all. The law is like a chain of ten links. Break one link, and the chain is broken. God does not allow us to keep the laws we like and break others. The laws of God are not in a buffet-style configuration, where we pick up what we want and leave what we do not like.

Verse 11—The same God who forbade adultery also forbade murder. A person may not be guilty of adultery, yet he may commit murder. The question is, is he a transgressor of the law? The answer is a definite YES. The spirit of the law is that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. Adultery is undoubtedly a violation of this, but so is murder. And so, too, are snobbishness and discrimination, along with a long list of other attitudes and actions. If we commit any of these acts, we have failed to do what the law commands.

Verse 12—James affirms in this verse that as believers, we are no longer under the law of bondage but are under the law of liberty; we are not at liberty to do whatever it is that we want to do—but we have the liberty to do what is right. The Law of Moses required people to love their neighbor but did not give them the power to do so and condemned persons if they failed. Under the law of liberty (grace), we are given the power to love our neighbor and are rewarded when we do so. We do not love our neighbor to be saved but *because* we are saved.

In James's view, the whole law was the will of God; to break any part of it was to disregard that will and therefore to be guilty of sin. That is perfectly true, and to violate any part of the law is to become a transgressor in principle. Even under human justice, a man becomes a criminal when he has broken one law. So, James argues, "No matter how

good you may be in other areas, if you treat people with respect of persons, then you have acted against the will of God, and you are a transgressor."

In his commentary on this passage, William Barclay wrote, "There is a great truth here that is both relevant and practical. We may put it much more simply. A man may be in nearly all respects a good man; and yet he may spoil himself by one fault. He may be moral in his action, pure in his speech, meticulous in his devotion. But he may be hard and self-righteous; rigid and unsympathetic; and, if so, his goodness is spoiled."[4]

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The church must be the one place where all distinctions are wiped out. There can be no distinctions of rank and prestige when persons meet in the presence of the King of Glory—and there can be no distinctions of merit when persons meet in the presence of the supreme holiness of God. All earthly differences are less than the dust in His presence, and all earthly righteousness is as filthy rags. In the presence of God, all men are one.

The Old and New Testaments unite in condemning peoples' partiality in judgment and favoritism of treatment which results from placing undue weight on a person's social standing, wealth, or worldly influence. And it is a fault against which everyone should guard his or her heart.

PRAYER

Our Father, we live in a world where people are judged based on their skin color, social standing, and financial portfolios; help us look beyond those things and see people for who they are—Your creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 13-19, 2023)

God Chooses the Poor

MONDAY, February 13: "Pure and Undefiled Religion" (James 1:19-27)
TUESDAY, February 14: "Defender of the Oppressed" (Amos 5:7-15)
WEDNESDAY, February 15: "Father of Orphans, Protector of Widows" (Psalm 68:1-13)
THURSDAY, February 16: "Defend the Poor and Needy" (Proverbs 31:1-9)
FRIDAY, February 17: "Good News for the Poor" (Luke 4:16-30)
SATURDAY, February 18: "Coming Miseries upon the Rich" (James 5:1-11)
SUNDAY, February 19: "God Has Chosen the Poor" (James 2:1-12)

Notes

1. https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-general-epistles/james
2. Compelling Truth, https://www.compellingtruth.org/Bible-favoritism.html
3. https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-general-epistles/james
4. William Barclay, "Commentary on James 2," in *William Barclay's Daily Study Bible*, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb/james-2.html.

February 26, 2023 **Lesson 13**

GOD CALLS YOU INTO LIGHT

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: An Important Role
Youth Topic: An Important Role

Children
General Lesson Title: God Has Called You into the Light
Children's Topic: A Living Stone

Devotional Reading
1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-25
Print Passage: 1 Peter 2:1-10
Key Verse: 1 Peter 2:9

Children
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-10
Print Passage: 1 Peter 2:1-10
Key Verse: 1 Peter 2:9

1 Peter 2:1-10—KJV

WHEREFORE LAYING aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,
2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:
3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.
4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,
5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.
6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.
7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone

1 Peter 2:1-10—NIV

THEREFORE, RID yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.
2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—
5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."
7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,
8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.
9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;
10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

8 and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.
9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People want to know that their lives are going somewhere. Is it possible for one to feel as though his or her life holds significance? Peter tells us that with Jesus as our foundation, we can be significant partners in building God's kingdom.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Describe the significance of being "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (see verse 9).
2. Reflect on the responsibilities of being and living as a chosen people.
3. Encourage others in building God's kingdom on the cornerstone of Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—A decidedly maternal metaphor is present in verse 2. Believers are infants nursing on the spiritual milk of Christ as they grow toward maturity.

—The imagery quickly shifts to that of a spiritual house/temple. Christ is a living stone (verse 4) and so, too, are all other believers (verse 5). There is a qualitative difference—Christ is the cornerstone (verse 6)—but there is at the same time a unity between Christ and believers as living stones that together constitute the spiritual house. A similar metaphor is present in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17, where believers are identified as the temple of God.

—Verse 8 quotes Isaiah 8:14 to describe Christ as the stone that causes others to stumble and fall. This is reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 1:23, which describes Christ as a stumbling block to the Jews. The very thing that makes Christ the cornerstone—His passion (emphasized in verses 22-24)—is what makes Him a stumbling stone for those who foolishly trust in their own wisdom.

—Just as Christ is "chosen" and "precious" (verse 4),

so also are "the people of God" (verse 10). This unity is expressed in the recognition of believers as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own people (verse 9).

—The theme of being called (hearing) and proclaiming (verse 9) is one that we have encountered several times over the course of this quarter. Zechariah, Mary, Isaiah, and Timothy all received some prophecy, calling, or divine word, and then went on to proclaim. First there is hearing, then believing, then proclaiming.

—According to verse 10, it is the gift of mercy that transforms "not a people" into "the people of God." (Compare Hosea 2:23.)

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The author identifies himself as Peter, an apostle, an elder, one who has witnessed the sufferings of Christ, and one who shares in the glory to be revealed. He was writing from "Babylon"—probably Rome—accompanied by Mark (called his "son"), Silvanus (his secretary), and the whole church. He had a very warm relationship with the recipients, calling them *beloved*.

The date of the writing/happenings of the book of 1 Peter is linked with the issue of authorship. Those who reject Peter as the author would probably date the letter in the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96) or Trajan (AD 98–117). Since there are reasonable grounds for holding to Petrine (Peter's) authorship, the letter probably should be dated during the reign of Nero (AD 54–68). The reference to Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13 is almost certainly a reference to Rome, leading one to conclude that Peter wrote the letter from Rome. He probably wrote before the Neronian persecution in Rome, and thus the date of composition is likely AD 62–64.

The authorship of 1 Peter does play a role in dating the epistle. If Peter is the author and if he was martyred under Nero, then a date of AD 62–64 is most likely the latest that the epistle could have been written.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ's and the author of this epistle, was writing to believers living outside of Israel, in the regions of Asia Minor. He wrote with a particular "Jewish flavor," yet it must be assumed that many in those churches must have included Gentile believers as well. Since it is assumed that Peter wrote in approximately AD 64, around the time of the vicious Neronian persecution in Rome, Peter warned believers to live holy lives even amid an impending escalation of persecution.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Peter wrote to a group of people that probably included both Jews and Gentiles. The apostle addressed the letter's recipients as "strangers" (1 Peter 1:1), indicating that Peter was speaking not just to Jews or just to Gentiles but to Christians who were living their lives so that they would have stood out as aliens (strangers) amid the surrounding culture.

The recipients who were considered as exiles were in five cities in Asia Minor. Peter described them as chosen, sanctified for obedience to Christ. The recipients of Peter's letter had been converted through the anonymous preaching of the Gospel. After being converted, they were the targets of ill will from those with whom they used

to participate in sin. They also became the objects of slander, ridicule, and outright persecution. The recipients of Peter's letter were encouraged to submit to governing authorities, which suggests that they were probably from the lower classes. having no say in government. The churches had specific leaders, referred to as elders.

The recipients of this letter were under threat of or were suffering, and they were slandered and persecuted by ignorant people who were not impressed by their conversion. This persecution seemed sporadic and haphazard and not as an organized persecution by the state.

The text of the epistle identifies its audience as believers living throughout various regions of Asia Minor—namely, "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). The fact that they were believers is seen in the first verse regarding the expression "who are chosen." Jewish believers would have taken comfort in the fact that they were the people of God amid such persecution, as the book addresses. The term "scattered" in 1:1 is from the Greek term *diasporav*. This term, used to refer to the scattering of Jews because of divine judgment, came to be used as a somewhat technical description for any Jews living outside of the homeland (see James 1:1). Peter's recipients were Jewish Christians who were either saved and then scattered into this area or, perhaps better, were Jews already living in the area who were saved through Gospel preaching.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Peter: "Simon Peter, also known as Cephas (see John 1:42), was one of the first followers of Jesus Christ. He was an outspoken and ardent disciple, one of Jesus' closest friends, an apostle, and a "pillar" of the church (Galatians 2:9). Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, brash. But for all his strengths, Peter had several failings in his life. Still, the Lord who chose him continued to mold him into exactly who He intended Peter to be. Simon was originally from Bethsaida (John 1:44) and lived in Capernaum ([see Mark 1:21-28]; Mark 1:29), both cities on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. He was married (1 Corinthians 9:5), and he and James and John were partners in a profitable fishing business (Luke 5:10)."[1]

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Chosen (verse 4)—Greek: *eklektos* (ek-lek-tos'): selected; chosen out; by implication, the favorite; of those chosen out by God for the rendering of a special service to Him.

Hypocrisy (verse 1)—Greek: *hupokrisis* (hoop-ok'-ree-sis): playacting; deceit; "hypocrisies" (KJV).

Malice (verse 1)—Greek: *kakia* (kak-ee'-ah): wickedness; vicious disposition; spite.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. What's Your Role?
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. What Christians Should Reject (1 Peter 2:1)
B. What Christians Should Desire (1 Peter 2:2-3)
C. The Christians' Privileges (1 Peter 2:4-8)
D. What Christians Are (1 Peter 2:9-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. What's Your Role?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term *role* as follows: "a character assigned or assumed; a socially expected behavior pattern usually determined by an individual's status in a particular society; a part played by an actor or singer; a function or part performed primarily in a particular operation or process."[2]

Each of us is called upon to play various roles throughout our lives. Some roles are assigned to or thrust upon us, and we assume other roles. Consider the fact that the typical female is a daughter (an assigned role), a wife (an assumed role), and/or a mother (could be assigned or assumed). Consider the typical male: a son (an assigned role), a husband (an assumed role), and/or a father (could be assigned or assumed). Beyond those roles, various other roles will either be assigned to us or ones that we voluntarily assume. Just think about where you are at this moment in your life. Perhaps you have been in the role of a student, an employee, an employer, a pastor, a deacon, an usher, etc. Each of those roles comes with various responsibilities and accountabilities.

Today's lesson is titled "An Important Role." Many people would tell you that the various roles they had in life were important. However, there is no role that compares to God's role for us. What God calls us to be and do is of utmost importance.

B. Biblical Background

We find the following information online at "The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Charles R. Swindoll":

> In this letter, Peter spoke much about persecution, which anticipated the persecution he and other Christians would endure in the final years of Nero's reign. At the time he wrote, Peter had not yet been arrested, an event that would lead to his martyrdom around AD 66–68. First Peter 5:13 indicates that Peter sent greetings from the local church—calling it "Babylon"—but it's most likely that the apostle was writing in a common metaphor there. He used the name of the ancient Mesopotamian city as a stand-in for Rome, the modern city that, like Babylon, gave itself over to idol worship and false gods. . . . First Peter focuses on the importance of believers bearing up under unjust suffering yet continuing to live well (1 Peter 2:20). In this way, 1 Peter might be called the Job of the New Testament, providing encouragement for the true believer to continue on in the way that Jesus has laid out for all His followers.[3]

Jeffrey Kranz wrote the following words pertaining to this subject:

> No other book of the Bible focuses on suffering and glory as much as First Peter. This epistle was written to give Christians a fuller understanding of what's going on: the present sufferings and the glories to come. First Peter is the second of the General Epistles . . . , the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to

specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences across the Roman Empire. This letter from Peter focuses on the sufferings and glory of Christ and His church.[4]

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. What Christians Should Reject
(1 Peter 2:1)

WHEREFORE LAYING aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.

Because of the privileged role we have as children of God, heirs of eternal life, the apostle Peter shares with us the things that must be eliminated from our lives. These are the things that must be stripped off, discarded, and rejected. Peter uses the word *apothesthai*, the verb used to describe one's stripping off one's clothes. There are things of which the Christian must divest himself as he would strip off a soiled, stained garment. Because Christians are partakers of the divine life, we must put away once and for all the following ungodly behaviors (you may refer to https://www.preceptaustin.org/1_peter_21 for more on these areas):

1. **Malice**—This is defined as the harboring of evil thoughts against another person. Malice nourishes antagonism, builds up grudges, and secretly hopes that revenge, harm, or tragedy will overtake another person.
2. **Guile**—Another word for "guile" is deceit, dishonesty, or trickery. Deceit falsifies income tax returns, cheats on exams, lies about one's age, bribes officials, and pulls shady deals in business.
3. **Hypocrisy**—This is defined as insincerity, pretense, sham. The hypocrite is a play actor, pretending to be someone he is not. Examples of hypocrisy are a person's pretending to be happily married when his home is a battlefield; pretending to be spiritual on Sundays but is carnal on weekdays; pretending to have an interest in other people, but his motives are selfish.
4. **Envy**—another term for "envy" is barefaced jealousy, and it is defined as having a feeling of displeasure because of the advantage of prosperity or advantage of another person. Envy can be a killer.
5. **Evil Speaking**—This sin includes backbiting, malicious gossip, recrimination. Slander is the attempt to make oneself look cleaner by slinging mud at someone else.

These sins are violations of the fundamental commandment for us to love our neighbor as ourselves. No Christian can stay the way he is, and Peter urged his people to do away with evil things and set their hearts on that which alone can nourish life.

B. What Christians Should Desire
(1 Peter 2:2-3)

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

After clearly delineating what the Christian should reject, Peter turns to what believers should desire. Our new birth obligates us to have an insatiable craving for the spiritual milk of the Word. The behaviors mentioned

in verse 1 would stunt spiritual growth, but the milk of the Word would nourish spiritual growth. When Peter uses the expression "newborn babes," he is not referring to readers who were new believers—and he intended to admonish those young or old in the faith to desire the Word just as an infant cries for milk. A healthy baby impatiently, aggressively, and determinedly sucks and swallows the milk.

Similarly, believers should aggressively seek the milk of God's Word. There is something on which the Christian must set his heart, and he must yearn for the unadulterated milk of the Word. The term used for "word" in this context is *logikos,* which has a connection to the term *Logos.* The word *logikos* means "belonging to the Lord." So, Peter is talking about the Word of God, which abides forever. Peter implies that the Christian must desire the nourishment from God's word with his whole heart, producing spiritual growth.

The Christian is to yearn for this milk of the Word; "yearn" is *epipothein*, a strong word. It is the word used for the heart longing for the water brooks (see Psalm 42:1) and for the Psalmist longing for the salvation of the Lord (see Psalm 119:174). For the sincere Christian, studying God's Word is not labor but a pleasure, for he knows that his heart will find the nourishment for which it longs.

Peter finishes this introduction with an allusion to Psalm 34:8. Peter says (in essence), "You are bound to do this if you have tasted the kindness of God." We must be aware that the kindness of God is not an excuse for laziness in the Christian life; it is the greatest of all incentives for us to seek after the things of God.

C. The Christians' Privileges (1 Peter 2:4-8)

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

The above passage from the KJV is better presented as follows: *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

This passage details the honor and privileges that Christians have.

Verse 4—The phrase "as you come to him" (NIV) is a present participle that means "as you continually come to him." This is not just the coming to Him for salvation, but coming to Christ in worship, in prayer, and

through the Word of God daily. We have the right to come to "the living stone" rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him. The word *precious* really means "there is nothing like him." That is our privilege. We have the right to come to Jesus Christ and God through Him continually.

There are many honors and privileges that come to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Peter wrote this to encourage the saints who were being persecuted for their faith. Peter not only describes the believers' privileges in Christ but also talks about those who reject Christ and "stumbled over him." The attractiveness of these believers is shown as more celebrated against a backdrop of those who stumble and dishonor Christ. Believers should stand in awe at the overflowing grace from God that saturates their lives.

The privileges mentioned in this passage would be even more pleasing to Jewish believers who would see the Old Testament parallels of Israel being presented or displayed in the church. Jesus Christ is central in the church, so we come to Him. Since Peter was thinking in terms of a building and of building materials, it is not surprising that he presents the Lord figuratively as a stone. He is that "living stone"—One who lives in the power of an endless life. He is not a dead, inanimate stone. Unfortunately, He is rejected by men. Many people have no room for Him in the plan for their lives. However, it is not humanity's opinion that matters. In God's sight, the Lord Jesus Christ is chosen and precious. He may be rejected by men but He is chosen by God.

Verse 5—Peter's reference to a "spiritual house" is analogous to the church. The church is a structure built of living stones. In the new covenant, God's temple is the living people of God. This is alluded to in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV), where Paul wrote, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

We are being built up into the house of God. The word *being* in this passage means that we are not yet where we need to be. This reminds us that this work is a process like the building of any house. We should not be discouraged when we see sin or failure in the church. We should be careful with desiring to quit or give up on ourselves. We should be cautious about the desire to quit or give up on others. It's a process. God is not done with us yet. We are being built into a spiritual house.

Not only are we a spiritual house, but we are also a holy priesthood. In the new covenant, all believers are priests with instant access to the Throne Room of the universe, day and night. Our function is to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and our bodies are to be offered as living sacrifices. We are also to offer the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of good works, and the sacrifices of possessions and service. These sacrifices are acceptable to God THROUGH Jesus Christ. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can approach God.

Verse 6—Jesus Christ is identified as the chief cornerstone. God has determined that Jesus would have this unique position. He is the elect and precious stone, and He is dependable. A cornerstone in modern architecture is placed at the base of the corner, where it binds two walls together and symbolizes the foundation

on which the entire building rests. Some scholars think that this term *cornerstone* is the "keystone" in an arch, and it is the stone that completes the arch and holds the rest of the building together. A third view is that the stone is the "capstone" in a pyramid, occupying the highest place in the structure. However, this cornerstone is interpreted; the bottom line is that Jesus is elect and precious in the sense that God has selected Him to occupy the place of chief honor.[5]

Verse 7—In this verse, Peter appears to present Jesus as the touchstone. A touchstone reveals whether certain minerals rubbed against it are genuine or counterfeit. When people come into contact with Jesus, they are shown for what they really are. He is precious to those who are true believers, but unbelievers reject Him.

Verse 8—Now the picture shifts from presenting Jesus as the touchstone and head of the corner to Him as the stone of stumbling. For those who will not believe in Jesus, He becomes a stumbling stone and a rock that trips them. God has decreed that all who will not believe on and in Jesus Christ will stumble.

D. What Christians Are
(1 Peter 2:9-10)

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Verse 9—Peter again references the privileges that believers have. Believers are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. In this verse, Peter uses a whole series of phrases that summarizes the functions of the church. He calls the Christians a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people dedicated to God, a nation for Him specially to possess.

The Christian is chosen for three things: (1) He is chosen for *privilege*. In Jesus Christ, he is offered a new and intimate fellowship with God. God has become his friend, and he has become God's friend. (2) He is chosen for *obedience*. Privilege brings with it responsibility. The Christian is chosen so that he may become the obedient child of God. He is chosen not to do as he likes but as God likes. (3) He is chosen for *service*.

Christians are a *royal priesthood*. This means that every Christian has the right of having access to God, and that we must offer our work, our worship, and ourselves to God.

As a *holy nation*, the Christian has been chosen so that he may be different from other men, and that difference lies in being dedicated to God's will and service. Other people may follow the world's standards, but the only standards are God's for the Christian.

Here is what God has done for those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior: (1) God has called the Christian out of darkness into His glorious light. The Christian is called out of darkness into light. In Jesus is the light of the knowledge of God. (2) God has made those who were not a people into the people of God. Here, Peter quotes from Hosea 1:6, 9-10; 2:1, 23. This means that the Christian is called out of insignificance into significance. The Christian's greatness lies in God's choosing him to be His man and to do His work in the world. No Christian can be ordinary, for he is a man of God. (3) The Christian is called out of no mercy and into mercy. The Christian has

discovered the love of God and knows that he no longer need fear Him because it is well with his soul.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Christians are a people for God—His own special possession. The value of a thing lies in the fact that someone has possessed it, and something ordinary acquires a new value if some famous person has possessed it. In any museum, we find common things—clothes, a walking stick, a pen, books, pieces of furniture—which are of value only because some great person once possessed them. It is so with the Christian. The Christian may be a very ordinary person, but he acquires a new value because he belongs to God through Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Father, we are so grateful that You have chosen us as a special people in Your divine wisdom and providence. Thank You for our relationship with You through Jesus Christ, our Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 20-26, 2023)

God Calls You into Light

MONDAY, February 20: "Rescued from Darkness" (Colossians 1:9-22)
TUESDAY, February 21: "Paul's Charge to Timothy" (1 Timothy 6:11-16)
WEDNESDAY, February 22: "God Turns Darkness into Light" (Isaiah 42:8-17)
THURSDAY, February 23: "God's Word Gives Light" (Psalm 119:121-136)
FRIDAY, February 24: "You Are Children of Light" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10)
SATURDAY, February 25: "You Belong to God" (1 Peter 2:1-12)
SUNDAY, February 26: "Live Free in the Light" (1 Peter 2:13-25)

Notes

1. GotQuestions.org, "Who was Peter in the Bible?" https://www.gotquestions.org/life-Peter.html.
2. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/role
3. The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Charles R. Swindoll, "First Peter," Insight for Living Ministries, https://www.ifl.org.au/resources/insights-on-the-bible/the-general-epistles/first-peter.
4. Jeffrey Kranz, "1 Peter's role in the Bible," Bible Books, Aug. 4, 2013, https://overviewbible.com/1-peter/.
5. https://dq5pwpg1q8ru0.cloudfront.net/2020/12/27/21/49/48/79794c5c-844c-4f8f-9d26-dc35f-668c10e/201222%20Noon%20Day%20Bible%20Study%20Peter%20%20copy%2012.pdf

Jesus Calls Us

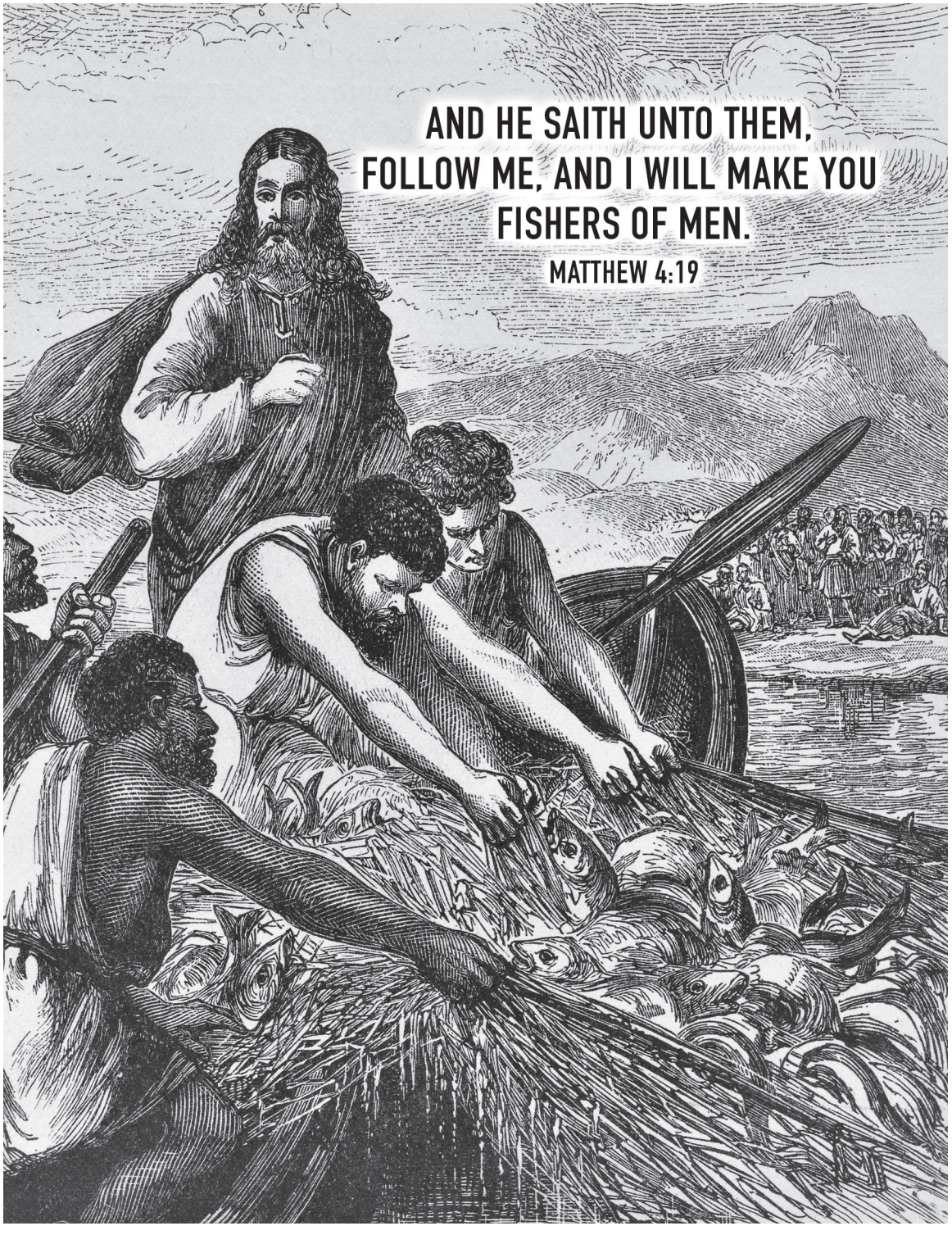
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The biblical thread of the Spring quarter connects Jesus' ministry on Earth—as exhibited in passages from all four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—to the birth of the church following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, as seen in passages from the book of Acts.

Unit I, *"Called from the Margins of Society,"* is comprised of four lessons that highlight accounts where Jesus disregards artificial societal barriers, choosing instead to reach people on the margins. Lesson 1, from the book of Luke, examines Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, who was restored to a place of honor in his father's home despite his indulgence in life's pleasures that left him destitute. In lesson 2, drawn from the book of Matthew, Jesus turns society's preferences upside-down as He declares a child as "greatest." Lesson 3, from John's gospel, examines Jesus' encounter with an outcast Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Lesson 4, from the gospel of Mark, explores Jesus' healing of a man possessed by a legion of demons.

Unit II, *"Experiencing the Resurrection,"* has four lessons (from the gospels of Luke and John) that center on Jesus' appearances to His followers. Lesson 5 explores Luke's account of the women's surprise encounter at the empty tomb and their attempts to convey the message to the disciples. Lesson 6 is Luke's account of the Easter Sunday lesson, where the author tells of how the disciples came to believe in the Resurrection. Lesson 7 concentrates on Jesus' appearance to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee as told in John 21. Lesson 8 continues John's account and records Jesus' reinstatement of Peter.

Unit III, *"The Birth of the Church,"* has five lessons from the early chapters of the book of Acts. Lesson 9 highlights Jesus' instructions that the disciples wait for the empowering of the Holy Spirit before beginning their ministry. Lesson 10 recounts the celebration of Pentecost—when the Holy Spirit's dramatic entrance empowers the disciples to speak in tongues (foreign languages). In lesson 11, Peter and John demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit when they heal a lame man. Lesson 12 spotlights the Holy Spirit, who transports Philip to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch—where Philip explains the Scriptures. The quarter concludes with lesson 13, where Ananias was directed by the Lord Himself to minister to his enemy, the newly converted Saul.


AND HE SAITH UNTO THEM,
FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU
FISHERS OF MEN.
MATTHEW 4:19

March 5, 2023 **Lesson 1**

THE PRODIGAL SON

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Love in Difficult Times
Youth Topic: Love in Difficult Times

Children
General Lesson Title: The Prodigal Son
Children's Topic: Love in Difficult Times

Devotional Reading
Psalm 28

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Luke 15:11-32
Print Passage: Luke 15:11-24
Key Verse: Luke 15:21

Children
Background Scripture: Luke 15:11-32
Print Passage: Luke 15:11-24
Key Verse: Luke 15:20c

Luke 15:11-24—KJV

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:
12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.
13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.
14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.
15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.
17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

Luke 15:11-24—NIV

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons.
12 "The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.
13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.
14 "After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.
15 "So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.
16 "He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.
17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.
20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.
21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:
23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:
24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

18 "'I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
19 "'I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'
20 "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.
21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
23 "'Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.
24 "'For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We all desire to explore the world on our own terms. What do we do when what we find falls short of our expectations? In the parable of the prodigal son, the father demonstrates how only God meets and exceeds the expectations of those who return to Him.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Evaluate how and why the actions of the father exceeded the expectations of Jesus' listeners.
2. Confront their resistance to the receiving of grace and forgiveness.
3. Give thanks for an occasion in which they received grace that exceeded their expectations.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

— While this parable is often identified as the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" (as the word *prodigal* appears in the headers to this section in many English Bibles such as the ESV, the RSV, and the NASB), German tradition calls it the "Parable of the Lost Son," which is appropriate since it is the third in a series of parables on lost things: lost sheep, lost coin, lost son. One might also argue that both sons are lost.

— It might still more aptly be called the "Parable of the Loving Father," a title proposed by Joachim Jeremias, for from the beginning the focus is on

the father: "There was a man who had two sons" (verse 11, NIV). The father's love is likewise evident in his conversation with the elder son.

— It was lawful for a father to distribute the inheritance to his son(s) either via a will upon his death or as a gift while he was still alive. Nonetheless, the younger brother's request would be seen as deeply disrespectful. The elder son also shows disrespect to his father when he grows angry at the father's forgiveness. When there were two or more sons in an Israelite family, the elder (firstborn) son was to receive "a double portion of all that [the father] hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deuteronomy 21:17). Therefore, the younger son in the parable would have received one-third of the inheritance (see Luke 15:12).

— The details of the younger son's "riotous living" are not spelled out (verse 13) and do not seem very relevant to Jesus, but verse 30 mentions prostitutes. Regardless, the fact that a boy from a Jewish family had ended up tending ritually unclean pigs and had come to the point where he would be willing to eat the food from their troughs indicates that he had hit rock bottom. Pigs (see Luke 15:15) were "unclean" animals to the Israelites (see Leviticus 5:2; 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8).

— When the father saw his son returning, he ran out to meet him. Many have commented that in the ancient Mediterranean it was considered dishonorable, even shameful, for men to run. Nonetheless, the father abandoned all social pretenses and ran out to greet his son with joy and compassion, indicating his love and forgiveness. Luke is the only gospel that records this parable. Luke's emphasis on the social outcasts of the day may explain why he included it (compare Luke 1:46-55; 4:18; 5:17-23; 6:20-23; 7:22, 34; etc.).

— When the father reached his son, he "put his arms around him and kissed him" (see verse 20; literally: "fell on his neck"). This is the language used to describe Esau's welcome of Jacob (see Genesis 33:4) and Joseph's welcome of his brothers (see Genesis 45:14-15). These brothers who welcome estranged siblings provide a striking contrast to the elder brother's rejection of his returning brother. In contrast to the elder brother, they offer positive examples of how brothers and sisters should offer forgiveness.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is historically documented that the healing and preaching ministry of Jesus lasted only three and a half years. In AD 27, Jesus called His first disciples. This marked the official beginning of His ministry. Jesus wanted to train His disciples to continue His ministry after He ascended from Earth. From AD 28 to AD 30, Jesus' ministry took on an intense focus. He moved with deliberate haste and divine purpose to heal the sick, raise the dead, feed the multitudes, experience the Transfiguration, and teach the disciples.

One of the interactive highlights of this intense period in Jesus' ministry was the telling of parables. *Parables* have been defined in a simple way as earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Jesus took various cultural experiences and objects and provided object lessons designed to lead His listeners into deeper divine truths.

Jesus spoke the parables in Luke 12–16 in AD 30–31 at the peak of His ministry. He told the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the focus of today's lesson, to highlight the unique love of God the Father and to show that He is forgiving and accepting. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the third of three parables recorded in Luke 15:11-32.

The parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin are the two previous parables that Jesus communicated in verses 3-10. Biblical scholars maintain that the most probable date for the writing of the gospel of Luke was between AD 59 and AD 63. Since the narrative of the book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome around AD 63, it is understandable why some scholars believe that the gospel of Luke was written prior to that year.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The story of the Prodigal Son is a familiar and favorite story to many students of the Bible. However, too often, the church retells the story separately from its larger context, which includes the first section of Luke 15. The setting of this parable is in response to the Pharisees and scribes' complaint that Jesus was too comfortable with sinners and outcasts. Jesus had a habit of dining with many "tax collectors and sinners," which provoked the Pharisees and scribes to grumble and complain that "this man receives sinners and eats with them" (see Luke 15:1-2). Apparently, the religious elites of Jesus' day harbored an arrogant disdain for sinners and marginalized persons. In their worldview, sinners and outcasts were to be shunned by the religiously pure followers of God. Nevertheless, Jesus confronted their religious elitism and shared this parable.

Although the previous two parables in Luke 15 focused on the loss and recovery of sheep and coin, this parable focused on the loss and recovery of a son, which is of even greater importance to the kingdom of God. It is worth noting that a primary image of God in the gospel of Luke is the portrait of God as Father. This parable illuminates that image as the father in the story continues to recognize the son as a member of the family instead of a hired hand (see Luke 15:19).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

The Father: the central character in the parable. Jesus left him unnamed to show us what God the Father is like as He welcomes those who stray.

The Prodigal Son: the second prominent character who demanded his inheritance. Jesus did not give him a name because, in a sense, there is a "prodigal inclination" in humanity.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Alive again (verse 24)—Greek: *anazaó* (an-ad-zah'-o): to live again; come to life again; be revived; has regained life.

Divided (verse 12)—Greek: *diaireó* (dee-ahee-reh'-o): divided into parts; cut asunder; distributed; apportioned.

Perishing (verse 17)—Greek: *apollumi* (ap-ol'-loo-mee): to destroy, destroy utterly; lose; "perish with hunger" (KJV); "starving to death" (NIV).

Sinned (verse 18)—Greek: *hamartanó* (ham-ar-tan'-o): missed the mark; did wrong; committed a sin (against God).

Sons (verse 11)—Greek: *huios* (hwee-os'): descendants; (figuratively) any persons sharing the same nature as their Father.

Wasted (verse 13)—Greek: *diaskorpizó* (dee-as-kor-pid'-zo): scattered; winnowed; dispersed; "squandered" (NIV).

Younger (verse 12)—Greek: *neos* (neh'-os): young; youthful.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. It Is Not What It Looks Like

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The Younger Son Exhibits Stupidity (Luke 15:11-13)

B. The Younger Son Endures Starvation (Luke 15:14-16)

C. The Younger Son Experiences Sorrow (Luke 15:17-19)

D. The Younger Son Encounters Salvation (Luke 15:20-24)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. It Is Not What It Looks Like

There is a temptation to look with disdain and disfavor upon the prodigal son. There are those who react to this parable with righteous indignation. They question how the young man could treat his father in such a manner. Some might wonder how the young son could ask for an inheritance prior to his father's death. Others might question the disrespectful behavior of the young man toward his father in choosing to live "the high life" in the "far country," violating his upbringing. While it is easy to be critical of the younger son, some argue that there is a trait of the prodigal in all of us. If we are honest with ourselves, we have at times ventured out into the "far country," deceiving ourselves into believing that there is an alternative way of truly enjoying life outside of God's kingdom ethics. Our need to control life and our endless pursuit of happiness will lead us into the "far country." Despite the perceived glitter and glamor of the far country, it is imperative that we remember that "it is not what it looks like."

If we ever find ourselves in the "far country," we are encouraged to "come to ourselves" and experience the forgiveness and unconditional love of a Father who lavishes us with grace and mercy.

B. Biblical Background

The major theme in the gospel of Luke is the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. Jesus entered human history as the perfect man—without sin. In the gospel of Luke, there is a special emphasis on the Lord's love for all people and His offer of salvation to everyone, not just to the Jews. Luke, the physician, is the author of the gospel that bears his name. Scholars maintain that Luke was probably the only Gentile writer inspired by God to write two New Testament books (Luke and Acts). Scholars suggest that Luke was an Antiochan by race and a physician by profession. He is the only evangelist to write a sequel to his gospel, which is the book of Acts. Paul referred to Luke as the beloved physician and listed him separately from the Jewish Christians. This lends credence to the belief that Luke was a Gentile. Luke's keenness for dates and research qualifies him for the title as the first church historian. In the first chapter of his gospel, Luke describes himself as a historian.

The parable of the prodigal son is a part of the triad stories of lostness and recovery, and of the joy that people experience when the lost is found and restored. The parable of the

lost son reflects God's concern for people who are lost and God's desire to reconcile and restore humanity. This concern illustrates the infinite value that God places on every person and the awesome joy He feels when one unbelieving, lost sinner is found, redeemed, and restored.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Younger Son Exhibits Stupidity (Luke 15:11-13)

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

Jesus' initial statement recognizes that a man and his two sons are the main characters of the story, though the interaction between the younger son and the father is the initial focal point of the story. With the phrase "a certain man" in verse 11, there is an embedded message that Jesus' intent was for the reader to be able to apply the principles of this dramatic story to any person at any time. Jesus refused to name the man, likely to suggest a kind of generality in the parable. This generality allows the reader to place himself or herself in the parable at various entry points. The traditional interpretation of the characters is that the father represents God the Father, and the younger son represents the repentant sinner. The older son represents the religious elites. The mentioning of *two* sons sets the stage for Jesus to show the character contrasts between them, thus providing object lessons for us. The younger son has come to be known as the *Prodigal* Son. The term *prodigal* now refers to a person who is recklessly extravagant and spends money wastefully.

In verse 12, Jesus begins this parable with the younger of the two sons requesting his share of the father's estate. In that culture, the eldest son traditionally received a double share of the inheritance. Hence, the eldest son's share of the inheritance was two-thirds and the prodigal son's share was one-third. Although sons did not usually demand an inheritance before the death of the father, the young son wanted to receive his inheritance before his father's death. Interestingly, the text tells nothing of the father's reaction to this request other than he divided his estate between his two sons.

Verse 13 provides a clue to the young man's ultimate motive. After receiving his portion, he took all he had, left home, traveled to a far country, and squandered it all with prodigal (reckless) living. The implied motive of the younger son's request for his inheritance was for the younger son to free himself from his father's authority. The younger son's resultant actions were tragic and wasteful. He eventually embarked upon a lifestyle of extravagant living and possible promiscuous behavior.

B. The Younger Son Endures Starvation (Luke 15:14-16)

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

According to verse 14, this young man foolishly wasted his inheritance on what has

been termed "riotous living," which simply means that the young man lived without control. He invested his inheritance in liabilities that he thought were assets, to his detriment. The young man lived in the moment, thinking his inheritance would last forever. At this point in the parable, the story takes a dramatic turn: as soon as the prodigal son's money ran out, a famine struck the land. He then found himself broke and destitute; he was in need. Verse 15 details the tragic level to which he had sunk. To add insult to injury, in his deplorable condition, he "joined himself to a citizen of that country." In other words, he "hired himself out" as a day laborer to a citizen of that region (verse 15). His job was to feed the swine. For a Jew to feed animals that were considered unclean meant that this young man had wound up in an occupation that was considered the most degrading and detestable job that a Jew could imagine. Interestingly, the Gentile owner valued his pigs more than he did the person who was looking after them.

It is not an overstatement to suggest that physically, morally, and spiritually, this younger son was at his lowest point. He was at the point of enduring starvation. In his extreme hunger, he was tempted to eat what he fed the swine (verse 16a). "Husks" (KJV) or "pods" (NIV) were the seeds of the carob tree and humanly indigestible. Notice that Jesus did not say that this young man did eat them, but that he *would have gladly eaten* them in his situation. At this point in the drama, one could ask, "Where were the people with which he spent time when he had money? Where are the companions upon whom he probably spent some of his money?" Unfortunately, this younger son found out quickly that friends can be fickle when the resources run out. Sadly, no one gave him anything to help him sustain himself (verse 16b). Ironically, the Prodigal Son discovered that pigs were more valuable than he was. There is always a high price tag attached to sin. Jesus used this younger son to symbolize the helpless and desperate condition of sinners estranged from God. The price tag of being alienated from God is too high a cost to pay.

C. The Younger Son Experiences Sorrow (Luke 15:17-19)

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

In his hardship the younger son began to reflect on his life and experience a moment of reckoning. The expression "came to himself" in verse 17 is a literal translation that connotes one's coming to his or her senses, especially when one has been under a delusion. The younger son's pathetic condition led him to regret his foolish decision to leave home, squander his inheritance, and surrender to the basest level of his fleshly nature. After experiencing hunger and bankruptcy, he came to himself. In his coming to himself, he had an enigmatic flashback. He remembered that even the servants in his father's household had enough bread that they could even give away some. The servants had plenty of food to eat while he suffered with hunger. He remembered the abundant resources of his home—where even the hired help had more than enough to eat daily. This verse is a reminder that sin has the capacity to blind persons to God's best for them.

A close analysis of verse 18 reveals that when the prodigal son left home, he left as an arrogant, self-centered person. But when he came to himself, the arrogance was gone, and he admitted his sinful condition and his predicament of pauperism. In the act of "coming to himself," he experienced sorrow and made a life-changing decision. He decided that he would "arise" and go to his father. He accepted the responsibility for his sin and repented. He made the conscious decision that staying where he was would be a non-starter. He therefore resolved to return to his father, confess his sin against him and God, acknowledge his unworthiness to be in the family, and request to be made a hired servant. His proposed request was to be considered less than an ordinary slave. The prodigal son's sincerity in repenting can be seen in the contrast between his requests. When he left home, he was selfishly demanding, "Father, give me"—but in making the conscious decision to return home, he returned home with the plea, "Father, make me . . . ."

The drama of this story serves as an object lesson for anyone who is lost: the lost must first recognize the depths of their sinfulness compared to God's holiness (see Isaiah 6:1-5). Second, they must move beyond regret to repentance from sin and then to obedience to God by placing faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

D. The Younger Son Encounters Salvation (Luke 15:20-24)

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Observe in verse 20 that the prodigal son did not make an arbitrary decision based upon the emotions of the moment. His resolve to follow through with his life-altering commitment is seen in the words "And he arose and came to his father." The younger son followed through on his resolution and returned home. At this point in the parable, the narrator focuses attention on the father's response to his son's return. The implication in this verse is that the father must have been watching for his son's eventual return. While the son was still a distance away, the father recognized his son and ran to meet him (verse 21). Instead of ostracizing his son and giving him a stern lecture, the father "fell on his neck, and kissed him." It is an understatement to say that the father was thrilled to see his son despite his son's misgivings and the less-than-admirable attitude he had toward himself. Without anger, indignation, or reprimand, the father received him back as a son.

As alluded to in verse 21, the prodigal son had his speech prepared and started to recite it. His resolve to demonstrate his sorrow over what he had done is reflected in his prepared speech. However, before he could request that his father make him a hired servant, his father interrupted him with words that undoubtedly thrilled the young man's heart. The father's joy in having his son return home thwarted the completion of the son's speech. The father symbolically illustrated God's attitude toward lost sinners that repent and return to Him.

The son's encounter with salvation is seen in the command that the father gave his servants in verse 22. He told them to do three things:

1. *Bring forth the best robe and put it on his son.* The robe signifies the covering up of the younger son's old self. The younger son was probably in rags. Now, he would be clothed in the finest robe in the household.
2. *Put a ring on his hand.* The ring signifies an elevated status. It is a symbol of authority.
3. *Put shoes on his feet.* Slaves and servants did not wear shoes. Putting shoes on the feet of the Prodigal Son emphasized total restoration and inclusion back into the family.

In verses 23-24, the servants were given one last directive: *bring the fatted calf, kill it, and let us eat.* Why? In his joy, the father pointed out that his son was, in a sense, dead, but was now alive. He was lost, but then he was found. Gaining salvation is always a reason to rejoice.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The main idea embedded in this story is that God allows U-turns. The actions of the father in the story are a picture of how God reacts when a sinner comes back to Him. God sees every person with compassion and worth. God greets the estranged and alienated sinner with open arms and welcomes him or her into the family of God. This should be our model for the way in which we are to be reconciled to one another and how we are to give aid and support to one another when we return from "our far country."

Another important insight in this story is that we will always need God's compassion and mercy to make the right choices as we navigate life. This parable offers hope to all persons. No matter how far persons stray from the Father, He is always ready and willing to welcome them back into a redeemed, reconciled, and restored relationship with Him. In a real sense, the story of the prodigal son is everyone's story (to some degree). Thank God for a Father who eagerly awaits, accepts, reconciles, and restores us!

PRAYER

Eternal God, we are so delighted that not only are You are our Creator, but also, You are our Father. Thank You for having a forgiving spirit toward us. We know that we have strayed away from Your will and way. Thank You for receiving us back into the family. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(February 27–March 5, 2023)

The Prodigal Son

MONDAY, February 27: "'Lord, Hear My Prayer'" (Psalm 28)
TUESDAY, February 28: "'Come to Me, You Who Are Weary'" (Matthew 11:25-30)
WEDNESDAY, March 1: "Jesus Shows Compassion" (Matthew 14:13-21)
THURSDAY, March 2: "I Take Refuge in the Lord" (Psalm 71:1-12)
FRIDAY, March 3: "I Will Proclaim God's Wondrous Deeds" (Psalm 71:13-24)
SATURDAY, March 4: "God Rejoices when Sinners Repent" (Luke 15:1-10)
SUNDAY, March 5: "A Rebellious Son Is Restored" (Luke 15:11-24)

March 12, 2023 **Lesson 2**

A CHILD IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: The Wonder of Childlike Qualities
Youth Topic: The Wonder of Childlike Qualities

Children
General Lesson Title: A Child Is Greatest in the Kingdom
Children's Topic: The Wonder of Childlike Qualities

Devotional Reading
Matthew 19:13-22

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15
Print Passage: Matthew 18:1-9
Key Verse: Matthew 18:4

Children
Background Scripture: Matthew 18:1-9
Print Passage: Matthew 18:1-5
Key Verse: Matthew 18:4

Matthew 18:1-9—KJV

AT THE same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,
3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.
6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Matthew 18:1-9—NIV

AT THAT time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"
2 He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.
3 And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
4 "Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
5 "And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.
6 "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.
7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause

7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!
8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.
9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!
8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.
9 "And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Children are cherished resources with innate qualities and values that often go unappreciated by the larger society. What impedes our ability to be more childlike? Jesus recognized qualities in children that most resemble God's definition of greatness and challenged disciples to relinquish their claims to power or greatness.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Acknowledge that those younger than we are sometimes understand God's ways more clearly.
2. Nurture openness and humility in their daily walk with Christ.
3. Let go of power and remove any obstacles to following God faithfully.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This passage can be seen as an "enacted parable," for Jesus begins by placing a small child among them (verse 2). In the next chapter, Jesus will also go on to welcome the little children (19:13-15).

—While we tend to idealize childhood today, in antiquity, children were held as having very little intrinsic value. Their worth lay in their potential as future contributors. Likewise, the church should remember that children have value now, not just as the future of the church.

—To become like a child does not suggest that we should become naïve or innocent. Rather, by encouraging His disciples to emulate one who was not deemed to hold social status, Jesus is encouraging us to relinquish claims of power and domination over others. Therefore, Jesus singles out humility as the characteristic to emulate (verse 4).

—This sort of inversion of social status is frequent in the Gospel tradition. The lowly are raised up (see Luke 1:52); the poor will be

blessed (see Luke 6:20); and the last will be first (see Matthew 20:16). This is a challenge to the church today to reach out to and to affirm the value of those on the margins of society.

—Jesus not only urges His followers to become like children, but He also threatens those who hold power over the "little ones," pointing out the severe consequences of abusing that power.

—Jesus is not urging literal amputation or self-mutilation in verses 8-9. Rather, He is using vivid imagery to challenge His listeners to remove the sources of sin and corruption in their lives.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Many biblical scholars agree that the gospel of Matthew is difficult to conclusively date. There are several factors that have inspired some scholars to consider a date ranging between AD 50 and AD 100. The first factor relates to the destruction of the Temple which occurred in AD 70. The fact that there is no mention of this catastrophic event in this gospel suggests that the gospel of Matthew was written before this event occurred. Second, the mostly Jewish nature of this gospel suggests that it was written at a time when much of the evangelizing in which Christians partook was directed more exclusively to the Jews. This type of evangelism became less common as time passed. The third factor relates to the writing of the gospel of Mark, which many scholars believe was the first gospel composed, thus making it most plausible that Matthew was written soon after. If the gospel of Mark was written first, then it stands to reason that the gospel of Matthew must have a later date (and vice versa). Nevertheless, most scholars accept the hypothesis that both Matthew and Luke used Mark as source materials and the composition of the book of Matthew was completed somewhere between AD 50 and AD 100.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Matthew is considered to be the most Jewish-centric book of the four Gospels. The author regularly evoked the writings of the Old Testament prophets to affirm Jesus' identity as Israel's long-awaited Messiah. Biblical scholars suggest that the main purpose of Matthew's book was to record the life and teachings of Jesus and to show the Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the expected Messiah. It is interesting to note that the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all written approximately one generation after Jesus' death and resurrection. This is significant because Matthew was a primary source for Jesus' life and ministry. As one of Jesus' disciples, Matthew was present for the events he described. Therefore, his record carries a high degree of historical consistency and reliability.

Most scholars agree that the atmosphere and society in which Matthew wrote his gospel was extremely complex from a political and religious standpoint. Although Christianity grew quickly after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the church was just beginning to spread beyond Jerusalem when Matthew wrote his gospel. Historians also remind us that Christians were beginning to experience persecution from the Roman Empire during the time Matthew wrote his gospel.

A notable fact related to Matthew's writing is that he recorded the narrative of Jesus' life during a time when a small number of people had been alive to hear Jesus' teachings or witness his miracles.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Matthew: the former tax collector who became a

faithful follower of Jesus Christ after being called to follow Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Become (verse 3)—Greek: *ginomai* (ghin'-om-ahee): to come into being; to happen; to is born; come about.

Believe (verse 6)—Greek: *pisteuó* (pist-yoo'-o): to have faith in, trust in; be entrusted with.

Children (verse 3)—Greek: *paidion* (pahee-dee'-on): young ones; little ones; infants.

Greatest (verse 1)—Greek: *megas* (meg'-as): large(st), in the widest sense; all the more; greater things.

Humble (verse 4)—Greek: *tapeinoó* (tap-i-no'-o): to show humility; true lowliness (happens by being fully dependent on the Lord; not relying on self); "lowly" (NIV).

Offenses (verse 7)—Greek: *skandalon* (skan'-dal-on): stumbling blocks; causes for error; "offences" (KJV); "things that cause people to stumble" (NIV).

Receives (verse 5)—Greek: *dechomai* (dekh'-om-ahee): takes; accepts; "receiveth" (KJV); "welcomes" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. The Measure of True Greatness
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. How to Get to Heaven: Conversion and Childlikeness (Matthew 18:1-6)
- B. How to Escape Hell: Watch What You Do and What You See (Matthew 18:7-9)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Measure of True Greatness

Many persons have heard the acronym GOAT (Greatest of All Time) used in reference to various sports personalities. The question, however, is, what does it take to be great? What are the personality ingredients that culminate to produce greatness? What measuring standards do people use to determine who is great and who is not great?

It is important to note that public recognition and definition of greatness are always changing. In fact, why is greatness only defined by comparing two great individuals and determining which one is less great? Interestingly, one observer suggested that people do not consider a person to be great until thousands of people know the person by first name only or until the individual is on top of the music charts, the topic of conversation, and/or bathed in money, jewels, awards, and trophies.

But what is really the test of true greatness? Greatness in the Bible is never determined by how much money someone has or how much influence or power he or she claims to have. Greatness is always associated with the one who is a servant. By biblical standards, our greatness is determined by our willingness to serve.

When the disciples asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, they were surprised by His response. Although the disciples coveted places, positions, and power, Jesus had something else in mind. Today's lesson takes us into one of Jesus' preeminent discourses concerning greatness. In this lesson, we will discover the true test and nature of greatness.

B. Biblical Background

In the first two chapters of the gospel of Matthew, the writer discusses the ancestry, birth, and early life of Jesus. From that point, beginning with chapter 3, the writer focuses on the ministry of Jesus. His ministry included a vast amount of teaching. Matthew describes those teachings as being arranged around "discourses." The teaching in chapter 18 contains the fourth of five discourses in the gospel of Matthew. The fourth discourse emphasizes the importance of humility and self-sacrifice as superior virtues within the faith community ("Five Discourses of Matthew," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Discourses_of_Matthew).

Scholars suggest that Matthew is the author of this gospel. On the Web site *Preaching Source*, it is asserted that the only record of Matthew aside from various lists of disciples is found in Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-32. In these writings, Matthew is called Levi, the publican or tax collector. The name *Levi* is Matthew's Jewish name, which was later changed to Matthew, the Greek equivalent of "Theodore," meaning "gift of Jehovah." Scholars do not know for certain why his name was changed from Levi to Matthew. Some suggest that the change was possibly made because Levi was too obviously a Jewish name, identifying him with the priestly tribe. His being a tax collector for Rome would have reflected unfavorably on the tribe of Levi and its priestly character. Other scholars suggest that the name change possibly carried Christian significance resulting from Matthew's call to discipleship, which was a gift from God (https://preachingsource.com/journal/the-background-of-matthew/).

Nevertheless, Matthew was called from his tax collector's booth in Capernaum in Galilee to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Matthew's education and experience equipped him perfectly for the discipleship ministry to which he was called. As a tax collector, Matthew was educated in the use of both the Aramaic and Greek languages.

Matthew's purpose in writing this gospel was to prove to the Jews that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. How to Get to Heaven: Conversion and Childlikeness

(Matthew 18:1-6)

AT THE same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone

were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Verse 1 opens by revealing how the subtlety of the "old nature's" desire for power, position, and prestige comes to life. In the previous chapter (see Matthew 17:22), Jesus gave the disciples a second prediction of His betrayal and subsequent death. Unfortunately, this announcement did not have a lasting effect on the men. Their attention turned to the pursuit of power and position. The day began with the auspicious appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1-8). However, only three of the disciples—Peter, James, and John—had been invited by Jesus to witness this glorious scene. In Mark's account, there is an argument among the three disciples about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (see Mark 9:33-34). After descending from the mountain, Jesus healed a demon-possessed boy and paid taxes for Himself and the disciples with a coin from the mouth of a fish (see Matthew 17:24-27). Perhaps the disciples pondered why the Lord of the kingdom is obligated to pay taxes of any kind.

Some scholars believe that the phrase "at the same time" suggests that the question the disciples were about to ask Jesus took place just after He had announced His death. Other scholars believe that the questions the disciples were about to ask Jesus took place after the miraculous healing of the demon-possessed boy. Nevertheless, embedded in the question the disciples asked was self-centered motivation concerning greatness, power, and prestige in God's kingdom.

Verses 2-4 reveal that instead of Jesus' directly answering His disciples' question, He decides to give them a powerful and compelling object lesson on greatness—with a little child as the subject. Imagine the disciples' surprise and shock when Jesus called a child to Him without naming any of them as the greatest. Although the King James Version refers to the male gender of the child, the word *child* (Greek: *paidion*) has reference to a young boy or girl. The word *set* (Greek: *histemi*) means "to stand." Jesus had the child to stand amid the disciples. In using the child as an object lesson, Jesus gave the disciples a lesson they would not forget. Jesus taught them that they had to become like a child—a person of no status—to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' answer was a radical departure from Jewish society's estimation of who is valuable in society. Children were not considered very valuable. They were persons of no status, subjected to the authority of their elders. Jesus taught that one could only belong to the kingdom of God by coming to God with a posture of humility absent of arrogant self-sufficiency. By providing this object lesson, the disciples were challenged to change their way of thinking regarding positions of power, popularity, prestige, and influence in the kingdom of heaven. Greatness in God's kingdom is based on childlike humility of spirit, not human effort through the jockeying for positions of power and prestige.

In verse 5, Jesus transitions from a focus on the natural to a focus on the spiritual. Jesus declares that there is a blessing in receiving citizens of His kingdom who humble themselves like children. Whoever receives a little child

(a representative of His humble followers) in His name will be rewarded as if the person has received the Lord Himself. What is done for the disciple (as represented by a child) would be considered as having been done for the Master. Those who desired to be accepted by Him were required to accept others who exemplify the virtue of humility. It is certainly understood that children are neither perfect nor sinless, but they possess traits that should characterize the believer's life. The truth that Jesus was sharing with His disciples is that true greatness is exemplified by accepting persons who humble themselves as children on the ground or authority of Jesus and by accepting the role of a servant. Assuming the posture of true greatness means becoming humble in Christ for the glory of God.

Verse 6 begins with the word *but*, suggesting that what Jesus is about to say was in contrast with what came before. Jesus issued a strong warning to those who cause little ones—who trust in Him—to stumble. The Greek verb used for the phrase "to sin" is *skandalisē*, meaning "to offend, or cause to fall." The warning is to those in the world, but especially to believers who directly or indirectly lead others to sin. Becoming a source of temptation to sin is one way to become a "stumbling block" to Jesus' "little ones." Refusing to forgive, making disparaging remarks, displaying denigrating attitudes, failing to defend and protect, and displaying a lack of Christian concern are additional causes. Jesus made it clear that the guilty are better off being drowned with a heavy millstone around the neck than to face God's judgment for seducing a believer to sin. In other words, it would be better for a person to die before causing a citizen of the kingdom of God to sin.

B. How to Escape Hell: Watch What You Do and What You See

(Matthew 18:7-9)

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

One of the inevitable experiences of life is the constant temptation to sin and the barrage of stumbling blocks presented by the world. The word *offences* (Greek: *skandalon*) speaks of people, places, or things that trip people up and trap them in a vicious cycle of sin. The world provides innumerable allurements that tempt persons to sin. Because believers are in the world, believers will never be free from the temptation of sin. However, believers must not be guilty of tempting others to sin. Individuals who tempt others to sin will experience the judgment of God in profound ways. The word *woe* (Greek: *ouai*) is an interjection that speaks of indignation or grief. This was a strong message to the disciples to not allow the scribes and Pharisees to cause them to stumble, and it is a strong message to believers to not follow the wrong people.

In verses 8-9, Jesus utilizes hyperbole to demonstrate the seriousness of causing others

to sin. The word *cometh* is a present-tense verb; it speaks of something or someone who continues to effect sin in an individual's life. It is important to note that Jesus was not touting self-mutilation when He suggested to "cut off" members of the body that may be offensive. The point that Jesus was making is that sin must be dealt with instantly, radically, and completely because of its destructive effects. In essence, Jesus is suggesting that we perform "spiritual surgery" by scrupulously acknowledging, confessing, and forsaking sin in our lives to prevent causing others to stumble.

As members of the faith community, we are challenged to apply Jesus' warning about sin's effect and the importance of dealing with it among our members in intentional ways. We are to dismantle the barrier of self-righteousness and eliminate spiritual snobbery and exclusivity. What should become evident in the faith community is a spirit of genuine humility exemplified in our relationships through forgiveness, acceptance, and restoration.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the age-old problems in modern society is understanding and accepting the characteristics of true greatness. Some suggest that greatness is measured by aggressiveness and the ability to show "alpha" strength. Jesus, however, taught a completely different view of greatness. Instead of pride, He emphasized humility. Instead of aggressiveness, He emphasized child-likeness. Instead of disorder, He emphasized self-control. True greatness is determined by one's willingness to humble himself or herself and display a spirit of meekness as he or she participates in the mission of God.

PRAYER

Father, we find ourselves sometimes at the disposal of the challenges and problems of life. Help us to have the humility of a child as we seek to maneuver through these challenges. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 6-12, 2023)

A Child Is Greatest in the Kingdom

MONDAY, March 6: "Jesus Heals a Gentile Girl" (Matthew 15:21-28)
TUESDAY, March 7: "Let the Little Children Come" (Matthew 19:13-22)
WEDNESDAY, March 8: "'Learn Wisdom, My Child'" (Proverbs 1:7-16)
THURSDAY, March 9: "Teach Your Children God's Laws" (Deuteronomy 4:7-14)
FRIDAY, March 10: "Consecrated from the Womb" ((Jeremiah 1:1-10)
SATURDAY, March 11: "The Praises of Children" (Matthew 21:12-17)
SUNDAY, March 12: "The Greatest in the Kingdom" (Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15)

March 19, 2023 **Lesson 3**

JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Different, but the Same
Youth Topic: Different, but the Same

Children
General Lesson Title: Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman
Children's Topic: Different, but the Same

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 44:1-8

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: John 4:1-42
Print Passage: John 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41
Key Verse: John 4:39

Children
Background Scripture: John 4:1-42
Print Passage: John 4:7-26
Key Verse: John 4:23

John 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41—KJV

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.
8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)
9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.
10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.
11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

John 4:7-15, 28-30, 39-41—NIV

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"
8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)
9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)
10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."
11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?
13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.
15 The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

. . . . .

28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,
29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?
30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

. . . . .

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.

12 "Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"
13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,
14 "but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

. . . . .

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.

. . . . .

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.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People create barriers that can hinder relationships. What can be done to eliminate these barriers? Jesus was able to break the relationship barriers with the Samaritan woman, offering her living water leading to eternal life.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Compare and contrast societal barriers in Jesus' time to the barriers that exist in the church today.
2. Confess their tendency to allow differences to hinder relationships.
3. Offer hospitality to someone who is different from themselves.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—After the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, foreign colonists were transplanted there and intermarried with the people of that region. The descendants of these marriages became known as Samaritans. The statement that "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans" (verse 9, NRSV) underscores the uneasy relationship that existed between Jews and Samaritans in the time of Jesus.

—There is a further tension here related to gender, and Jesus' disciples were astonished to find Him speaking with a woman (see verse 27).

—Despite these differences, the Samaritan woman emphasizes their commonality when she speaks of "*our* ancestor Jacob" (verse 12, NRSV; emphasis added).

—Most people would travel to the well either early in the morning or late in the evening to escape the heat. Jesus, however, meets the woman at the well at noon in the heat of the day. She has probably traveled to the well at this time because she has been ostracized on account of her questionable marital status.

—While the woman has the bucket at the well, it is Jesus who offers "living water." This can also be translated as "flowing water." Jesus is thus depicted as a fountain of fresh, flowing water, while Jacob's well is a stagnant cistern. The phrase "living water" in John 4:10, explained in John 4:14, also appears in John 7:38, with variations in Revelation 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17.

—The story concludes with the woman's assuming the role of disciple/missionary when she carries her story to the city and implores the others to "come and see" (verse 29).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The traditional view is that John wrote his gospel from Ephesus between AD 69 and AD 70. Recent scholarship, however, indicates that the book was written later. Because John's gospel is the last of the four Gospels to be written and because John's gospel appears to supplement and build on the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), many scholars believe that the chronological setting of John's gospel is sometime in AD 85–90. Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that the gospel of John was written between AD 50 and AD 100.

In today's lesson, the extended and salient story about Jesus' interchange with a Samaritan woman continues Jesus' pattern begun in chapter 3—where Jesus intentionally and continuously reaches out to and interacts with persons of questionable character, status, and worth in first-century Palestine. The dialogue with Nicodemus in chapter 3 and the interaction with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 intrigued and disturbed the religious elites of Jesus' day.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The personality in today's lesson is a Samaritan woman who had experienced multiple marriages. By Jesus' day, a vehement tension existed between the people of Judea and Samaria partly because of race and religion. Both groups experienced centuries of extreme and brutal political fights. Hence, it would have been surprising to a first-century observer to witness Jesus and a "Samaritan woman" acknowledging and saluting each other.

One should be careful, however, to not conclude that the Samaritan woman was a resident of the city of Samaria. Instead, one should view the Samaritan woman as a representative of the religion, language, history, culture, and attitudes of persons who were on the margins of Judaism. Hence, when the disciples saw Jesus talking to the woman (and what the woman represented), they were amazed. The disciples were amazed that Jesus was conversing with a woman in public. The cultural norms of that day held women in very low regard. Perhaps the disciples were more concerned that Jesus was "talking with a woman" than with the fact that she was a Samaritan. In the eyes of many, the woman at the well had three things working against her: (1) she was a woman, (2) she was a Samaritan, and (3) she had been married multiple times. However, Jesus did not allow the cultural, societal, and religious strikes against her to prevent Him from reaching out and communicating with her. Jesus espoused and modeled a message that was inclusive of everyone— regardless of status, sin, or stains from society. In a very real sense, Jesus was "cross-cultural" before the phrase became popular.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

John: John was one of the sons of Zebedee, who followed our Lord. His story extends many years past the earthly ministry of Christ. John was known as an apostle, an author, and the only apostle who was not killed as a martyr.

Samaritan Woman: the Samaritan woman is one of the unnamed persons in the Bible who came to occupy a prominent place in biblical history. The Samaritan woman met Jesus at Jacob's well and discovered His identity as the Messiah. She left her water jar, much like the disciples left their nets, and became an effective evangelist to her community.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Association (verse 9)—Greek: *sugchraomai* (soong-khrah'-om-ahee): to use together with; "have . . . dealings with" (KJV); "associate with" (NIV).

Disciples (verse 8)—Greek: *mathétés* (math-ay-tes'): learners; pupils.

Gift (verse 10)—Greek: *dórea* (do-reh-ah'): a free gift; a gift without repayment; freely give.

Give (verse 7)—Greek: *didómi* (did'-o-mee): to put, place, offer, allow, grant.

Living (verse 10)—Greek: *zaó* (dzah'-o): to live, experience God's gift of life; is alive.

Water (verse 7)—Greek: *hudór* (hoo'-dore): waters; of the water in rivers.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Diversity in Action
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Jesus' Request of the Samaritan Woman (John 4:7-8)
B. The Samaritan Woman's Response (John 4:9)
C. Jesus Discusses Liquid Water versus Living Water (John 4:10-15)
D. The Samaritan Woman Delivers a Life-giving Message (John 4:28-30)
E. The Townspeople Respond (John 4:39-41)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Diversity in Action

One of the buzz words we hear frequently in the political and economic world is "diversity." There is a concerted effort to push for diversity in politics, education, the workplace, and other spaces. What is *diversity*? It is the quality of being different and the practice of including or involving people from a wide range of distinct backgrounds and experiences to add value to the whole.

Although some persons argue that diversity was not prioritized in biblical times and should not be the major issue in current times, it is important to remember that most societies in biblical times were male-dominated. When Jesus arrived on the scene in human form, He transformed the landscape by reaching out to persons regardless of their gender, socioeconomic status, or racial identification.

Today's lesson focuses on Jesus' dismantling of the social customs that banned Jewish men from publicly conversing with women as well as engaging socially with a Samaritan. Jesus dismantled cultural, religious, and social barriers. In one interaction, Jesus personified and modeled diversity in action.

B. Biblical Background

The book of John is believed to have been written by the beloved disciple of Jesus named John, the brother of James and the son of Zebedee. Not only was John part of Jesus' inner circle, but he was also a Jew, a native of Palestine, an apostle, and an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. The gospel of John was written after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and scholars believe that it was written in a relatively short time. The book is noted by many biblical scholars as being a testament to the deity of Jesus Christ—as it presents Him as the Savior of the world in human form. In other words, the gospel of John introduces Jesus as fully divine yet completely human.

The theme of John's gospel is Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God. The signs presented in John's gospel point to and prove the deity of Christ that encourages others to receive new life in Christ.

In chapter 4 of the gospel of John, Jesus is presented as the Savior of the world. As John focused on affirming Jesus' deity, John stated that Jesus "must" go through Samaria (see John 4:4). Jesus knew that the Samaritan woman would be at the well and He planned to be there to speak with her. It is important to affirm that Jesus' meeting the Samaritan woman was not by chance; rather, it was part of God's intentional plan to further reveal Jesus' identity and bring the Samaritan woman and many others in her village into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Biblical scholars suggest that the content of this lesson is Jesus' second long interview with an individual. The first was with Nicodemus (see John 3:1-21). The difference between the two interviews is that *Nicodemus sought* Jesus, but *Jesus* purposely *sought* this woman. Thus, His intentional "detour" through Samaria was both expedient and spiritual (see John 4:4). Jesus expeditiously left Judea for Galilee to prevent an intensification of what appeared to be a public rivalry between His ministry and His cousin John the Baptist's ministry. Spiritually, Jesus' decision to go through Samaria was prompted by a divine appointment He had to fulfill: to continue His mission of seeking and saving the lost (see Luke 19:10).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jesus' Request of the Samaritan Woman (John 4:7-8)

There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

Centuries of hostility between Jews and Samaritans had incited prejudice and hatred. Although Samaria lay between Galilee and Judaea, where the Jews lived, many Jews chose to journey around Samaria rather than travel through it. The Samaritans were a mixed-race people with a mixed religion. Scholars suggest that the Jews hated and despised the Samaritans because the Samaritans were the descendants of Jewish exiles who married Gentiles after the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Hence, Samaria did not just represent a geological barrier, but also a racial and religious barrier for the Jews. Perhaps this is the reason why Jesus was so strongly inclined to go through Samaria as He headed north from Judea (see John 4:1-4). Scholars suggest that Jesus and His disciples walked about 34 miles from Jerusalem before resting. When Jesus and the disciples reached the Samaritan village of Sychar, Jesus rested beside a well while the disciples went to purchase food. According to Jewish time, it was the sixth hour, which meant it was around noon (see John 4:5-6, 8).

As Jesus sat by Jacob's well, tired and thirsty, a woman of Samaria showed up to draw water (verse 7). A critical look at the woman's arrival at Jacob's well reveals two unusual dynamics. The first unusual circumstance is that the woman came to the well to draw water at an unusual time. She arrived at midday; but the customary times for drawing water was either in the evening or in the morning. The second unusual occurrence is that according to biblical details, she traveled a long distance, purposely disregarding water sources closer to her village. Why would she do what she did? God ordered the woman's steps to meet a divine appointment, positioning her at the well at the very moment when Jesus would be there.

As soon as the woman arrived at the well, Jesus initiated the discourse by requesting a drink of water. With this request, Jesus was effectively dismantling the social, racial, and cultural barriers that separated them. They were separated by race: she was a Samaritan, and He was a Jew. Jews did not want to be associated with Samaritans. There was also the religious barrier: the Jews worshipped in Jerusalem; the Samaritans worshipped at a mountain in Samaria. Additionally, there

was the cultural barrier—a tradition restricting men from speaking to women in public. Nevertheless, Jesus broke down those barriers by requesting a drink of water.

B. The Samaritan Woman's Response (John 4:9)

Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

Verse 9 records the details of the woman's response to what seems like an ordinary request from a weary traveler: "Will you give me a drink?" (verse 7, NIV). The woman was shocked and wanted to know why a Jew would ask her for a drink, especially since she was a Samaritan woman. To this woman, it was even more surprising that a Jew would risk ceremonial defilement by drinking from a Samaritan's waterpot. The woman was so surprised that she repudiated Jesus for crossing the line between men and women and Jews and Samaritans (see John 4:27). She had no idea that what was taking place was a divine setup. Jesus' purpose in passing through Samaria was to ignite a fire that would breach the wall of the residual cultural, social, and religious hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

C. Jesus Discusses Liquid Water versus Living Water (John 4:10-15)

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

Jesus ignored the woman's question and turned the tables on her. He did not allow Himself to be drawn into a debate along religious and racial lines. His reply with the phrases "the gift of God," "who it is that asks you for a drink," and "living water" diplomatically placed her in the position of the thirsty one (verse 10). The Samaritans did not believe that people received gifts from God. Rather, they attempted to satisfy God with various rituals and sacrifices based upon the laws of Moses and Assyrian customs. Hence, Jesus piqued her curiosity. Additionally, Jesus' own identity was a mystery. His response caused her to wonder if this Jewish stranger facilitated the equivalent of an angelic visitation. Additionally, Jesus caused her to ponder the capacity of "living water" to quench and satisfy the insatiable thirst of her soul. Interestingly, Jesus' response caused her to thirst for clarity.

The Samaritan woman challenged Jesus' amazing offer, and her response revealed the depths of her spiritual blindness (verses 11-12). She failed to comprehend two significant truths: His reference to "living water" was spiritual and not physical, and He was indeed greater than Jacob, the revered ancestor of both the Jews and Samaritans. She most likely understood His reference to "living water" as water flowing in the underground spring that fed the well. Perhaps she pondered in her mind that Jesus was not even able to produce "regular water" because He did not have a bucket and

a rope. She pointed out that this well was deep (about 100 feet) and implied that He thought too highly of Himself if He considered Himself more significant than Jacob, who gave the well, drank from it, and watered his livestock there. Although she wondered what Jesus had to offer regarding "living water," her question anticipated a negative answer. She doubted if this stranger possessed the ability to provide what He offered. Again, Jesus chose not to respond to the questions raised by the woman.

Instead, Jesus refocused the woman's attention on the issue at hand (verses 13-14). He made an important distinction between the well water and the "living water." Jesus stated that the water from Jacob's well was great, but it would not permanently satisfy thirst. People and animals kept getting thirsty and had to return to Jacob's well every day for water to quench their thirst. However, those drinking the "living water" Jesus offered would never thirst again. Additionally, they would be continually satisfied and possess an internal spring of life-giving water. Jesus used the word *whosoever* to indicate that the water He offered is available to anyone who desires it.

The woman immediately asked for this gift even though she did not fully understand what she was requesting (verse 15). She was still unclear about the process of spiritual transformation. All the woman "heard" was that she would never thirst again. She had reached the point of accepting Jesus' offer of eternal life. However, she needed to acknowledge the reality of her sin and His identity as the Savior and Messiah.

D. The Samaritan Woman Delivers a Life-giving Message

(John 4:28-30)

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.

Jesus capitalized on the woman's personal expectation that the Messiah would come and explain everything by announcing that He was the anticipated Messiah (see John 4:25-27). With her spiritual vision corrected, she left her waterpot at the well, went into the city, and excitedly invited people to come see a man that knew everything about her past (verses 28-29).

Interestingly, these verses indicate that the woman was willing to leave behind the very thing she guarded with her life to tell others of the experience she had with Christ. Oh, the things we are willing to leave behind when we have a genuine encounter with Jesus! Jesus' supernatural knowledge of her personal life impressed her so much that she concluded that He was a prophet. Having recognized her need for Christ as Messiah, the woman endeavored to share her discovery with others (verse 30).

E. The Townspeople Respond

(John 4:39-41)

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.

Consequently, a sizeable group from her village, Sychar, gathered at her request and believed in Him because of her testimony (verse 39). However, many more believed after He ministered in the area for two days at the crowd's request (verses 40-41). Amazingly, the evangelistic harvest in the city was based on the woman's encounter with Jesus

and public testimony thereafter. This underscores the fact that human witness is essential to evangelism. The outreach effort in the city spearheaded by a woman who refused to remain quiet resulted in many persons' believing that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. This was the unspoken reason for why Jesus traveled through Samaria. To reiterate, the woman's willingness to evangelize resulted in many people's coming to faith in Jesus. Some scholars believe that her efforts laid the foundation for the ministry of Philip in Samaria (see Acts 8) following Stephen's martyrdom. The complete account of Christ's ministry to this woman and the Samaritans at Sychar sets an example for the faith community to follow in offering salvation to the lost. Jesus did not allow systemic racism and sexism, or religious prejudices to hinder Him from offering eternal life to all persons of society—including the outcasts and marginalized. Therefore, any evangelistic efforts to the world should emulate Jesus' loving model and embracing attitude toward others and the Samaritan woman's zeal to share her testimony after encountering Jesus.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

An unlikely vessel became a strong witness to the Gospel. Jesus' approach with the Samaritan woman is both instructive and inspirational. His goal was to save her and not shame her. His strategy was to lift her up and not tear her down. His intent was to reach her and not revile her. In other words, Jesus' goal was to save the Samaritan woman and send her into the world to share the Good News. Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well is a wonderful reminder of God's vision for citizens of the kingdom of God. God's salvation is available to all and can be effectively shared.

PRAYER

Father, thank You that Jesus does not leave us at the surface, but probes until He can lead us deeper. Help us to allow You to fill us with Your living water. Help us never to take Your Holy Spirit for granted. Thank You for filling us and using us in Your service. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 13-19, 2023)

Jesus Talks with a Samaritan Woman

MONDAY, March 13: "Rivers of Living Water" (John 7:37-43)
TUESDAY, March 14: "Worship God Alone" (2 Kings 17:24-34)
WEDNESDAY, March 15: "Handling Opposition to God's Plans" (Ezra 4:1-8, 11b-16)
THURSDAY, March 16: "Water on a Thirsty Land" (Isaiah 44:1-8)
FRIDAY, March 17: "Jesus Offers Living Water" (John 4:1-15)
SATURDAY, March 18: "Worship in Spirit and Truth" (John 4:16-26)
SUNDAY, March 19: "Jesus, the Savior of the World" (John 4:27-29, 31-42)

March 26, 2023 **Lesson 4**

JESUS OVERPOWERS LEGION

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: One with a Mental Illness
Youth Topic: One with a Mental Illness

Children
General Lesson Title: Jesus Heals
Children's Topic: A Sick Man Is Healed

Devotional Reading
2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Adult/Youth
Background Scriptures: Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39
Print Passage: Mark 5:1-13, 18-20
Key Verse: Mark 5:20

Children
Background Scripture: Mark 5:1-8, 14-20
Print Passage: Mark 5:1-8, 14-15, 18-20
Key Verse: Mark 5:8

Mark 5:1-13, 18-20—KJV

AND THEY came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.
2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,
3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:
4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.
5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.
6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

Mark 5:1-13, 18-20—NIV

THEY WENT across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.
2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.
3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.
4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him.
5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.
6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.
7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.
8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.
9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.
10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.
11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.
12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.
13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

. . . . .

18 And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.
19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.
20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

God's name don't torture me!"
8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"
9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."
10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.
11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.
12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them."
13 He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

. . . . .

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.
19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."
20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: There are people who shun those that are on the margins of society. What can be done for those who are marginalized? After Jesus heals a man marginalized by an extreme disabling condition, He directs him to give witness of his transformation to his community.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Compare and contrast contemporary symptoms and consequences of mental illness with those experienced by the man in Mark's story.
2. Confess the ways that they (or their churches) misjudge or stigmatize people.
3. Raise awareness in the community of services available for treating mental illness.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The setting among the tombs suggests that the man with the unclean spirits, who was utterly isolated and cut off from society, was (at least figuratively speaking) dead to the world.

—The implied presence of corpses among the tombs and the nearby presence of unclean swine provide a context of ritual impurity, which matches the identification of the possessing spirit as "unclean."

—The exorcism of the unclean spirits results in the potential for the man's reintegration into society. He was now "sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). If he had been dead before, he is now raised to new life. This story may anticipate the resurrection of Jesus and of those who believe in Him.

—The people's response is surprising. Rather than welcoming the former demoniac, they are fearful and ask Jesus to depart. They have no conceptual framework for understanding His life-transforming powers. The loss of the pigs would also spell financial hardship for their owners.

—The fact that Jesus healed a man who lived among tombs and near pigs speaks to Jesus' willingness to work for a purpose higher than the Old Testament laws of purity (see Leviticus 11:7; Numbers 19:11; etc.).

—The designation *Legion* suggests that the man was beset by a multitude of demons producing impulses, personalities, and behaviors beyond the man's control. A Roman legion at full strength numbered six thousand. The intense desire of Legion to drive Jesus away is consistent with other accounts in which demons encounter Jesus, the Holy One of God (see Mark 1:24, etc.).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The gospel of Mark is identified as the shortest gospel. Approximately 90 percent of its material also occurs in Matthew, Luke, or both. However, the significance of Mark's gospel is the fact that its shortness and simplicity have made it an ideal introductory treatise of the Christian faith.

Most scholars accept the early unanimous view that John Mark wrote this gospel. However, the date of the writing of the gospel of Mark has been debated by many. There is agreement that no date can be fixed with any certainty; however, a date prior to the destruction of Jerusalem is the common consensus. Because Mark is thought to be the first gospel written, an early date is considered essential for Luke to have used Mark's material. A date of AD 57–60 is the date many scholars accept for the composition of this gospel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The description of the demoniac provides a clue into the geographical setting of today's lesson. The demoniac is identified as "the Gadarene

Demoniac." The country of the Gadarenes or Gergesenes was located on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. In the New Testament, it refers to a location on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Scholars suggest that although "Gadarenes" and "Gergesenes" are derived from a different Greek word as each other, they are essentially referring to the same area. Historians maintain that the Gadarenes consist of the city of Gadara and its surrounding area. The region is located east of the Jordan River and southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The country of the Gadarenes (Gergesenes) is one of the few areas that Jesus visited where Gentiles (non-Jews) composed most of the population. The Gadarenes was the place where Jesus confronted a man whose possession by demons apparently gave him a level of superhuman strength like that of Samson's (see Mark 5:3-5). The man, who was naked when he saw Jesus (see Luke 8:27), had the added ability of enduring both freezing and sweltering temperatures as well as the pain he inflicted upon himself!

Scholars suggest that the significance of the name and location of this country provide insight into how Jesus extends God's mercy to both people and locations outside of Israel. Hence, salvation is offered to Gentiles as well as Jews.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Mark: John Mark, often simply called Mark, is the author of the gospel of Mark. He was a believer in the early church mentioned directly in the book of Acts. John Mark is first mentioned as the son of a woman named Mary (see Acts 12:12) whose house was being used as a place in which believers could gather and pray. Later, Mark is mentioned as a companion of Barnabas and Paul's during their travels together (see Acts 12:25).

The Gadarene Demoniac: a man "possessed by a demon" who came from the caves to meet Jesus. Although people attempted to tie him down, he was too strong to be bound, even with chains. He would cry out night and day among the tombs and cut himself with stones.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Adjure (verse 7)—Greek: *horkizó* (hor-kid'-zo): to make (one) swear; charge solemnly; implore; make an oath with the prompt "In God's name" (NIV).

Compassion (verse 19)—Greek: *oiktirmos* (oyk-tir-mos'): pity; favor; grace; "mercy" (NIV).

Legion (verse 9)—Greek: *legión* (leg-eh-ohn'): a division of the Roman army, numbering about 6,000 infantry with additional cavalry; hence, a very large number.

Possessed (verse 18)—Greek: *daimonizomai* (dahee-mon-id'-zom-ahee): under the power of an evil spirit or demon; "demon-possessed" (NIV).

Unclean (verse 2)—Greek: *akathartos* (ak-ath'-ar-tos): not pure; unclean things; "impure" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Demons Are Not Forever

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. The Demoniac's Desolation (Mark 5:1-5)
B. The Demoniac's Deliverance (Mark 5:6-13)
C. The Demoniac's Desire and Destiny (Mark 5:18-20)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Demons Are Not Forever

Scripture speaks of the existence of beings known as "demons," or "unclean spirits." Contrary to the opinions of many, demons do exist. They are evil spirits with malicious intent. They exist everywhere on the earth, facilitating the work of Satan.

What are demons? Demons are evil, fallen angels who follow Satan instead of God. When Satan was cast out of heaven, many angels fell with him and evil abounded in them (see Ezekiel 28:15). A description of the fall of Satan and his demons is found in Revelation 12:9, which reads, "The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (NRSV).

Why do demons exist? Just as God's angels exist to praise Him and assist believers, Satan and his demons exist to slander God's name in the earth and to deceive and destroy all who love and serve God. The Bible refers to demons as "evil spirits" and "unclean spirits" who are angels of Satan. Satan and his demons continuously do battle with God and his angels as well as God's people. Demons are dark spiritual beings that sometimes take on physical characteristics.

Demons are powerful spirits, and the Bible indicates that human beings should not play with or underestimate them. However, it is important to remember that demons/fallen angels are defeated enemies of God. They are already under the curse of destruction. There is coming a day when the devil and his demons will be ultimately defeated. Satan may be the prince of this world, but every believer has received the following assurance that "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4; see Ephesians 2:2). The good news for every believer is that the power of God is greater than any demonic force you could ever face.

B. Biblical Background

Mark's gospel is a fast-paced, "in your face" gospel. Specifically, Mark emphasizes the works of the Lord rather than the words of Jesus. For example, Mark records nineteen of Jesus' miracles but mentions only four parables. Scholars suggest that the main contextual thrust of Mark's gospel is to present Jesus as coming into the world not to be served but

to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many (see Mark 10:45). Mark presents Jesus as a man on a mission to bring hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless, healing to the hurting, deliverance to the bound, and salvation to the lost.

Biblical historians suggest that in New Testament times there were two main areas of Galilees, upper and lower. Jesus grew up in the densely populated lower Galilee and carried out most of His ministry within the confines of that area. It was in Galilee that Jesus first proclaimed the dimensions of His message and demonstrated its power. Scholars observe that Jesus performed at least thirty-three miracles and shared nineteen of His thirty-two recorded parables in that area.

Prior to chapter 5 of the gospel of Mark, Jesus calmed the wind and seas. The command that Jesus had over the elements produced a sense of awe among the disciples. As the disciples approached land, Jesus revealed who He was in another dramatic way. Scholars suggest that the chapter 5 narrative represents people's being set free by Jesus (in a myriad of ways) from bondages of all kinds. Because Jesus is as a man on a mission, the story of His interaction with the demoniac of Gadarene is not strange or unusual.

The demon-possessed man in the fifth chapter of the gospel of Mark was a citizen of Gadara. Gadara is the name given to this place because this is the place where the tribe of Gad settled after the exodus from Egypt. God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh to let His people go. God had heard their cry and remembered the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of how He was going to bring the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and bring them to Canaan to a large land flowing with milk and honey. However, the tribe of Gad decided not to settle in Canaan but to settle on the east side of the Jordan. As they settled on the east side of the Jordan, they began to assimilate themselves with the world around them. They even began to eat the forbidden flesh of swine. Interestingly, Jesus cast the evil spirits of the demoniac man into a herd of pigs. Although Matthew suggests that two demon-possessed men met Jesus (see Matthew 8:28), scholars suggest that Mark and Luke focused on the more vocal man who eventually desired to become a disciple of Jesus'.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Demoniac's Desolation
(Mark 5:1-5)

AND THEY came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

This passage follows Jesus' demonstration of power over the natural world (see Mark 4:35-41). Verse 1 records Jesus and His disciples arriving in the country of the Gadarenes or the region of the Gerasenes. This area was located on the eastern shore of the Sea of

Galilee. The tribe of Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh received this area to settle. Hence, the people came to be known as the Gadarenes. They lived on that side the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee.

In verse 2, immediately after getting out of the boat, Jesus encountered a man from "the tombs" with an evil/unclean spirit. This verse highlights not merely a maniac, but a demoniac. Mark paints the vivid and chilling picture of a sadistic, out-of-control individual that one expects to see in a science fiction movie rather than experience in real life. With blood streaming from various parts of his body he had cut with a jagged, sharp stone, the man roamed the mountains and the tombs—howling and crying in utter despair. Although the description of the demoniac man may seem extreme on the surface, he was only expressing the disorder that was within. Sadly, the current culture encourages and teaches individuals to camouflage and mask demonic oppression and mental/emotional disorders. Because people are so successful at masking their condition, no one ever knows the extent of their inner turmoil until it is played out in the public arena.

The demoniac man was at war with himself and with other human beings. His condition indicated that he could not live in community. He was consigned to the tombs. The term *tombs* refers to cave-like rooms that were chiseled or carved out of rocks to serve as burial sites. Often, these tombs were the habitation for those whom society deemed demented and deranged. Forms of "medical treatment" for the demented or mentally sick included isolating them from inhabited areas like graveyards and binding them with chains. Unfortunately, during that period, there were no psychiatric hospitals or mental health centers. The only place that could serve as a place of consignment was the cemetery—the abode of the dead. This account, more graphic than the other Gospel accounts, indicates that the function of demonic possession is to distort and destroy the image of God in humanity.

In verses 3-4, Mark intricately describes the man's condition. He was a violent outcast of society. The powerful demonic forces imbued the man with strength to pull his chains apart and break his shackles. With such strength, one can imagine the damage he could do in a community or village if allowed to remain there. Apparently, the community had made efforts to confine this man, but his great strength, resulting from demonic possession and influence, prevented the community from restraining him.

Verse 5 describes the man as roaming the mountains and tombs, day and night, emitting a continuous unearthly scream while cutting himself with stones. The inclusion of this dramatic encounter between Jesus and this demoniac provides an illustration of what Satan can do to people or cause them to do to themselves if they have not been delivered from demonic influence and sealed with the power of God's Spirit. Ultimately, the devil's purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy all who are made in the image of God. While it may be debatable whether a saved person can be demon-possessed, it is irrefutable that a person can be demon-afflicted or demon-oppressed.

B. The Demoniac's Deliverance (Mark 5:6-13)

But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he

said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

In verse 6, Mark shows that demonic forces recognize who Jesus is. Even from afar, the demoniac saw Jesus and ran to Him. The demons paid homage to Jesus through the demoniac by causing him to kneel in Jesus' presence. The demons understood who Jesus was. But they were not willing to surrender to Him. This is a reminder of the idea that intellectual agreement with the facts about Jesus does not equal saving faith. Perhaps the demons' initial reaction to Jesus was an act of public respect, not worship, because evil spirits neither adore Jesus nor appreciate His worth.

Addressing Jesus as the Son of the Most High God (see verse 7) was the demons' admission that they recognized Jesus as the Son of God. They also knew that He would judge them at the appointed time. Therefore, the demons appealed to Jesus likely in the hopes of softening their inevitable eviction and punishment.

In verse 8, Mark explains that Jesus had previously commanded the demons to leave the man. This is evident from a reading of the latter part of verse 7—where the demon, through the man, says, "I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." The idea is that the demon recognized that being told to get out of the man signified torture and punishment. Even though the storyline fluctuates between the personalities of the man and the demons, some argue that Mark wants the reader to recognize that the man was crying out for help and release. Intentionally or unintentionally, the demons had reluctantly brought the man into the presence of the One who could free him permanently and restore him to society, placing him into God's kingdom.

Verses 9-10 serve as a reminder that whenever divinity asks a question of humanity, it is not for obtaining information to allow humanity to contemplate or confront the issue at hand. When Jesus demanded to know "What is your name?" He was confronting the man with the reality that his personality was out of order and needed adjustment. Some scholars suggest that one of the steps in satanic deliverance is the identification or naming of evil spirits that have the individual in spiritual bondage. Others argue that the positive identification of tormenting spirits serves to expose them and their satanic ways. Narrowing down the source of the torment can facilitate the relief of the tormented.

Scholars have also suggested that Jesus may have asked for the name to reveal to those present (and to readers through the ages) the severe extent of the man's problem. According to the text, the man was filled with many demons (Legion), not just one. A Roman legion usually consisted of six thousand men. This does not necessarily mean that the man was inhabited by exactly six thousand demons, but that the demoniac was tormented and controlled by many formidable evil spirits. Some biblical scholars note that these demonic spirits oppressed the man as one combined force led by a spokesman. The "lead demon" continued

to plead with Jesus not to send them out of the area; they wanted to continue using their destructive demonic powers. Notice that the term *Legion* is not a name. Hence, the demons who spoke through the man were not really giving Jesus a name but, rather, were attempting to intimidate Jesus by warning Jesus that they were many. Clearly, Jesus could never be intimidated by evil. This is seen in verse 10, where the demons begged Jesus not to send them to a distant place (out of the country).

In verses 11-13, the demons requested to be sent into a herd of pigs that was feeding nearby. Perhaps their request was motivated by their desire to find a convenient alternative to the abyss or by their desire to see the pig owners/herders become angry and force Jesus to leave the area. Nevertheless, Jesus gave them their request—but they met their judgment anyway. The pigs went mad and drowned in the sea. By sending the demons into the pigs, Jesus gave dramatic visible proof of His power over demons and at the same time revealed the vast number of demons that possessed the man.

Inherent in the demons' request is evil's tenacity and intentionality to destroy and dishonor all of God's creation. When Jesus cast out the demons, they possessed a herd of about two thousand pigs (see verse 13). Under their influence, the pigs plunged to their deaths in the lake. The text does not explain why Jesus permitted these animals' destruction. However, Jesus wanted to demonstrate that these demons were real, and that the man's deliverance was genuine. Jesus' exorcism of the demons resulted in the man's deliverance.

C. The Demoniac's Desire and Destiny (Mark 5:18-20)

And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

After Jesus' encounter with the townspeople and their protest of His healing the blind man (see verses 13-17), the verses of this passage (verses 18-20) highlight the miraculous deliverance of the demoniac. This reality is evidenced by the man's desire to go with Jesus and shows the change that Jesus had effected in him. Prior to his deliverance, the demoniac was controlled completely by satanic forces. He spent his time wandering among tombs, ranting and raving like a lunatic. After his deliverance, the former demoniac was calm and composed and sought to follow Jesus. Interestingly, Jesus' response to the man's request was not what the former demoniac expected. Jesus denied his request. Instead, Jesus commanded the former demoniac to go home to his immediate family and the citizens of his country from whom he was estranged to tell them what the Lord had done for him, and how Jesus had shown Him mercy. The man immediately obeyed and gave his testimony in the Decapolis (a league of ten Grecian cities in the area), captivating the attention of many who heard him.

The former demoniac was now commissioned to go where Jesus was no longer welcomed and proclaim Jesus' marvelous grace and great power. Hence, through his obedience, the former demoniac became one of the early witnesses to the Gentiles. It is interesting that Jesus left the region when the inhabitants requested Him to do so but He did not leave the

region the same as He found it. Jesus left one believer who could testify personally of God's grace and have significant impact on the region. Please observe that Jesus did not train the man or send him to seminary, Bible school, or even to a short-term training seminar. On the very day of his salvation, the former demoniac was commissioned by Jesus to go forth as a compelling witness of the Gospel, although he knew so little about Jesus. What He did know, perfectly, is what Jesus had done for him and he could share this with others.

Often, the most important mission field is among our family and those on the margins of society. These are the misjudged and stigmatized because of their moral, physical, or mental deficiencies. Jesus sets the example and the standard for the faith community to follow.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This story featuring Jesus and the demoniac is a very harsh reminder that Satan and demons are very real and are active in our world. They are actively working against God, against the church, and against believers. We cannot hope to win the spiritual battle against the devil and his demons in our own power. The devil is strong, cunning, and deceptive. God has given every believer the power to resist the devil (see James 4:7)—but to be victorious, we must engage him with the whole armor of God (see Ephesians 6:11), relying on the strength of God rather than on ourselves. Because all of us are susceptible to satanic entanglements, we must rely on the Lord and His Word and remain on high alert to the snares of the enemy. Perhaps Jesus is inviting the modern church to reconsider its approach to the ministries of healing, deliverance, and evangelism.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for reminding us in this story that the power of heaven is greater than any power that may exist on Earth. Help us to lean on Your power more and become more aware of the satanic activity around us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 20-26, 2023)

Jesus Overpowers Legion

MONDAY, March 20: "Resist the Devil" (James 4:1-10)
TUESDAY, March 21: "The Weapons of Our Warfare" (2 Corinthians 10:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, March 22: "'Lord, Remember Your People'" (Psalm 106:1-7, 36-41, 47-48)
THURSDAY, March 23: "Take Refuge in God" (Psalm 34:1-15)
FRIDAY, March 24: "Let God's Enemies Be Scattered" (Numbers 10:29-36)
SATURDAY, March 25: "Jesus Sets a Demoniac Free" (Mark 5:1-13)
SUNDAY, March 26: "Sent to Bear Witness" (Mark 5:14-20)

April 2, 2023 (Palm Sunday) **Lesson 5**

THE EMPTY TOMB

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Amazing Encounters**
Youth Topic: **Amazing Encounters**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Jesus Has Risen**
Children's Topic: **He Is Alive!**

Devotional Reading
Psalm 22:20-31

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: **Luke 24:1-12**
Print Passage: **Luke 24:1-12**
Key Verses: **Luke 24:5b-6a**

Children
Background Scripture: **Luke 24:1-12**
Print Passage: **Luke 24:1-12**
Key Verses: **Luke 24:5b-6a**

Luke 24:1-12—KJV

NOW UPON the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.
2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.
3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.
4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:
5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?
6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,
7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the

Luke 24:1-12—NIV

ON THE first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.
2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,
3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.
5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?
6 "He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:
7 "'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'"

hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.
8 And they remembered his words,
9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.
10 It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.
11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.
12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

8 Then they remembered his words.
9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.
10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.
11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.
12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: When we encounter amazing circumstances in life, it's nearly impossible to keep the news to ourselves. How do we convey our excitement about amazing experiences? The women visiting the tomb faced the astonishing reality of Jesus' resurrection and shared their excitement with the disciples.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Compare and contrast the various reactions that persons had to hearing of Jesus' resurrection.
2. Confess areas of their lives where they look for Jesus and do not find Him.
3. Identify one aspect of congregational life that most embodies the significance of the Resurrection.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In today's Scripture verses, the two men in dazzling white garments are typically thought to be angels. This view is confirmed in Luke 24:23.

—The response of the women to these angelic messengers—"the women were terrified"—is a typical reaction to many religious experiences. Consider the response of the disciples when they saw Jesus' walking on the water or at the Transfiguration. They were overcome with amazement and wonder as much as they were with fear. These are the first steps toward a deeper belief in Jesus.

—The angels' question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (verse 5, NIV) is reminiscent of Jesus' reproach of the Sadducees: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Luke 20:38, NIV). It may thus serve as a mild chastisement of the women's failure to anticipate Jesus' resurrection despite His prophecies of it.

—The women were called to "remember" (verses 6-8), indicating more than a mere recollection of facts, but suggesting that they were coming to a fuller understanding of what Jesus had taught them.

—Mark 16 provides an interesting contrast. In that gospel, the angel tells the women to relay news of the empty tomb and resurrection to the male disciples, but the women run away and tell no one—for they were afraid (see Mark 16:8). In Luke's gospel, there is no command for the women to tell the other disciples, but it is their faithful response and their own initiative to do so. Luke's story implies a close relationship between the disciples and the women who were followers of Jesus and were, therefore, also disciples.

—The male disciples responded with cynicism. Except for Peter, who ran to the empty tomb, they believed the words as mere "idle tales" (verse 11). Yet, even Peter, who was amazed, appeared to tell no one. It is the women who spread the good news of the Resurrection.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The earthly ministry of Jesus lasted only three and a half years. Many scholars believe that Jesus called His first disciples in AD 27, which marked the official beginning of His ministry. From AD 28 to AD 30, Jesus' ministry took on an intense pace and focus as He endeavored to fulfill His mission. Hence, several scholars believe that Jesus was crucified at age 33. Although various theories abound concerning His crucifixion, death, and resurrection, the traditional Christian view is that Jesus was betrayed on a Thursday, crucified on a Friday, and rose from the dead on a Sunday. It is not the intent of this lesson to debate various days and dates concerning Jesus' resurrection but, rather, to affirm that Jesus did die and was resurrected.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ permeates the four New Testament gospels as well as the entire New Testament. In a real sense, it is the foundation of the Christian faith. The twenty-fourth chapter of Luke shows the final authentication of Jesus as the Son of Man with emphasis on the empty tomb (see Luke 24:1-12), the Emmaus Road experience (see Luke 24:13-35), Jesus' resurrection appearances (see Luke 24:36-49), and His ascension into heaven (see Luke 24:50-53).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Scholars suggest that Luke's interpretation of Jesus' suffering and death focuses on the political and theological implications of His death. They believe that it is important to observe how Luke zeroes in on Jesus' nonviolent opposition to Roman rule and His practice of universal love, even of one's enemy.[1] The heart of the Christian faith, which distinguishes it from other religions, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus confirms that God accepted Christ's sacrifice for sin on the cross and gave believers access to a right relationship with Him. The resurrection of Jesus Christ shows that Jesus defeated death (see Romans 6:9).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jesus Christ *(c. 4 BC–c. AD 30/33)*: also referred to as *Jesus* of Nazareth and *Jesus Christ*, He was a first-century Jewish preacher and religious leader. He is the central figure of Christianity. Most Christians believe that He is the incarnation of God the Son and the awaited Messiah (*Christ*), prophesied in the Old Testament (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus).

Joanna: among the first women to discover the empty tomb; she was married to Chuza, the

household manager or steward of King Herod Antipas. She was a follower of Jesus and helped to provide financially for Jesus's ministry, along with Susanna and many others.

Mary Magdalene: a Galilean woman probably from the town of Magdala (on the west bank of the Sea of Galilee). Jesus delivered her from seven demons. She became a follower of Jesus, was a witness to the Crucifixion and burial, and was among the women who went to the tomb on Sunday. She was the first person to see Jesus alive (see Mark 16:9) and to tell the other disciples (see Luke 24:10; John 20:18).

Salome: mother of James and John; one of Jesus' female followers in Galilee. She witnessed the Crucifixion and went to the tomb on Sunday (see Mark 15:40; 16:1).

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Behold (verse 4, KJV)—Greek: *idou* (id-oo'): look; see; "Lo!"

Found (verse 3)—Greek: *heuriskó* (hyoo-ris'-ko): learned; discovered, especially after searching; proved; regarded; "did . . . find" (NIV).

Perplexed (verse 4)—Greek: *aporeó* (ap-or-eh'-o): to be at a loss; was in doubt; "were wondering" (NIV).

Seek (verse 5)—Greek: *zéteó* (dzay-teh'-o): to search for, desire, require; inquire; "look for" (NIV).

Stone (verse 2)—Greek: *lithos* (lee'-thos): a rock of indeterminate size or shape; metaphorically, of Jesus as the chief stone in a building.

Tomb (verse 1)—Greek: *mnéma* (mnay'-mah): a memorial; a sepulcher; a monument; "sepulchre" (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   - A. You Can't Keep a Good Man Down
   - B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   - A. The Anointments Acquired for the Tomb (Luke 24:1)
   - B. The Women Arrived at the Tomb (Luke 24:2-3)
   - C. The Angels' Presence at the Tomb (Luke 24:4-8)
   - D. The Announcement Concerning the Tomb (Luke 24:9-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. You Can't Keep a Good Man Down

Throughout history, there have been various persons who have made a significant impact on life in general and human life in particular. Many good men and women have walked the face of the earth, making their contributions and passing off the scene. Journey through any cemetery and you will witness many tombstones with two dates: sunrise and sunset—birth and death. Between the sunrise and sunset there is usually a dash (-). The birthdates and death dates may be different, but all of them have that dash. The insight for us is that all our lives exist within that dash. As you read this lesson, consider the contributions and actions of your life that comprise that dash, representing the time allotted to

each person by God. Some people misuse their dash; others make valuable contributions and leave a legacy. Regardless of how one has lived, sooner or later, even the very best of people are cut down by death!

In the case of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, there is the birth date and Crucifixion date. However, there *is* also the Resurrection date! No other person born or unborn can compare with Jesus of Nazareth in life or death. As the Son of God, Jesus survived death and is alive forevermore.

The predominant theme of the Scriptures is the person and the work of Jesus Christ. He became human, died by crucifixion, and was buried. But the story does not end there. He rose from the dead. He is the only all-sufficient Savior of the world. Nothing can keep a good man down!

B. Biblical Background

Luke's gospel, as distinguished from the other gospels, presents Jesus as the One who came to seek and to save all who are lost. Luke placed special emphasis on Jesus as Redeemer. Throughout Luke's gospel is the theme that Jesus offers forgiveness and redemption to all.

Luke 24 is the last chapter in Luke's gospel and focuses on the Resurrection. Interestingly, Luke records only three of the many post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus: the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the disciples gathered in a room in Jerusalem, and the disciples and others who observed Jesus' ascension into heaven on the Mount of Olives. During His first appearance to the disciples, Jesus proved that He was not a ghost or spirit by eating in front of them and allowing the disciples to touch Him.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ put an immortal stamp of validation on *everything* He taught—including death, hell, and judgment, and more importantly, how persons should live and treat each other today. Jesus' resurrection dismantles the power of the Law and replaces it with the new commandment for believers to love one another. Jesus' resurrection brings an end to the sting of death and serves as a death toll for Satan's power over those who choose to follow Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus Christ signaled the beginning of the end of Satan's rule over the world and guaranteed his final defeat.

Chapters 19–23 narrate Jesus' triumphant arrival into Jerusalem as king, His betrayal, His Last Supper, His fervent prayer on the Mount of Olives, and His arrest, crucifixion, and death. The closing chapter (chapter 24) of Luke discloses how the women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others—went to prepare Jesus' body in the tomb, only to find out that He was not there. Luke's gospel ends with Jesus' sharing a meal with His disciples, helping them understand Scripture, and promising that God would soon send the promised Holy Spirit.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Anointments Acquired for the Tomb (Luke 24:1)

NOW UPON the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

This passage begins with a special emphasis on the *first day of the week*. In this context, the *first day of the week* is Sunday. This observation is important because the preparation day (Friday) and the Sabbath (Saturday) are past. When the text utilizes the word *they,* it is referring to the

women mentioned in Luke 23:55-56 who returned to the tomb to complete the anointing of Jesus' body.

While there is continuous debate over which day of the week is the first day, a careful reading of the text and its emphases on *very early in the morning* with a sunset-to-sunset understanding of day-to-day transitions will help one to see that the day emphasized is Sunday (see Luke 23:54; Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:22-23; and Matthew 20:17-19). As customary with Jewish burial traditions, the women—after seeing where Joseph and Nicodemus had buried Jesus' body—went to the sepulcher prepared to wrap Jesus' body in strips of linen and spices.

B. The Women Arrived at the Tomb (Luke 24:2-3)

And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

It is not unusual for archaeologists to uncover hundreds of tombs on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Although many tombs have stones that can be rolled away, Mark 16:4 suggests that the stone over Jesus' tomb was "very large." Because limestone weighs approximately 170 pounds per cubic feet, some scholars suggest that when considering the dimensions of a stone in the first century, the stone at Jesus' tomb could have possibly weighed more than a ton.

Apparently, the women left Jerusalem while it was still dark and arrived at the tomb after sunrise to anoint the body of Jesus. They experienced a "sunrise surprise." Luke records that the women found the stone rolled away. Many have stated that the stone was not rolled away from the tomb to let Jesus out, but to allow others in to see the empty tomb!

C. The Angels' Presence at the Tomb (Luke 24:4-8)

And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, aaying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words.

In verses 4-8, the women were initially confused about the missing body. The scene that the women encountered was a puzzling one. The women most likely pondered, *Who moved the stone from the mouth of the tomb and where is Jesus' body?* Their confusion quickly gave way to fear—as two men in shining garments appeared beside them, adding to their consternation. The word rendered "shining" in verse 4 is derived from a Greek word with a root meaning of "lightning."

The two men are referred to as angels in Luke 24:23 (see also John 20:12). One might observe that Matthew and Mark mention only one angel (see Matthew 28:2 and Mark 16:5). Some scholars maintain that Matthew and Mark mention only one angel because the focus was primarily on the speaker. Nevertheless, the angels led the women down "memory lane" and reminded them of what the Master had told them in Galilee. Jesus had previously proclaimed to the women that He would rise on the third day, and He had previously predicted His betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. It is possible that if the women had remembered and believed Jesus' words, then they would not

have gone to the tomb still expecting to find a lifeless body to anoint for permanent burial.

The women's reaction to the angels' presence was fear, respect, and awe. In the presence of what appeared to be a supernatural event, the women bowed their faces to the earth. The angels asked them a simple yet profound question: *Why are you seeking the living among the dead*? It almost seemed that the angels were scolding the women for looking for Jesus in the wrong place.

The angels then declared the most significant truth in human history: *He is risen!* The truth of the angelic announcement is the centerpiece and central pillar of the Christian faith.

D. The Announcement Concerning the Tomb (Luke 24:9-12)

And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

The return of the women is reminiscent of their previous return as mentioned in Luke 23:56, but this time the reason is quite the opposite! Instead of preparing spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus, they return with the message of a risen Savior. After the angels led the women down "memory lane"—reminding them of what the Master had told them in Galilee—the women's hearts were convicted, and their faith was rekindled. In that moment, they were transformed from helpless mourners to enthusiastic messengers commissioned to carry the Good News concerning the Resurrection to the eleven disciples and other followers of Christ. Verse 9 mentions "the eleven" to highlight the fact that Jesus' apostles included twelve disciples minus one: Judas the betrayer, who had committed suicide after betraying Jesus. Verse 10 illuminates the women who went to the tomb and received the Good News from the angels. The women, undoubtedly excited after what they had experienced at the tomb, shared the Resurrection message with the eleven apostles. Verse 11 records the response of the Eleven. While Jesus was ministering in Galilee, He informed the disciples that it was prudent that the Son of Man be betrayed into the hands of sinful people and be crucified. He also informed the disciples that He would rise from the dead (see Luke 9:22 and Luke 18:31-33). Apparently, they forgot or were somehow unclear about what Jesus shared with them and, unfortunately, because they refused to believe the women. The account of the empty tomb was dismissed by the disciples as hysteria (compare Acts 12:14-15). The KJV translates it as "idle tales."

It is possible that the initial negative response of the disciples to the women's proclamation resulted from cultural norms of that day which considered the testimony of women as unreliable. It was no accident or error—God intentionally chose to reveal the greatest news on Earth to women. Some have attributed the disciples' reaction to "spiritual amnesia" or "fearful shock." Nevertheless, verse 12 records that despite the doubts concerning the authenticity of the women's testimony, Peter listened and went to investigate the validity of the wild claim. Interestingly, some

ancient texts omit verse 12. Nevertheless, Peter found visible proof that Jesus' body was gone. Peter left the tomb perplexed. Clearly, he needed a reminder of Jesus' words as much as the women did.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The Scriptures affirm the fact that Jesus was brutally tortured and hung on a horizontal wooden beam (cross). Scholars suggest that the method of execution used for Jesus restricted the airflow of His lungs, killing Him in a matter of hours. Some scholars suggest that He died on that cross in three hours. The Roman soldier at the Crucifixion attested to the fact that Jesus died. But that was not the end of the story. Resurrection was in the divine sovereign plan of God. According to more than five hundred witnesses, Jesus returned from the dead and over the next forty days He journeyed to the southern and northern provinces of Israel. To many, this was conclusive proof that Jesus Christ was risen! What about you? How do you see the Resurrection in twenty-first-century America? The resurrection of Jesus Christ has profound personal, professional, spiritual, and prophetic implications. Lean into that truth and experience the resurrection of Jesus daily in new and profound ways. He is risen!

PRAYER

Dear God, as we reflect on the death and resurrection of Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ, help us to never allow this season in the life of the church to become so familiar that it loses its significance. Thank You for Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross and (most of all) His resurrection from the dead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 27–April 2, 2023)

The Empty Tomb

MONDAY, March 27: "The Stones Would Shout" (Luke 19:28-40)
TUESDAY, March 28: "Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem" (Luke 19:41-48)
WEDNESDAY, March 29: "If Mortals Die, Will They Live?" (Job 14:1-15)
THURSDAY, March 30: "'This Is My Body'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-34)
FRIDAY, March 31: "'Why Have You Forsaken Me?'" (Psalm 22:1-2, 7-19)
SATURDAY, April 1: "'Deliver My Soul, O Lord'" (Psalm 22:20-31)
SUNDAY, April 2: "The Angels Call the Women" (Luke 24:1-12)

Note

1. Joel B. Green, "Jesus' Crucifixion in Luke's Gospel (Luke 23)," Bible Odyssey, https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/jesus-crucifixion-in-lukes-gospel.

April 9, 2023 (Easter Sunday) **Lesson 6**

DISCIPLES COME TO BELIEVE THE RESURRECTION

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Struggling to Accept
Youth Topic: Struggling to Accept

Children
General Lesson Title: Disciples Come to Believe the Resurrection
Children's Topic: Believing the Impossible

Devotional Reading
John 20:11-18

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Luke 24:13-49
Print Passage: Luke 24:13-27, 30-31
Key Verse: Luke 24:31

Children
Background Scripture: Luke 24:13-49
Print Passage: Luke 24:15-27, 30-31
Key Verse: Luke 24:31

Luke 24:13-27, 30-31—KJV

13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.
14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.
15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.
16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.
17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?
18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in

Luke 24:13-27, 30-31—NIV

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.
14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.
15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them;
16 but they were kept from recognizing him.
17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.
18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not

Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?
19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:
20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.
21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.
22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;
23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.
24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.
25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:
26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?
27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

. . . . .

30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.
31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

know the things that have happened there in these days?"
19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.
20 "The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;
21 "but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.
22 "In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning
23 "but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive.
24 "Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."
25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
26 "Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"
27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

. . . . .

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.
31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: We need someone or something to convince us to accept the truth in our struggle to understand what we cannot explain. What can enable us to believe and trust that which we cannot explain? Jesus appears to the disciples on the road to Emmaus—reassuring them of the significance of His crucifixion—and reveals the truth of His resurrection as prophesied in Scripture.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recall the struggle of Jesus' first followers to embrace His resurrection.
2. Admit their own struggle to believe things that they cannot explain.
3. Proclaim the Good News of Jesus' resurrection faithfully.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This entire passage can be read as a dramatic enactment of the progression from spiritual blindness ("their eyes were kept from recognizing him" [verse 16, NRSV]) to spiritual insight ("their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" [verse 31a, NRSV]).

—The two travelers seem to have been among those to whom the women had reported the Resurrection in the previous episode. They thus represent those who cynically disbelieve their report despite Jesus' prophecies of His resurrection. Some scholars have suggested that the two travelers were Cleopas and his wife, thus emphasizing the equality among the male and female followers/disciples from the beginning.

—There is a degree of irony in Cleopas's question, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know . . .?" (verse 18, NRSV)—for as they would come to realize, Jesus is no stranger and He is, in fact, the only one who fully understands the situation.

—Cleopas describes Jesus of Nazareth as a "prophet mighty in word and deed" and one who suffered and died. While none of this is incorrect, it falls short, and Jesus goes on to explain how He is also the Messiah who enters glory (i.e., is raised from death).

—The progression from blindness to insight occurs first through Jesus' exposition of the Scriptures, but even more clearly through the meal that He and His disciples share. The vocabulary—*He took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them*—is reminiscent of both the feeding of the multitudes and of the Last Supper. Jesus is present when His disciples share Communion.

—Paradoxically, once the disciples gain their spiritual insight, Jesus vanishes from their sight. This latter state resonates with the experience of most Christians who believe without having the benefit of having seen the risen Christ (compare John 20:29). The two disciples, eager to share their experience, return to Jerusalem after dark (a dangerous time of day) to tell the disciples that they have seen Jesus.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The gospel of Luke places emphasis on how Jesus came as the Redeemer. The Resurrection narrative begins with the empty-tomb phenomenon. Luke 19:28–22:46 highlights the events of Jesus' final week, and Luke 22:47–23:49 illuminates His arrest, trials, and crucifixion. Luke 23:50-56 speaks of Jesus' burial. Today's lesson is a continuation of the events that took place in last week's lesson. It is a story worth reiterating repeatedly because it is at the very heart of the Gospel. It highlights the living hope found only in the resur-

rection of Jesus Christ. Paul the apostle wrote to the believers in Corinth, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:19-20). Unfortunately, on that Resurrection Sunday, the living hope that Paul espoused was far from being established in the experience of the two people we read of in this New Testament lesson.

The town of Emmaus received its name from the hot springs that were there. Concerning the Emmaus Road, not much is stated in the Bible about this route of travel. Scholars suggest it was sixty furlongs (or about seven miles) from Jerusalem. The episodes recorded in this lesson occurred after the discovery that Jesus had risen from the dead—initially evidenced by the rolled away stone, the angelic announcement, the abandoned graveclothes, and Jesus' missing body. The events in today's lesson occurred on that same Sunday, the first day of the week.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

In the concluding chapter of the gospel of Luke, the narrator presents a story about two men, distraught over the death of Jesus, who find themselves in deep conversation with the Teacher Himself—only they do not realize that it is Him. As the two disciples traveled to Emmaus, they learned about Jesus Christ and His mission directly from Jesus. And when the two disciples finally realized the identity of the person to whom they were talking, they rushed to tell the apostles the good news: the Lord had indeed risen! On the road to Emmaus, Jesus provided a lesson on the prophecies of the Old Testament which were fulfilled in His death and resurrection. The experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is a powerful experience; not only does the experience serve as a record of one of many post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus, but it also shows how one can look to Scripture to see how God's plans unfold.

The journey to Emmaus was filled with lessons concerning discernment, hope, and the truth of Old Testament prophecies. Although the encounter of Jesus with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road is mentioned in Mark 16:12, only Luke records the story with additional details. The gospel of Luke is the only New Testament book which mentions the town of Emmaus.

The encounter between the resurrected Christ and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of twelve post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded in the New Testament; eight of these encounters are recorded in the Gospels.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Cleopas: one of two disciples whom Jesus met on the road to Emmaus on the day of His resurrection. Cleopas and the other disciple were on the road to Emmaus, discussing the Crucifixion and the empty tomb, when Jesus suddenly joined them, although they did not recognize Him. Luke is the only gospel writer who included this event and who mentions the name of Cleopas.

The Resurrected Jesus: the resurrection of Jesus, or anastasis, is the Christian belief that God raised Jesus on the third day after His crucifixion, starting—or restoring—His exalted life as Christ and Lord. According to the New Testament writings, He was firstborn from the dead, ushering in the kingdom of God.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Crucified (verse 20)—Greek: *stauroó* (stow-ro'-o): fenced with stakes; fixed to the cross; destroyed; mortified.

Prophet (verse 19)—Greek: *prophétés* (prof-ay'-tace): an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will; a person gifted at expositing divine truth.

Redeem(ed) (verse 21)—Greek: *lutroó* (loo-tro'-o): release(d) by paying a ransom; liberate(d); restore(d) something back.
Talking (verse 15)—Greek: *homileo* (hom-il-eh'-o): to consort with, converse with; commune with; to be in company with; "communed" (KJV); "talked" (NIV).
Visit (verse 18)—Greek: *paroikeó* (par-oy-keh'-o): to dwell near, reside as a foreigner; "a stranger" (KJV); "visiting" (NIV).
Walk (verse 17)—Greek: *peripateó* (per-ee-pat-eh'-o): to walk around, about; conduct oneself.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. On the Road Again
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Reunion with Jesus (Luke 24:13-16)
   B. A Request from Jesus and a Response from the Disciples (Luke 24:17-24)
   C. A Rebuke by Jesus (Luke 24:25-27)
   D. The Revelation of Jesus (Luke 24:30-31)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. On the Road Again

During the three years between His baptism and His death and resurrection, Jesus traveled extensively, ministering to people. An account of the three years of Jesus' public ministry is chronicled in each the four Gospels. A detailed study of the four Gospels will illuminate the amount of time that Jesus spent on the road—teaching, ministering, and modeling a new way of living—in ways that a cursory scanning of the text would not reveal.

For example, Jesus' departure from Galilee during the last year of His public ministry marks the beginning of His ministry in Perea. The text does not explicitly note this detail with a verse stating that Jesus went to Perea. Instead, it indicates this fact with a broader statement that Jesus traveled "beyond the Jordan," which means that Jesus crossed to the east side of the Jordan River, landing in the province of Perea. Additionally, Jesus' later Judean ministry in the same third year is not directly indicated by a specific verse stating that Jesus entered Judea but that He went to Samaria or the village of Bethany, which were both located in the province of Judea.

During His three years of ministry, Jesus was "on the road" regularly, going into small towns and cities carrying the Good News of the kingdom of heaven. The news of Jesus ushered many people into the kingdom of God.

B. Biblical Background

Many scholars agree that Jesus' crucifixion and death occurred when He was thirty-three years old. Although there are various theories surrounding the timeline for His crucifixion, death, and resurrection, the traditional view is that Jesus was betrayed on a Thursday, was crucified on a Friday, and rose from the dead on a Sunday.

The Emmaus Road experience happened after Jesus' crucifixion, the same day the women brought spices to Jesus' tomb, only to find the stone rolled away and Jesus' body nowhere to be found.

The story of the remarkable encounter between the resurrected Christ and two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of the most dramatic post-Resurrection stories in the Gospels. On the Sunday after the Crucifixion, two of Jesus' disciples left Jerusalem to travel back to their hometown of Emmaus. While traveling back, they discussed the events of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (see Luke 24:13-17). As the men talked about the events of the past week, Jesus Himself appeared and walked beside them. However, like Mary Magdalene, they did not recognize Him (see John 20:14). Interestingly, when Jesus inquired about the events under discussion, the disciples told the "stranger" that they had hoped Jesus of Nazareth would be the promised Messiah, but that they could not understand the tragic events that had transpired. Jesus rebuked them, calling them foolish men, and then patiently explained that it was necessary that the Messiah suffer before entering His glory. Starting with the books of Moses and including the books of the prophets, Jesus explained the prophecies concerning Him (see Luke 24:18-27). Although Jesus could have referred to numerous Old Testament passages, He emphasized Isaiah because Isaiah placed emphasis on the Messiah as a "Suffering Servant"—a role that Jesus fulfilled.

When the disciples reached their destination, they were so captivated by this stranger's teaching that they invited Him to stay with them. As Jesus sat with the disciples at the dinner table, He took the bread, said the blessing, and then broke the bread and handed the pieces to His disciples. In the breaking of the bread, the disciples' eyes were opened, and they recognized the risen Savior. Once the disciples recognized Him, Jesus departed from their sight.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Reunion with Jesus

(Luke 24:13-16)

And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

Verses 13-14 indicate that *two* went to Emmaus. Scholars believe that the *two* were followers of Jesus, who were among the 120 mentioned in Acts 1:15. Interestingly, they are not mentioned again in Scripture. It is believed that the two were either friends or members of the same family who possibly lived in Emmaus (see Luke 24:28-29).

Apparently, the two disciples had been in Jerusalem long enough to know about the recent events. Some scholars believe that their walk to *Emmaus* occurred sometime in the afternoon on the day of Jesus' resurrection.

Initially, Luke does not name the two (it is not until verse 18 that Luke reveals Cleopas's name), nor does Luke share greater details of the conversation that occurred among the three of them as they traveled. However, when Luke uses the phrase "all these things" in verse 14, the reader can surmise that the conversation included the events surrounding Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, and perhaps the highlights of the women's report of the empty tomb and a summary of the angel's explanation of the empty tomb. Apparently, the two were concerned about their Master being crucified, but even more concerned about not knowing what happened to His body.

Reading verses 15-16, one can imagine that the intensity of the discussion made it easy for almost anyone to join the dialogue. The two disciples were passionately discussing the events concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus joined them as an attentive listener. The distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus was approximately seven miles. Hence, the two disciples' conversation on the considerable journey was certainly not boring or trivial.

Luke does not indicate where Jesus had been before joining the two pedestrians. Luke simply highlights that Jesus drew near (came alongside) the two disciples as they walked. Some scholars note that Jesus in His post-Resurrection body had the ability to appear and disappear at will. Hence, it would be strange for Him to appear alongside the two disciples as they walked to Emmaus. Although Mark and John record Jesus' early-morning appearance to Mary Magdalene (see Mark 16:9-11 and John 20:1-18) and Matthew records His appearance to Mary and other women (see Matthew 28:10), this is the first appearance of the resurrected Jesus mentioned by Luke.

B. A Request from Jesus and a Response from the Disciples

(Luke 24:17-24)

And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

In verse 17, instead of being hesitant or vague, Jesus directly asked the two what they had been discussing and the reason for their apparent sadness. The question from Jesus startled the men. The disciple named Cleopas expressed surprise that their new walking partner had not heard about the crucifixion of Jesus and seemed completely clueless concerning the hottest topic in town (verse 18). The two surmised that this person must be a stranger in Jerusalem, unaware of the recent goings-on.

The name *Cleopas* appears only here in Luke's gospel and once more in John 19:25. However, there is no connection between the two names. Additionally, Luke does not identify or describe the second disciple who was traveling with Cleopas.

Jesus' second question in verse 19 precipitated a revealing response from the disciples, which shed light on their general understanding and lack of deep spiritual insight concerning Jesus' person and mission. Their assessment of who Jesus is and what He came to do was shamefully limited. Although they recognized Jesus as the one who grew up in Nazareth and was a prophet who performed great deeds, they fell short of saying that He was/is the Messiah (verses 19-21).

While the two disciples blamed the religious leaders for causing Jesus' death, they also expressed disappointment in Jesus. Their trust in Jesus was crushed when He died. They had expected Jesus to redeem the nation of Israel. Some scholars believe that their misplaced expectations were later fulfilled by the military intervention that would deliver them from Rome. Hence, they could not wrap their heads around how Jesus could be betrayed by His own people and executed by the power structure that He was supposed to overthrow (verse 21). In other words, the two disciples (along with many others) had expected Jesus to redeem Israel politically and establish an earthly kingdom. Their spiritual insight concerning Jesus' mission was inaccurate, myopic, and self-serving. Unfortunately, the two disciples and other followers who were impressed with Jesus' teachings and miracles possessed a nationalistic mindset that expected Jesus to restore the nation of Israel to power and preeminence. Since Jesus' death on the preceding Friday, they along with many others had given up hope that such a mission would be fulfilled.

In verses 22-24, Cleopas and his fellow traveler identified themselves as having been among Jesus' followers. The company included the women who brought them a report about the empty tomb and their experience with the angels. It is important to note that the Jews traditionally believed that the spirit of a "deceased" person stayed near the body for three days, but after that period, resuscitation was impossible. The women's report of the empty tomb and a vision of the angels had failed to convince the two travelers of the Resurrection. They still held firmly to their skewed belief concerning Jesus' mission and the implications of the fact that He had now been dead for three days. They did acknowledge that some (including Peter and John) had gone to the tomb and verified that it was empty, but because they did not see Jesus alive, Cleopas and his fellow disciple further doubted what the women reported. These men were "spiritually incredulous"—they required visible proof to believe. The Lord blesses those who believe Him without tangible proof (see John 20:29).

C. A Rebuke by Jesus (Luke 24:25-27)

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

In verses 25-27, Jesus was apparently frustrated that the two disciples did not truly

know or understand the Scriptures (and made no reference or recollection to what He had spoken to them before His arrest and crucifixion). Periodically, Jesus had to forcefully clarify teachings for His disciples. In this instance, He rebuked these two for miserably failing to understand and believe what the prophets said about the inevitability of the Messiah's suffering. The prophets had spoken plainly about what the Messiah would have to experience. Apparently, Jesus' disciples failed to grasp the totality of the prophetic predictions. They failed to see that the Cross would be the prelude to the Messiah's glory. Additionally, they failed to see how the death and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled the pattern that God had been facilitating throughout the history of His people.

Jesus corrected the two disciples' vision with a "systematic study" concerning Himself as revealed in the Old Testament from Moses through the prophets as well as other Scriptures that spoke of His identity and Messianic ministry. Jesus' teaching session was so dynamic and insightful to them that they begged Him to accompany them home (see verses 28-29).

D. The Revelation of Jesus (Luke 24:30-31)

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

After accepting the two disciples' invitation to stay with them and have supper, Jesus blessed the meal that they were prepared to eat. Scholars remind us of Luke's emphasis on the fact that Jesus used mealtimes as occasions for sharing kingdom truths (see Luke 5:27-39 and Luke 7:36-50). Other scholars believe that Luke was trying to draw a connecting line from the Lord's Supper to the post-Resurrection meal to emphasize that the spiritually blind cannot see or perceive Jesus for who He truly is, even when He is near.

Concerning this meal, Luke records that Jesus then took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. It was at that time that it all became clear to the disciples. As their eyes were opened, they suddenly knew Jesus. God chose that moment to reveal either by spiritual revelation (or perhaps by the nail wounds in His hands) that the so-called stranger and dinner guest was His Son. Jesus immediately disappeared from their sight after their moment of clarity.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Jesus was born by a miracle to a humble woman of common social standing. The years of His ministry were spent in suffering, suspicion, and rejection—as He traveled from place to place doing good. In time, Jesus was arrested, beaten, tortured, nailed to a cross, and left to die a terrible, gruesome death—for the crime of declaring who He truly is. But that was not the end of the story. He was resurrected from the dead! Through Him, all who are willing can receive salvation, regardless of race, gender, or pedigree. There is no discrimination as it relates to the salvation that Jesus provides.

The experience of the two men who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus is powerful. Not only does it serve as one of many post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus, but it also shows how we can look

to Scripture—particularly Old Testament prophecies—to see how God's plan has unfolded and will unfold. The two disciples experienced an epiphany at Emmaus. Perhaps the resurrected Christ is accompanying you on a journey toward a personal epiphany!

PRAYER

Eternal Father, thank You for the realization of Your Son's death and resurrection. Thank You that because He lives, we have a right to the Tree of Life and can live eternally with You when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 3-9, 2023)

Disciples Come to Believe the Resurrection

MONDAY, April 3: "'I Have Seen the Lord!'" (John 20:11-18)
TUESDAY, April 4: "Blessed Are Those Who Believe" (John 20:19-31)
WEDNESDAY, April 5: "'The Lord Is My Strength'" (Psalm 118:1-14)
THURSDAY, April 6: "'I Shall Not Die, but Live'" (Psalm 118:15-29)
FRIDAY, April 7: "Jesus Meets Two Disciples" (Luke 24:13-24)
SATURDAY, April 8: "Jesus Opens the Disciples' Eyes" (Luke 24:25-35)
SUNDAY, April 9: "You Are Witnesses of These Things" (Luke 24:36-49)

April 16, 2023 **Lesson 7**

JESUS COOKS BREAKFAST

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Friends, Food, Fellowship
Youth Topic: Friends, Food, Fellowship

Children
General Lesson Title: Jesus Cooks Breakfast
Children's Topic: He Is Real and Alive!

Devotional Reading
Psalm 30

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: John 21:1-14
Print Passage: John 21:1-14
Key Verse: John 21:12

Children
Background Scripture: John 21:1-14
Print Passage: John 21:1-14
Key Verse: John 21:12

John 21:1-14—KJV

AFTER THESE things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.
2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.
3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.
4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.
5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.
6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast

John 21:1-14—NIV

AFTERWARD JESUS appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way:
2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.
3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.
4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.
5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.
6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.
7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.
8 And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.
9 As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.
10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.
11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.
12 Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.
13 Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.
14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.
8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.
9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.
10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."
11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.
12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.
13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.
14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Traumatic losses can lead us to become disconnected from our purpose in life. What helps us recover a sense of wholeness and purpose? Jesus' appearance and fellowship with His disciples at the Sea of Galilee reunified the disciples and restored their sense of purpose.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Discern the meaning of "recognizing" Jesus only after He says or does something familiar to His followers.
2. Awaken to Jesus' healing power in their own lives.
3. Restate their sense of purpose in light of the spiritual nourishment and sustenance that Jesus offers.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This is the third post-Resurrection appearance that John records—with the other two being in John 20:19, 26. As with the accounts involving Mary Magdalene and the Emmaus Road travelers (see John 20:16; Luke 24:13-33), neither Mary nor the disciples recognized the risen Christ until He said or did something familiar (in this case, calling forth a large quantity of fish).

—As with many post-Resurrection appearances, this one begins with a failure to recognize Jesus. Peter does not at first know who it is until the disciple whom Jesus loved identifies Him (verse 7).

—In giving an exact count of the fish caught, John provided a detail that bolstered his claim to be an eyewitness to the event. Some commentators have suggested, however, that the 153 fish may be symbolic of the fullness of time. Ezekiel 47:10 is a prophecy of a new temple at the end of days, which states that from it, a river will flow "from En-gedi to En-eglaim" (NRSV), and it will be full of fish. The numerical value of the word *En-eglaim* is 153. For John's gospel, Jesus is the new temple (see John 2:19-21), and His resurrection fulfills these prophecies of the last days.

—Thus, while Jesus provides physical nourishment, telling His disciples where to fish and offering them cooked fish, He more importantly provides them with spiritual nourishment, encouraging their faith by being present to them in His resurrection state.

—John's account contrasts the disciples' ineffective efforts in Jesus' absence with amazing power and effectiveness in Jesus' presence.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The author of the gospel of John is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (see John 21:20-24). Scholars believe that John the apostle is the author of the book, and he is one of the sons of Zebedee. Although the gospel of John is the favorite of many students of the Bible, scholars remind us that the gospel of John was not initially warmly welcomed by the church until AD 180, almost a century after its composition. Some scholars believe that the gospel of John was composed AD 85–90.

Only the gospel of John records the events of Jesus' appearing to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee). Jesus previously communicated to them before His crucifixion that after His resurrection, He would meet them in Galilee (see Matthew 26:32). Additionally, He told the women who experienced His appearance to tell the disciples that He would meet them in Galilee (see Matthew 28:7). Perhaps Jesus gave these instructions because He knew that Galilee was in northern Israel and, thus, was far away from the Jewish rulers in Judaea who held contempt for His followers.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The author of this gospel mentions that the purpose of the gospel of John is as follows: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Unlike the three Synoptic Gospels, John's purpose

is not to present a chronological narrative of the life of Christ but to display His deity.

John endeavored to strengthen the faith of second-generation believers and to draw unbelievers to Christian faith. John also endeavored to correct false teaching that was spreading in the first century. John emphasized Jesus Christ as "the Son of God," fully God and fully man—contrary to the false teaching of his day that taught that the "Christ-Spirit" came upon the human Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the Crucifixion.

In today's lesson, the disciples are waiting in Galilee. They have gathered in the absence of Jesus' physical presence. The disciples had no awareness or sense of the presence of Christ unless He was with them in the flesh. Without an awareness of the spiritual presence of Christ, the disciples engaged in the secular activity of fishing instead of the spiritual activity of kingdom building. After a disappointing experience in doing what they knew best, Jesus showed up as an unrecognized stranger by the Sea of Galilee. Knowing that the men did not recognize Him as Jesus, the Master called out to them. Jesus was preparing the disciples to recognize Him and relate to Him beyond His physical presence.

Today's lesson presents an interesting setting in which Jesus assumed the role of a divine chef when He prepared a meal for His disciples after teaching them how to catch fish, following a long night of toiling with no success. In response to their miraculous catch of fish, the disciple whom Jesus loved proclaimed to Peter, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7a). Jesus taught the disciples a valuable lesson concerning spiritual awareness and spiritual perception.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

The Risen Jesus: the risen Jesus is the one in whom we have forgiveness of sins because He died and rose again for our sins. The risen and glorified Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation—that is, the firstborn from the dead.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Cast (verse 6)—Greek: *balló* (bal'-lo): to toss, throw out, put, place; "throw" (NIV).

Disciples (verse 2)—Greek: *mathétés* (math-ay-tes'): learners; pupils; followers of Christ.

Dragging (verse 8)—Greek: *suró* (soo'-ro): to draw, sweep away; "towing" (NIV).

Fish(ing) (verse 3)—Greek: *halieuó* (hal-ee-yoo'-o): to go fishing, be a fisher.

Multitude (verse 6)—Greek: *pléthos* (play'-thos): a great number; a crowd, bundle; assemblage; "large number" (NIV).

Revealed (verse 1)—Greek: *phaneroó* (fan-er-o'-o): made visible, clear; made known; displayed; "shewed" (KJV); "appeared" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. The Master Teacher, Master Healer, and Master Chef

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The Disciples' Decision: "Let's Go Fishing!" (John 21:1-3)

B. Jesus' Call to the Disciples: "Have You Caught Anything?" (John 21:4-5)

C. Jesus' Instruction to the Disciples: "Cast Your Net on the Right Side" (John 21:6)

D. The Disciples' Reward for Obedience: A Catch of Fish (John 21:7, 10-11)

E. Jesus Treats His Disciples to Breakfast (John 21:8-9, 12-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Master Teacher, Master Healer, and Master Chef

In the Gospels, the ministry of Jesus began with His baptism in the countryside of Roman Judea and Transjordan—near the river Jordan by John the Baptist—and it ended in Jerusalem following the Last Supper with His disciples. The gospel of Luke states that Jesus was "about thirty years of age" at the start of His ministry (see Luke 3:23). Some scholars estimate that Jesus started His ministry in AD 26. Other scholars estimate that He started His ministry around AD 27–29, and His physical, earthly ministry ended between AD 30 and AD 36. Jesus' ministry could be summed up with the following statement: *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become children of God* (see John 1:11-12). Jesus' ministry of teaching flowed through Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem. No one taught like Jesus.

Jesus carried out His ministry of teaching, proclaiming the Good News, and healing throughout Galilee in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. He called for repentance at the coming of the kingdom, and He called fishermen who abandoned everything to follow Him.

It is interesting that Jesus opened His earthly ministry with fishermen and that John's gospel records the closing of His ministry with fishermen. Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed Himself to be a Master Teacher, a Master Healer, and, in today's lesson, a Master Chef.

B. Biblical Background

It appears that at the end of chapter 20 is when the story of Jesus comes to the awe-inspiring conclusion: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may . . . have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). However, there is another scene in the story of Jesus in chapter 21 where Jesus' disciples are back in Galilee seeking to return to the life they knew prior to the death of Jesus.

The twenty-first chapter of John describes the third occasion when Jesus appeared to His disciples. Some scholars believe that the gospel of John includes four of the eleven post- Resurrection appearances of Jesus. The only one unique to the gospel of John is Jesus' appearance to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee. During this appearance, there is a miraculous catch of 153 fish, a confirmation of Peter's love for Jesus, a foretelling of Peter's death in old age, and a comment about the beloved disciple's future.

Scholars suggest that the gospel of John went through at least three stages of composition before its final form: the primitive diary which John made while with Jesus, a finished version which lacked the prologue (see John 1:1-18), and the epilogue which includes chapter 21. John concluded his gospel with information not recorded in other places (see John 21:1-25). It is believed that this section of John's writing is an epilogue

intended to clarify the roles of the apostles and the relationship of Jesus to His followers.

The specific contextual setting of this week's lesson is the Sea of Tiberias, located in Galilee. The disciples had journeyed north to their homes in Galilee. The Lord met them there just as He had promised. It is interesting to note that seven of the disciples were together at the time: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John (the sons of Zebedee), and two others whose names we do not know. In response to Peter's statement in John 21:3 indicating that he was going fishing, the other disciples agreed to go with him. Their efforts were futile. Jesus utilized the opportunity to teach a lesson concerning restoration, renewed relationship, and renewed purpose.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Disciples' Decision: "Let's Go Fishing!" (John 21:1-3)

AFTER THESE things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

In verse 1, John provides a narrative of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearance. The verse begins with the phrase "After these things," which is linguistically linked to what took place in chapter 20. Specifically, the phrase refers to the unspecified amount of time between the various appearances of Jesus in and near Jerusalem and the appearance that takes place by the Sea of Galilee known as the Sea of Tiberias (see John 6:1) and the Lake of Gennesaret (see Luke 5:1). Prior to His appearance to His disciples in this narrative, Jesus had appeared several times to the women, and to the apostles at Jerusalem. He instructed them to go to Galilee, where He would meet them. Only John records this event of Jesus' "manifesting" or "appearing" to His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. The Sea of Tiberias encompasses approximately sixty-four square miles and is a major hallmark of the region where Jesus grew up and facilitated much of His ministry.

Although all the disciples were in Galilee, only seven are mentioned in this scene (verses 2-3). In verse 3, Simon Peter is listed first, probably as an indication of his leadership role among the disciples. The mentioning of Simon Peter first is not inconsistent with his name's appearing first in the listings of the twelve disciples in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; and Acts 1:13. Peter stated his intention to go fishing; the other six promptly agreed to follow his lead. Some commentators criticize Peter for his actions; they believe that Peter grew impatient waiting on Jesus and decided to return to his former occupation. Other commentators take a more gracious approach and maintain that since Peter and the other disciples no longer had Jesus with them, they had to go back to work to provide for themselves. Regardless of the reason, Peter led the other six disciples back into their previous work of fishing. Strangely, they did not catch any fish.

B. Jesus' Call to the Disciples: "Have You Caught Anything?"
(John 21:4-5)

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

After the disciples fished all night and caught nothing, the morning came. As they looked to the shoreline, they saw Jesus. However, the disciples did not recognize Him. Interestingly, Jesus showed up at a location where and time when the disciples least expected and called out to the men. Although some students of Scripture find it unimaginable that the disciples failed to recognize Jesus, several scholars suggest that after the Resurrection, it was totally plausible that persons would not recognize Jesus unless He did or said something that revealed His post-Resurrection identity.

Jesus called out, referring to the disciples as "friends," "little children," or "lads." Jesus asked them if they caught any fish, and they dejectedly responded "no." Although Peter, James, and John were experienced fishermen, they toiled all night without one catch. Some commentators suggest that Jesus called out as someone speaking to close friends for whom He is concerned. The Greek rendering of the text illustrates that Jesus already anticipated the answer to His question, "Children, have ye any meat?" The fishermen, most likely fatigued and hungry from a night of consistently casting their nets, acknowledged their failure.

Jesus commissioned the disciples in John 20:21-23, and He called them to leave their nets and be "fishers of men" (see Matthew 4:19). Perhaps Jesus was teaching the disciples of His day and ours that lasting success is impossible without Christ. After toiling all night, the disciples headed to the shore where Jesus was standing. Unfortunately, they failed to recognize Him.

C. Jesus' Instruction to the Disciples: "Cast Your Net on the Right Side"
(John 21:6)

And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

In verse 6, Jesus teaches the disciples another valuable lesson about His control of nature. Jesus' instructions were specific (as they were in Luke 5:4). Jesus instructed the disciples to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, assuring them that they would be successful. The result was immediate and staggering. The multitude of fishes are numbered in John 21:11. Interestingly, the outcome of this event with Jesus is like what happened when Jesus previously instructed Peter to let down his net one more time after an unsuccessful night of fishing (see Luke 5:4-7).

D. The Disciples' Reward for Obedience: A Catch of Fish
(John 21:7, 10-11)

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. . . . Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

In verse 7, the disciple whom Jesus loved is the apostle John, the author of the gospel of John. It was John who first realized that the one who had just provided the miraculous

catch of fish is the one who commanded the forces of nature. Again, John received a revelation about Jesus before Peter did (see John 20:8). Perhaps John also remembered a similar miracle performed by Jesus a few years earlier (see Luke 5:1-11). Nevertheless, after hearing John's declaration, Peter spontaneously jumped into the water to swim to shore to meet Jesus.

Peter's action may appear bizarre initially. Peter, being the impetuous one, immediately responded by taking off his outer garment and dashing into the water. The KJV refers to Peter as being naked. Some scholars maintain that fishermen in Peter's day often worked unclad; but out of respect for Jesus, Peter put on his fisher's coat and made his way to meet Jesus on the shore. Other scholars suggest that Peter's actions should probably be understood from the perspective that Peter had been lightly dressed in a loose smock common to fishermen in the first century, and that Peter wrapped an outer garment around him to secure the loose garment as he waded in the water to get to Jesus. Nevertheless, it was Peter, the rash and hasty disciple, who jumped into the water first to get to Jesus. Apparently, the distance was not so great that Peter could not swim to shore.

The other disciples stayed with the boat and dragged to shore their catch of fish in the net. When the other disciples arrived at the shore, Jesus, the Master Chef, had a breakfast waiting for them that was full of spiritual significance. As a visible demonstration of His compassion for them, Jesus prepared a breakfast meal. It is important to remember that a fire of burning coals requires a substantial amount of time to fully heat. Nevertheless, the same miracle worker who directed the fish to the fishermen's net is the same Jesus who miraculously prepared a breakfast meal. Additionally, the charcoal fire likely served as a reminder to Peter of the charcoal fire with which he warmed himself on the night when he denied Jesus. At that moment, perhaps all the disciples were shocked. Jesus instructed them on what to do next.

In verses 10-11, Jesus requested that the disciples bring some of the fish they caught. Peter responded by singlehandedly dragging the unbroken net to the shore. The text does not say how close Simon Peter was to Jesus before he turned back to help with the net full of large fish, but the text does provide a numerical detail at the end of verse 11. The number of fish in the unbroken net amounted to 153. This detail is probably mentioned to illuminate the impact of the miracle.

E. Jesus Treats His Disciples to Breakfast (John 21:8-9, 12-14)

And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. . . . Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

Jesus' invitation to the disciples to come and dine with Him was a call to fellowship. Sharing a meal together was a gesture of friendship and a form of covenant commitment. Hence, Jesus' request was designed to address the disciples' spiritual hunger for forgiveness and restoration more so than satisfying their physical need for food. Interestingly, the host of this feast is Jesus, and the disciples are His welcomed guests. Perhaps gone is the doubt that had hounded Thomas and others. All the

disciples who were present recognized Jesus as the one who has power over nature and the creatures that dwell upon the earth.

The disciples did not ask Jesus to identity Himself because, by then, they knew exactly who He was. However, to alleviate any doubt, fear, shame, and guilt, Jesus took the initiative to serve them and restore the fellowship. The phrase *the third time* encompasses the current appearance to the disciples, and the two appearances in John 20:19-23 and John 20:24-29. While some believe that John's enumeration is incorrect because of the appearance to Mary Magdalene in John 20:11-18, it is important to remember that John is enumerating the appearances of Jesus to the disciples. It is also important to remember that other biblical expositors include additional appearances based upon individual appearances. Nevertheless, Jesus' resurrection was no hoax in the minds and hearts of His followers. It was an unexpected, earth-shattering event that altered history forever.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It must have been a thrilling invitation for the disciples to hear the Lord say, "Come and dine!" What an amazing experience it was to be in the Lord's presence post-Resurrection and have Him host a breakfast meal of fellowship and restoration. Perhaps we can only imagine the serene scene as they sat around the fire on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in the presence of the resurrected Lord. None of them asked who Jesus was because in their hearts they knew in whom they had believed—and He was once again present with them. Jesus is not present in the flesh with us as He was with the disciples. However, His presence with provision is ever-present with Christians. Whether our lives are difficult or disrupted, our resurrected Host continues to provide for our every need and empower us to fulfill His mission for our lives. The resurrection of Jesus Christ strengthens us for the journey ahead!

PRAYER

Father, we thank You for the privilege of knowing Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Thank You that He can do abundantly more than we could ever imagine. Grant us the peace that comes from knowing Him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 10-16, 2023)

Jesus Cooks Breakfast

MONDAY, April 10: "Hospitality and Redemption" (Luke 7:36-50)
TUESDAY, April 11: "Raised with Christ in Glory" (1 Corinthians 15:27-31, 35-44)
WEDNESDAY, April 12: "Death Is Swallowed Up in Victory" (1 Corinthians 15:45-58)
THURSDAY, April 13: "'God, Hear My Morning Prayer'" (Psalm 5)
FRIDAY, April 14: "Great Is God's Faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-36)
SATURDAY, April 15: "Joy Comes with the Morning" (Psalm 30)
SUNDAY, April 16: "Jesus Appears by the Sea" (John 21:1-14)

April 23, 2023 **Lesson 8**

JESUS REINSTATES PETER

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Restored Friendship
Youth Topic: Restored Friendship

Children
General Lesson Title: Jesus Forgives Peter
Children's Topic: A Fresh Start for Peter

Devotional Reading
2 Corinthians 7:1-11

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: John 21:15-25
Print Passage: John 21:15-19
Key Verse: John 21:15

Children
Background Scripture: John 21:15-25
Print Passage: John 21:15-19
Key Verse: John 21:15

John 21:15-19—KJV

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.
16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

John 21:15-19—NIV

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."
16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."
17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.
18 "Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Broken friendships often leave us with a sense of guilt and shame that makes it difficult to reconcile with those we love. How do we overcome such feelings and rebuild broken relationships? Jesus transformed Peter's brokenness to wholeness by restoring Peter to a loving relationship with him, challenging Peter to fulfill his missional purpose.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recall the actions and attitudes that led to Peter's broken relationship with Jesus.
2. Search their hearts for actions and attitudes that harm their relationship with Christ.
3. Identify someone with whom they need to reconcile and identify how they might appropriately communicate their regret (or forgiveness).

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The mention of the "charcoal fire" in last week's passage is significant (verse 9). The last time we had seen a charcoal fire in this gospel (see John 18:18) is when Peter denied Jesus three times. After Jesus and His disciples had eaten breakfast around the charcoal fire in John 21, Peter affirmed his love for Jesus three times. Here, Jesus provided Peter with the opportunity for repentance.

—Not only is Peter's love for Jesus confirmed, but also, so is his responsibility. He is to be a shepherd for Jesus' people. In this conversation between Jesus and Peter, disciples/believers through the ages have found personal forgiveness and recommitment to service.

—Different terminology is used for the verb *love* (*agapao, agapao, phileo*). Some have seen different connotations in these varying words. *Agape* love is often described as a sort of unconditional, selfless, all-giving love; *philia* love is more akin to friendship.

—This passage also affirms the significance of Peter. Throughout this Gospel, "the one whom Jesus loved" has been more prominent. Now Peter is identified as the one who loves Jesus "more than these" (verse 15).

—The text also foreshadows Peter's martyrdom. According to the church historian Eusebius, Peter was crucified upside-down. Here, Jesus prophesies that He would meet an untimely end. Many of the Twelve also died as martyrs, as did numerous early Christians. All who follow Jesus are called to bear the risk of sharing the Good News.

—Jesus' questions to Peter probed his understanding of who Jesus is and Peter's self-awareness in relation to Jesus. With each question and answer, Peter seems to have come to a fuller realization of exactly what Jesus was asking of him.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

John's presentation of the person and ministry of Jesus differs from the presentations in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Although each gospel highlights events in Jesus' earthly ministry, John's gospel begins and ends quite differently from the others. For example, John presents Jesus as God who was in the beginning (see 1:1), the Word made flesh (see 1:14), the rejected Jesus by His own people (see 1:11), and the sacrificial Lamb of God (see 1:29). Additionally, John's gospel ends without mentioning the Great Commission or the ascension of Jesus.

Nevertheless, John's account of the ministry of Jesus consists of two parts. The first twelve chapters of his gospel describe Jesus' public ministry, beginning with His meeting John the Baptist and closing with the visit of the Greeks who came to worship at the Feast of Passover. The remaining chapters (13–21) deal with the closing days of Jesus' earthly ministry and Jesus' instructions concerning the meaning of His life and imminent death. Although there are differing opinions concerning the date of the composition of the gospel of John, many scholars suggest that it was written somewhere around AD 85–95.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The New Testament, including the gospel of John, discloses the story of Jesus as a man on the move with a mission. The book is a divinely inspired record of the preexistence, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus spends much of His ministry traveling from place to place. Because the gospel of John speaks to a wide range of individuals not confined to a particular space and time, Bible scholars suggest that the audience of John's gospel must be characterized both relationally and territorially. Although place and time are important for the setting of any book, John's gospel was directed at a broad audience instead of those confined to a particular space and time. Hence, place and time are not of paramount importance for this book.

Some scholars suggest that John was probably the only disciple at the Crucifixion. Interestingly, he outran Peter to reach the empty tomb and was the first disciple to recognize the risen Savior in Galilee (see John 20:1-4; 21:7). Scholars also believe that John was the only apostle who was not martyred. Next to the apostle Paul, John was the leading writer of the New Testament. The apostle Peter is a prominent character in today's lesson and was a prominent leader in the early church. Although Peter was originally named Simon, Jesus changed his name to Cephas or Peter, which means "rock" (see John 1:42). Although John's gospel does not end with the ascension of Jesus or the Great Commission, it does record the startling commissioning of Peter.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Peter: Peter was a fisherman in Bethsaida. He was named Simon, son of Jonah or John. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) describe how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law at their home in Capernaum and is proof that Peter was a married man.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Feed (verse 15)—Greek: *boskó* (bos'-ko): to pasture; spiritually, to nourish by feeding people the Word of God.

Grieved (verse 17)—Greek: *lupeó* (loo-peh'-o): to be distressed; to be in pain, vexed; "hurt" (NIV).

Know(est) (verse 17)—Greek: *ginóskó* (ghin-oce'-ko): to come to know, recognize, perceive; ascertain; realize.

Love (verse 15)—Greek: *agapaó* (ag-ap-ah'-o): to wish well to, long for; embrace God's will (choosing His choices) and obey it through His power.

Shepherd (verse 16)—Greek: *poimainó* (poy-mah'-ee-no): to act as a shepherd; to tend, herd; rule; govern; care for (protect) the flock; "Feed my sheep" (KJV); "Take care of my sheep" (NIV).

Walked (verse 18)—Greek: *peripateó* (per-ee-pat-eh'-o): in an ethical sense, one's having conducted his/her life, lived; "walkedst" (KJV); "went" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. The Anatomy of True Love
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Jesus: "Do *You* Love Me, Peter?" (John 21:15)
- B. Jesus: "Do You *Love* Me, Peter?" (John 21:16)
- C. Jesus: "Do You Love *Me,* Peter?" (John 21:17)
- D. Jesus: "You Will Be Martyred, Peter" (John 21:18-19)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Anatomy of True Love

One of the age-old questions that has become a part of relationships in many parts of the world is that of knowing when love is for real. It is easy to tell another person "I love you." The issue, however, lies in knowing how such an expression of love can be tested and proven to be true or false. A minister preparing to be ordained in his denomination was told that during the examination period, he would be questioned concerning his understanding of biblical doctrine, church policy, and other ecclesiastical matters. There would also be an open session during which members would be allowed to ask the candidate ordination questions. The candidate was then told that a certain member always directed the same question to the candidates: "Do you love Jesus?" After the candidate answered various questions from the Ordination Council, the member stood and asked the question: "Do you love Jesus?" The candidate responded by saying, "Yes, I love Jesus with all my heart and my entire being." The questioner then sat down. When asked why he would ask such a question, the examiner responded by saying that it is vitally important for every candidate to express his love verbally and publicly for Jesus. After all, a person cannot really serve the Lord without a genuine love for the Lord.

Today's lesson highlights that basic question: Do you love Jesus? This is a question that modern-day Christians must answer. Our work in the church is useless if done for any other reason than love for our Lord.

B. Biblical Background

The importance of the gospel of John can hardly be overestimated. Throughout Christian history, believers have read and cherished it far more than any of the other well-preserved accounts of Jesus' life. The genius of the gospel lies in the way in which John presents the relationship between humanity and divinity. This relationship between humanity and divinity has puzzled people for many years. How can God—who is as an eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent being— have any direct contact with that which is temporal, changing, and limited by the conditions of space and time? In other words, how can divinity ever be united with humanity unless one becomes connected in a contradictory manner? John's answer to that question is this statement: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14a, NIV). The Word (Greek: *logos*) is identified with God as Jesus of Nazareth. This Word became flesh and dwelt among us, meaning that God took on human form to dwell among humanity.

The gospel of John ends with two distinct sections. The first section focuses on Peter's reinstatement while the second section focuses on the confidence that John provides. Although Jesus had risen from the dead, He had not yet ascended to the Father. He appeared to His disciples on several occasions (see John 20:15, 26-29; 21:5-23). On the last occasion, Peter was commissioned by Jesus as a shepherd of the flock.

Jesus' concern and love for Peter is shown in His post-Resurrection conversation in John 21. Jesus took the time to reinstate Peter and demonstrate His forgiveness toward Peter. Although Peter was hurt by Jesus' third iteration of the question "Do you love me?" Jesus was gently forcing a threefold declaration of Peter's love that mirrors Peter's threefold denial.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jesus: "Do *You* Love Me, Peter?" (John 21:15)

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

Immediately after Jesus and the disciples ate breakfast together, Jesus turned His attention to Peter. The *they* in verse 15 speaks of the seven disciples of John 21:2 and Jesus. The shared meal eventually transitioned to a one-on-one conversation with Peter. In many cultures, an ideal time to have a serious conversation with an individual is after a meal. Jesus took advantage of this period to address His concerns regarding Peter's past conduct. Notice how Jesus addressed Peter. He addressed Peter as "Simon, son of Jonah." A quick review of Jesus' relationship with Peter reveals that Jesus had changed Peter's name from Simon to Peter, the "rock." Such a change was based upon Peter's relationship with Jesus Christ. However, that relationship was ruptured when Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. Some biblical scholars suggest that Peter was being called Simon until the relationship could be reestablished. Jesus started that process in verse 15.

Jesus called Peter aside and began the questioning. The title developed for this section places the emphasis on the YOU in the question "Do YOU love me, Peter?" The focus is on whether Peter really loved Jesus. When Jesus addressed Peter as Simon, son of Jonah, there was undoubtedly a tone of rebuke in His voice. The emphasis is placed upon the need for Peter to take an introspective look at whether he really loved Jesus, considering what he had done in the past in denying that he knew Him.

Some scholars interpret that the second phrase of Jesus' question, "more than these," directs Peter to seriously examine his love for Jesus in comparison to everything and anyone else. Remember that Peter had boastfully declared that if everyone else deserted Jesus, he would never desert Jesus, all while dramatically pledging to die for Jesus (see Matthew 26:33, 35; John 13:37). However, Peter reneged on all his high proclamations and shamefully denied Jesus three times.

It is important to note here that Jesus wasn't asking Peter this question because He didn't know the answer. Peter was correct in saying, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus asked Peter the question to encourage Peter to confront his sins, which had to be addressed and removed before Peter could be commissioned to tend to the Lord's sheep. In response to this affirmation of love by Peter, Jesus commissioned him to *feed His lambs*, or to provide continuing spiritual nourishment for new believers. Jesus emphasized love because it is the supreme motive behind a faithful commitment to Him.

B. Jesus: "Do You *Love* Me, Peter?" (John 21:16)

He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

The question of verse 15 is repeated in verse 16: "Simon, son of Jonah, LOVEST thou me?" Interestingly, Jesus does not ask Peter, "Do you *like* me?" or "Do you *respect* me?" Jesus asked, *Do you LOVE me?* It is questionable if Peter really knew the profound meaning behind loving Jesus. Love is more than an emotion; it is a commitment. No doubt when Jesus asked this question the second time, it probably caused Peter to reflect again on that night by the fire when Peter used profanity in denying that he even knew Jesus. When Peter responded this time, it was with the same words; however, we can imagine the feeling of hurt that Peter was probably experiencing being subjected to a second time of questioning. This time, Jesus commissioned him to shepherd or provide pastoral care for believers in general.

C. Jesus: "Do You Love *Me*, Peter?" (John 21:17)

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

Finally, for a third time, Jesus asked Peter to confess his love for Him. *Simon, son of Jonah, do you love ME?* John records that Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him a third time to confess his love for Him. John does not explain why Peter was grieved, but it is suggested that Peter thought that Jesus was not satisfied with his previous confessions. Peter gave the same response but qualified it by adding that Jesus was omniscient and knew the intent of his heart. Jesus then charged Peter with the

responsibility to provide spiritual nourishment for believers.

Some scholars question whether there is a difference between the second and third questions. Although the word *love* reads the same in English, they are not the same in the original Greek. Jesus used the verb form of *agape* for "love" in the first two questions and the verb form *philos* in the third question. The verb form *philos* speaks of friendship, and the verb form *agape* speaks of sacrificial love. Interestingly, in this passage, John uses two different Greek words for "love," two different Greek words for "know," two different Greek words for "feed," and two different Greek words for "flock" (such as lambs and sheep).

In reviewing this dramatic dialogue between Jesus and Peter, the critical issue in Peter's restoration was his love for Jesus. At another fire of coals, Peter had vehemently denied Jesus three times (see John 18:15-17, 25-27). Now, Jesus gave Peter three opportunities to publicly reaffirm his love for Him while recommissioning him to greater service. Jesus was aware that the significant role that Peter was to play in the early church required public restoration to fellowship and friendship with Him. For the faith community, Peter's loving restoration by Christ is the encouragement to know that failure is not final, and that forgiveness is readily available to every repenting believer. Just as Peter was restored to the special relationship that he had with Jesus, we, too, can experience restoration with the Lord.

D. Jesus: "You Will Be Martyred, Peter" (John 21:18-19)

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

Following the dialogue during which Jesus questioned the love and loyalty of Peter, Jesus referenced the martyrdom of the apostle Peter. The expression "verily, verily" is a favorite phase in John's gospel—occurring twenty-six times. With this phrase, Jesus is illuminating the absolute certainty of what is coming. Interestingly, Jesus used the same wording when He warned Peter of his coming denial (see John 13:38). Now, Jesus uses it to express a different kind of warning.

Jesus gives Peter a prophetic warning. Jesus presents a contrast between the vigor and self-will of youthful Peter with an older and mature Peter. Youthful vigor and vitality slowly wane as one progresses in age. This verse also foreshadows Peter's imminent and violent death in bonds. The language that Jesus used made it clear that Peter would die as a prisoner for being one of His followers. Jesus warned Peter that he would be seized, bound, and led away to be executed. The phrase "stretch out your hands" implies that Peter would be crucified. After Peter's threefold affirmation of love for Jesus and his recommissioning, Jesus prophesied His martyrdom (verses 18-19a). Peter's future death, however, would not be without purpose—Jesus told Peter that it would glorify Him.

One of the inevitabilities of life is death. We will all eventually die. That reality should change our perspective on life and death. John

does not state Peter's initial reaction to Jesus' prediction concerning Peter's death. Hence, we are left to conjecture. Nevertheless, from that point forward, Peter faithfully showed a bold, tenacious love and commitment to Christ. Jesus completed His prophecy and said to Peter, "Follow me." Peter's ministry as an evangelist and pastor proved that he spent the rest of his life following Jesus to the point of making the ultimate sacrifice, as Jesus prophesied.

According to church historian Eusebius, Peter was crucified by Emperor Nero upside-down—at his own request—because he felt unworthy to be crucified like Christ. Following Jesus is the most essential issue in every believer's life. Peter's life illustrates that following Jesus involves the willingness to sacrifice everything in submission to Christ's will and to obey His commands, even if it leads to a cross or seasons of loss, inconvenience, sacrifice, or dire adversity. Inevitably, we will all die physically, but because we have been redeemed and reconciled to God, we can faithfully follow Jesus with the assurance of spending eternity in His presence.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Following Jesus is not easy. It is challenging, difficult, and sacrificial. Those who follow Christ must be willing to do so at the cost of their popularity, preferences, career path, comfort, pride, or their very lives. Despite the sacrifices, following Jesus is immeasurably rewarding, refreshing, and purposeful—with earthly and eternal ramifications. Immediately after commissioning Peter, Jesus informed Peter of the ultimate cost for following Him. Christ came into this world and took on the very nature of a servant. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross (see Philippians 2:8). Jesus did that for Peter, for you, and for anyone who will receive that truth. Each of us has stumbled and fallen. Nevertheless, Jesus is calling us to follow Him! Will you follow?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, remind us daily of what You did for us in sending Your Son to die for our sins and granting us a right to the Tree of Life. Help us to show our love for You by being willing to serve You through serving others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 17-23, 2023)

Jesus Reinstates Peter

MONDAY, April 17: "Jesus Brings Danger and Conflict" (Matthew 10:28-42)
TUESDAY, April 18: "Peter Denies Jesus" (John 18:13-27)
WEDNESDAY, April 19: "Repent, Turn, and Live" (Ezekiel 18:13-27)
THURSDAY, April 20: "Godly Grief Produces Repentance" (2 Corinthians 7:1-11)
FRIDAY, April 21: "'O God, Blot Out My Transgressions'" (Psalm 51:1-9)
SATURDAY, April 22: "'Create in Me a Clean Heart'" (Psalm 51:10-19)
SUNDAY, April 23: "'If You Love Me, Follow Me'" (John 21:15-25)

April 30, 2023 **Lesson 9**

A PROMISE IS MADE TO JESUS' DISCIPLES

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Hope and Power
Youth Topic: Hope and Power

Children
General Lesson Title: Jesus Promises to Send Help
Children's Topic: Help Is on the Way!

Devotional Reading
Psalm 24

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Acts 1:1-11
Print Passage: Acts 1:1-11
Key Verse: Acts 1:8a

Children
Background Scripture: Acts 1:1-11
Print Passage: Acts 1:1-11
Key Verse: Acts 1:8a

Acts 1:1-11—KJV

THE FORMER treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:
3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:
4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.
5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

Acts 1:1-11—NIV

IN MY former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach
2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.
3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.
4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.
5 "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?
7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.
8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.
10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;
11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"
7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.
8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.
10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.
11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People want to know how to move forward when they feel powerless. How do we overcome feelings of powerlessness? Jesus told the disciples to wait for the power that would come to them through the Holy Spirit.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Identify with the disciples' sense of hopelessness at Jesus' ascension.
2. Trust the empowerment and work of the Holy Spirit within and among them.
3. Wait with hope and share the Good News of Jesus' promised return.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The preface to the book of Acts demonstrates its connection to the gospel of Luke (both written by the same author). The author begins by summarizing the contents of the book of Luke. If Luke is the story of Jesus, then Acts is the story of the church.

—The person to whom the work is addressed is a certain Theophilus. There has been considerable discussion as to whether this was an actual individual (perhaps a patron who funded Luke's work, as indicated by his title "most excellent")

or whether the name is symbolic, for *Theophilus* means "lover of God" or "beloved of God" and could be any child of God who reads the text. Thus, we can read both Luke and Acts as having been written for us.

—Jesus' statement that "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8b, NIV) serves as the outline for the book of Acts. After Jesus' ascension, the good news of the Gospel was indeed proclaimed first in Jerusalem (see 2:14-36), then throughout Judea and Samaria (see Acts 8), and then into Gentile territories (see 9:1–28:31). This suggests yet today that the Christian's primary task is evangelism.

—In this opening scene, Jesus' disciples witness His ascension and in the following scene they will receive the Holy Spirit, who empowers them to perform signs and wonders. There is a link here to the story of Elijah, for after he ascended to heaven, his disciple (Elisha) received "a double portion of his spirit" and was able to work miracles. One might draw a connection to the ritual of ordination in the church, which symbolizes the transmission of power and authority to the newly ordained, both by the church and by the Spirit.

—After Jesus' ascension, two men in white robes appear (as they appeared to the women at the empty tomb in Luke 24:4ff.) and ask the disciples why they are staring up into the heavens. This serves as a subtle reminder that they had work to do here on Earth. That work includes waiting patiently for the gift of the Spirit (the return of Jesus) when they will receive the power that Jesus promised.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Although Bible historians suggest that the date of the writing of some of the New Testament books is not crucial, the date of the writing of the book of Acts is vitally important because it is identified as a church history book. The Acts of the Apostles is considered to be the only inspired record of early church history. It is also the first and only primary historical account to chronicle the earliest days of the Christian faith. Some scholars suggest that the book of Acts was written around AD 62 or a short time thereafter while Paul was in prison. Other scholars suggest that the book of Acts was written around AD 70–80, which makes provision for Luke to use the gospel of Mark as source material for the gospel of Luke. It is safe to say that the book of Acts was written between AD 61–80, and it was most likely written in Rome.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The Acts of the Apostles, often referred to simply as Acts, or the book of Acts, is the fifth book of the New Testament. It speaks of the founding of the Christian church and the spread of its message to the Roman Empire. The book of Acts throbs with life and action. In it, the Holy Spirit is at work in a phenomenal way. In Acts, the Holy Spirit is integrally involved in the forming of the church, the empowering of the church, and the expanding of the outreach of the church.

The book of Acts serves as a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. It is a bridge between the life of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the "Christ-life" that is taught in the Epistles. Scholars suggest that the book of Acts is a transitional link between Judaism and Christianity and between the

Law and Grace. In Acts, one sees how the Christian faith expanded from a small Jewish movement headquartered in Jerusalem to a worldwide faith that has made inroads into the imperial capital of Rome.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Luke: little is known about Luke, the author of the books of Luke and Acts in the Bible. He was a physician and the only known Gentile to write any part of the New Testament.

Theophilus: Theophilus was the person for whom Luke originally wrote his two books: the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. It is interesting to note that around 26 percent of the New Testament was written to Theophilus in Luke's writings. Luke desired to prove to Theophilus the truth of Jesus the Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Alive (verse 3)—Greek: *zaó* (dzah'-o): to live, experience God's gift of life; be living.

Baptized (verse 5)—Greek: *baptizó* (bap-tid'-zo): dipped; sunk; submerged, but specifically of ceremonial dipping; immersed.

Chosen (verse 2)—Greek: *eklegó* (ek-leg'-om-ahee): selected; "picked out for myself"; elected.

Depart (verse 4)—Greek: *chórizó* (kho-rid'-zo): to separate, divide, put apart; withdraw; "leave" (NIV).

Kingdom (verse 3)—Greek: *basileia* (bas-il-i'-ah): sovereignty; royal power; authority, rule, especially of God.

Promise(d) (verse 4)—Greek: *epaggelia* (ep-ang-el-ee'-ah): a summons (summoned); of God's promises; what was promised.

Teach (verse 1)—Greek: *didaskó* (did-as'-ko): to direct, admonish, instruct, preach.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. "What Are You Looking At?"
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Jesus' Preparation for Leaving (Acts 1:1-3)
- B. Jesus' Promise before Leaving (Acts 1:4-8)
- C. Jesus Departs in View of the Disciples (Acts 1:9)
- D. Jesus Will Return Just as He Left (Acts 1:10-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. "What Are You Looking At?"

One human weakness that many persons struggle with is the temptation to become easily distracted. This phenomenon plays itself out daily in the news media as the media focuses upon one "breaking news" story after the other—only to become interrupted or upstaged by another "breaking news" story. Unfortunately, the consumers of these stories have become unwitting victims of "head-spinning" media diversions. This is a sad indictment when one considers the fact that many of the under-reported stories produced by the

media need to have greater exposure because of the seriousness of the contents of the stories. This unfortunate reality prevailed during the previous Presidential administration. Stories that were of urgent national import and which should have gained greater publicity were short-circuited to focus on sensational social-media posts from the Oval Office.

It is no doubt that there is a need to exercise a spirit of focus and discernment and not become easily distracted with passing fancies. Our lesson today focuses on the disciples' intently looking up as their Master (Jesus Christ) ascended into the heavens. The disciples were steadfast in their focus, so much so that two dressed men stood beside them and spoke: "'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:11, NIV). The fact that they were focused on that awesome event enabled them to be the recipients of a divine news flash. May we remain focused on the task(s) God has called us to accomplish.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Acts is a historical account of the facilitating of God's plan to spread the Gospel—using the church as His chosen vehicle to accomplish His goal. While some refer to the book as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, the Acts of the Apostles, the Acts of the Church, it is accurate to simply refer to Luke's second volume as the book of Acts. Luke, the physician, is the author of the book of Acts. He was a fellow worker and traveler of Paul's. Paul referred to Luke as the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14).

The book of Acts opens where the gospel of Luke closes—meaning the book of Acts is a "sequel" to the gospel of Luke. Acts 1 sets the stage for the establishment of the church and the spread of the Gospel. The entire book of Acts chronicles the formation and journey of the early church as it transitioned from the influences of Judaism into a Christ-centered, powerful witness to the first-century world. Some scholars suggest that the book of Acts covers approximately thirty-three years. Interestingly, Jesus' earthly life lasted thirty-three years.

Acts 1 finds Jesus still physically present on Earth. For the Holy Spirit to come, Jesus needed to ascend into heaven (see John 16:7). The disciples obeyed Jesus' last instructions and waited in Jerusalem to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. In a real sense, one could argue that Jesus is the primary actor in the book of Acts, working through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of His church.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jesus' Preparation for Leaving

(Acts 1:1-3)

THE FORMER treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Luke, the author of the gospel that bears his name, is also the author of its sequel—

the book of Acts. The *former treatise*, or book, mentioned in verse 1 speaks of the gospel of Luke. In the gospel of Luke, the author describes Jesus' work in Galilee, Judea, and especially Jerusalem. The book of Acts continues the story where the Gospels leave off by describing the early days of the church. In a real sense, Acts connects the Gospels to the Epistles. Both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are addressed to the same individual: *Theophilus*. Although not much is known about Theophilus, Luke refers to him by his title the "most excellent" in Luke 1:3. Hence, many scholars believe that Theophilus was probably a Gentile who was a high Roman official.

The focus of Luke's first book was "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (verse 1). The word *began* suggests that the works and teachings of Jesus continued after His resurrection and ascension through the power of the Holy Spirit. To remove the doubts of His followers, Jesus facilitated many infallible proofs (verse 3)—such as entering a locked room (see John 20:19), showing His crucifixion wounds (see Luke 24:39), and eating and drinking with the disciples (see Luke 24:41-43). In verse 2, the word *infallible* (Greek: *tekmerion*) speaks of the fact that Jesus revealed Himself in such ways that His appearances could not be denied. His desire was to leave no doubt that He was the same Jesus who died on the cross. Interestingly, Jesus did not simply spend several hours giving convincing proofs that He was alive. Jesus spent forty days between His resurrection and ascension highlighting the reality that He was indeed alive. In verse 3, the word *kingdom* (Greek: *basileias*) refers to the rule and reign of God over His creation. It has reference to the sovereignty, power, and authority of God. The subject of Jesus' post-Resurrection teaching was the kingdom of God, just as it had been the focus of His public ministry (see Luke 4:43). The kingdom of God also speaks of God's rule and reign in the hearts and lives of people as they experience forgiveness of sins and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

B. Jesus' Promise before Leaving (Acts 1:4-8)

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 1:4-8 records part of the final conversation between Jesus and the disciples. The emphasis was upon the Father's plan to spread the Gospel throughout the world by relying upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In verses 4-5, Jesus commanded the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. This would be the fulfillment of the Father's promise made earlier and recorded in both Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16.

In verse 5, Jesus contrasted the baptism performed by John and the baptism provided by the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was

physical in nature ("with water"), while the Holy Spirit's baptism is supernatural in nature ("with the Holy Spirit"). The passive tense of the Greek verb rendered "shall be baptized" highlights the fact that for this act to happen depended not on the efforts of the disciples but, rather, on the divine action of God.

While many denominations differ on the interpretation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Paul suggests that it refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each disciple (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism in the Holy Spirit is mentioned seven times in Scripture. The first four times highlight John the Baptist's pronouncement that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:33). The fifth time it is mentioned is in our text in Acts 1:5, where Jesus emphasizes the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The sixth reference is in Acts 11:16, where Peter connects the Lord's promise of the filling of the Holy Spirit with events at Cornelius's house. The seventh reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul illuminates that all Christians have been baptized by one Spirit into one body.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly taught that God, the Father, would send the Holy Spirit. Now, in the days ahead, that promise would be fulfilled as an enduement of power so the apostles could accomplish God's will. Although Jesus' promise of power for ministry was initially targeted to His chosen apostles, it is available to all believers—because no one can fulfill God's purposes without the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.

In verses 6-7, the potential of fulfilling this promise provoked the apostles to ask if Jesus was ready to restore Israel's kingdom. It is clear from their question that the apostles still possessed an earthly, nationalistic view of what Jesus meant when He referred to the coming kingdom. In the disciples' minds, the kingdom of God and the Jewish nation were synonymous. Jesus quickly reminded them that it was not their business to know the time and date which God had established for this event to occur.

The disciples were not to be concerned with the times and the season regarding God's plans. In verse 7, the word *times* (Greek: *chronos*) refers to the chronology or duration of time, and the word *seasons* (Greek: *kairos*) refers to the events or epochs that take place within time. Interestingly, Jesus did not rebuke the apostles for their misunderstanding of Him and the kingdom. Instead, He redirected their focus to the task at hand and the purpose of the power they were to receive to accomplish His purpose. Rather than being fixated upon the times and seasons of the future, the disciples were to be focused on the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.

In verse 8, Jesus indicated that the Holy Spirit would enable the disciples to be His witnesses—beginning in Jerusalem and expanding into the world. Up to that point, they were eyewitnesses *of* Jesus' life and teachings, but now they would be empowered to witness *about* them. In verse 8, the verb *shall receive* (Greek: *lambano*) is in a tense and mood (future tense and the indicative mood) that suggests that this action that the disciples should obtain and of which they should take hold would occur in the future without human origin. The word *power* (Greek: *dunamis*) speaks of miraculous

ability, capability, or strength. Interestingly, it is always used in reference to the power of the Holy Spirit. The word *witnesses* (Greek: *martus*), which produces our English word *martyr*, speaks of one who bears witness to the truth of the Gospel and is willing to suffer death for the sake of that cause.

Verse 8 is a centerpiece verse in the book of Acts. It reflects another record of the Great Commission given by Jesus (see Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; and John 20:21-22). The book of Acts begins in Jerusalem and concludes in Rome, which is symbolically the ends of the earth because of what it represented in the first-century world. Hence, scholars suggest that verse 8 highlights the outline of the book of Acts because it describes how the Gospel was to spread geographically from Jerusalem (see Acts 1–7) to Judea and Samaria (see Acts 8–9), and to "the ends of the earth" (see Acts 10–28).

C. Jesus Departs in View of the Disciples (Acts 1:9)

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

After giving His mandate to the apostles to be His witnesses, Jesus ascended from the earth and disappeared into a cloud. Luke gives the fullest New Testament account of Jesus' ascension. Although some have reduced this epoch event to a hallucination or a vision, Luke renders it as a real event. The phrase *beheld* (Greek: *blepo*) in verse 9 speaks of careful and intentional gazing or looking. It has reference to seeing that perceives or understands. The phrase *taken up* (Greek: *epairo*) is a passive verb that means "to be borne upward." This suggests that an action was being performed on Jesus. He was literally taken up or lifted. The cloud is a reminder to the disciples of the *shekinah*—the visible manifestation of God's glory and presence in the Old Testament. Scholars suggest that the cloud was a visible reminder that God's glory was present as the disciples watched the majestic ascension of Jesus Christ from Earth. It is important to note that the ascension of Jesus is a proof of His divinity, as is the Resurrection. By the time Jesus ascended, the apostles knew exactly who He was. Jesus' departure was essential because it guaranteed the fulfillment of the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit (see John 16:5-15).

D. Jesus Will Return Just as He Left (Acts 1:10-11)

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

As Jesus departed, the apostles continuously strained to see Him (verse 10). Even after He disappeared from their sight, the disciples continued looking intently up into the sky. Use of the phrase *looked steadfastly* (Greek: *atenixo*) means that the disciples fastened their eyes upon Jesus. They fixed their attention on Jesus and strained their eyes to see Jesus as He was taken into the cloud. One can surmise that the disciples were astonished at the sight of Jesus' ascension. Suddenly, two angelic figures appeared in human form. They reprimanded the disciples for standing there, gaping at the sight of their rising Savior. The angelic figures informed the disciples that Jesus would "come

back in the same way" in which they had seen Him go up. This statement comprises one of several statements scattered throughout the New Testament in reference to the *Parousia*, which means "the arrival or presence of someone." The word is used as a technical term for the coming of Jesus Christ in glory. Most commonly, *Parousia* is known as the second coming of Christ at the end of the age.

Jesus' ascension and promised return are the basis for Christian hope. Despite many failures, the disciples' hope of Christ's return motivated them and the early church to continue Jesus' unfinished work of evangelizing the world. Jesus will return. The reality of an imminent return should motivate every believer to serve Jesus and continue His mission in the world.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The book of Acts is a fast-paced, action-adventure book that recounts the birth and growth of the early church from the Jewish center of Jerusalem to the Gentile capital of Rome. Additionally, it is a bridge-like continuation of the Gospels and connection to the Epistles. But most of all, the book of Acts is a tribute to the transforming power of God through the acts of the Holy Spirit as evidenced in the lives of the apostles. In Acts, we observe a change in the apostles' lives—from their being fearful weaklings to being dynamic witnesses. The apostles' transformation gives hope and encouragement for believers today. Jesus' plan for the church was larger than anything the disciples could have imagined. Likewise, Jesus' plan for our lives is larger than anything we can imagine. God calls us to become transformed witnesses for Him in a world gone wild. Will you be a witness?

PRAYER

Eternal God, grant us the presence of Your Holy Spirit each day to accomplish the mission to which You have called us. We are unable to accomplish it on our own. We need Your power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 24-30, 2023)

A Promise Is Made to Jesus' Disciples

MONDAY, April 24: "Go and Make Disciples" (Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20)
TUESDAY, April 25: "The Day of the Lord Approaches" (Joel 2:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, April 26: "Jesus Is Seated at God's Right Hand" (Hebrews 1:1-14)
THURSDAY, April 27: "Jesus, Our Great High Priest" (Hebrews 8:1-13)
FRIDAY, April 28: "Jesus Has Entered the Holy Place" (Hebrews 9:8-22)
SATURDAY, April 29: "Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!" (Psalm 24)
SUNDAY, April 30: "You Shall Receive Power" (Acts 1:1-11)

May 7, 2023 **Lesson 10**

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Fear and Trust**
Youth Topic: **Fear and Trust**

Children
General Lesson Title: **The Beginning of the Church**
Children's Topic: **Fear and Trust**

Devotional Reading
Psalm 16

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: **Acts 2:1-42**
Print Passage: **Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39**
Key Verse: **Acts 2:39**

Children
Background Scripture: **Acts 2:1-42**
Print Passage: **Acts 2:1-4, 36-42**
Key Verse: **Acts 2:38**

Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39—KJV

AND WHEN the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.
3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.
4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.
6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.
7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?
8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-39—NIV

WHEN THE day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.
2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.
4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.
6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.
7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?
8 "Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?"

. . . . .

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:
15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.
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:
18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:
19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:
20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:
21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:
23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:
24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

. . . . .

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?
38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

. . . . .

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.
15 "These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!
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 will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.
19 "'I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.
20 "'The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
21 "'And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'
22 "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.
23 "This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.
24 "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

. . . . .

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"
38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
39 "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: **New possibilities in life often present us with new challenges. What enables us to face new possibilities and challenges? Through Christ, God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the first disciples and to guide them in new possibilities for ministry.**

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Consider people's response to Peter's preaching of a new message of salvation in Jesus.
2. Trust God's Holy Spirit to assuage fears of following God in new ways.
3. Respond as Peter's hearers and readers did.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This scene presents the dramatic fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy given in the previous chapter: "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5, NRSV). The presence of tongues of fire recalls John the Baptist's prophecy of the coming One's baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire (see Luke 3:16).

—The disciples' ability to speak in other languages, understood and interpreted by others, is to be differentiated from the practice of "speaking in unknown tongues" (see 1 Corinthians 14:2a)—the practice of "speaking mysteries to God" with one's spirit in language that is unintelligible to humans—"for no man understandeth" (1 Corinthians 14:2b).

—The disciples' ability to speak in several different languages is a divine reversal of the problem set forth in Genesis 11:1-9 (the Tower of Babel story), where God confused the people's speech so they could no longer communicate with one another and then scattered them across the earth. The Holy Spirit reestablishes these lines of communication and reflects a restored relationship between God and humankind, made possible through Christ and the Spirit.

—Peter returns to the Scriptures to explain this event, citing Joel 2:28-32. Interestingly, Luke adds the opening line "In the last days" (Acts 2:17, NRSV), which indicates that he sees the events of Jesus' death and resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit as the fulfillment of eschatological expectations. (*Eschatology* is the branch of theology that deals with the "last things," often interpreted as the end of time.)

—Those who hear Peter's words are "cut to the heart" and are led to repentance. Repentance is a significant theme in Acts (see 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20) and is tied here to baptism, just as it was in the preaching of John the Baptist. Repentance need not be construed in purely negative terms (feeling bad about one's past) but can be understood positively as a turn to new life. Note verse 42. The turning toward new opportunities is the aspect of repentance that the church continues to neglect in many situations. We are happy to repent because it opens new doors for us.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts is the sequel to Luke's gospel. Scholars differ over whether Luke wrote the book of Acts as a separate work or as the second volume of a unified Luke–Acts composition. Regardless, there is no doubt that Luke's goal was to connect the life, work, and teachings of Jesus to the beginnings of the early church. It is the first documented church history book. Some scholars suggest that what happened in Jerusalem with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was begun in Galilee—with Jesus preaching the Good News of the kingdom of God.

The second chapter of the book of Acts documents the fulfillment of the promise in Acts 1:4-5 and Acts 1:8. In chapter 1, Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit. In the second chapter of the book of Acts, the apostles receive an infilling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was proof or verification that Jesus is alive. Our lesson for today is a part of the early church's witness in Jerusalem with special emphasis on Pentecost (see Acts 2:5-47).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

There is a similar chronological length in the books of Acts and the gospel of Luke. Both books cover roughly the same number of years. And there are parallel themes between the books as well. For example, the gospel of Luke climaxes with the journey of Jesus toward His arrest, trial, suffering, death, and victory in the seat of Jewish monarchical power in Jerusalem. The book of Acts reaches its conclusion with the apostle Paul's journey toward Rome, beginning with his arrest, trial, and suffering, and concluding with his victorious proclamation of the Gospel of Christ in the capital city of his world's imperial power. Expectations raised in the gospel of Luke are not fulfilled until the book of Acts.

The book of Acts presents the work of the Holy Spirit as the lifeline of the church. The book of Acts also presents the church as being on the move. It tells the story of church leaders actively engaged in the work of the ministry. The book also highlights the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the freedom, inclusivity, empowerment, and evangelism that come about because of the Holy Spirit at work.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit is the real manifestation of God in spirit form, just as Jesus was the incarnate manifestation of God, the "Word made flesh" (see 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:7-8). The Spirit is neither a separate, impersonal "it" nor a mere influence, but is the very Spirit of almighty God with intelligence (see 1 Corinthians 2:10-11), emotions (see Ephesians 4:30), and a will (see 1 Corinthians 2:11).

Peter: a fisherman in Bethsaida. He was named Simon, son of Jonah or John. The Synoptic Gospels recount how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law at their home in Capernaum—textual proof that Peter was a married man. He was one of the first disciples called by Jesus.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Devout (verse 5)—Greek: *eulabés* (yoo-lab-ace'): cautious; circumspect; hence: "God-fearing" (NIV), pious; reverencing God.

Filled (verse 2)—Greek: *pléroó* (play-ro'-o): made full; completed; fulfilled.

Sound (verse 6)—Greek: *phóné* (fo-nay'): a voice; noise; language; utterance; "this was noised" (KJV).

Spirit (verse 4)—Greek: *pneuma* (pnyoo'-mah): wind; breath.
Tongues (verse 3)—Greek: *glóssa* (gloce-sah'): the tongue; language; (figuratively) speaking, inspired by God.
Wind (verse 2)—Greek: *pnoé* (pno-ay'): a blowing, breath; breath of life.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. LUI—Living under the Influence
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. The Sounds and Sights at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3)
B. The Speeches at Pentecost (Acts 2:4-8)
C. Peter's Speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-24)
D. Peter's Challenge to the People (Acts 2:37-39)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. LUI—Living under the Influence

Many persons are familiar with the acronym DUI. Society has witnessed the devastating, destructive effects of individuals *driving under the influence* of alcohol or drugs. Numerous lives have been wrecked and lost because of persons being under the influence. Many laws around the country have been enacted to counteract the deadly results of people's driving under the influence. Interestingly, the people who observed the disciples after the coming of the Holy Spirit had an interesting response to what they saw and heard. Their response is recorded in Acts 2:13: "Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine."

The current culture ridicules manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever noticed someone who is perceived to be full of the Spirit? The individual may appear to have a holy enthusiasm. Some persons respond, "Ah, they're crazy." It is not unusual to see persons mocking others who live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, many have reduced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to "speaking in tongues," shouting, or "holy dancing." When one is truly filled with the Holy Spirit, he or she lives under the power, purpose, precepts, and persuasion of the Holy Spirit.

When one lives under the Spirit's influence, he or she also lives a risky, costly, and sacrificial life. Acts 2 records one of the results of living under the influence: "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44-45, NIV). The apostles sacrificed much to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit. They sacrificed their jobs, careers, reputations, and lives. In fact, they were even imprisoned and persecuted. The apostles were guilty of LUI. They lived under the influence. What about you? Can you be accused of LUI—living under the influence?

B. Biblical Background

Ancient Israel commemorated seven feast days. Included in the first month of their religious year were the Festivals of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits. Pentecost or the Feast of the Weeks was the fourth festival celebrated seven weeks after First Fruits. In the New Testament, the word *Pentecost* is mentioned three times (see 1 Corinthians 16:8; Acts 2:1; and Acts 20:16). Today's lesson takes place exactly fifty days from Jesus' resurrection. The Feast of Weeks or this harvest festival marked the commencement of the time when the people brought their offerings of first fruits (see Leviticus 23:15-21). The festival is also known as the Feast of Ingathering (see Exodus 23:16) or "the day of the firstfruits" (Numbers 28:26). Pentecost is the time when the church celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the New Testament church.

Luke's record of the third incident in the Pentecost saga (see Acts 2:1-41) describes Peter's speech before the Jews of Jerusalem, Judea, and the diaspora. When the assembled crowd heard Jesus' disciples miraculously speaking in languages they had not known and could not have learned as Galilean Jews, they demanded an explanation. The explanation was given by Peter as a fulfillment of prophecy, specifically Joel 2:28-32. As a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the apostles and subsequent followers of Christ were/are empowered to share the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Sounds and Sights at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3)

AND WHEN the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

When the Day of Pentecost arrived, the disciples of Jesus were waiting in unity just as He had instructed them to do. The word *Pentecost* (Greek: *pentekostos*) means "fiftieth." It referred to an Old Testament festival. Interestingly, it was the only Old Testament festival determined by counting. On the day after the Sabbath or after Passover, the ancient Israelites selected a sheaf of the first grain that had been harvested in the spring. This grain became an offering, and the priest waved it "before the Lord" (see Leviticus 23:11-12). Pentecost was observed in ancient Israel on the fiftieth day after this (see Leviticus 23:15). For the Jews, it signified the commemoration of the giving of the Law at Sinai fifty days after the Exodus Passover. Pentecost is also referred to as the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Harvest.

Verse 1 indicates that the disciples were in one place on one accord. Some scholars suggest that the disciples were either assembled in the Temple's precincts or at or somewhere near the Temple. The word *one* (Greek: *autos*) suggests that the disciples were all of one mind, united by the same purpose, love, and yearning for God. The verse connotes that the apostles were in one location—namely, a house where they had gathered in prayerful anticipation of the Spirit's arrival.

Verses 2-3 highlight the fact that the Holy

Spirit's descent was sudden, auditory, and visual. The word *suddenly* emphasizes an element of surprise. Although He was expected, the way in which the Holy Spirit arrived caught the apostles off guard. In other words, the Holy Spirit descended without warning. Luke describes the descent of the Holy Spirit figuratively, using two distinct external signs or symbols. The Holy Spirit's arrival was *like* the sound (auditory) of a mighty wind that filled the place where they were sitting, and His arrival was like *sights* (visual) of cloven tongues of fire that settled on each of the disciples.

The root of the word *wind* (Greek: *pnoe*) in verse 2 means "breeze" or "to breathe hard." Symbolically, the wind is a sign of God's presence as Spirit and the fullness of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The word *filled* (Greek: *pleroo*) in verse 2 speaks of space. Hence, the arrival of the Holy Spirit in what appeared as the sound of wind and what looked like fire of tongues was a supernatural phenomenon orchestrated by God and explainable only through similes and comparisons that could be humanly comprehended. In a real sense, the disciples experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit through both sound and sight.

B. The Speeches at Pentecost
(Acts 2:4-8)

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

The graphic manifestation of the Spirit continued in verse 4. The word *other* (Greek: *heteros*) speaks of "different, another, or someone else." The word *tongues* (Greek: *glossa*) speaks of a language that is not acquired by instruction. Hence, the evidence of the disciples' being filled with the Holy Spirit was their ability to speak in known and unknown languages that they had not learned as the Spirit directed them. The mystery is that these same utterances or languages, demonstrated by Luke's use of the word *dialekto* in verses 6 and 8, were understood by each hearer in their own native tongue. It is an experience like Spirit-filled preaching that ministers individual relevance and significance to a congregation of various people who each hear and interpret the Word through the context of their own situation and personal need. The people were amazed, and they marveled. The word *amazed* (Greek: *existemi*) in verse 7 suggests that the people were out of their minds. In essence, they were transported beyond themselves. The word *marvelled* (Greek: *thaumazo*) in verse 7 suggests that the people wondered, were astonished, or were struck with admiration. Amazingly, each disciple spoke in one voice words that were clearly understood and interpreted by everyone present—persons all over the known world at that time (verse 8).

Scholars differ over the reason for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in tongues or languages. Some scholars suggest that it was a reversal of God's judgment on humankind at Babel (see Genesis 11:1-9). Other scholars suggest that the coming of the Holy Spirit was manifested in that manner to let people know that the Gospel was available for all humanity and that God was reminding His followers

of the importance of evangelizing the whole world. Regardless of the reason, the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit signaled a new day in salvation history.

C. Peter's Speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-24)

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. 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: 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. Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

After the ascension of Jesus, Peter assumed leadership of the apostles. In verse 14, the phrase *standing up* (Greek: *histemi*) suggests that Peter faced the multitude and spoke on behalf of all the apostles. This was an important moment in the life of Peter, the life of the other apostles, and the life of the church, because as the apostles spoke in other languages, it was clear that not everyone in the crowd was impressed by the miracles and signs. Luke writes, "Some, . . . made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine'" (Acts 2:13, NIV). As a result, Peter began his speech to the astonished Jews by insisting that the disciples were not drunk. It was 9:00 a.m.—too early to be drinking, and much too early to be drunk. Those speaking in languages were not filled with wine, but with the Holy Spirit.

As Peter began to address the crowd, he explained what the experience really meant. Peter's speech takes up much of the remainder of chapter 2. Peter made a compelling and courageous witness to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. Ironically, just a few weeks earlier, this same Peter had denied his Savior with oaths and curses (see Matthew 26:72, 74). Peter had insisted to a servant girl who recognized him as a disciple that he did not even know the man (Jesus). Yet, now, Peter was the first to declare that he not only knew Jesus, but that he was also a witness to all that Jesus had said and done. The Holy Spirit had breathed new courage into a once dispirited and dismayed disciple.

Peter presented proof that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He referred to the Hebrew prophet Joel. In this context, devout Jews would have carefully listened to what Peter had to say about this recognizable figure in Jewish history. In verses 17-21, Peter quoted from Joel 2:28-32. Peter appealed to the Hebrew Scriptures as the word of God. He insisted that this Pentecost event is a fulfillment of prophecy. In the prophecy of Joel, God promised the universality of the outpouring of His Spirit. Hence, the empowering Holy Spirit is available to all who will receive

Him—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or social status.

Scholars debate as to what Peter meant by his words in verses 19 and 20. Luke did not explain Joel's prophecy. Some scholars believe that Peter was referring to the end of time, and others believe that Peter was speaking of the things that occurred in nature while Jesus was dying on the Cross (see Matthew 27:45). In verse 21, the purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is highlighted. Because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the way of salvation is open to all humanity.

In verse 22, Peter refers to his audience as *men of Israel* to establish common ground with his listeners due to the covenant that God made with Israel and the connection that Jesus had/has to the people of that covenant. Interestingly, Peter referred to Jesus as "Jesus of Nazareth," an intentional allusion to the humanity of Jesus. Peter referenced the deity of Jesus by highlighting the many miracles, wonders, and signs that He had performed. In other words, Peter illuminated the reality that Jesus is no ordinary man—He is the God-man.

As Peter continued his address, he also appealed to his listeners' own experiences. Peter's argument was that if these Jews had been in Jerusalem since Passover—and especially if they lived in the city—they would have known of Jesus' miraculous works, and especially the circumstances surrounding His death. Many of them saw the miracles that God manifested through Jesus but chose to reject Him and demand His death. Yet, because His death was God's eternal plan, Peter argued that it did not nullify any of Jesus' claims to be their Messiah. Peter emphasized that a conclusive proof of Jesus' messiahship was His resurrection. Because God raised Jesus from the tomb, death had no power over Him (see verse 24). Peter concluded his argument by suggesting that since Christ was alive in heaven as evidenced by Holy Spirit at work on Earth, death's hold on Jesus was broken to fulfill God's purpose of ensuring that His people would spend eternity with Him. Hence, because Jesus lives, every believer will live eternally.

D. Peter's Challenge to the People (Acts 2:37-39)

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The words of verse 36 (not in the Print Passage) of this second chapter of Acts is considered the conclusion of Peter's argument. The events of verses 37-39 are considered the application of his sermon. In verse 36, Peter proclaimed that the same Jesus is the one whom God confirmed as the promised Messiah and was the same one who was handed over to be crucified. Therefore, they were guilty of rejecting their Messiah and of opposing God. When his listeners internalized the meaning of his logical argument, they were deeply convicted and asked Peter and the other apostles to tell them what to do to make things right and avoid the Messiah's wrath (verse 37). The word *pricked* (Greek: *katanusso*) has reference to a wounded conscience. It is like the piercing

with grief or acute pain. Peter's listeners were filled with anguish in the seat of their thoughts and feelings.

Peter immediately took advantage of the Holy Spirit-inspired moment as the people acknowledged their guilt and expressed a fervent desire to be saved from wrath by willingly submitting to God's will. Peter's prompt response was to urge them to repent and be baptized based on the remission of their sins. This was the prerequisite for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. For these prospective believers in Jesus Christ, water baptism would mean publicly identifying themselves with Christ and accepting the risk of being outcasts among the Jews. However, it would prove the genuineness of their repentance. The word *repent* (Greek: *metanoeo*) relates to undergoing "a complete change of mind for the better," and the phrase *be baptized* (Greek: *baptize*) means "to yield to immersion in water in baptism as evidence of repentance, public identification with Jesus Christ, and a public demonstration of an inward change." It is important to note that in verse 39, Peter did not place any limitations on who could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is available to Jews, Gentiles, and all of humanity throughout the end of the age.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The Holy Spirit is not a nebulous, ethereal force. The Holy Spirit is not an "it." He is the spiritual manifestation of our God, just as Jesus was God in the flesh. He desires to do some amazing things in our lives if we will allow it. In the same way we have differing levels of closeness and connection with people, we can also have varying intensity in our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Experiencing the Holy Spirit does not lead to a superficial emotional high. It is a deep, inner spiritual work that brings about transformation and liberation.

PRAYER

Eternal Father, strong to save, we thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to be our guide, our comforter, and our helper. Thank You for salvation and the Holy Spirit's infilling. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 1-7, 2023)

The Birth of the Church

MONDAY, May 1: "God's Strength Is Revealed" (Psalm 68:17-19, 24-35)
TUESDAY, May 2: "The Spirit of Truth" (John 14:15-27)
WEDNESDAY, May 3: "The Spirit Testifies of Jesus" (John 16:1-15)
THURSDAY, May 4: "The Lord, My Chosen Portion" (Psalm 16)
FRIDAY, May 5: "Amazement at the Spirit's Power" (Acts 2:1-13)
SATURDAY, May 6: "The Promise Is Fulfilled" (Acts 2:14-28)
SUNDAY, May 7: "Receive the Gift of the Spirit" (Acts 2:29-42)

May 14, 2023 **Lesson 11**

JUMPING FOR JOY

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Healing a Man Who Cannot Walk
Youth Topic: Healing a Man Who Cannot Walk

Children
General Lesson Title: Healing and Jumping
Children's Topic: A Man Walks

Devotional Reading
Luke 10:1-9

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Acts 3
Print Passage: Acts 3:1-11
Key Verse: Acts 3:8

Children
Background Scripture: Acts 3
Print Passage: Acts 3:1-11
Key Verse: Acts 3:9

Acts 3:1-11—KJV

NOW PETER and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.
2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;
3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.
4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.
5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.
6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.
7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

Acts 3:1-11—NIV

ONE DAY Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.
2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.
3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.
4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"
5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.
6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."
7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.
9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:
10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.
11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.
8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.
9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God,
10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.
11 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often focus on alleviating the consequences of a problem rather than on solving the problem itself. How can we be more open to the latter possibility? When a man who could not walk begs for money, Peter and John respond by healing the man.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore the blind man's need behind his request.
2. Value the gifts of healing for the body and the soul that Peter and John had to offer.
3. Offer responses to people's greater needs.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The story begins with the apostles' "going up to the temple" (verse 1, NIV), which indicates their continued allegiance to the traditions of Israel. The birth of the church did not constitute a break with the past but a reinterpretation and fulfillment of it.

—Strikingly, the man at the gate received far more than that for which he asked. He was begging for mere alms, but he received healing. God's gifts always exceed our expectations. Alms would have been a temporary fix; healing opened new opportunities before the man. (Note what is said in the Unifying Principle about alleviating consequences and fixing problems.)

—This healing is more than just physical but is spiritual as well, as is indicated by the fact that he not only jumped, walked, and leaped, but also praised God, presumably understood anew in light of his healing in Jesus' name.

—The response of those who witness this healing is "wonder and amazement" (verse 10), indicating their simultaneous disbelief and awe. In the following verses, Peter takes this opportunity to lead them to belief in Jesus as Messiah.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts is the only biblical book that narrates the history of the church immediately after Jesus' ascension. It provides great insights into how the early church was able to grow and expand from Jerusalem into the rest of the Roman Empire. What is remarkable is that in approximately thirty years, according to Chuck Swindoll, a small group of frightened believers in Jerusalem expanded into a mighty, empire-wide movement of people who enthusiastically and sacrificially committed their lives to advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the book ends with Paul on the verge of taking the Gospel to the highest government official in the known world of that day—the Emperor of Rome (refer to *The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll*, https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-history-of-the-early-church/acts).

Scholars suggest that the title of the book of Acts comes from the Greek word *praxis*, a word often used in early Christian literature to describe the great deeds of the apostles or other significant believers. The book of Acts in many ways can be observed as the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles because it reflects the acts of two key apostles in the New Testament era (Peter and Paul). In Acts 3, Peter and John are utilized by the Holy Spirit to heal a lame man. The healing of the lame man commenced a new dispensation in the apostles' ministry—where miracles accompanied the proclamation of their message as promised by Jesus.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts records the transition of the spread of the Gospel from being taken to an exclusively Jewish audience—with Peter preaching to a small group in the Upper Room—to its being taken to the Gentiles, primarily under the ministry of the apostle Paul. The transition is best illustrated by Peter's vision in which he heard a voice telling him, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (Acts 10:15, NASB). This dream led Peter to share the Gospel with many Gentiles. By the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus Christ receive power to share the Gospel effectively with all people—"in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NASB).

Because the first converts to the Christian movement were mostly Jews, it would have been difficult to distinguish Christianity from an offshoot of Judaism. For some time, the earliest converts continued their connection to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. There were also no special governmental programs in first-century Palestine to assist people in need. The New Testament regularly mentioned beggars as they were a common sight on the city streets of Palestine. Luke provided a specific example of a miraculous act in the case of a disabled and destitute beggar who sought assistance at the gate called Beautiful of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some archaeologists suggest that this Temple gate was located on the east side of the third temple known as Herod's temple, which was destroyed in AD 70.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

John: John Mark is a minor biblical figure who lived during the first century. He is traditionally believed to also be Mark the Evangelist, the author of the gospel of Mark. In the book of Acts, John Mark was a companion of Paul and Barnabas's. While the Bible does not confirm or deny this, many believe that he developed a close relationship with Peter, and that his gospel records Peter's account of Jesus' life and ministry.

Peter: Simon Peter, also known as Cephas (see John 1:42), was one of the first followers of Jesus Christ. He was an outspoken and ardent disciple, one of Jesus' closest friends, an apostle, and a "pillar" of the church (see Galatians 2:9). Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, brash.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Alms (verse 2)—Greek: *eleémosuné* (el-eh-ay-mos-oo'-nay): mercy; pity; alms-giving; charity; "to beg from" (NIV).

Lame (verse 2)—Greek: *chólos* (kho-los'): halt; maimed; deprived of a foot; limping; crippled.

Look (verse 4)—Greek: *blepó* (blep'-o): to look (at); see; perceive; discern.

Prayer (verse 1)—Greek: *proseuché* (pros-yoo-khay'): a prayer (to God); a place for prayer.

Raise Up (verse 22 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *egeiró* (eg-i'-ro): to waken, arouse, cause to rise; to arouse from the sleep of death.

Receive (verse 5)—Greek: *lambanó* (lam-ban'-o): to take, lay hold of; accept; "get" (NIV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Show and Tell
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Crippled Man's Encounter (Acts 3:1-2)
- B. The Crippled Man's Request (Acts 3:3)
- C. The Crippled Man's Miracle (Acts 3:4-6)
- D. The Crippled Man's Praise (Acts 3:7-8)
- E. The Crowd's Amazement (Acts 3:9-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Show and Tell

Do you remember the childhood experience of "show and tell" at school? "Show and tell" has been incorporated into preschool and elementary school learning for decades. It is a teaching method used to build students' skills and confidence in an affirming environment. Students bring items to describe or share with classmates in the form of an oral presentation communicated to the class with prompts from the teacher. "Show and tell" is a terrific way to build classroom community and develop children's listening and speaking skills. The following are some favorite show-and-tell topics for young students: (1) a favorite item; (2) an awesome artifact from a family trip or adventure; (3) a favorite card trick or magic trick; (4) a family recipe; (5) a family member; (6) a pet; (7) a best friend; (8) a favorite outfit.

Today's lesson features a dramatic *show and tell*. Peter and John were on their way into the Temple at the hour of prayer. A lame man lay at the gate, begging for money. Peter and John invited the lame man to look at them. Expecting some sort of handout, the lame man looked at them. Peter then instructed the lame man to get up and walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

The lame man got up and accompanied the men into the Temple. The people who saw the lame man recognized him as the person who used to lay at the Temple gate. But now he was healed. It was an unforgettable show-and-tell!

B. Biblical Background

The church was born on the Day of Pentecost. On that occasion, the Holy Spirit filled the 120 believers and made them one spiritual organism—the church, the body of Christ. The book of Acts was written to provide a history of the early church. The emphasis of the book is on the apostles' fulfillment of the Great Commission. The book of Acts records the apostles' transformation into empowered witnesses for Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding world. The book of Acts also illuminates the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers, guides, teaches, and serves as a counselor, comforter, guide, and miracle facilitator.

The book of Acts can be divided into two sections. The first section deals primarily with the ministry of Peter in Jerusalem and Samaria (see Acts 1–12), and the second section deals with Paul on his missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire (see Acts 13–28).

Many miracles were performed to validate the message of the apostles. Today's lesson focuses on one of those miracles. Miracles have been described as the untiring and mysterious work of God. Although God often works within natural law, He sometimes works above and beyond natural law. This action is often referred to as a miracle.

Jesus Christ appeared supernaturally to the disciples after His resurrection (see Acts 1:3). After Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 1:9), the miraculous activities shifted to being the works of the Holy Spirit, with His operating through Jesus' apostles. God used miracles to authenticate the ministry of the apostles just as He had done to authenticate the ministry of Jesus and verify His identity as the Son of God. Luke records that many signs and wonders were performed through the apostles (see Acts 5:12).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Crippled Man's Encounter

(Acts 3:1-2)

NOW PETER and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

In the Scripture text for this section of the lesson, Luke records Peter and John's going to the Temple for the scheduled time of prayer. Peter and John literally *went up* into the Temple. The Temple sat atop four ascending promenades of porches. It was not unusual to see Peter and John together because they were close associates before Jesus invited them to minister with Him (see Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; and Luke 8:51).

Peter and John were at the Temple, fulfilling the duties of Jewish piety and devotion. A common sight in ancient Jerusalem was that of the poor and destitute at the entrance of public places to beg for assistance. The Jewish faith insisted that believers care for and support those in need (see Deuteronomy 15:11). Hence, it was not unusual to find many persons

seeking financial assistance at the entrance gate of the Temple. Because the giving of alms was considered a meritorious act for devout, pious Jews, those seeking financial help often positioned themselves in spaces where there would be visible by Jews inclined to practice their generosity.

It was the ninth hour of the day, about 3:00 p.m. Religious custom dictated that devout Jews would observe three times of prayer at the Temple—morning (9:00 a.m.), afternoon (3:00 p.m.), and evening (sunset). Interestingly, the ninth hour was not 9:00 a.m. (as might be assumed). Because the Jews considered a new day starting at 6:00 a.m., the ninth hour would have been nine hours after 6:00 a.m. Hence, the ninth hour would have been 3:00 p.m. or the second time of prayer. As Peter and John entered the Temple for the afternoon prayer session, they noticed a beggar who had been crippled from birth (verse 2). Because of the severity of the man's disability, he had to be carried to the Temple gate, where he begged daily for assistance from the Temple worshippers.

B. The Crippled Man's Request
(Acts 3:3)

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

As Peter and John approached the gate called Beautiful, the lame man began begging for gifts. The gate called Beautiful was the largest entrance into the Temple area. It is important to note that the gate was an entrance into the Temple, not the city. The fact that almsgiving was embedded in the Jewish faith suggests that this beggar's presence at the gate called Beautiful was neither uncommon nor inappropriate. Due to his inability to walk, this unnamed beggar required assistance to be placed at the gate. As Peter and John approached the gate, this beggar asked them for money. Little did this man know that he was about to get something more useful than money.

C. The Crippled Man's Miracle
(Acts 3:4-6)

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Interestingly, Peter and John did not walk by the man, as was the custom of some in that day. Remembering what they had learned from Jesus, Peter and John stopped and gave time and attention to a beggar who was perceived by the power structure and religious elites as having no societal value. In fact, many persons in that day concluded that such congenital deformity was a sign of God's judgment on the lame man's sin or those of his parents' (see John 9:2). Nevertheless, Peter and John focused their attention on the lame beggar and responded to his plea for alms by requesting him to fix his attention on them, which he did in anticipation of receiving a donation. To receive what Peter and John had to offer required the lame man to give them his undivided attention. Likewise, to receive special blessings from God requires Christians to give God their undivided attention.

The initial words spoken by Peter may have momentarily dashed his hopes, but what followed was beyond his expectations. He was offered something far better than money—a miracle. Peter commanded the man to get up and walk in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. "In the name of Jesus" literally here means "by the

authority of Jesus." It symbolized Jesus' continuous power bestowed on and working through the apostles. It is important to note that any divine interventions that may take place in the body of Christ must always be credited to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Peter's verbal response to this man's plea should not cause us to assume that it is useless to give financial help to the poor and needy. The church must point persons toward spiritual salvation while providing temporary material assistance.

D. The Crippled Man's Praise (Acts 3:7-8)

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

The physician Luke was intentional in describing both the speed of the healing and its location. Luke uses very specific language. When Luke used the phrase "received strength," he was using a medical term for mending broken bones. Although such healing normally involves a long and arduous process, Luke records that the healing happened immediately by the power of God. In verse 7, Luke notes that Peter took the lame man by the right hand. The right hand is the hand of a witness that symbolizes power, salvation, and fellowship.

The miracle that was performed was instantaneous and complete. Peter accompanied his command to walk by extending his hand to help lift the beggar to his feet. Immediately, the beggar's feet and ankles were strengthened. The beggar stood up, began to walk, and entered the Temple, "walking, and leaping, and praising God." The miracle was a divinely orchestrated miracle reinforcing the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the empowerment of the disciples, and the authority of Jesus Christ.

Because the lame man's life had been suddenly and radically changed, he engaged in exuberant worship. This man was full of praise. Interestingly, verse 8 infers that nobody had to direct or prompt the man to go to the Temple and thank God for his miracle. His very first act after being healed was one of praise and thanksgiving. He was excited (with good reason) and wanted to share his experience with everyone he met. The formerly lame man did not consider if doing so would offend others or wonder if his worship would drive others away. He simply wanted to tell others what had happened to him.

Ministry done in Jesus' name is always consistent with the Lord's will, authority, and delegated power. Peter and John were effectively continuing Christ's mission of ministering to the needs of those on the margins of society and offering them the opportunity to accept Jesus by faith. By addressing the formerly lame man's physical condition, they opened the door to address his spiritual condition.

E. The Crowd's Amazement (Acts 3:9-11)

And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

The healing of the beggar created a commotion as people rushed to Peter and John outside the Temple. Solomon's Colonnade ran along the eastern portion of the Temple's outer court (which was/is often referred to as

the Court of the Gentiles). The Court of the Gentiles was surrounded by porticoes. The colonnades or porticos were busy places where religious teachers debated and taught their pupils. The spaces were also utilized by merchants and money changers to conduct business transactions. As the crowd converged on Solomon's Colonnade, Peter had an opportunity to preach the Gospel.

The crowd that gathered around Peter, John, and the once lame man were curious to understand how the man was walking and leaping. They mused about whether Peter and John's being the source of the healing would suggest that the healing resulted from human power and natural means. Peter and John informed the crowd that the source of the healing was divine in nature. Like Peter, those whom God uses in ministry must always give glory to God for any blessing that results from their service. Peter readily identified the source of the healing as the power of God rather than any skill or effort on their part.

The man clinging to the apostolic duo (Peter and John) was the living proof of Jesus' power to heal physically and spiritually. The man's praise to God indicated that a spiritual change had occurred in his life as well. This lesson should serve to convince the faith community that even though physical miracles are possible, there is no greater miracle than the miracle of salvation.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

God can do amazing things through ordinary people as He empowers them through His Spirit. Never underestimate the power of God. The book of Acts illuminates how God essentially took a group of average men, common fishermen, and used them to turn the world upside-down. He wants to do the same through us. We can accomplish much in the power of the Holy Spirit. In today's lesson, we observed how the Holy Spirit empowered Peter and John to perform the miracle of the healing of the lame man. Likewise, God desires to empower us in various ways to bring about healing to a hurting world.

PRAYER

Father, thank You that You are still a miracle-working God. In fact, we see miracles occurring each day, not necessarily spectacular occurrences but the steady and consistent moving of Your Holy Spirit. Thank You for including us in the outworking of Your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 8-14, 2023)

Jumping for Joy

MONDAY, May 8: "Sent to Preach and Heal" (Luke 10:1-9)
TUESDAY, May 9: "Rejoice in Salvation, Not Power" (Luke 10:10-24)
WEDNESDAY, May 10: "God Protects and Preserves" (Psalm 41)
THURSDAY, May 11: "My Soul Longs for God" (Psalm 42)
FRIDAY, May 12: "Then the Lame Shall Leap" (Isaiah 35:1-10)
SATURDAY, May 13: "Peter Heals in Jesus' Name" (Acts 3:1-11)
SUNDAY, May 14: "Peter Preaches Salvation through Jesus" (Acts 3:12-26)

May 21, 2023 **Lesson 12**

AN ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL IS BAPTIZED

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Breaking Down Barriers
Youth Topic: Breaking Down Barriers

Children
General Lesson Title: An Ethiopian Official Is Baptized
Children's Topic: Breaking Down Barriers

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 60:9-14

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Acts 8:26-40
Print Passage: Acts 8:29-40
Adult/ Youth Key Verse: Acts 8:38

Children
Background Scripture: Acts 8:26-40
Print Passage: Acts 8:29-40
Key Verse: Acts 8:35b

Acts 8:29-40—KJV

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.
30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?
31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.
32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:
33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.
34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray

Acts 8:29-40—NIV

29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."
30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.
31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.
32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
33 "In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."
34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?
35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.
36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?
37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.
39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.
40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.
36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?"
[37 *Some manuscripts include this:* Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]
38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.
39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.
40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: There are many social conventions that prevent us from interacting with others. How do we move past these social conventions? The Spirit moved Philip to approach the Ethiopian eunuch and guide him in understanding God's Word.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand the cultural and social implications of Philip's helping the man in the chariot to understand what he read.
2. Regret the times when they have allowed cultural and social conventions to keep them from sharing the Good News.
3. Boldly share the Good News.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The fact that the Ethiopian eunuch had been in Jerusalem might be interpreted as a fulfillment of Psalm 68:31b (NRSV): "Let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out its hands to God."

—According to biblical law, eunuchs were not permitted in the Temple (see Leviticus 21:18-21;

Deuteronomy 23:1). Isaiah 56:3-5 contains a promise of inclusion for eunuchs who keep the covenant. Interestingly, this is close to the passage that he and Philip went on to discuss (see Isaiah 53:7-8).

—The eunuch's asking the question, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" (verse 34, NRSV) indicates his awareness of the deeper significance of the ancient prophets' message. Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah, who was Jesus. Like the eunuch, Christians should read all of Scripture prayerfully, as they actively seek to understand its meaning and application.

—Like so many events in the books of Luke and Acts, this story is narrated "as they were going along the road (literally: way)." This resonates with the fact that the early Christian movement was first called the "Way" (see Acts 9:2).

—Like the story of the two on the way to Emmaus, this story ends in mystery. After Philip baptizes the Ethiopian, he is "snatched away" and is no longer physically present with the Ethiopian. Yet, the important aspect of the story is that Philip obeyed the divine prompting to go to the wilderness, where he discovered an opportunity to share the Gospel with the Ethiopian.

—Philip's miraculous relocation provides access to deliver the Gospel into even more distant lands, furthering the spread of the Christian message. (See verse 40.)

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts illuminates the early growth of the church. In at least five chapters of the book of Acts, Luke highlights the prominence of the sovereignty of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ (see Acts 1:8; 2:4, 38; 5:9, 32; 13:2, 52; 15:28). Luke also emphasizes the church's being a growing organism instead of a growing organization. Additionally, Luke portrays the church as a universal phenomenon. He highlights approximately thirty-nine different cities and thirty different countries, provinces, and islands—with almost all of them outside the land of Israel—as he documents the growth of the church.

The impetus for the church's expansion beyond Jerusalem was the death of Stephen. Scholars suggest that Saul, later known as Paul the Apostle, was instrumental in wreaking havoc on the believers in Jerusalem, causing many of them to leave Jerusalem and scatter into Samaria and beyond. Amazingly, as believers carried the Good News of salvation everywhere they went, the early church continued to grow at a phenomenal rate.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Philip, who is identified as a deacon in Acts 6, traveled north to the city of Samaria. He proclaimed salvation through Jesus Christ, and he performed many miracles. God utilized miracles in the early church to authenticate the Gospel message. The miracles that Philip performed included driving out unclean spirits and healing paralyzed and lame individuals. Philip's message focused on the Good News of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God acknowledged, accepted, and actualized.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ethiopian eunuch: a court official of Candace's,

queen of the Ethiopians, and overseer of her entire treasury. The reference to him as "an Ethiopian man" is a term that some scholars believe can simply be translated "African." He was also a high official in the court of the Ethiopian queen.

Philip: "Philip the Evangelist . . . appears several times in the Acts of the Apostles. He was one of the Seven chosen to care for the poor of the Christian community in Jerusalem (see Acts 6). He preached and reportedly performed miracles in Samaria, and met and baptised an Ethiopian man, a eunuch, on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, traditionally marking the start of the Ethiopian Church (Acts 8:26-39)."[1]

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Go near (verse 29)—Greek: *proserchomai* (pros-er'-khom-ahee): to approach, draw near; visit; "Go to" (NIV).

Invited (verse 31)—Greek: *parakaleó* (par-ak-al-eh'-o): called to or for; exhorted; encouraged; summoned; "desired" (KJV).

Join (verse 29)—Greek: *kollaó* (kol-lah'-o): to glue, unite; cleave; adhere (to); cling to; "stay near" (NIV).

Reading (verse 30)—Greek: *anaginóskó* (an-ag-in-oce'-ko): to know certainly, know again, read; "readest" (KJV).

Scripture (verse 32)—Greek: *graphé* (graf-ay'): a writing; a passage of Scripture; plural: the Scriptures.

Understand(est) (verse 30)—Greek: *ginóskó* (ghin-oce'-ko): to come to know, recognize, perceive; ascertain; realize; learn.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Divine Affirmative Action
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Philip Receives a Divine Directive (Acts 8:29)
- B. Philip Dialogues with the Eunuch (Acts 8:30)
- C. The Eunuch Admits His Dilemma (Acts 8:31-34)
- D. Philip Preaches Jesus to the Eunuch (Acts 8:35)
- E. The Eunuch Becomes a Believer (Acts 8:36-38)
- F. Philip: Still Preaching! (Acts 8:39-40)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Divine Affirmative Action

"Affirmative action" is a term that conjures up heated debate and emotions in the current political context. In practice, it is an intentional effort to improve opportunities for members of minority groups and women in the United States. Specifically, it is a set of policies and procedures designed to level the playing field and remedy the lingering effects of past discrimination and injustices. The purpose of affirmative action is to promote social equality and access for people who have been disadvantaged and exploited because of years of injustices and inequality.

In today's lesson, we observe what some would consider to be biblical affirmative action. An Ethiopian eunuch became the focus of divine concern. In the New Testament, eunuchs were persons who had been castrated and declared impotent. Eunuchs were not viewed favorably by the power structure or the religious elites (see Deuteronomy 23:1). In fact, eunuchs were religiously discriminated against.

In this lesson, God effectively circumvented the Jewish religious restriction and extended divine affirmative action to the Ethiopian eunuch. God expanded the community of faith to include Ethiopian descendants of Solomon's royal line. In other words, a man who had been formerly excluded from worshipping in the Temple because of physical characteristics was now accepted into the family of God. God used Philip to communicate the vision of God's beloved community that is available to all.

B. Biblical Background

Following the martyrdom of Stephen at the beginning of the eighth chapter of Acts, followers of Christ departed from Jerusalem to avoid persecution. Luke portrays the church as scattering out of Jerusalem and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere they went. Luke highlights the fact that the church reached out to the Gentiles with the Gospel message and into Africa through the Ethiopian eunuch. One of those followers was the evangelist Philip, one of the original seven deacons of the early Christian church (see Acts 6). However, he is not to be confused with the apostle Philip. Scholars suggest that the Ethiopian eunuch is the first Gentile whose salvation is recorded in the book of Acts.

The story of the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch came right after Stephen had been stoned to death for proclaiming Christ. This story begins a series of healing and conversion narratives. It also challenged the traditional norms of exclusion.

The story of the Ethiopian official is one of two lengthy conversion narratives in the book of Acts (see 8:3-35 and Acts 10:1-48). The Ethiopian, like Cornelius, was an important person of status; he had significant authority within the queen of Ethiopia's administration. He was a high-ranking officer who was the minister of finance for the queen. Hence, he was overseer of the queen's treasury. Interestingly, the eunuch's ethnicity is emphasized more than his position. His status as a black Ethiopian is significant because Acts 8 highlights how God used Philip, a Jewish Christian from Jerusalem, to cross cultural barriers.

In the second half of the narrative, the physical characteristics of the Ethiopian as a eunuch is highlighted. It is important to note that eunuchs were excluded from participation in Temple rituals and from full admittance, as proselytes, into Israel's community. As a eunuch, he was ritually or religiously distanced from the faith community. Thus, his conversion symbolizes and surpasses the expectation of "Ethiopia reaching out her hands" (see Psalm 68:31) and being drawn near to God. A *eunuch* is a man that has been castrated either by choice or involuntarily to perform a specific social function. The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch graphically demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Gospel.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 is a marvelous depiction of God's role in evangelism. There are many elements of God's providence and intervention in the

narrative. The story reveals the importance of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and a human evangelist. The Spirit of the Lord prepared the eunuch's heart to receive the Gospel. As the eunuch read Isaiah, he began to ask questions, and at just the right moment the Lord allowed Philip to cross his path. The field was "ripe for harvest" (John 4:35c, NIV), and Philip was God's laborer in the field. This was no coincidence. It was God's orchestrated plan from the very beginning, and Philip was obedient to that plan.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Philip Receives a Divine Directive (Acts 8:29)

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

It is amazing how the Lord orchestrates events and conditions to accomplish His divine will. The spread of the Gospel was a crucial element in Jesus' post-Resurrection agenda. Philip, who was one of the seven servant leaders chosen in Acts 6, made two significant inroads against the social, cultural, and religious barriers that were designed to exclude non-Jews from hearing the Gospel. First, he reached out to the hated Samaritans and successfully led many of them to accept Jesus Christ as Savior (see Acts 8:4-7). The second breakthrough was his Spirit-directed encounter with a Gentile, the "minister of finance" for Ethiopia's queen. Philip received a divine directive to leave Samaria and go south to the road leading to Gaza. This command was unusual because this desert road was seldom used and was deserted due to excessive heat at noon—but Philip obeyed unquestioningly. Philip understood that if God directed one to do something, then God had a definite plan in mind greater than the individual. A second command directed Philip to join the Ethiopian eunuch who was returning home after worshipping in Jerusalem and was reading aloud from the Prophet Isaiah as they set in the chariot. It is vitally important to readily obey divine directives because God has a plan that is designed to advance His kingdom.

B. Philip Dialogues with the Eunuch (Acts 8:30)

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

In response to the Holy Spirit's directive, Philip ran up to the Ethiopian's chariot. Clearly, it took real boldness for Philip to go right up to the Ethiopian's chariot and speak to him. Yet, this is exactly what the Holy Spirit directed Philip to do. The Ethiopian was a rich man of power and celebrity. Nevertheless, Philip knew that the Ethiopian eunuch needed to know about Jesus and His power to transform lives. Unfortunately, many Christians forfeit opportunities to win others to salvation because they shy away from speaking boldly about Jesus. In verse 30, Philip's inquiry starting with the use of the word *understandest* (Greek: *ginosko*) suggests that Philip knew that the eunuch did not comprehend what he was reading.

Scholars maintain that it was common in the ancient world to read aloud. Philip heard the Ethiopian reading from the Prophet Isaiah. Philip knew at that moment that God

had given him an open door and a prepared heart. Clearly, God had arranged this meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian, which is an example of how God opens doors for the spread of the Gospel.

After hearing the Ethiopian reading, Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. Embedded in that question was God's opportunity to allow Philip to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in an inoffensive, subtle, and gracious manner.

C. The Eunuch Admits His Dilemma (Acts 8:31-34)

And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

In response to Philip's query as to whether the Ethiopian understood what he was reading, the Ethiopian responded with a question seeking clarity. After the Ethiopian expressed his perplexity and need for clarity, he invited Philip to join him in his chariot to read and discuss Isaiah 53:7-8. The passage that was read referred to the Servant of God's suffering multiple forms of humiliation, bearing the consequences of others' sins, and finally being exalted by God. What is interesting is how verse 31 suggests that although the eunuch had the Scriptures, he was wise enough to know that he needed Philip to help him understand what the Scriptures meant. The word *guide* (Greek: *hodegeo*) in verse 31 means "to lead along a road." Sadly, contemporary Jews remain divided regarding the interpretation of the passage. Some contemporary Jews believe that it referred to the nation of Israel. Still, other Jews believe that the passage related to Isaiah. Nevertheless, there are other contemporary (messianic) Jews who indeed believe that the passage points to the Messiah.

D. Philip Preaches Jesus to the Eunuch (Acts 8:35)

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

In verse 35, use of the word *preached* (Greek: *euaggelizo*) means that Philip engaged in personal evangelism. He made known or opened the message of salvation to the eunuch. Philip's approach in the conversation is instructive. In Philip's discussion with the eunuch, he began with what was common ground with the Ethiopian and later pivoted the conversation to talking about Jesus. Philip preached Jesus to him. Philip's effective preaching consisted of explaining *who Jesus was* (like a lamb) and *what He has done for us* (He was led as a sheep to the slaughter). Explaining who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us is the essence of the Gospel. The Gospel begins with and is founded upon what God has done for humanity through Jesus Christ.

This evangelistic encounter was orchestrated by God. It highlights the essence of the presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a pattern to emulate. First, Philip was submissive to the Holy Spirit's leadership. Second, Philip's

presentation was solidly based on the truth of Scripture. Third, Philip met the Ethiopian on common ground and at a level on which the Ethiopian could understand. Finally, Philip's presentation was Christ-centered: he linked Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

E. The Eunuch Becomes a Believer (Acts 8:36-38)

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Luke did not detail the entire conversation between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. However, the conversation was enough to convince the eunuch of his need for salvation. The Ethiopian eunuch was ready to respond to the Gospel. The question raised by the Ethiopian eunuch concerning baptism indi-cated his softening heart and his openness to belief in Jesus.

How far they traveled as Philip shared Jesus with the Ethiopian is not indicated, but at some point, after reaching water, the eunuch requested to be baptized. The eunuch's request also indicated that Philip explained the appropriate response after accepting Christ by faith.

The Ethiopian responded with the following (in response to Philip's statement regarding the prerequisite for baptism): "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (verse 37b). The response of the eunuch highlighted his understanding of the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Jesus. The name *Jesus* illuminates the humanity of Jesus, and the words "Christ is the Son of God" highlights the divinity of Jesus. This confession of faith is the essential belief for anyone who will come to God. One must believe in the person of Jesus, in all that He is and has done as Savior. One must also believe that Jesus is the divine Son, and that He is the Son of God sent from the Father to accomplish salvation for all who will believe with all their hearts.

It is important to note that when the Ethiopian stated his belief in "Jesus Christ," he was also confessing that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ). Evidently, the eunuch agreed in his mind and heart that Jesus fulfilled the role of the sin-bearing servant that Isaiah described.

After acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior, Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water, where Philip immersed the Ethiopian in water and baptized him. This was not a sprinkling, but an immersion—a total covering of the body in water—symbolic of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

F. Philip: Still Preaching! (Acts 8:39-40)

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Suddenly, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away as he and the Ethiopian came out of the water. Philip was then transported supernaturally in some way to the former Philistine city of Azotus (also known as Ashdod).

The phrase *caught away* (Greek: *harpazo*) means "to be snatched." In other words, Philip was snatched away by the Holy Spirit for another evangelistic assignment. There is no explanation as to how it happened. Luke only records that it took place. The eunuch continued his journey home, rejoicing that he had received the Holy Spirit. Philip's work of evangelism to the Gentiles was not over. He appeared in Azotus, passed through various cities (preaching as he journeyed), and finally settled in Caesarea.

Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch is significant because he was neither a Jew nor a Samaritan but a Gentile (African) worshipper of Yahweh. By evangelizing him, God (by way of Philip) proved that the divine plan of redemption is for all humanity—regardless of race, ethnicity, or social standing. In Jesus Christ, all barriers are broken down, and Jesus invites "*whosoever will*" to come and be a part of His kingdom.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The account of the Ethiopian eunuch illustrates God's continuous interest and active involvement in promoting the Gospel message throughout the world (see Matthew 28:19). God utilizes His disciples to break down barriers. When we evangelize to and share the Gospel with others, we must always remember that Christ is the very message we preach, and He is the one who empowers and motivates others to break down barriers. Perhaps Jesus is facilitating divine appointments for you to break down barriers. Will you accept the invitation?

PRAYER

Father, this lesson showed us that "in Christ there is no east or west, in Him no north or south." Thank You for reaching out to a man who was an outsider to the religious community and including him in the kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 15-21, 2023)

An Ethiopian Official Is Baptized

MONDAY, May 15: "Full of Grace and Power" (Acts 6:8-15)
TUESDAY, May 16: "The First Martyr" (Acts 7:48–8:2)
WEDNESDAY, May 17: "The Far Countries Wait for God" (Isaiah 60:9-14)
THURSDAY, May 18: "Peoples Shall Come to the Lord" (Zechariah 8:1-8, 20-23)
FRIDAY, May 19: "God Is Present Everywhere" (Psalm 139:1-10)
SATURDAY, May 20: "Samaritans Embrace the Gospel" (Acts 8:4-17)
SUNDAY, May 21: "The Spirit Guides Us" (Acts 8:26-40)

Note

1. Wikipedia, "Philip the Evangelist," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_the_Evangelist.

May 28, 2023 **Lesson 13**

SAUL OF TARSUS

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: The Challenges of Change
Youth Topic: The Challenges of Change

Children
General Lesson Title: Saul of Tarsus
Children's Topic: The Challenges of Change

Devotional Reading
Philippians 3:1-14

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: Acts 9:1-31
Print Passage: Acts 9:9-17
Key Verse: Acts 9:17

Children
Background Scripture: Acts 9:1-31
Print Passage: Acts 9:9-17
Key Verse: Acts 9:17b

Acts 9:9-17—KJV

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.
10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.
11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,
12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.
13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:
14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.
15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he

Acts 9:9-17—NIV

9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.
10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.
11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.
12 "In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."
13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.
14 "And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."
15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is

is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:
16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.
17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.
16 "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."
17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Our natural tendency is to hate our enemies. How do we respond when our enemies need our help? God used Ananias to help Saul take his first steps in faith, even though Saul had been an enemy of the early church.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine how Saul's conversion challenged his enemies to respond in love to him as a new follower of Jesus.
2. Repent of their reticence to forgive.
3. Welcome former enemies as sisters and brothers in Christ.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The call of Ananias and his response "Here I am" (see verse 10) are reminiscent of God's call to prophets in the Old Testament (see Abraham in Genesis 22:11; Jacob in Genesis 46:2; Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:4, 10; and others).

—As with the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, this narrative invokes the themes of physical and spiritual blindness.

—Just as Saul is physically blinded, so Ananias cannot at first see the transformation that God has worked in Saul.

—Ananias's first response was fear because he had heard of Saul as one who persecuted the church. This concern was indeed legitimate, for earlier in the same chapter, Saul is described as "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (9:1). But Ananias was unaware of Saul's encounter with the risen Christ. Nonetheless, Ananias went to Saul, just as the Lord had directed him to do.

—As the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Saul was also filled with God's Spirit. This comparison is profound, for it indicates the immense power of Saul's experience. He had been transformed from the chief prosecutor of the young Christian church to one who would serve

as its premier apostle to the nations (Gentiles). —Saul, later known as Paul (see Acts 13:9), became the most prominent of a great cloud of witnesses to Christ beyond the Jewish church.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Acts or the Acts of the Apostles is also referred to as the Book of the Holy Spirit or simply the Acts of the Holy Spirit because of the numerous portrayals of the work of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts presents the work of the Holy Spirit as the lifeline of the church. As the events unfold in the book, Jesus is absent, for He had already ascended back to heaven. At the time of His ascension, Jesus promised to send the helper, the Holy Spirit. Jesus' disciples continued to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ—assisted by the Holy Spirit's power. Following the ascension of Jesus, the book of Acts highlights the dynamic ministry of the Holy Spirit. The book features an account of how the Holy Spirit came upon the church and empowered the disciples to accomplish feats that they could not do by their own power or volition. The book of Acts also chronicles the establishment of the church, describing its growth amid virulent opposition and frequent hazards. It also chronicles the Gospel's amazing spread through the Roman Empire. Additionally, the book of Acts provides inspiring accounts of courageous persons who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the dissemination of the Gospel. In other words, the book of Acts narrates the triumph of the Gospel in the hearts of men and women in a hostile world.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The setting of the events of today's lesson is the city of Damascus. This city is connected to the kingdom of Syria (see 1 Kings 15:18). Some scholars believe that Damascus is the oldest continuously populated area in the world—with its roots dating back to the time of Abraham (see Genesis 15:2). Damascus was a multiethnic city with a large Jewish population. Damascus was valuable in the first century because of its trading hub's strategic location. Saul plays a central role in today's lesson. He was a Jew from Tarsus, trained as a rabbi (see Acts 22:3). Scholars maintain that Paul's considerable education constitutes an ancient equivalent of a modern doctoral degree. Because of his training and leadership abilities, Saul was the ideal candidate for the religious power structure to use to organize the persecution of Christians.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ananias: extraordinarily little is known concerning this disciple of Jesus who became a vital figure in Paul's life (formerly known as Saul) immediately after Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road. Ananias received spiritual power to impart the Holy Spirit to Paul and to bring restoration of his sight after three days of blindness.

Saul/Paul: Paul was born as Saul (likely in homage to Israel's first king). He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia around AD 1–5 in a province in the southeastern corner of modern-day Tersous, Turkey. He was of Hebrew ancestry and Benjamite lineage (see Philippians 3:5-6). He had been a fervent Jewish nationalist and Pharisee who adhered strictly to the Law of Moses and sought to protect others from "contamination" from the Gentiles. When Saul of Tarsus, who was later renamed Paul, saw the resurrected Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, he received salvation and a calling to Christian ministry. Paul would later make three long missionary journeys throughout

the Roman Empire, planting churches, preaching the Gospel, and providing strength and encouragement to early Christians.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Authority (verse 14)—Greek: *exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah): the power to act; weight; influence.
Behold (verse 10, KJV)—Greek: *idou* (id-oo'): look; "See!" "Lo!"
Disciple (verse 10)—Greek: *mathétés* (math-ay-tes'): a learner, pupil.
Praying (verse 11)—Greek: *proseuchomai* (pros-yoo'-khom-ahee): to pray, offer prayers; "prayeth" (KJV).
Straight (verse 11)—Greek: *euthus* (yoo-thoos'): straightway; straight of direction, as opposed to crooked; upright.
Three (verse 9)—Greek: *treis* and *tria* (trice): the number of God (as the triune Godhead).
Vision (verse 10)—Greek: *horama* (hor'-am-ah): that which is seen; a spectacle; sight.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. That's Too Good to Be True
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Saul's Post-confrontation with Christ (Acts 9:9)
   B. Ananias Is Instructed to Minister to Saul (Acts 9:10-12)
   C. Ananias Is Reluctant to Encounter Saul (Acts 9:13-14)
   D. Ananias Receives Divine Assurance (Acts 9:15-16)
   E. Saul Receives Salvation and Healing (Acts 9:17)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. That's Too Good to Be True

Many individuals have frequently heard the expression that something is "too good to be true." When there is a product advertisement or other offer that seems incredible, we are tempted to respond with those words. Unbelievable news reports cause us to declare that phrase as well. Likewise, people who casually meet the love of their lives, receive the career opportunity of a lifetime, or find a much-wanted item at little or no cost might say, "it's too good to be true."

News of Saul's conversion experience took many in the early church by surprise. It was literally unbelievable! Saul had been quite instrumental in "hunting down" Christians and persecuting them. However, something dramatic took place on the Damascus Road. Saul was visited by Jesus and confronted with the ramifications of what he was doing. The voice of Jesus spoke to Paul, asking why he was persecuting the Him. This confrontation on the Damascus Road totally changed Saul. In a vision the Lord called to a prominent disciple, Ananias, giving directions for how he was to minister to Paul. Ananias initially objected on the basis that Saul "was authorized by the chief priests to bring harm to God's people in

Jerusalem" (see Acts 9:14). Could it be true that Saul, a persecutor of Christians, had really been converted? The prospect of Saul's conversion was "too good to be true," yet it was true indeed. The Lord reassured Ananias that Saul's conversion was genuine and not a ploy. Whenever God is involved in a person's life, it can really seem like "it's too good to be true!"

B. Biblical Background

A main thrust of the book of Acts is the action of the Holy Spirit. References to the Holy Spirit occur throughout the book in a variety of ways. There are numerous occurrences of individuals' being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is significant to note that Luke references the Holy Spirit as being synonymous with God and highlights the Spirit's direct intervention in Paul's life throughout his ministry. The book of Acts traces the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome. The geography of the book encompasses three cities: Jerusalem (see chapters 1–12), Antioch (see chapters 13–21), and Rome (see chapter 21 to the end of the book). The central personalities of the book are Peter and Paul. In the first twelve chapters, Peter dominates the book as the apostle to the Jews. In the rest of the book, Paul dominates the book as the apostle to the Gentiles. The book of Acts covers approximately thirty years of ministry.

The activities of the Holy Spirit and His confirmation with miraculous signs of validation of the Gospel message permeate the book of Acts. The salvation experience of Saul is perhaps the most famous salvation story in history. The lesson for today of chapter 9 is one of three generative accounts of Saul in the book of Acts. Luke illuminates the other regeneration accounts in chapters 22 and 26. Luke narrates Saul's testimony of his own regeneration story. Saul had increased his visceral attack against the church after Stephen's death. In fact, Saul was the chief persecuting officer of the church. According to his former view, it was a Jew's religious and societal duty to rid the world of Christian "heresy." Hence, Saul went everywhere he could go, persecuting Christians. In today's lesson, Saul traveled to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem upon the authority of the high priest in Jerusalem. However, Saul received a revelation from the ascended Savior that changed the course of his life and the entire course of history.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Saul's Post-confrontation with Christ (Acts 9:9)

And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

The resultant drama involving Saul's mira-culous conversion experience left him physically blinded—after which he was led into Damascus like a helpless lamb instead of the "raging beast" he had been as he raced toward the city on an evil mission before being interrupted by Jesus. Evidently, Saul was so shaken by the experience that he was unable to eat or drink for three days (likely a divinely imposed fast). All Saul could do was simply sit

in blind silence. This was a humbling experience for Saul, and a reflective time where Saul reconsidered his previous, misguided ideas about God and Christian faith. One can only imagine what Saul struggled with as he recalled his sins and crimes against vulnerable Christian victims. Although salvation is instantaneous, it can take a believer time to learn the Scriptures and the ways of Christian discipleship. Being saved is a lifelong process of spiritual transformation and growth.

B. Ananias Is Instructed to Minister to Saul (Acts 9:10-12)

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

While Saul was waiting and reflecting on what recently occurred in his life, God was preparing another man to influence Saul. God gave Ananias the surprising assignment of ministering directly to Saul. The word *vision* speaks of seeing things not normally seen or hearing things not normally heard. God revealed things to Ananias that had not been heard or seen. There is not anything known about Ananias before his meeting with Saul or after his meeting with Saul. Luke does not reveal how he came to Damascus or what happened to him after his time in Damascus. It is interesting to note that Ananias was not identified with prominence. He was simply identified as a certain disciple, an average follower of Jesus. Ananias is presented as an ordinary man—not an apostle, prophet, pastor, evangelist, elder, or deacon. Yet, God used him in a mighty way. He was familiar with the street called Straight. Scholars suggest that Straight Street is a major east-west road that is approximately 50 feet wide with monumental gates at each end. The word *straight* (Greek: *enthuse*) means "level or upright." Perhaps the people who lived on this street were righteous people in a right relationship with God.

Notice that God spoke to Ananias in a completely different way than He spoke to Saul. Saul had a bold, dramatic confrontation with God, as was needed to arrest his attention. However, Ananias heard the voice of God gently in a vision, where God called and Ananias obediently responded by saying, "Here I am, Lord." This is always a perfect response to God and His instructions. Ananias was instructed to go to a house on Straight Street where he would find a man called Saul of Tarsus. Saul was expecting Ananias because the Spirit had shown him a vision of Ananias's coming to lay hands on him to restore his sight (verses 11-12). Ananias readily agreed to go after God informed him of Saul's recent conversion and calling (see Acts 9:15).

C. Ananias Is Reluctant to Encounter Saul (Acts 9:13-14)

Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

Initially, and quite understandably, Ananias protested meeting Saul. Ananias knew the harm that Saul had inflicted on believers in Jerusalem and how he was headed to Damascus for the same purpose. Ananias was effectively

asking if the Lord was serious or if God knew the danger and mortal risk associated with a Christian's approaching Saul. Figuratively speaking, God's command was like asking Ananias to walk into a lions' den and put his head in a lion's mouth. Certainly, Ananias had heard that this angry and violent persecutor named Saul of Tarsus was on his way from Jerusalem. The disciples in Damascus must have anxiously prepared for the coming persecution. Ananias's objections were perfectly logical and well-founded but were based on the erroneous assumption that Ananias knew more about Saul's current spiritual condition than God did.

Scholars suggest that God's command to Ananias had a dual purpose. First, it was a severe test of Ananias's faith. Why does God allow our faith to be tested? God allows faith-testing circumstances to reveal to us the measure or inadequacy of our faith in Him. God also uses testing experiences to strengthen our faith. Often, as in the case of Ananias, these tests are designed to push us into "uncharted territory" to teach us perseverance and enhance our spiritual growth during the process. Second, God's instruction to Ananias to meet Saul was a test of his capacity and willingness to practice forgiveness, especially toward a known enemy.

God intended to use Ananias in fulfilling His plans for Saul. Therefore, it was essential that Ananias harbor no ill will or grudge toward Saul and welcome him as a brother in Christ.

D. Ananias Receives Divine Assurance (Acts 9:15-16)

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

God directed Ananias to minister to Saul to assist or activate the calling upon Saul's life. Jesus conveyed Saul's call to ministry during the encounter on the Damascus Road (see Acts 26:12-17). God considered Saul to be His chosen vessel long before Saul seemed suited for such a task. God knew what He could make of Saul, even when no one else realized it.

Additionally, God also revealed to Ananias that God would show Saul how many things Saul must suffer for God's name's sake; this was a sobering addition to the awesome call that God had placed upon Saul's life. God was essentially calling Saul to leave a life of privilege and honor to embrace a higher calling that would be accompanied by much suffering. Some will perhaps see this action of God as unfair. At surface level, it appears that God is rewarding Saul with suffering as a bonus for being called by God. However, this reality was prophesied to Saul, and God often uses suffering for redemptive purposes (see Matthew 5:11-13).

God overruled Ananias's protest by assuring Ananias that Saul would be a changed man. God's plans are always purposeful and will not be altered for our comfort or preferences. Saul's eventual ministry involved a multitude of sufferings and persecutions for Christ's sake. In fact, his suffering and persecution for Christ's name began shortly after his conversion and continued until his execution in Rome.

E. Saul Receives Salvation and Healing (Acts 9:17)

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the

Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

The Lord's words strengthened Ananias and helped him overcome his fears. After receiving God's assurance concerning his mission to Saul, Ananias went his way and entered the house. Certainly, this took great courage. Ananias had to overcome his fear or suspicion of one who had harmed Christians. Nevertheless, Ananias laid his hands on Saul and referred to him as "brother." The word *brother* (Greek: *adelphos*) used in this verse is an endearing word that speaks of fellow believers' being of the same spiritual Father. Hence, Ananias was letting Saul know that they both shared spiritual kinship from the same spiritual family. Ananias's actions and choice of words powerfully communicated the love of God. Some scholars believe that the admonition to Saul to be filled with the Holy Spirit was the actual point when Saul was "born again." Paul received the Holy Spirit and was healed from his blindness, both spiritual and physical.

We can conclude that the lives of Saul (later called Paul) and Ananias were both changed to illustrate that God's call to ministry is not ever based on the whims and preferences of those called, but on God's sovereign plan to accomplish His purposes. Ananias learned the importance of obeying God, trusting God's direction, and extending forgiveness and patience to those whom others may consider as unworthy or hostile. The dramatic change in Ananias's disposition is evident in his greeting of Saul as "brother," indicating that he had accepted Saul into Christian fellowship. The evidence of Saul's transformation is revealed as his story unfolds in the book of Acts. God used Saul's natural abilities—his innate leadership skills, oratorical skill, intelligence, and knowledge of Scriptures—to expand the church throughout the known world. God redirected Saul's talents for the purpose of building up the kingdom instead of trying to tear it down by harming God's people. God is still able to transform people from every end of the spectrum, whether a raging Saul who would one day become a prominent Paul, or an obscure Ananias who would facilitate the ministry of the Pauls in our midst.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In today's lesson, Luke provided a broad view of what was taking place in the New Testament church. Luke pivoted away from a careful analysis of the apostles' experiences in Jerusalem and showed how the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to unknown places and unusual people. Among those transformed was a most unlikely convert—Saul of Tarsus. It is amazing how God turned the angry heart of Saul into a mighty force for the kingdom. The Holy Spirit can transform anyone and empower ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things for the mission of God. If God could utilize Ananias strategically to help facilitate Saul's transformation, then how might God use you to assist the transformation of persons you least expect? God is at work in you, around you, and through you. Allow God to do amazing things through you for His kingdom.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we are witnesses of how You can turn the hearts of people from evil toward good. Thank You that You are still in the transformation business. Help us to be willing to work with You in bringing men and women into a saving relationship with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 22-28, 2023)

Saul of Tarsus

MONDAY, May 22: "The Heavens Tell God's Glory" (Psalm 19)
TUESDAY, May 23: "A Heavenly Gospel" (Galatians 1:10-24)
WEDNESDAY, May 24: "Only Christ Matters" (Philippians 3:1-14)
THURSDAY, May 25: "Our Citizenship Is in Heaven" (Philippians 3:15-21)
FRIDAY, May 26: "Blinded by the Light" (Acts 9:1-9)
SATURDAY, May 27: "Saul Begins to Preach Jesus" (Acts 9:10-22)
SUNDAY, May 28: "Saul Escapes to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:23-31)

The Righteous Reign of God

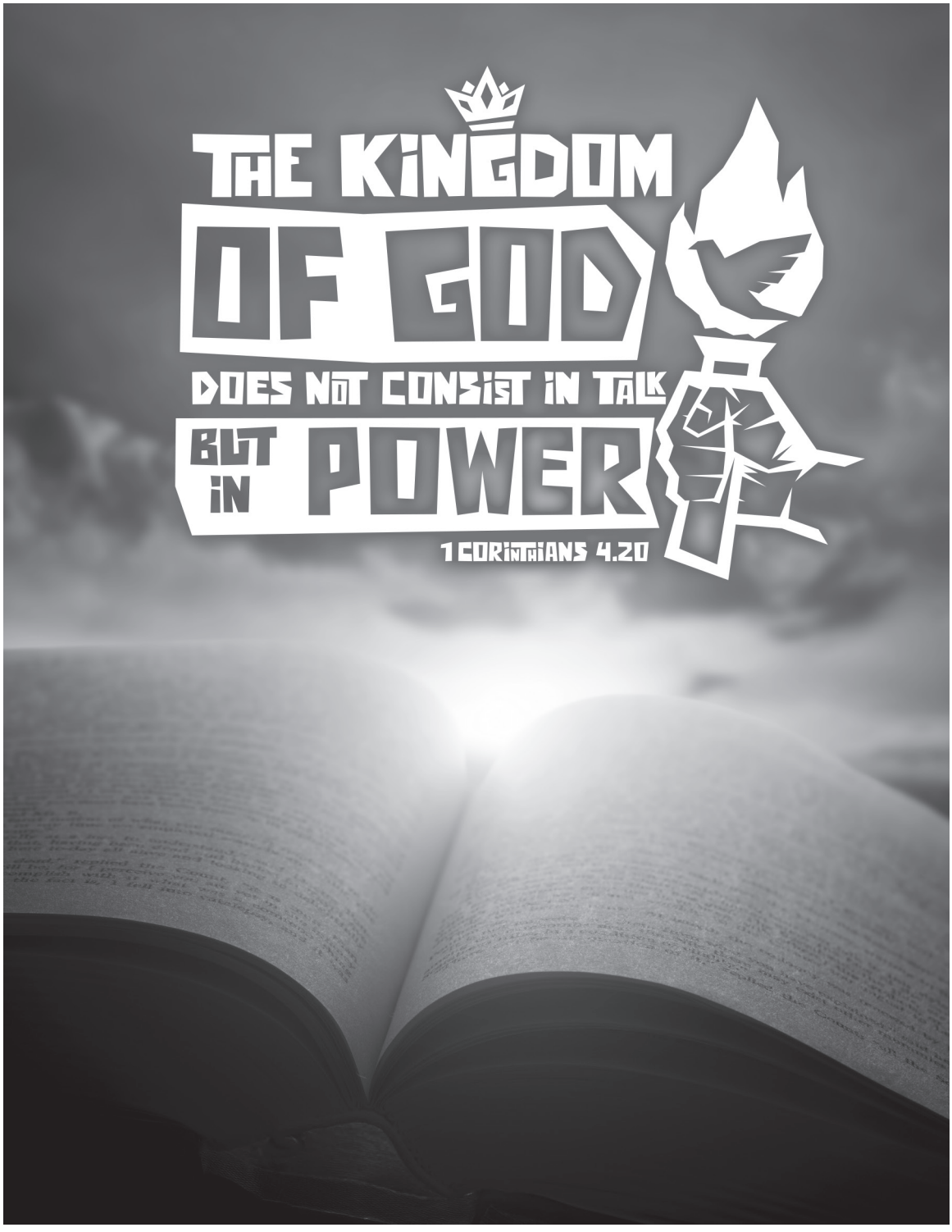
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Summer quarter explores the broad sweep of biblical teaching about the nature of God's reign, beginning with Old Testament declarations of God's righteous power. Both Old and New Testaments depict God as "King over all the earth" (see Psalm 47:2). Among Israel's prophets, only Daniel references God's "kingdom." The phrase "kingdom of God" takes on new significance in Jesus' teaching, which is the focus of Unit II. The third unit considers New Testament Epistle texts that elaborate on the theme of Jesus as King and what it means for believers to participate in God's eternal reign.

Unit I, *"The Prophets Proclaim God's Power,"* is a five-week study of the reign of God as depicted in the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. Taken as a whole, what do these prophetic texts teach us about the kind of rule that God exerts over the earth's inhabitants? The first two lessons advance the theme of God's powerful and peaceful reign. Lesson 3 introduces the concept of God's Servant-King, the promised Messiah. Lessons 4 and 5 explore the concept of God's appointed King.

Unit II, *"Jesus Envisions the Kingdom,"* presents four lessons on Jesus' kingdom teachings as found in the gospel of Matthew. The first lesson recounts how Jesus' powerful acts of deliverance are evidence of God's kingdom in our midst. The subsequent three lessons explore Jesus' parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13—the urgency of understanding its message, the enemy who undermines kingdom work, the unseen growth of the kingdom, the precious joy of finding the kingdom, and the universal judgment at the end of the age.

Unit III, *"God's Eternal Reign,"* presents four lessons from the New Testament Epistles about the implications of life under God's authority. The first lesson explores the fruit of life according to the law of love. The second lesson contrasts a life of religious rule following with the righteousness, peace, and joy to be found in God's economy. The third lessons reminds us that the power of God is at work in us. The unit concludes with praise for Christ, the exalted ruler.


THE KINGDOM
OF GOD
DOES NOT CONSIST IN TALK
BUT IN POWER
1 CORINTHIANS 4.20

June 4, 2023 **Lesson 1**

YOUR GOD REIGNS

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Stop the Chaos**
Youth Topic: **Stop the Chaos**

Children
General Lesson Title: **God Reigns!**
Children's Topic: **"Know My Name"**

Devotional Reading
Colossians 3:8-17

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: **Isaiah 52:1-12**
Print Passage: **Isaiah 52:7-12**
Key Verse: **Isaiah 52:7**

Children
Background Scripture: **Isaiah 52:1-12**
Print Passage: **Isaiah 52:7-12**
Key Verse: **Isaiah 52:12b**

Isaiah 52:7-12—KJV

7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!
8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.
9 Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.
10 The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.
11 Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.
12 For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward.

Isaiah 52:7-12—NIV

7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"
8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.
9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.
10 The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.
11 Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the articles of the LORD's house.
12 But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Both in our personal lives and in society as a whole there are times of chaos and uncertainty. Is there a reality bigger than the chaos we experience? Even in the midst of exile, Isaiah proclaims, "God reigns."

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Contrast Israel's history of oppression with the peace of God's promised kingdom.
2. Enjoy the peace that comes from God.
3. Respond to God's peace with exuberant worship.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—These verses contain key messianic themes picked up throughout the New Testament. Compare Isaiah 52:3 with 1 Peter 1:18-19 and 52:7 with Romans 10:15. The apostles saw the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated (see Mark 1:14-15) as the truest fulfillment of these promises.

—Israel in her exile was counted worthless (see 52:3), but in this riddle, God's promise of redemption suggests a price beyond money. John 3:16 offers the answer to the puzzle.

—The imagery of celebration (clean, "beautiful" clothing; see 52:1-2) on the heels of sorrow and oppression (chains, dirt; see 52:2) hinges on the coming presence of God with His people (see 52:6, 8). It is God's presence that brings healing, freedom, joy, and protection (see 52:8-10).

—The messenger's announcement (see 52:7) echoes traditional enthronement scenarios found in 2 Samuel 15:10 and 2 Kings 9:13.

—Jerusalem as a city (both structures and inhabitants) was to be holy like the Temple itself, and the rationale is found in God's presence: the whole city was to reflect God's character now that He was fully present with His people.

—See the parallels and contrasts with the original exodus out of Egypt: God went with them (compare 52:12 with Exodus 14:19); this exodus from exile was orderly (compare Exodus 12:31-39 with Isaiah 52:12 and Ezra 1–3), and the people brought nothing out of their exile that was idolatrous or impure, physically or in their hearts (see Exodus 32).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Isaiah is the first of the three "major prophets," the three longest prophetic books. Its position as the first reflects the fact that Isaiah himself lived in the eighth century, whereas the other two major prophets—Jeremiah and Ezekiel—lived approximately one hundred years later. The book reflects several different periods, but it is not an anthology of unrelated prophecies. In all three parts of the book—Isaiah 1–39; Isaiah 40–55; and Isaiah 56–66—Yahweh is "the Holy

One of Israel." The entire book is a message from the Holy One of Israel.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Isaiah of Jerusalem lived in the second half of the eighth century BC and addressed himself to the conditions existing at the time. It is believed that his ministry began in 739 BC and continued to be a voice for God until well into the reign of King Manasseh. In the writing of Isaiah, Judah and Israel were still in existence as independent kingdoms. However, in Isaiah 40–55, the background for these Scriptures is not the eighth century but, instead, the middle of the sixth century BC. Contemporary scholarship suggests that Isaiah 40–66 has a different theological focus from Isaiah 1–39. Many scholars believe that different persons wrote chapters 1–39 of Isaiah and chapters 40–66. However, this neither takes away from nor questions the entire book's divine inspiration.

Isaiah prophesied for more than forty years to the nation of Judah. During his prophetic ministry, the nation was experiencing great moral and political upheaval. Bible scholars suggest that even though the nations of Assyria and Egypt threatened Judah, Judah was spared from being destroyed mainly because of Isaiah's prophetic influence.

Chapter 52 of Isaiah, from which today's lesson comes, is a part of the prophecies of comfort embedded in chapters 40–66. In chapters 1–39, the focus of Isaiah's prophecies was God's divine condemnation for Judah's sin. In chapters 40–66, the prophet comforts Judah with God's promises of hope and restoration. In chapters 49–57, the focus is on the prophecy of Israel's deliverer.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: the son of Amoz—called and commissioned by God to the prophetic ministry in the "year that King Uzziah died."

Messiah: the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. Christians regarded Jesus as the Messiah of the Hebrew prophecies and the Savior of humankind.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Awake (verse 1)—Hebrew: *ur* (oor): to rouse oneself; awaken.

Good Tidings (verse 7)—Hebrew: *basar* (baw-sar'): news; messenger of good news; "good news" (NIV).

Watchmen (verse 8)—Hebrew: *tsaphah* (tsaw-faw'): those who look out or about, observe, spy, keep watch, wait for.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. This Is What the Lord Says

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Good News Is Coming (Isaiah 52:7)

B. Witness to the Good News (Isaiah 52:8)

C. Reaction to the Good News (Isaiah 52:9)

D. God, the Enforcer of the Good News (Isaiah 52:10-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. This Is What the Lord Says

One of the hallmarks of biblical prophecy is the phrase "Thus says the Lord" or "This is what the Lord says." Whenever God commissioned a prophet, that prophet was obligated to speak only what the Lord instructed him to speak. It can be correctly stated that the actual test of a prophet's calling and identity was whether what he or she prophesied came true.

Who or what is a prophet? Heather Adams states that a prophet is someone chosen by God to speak for God. Whatever the time period or tidings, the prophet's job was to impart God's message accurately. "[Persons] called to this task came from differing backgrounds, personalities, and levels of social status. But what they all had in common was a heart for God, an anointing to hear from Him, and the faithfulness to impart His message to others" (https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-a-prophet.html).

Many references to prophets are made in the Bible. A cursory view of the Bible reveals that major sections of the Old Testament are devoted to a collection of books by prophets. Their names and quotes appear all over the New Testament and are the subject of sermons even today.

For an individual to say "This is what the Lord says" carries divine import and should not be viewed lightly or considered inadvisably. The impact of the words from the Lord has with it heavenly reward or punishment, mercy or judgment, hope or hopelessness.

When God placed a succession of rulers/kings in place in the life of the nations of Israel and Judah, He provided prophets to advise the rulers/kings and declare His word directly to the nations. It is important to note that God usually never communicated directly with the ruler or king. His intermediary was always the prophet. The prophet was divinely authorized to speak truth to power and was backed up by the authority of heaven.

Most Bible scholars considered Isaiah one of the greatest of God's prophets. Isaiah's ministry lasted through the reigns of five of Judah's kings. Themes in the book of Isaiah include the holiness of God, the prediction of the invasion of Jerusalem, and the future coming of the Deliverer.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Isaiah is regarded as an important prophetic book. The phrase "prophetic books" refers to a group of writings in the Old Testament. They have been divided into two groups: major and minor. The distinction relates to the book's size rather than the importance of the individual or message.

The *Quest Study Bible* describes Isaiah as a prophet who understood the two-sided nature of God's character: mercy and judgment, grace and discipline, justice and forgiveness, and exile and salvation. These paradoxes are seen in Isaiah's writings, and as modern-day readers examine his prophecy, they are faced with the decision (just like Judah) to respond in faith or unbelief. Isaiah described what he saw in his visions to effectively communicate this paradox, hoping to impress Judah with the contrast between God's holiness and Judah's sin.

What did prophets do as a part of their prophetic duties? Scholars remind us that God directed prophets to act out their messages as visual reminders or object lessons. Isaiah walked barefoot and stripped down for three years to signify Jerusalem's coming captivity.

A true prophet is God's mouthpiece. He is God's spokesman; he is one who accurately predicts (foretells) the future and foretells (communicates) the will of God as God has revealed it to him. The prophet brings revelation and direction to the people and lays the foundation for a proper relationship with God.

Chapter 52 of the book of Isaiah presents the theme of God's deliverance for His people, which now reached its most significant expression in the Servant of the Lord, who would suffer for the sins of His people. The prophet foresaw the time when Jerusalem would once again be "the holy city" and the "uncircumcised and the unclean" (unrighteous) would no longer enter her gates. Isaiah 52 is a part of the section of the book of Isaiah referred to as Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–66) by some scholars. Isaiah 52 is also to be understood as a response to Isaiah 51, particularly Isaiah 51:23-24. God called His people to put on the righteous garments of equity and justice.

The book of Isaiah presents a rich landscape of salvation history on an eternal and global scale. Isaiah, in essence, declared that God has a purpose and plan, and His eternal decree will stand. God's declaration will neither be thwarted by strong and aggressive nations (see Isaiah 14:26-27) nor derailed by unfaithful ones (see Isaiah 1:4, 9). God has a message for the world that He created, and He declares the following, without ambiguity: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isaiah 46:9b-10, ESV).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Good News Is Coming

(Isaiah 52:7)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

The messenger tasked with bringing the good news concerning freedom from Babylonian captivity is described as having beautiful feet. The reference to the feet of the messengers who bring good news should be understood from the perspective that the beautiful, hopeful message is what makes the messenger's feet "beautiful." The good news concerning the release of the Jews from Babylonian captivity is the backdrop for this verse. The good news is the ultimate salvation of the Hebrew people who had been confined to the horrors of Babylonian captivity. The good news encompassed peace, good tidings, salvation, and the reign of God. The word translated "peace" is *shalom,* which speaks of the absence of conflict. Interestingly, seventy years prior, it was conflict and war that led to the captivity of the Israelites. However, the war had finally ended.

The term "good tidings" suggests that the season of darkness had passed and light had arrived. "Good tidings" means that there was no bad news to blemish the good news. The word *salvation* has a liberating emphasis in this text. Liberation is a common focus in the Hebrew tradition dating back to the Exodus experience when God freed the captives from Egypt. The chains that kept the people in bondage for the past seventy years had been broken, and the people were free to return home. With the phrase "your God reigns," there is a prophetic declaration that the empires of this world will not ultimately rule. The phrase speaks of God's rule over darkness and God's rule over the power of the enemy. The release of the people from bondage affirms the fact that "God reigns!"

B. Witness to the Good News

(Isaiah 52:8)

Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

The watchmen, those who look out for the people's welfare, would lift their voices in unity, singing praises to God while inviting and invoking others to join with them in their praises. The language used in verse 8 "is taken from the custom of placing watchmen on the walls of a city, or on elevated towers, who could see if an enemy approached, and who, of course, would be the first to discern a messenger at a distance who was coming to announce the good news. The idea is that there would be . . . great joy at the announcement of the return of the exiles [from captivity]" (https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/18705/eVerseID/18705/RTD/barnes). Although this reference in verse 8 was initially applied to the return from Babylon, it contains the general truth that those appointed to watch over Zion and its interests would rejoice at all the symbols of God's favor to His people, especially when He would come to bless them after long times of darkness and depression and calamity.

C. Reaction to the Good News (Isaiah 52:9)

Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was lying in waste and in ruins. The call by the prophet for the waste places of Jerusalem to break out into expressions of praise is in accord with a style that frequently occurs in Isaiah—where inanimate objects are called on to manifest their joy.

Here is the process: First, the messenger signaled good news. Then the watchmen on the wall would burst out in song to celebrate the good news. The prophet calls the "waste places of Jerusalem" to join in the joyful song. One notable insight is to remember that this is poetry in which it is possible (symbolically) for ruins to raise their voice in song. One might also think of the ruins of the city as a representation of the people of Jerusalem. The Babylonians had ruined their lives, but now, they could rejoice and break forth in singing because Yahweh had made their restoration possible. They would no longer be considered *ruined* people but would, instead, be *redeemed*. Who had made this possible? Verse 9b gives us the answer: "for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem." As a result of divine intervention, the ruins of Jerusalem would not remain in ruins because Yahweh had comforted and rescued His people and had redeemed Jerusalem. This does not mean that the rebuilding of the walls and people of Jerusalem was complete, but it does mean that the Lord had determined to bring into reality redemption, so the people could be confident that it would happen.

The word *redeemed* has to do with release from bondage and usually involves payment or ransom to achieve freedom. Interestingly, Second Isaiah opens with the call to comfort God's people (see 40:1), and it ends with their deliverance and comfort (see 51:3; 52:9). In essence, what the people had hoped for was becoming a reality. Perhaps this is why some scholars refer to verse 9 as a song sang by all of Jerusalem as the choir and orchestra. The hopeless and helpless predicament of Israel had been remedied by the power and presence of almighty God.

D. God, the Enforcer of the Good News (Isaiah 52:10-12)

The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD. For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your reward.

The prophet continues his discourse by explaining to Israel's people how the Lord, during this time, would reveal His power in plain view of all nations. Israel's redemption would be a worldwide phenomenon that illuminated the power and personhood of God. The prophet declares that God would show Himself as the "Enforcer" of the Good News. The entire world would be witness to what God can do with His mighty arm. For Isaiah, the "arm of the Lord" highlights the authority and actions of God to accomplish mighty works (see Isaiah 40:10; 51:9; 52:10). His victory would be announced and circulated. His strong power would be apparent in the land. The prophet is judicious in emphasizing that God's power, through the

baring or flexing of His holy arm, will be seen in relationship to the salvation that He will bring about. That salvation relates to that of Israel, God's chosen people. Hence, the display of God's power had a twofold purpose in this text: to be visible to all (see Isaiah 52:10b), and to bring salvation to the whole world (see Isaiah 52:10c).

As the prophet proclaims the good news of deliverance, he commands the people to move from their place of bondage immediately. The people were not to waste any time getting out of the place of bondage. As they moved from bondage to freedom, they were further commanded not to "touch" anything unclean. God did not want the contamination of their place of bondage to have any attachment to His people. They were now free, and they were to act like they were free. The idea of not touching any unclean thing implies that they were not to repeat or pick up sinful habits as they traveled with the promise of God's deliverance. Many scholars believe, however, that they were allowed to carry only the holy artifacts taken from the Temple during the invasion of the Babylonians. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on God's call to holiness as the people journeyed home.

The newly delivered exiles must depart from Babylon and the sinful way of life that caused their exile in the first place. It is essential "to be free from outside forces that imprison us, but it is even more important to be free from the forces within that prevent us from achieving freedom" (Isaiah 52:7-10, Commentary—Sermon Writer, https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/isaiah-527-10-commentary/). When the people were instructed to "touch not" anything unclean, that command implies that because the Lord is holy, He expects His people to be holy. The people were to purify themselves to be fit for the task ahead—carrying the Temple vessels from Babylon to Jerusalem.

When the people were told, "For you shall not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight," their ancestors' departure from Egypt would come to mind. In that experience, their ancestors had to flee in haste and were threatened by the pursuit of Pharaoh and his armed forces. In contrast, in this instance, "[the people's] departure from Babylonia will be unhurried and safe from threat. Cyrus of Persia will allow them to depart under the protection of his imperial decree, and will even provide funds to help them with the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple" (Isaiah 52:7-10, Commentary—Sermon Writer, https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/isaiah-527-10-commentary/).

Interestingly, the prophet illuminated the universality of God in that all nations would see the glory of almighty God. Perhaps the emphasis on the universality of God would be very instructive to the nations of the world who emphasized the power of "territorial gods." The emphasis on the universality of God would also be instructive and encouraging to the Israelites as they returned home because they questioned God's ability to defend them while they were in exile and they were told that the gods of the Babylonians were superior to the Hebrew God. Hence, in a real sense, their return home was a theological affirmation of the power of almighty God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The book of Isaiah is agreed to be one of the essential books in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah added to his people's knowledge of God and their awareness of the coming Messiah. He faithfully communicated God's message for his time and ours. The messages Isaiah proclaimed condemning Judah's sin and proclaiming the need for social justice show how desperately reformation was needed in his day. Despite the dangers of Isaiah's day and the awareness that God would eventually punish Judah for her sins, Isaiah's final messages conveyed hope and confidence. That hope was wrapped up in the belief that God would bring His people back to the land and foster an intimate relationship with Himself. Sin would be punished, but God would send a Redeemer. That Redeemer will rule over an eternal kingdom. Hence, the people in Isaiah's day and our day had/have something and someone in which to hope. Our God reigns. To God be the glory!

PRAYER

Eternal God, You have an awesome track record regarding deliverance. Down through history You have always been active in delivering Your people from bondage, whether physical, emotional, mental, relational, financial, communal, or spiritual. Thank You for deliverance. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 29–June 4, 2023)

Your God Reigns

MONDAY, May 29: "God's Servant Will Establish Justice" (Isaiah 42:1-7)
TUESDAY, May 30: "Live by Faith, Not Works" (Galatians 2:16b-21)
WEDNESDAY, May 31: "'My Servant Shall Restore Israel'" (Isaiah 49:1-13)
THURSDAY, June 1: "God Will Not Forget You" (Isaiah 49:14-23)
FRIDAY, June 2: "God Desires that You Live in Purity" (1 Thessalonians 3:11–4:8)
SATURDAY, June 3: "Clothe Yourselves with Love" (Colossians 3:8-17)
SUNDAY, June 4: "'You Shall Be Redeemed'" (Isaiah 52:1-12).

June 11, 2023 **Lesson 2**

GOD'S KINGDOM OF PEACE

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Dare to Dream**
Youth Topic: **A Life of Hope and Peace**

Children
General Lesson Title: **A New Day Is Coming**
Children's Topic: **We Have Hope**

Devotional Reading
John 16:20-33

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: **Isaiah 65:17-25**
Print Passage: **Isaiah 65:17-25**
Key Verse: **Isaiah 65:25**

Children
Background Scripture: **Isaiah 65:17-25**
Print Passage: **Isaiah 65:17-25**
Key Verse: **Isaiah 65:18a**

Isaiah 65:17-25—KJV

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.
18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.
19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.
20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.
21 And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.
22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

Isaiah 65:17-25—NIV

17 "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.
18 "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.
19 "I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.
20 "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.
21 "They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22 "No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.
24 And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.
25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

23 "They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.
24 "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.
25 "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: All living creatures long to thrive, but sometimes circumstances cloud our imagination for paths to change. What can remove the "clouds" and open us to new possibilities? Isaiah 65 describes God's new creation in which God would establish perfect peace.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Identify the changes that Isaiah claims God will make in a new era of peace.
2. Long for the era of peace that God promises.
3. Reinforce hope in light of God's promise of peace.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The phrase "new heavens and new earth" is brought forward all the way to Revelation 21:1, where John's apocalyptic vision equates it to God's final re-creation (see Genesis 1–2).

—Part of this re-creation involves undoing all the effects of the Fall, bringing final judgment on God's enemies, and eradicating violence—the climax of this plan being the Cross (compare Isaiah 65:20-21, 25 with Genesis 3; Ephesians 2:13-17; and Revelation 22).

—The imagery of vineyards and orchards affirms God's role as provider and Creator, evoking the abundance of the original Garden of Eden and God's care for His creation (compare Isaiah 65:21-22 with Genesis 1:29-30).

—Yet, this new creation is even better than its predecessor: while God was present in Eden (see Genesis 3:8), He will be present in an even more immediate way in this New Jerusalem (see 65:24) and establish creation according to God's original plan of peace and prosperity for all of creation.

—Isaiah's prophecy emphasizes God's nearness to His people in the new creation (see 65:24). The prophecy hinges on God's presence as the source and guarantee of lasting joy, peace, and stability in the New Jerusalem (see 65:23).

—It is important not to overlook that the joy of this re-creation is not just for God's people, but that God rejoices in His people as well. His people are themselves a source of delight for Him, and He relishes also in their joy and peace with Him (see 65:18-19).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

A review of the chronological setting of last week's lesson is appropriate for this lesson. Isaiah has been identified as the writer of the book of Isaiah. Even though today's lesson comes from the second-to-last chapter of the book, it is still appropriate to recognize Isaiah's role in the prophetic tradition and the chronology of his ministry. Isaiah was called to the prophetic ministry in the year that King Uzziah died, which was approximately 740 BC. Isaiah's call was encapsulated in a vision of God that Isaiah experienced. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. The question of "Who will go for us?" was asked by the Lord. In response, Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me." Some scholars believe that the actual writing of the book of Isaiah is timed to have occurred between 700 BC and 681 BC. Scholars suggest that readers should approach Isaiah 65 from two realities of prophetic fulfillment: the return of the Judean exiles from Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BC; and the messianic/church age culminating by the eternal state of heaven ushered in at Jesus' return.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The prophets received a particular word from God to communicate to others. They spoke boldly to kings and ordinary people. Their messages included warning, condemnation, encouragement, instruction, and comfort. It is essential to recognize that the prophets spoke directly to the conditions of their day. Their message had a contemporary "Sitz I'm Leben" or setting in life. The "Sitz I'm Leben" refers to a particular era's social, ethnic, and cultural setting. The prophets spoke strongly against any distortion of the law practiced by the people. They also spoke out against any deviation from the true worship ordained by God. The prophets had a foretelling and a forthtelling ministry. Their foretelling role would foretell God's coming judgment due to the people's sins. On occasion, they would detail how God would use foreign nations to punish His disobedient people.

As a true prophet in the prophetic tradition, Isaiah's style of writing takes one to great heights of grandeur as Isaiah pointedly and piercingly focused on Judah's rebellious relationship with Jehovah God. Isaiah was not afraid to speak truth to power and truth to the powerless. At the same time, as a spokesman for God, Isaiah was careful to recognize the dichotomy encapsulated in God's relationship with Judah. Grace and mercy are seen in God's response to Judah's rebellious behavior.

Isaiah's prophetic ministry had a dichotomous thrust. He was vocal in condemning the sins of Judah, yet he was also forceful in providing comfort to God's people when appropriate. God's people will not be forsaken despite failures and the discipline that sin brings with it. The prophet's words brought hope into hopeless situations. When God's people returned to the Lord, He was merciful to pardon them and grant restoration. In essence, Isaiah wrote to encourage both Jews and Gentiles to view the future through the lens of hope and anticipation. God used Isaiah to encourage all believers to anticipate and envision a radically new way of living and existing in God's kingdom.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Isaiah: the son of Amoz; a prophet whose ministry spanned the reigns of four kings. He was also considered to be the prince of prophets.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Former (verse 17)—Hebrew: *rishon* (ree-shone'): first; chief; before; earlier.

Rejoice (verse 18)—Hebrew: *gil* (gheel): to be glad, joyful; show joy.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Out with the Old, In with the New
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Place of Joy
      (Isaiah 65:17-20)
   B. A Place of Prosperity
      (Isaiah 65:21-23)
   C. A Place of Peace
      (Isaiah 65:24-25)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Out with the Old, In with the New

In reviewing prophecy, it is essential to recognize that the concept of God's making things new is embedded in prophetic utterances. There is the upheaval of the status quo. History has proven that things are never the same after God intervenes. Many biblical scholars maintain that much of the writings of the prophets extend far beyond their day and time and even their own cultures. Most of the prophets envisioned a far future in which God would actively transform what *is* into what *will be*. The prophets were guided by the theological concept of the covenant, which was undergirded by the fact of God's commitment to His people. This commitment is found in God's specific promises to multiple individuals in the Old Testament. The prophets looked at history in a very literal way. Therefore, it is essential that, as believers today, we also look in a literal way at history and the prophetic utterances impacting that history.

God's involvement in history should be viewed from a three-dimensional perspective. God had spoken in the historical past; God continues to act in the present; and God will work in the future. Embedded in this approach is the idea that God knows the end from the beginning. Hence, when prophets spoke of future events, they were not introducing anything new. The prophets viewed themselves as conduits through whom God explained more fully how He would keep His promises. Indeed, it would be out with the old and in with the new as God would in the future facilitate radical newness: a new heaven and earth, a new city, a new people, and a new way of existing in the world.

B. Biblical Background

It has been previously stated that chapters 1–39 of Isaiah's prophetic book focus primarily on condemnation. Judah's sins were identified, and her rebelliousness was condemned. The focus of chapters 40–66 is on God's comforting nature as the prophet would utter the words "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." An era of comfort would be the main focus of the latter chapters. Chapter 65 of Isaiah fits into that pattern. One of the

critical concerns in understanding prophecy is whether it is didactic teaching (focused on the prophet's own time) or predictive teaching, focused on the near or distant future. It is important to discern whether a predictive prophecy has already been fulfilled (such as Isaiah 53, which concerns Jesus' death). However, the prophet has other predictive utterances that have not yet been fulfilled. Hence, they are future to us as well as was future to those in the prophet's time. In interpreting prophecy, one should be aware of what biblical scholars call "multiple fulfillments." This is where a single passage may refer to an event that would happen in the prophet's day and another event that would occur later. Therefore, when interpreting prophecy, we need to pray for the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit. We need Him to enlighten us so that what God is saying is discernible.

As we look at the details of chapter 65, we need to make sure that we understand how the prophetic utterance in the chapter is approached. First, we must understand that the prophet Isaiah had a message for the people of his day. We should look carefully at that message and see what God reveals of Himself and how He expects His people to live in the society. We also need to approach the predictive writings of Isaiah and seek to understand them as the prophet understood as pictures of events that would happen, even though the minute details cannot be fully comprehended.

Isaiah had an unobstructed vision of the future. He had vivid images of God and the Messiah. Isaiah's other vision was that of history's end when God's promises to Israel would be fulfilled. Then, sin and injustice will be removed, with all their condemnatory ramifications, and God's righteous kingdom will become a reality on Earth.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Place of Joy

(Isaiah 65:17-20)

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

The prophet Isaiah opens this chapter by explaining how God made Himself available to people who did not even seek Him or ask (see verse 1). In verses 1-16, Isaiah reveals the Lord's message of grace, mercy, redemption, and restoration. It is against this backdrop that Isaiah delivers another amazing message from the Lord and admonishes the people to "pay attention and see," for God says He will "create" (verse 17).

What is about to happen when God says "I will"? God is emphasizing the certainty of His promises. According to Joshua 21:45 (NIV), "not one of all the LORD's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled."

It is important to remember that Isaiah's prophetic words were uttered approximately 150 years before their fulfillment. Hence, it was almost unimaginable for many people

in Isaiah's day to envision a future that had no resemblance to the current realities of the people hearing the prophetic words. Nevertheless, Isaiah's prophecy of *new heavens* and *a new earth* birthed great excitement among many Israelites who were returning home to Judah after seventy years of bondage and exile. Some scholars suggest that because Jerusalem had been destroyed so completely by the Babylonians in 587 BC (see 2 Kings 25:8-10), the rebuilding of Jerusalem itself could be considered a new creation.

God's judgment on His rebellious people was realized with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Jeremiah personified grief and sorrow over the fallen and sinful nation in the book of Lamentations. Nevertheless, Isaiah prophesied that the period of sorrow and grief would eventually end, and weeping and crying would be replaced with rejoicing and delight (verse 19).

In verse 17, when God said, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth," He used the Hebrew word *bara*. The use of *bara* means that God would bring a new heaven and a new earth into existence out of nothing. Only God has that capacity. There is another Hebrew word translated as "create" or "made"—the word *asah*. That word in Hebrew means "to assemble existing materials and bring something else into existence." The people were told, in essence, that when God creates (*bara*) out of nothing, a new heaven, and a new earth, they are given a fringe benefit; the former (heaven and earth) will not be remembered or called into mind.

According to Isaiah's prophecy, long life would be restored (verse 20). Interestingly, Moses declared in Psalm 90:10 that the length of our days is seventy years. Scholars maintain that the average life span during the Babylonian captivity period was less than seventy years. Isaiah, however, prophesied of a time when a hundred years of living would be the new standard. One should be careful, however, not to apply the literal "one-hundred-year life span" to a particular time. Historians suggest that one-hundred-year life spans were not the norm for the people of Judah after they were freed from Babylonian captivity. Hence, the "one-hundred-year life span" is more of a symbolic message of God's new ordering of things—where death will have no place in the new heavens or the new earth, and a new standard for quality of life will be established based upon a relationship with God rather than quantity of years.

It is essential to review Israel's condition in the prophet's time, which contrasts with conditions in the New Jerusalem (the kingdom of the Messiah). The Messiah's kingdom will not be an improved version of the old Israelite kingdom, but it will be entirely new. It will be a new creation, where the quality of life will be different from that of the present world's. What was wrong with the world in Isaiah's day? Sin, disobedience, and separation from God were the standard. In the New Jerusalem, sorrow will be replaced by rejoicing. Life will not be cut short except where God acts in judgment.

Interestingly, similar language is used in the book of Revelation—where the new heaven and the new earth (see Revelation 21:1) are described as a place where the "old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4, NIV) and where "he who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" (Revelation 21:5a, NIV). In other words, both

Isaiah and John prophecy a time when God and redeemed humanity will live in perfect and lasting peace, communion, and harmony.

What does this mean for believers today? When we get into that final age, out at the end of the millennium in the new heaven and the new earth, we won't be saying, "Oh, you remember that day we were swimming down at the beach in Florida?" The reality is that we won't be remembering anything like that anymore. We will be in perfect harmony, peace, fellowship, unity, and communion with God. As believers, we will no longer be burdened with our sins or even the consequences of our sins. An even more incredible blessing is that God will no longer remember our sins. God, through Isaiah, is reminding believers that this life isn't all there is. As believers, we have a time of everlasting joy and gladness to anticipate.

B. A Place of Prosperity (Isaiah 65:21-23)

And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them.

The place God is preparing will be a place of prosperity. It is important to understand that prosperity does not only equate to financial or material gain and stability. In the new creation, people will have complete satisfaction. They will not experience the sufferings and frustrations that result from sin. People will enjoy life as God intended them to enjoy it. In verse 21, scholars suggest that the *houses* and *vineyards* refer to the good life that the returning exiles would experience as they resettled in Judah (see I Kings 4:25), rather than literal houses and vineyards in the current church age. Building houses and planting vineyards is a picture of the blessing of being with God in heaven.

In verse 22, Isaiah utilizes another word picture to describe the life of God's people's new home: *as the days of a tree are the days of my people.* Some scholars suggest that Isaiah is referencing the majestic cedars of Lebanon or the mighty oak tree (see Isaiah 2:13), because both of them could stand strong for centuries. Utilizing this word picture allows Isaiah to symbolize the eternally long period of blessings and favor that God's people would enjoy.

In verse 23, Isaiah contrasted the efforts of God's people in the new heavens and new earth with their experiences with the Babylonians. The people's toil was in vain when the Babylonian captives took their land and stole their harvest. Isaiah also contrasted the existence of God's people in the new heavens and new earth with their current existence. The tragedy of affliction, tribulation, and misfortune experienced in Babylonian captivity would not be the experience of God's people in the new heavens and new earth.

A relevant question is this: When and where is this new heaven or New Jerusalem? Many biblical scholars suggest that these verses foreshadow the life of God's people during the millennial reign of Christ on Earth as described in Revelation 20:1-6. After the one-thousand-year reign, the Lord will conduct His "great white throne" judgment. Following the millennial reign and final judgment, the new heaven and new earth, including the New

Jerusalem, come down "out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:2, NIV). There is agreement that the time of the new creation will be one of overwhelming victory for God and His people. As believers, we can live with confidence and hope because we know that God will create a new heaven and new earth one day.

Just as God's presence is with His people in the established and secure city of New Jerusalem because of God's power, His permanent provisions are likewise with and for His people. The limitations we are accustomed to in this life are no longer applicable. In the New Jerusalem, long life will be the norm. Premature deaths will not exist, and those who live to be one hundred years old will still be considered young.

Succinctly stated, verses 21-23 affirm that God's people past, present, and future will have the following provisions: they will build their own houses and eat their own food. In the New Jerusalem, the people will not build or plant for someone else to enjoy. God's provisions are so good that His people shall live as long as trees, and their lives will be filled with joy. The powerful and wealthy will not gain or retain status through the oppression of and domination over others. God's divine blessings will be the gauge for success. Money and material wealth will be meaningless. Success will exclusively belong to God's children as God redefines success and prosperity.

C. A Place of Peace
(Isaiah 65:24-25)

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Verse 24 affirms what is recorded in Matthew 6:8—"your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (NASB). The prophet reminds the people that God hears the prayers of His people while they are still speaking. Jesus gives believers direct access to the Father (see John 14:13; 15:16), and the bond of the triune God with His people will be perfected in the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:3).

Verse 25 highlights the reality that because of God's presence, we have His power, His provision, and His peace. God's peace is so powerful that it is all-encompassing. His peace will permeate all of life, including the animals that are natural predators. The animals' predatory nature will be reversed, and predators will co-mingle with their "victims." Additionally, the diet of predators will also be transformed; for example, lions will eat straw like bullocks. Some scholars suggest that literally speaking, the verse means that God's new heavens and earth (the holy mountain) will be free from the harm and destruction caused by the terror of creatures, and symbolically speaking, the Gospel message will unite people of different backgrounds and cultures under the kingship of Jesus.

Nevertheless, sin in all of its forms will be absent from the new heavens and the new earth. The absence of sin will mean that above all, believers will live in perfect fellowship with God. The world of nature also will benefit in this new era of genuine peace and harmony. Believers have the promise from God that He will provide a perfect paradise for us as believers, and that we get to stay there forever.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Can you imagine the new heavens and new earth prophesied by Isaiah? We must admit that we should be moved to awe and worship when we closely view Isaiah's didactic and predictive prophecies. When we consider the kind of God Isaiah alluded to, we must proclaim that there is no god like that God! Isaiah's God is in a league all by Himself. He has no competitors or challengers to His authority. We can join with Isaiah in expressing the confident hope that this God will surely bring to pass the promises He has made to His people. One of the preeminent promises is that humankind will be restored. What took place in the Garden of Eden will be reversed. There will be untold and unimaginable splendor as God makes all things new and brings about a complete transformation. Isaiah's confident picture of the end affirms that God will turn history to His own ends and bring His promised blessings to His people. Glory to His name!

PRAYER

Father, thank You that we have a glorious future to look forward to. We thank You that we have a future in which joy, prosperity, and peace will be our inheritance. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 5-11, 2023)

God's Kingdom of Peace

MONDAY, June 5: "The River of Life" (Ezekiel 47:1-13)
TUESDAY, June 6: "Receiving Everlasting Joy" (John 16:20-33)
WEDNESDAY, June 7: "The Right Kind of Spirit" (James 3:13-18)
THURSDAY, June 8: "Peace in the Midst of Distress" (Psalm 4)
FRIDAY, June 9: "God Is Our Refuge" (Psalm 46)
SATURDAY, June 10: "Christ Is Our Peace" (Ephesians 2:11-22)
SUNDAY, June 11: "A New Heaven and Earth" (Isaiah 65:17-25)

June 18, 2023 **Lesson 3**

GOD'S SERVANT-KING

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: All for One and One for All
Youth Topic: All for One and One for All

Children
General Lesson Title: One Nation under God
Children's Topic: One for All

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 50:4-9

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: Ezekiel 37:15-28
Print Passage: Ezekiel 37:21-28
Key Verse: Ezekiel 37:27

Children
Background Scripture: Ezekiel 37:15-28
Print Passage: Ezekiel 37:21-28
Key Verse: Ezekiel 37:24a

Ezekiel 37:21-28—KJV

21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:
22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.
23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.
24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also

Ezekiel 37:21-28—NIV

21 "and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.
22 "'I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.
23 "'They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God.
24 "'My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.

walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.
25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.
26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.
27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
28 And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

25 "'They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.
26 "'I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.
27 "'My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.
28 "'Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.'"

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: To many, the world seems to be in turmoil and disarray. How can life change for people who are scattered, are separated, and have little concern for one another? Ezekiel proclaims restoration of relationships under a renewed covenant in which God says, "I will be their God and they will be my people."

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand how the unity of God's people in the covenant of peace reveals God to us and to the nations.
2. Value unity over personal preference.
3. Examine sources of disunity within the church and develop a plan for peace and harmony.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—God is the active agent in this process of restoration and unity. His action is not dependent on Israel's work but, rather, is His own gracious choice, extending love and mercy to a people who had broken their covenant with Him repeatedly; here, God extends a gracious promise of an unbreakable covenant (see Ezekiel 8).

—The key to this unification is that the nation of Israel become once again God's people (see 37:23). God accomplished this by rescuing them from their sin and purifying them. Compare Romans 5:6-11 and Hebrews 10:19-22.

—In the context of Ezekiel's prophecies, this purification reflects the sacrificial rites of the atonement sacrifice (see Leviticus 16:14-19) but is applied to the heart and is eternally effective. Compare Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 10:10-22.

—"David" here is a symbolic reference to the Davidic covenant (see 2 Samuel 7) in which God promises an eternal king from David's line to rule over God's people.

—God's claim of His people is proved in the sight of all by the process of sanctification that His people will experience (see 37:27-28). The transformation of God's people to reflect His character is the greatest proof that they are His.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Although some scholars question the authorship of the book of Ezekiel, most biblical scholars agree that Ezekiel is the author of the book that bears his name. Ezekiel was a priest who became a spokesman for the Lord. He lived among the Jewish captives in Babylon. Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity (see Ezekiel 1:2), around 597 BC. Ezekiel is also believed to have prophesied for at least twenty years among the captives until 573 BC.

Scholars suggest that Babylon rose to power on the world scene as the dominant empire more than a century after Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Judah was defeated, and hostages were taken to Babylon in three stages. The first stage was in 605 BC, the second stage was in 597 BC, and finally, the third stage took place in 586 BC—when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Tradition states that Ezekiel was taken to Babylon among the second group of exiles in 586 BC. Ezekiel ministered prophetically to his fellow captives, echoing Jeremiah's message of judgment until Jerusalem fell in 586 BC. After the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel then offered words of hope, promising that restoration would come according to God's timetable. Relying on the content of the book of Ezekiel, many scholars believe that Ezekiel's prophecies were revealed to him between July of 593 BC and April of 571 BC (see Ezekiel 1:1-2; 29:17).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel is a part of a collection of salvation oracles (chapters 34–48) that declare the restoration of Israel. Interestingly, Ezekiel offers hope while giving voice to Israel's feelings of despair and hopelessness. Nevertheless, Ezekiel endeavored to convince the Israelites that God was not powerless.

Although the book of Ezekiel contains several bizarre visions and revelations, the book reveals profound truths about God and God's relationship with His people. One of the fundamental lessons Ezekiel teaches is that God desires to forgive His people rather than judge His people. Additionally, God remains faithful to His people, even when they are not faithful to Him. Additionally, the book of Ezekiel highlights a God that can use anything to accomplish His purpose. Ezekiel speaks in the first person throughout the book. He is identified as a member of Judah's aristocratic priestly families and was subsequently called to serve as a prophet.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Ezekiel: the central character in the book of Ezekiel. He was considered the book's writer—whose background included a priestly family origin.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Decrees (verse 24)—Hebrew: *chuqqah* (khook-kaw'): things prescribed; enactments; ordinances; customs; "statutes" (KJV).

Nation (verse 22)—Hebrew: *goy* (go'-ee): people; Gentiles; every nation; herds.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Restoration for the Nation
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. God's Promise to Unify and Restore Israel (Ezekiel 37:21-23)
   B. David, King over Restored Israel (Ezekiel 37:24-28)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Restoration for the Nation

Whenever the word *restoration* is uttered, there is the understanding that something happened that gave rise to the need for something to be restored or repaired. Throughout Ezekiel's prophecy, the reader will observe the tension between punishment and forgiveness. Israel and Judah would indeed be punished for their rebellion and idolatry. This theological tension drove Ezekiel to communicate his revelations in a way that may have seemed to be repetitious. Still, it was designed to drive home the truths that God commissioned him to share: any nation that becomes the victim of invasion and destruction would be susceptible to despair and demoralization.

The restoration that Ezekiel prophesied resulted from four major themes. The first theme relates to Ezekiel's understanding of God. Ezekiel recognized and understood God to be transcendent. In other words, God cannot be confined to any one locale. He cannot be squeezed into a narrow doctrinal category. The problem that Ezekiel encountered among the people was their belief that God was tied to their Temple and the Land of Promise. The second theme was directed to the people of Israel: Israel is sinful. Ezekiel identified the specific sin of which Israel and Judah were guilty: idolatry, or spiritual adultery. Israel was bent on straying away from the true God and was drawn to idol gods. The third theme was the reality that judgment was inevitable—if God is holy and Israel is sinful, then the result is the certainty of judgment. The fourth theme focused on the "alien" idea that individuals are responsible. Ezekiel emphasized the idea that everyone would bear responsibility for their response to God and be treated by God accordingly.

B. Biblical Background

Some scholars refer to Ezekiel as the second Moses, because much of the language in the book of Ezekiel is also found in the book of Moses. Ezekiel wrote to the Israelites living in exile.

Ezekiel proclaimed to the people that the God of Israel was God, even in pagan Babylon. Ezekiel warned the people that their idolatrous ways would be judged. He reminded the people that they would not get away with their rebellious behavior. One of the most significant insights embedded in Ezekiel's book is the teaching of individual responsibility. The people of Israel had an intense sense of identity as the people of God under a covenant relationship. The issue that Israel needed to face was the need to understand their role as individuals to follow God and His will.

Ezekiel used parables, symbolic behavior, and object lessons in his prophetic utterances to underscore his messages. In his prophecies, Ezekiel pictured God's people as helpless newborn children (see 16:4), like a lioness who cares for her cubs (see 19:1-9), as a sturdy cedar (see 17:1-10), and as a doomed and useless vine (see chapter 15). Nevertheless, scholars observe that God still restored His covenant with the people from the Temple, then the altar, then the sacrificial rituals, and finally the resettlement of the people in the land—which signaled the commencement of a new beginning that had its genesis in the house of God.

The following summation provides us with a survey of the book of Ezekiel: chapters 1–3 focus on the commission of Ezekiel to be a prophet. Chapters 4–24 discuss the judgment on the nation of Judah. Chapters 25–32 describe the judgment on the Gentiles. Chapters 33–48 tell us about the restoration of Israel. Today's lesson from chapter 37 falls within the last paradigm: the restoration of Israel. After the overthrow of Jerusalem, Ezekiel's message no longer focused on the coming judgment but on comfort and consolation. His message was filled with hope, proclaiming the regathering and restoration of God's people. His message was that Israel and Judah would be purified and reunited. Ezekiel assured the people that God would bring them back to their homeland.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God's Promise to Unify and Restore Israel (Ezekiel 37:21-23)

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

This lesson commences with the prophet Ezekiel's prophetic proclamation regarding the unification of God's people as one nation led by one king. With the hand of the Lord still upon Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 37:1), God instructed Ezekiel to prophesy that the Lord would bring His people out from among the "heathen" and out from wherever they may be scattered and bring them "into their land." However, there was a caveat: the people of Israel would not be able to experience this unification by their merit or might. It would be the Lord who would restore the people of Israel upon His

holy hill and raise a leader, a king, who would rule the divided people as one nation.

The statement that reads "will gather them from every side, and bring them into their own land" (verse 21) should also be understood in a broad sense. Israel's restoration after the Babylonian exile was only a shadow of God's promise. God's promise to bring the scattered Jewish people from among the nations is broader than the Babylonian captivity. Some scholars believe that Ezekiel's prophetic promise implies and anticipates a greater restoration than what took place in the days of Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah. According to some scholars, the Jewish people as a whole will be brought back into the literal land of Israel: "in the land upon the mountains of Israel" (verse 22a).

Hence, Israel would be gathered under one king and established in the literal land of Israel under a literal king. Some scholars believe this will occur in the millennial kingdom under Jesus Christ.

B. David, King over Restored Israel (Ezekiel 37:24-28)

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.

In Ezekiel 37:22, Ezekiel prophesied that there would be one king over a restored and unified Israel. That truth was reaffirmed in verse 24. However, there is disagreement among some scholars concerning the king. Some scholars believe that the king is the Lord Jesus Christ based on the fact that Jesus was born in the line of David. Other scholars believe that this text reaffirms that the one king is David. Some scholars believe that God would raise up David to reign over Israel, either in the millennium or in the eternal kingdom following the millennium reign. There are other scholars who believe that David would reign during both.

Regardless, the promises clearly and repetitively refer to a specific, literal land. This reality is important because it nullifies attempts to spiritualize the promises and deny that God has a plan for the ethnic Israelites in their ancestral land. The reference to "Jacob" refers to the twelve tribes, and the land given is the entirety of Palestine; consequently, the promise states that when the Israelites return, they are to possess the whole of the Promised Land.

Hence, the following prophetic promise—"my servant David shall be their prince for ever" (verse 25c) is most appropriately seen not as a mysterious and vague reference to Jesus the Messiah but, rather, as one of several promises indicating that King David will once again rule over Israel in God's kingdom.

God also promises an everlasting covenant of peace with Israel. This covenant will bring true shalom that never ends. This concept of peace or shalom represents much more than merely the absence of war. It implies a state of harmony and equilibrium among all those in the divine-human-territorial relationships—God, Israel, and the Promised Land. Interestingly, God's

ultimate restoration of Israel will be on a large scale. God will set Israel up as an example of His love and concern by enlarging their territory.

An expansion of the covenant promise with Israel includes God's placing the people in the land, multiplying the people in the land, and then dwelling in the midst of the people.

As a result of what God would do for Israel, the nations would know that the Lord made Israel holy. Israel would be set apart from all nations as God's special possession. No other nation would have the Lord dwelling in its sanctuary like Israel. God would set His sanctuary in Israel's midst. The promise of this sanctuary is described in detail in chapters 40–48 of Ezekiel. It is essential to recognize that no restoration would be complete without a temple for worship. It is important to note that the Temple's restoration is far more than simply a matter of repairing a war-damaged structure. The promise made by God emphasized that God "dwells" or "tabernacles" with His people. This is further highlighted as God stated that He "will be their God, and they shall be My people."

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Ezekiel's messages from a historical and contemporary perspective call us to a personal vision of God. We need a fresh revelation of God's transcendence, understanding that God cannot be confined to our puny cathedrals and our paltry church buildings. As we struggle with the intricacies of our daily lives, we need to understand that we bear personal responsibility for our response to God's grace. We have the personal responsibility to choose how we will respond to the relationship that God offers us. Will we say, "Yes, Lord, to Your will and to Your way"? Wherever we are in our life's journey and whatever the circumstances are in which we find ourselves, there is hope in God. We have the potential to become what He wants us to become. God is in the business of personal and societal restoration. Bless His holy name!

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the assurance that Your promises will come to fruition. Not one iota of Your promises will ever fail. Thank You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 12-18, 2023)

God's Servant-King

MONDAY, June 12: "The Confidence of God's Servant" (Isaiah 50:4-9)
TUESDAY, June 13: "God's Servant Will Make Many Righteous" (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)
WEDNESDAY, June 14: "Forsaking All for the Kingdom" (Mark 10:17-27)
THURSDAY, June 15: "The Greatest Must Be a Servant" (Mark 10:35-45)
FRIDAY, June 16: "Who Is Like the Lord?" (Psalm 113)
SATURDAY, June 17: "A Humble Act of Love" (Mark 14:1-9)
SUNDAY, June 18: "God's Servant David Shall Be King" (Ezekiel 37:15-28)

June 25, 2023 **Lesson 4**

RENEWED IN GOD'S LOVE

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **A Fresh Start**
Youth Topic: **A Fresh Start**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Rejoice in What God Will Do**
Children's Topic: **A Joyful Song**

Devotional Reading
2 Corinthians 5:12-21

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: **Zephaniah 3:14-20**
Print Passage: **Zephaniah 3:14-20**
Key Verse: **Zephaniah 3:17a, b**

Children
Background Scripture: **Zephaniah 3:14-20**
Print Passage: **Zephaniah 3:14-20**
Key Verse: **Zephaniah 3:17b**

Zephaniah 3:14-20—KJV

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.
15 The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.
16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.
17 The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.
18 I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.
19 Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

Zephaniah 3:14-20—NIV

14 Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!
15 The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.
16 On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.
17 "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."
18 "I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.
19 "At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.

20 At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

20 "At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the LORD.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People can suffer consequences for the poor choices of a previous generation. Where or in whom can a new generation find a fresh start? Zephaniah 3 promises that God takes away judgment and brings renewal fashioned out of love.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine God's proclamation through Zephaniah that God will deliver the faithful remnant.
2. Believe that God will defeat oppressors and deliver His people from their suffering.
3. Maintain hope in suffering and communicate hope to a new generation.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In the ancient Near East, the presence of a king is linked with protection and justice for his people. Zephaniah describes this familiar paradigm (see 3:17) but adds unfamiliar elements: God's love for and joy in His people.

—Joy is the defining expression of renewed relationship with the God who is with us: His joy in us (see 3:17) and our joy in Him and His deliverance (see 3:14; compare John 15:11; 17:13).

—Zephaniah's reference to God's people as a daughter (see 3:14; both "Zion" and "Israel" are used as synonyms) intentionally brings out the vulnerability of God's people and their need for God's protection. The text also elicits the reader's sympathy for Israel and for the poor and oppressed of the world throughout history.

—God's plan for Israel continues to reflect His original plan for Abraham's family (see Genesis 12:1-5): that those who follow Him serve as witnesses to the world of God and His character (see Zephaniah 3:20).

—This prophecy follows Zephaniah's prophecies of judgment against God's people because of their disobedience. Yet, it demonstrates that God's desire for His people is not to punish them but to discipline them with a view toward restoring them to a right relationship with Himself (see Hebrews 12:7-13).

—Although the language of 3:18 is complicated, the irony of the problem is clear: the festivals—which were intended to symbolically portray God's history with and care for His people—were no longer events that honored God or celebrated His relationship with Israel and thus had become a source of shame for His people. Compare Matthew 21:12-14 for a similar perversion of God's intention.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Zephaniah is not a familiar book to many believers. The name *Zephaniah* means "the Lord hides," or "the Lord protects." Zephaniah ministered in Judah from 640 BC to 621 BC. The book of Zephaniah was written during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, who reigned from 640 BC to 609 BC. Specifically, most biblical scholars suggest that the book was written between 635 BC and 627 BC. Scholars generally agree that the prophet Zephaniah was the one who wrote the book that bears his name. In the introduction to his book, Zephaniah traced his pedigree or ancestry back four generations to Hezekiah, a former king of Judah who was known for his faithfulness to God. The book also details how Zephaniah ministered during the days of Josiah, a godly king. Some scholars believe that Zephaniah had a positive impact on King Josiah. Interestingly, there is but one specific reference to the prophet Zephaniah in the book that bears his name. Many scholars believe that Zephaniah was a descendent of Hezekiah's and an inhabitant of Jerusalem.

Although some scholars connect the commencement of Zephaniah's ministry with the threat of Palestinian invasion by the Scythians, the book of Zephaniah never illuminates the Scythians (or any other people) as Judah's oppressor. Interestingly, the oppressor is actually an unnamed oppressor. Nevertheless, Zephaniah spoke emphatically concerning the oppression of God's people. And within the prophetic tradition, Zephaniah called the covenant people of God to repentance.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The general theme of the book of Zephaniah is the imminent arrival of the Day of Yahweh. Israel was very familiar with the concept of the Day of Yahweh. Dating back to the eighth century, Israel held the popular belief that a day of reckoning would eventually come that would bring judgment and destruction to God's enemies and the covenant people of God would eventually be vindicated and exalted. Some scholars illuminate the nationalistic tone of this popular belief and question its veracity against the backdrop of Amos's proclamation that suggested that Israel's special relationship with God did not preclude judgment from God (see Amos 5:18-20). Drawing upon the message of Amos, Zephaniah presented the Day of Yahweh as a day of battle which would result in devastation for both Judah and her enemies instead of the enemies alone. However, Zephaniah's message also included a word of hope. Drawing upon the message of Isaiah, Zephaniah emphasized that a remnant of God's people would be preserved, and changed relationships would be the order of the future where God's elect, and the protagonists of God's elect, would one day and with one voice call on the name of God.

Hence, the book of Zephaniah reinforces the confidence of God's people that God will make everything right. Geographically and culturally, King Josiah attempted civil and religious reforms; however, the leaders in Judah were corrupt, and the practice of idolatry was widespread among the people. Biblical historians observed that the Assyrian Empire, which ruled over Judah for more than a century, was disintegrating. Shortly after King Josiah's death and Zephaniah's ministry, the Babylonians conquered Judah, destroyed the temple, and exiled many of the people of Judah. Nevertheless, Zephaniah ministered to the people of Judah prophetically, warning them of judgment that was surely coming because of the people's sins. The prophet envisioned a day when God would act dramatically, and history (which is, in reality, His Story) will prove that God is the judge of all and will bring all wrong under His righteous rule. Zephaniah's

strategy was to stir the people to repentance before it was too late. However, Zephaniah also assured God's people that God's judgment would usher in a new society where justice would prevail, and all humankind would worship the Lord.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Zephaniah: the writer of the book of Zephaniah, a descendant of King Hezekiah's, and a prophet during the reign of King Josiah in Judah.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Fortunes (verse 20, NIV)—Hebrew: *shebuth* or *shebith* (sheb-ooth'): captives; "captivity" (KJV).
Gather (verse 19)—Hebrew: *asaph* (aw-saf'): to remove; assemble; collect; bring together.
Shout (verse 14)—Hebrew: *rua* (roo-ah'): to raise a shout, give a blast; cry aloud.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Starting All Over Again
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. It's Shouting Time! (Zephaniah 3:14-15)
   B. No More Fear (Zephaniah 3:16-17)
   C. Taking Care of Business (Zephaniah 3:18-19)
   D. Safe at Last! (Zephaniah 3:20)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Starting All Over Again

There is a song sung by Mel and Tim that reads as follows: "Starting all over again is gonna be rough, so rough, / But we're gonna make it."

The process of starting all over again, whether it is in a relationship, a business venture, or a spiritual trek, is a deeply involved endeavor. The past will no doubt rear its head. Words uttered in the heat of anger will be remembered. Actions and behaviors that have since been regretted will be called to remembrance. Starting all over again can be rough! This process calls for patience and an attitude of forgiveness. It involves a willingness to move forward and not look back. This is the kind of God we serve—a God who is willing to look beyond our faults and see our needs. The God of the Bible is a God who will take our sins and cast them into the sea of forgetfulness. The God of Scripture is a God who can and will turn things around and give us the opportunity to start all over again.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Zephaniah can be divided into two main sections. The first section consists of 1:1–3:8. This section focuses on the judgment on the Day of the Lord. Judah was

polluted with idolatrous priests who promoted and practiced Baal and nature worship. The officials and princes were corrupt as well. According to Zephaniah, the Day of the Lord was imminent and would come with terror, desolation, and distress. The second section of Zephaniah's book consists of 3:9-20. This section deals with salvation on the Day of the Lord. Zephaniah's tone changes from condemnation to blessing. The nation of Judah would be cleansed and would call upon the name of the Lord. Additionally—and this is the most significant part of his prophecy—the remnant of Israel would be regathered, redeemed, and restored. The survivors of God's judgment would be those who trusted in the name of the Lord.

Scholars suggest that the book of Zephaniah belongs to a dark period in Judah's history. Approximately one hundred years before Zephaniah's time, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen under the oppressive power of a foreign nation because of its sin of idolatry. The prophet Zephaniah had a prophetic feeling that the same thing was about to happen to Judah for the same reason: idolatry. Hence, Zephaniah communicated with a sense of urgency similarly to Jesus' proclamation that "the kingdom of God is at hand." Time was running out for God's covenant people, and the prophet Zephaniah summoned them to repentance while they still had a chance.

Utilizing blistering language, the prophet Zephaniah called out the ungodly practices of the people and their leaders. Under the leadership of two successive evil kings, Manasseh and Amon, the people of Judah fell into the worship of false gods. Despite King Josiah's short-lived religious renewal, the sweeping tide of paganism and false worship carried Judah toward certain destruction. Zephaniah pronounced God's looming judgment upon the nations that surrounded Judah. Those nations were Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria. In 3:1-7, Zephaniah turned his attention to Jerusalem, characterized by spiritual rebellion and moral decay. Judah's sin was of utmost concern to Zephaniah. He was convinced that Judah's sins were so great that judgment was imminent. No one was immune to the sweeping prophetic view of this prophet who saw all humankind as deserving of the coming visitation of the Lord (the Day of the Lord) or (the Day of Yahweh).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. It's Shouting Time!

(Zephaniah 3:14-15)

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.

Verses 14-15 open with the prophet Zephaniah's charging the people of God to "sing," "shout," "be glad," and "rejoice." They were to participate in these acts with their "whole hearts." In contrast to the judgment tone of chapter 1, this chapter rings with a celebratory tone of basking in the glory of God because Judah's judgment would be removed, and her condemnation would be canceled. Additionally, the people would rejoice and shout because Judah's punishments would

be canceled, and her guilt pardoned. Jehovah God would once again be in the midst of His people. Scholars point out that verses 14-15 encompass a unit similar to the enthronement in Psalms (see Psalms 47; 93; 95; 98–99).

In verse 14, the people of God are referred to as the "daughter of Zion" and the "daughter of Jerusalem." These phrases are synonymous and emphasize the connection of God's people with God. At this point in Israel's history, the time of punishment that Zephaniah foresaw on the earth had ended, and the time of rejoicing had come. The people would experience rejoicing when released from exile in Babylonia and allowed to return to Jerusalem.

In verse 15, the word for "judgment" is *mispat*, which is a legal verdict. The prophet had already dealt with Judah's guilt and the judgment that would be pronounced against her (see Zephaniah 1:1-13; 3:1-7). This judgment happened when the Babylonians ruined Jerusalem and carried its inhabitants into exile in Babylonia. Now, the prophet Zephaniah fast-forwards to when Yahweh rescinded the verdict against Judah. The Lord would pronounce Judah's punishment as being accomplished; He would redeem Judah from captivity and save her from her enemies.

The Lord reaffirmed His sovereign prerogative over Israel. Although Israel had experienced a series of kings, good and bad, God was Israel's true king. When Israel rejected God as king (see 1 Samuel 10:19) and desired a human king like other nations (see 1 Samuel 12:12), God allowed human kings to reign over His people. Israel's greatest king was David, with whom God established a covenant to establish his throne forever (see 2 Samuel 7:12). While the prophet does not mention David, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy would await the birth of the Messiah.

Interestingly, Zephaniah describes death and resurrection in verse 15. Judah would die when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the people into captivity; however, Judah would live again when the Lord made provision for Judah to be redeemed from captivity and restored as a nation. Although it would be necessary for Israel and her enemies to experience corrective judgment, Zephaniah encouraged Israel to look beyond the sadness and depression to a future day of joy and happiness. With restoration, Judah would live without fear and evil, which would be a welcome experience for the people of Judah.

B. No More Fear
(Zephaniah 3:16-17)

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

In verses 16-17, the phrase "in that day" is highlighted again to emphasize the day when God would take away the judgments against Judah. It is the day when God would render the verdict against Judah null and void. Judah's slate would be wiped clean. Judah would no longer be under the penalty of divine judgment. The words *Jerusalem* and *Zion* are significant because God refers to the same group of people but emphasizes the city (Jerusalem) and the place upon which the city sits (Zion). Hence, the people were encouraged not to allow fear to paralyze them. With the Lord as their King,

Judah's people would have nothing to fear. The posture of the hands symbolizes the state of the heart. When God tells His people to "Let not thine hands be slack" (verse 16), God is suggesting that the people of God let nothing keep them from doing the will of God. The phrase literally means "do not let your hands drop or sink." In other words, do not become paralyzed by fear any longer. With the Lord as their King, Judah's people would have no reason to let their hands grow weak.

The realization of success and peace destined for the people of God was not the result of their doing but because of the Lord's being in their midst. The prophet proclaims that the Lord, who is in the midst of His people, is mighty. It is He who would save His people because of His love. In the day the prophet is predicting, the Lord would be present with His people as a warrior who would bring Judah victory over her enemies. He is the mighty one who will save. God will rejoice over His people with joy. This reality is literally a miracle of grace that underscores the benevolent nature of God. The reality of God's love would bring peace to these people who had known so much turmoil. God's love would quiet their spirits as they began to recognize that the Lord had provided them with security and singing. The prophet Zephaniah paints the picture of a celebration usually associated with a wedding or an equally joyous occasion. The Lord's joy in His people is not a halfway phenomenon. The Lord's joy can be expressed only in full-blown festivity, characterized by singing. God's joy is so effusive and extravagant that it is expressed with the joy of melody.

C. Taking Care of Business
(Zephaniah 3:18-19)

I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

The prophet quotes God using the phrase "I will" five times in these two verses. God is making a declarative proclamation. In these two verses, the voice shifts from being that of the prophet's to being that of the Lord's. Although some scholars admit that this verse is difficult to translate, many scholars interpret the verse as the Lord's promising to gather up the sorrow of His people and doing away with it so that they would no longer suffer the damage to their reputation caused by exile. It is a promise of complete restoration. God's people would go through "a great deal of grief in the Babylonian Exile. They will see friends die at the hands of the Babylonians. They will see Jerusalem and the temple laid waste. They will lose their freedom. Every religious observance will remind them that they no longer have the privilege of worshipping in the temple. It will appear to their captors and neighbors (and, perhaps, even to themselves) that Babylonia's gods are more powerful than the God of Israel" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zephaniah-314-20/). However, God's people would see that this was only a mirage—an illusion. God would show Himself to be mighty and strong. "The time will come when their grieving will be ended—a time when Cyrus of Persia will grant them permission to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple"—when their tarnished reputation

would be restored, and when the Lord would gather up their grief and dispose of it (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zephaniah-314-20/). In other words, God was assuring His people through the prophet Zephaniah that His judgment on His people shall be removed (verse 18).

In Zephaniah 3:19, God declares retribution to the oppressors of Judah and Jerusalem.

Many scholars believe that God had in mind, at minimum, the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem and took its citizenry into exile. God would reverse the affliction of Judah's enemies. Those who had persecuted God's people would be punished. Defeat would be replaced by victory. God would take away the shame of His people and give them new life. The exiles would be gathered from the lands of their oppression and established again in their land. Under God's rule, they will share with Him in receiving praise from the whole earth. Their reputation will be restored. As a result of God's redemptive actions, His people would experience praise, and their fame would be evident in places where they were put to shame. The future restoration and blessing of Israel in the world would be something that the Lord Himself will accomplish "in that day" (i.e., the day of the Lord).

It is not just the strong whom the Lord will save, but the weak as well. The word *halteth* refers to those who are lame or crippled. It has always been a hallmark of the Old Testament to portray God as being concerned about defending the poor, the hopeless, and those suffering from physically debilitating issues. "[God] has always shown a concern for those who are weak and vulnerable. Torah law [Jewish law] included provisions to provide for the needs of the poor. Landowners were required to leave the edges of their fields unharvested so that poor people could glean those fields and obtain enough food for survival (see Leviticus 19:9-10). The law also made provision for the next of kin to redeem land sold by a relative (Leviticus 25:25), and required families to support indigent kin (Leviticus 25:35). The prophets emphasized concern for the poor and condemned ill treatment of widows and orphans (Isaiah 1:17, 23; [10:2]; Jeremiah 5:28; 7:6; 22:3; Malachi 3:5)" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zephaniah-314-20/). In the New Testament, the theme is continued as Jesus healed the sick and extended compassion to the vulnerable. God will bring salvation to all—both weak and strong.

D. Safe at Last!
(Zephaniah 3:20)

At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

In verse 20, the prophet Zephaniah illuminates the completeness of the restoration process. God restores Israel to its land. Interestingly, a final change in address occurs in verse 20. Utilizing first-person narrative, God speaks to Zion, Jerusalem, and Israel as a collective unit in the second-person plural. This verse amplifies and heightens what was said in verse 19. It makes clear that the exiles could expect to return to their homeland. The Lord would unite them and bring them home. The people would be delivered by the Lord God almighty. Judah was perhaps ridiculed and mocked.

People everywhere heard about Judah's shame. But now, God was about to do something spectacular. Now people everywhere would see their restoration. Occasionally during their exile, the people of Judah may have thought that restoration was impossible. However, a miracle happened. Thus, their reputation would be restored.

The book of Zephaniah ends on a high note. The prophet opened with a scene of cataclysmic destruction. Now the prophet closes with another scene of cosmic delight. Although the journey included loss (see Zephaniah 1:2), punishment, anguish, ruin, and devastation (see Zephaniah 2:2-3), the journey also included victory and restoration (see Zephaniah 3:18-20).

There will come a day when God's people will be restored to righteousness, peace, and restoration. This restoration will be a type of redemption from sin, iniquity, and wrath. At that time, the Day of Yahweh, God's people will finally be restored and safe.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Today's lesson reveals a simple message from the prophet Zephaniah. He wanted to affirm that God is a God of judgment. He will act personally and enter history to judge all people and nations in what the prophet called "the Day of the Lord." This lesson reminds us that God condemns rebellion and idolatrous behavior. It will be punished. However, God desires that people reject such behavior and repent. The book of Zephaniah illustrates the balance between judgment and salvation, between God's anger and God's compassion. God is longsuffering and does not desire that any should perish but, rather, that they enter a saving relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. This message signifies a fresh start.

PRAYER

Our Father, Your promises are always faithful and steadfast. Thank You for the promise of a "turnaround" in life. Help us recognize that You will deliver us with Your strong arm. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 19-25, 2023)

Renewed in God's Love

MONDAY, June 19: "Love with an Everlasting Love" (Jeremiah 31:1-9)
TUESDAY, June 20: "A New Covenant" (Jeremiah 31:27-34)
WEDNESDAY, June 21: "'We Walk by Faith'" (2 Corinthians 5:1-11)
THURSDAY, June 22: "Renewed in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:12-21)
FRIDAY, June 23: "God Abounds in Steadfast Love" (Psalm 86:1-7, 9-16)
SATURDAY, June 24: "Love Is the Greatest" (1 Corinthians 13)
SUNDAY, June 25: "The Lord Is in Your Midst" (Zephaniah 3:14-20)

July 2, 2023 **Lesson 5**

PEACE TO THE NATIONS

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **World Peace**
Youth Topic: **World Peace**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Praise God!**
Children's Topic: **A Humble King**

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 55

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: **Zechariah 9:9-17**
Print Passage: **Zechariah 9:9-13, 16-17**
Key Verse: **Zechariah 9:16**

Children
Background Scripture: **Zechariah 9:9-17**
Print Passage: **Zechariah 9:9-13, 16-17**
Key Verse: **Zechariah 9:9**

Zechariah 9:9-13, 16-17—KJV

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.
10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.
11 As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.
12 Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee;
13 When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.

Zechariah 9:9-13, 16-17—NIV

9 Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
10 I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.
11 As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
12 Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.
13 I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, Zion, against your sons, Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.

. . . . .

16 And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.
17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

. . . . .

16 The LORD their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.
17 How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People are frustrated and discouraged under oppressive rule. What can put an end to corrupt leadership? Zechariah 9 envisions a day when God brings down all earthly powers and initiates an eternal reign of peace.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Realize that God expects worship from all creation.
2. Aspire to greater holiness.
3. Find opportunities for worship in daily routines.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Like many prophecies in the Old Testament, this text has both an obvious biblical fulfillment and a symbolic future fulfillment. Here, the biblical fulfillment is Jesus' triumphal entry (see Matthew 21:5; John 12:15). Revelation 19:11-16 echoes and affirms the future fulfillment.

—The Hebrew terms identifying this king (see 9:9) indicate that the king is a valid or legitimate king, meaning he is descended from David, and that he brings deliverance or salvation. Jesus fulfilled these—not as His peers expected, but beyond their understanding (see Luke 23:34)—as well as demonstrating His humility and riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt (see previous).

—Zechariah foreshadows the new covenant established through Jesus' blood and His death on the Cross (compare Zechariah 9:11 with Hebrews 9:24-28).

—Pits were frequently used as prisons in the ancient Near East (compare Genesis 37:12-28; Jeremiah 38:1-12). The freedom he references (see 9:11-12) may be in part fulfilled in the return from exile (see Nehemiah 1:7-9), but the reference to blood suggests instead that it points toward both the freedom we have in Christ (see Galatians 5) and our freedom from death and ultimate separation from God (see Philippians 1:21-23).

—God's entire plan is for the restoration and nurturing of His people (see 9:16-17). Like a shepherd (see John 10), He will destroy those who threaten and injure His flock (see 9:14-15; compare 1 Samuel 17:34-36) so that His sheep may live in peace and safety.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Although several modern-day scholars dispute the authorship of the book of Zechariah, tradition maintains that the prophet Zechariah is the author of the book that bears his name. The name *Zechariah* literally means "whom Jehovah remembers." The prophet identified himself as the son of Berechiah. Zechariah's divine assignment was to encourage God's people who returned from exile to rebuild God's Temple in Jerusalem. Scholars maintain that Zechariah's prophecies were delivered and then recorded in writing over approximately forty-five years from 520 BC to 475 BC. Conservative scholars date the writing of this book around 520 BC.

Interestingly, Zechariah was a priest and a prophet. This was unique and unusual because many prophets spoke out vehemently against the priestly group. Nevertheless, Zechariah was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai's (see Ezra 5:1; 6:14) and was similar in delivering messages from the same historical context. Because Zechariah's prophecy is next to the last book of the Bible, some scholars suggest that Zechariah's prophecy practically closes the Old Testament.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Zechariah was born in Babylon while the Jewish people were in captivity. He returned with his family to Jerusalem when the first wave of captives returned. His return occurred around 530 BC. Biblical historians maintain that God's people were in captivity in Babylon for seventy years. However, when Cyrus came to power, he permitted the people in captivity to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Many captives chose to stay in Babylon; however, those who left and returned to Jerusalem began the task of rebuilding the Temple with great enthusiasm. Unfortunately, they encountered obstacles and became discouraged. Fortunately, a prophet among them dared to speak the truth to the powerless. Zechariah encouraged the people to finish what they had started. In addition to motivating the people to complete the Temple, Zechariah shared a vision of God's plan beyond restoring the Temple.

It is important to note the role of visions in the life of prophets. Scholars suggest that visions were the mechanisms God used to deliver His word to the prophets. The visions were revelations from God. However, modern-day readers must be careful to guard against making the experiences of the Old Testament prophets the normative experience of all believers. It is also important to note that one of the most important contributions of the book of Zechariah is the blending of the priestly and prophetic elements in Israel's history. The priest was concerned with rituals in religion; the prophet, on the other hand, was concerned with relationships beyond religion.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Zechariah: the priest-prophet who wrote the book of Zechariah and spoke in apocalyptic terms regarding God's relationship with His people.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Ephraim (verse 10)—Hebrew: *Ephrayim* (ef-rah'-yim): a son of Joseph, also his descendant and their territory.

Peace (verse 10)—Hebrew: *shalom* (shaw-lome'): completeness; soundness; welfare; ease.

Restore (verse 12)—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to turn back, return; bring back; "render" (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

A. Here Comes Royalty

B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

A. Rejoicing Time! (Zechariah 9:9)

B. A Reign of Peace (Zechariah 9:10)

C. Freedom and Restoration (Zechariah 9:11-13)

D. A Precious People and a Gracious God (Zechariah 9:16-17)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Here Comes Royalty

In the not-too-distant past, England was known as Great Britain. Great Britain said that the sun never set on the British Empire. In other words, Great Britain had colonies scattered around the world in almost every time zone. These colonies were part of the British Empire and under the direct political influence of the person sitting upon the throne in England. On various occasions, the king or queen of England would visit one of the colonies of the British Empire. The particular colony selected for a visit would go to great lengths to prepare for the royal visit. A holiday would be declared in preparation for the royal visit.

Many royal personalities existed in biblical times—some good and some evil. Undoubtedly, the nations under those royal personalities were obligated to go to great lengths to welcome them and cater to their needs. In today's lesson, Zechariah proclaimed the coming of Zion's King. However, there would be a radical difference between Zion's King and the human royalty of nations during that time. Zion's King would not come riding on a stallion, but He would come riding on a donkey, thus emanating humility and grace. Usually, the arrival of royalty in any area would reflect arrogance and terror. Not so with Zion's King!

B. Biblical Background

Zechariah began his prophecy by reminding the Jews that their captivity resulted from their disobedience, and God also rebuked their fathers. At the beginning of the book, Zechariah received visions in which God revealed His plan for the history and future of the world, showing that God is ultimately in control, and God will fulfill the promises made to their fathers and Abraham. Scholars refer to the book of Zechariah as an apocalyptic book. It is a book that looks into the distant future; it is full of symbolism, shapes, and images, and it has been called an obscure book. The book is considered one of the two important books in the

Old Testament that focus on predicting events related to God's relationship with His people in particular and the world in general. It stands apart from the books of Daniel and Revelation, which are both apocalyptic.

Zechariah also prophesied about the nations that oppressed Israel. He prophesied how there would be a time of destruction, and later, a time to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. A close examination of the book of Zechariah reveals that the prophet spoke more about the Messiah than did any other prophet, except the prophet Isaiah. The book consists of eight visions:

1. The vision of the Horseman among the myrtle trees
2. The vision of the four horns and craftsmen
3. The vision of the man with the measuring line
4. The vision of the cleansing of Joshua, the high priest
5. The vision of the golden lampstand
6. The vision of the flying scroll
7. The vision of the woman in the basket
8. The vision of the four chariots

The first five visions are visions of comfort, and the last three visions are visions of judgment. In chapters 7–8, God gave Zechariah a series of four messages. The first message was a rebuke for empty ritualism, and the second message was a reminder of past disobedience. The third message consisted of restoration and consolation of Israel, and the fourth message highlighted the recovery of joy in the kingdom. In chapters 9–14, two burdens are described. Today's lesson comes from the first burden of chapters 9–11, which concerns the first coming and rejection of Israel's King (Jesus Christ). The second burden is the focus of chapters 12–14 and concerns the second coming of Christ and the acceptance of Israel's King.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Rejoicing Time!

(Zechariah 9:9)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Scholars suggest that verse 9 is the hinge on which the prophecy goes into a new direction. Verse 9 is often interpreted with an eye toward Jesus' triumphal entry in the New Testament which fulfilled the prophecy. However, one must be careful not to take the passage out of the context of God's history with the Jewish people. The expressions "daughter of Zion" and "daughter of Jerusalem" are terms of endearment. Zion is the mountain upon which Jerusalem is built. Hence, "Zion and Jerusalem are virtually synonymous in this context" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zechariah-99-12-exegesis/).

"The cause for rejoicing [and shouting] is that their king will come to them 'righteous and having salvation.' [The] people have had seventy years of servitude and humble pie during their exile, followed by a return to Jerusalem that has been difficult and disappointing" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zechariah-99-12-exegesis/). The phrase "thy King cometh" refers to the messianic King. "Both Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15

quote Zechariah 9:9 in connection with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. . . . Their king will be righteous and victorious. They can depend on him to do the right thing ([the implied meaning of] righteousness [in this context]) and to save these people (victorious)" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zechariah-99-12-exegesis/). The king is identified as "riding on a donkey." "Donkeys are smaller than horses and are used both as beasts of burden and riding mounts. It was quite common for people to ride donkeys, but a warrior would usually ride a horse. To have the messiah-king come riding a donkey is a sign of peaceful intentions" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zechariah-99-12-exegesis/). The Messiah-King was not coming as a warrior equipped for war but as a humble leader.

B. A Reign of Peace
(Zechariah 9:10)

And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.

Scholars inform us that Ephraim represents the Northern Kingdom (Israel), and Jerusalem represents the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The Northern Kingdom was taken into captivity by Assyria and never emerged as a viable nation. To mention both Ephraim and Jerusalem in this verse is to hold out the hope of a reunited kingdom. The reference to chariots, horses, and battle bows gives a picture of being equipped for war, and they are identified as war instruments. The coming Messiah-King will eliminate these instruments of war, and "he shall speak peace unto the heathen" (Hebrew: *goy*). The word *goy* often refers to Gentiles. Hence, this verse offers the hope of peace for the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Messiah-King will reign globally, as the statement "his dominion shall be from sea even to sea" suggests. In this context, the reference to "from sea to sea" is an indication that the Messiah-King will reign worldwide and will have a sovereign global impact with global dominion. The reference to "the River" is also important. Historians remind us of three prominent rivers in Jewish history—the Nile (Egypt), the Jordan (Israel), and the Euphrates (Babylon). The Israelites' involvement with the Nile ended centuries earlier when the Lord freed them from slavery in Egypt. Hence, "the River" in this verse is the Jordan or the Euphrates. Scholars believe that given the people's recent history as exiles in Babylon, "the River" likely refers to the Euphrates. This reference would remind the people of their exile, captivity, servitude, and shame. It would be a source of joy to them to discover that their Messiah-King's rule would begin where foreign kings recently ruled the people. Their Messiah-King would inaugurate a peaceful reign where war will no longer be imminent.

C. Freedom and Restoration
(Zechariah 9:11-13)

As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee; when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.

The statement "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant" in verse 11 refers to the covenant

the Lord had established with Israel, which began with Abram (Abraham) before there was an Israel (see Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18-20). God renewed this covenant with Moses (see Exodus 24) and Joshua (see Joshua 24), along with several other personalities, including Jehoiada (see 2 Kings 11), Hezekiah (see 2 Chronicles 29:1-10), Josiah (see 2 Kings 22:1-3), and David (see 2 Samuel 7:12-17). When we review the covenants between the Lord and Israel, we observe that those covenants were routinely ratified by blood sacrifice (see Genesis 15:9-10; Exodus 24:5-8; 29:38-46; see also Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15-22). The covenant between Yahweh/the Lord and Israel was multifaceted. Nevertheless, Yahweh summarized its essential provisions in His promise to Abram, recorded in Genesis 12:1-2 (NKJV): "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing" (https://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/zechariah-99-12-exegesis/).

Verse 11 highlights the hopelessness the people experienced. A "pit in which there is no water" is a phrase that highlights minimum prospect of survival which was the experience of God's people. The people of God suffered through many decades of servitude in Babylon. Even after Cyrus freed them, they experienced one problem after another. The rebuilding of Jerusalem had been beset with conflict with neighboring tribes, and progress had been painfully slow. Once the Temple were completed, it would have little of the grandeur of Solomon's Temple. Hence, this is a people who needed encouragement, and encouragement is the purpose of the declaration in verses 11-13.

The people's return from bondage/exile had, so far, proven to be far less satisfying than they had hoped, but the Lord wanted them to know that they had a reason not to despair; in fact, they had a solid reason to hope. In verse 12, God called the people *prisoners of hope*. Some scholars postulate that this phrase indicates that the people were still prisoners, in some sense, even though they had been freed from their servitude in Babylon. Other scholars suggest that the phrase means that the people of God had reason to hope even though they had not seen their dreams of freedom fully realized. Several scholars suggest that the phrase means that the people of God were imprisoned by their hopes—suffering because of their unrealized and, perhaps, unrealistic expectations. Some scholars argue that the phrase suggests that although the people were physically free, the phrase could mean that their minds and spirits were in bondage, struggling to find hope in their predicament. In any event, the Hebrew word for "turn" or "return" is *shub*, which implies repentance. In this context, to return would require the people to change their minds and the direction of their lives. It would require their letting go of the things that had separated them from the Lord. God's people had already received "double for all her sins" (see Isaiah 40:2), so the prophet promised, "Instead of your shame you shall have double; and instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore, in their land, they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be to them" (see Isaiah 61:7). Now Yahweh reaffirms that promise. This passage is instructive in that it is a reminder that God's messianic kingdom is incomplete without the healing of God's people.

D. A Precious People and a Gracious God (Zechariah 9:16-17)

And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the

flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

In verses 16-17, there is a change in imagery. The images of war and bloodshed (see Zechariah 9:14-15) give way to two other images. Two metaphors are used to describe God's benevolence to His people. First, God would treat His people like a flock of sheep. And second, the Lord was going to treat them like precious stones in a crown. Hence, they would be near to God and cared for by God. And they would be prized and honored and placed on display for all the world to see God's graciousness toward them. The change in imagery highlights the reality that God would provide both victory and peace. The reference to precious stones speaks of the durability of the peace that God would provide, which would be a lasting peace. In other words, the prophet reaffirmed the greatness of God's goodness.

The "b" clause of verse 17 speaks to the prosperity the Lord provides by His presence and protection. Simply put, young men shall flourish, and young women shall have joy. For both, the bitterness and sorrow of life were gone, peace reigned, and the Lord God almighty ruled. What an encouragement to the Jews of Zechariah's day, who had so little. They lived among the ruins of a once-great city. Nevertheless, God wanted them to know that they had a bright future which was connected to their relationship to God's king for them.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the exciting insights we gain from Zechariah's prophetic ministry is his encouragement to Israel to declare their total dependence upon the Lord. Israel was surrounded by nations that depended on idols and false gods for their daily needs. Those nations believed that their idol gods were responsible for their crops, harvest, and food. By depending on the Lord to provide for them, Israel showed their independence from the idol gods of other nations.

This is an important lesson for us today. We must declare our independence from those preaching a gospel of human self-sufficiency. We must say to them unequivocally that it is in God that we live, move, and have our being. God desires that we trust Him for everything in our lives.

PRAYER

God, You are faithful to Your Word. Your promises are steadfast and certain. Thank You for being true to Your Word and Your promises. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 26–July 2, 2023)

Peace to the Nations

MONDAY, June 26: "The Redeemed from Every Nation" (Revelation 7:4-17)
TUESDAY, June 27: "God's Invitation to Peace and Care" (Isaiah 55)
WEDNESDAY, June 28: "Dreams and Visions Revealed" (Daniel 7:1-14)
THURSDAY, June 29: "'God's Peace Will Be with You'" (Philippians 4:4-9)
FRIDAY, June 30: "God Makes All Things New" (Revelation 21:1-14)
SATURDAY, July 1: "Glory and Honor of the Nations" (Revelation 21:15-27)
SUNDAY, July 2: "Rejoice! The King Is Coming!" (Zechariah 9:9-17)

July 9, 2023 **Lesson 6**

THE KINGDOM HAS COME UPON YOU

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: A Demonstration of Power
Youth Topic: Power over Evil

Children
General Lesson Title: God's Kingdom Has Come upon You
Children's Topic: Performing Miracles

Devotional Reading
Matthew 6:5-15

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: Matthew 12:1-32
Print Passage: Matthew 12:22-32
Key Verse: Matthew 12:28

Children
Background Scripture: Matthew 12:1-32
Print Passage: Matthew 12:22-32
Key Verse: Matthew 12:15b

Matthew 12:22-32—KJV

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.
23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?
24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.
25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:
26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?
27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

Matthew 12:22-32—NIV

22 Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.
23 All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"
24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."
25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand.
26 "If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?
27 "And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.
29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.
30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.
31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.
32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

28 "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.
30 "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.
31 "And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.
32 "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: There are people who suffer from various afflictions. To whom or what can we turn to be delivered and thus made whole? Jesus' power to deliver people from any affliction, including demon possession, was a sign of the arrival of God's kingdom.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Examine the role of Jesus' miracle of deliverance as a sign of the arrival of the kingdom of God.
2. Appreciate Jesus' power to deliver the suffering from affliction.
3. Call upon the power of Jesus to alleviate suffering.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—This dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees fits a challenge-riposte formula typical of the first-century Mediterranean world. The wittiest response or unanswerable question would win the contest. At stake was one's reputation, community standing, and public support. Jesus had a habit of winning these dialogues so thoroughly that His opponents were humiliated (see Mark 12, especially 12:34).

—Sorcery—magical acts performed by controlling or eliciting power from other supernatural entities—was punishable by death according to Jewish Law. If Jesus' opponents could convince others that He was using sorcery instead of performing miracles, they would destroy His credibility and be able to stone Him.

—Jesus' response indicates that by God's power in Him, He is already victorious over Satan (possibly looking back on His temptations; see Luke 4:1-14) and able to free at will those bound by the enemy. Compare the promises of restoration

and justice (see Zechariah 9:14-15; Zephaniah 3:15; Isaiah 65:20-21, 25) from previous weeks, as well as Galatians 5 and Romans 6:14.

—Jesus establishes Himself at the very heart of the issue (see 12:30), making His peers' response to Him the true issue at hand (compare Luke 4:16-30; John 3:1-21).

—In the context, Matthew uses Jesus' appeal to the Spirit of God as further proof that He is the Messiah: compare 12:18-21 with 12:28-32.

—Jesus ends the debate by calling out His opponents' refusal to accept the evidence of God's work before them. Their determined rejection of the Spirit's work indicated their refusal to accept God's plan (see 12:31-32) and reflected their growing opposition to Jesus.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Most Bible students learned early in their formal and informal matriculation in Bible studies that there are four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first three are known as the Synoptic Gospels. They are referred to in that manner because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is mostly distinct. The term *synoptic* comes via Latin from the Greek σύνοψις, *synopsis*, which means "seeing together." The four Gospels provide a multi-part picture of the work and person of Jesus Christ. These gospels work together to clarify our understanding of Jesus, who is without a doubt the most significant figure in human history. In Jesus, we see the human and divine united in the God-man. Although many scholars believe that Matthew, a Palestinian Jew, wrote the gospel of Matthew in the AD 70s, some scholars believe it was written at the earlier date of the AD 50s or AD 60s.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The gospel of Matthew was written to provide indisputable proof that the long-awaited Jewish Messiah had come to usher in God's kingdom on Earth. Matthew offered a very persuasive record of the Good News (Gospel) of Jesus. Matthew referred to Old Testament evidence that supported the early believers' claims about Jesus. Those claims recognized that Jesus was the Messiah sent from God to bring into reality the kingdom of God. Matthew wrote primarily for a Jewish audience. Matthew uses many Old Testament references concerning Jesus. For example, he refers to Jesus as the Son of David instead of calling Him the Son of God. Another interesting fact about Matthew's gospel is the term "kingdom of heaven," which suggests a king and a kingdom. The King is Jesus Christ. Such an understanding is reflected in the first verse of chapter 1 of Matthew's gospel, which reads as follows: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Writing to a Jewish audience motivated Matthew to connect Jesus Christ with David and Abraham, two of the most extraordinary personalities in Jewish history.

Matthew wanted to show the human side of Jesus' genealogy by tracing his roots back to David and Abraham. A Jewish male always traced his roots through his father. This is precisely why Jesus' genealogy was traced from David and Abraham down through Joseph (see Matthew 1:16). It is also noteworthy to recognize that Matthew's purpose in tracing Jesus' genealogy back to David and Abraham was to affirm that Jesus was the fulfillment of the covenants that God made to David and Abraham.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Beelzebub: Beelzebub, also called Baalzebub, in the Bible, is considered the prince of the devils.

Matthew: the apostle Matthew, also known as Levi, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He is traditionally regarded as the author of the gospel of Matthew. When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, Matthew was a tax collector (or "publican")—one of the most reviled professions in ancient Judaism. However, little is known about Matthew.

Pharisees: the Pharisees were part of the largest and most influential religious-political party in the New Testament. They are mentioned in the gospels as opponents of Jesus Christ and the early Christians.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Blasphemy (verse 31)—Greek: *blasphemia* (blas-fay-me'-ah): slander; abuse or scurrilous language.

Demon-possessed (verse 22)—Greek: *daimonizomai* (dahee-mon-id'-zom-ahee): to be possessed by a demon; "possessed with a devil" (KJV).

Pharisees (verse 24)—Greek: *Pharisaios* (far-is-ah'-yos): members of a Jewish religious sect.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. True Power
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Miracle by Jesus (Matthew 12:22-23)
- B. The Criticism by the Pharisees (Matthew 12:24)
- C. Jesus' Response to the Pharisees' Criticism (Matthew 12:25-29)
- D. Jesus Condemns the Pharisees (Matthew 12:30-32)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. True Power

One challenge we face in the twenty-first-century's political arena is the issue of power. Every two and four years, the United States of America experiences an election cycle where the country elects representatives to Congress (every two years) and elects a president (every four years). The ideal goal is to select persons who will represent the people and draft laws and policies that benefit people. Unfortunately, what has taken place during the immediate past several years (and perhaps earlier) is that some of the persons who should be representing the people become enamored of and captured by the allure and appeal of power. And so, what becomes lost is the importance of having an objective concern for the well-being of the politicians' constituency. We have heard the statement "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Our country has recently emerged from what some historians call a dark period of political corruption under a political administration that lasted for four years (2016–2020).

Many political prognosticators highlight how power was abused, misused, and misappropriated during this time period. This is fundamentally the problem with the human use of power. Unless the recipients of power recognize what has been entrusted to them, they will tend to misuse this power. True power is exercised under the realization that it must be used to benefit the powerless and give a voice to those who are voiceless. Power should be about people rather than popularity, profit, and position.

B. Biblical Background

Scholars maintain that Matthew's main subject can be wrapped up in the theme "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God." *Nelson's Bible Handbook* examines the theological contribution of the book of Matthew. It notes that the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are mentioned fifty-one times in this gospel. The kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, refers to the reign or rule of God over the entire universe, the world, and our hearts.

Nelson's Bible Handbook suggests that the gospel of Matthew records at least five insights concerning the valuable contributions of the book to our understanding of Jesus' ministry. According to *Nelson's Bible Handbook*, Matthew attempted to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ who fulfilled the Old Testament's prophecy. Additionally, Matthew had a particular interest in the church, which became the dominant factor in the lives of Christians. The gospel of Matthew also has a strong interest in eschatology (the doctrine of last things) with its focus on the second coming of Jesus, the end of the age, and the final judgment. Additionally, Matthew has a great interest in the teachings of Jesus, especially His teachings concerning the kingdom of God. Matthew also writes to show that Jesus is the King to whom God has given power and authority to redeem and to judge humankind.

While Matthew 1:1–4:11 focuses on the presentation of the King, Matthew 4:12–7:29 presents the proclamation of the King. Verses 8:1–11:1 focus on the power of the King, and verses 11:2–16:12 present the progressive rejection of the King.

Matthew 16:13–20:28 focuses on the preparation of the King's disciples, and verses 20:29–27:66 present the presentation and rejection of the King. Chapter 28 closes the gospel of Matthew with a focus on the proof of the King. The biblical text for today's lesson falls within the section dealing with the progressive rejection of the King. This section shows many reactions to Jesus' words and works. Jesus does things that no one has ever done nor could ever do. Whenever Jesus performed a miracle, the people who witnessed it would observe with astonishment and wonder.

Today's lesson presents the invariable confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus. Despite what Jesus did that benefitted the people, the Pharisees took issue with it and desired to denigrate Jesus. The miracles that Jesus performed provided the impetus of the thinking that Jesus was the Messiah. To deal with the threat to their authority and position in Judaism, the Pharisees openly attacked Jesus, even characterizing His miracles as being the work of Beelzebub (the prince of devils). The Pharisees' attribution of the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus' life was a "red line" of no return for them.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Miracle by Jesus
(Matthew 12:22-23)

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

Throughout Jesus' ministry, persons were brought to Him who were blind, disabled, or suffering from some debilitating condition. The events of this text happened sometime after Jesus withdrew Himself from the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Interestingly, in this incident, the person brought to Jesus is described as being possessed by a devil and being blind and dumb. It is assumed that the man's blindness and inability to speak resulted from his being demon-possessed. Notably, in this miracle, Jesus dealt with the man's condition of being blind and dumb; nothing is said about the devil or demonic possession. The physical condition of the man was a result of his spiritual condition. In essence, the man's heart was influenced by demons and demonic spirits dominated his life. Fortunately, a wise and compassionate individual brought the man to Jesus.

Jesus healed this man, and immediately, the man could speak and see. The word translated "heal" (Greek: *therapeuo*) speaks of miraculous relief or cure. It has reference to a cure mixed with compassion. Interestingly, the verb "healed" is in the active voice, which suggests that Jesus performed this miraculous healing without the assistance of others. Although the people were amazed, they questioned whether Jesus was the Son of David. The word translated "amazed" (Greek: *existemi*) in verse 23 suggests that the crowds were astonished and overwhelmed. In other words, they were literally blown away. The imperfect verb tense of the verb *amazed* suggests that the astonishment of the crowd continued. The crowd's astonishment was ongoing and not temporary. Perhaps the crowd's astonishment continued because Jesus' display of supernatural power continued. Some scholars suggest that their doubt was based on the fact that Jesus was unlike what they had in mind concerning the Son of David. They were looking for the Son of David to be a glorious prince with pomp and circumstance. However, this Son of David came with no rattle of swords or an army with banners. There were no fiery crosses calling men to war. Instead, Jesus was a simple carpenter from Galilee, whose words contained wisdom beyond men's understanding. However, He had the power to heal and deliver. Other scholars suggest that the crowds were more perplexed than disturbed. Consequently, they praised Jesus, and their question was more a question of perplexity and astonishment rather than a question of dismay and disappointment. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the healing of the demon-possessed man was complete and instantaneous. The demon-possessed man could now instantaneously speak and see. In a real sense, this is a picture of salvation. Jesus has the supernatural ability to save instantaneously, and He has the miraculous ability to save completely.

B. The Criticism by the Pharisees
(Matthew 12:24)

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

With the supernatural healing of the demon-possessed man, Jesus sent a message to the Pharisees that His healing was not facilitated by natural means. Instead, the healing of the demon-possessed man was facilitated supernaturally, which affirmed Jesus' power over evil and evil spirits. In contrast to the response of the people, the Pharisees tried to make excuses or diminish the miracle that took place. Because the Pharisees could not deny that the man was healed, they devised a response that would reject the authenticity of Jesus' ability to perform miracles. Hence, the Pharisees attributed the miracle to the prince of the devils/demons, Beelzebub. The Pharisees had two objectives in mind: (1) they would agree that this was a miracle or a feat that was supernatural in its outcome, and (2) at the same time, they would attempt to undermine Jesus' ministry and cast aspersion on His character by attributing His miracle-working ability to Beelzebub, the leader of demons.

C. Jesus' Response to the Pharisees' Criticism (Matthew 12:25-29)

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

Verse 25 illuminates the omniscience of God. The word translated "knew" (Greek: *oida*) in verse 25 is a verb used in the imperfect tense that suggests that Jesus discerned what was going on in the minds of the Pharisees, and Jesus understood that the current thoughts of the Pharisees were based on past actions and thoughts. In other words, the Pharisees already had their minds made up concerning Jesus based on their past attitudes toward Jesus. Hence, there was not anything that Jesus could have ever done to change the attitudes of the Pharisees toward Him, and Jesus knew their thoughts and the motives behind their thoughts.

This should have been proof positive that Jesus had divine characteristics. The ability to know a person's thoughts belongs only to God. The fact that Jesus knew their thoughts should have alerted the Pharisees to the fact that they were dealing with divinity. Additionally, the thought processes of the Pharisees were illogical. In essence, the man's heart was influenced by demons, and demonic spirits overpowered his life.

In Jesus' response to the Pharisees' wrong thinking, He eviscerated their faulty conclusion. Jesus' reasoned response undermined their insinuation regarding His power, turning their argument back on them. Jesus illustrated His reasoning with a parable of a strong man's house. Jesus, in a lawyerly fashion, pointed out that a kingdom can prosper only through having harmony. If it is divided and one part undoes the other, that kingdom will fall. It is so with the kingdom of Satan. Perhaps Jesus would have said it this way: "Is it your doctrine that Satan has 'possessed' these whom I have cured? And is it also your doctrine that he has helped me to cure them? If so, he has helped me undo what he had done. He has assisted me in casting himself out—that is,

to oppose and make himself uncomfortable and embarrassed. Considering this, how can there be any stability in his kingdom? It must fall, and Satan must have less than human wisdom." In essence, Jesus was saying that if the prince of demons used his power to cast them out, he would be creating a civil war and destroying himself. The only way a strong man can be defeated is if a stronger man overpowers him. In casting out demons, Jesus showed that he was stronger than Satan.

D. Jesus Condemns the Pharisees (Matthew 12:30-32)

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

In verse 30, Jesus warned the Pharisees that there is no neutral ground with Him. Jesus succinctly stated that people are either a part of the family of God or they are a part of the family of Satan. The word translated "with" in verse 30 (Greek: *meta*) speaks of companionship or accompaniment. It has reference to union—where one works with another. The word translated "gathereth" in the second part of verse 30 (Greek: *synago*) means "to bring together or cause to come together." Jesus is in essence illuminating that there is no neutral ground: one is either in union with the kingdom of God, or he or she is in union with the kingdom of Satan. Additionally, one is either working with Jesus to bring people into the kingdom of God, or he or she is working against Jesus and scattering people away from the kingdom of God. The attitude of the Pharisees indicated that they were *not* with Jesus regarding His teachings and ministry; therefore, they were against Him. The Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, even though it could be said that the Pharisees were Satan's tools, seeking to undermine the Lord's work.

Verses 31-32 have been the subject of intense speculation and debate. The basic understanding of these verses is that God could forgive people's doubts and misunderstandings about Jesus. However, God would not forgive a person who defiantly rejected the unmistakable evidence that all of Jesus' works are good and that they originated in God. Those who called God's Spirit Satan, who called good evil, actually placed themselves in a position where they could not receive God's forgiveness. Speaking against the Holy Ghost results in eternal death.

The word *forgiven* in verse 31 (Greek: *aphiemi*) literally means "to let loose or send away." The word *sin* in verse 31 (Greek: *harmartia*) speaks of something communicated or acted upon that is contrary to the word and will of God. It is missing the mark of God's will in word, deed, or actions, and it is not doing that which is the will of God. In verse 31, the word *blasphemy* (Greek: *blasphemia*) speaks of slander, verbal abuse, and evil speaking against a person's reputation and good name. Hence, the Pharisees slandered the works of Jesus and spoke out against Jesus' good name when they accused Jesus of healing the demon-possessed man by the power of the devil, Beelzebul. Interestingly, Jesus indicated that one could be forgiven for speaking against the humanity of

Jesus. This was made clear with the phrase "Son of Man." However, one could not be forgiven for speaking against the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is important that persons understand that slandering or speaking evil against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The challenge confronting us today lies in acknowledging the authority and power inherent in Jesus Christ. The importance of recognizing who Jesus is and what He can do cannot be underestimated. Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah's coming. Also, Matthew reminds us that the kingdom of God is present (in the person of Jesus Christ) and future (when He returns). The kingdom of God is present and future. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the kingdom of God is within us. However, at the end of the age, the kingdom of God will become a visible reality. Embedded within Jesus' entire ministry was the realization that He came to usher in the kingdom of God and to bring into that kingdom men and women, boys and girls daring to exercise faith in Him.

PRAYER

Our Father, some would seek to criticize Your work. Help us to be faithful to You and recognize that Your authority is over all of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 3-9, 2023)

The Kingdom Has Come upon You

MONDAY, July 3: "Teach Us to Pray" (Luke 11:1-13)
TUESDAY, July 4: "Your Kingdom Come" (Matthew 6:5-15)
WEDNESDAY, July 5: "The Lord Is King!" (Psalm 97)
THURSDAY, July 6: "Shout to God, the King" (Psalm 47)
FRIDAY, July 7: "The Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:1-13)
SATURDAY, July 8: "God's Gentle Servant" (Matthew 12:14-21)
SUNDAY, July 9: "The Kingdom of God Has Come" (Matthew 12:22-32)

July 16, 2023 **Lesson 7**

THE SOWER AND THE SEED

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Growing Strong
Youth Topic: Growing Strong

Children
General Lesson Title: Growing in Jesus!
Children's Topic: The Story of the Sower

Devotional Reading
Psalm 95

Adult/ Youth
Background Scriptures: Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4; Luke 8:5-15
Print Passage: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
Key Verse: Matthew 13:23

Children
Background Scripture: Matthew 13:1-23
Print Passage: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
Key Verse: Matthew 13:23a

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23—KJV

THE SAME day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.
2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.
3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;
4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:
5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:
6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.
7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:
8 But other fell into good ground, and brought

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23—NIV

THAT SAME day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.
2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.
3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed.
4 "As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.
5 "Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.
6 "But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.
7 "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.
8 "Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced

forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.
9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

. . . . .

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.
19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.
20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.
22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.
23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.
9 "Whoever has ears, let them hear."

. . . . .

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:
19 "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
20 "The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.
21 "But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.
22 "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.
23 "But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: Human endeavors have no guarantee of success. Why do many of our efforts seem to fail? Jesus' parable of the sower reminds us that the success of what we do is not entirely dependent on us.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Analyze the parable of the sower from the perspective of one who sows.
2. Value God's hand in the success of human efforts in the work of His kingdom.
3. Work in God's kingdom with an understanding that success comes in various forms.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—By getting into the boat, Jesus was not trying to avoid the crowds or distance Himself from them; He was creating an ideal acoustic context so that everyone could hear Him (compare Matthew 5:1; 15:29). In the same way, Jesus taught unfamiliar spiritual truths using comparisons to what was familiar (see 13:3). When He taught about the kingdom, Jesus used every means available to ensure the maximum impact.

—Seed was either thrown in an arc or trickled down through holes in a sack as the farmer walked his field; so wherever the farmer walked, he left seeds behind. Compare to Matthew 5:14-16 and Colossians 4:5-6.

—The ground would be too hard on well-trodden paths through the field for the seeds to take root, making the path vulnerable to scavengers. Compare Romans 2:5; Mark 8:17; Matthew 15:8; Ezekiel 36:26.

—Often seed was sown before the land was plowed, since the plowing would turn the seed under the soil. The farmer would not know the ground was rocky when he sowed because of the layer of soil covering it. Compare Matthew 26:31; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; and Hebrews 3:12-19; 12:7-15.

—There is no condemnation on the farmer for the failure of some of the seed to take root and bear fruit. There is, however, the implicit expectation that the farmer has a field which he cultivates. Compare Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2, 6; 4:2.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Many scholars believe that Matthew, a Palestinian Jew, wrote the gospel of Matthew in the AD 70s. Some scholars suggest an earlier date of the AD 50s or 60s. Other scholars suggest that Matthew wrote his gospel around AD 45–55. Regardless of the exact date, the gospel of Matthew was written to the Jews to illuminate that Jesus of Nazareth is the King of the Jews. Linking the books of the Old Testament with the writings of the New Testament, Matthew demonstrated how the person and work of Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Many scholars believe that the time period covered by the parables in Matthew 13 encompasses the time of Israel's rejection of Jesus until Israel's eventual reception of Jesus as Messiah in the future—hence, the parables of Jesus as a now and not-yet kingdom dynamic to them.

Today's parable and its interpretation are sandwiched between stories of opposition to the Gospel. Chapters 11–12 contain several stories of misunderstandings and opposition to Jesus' ministry. Chapter 13 ends with Jesus' hometown's rejecting Him. Some scholars refer to this parable as the parable of the sower, the parable of the four soils, or the parable of the miraculous yields. The predominant theme illuminated in the parables of Jesus is the kingdom of God.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Matthew was a Galilean Jew who was also known as Levi. He lived in Capernaum and was a tax collector, or publican, employed by the Romans. One who was a tax collector was considered a part of a profession of ill repute. Persons who held the position of tax collector were known to be covetous or afflicted with the spirit of avarice or greed.

The parable in Matthew 13 highlights an incident that occurred a little past the halfway point of Jesus' three-and-a-half-year earthly ministry. Interestingly, the initial appearance of the word *parables* occurs in the gospel of Matthew. The parable in the lesson today so amazed the disciples that they asked Jesus why He was using parables in His teaching (see Matthew 13:10). As we shall discover in today's lesson, Jesus utilized parables to differentiate true followers of Jesus from followers of miracles, healings, publicity, and excitement. Most of Jesus' audience in the parable today understood how sowing was done and how a farmer usually walked across a field with a handful of seeds, scattering them on the earth.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Matthew: also known as Levi, he was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He is traditionally

regarded as the author of the gospel of Matthew. When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, Matthew was a tax collector (or "publican")—one of the most reviled professions in ancient Judaism. However, little is known about Matthew.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Hear (verse 9)—Greek: *akoué* (ak-oo'-o): to listen, comprehend by hearing; give heed.

Parables (verse 3)—Greek: *parabole* (par-ab-ol-ay'): comparisons; parables, often of those uttered by our Lord; proverbs; adages.

Withered (verse 6)—Greek: *xérainó* (xay-rah'-ee-no): dried up; wasted away; parched.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Listen Closely
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Parable: The Sower, the Seed, and the Soil (Matthew 13:1-9)
   B. The Parable's Meaning (Matthew 13:18-23)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Listen Closely

One of the crucial lessons many people learn early in life is the necessity of listening closely to instructions. This is especially true as persons matriculate through elementary school, secondary school, and college. Many people learn the hard way that there are dire consequences to not listening closely; mistakes are made. Wrong answers can be given on an examination. Interviews for positions can quickly "go south." Listening helps one better understand facts, ideas, and thoughts. Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, the author of *Are You Listening?* (a pamphlet that includes the ten aspects of listening and many speeches on the subject), said on one occasion that "the most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood" (https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/167082-the-most-basic-of-all-human-needs-is-the-need). In order to understand people, one must be willing to listen.

Jesus could be considered the greatest communicator who ever walked the face of this Earth. He had a way of connecting with His audiences. To people with agricultural backgrounds, He began with the words "A sower went out to sow . . . ." This approach immediately drew in His listeners because they understood that He knew something about their culture and lifestyle. In addition to understanding that Jesus is a great communicator, it is crucial that people listen closely to what He has to say. Jesus' words have cosmic significance and eternal value. His parables and their truths provide His listeners with the wisdom necessary to navigate life.

B. Biblical Background

Parables have been likened to digging gems deep within the earth. Some gems close to the surface require little effort to retrieve. However, other gems deep within the earth require tremendous effort to extricate. A similar dynamic is at work with the parables of Jesus. Some parables seem to be quite obvious while other parables are more difficult to grasp.

The lesson for today introduces the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils. This parable is introduced in Matthew 13:1-9 and explained in Matthew 13:18-23. The major emphasis of this parable is on the soils on which the seed fell. The parable teaches that people give different responses to the Word of God. The sower in the parable is Jesus. The seed in the parable represents the Word of God. The soils in the parable represent the hearts of humanity.

According to David W. Jones (at https://intersectproject.org/faith-and-culture/why-did-jesus-teach-in-parables), the word *parable* in the Greek means "to come alongside." Hence, one can define parables as short stories that Jesus told "to come alongside" His listeners and teach them essential spiritual truths.

A parable can also be described as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. In the book of Matthew, twelve parables are peculiar to Matthew. The parable recorded in today's lesson is the first of the twelve parables uniquely attributed to Matthew. Jesus frequently used parables when speaking to large crowds. However, in private, He provided His disciples with more detailed explanations of what the parable was about and the essential truths embedded in the parables. Jesus had the unique ability to use parables to teach moral principles. He used down-to-earth object lessons familiar to farmers, fishermen, and others in His audience to communicate eternal truths. The unique factor concerning Jesus' parables was that many moral truths contained in the parables were hidden from those opposed to Jesus' ministry and mission or not in tune with His teachings.

On one occasion, Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Why do you speak to [them] in parables?" Jesus answered them, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Matthew 13:10-17, NIV). "From this point on in Jesus' ministry, when He spoke in parables, He explained them only to His disciples" (https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-parables.html). Jesus told His disciples that those who continually reject His message would be left in their spiritual blindness to wonder about the meaning of His parables.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Parable: The Sower, the Seed, and the Soil (Matthew 13:1-9)

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

In verse 1, the phrase "the same day" connects this event to the events of Matthew 12 and Mark 3. Interestingly, unlike in the modern custom, the preacher sat down to minister while the audience stood up. Jesus sat down by the seaside and ministered to the crowd.

The seaside was one of the unique places where Jesus instructed people who witnessed His ministry. Verses 1-2 highlight the tremendous influence of Jesus. Some scholars describe Jesus' influence as contagious. Verse 2 reveals that great multitudes congregated around Jesus. The word *multitudes* is plural, which suggests that there were several groups of people assembled around Jesus by the seaside. It is important to note that out of great concern for those who followed Him, Jesus took the time to teach His followers. Jesus utilized parables to instruct those in the crowd. A parable is a simple story utilizing concrete imagery to make a single point. Parables are not intended to be allegories (where one thing represents another). Parables are not to be interpreted metaphorically. They are not similes, analogies, paradigms, or riddles. Jesus used parables to make a single point about the nature of the kingdom of God.

Although the parable of the sower appears to be about the seed at face value, scholars suggest that the parable is really about the soil and the soil is about believers. Scholars also highlight the importance of identifying the parable in the lesson today as describing one sower who sowed one kind of seed that fell on four kinds of soil. Additionally, it is important to note that the sower was a generous sower who sowed seeds liberally. Interestingly, the seed did not receive the same reception.

Some of the seed fell beside the road and became food for birds (verse 4). Because the soil was hardened as a result of being walked on, the seed became easy prey for the birds. Soil, like human beings, is shaped by its environment. Consequently, the soil on the wayside was walked on repeatedly. It would have been trodden on frequently to become packed so hard that it was no longer fit for planting seeds. The seed that is sowed in this soil becomes bird food. Unfortunately, we see this in society as well. People who have been walked on over and over again often develop a hardened exterior to protect themselves.

Some of the seed fell on stony places that did not have adequate soil to sustain the growth of the seed. Although the seed grew quickly, it had no depth. Consequently, the seed was scorched, and the plant withered as

a result of an inadequate root system to hold it (verses 5-6). Rocky soil does not provide enough soil for the seeds to take root and grow. The seeds planted in this soil may spring up but will not last because the root cannot go deep into the soil. In a sense, Jesus was describing those who lack staying power.

There were some seeds that fell among the thorns. Because the thorns grew more quickly than the seed, the thorns choked out the seed (verse 7). The soil filled with thorns caused the seeds to compete with the thorns, which would choke them off and prevent them from growing. This part of the parable is a picture of an overcrowded life.

There were seeds that fell on good soil (verse 8). Because of the good soil, the seeds produced an abundant crop. It is important to note that the seed that fell on the good soil was the same seed that fell beside the road, on the stony places, and among thorns. Hence, the growth of the seed was not based on the quality of the seed or the skill of the sower. Interestingly, the growth of the seed was based on the soil on which it fell. For example, the birds stole the seed that fell by the roadside (verse 4). The seed that fell on stony places was scorched by the sun (verse 6). The seed that fell on among thorns was choked by the thorns (verse 7). However, the seed that fell in good soil germinated and produced a harvest (verse 8)—in other words, the seed's having fallen into good soil helped it to produce an abundant crop.

The parable ends with an imperative—*Let anyone with ears, hear* (see 13:9). The word translated "hear" (Greek: *akauo*) means "to take heed or obey." The word is in the present-active imperative voice which suggests that persons who have the capacity to take heed or obey should use that capacity.

B. The Parable's Meaning
(Matthew 13:18-23)

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Beginning with verse 18, Jesus explains the parable of the sower. Although Jesus calls the parable *the parable of the sower*, His explanation does not focus on the sower. Jesus' explanation focused on the soil. Jesus highlights the fact that the seed is the word of the kingdom (verse 18), and He is the sower. The phrase "word of the kingdom" bears a resemblance to the description of Jesus' work in "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom."

Jesus' explanation focuses on the destiny of the seed in different types of soil. These scenarios represent various responses to Jesus' ministry. In verse 18, Jesus commanded the crowd to hear the parable. The word translated "hear" (Greek: *akouo*) means "to pay attention to with the intent of heeding what is communicated."

The word translated "understandeth" (Greek: *suniemi*) suggests gathering the pieces of a puzzle and putting them together to make a picture. Jesus desired that the crowd grasp the meaning of "the word of the kingdom." When the truth of Jesus' teaching is not grasped, it is snatched and stolen by Satan. The phrase translated "catcheth away" (Greek: *harpazo*) speaks of a carrying off by force. The Evil One is portrayed as the birds in verse 4. The birds eat the easily accessible seed lying on top of the soil. This is a reminder that the Evil One endeavors to snatch and steal the Word of God before it takes root in the heart.

Unfortunately, the seed that fell by the wayside did not take root because the soil was too hard. This is a picture of a heart that is hard. The seed that falls on the hard path represents those who hear the message with their ears but do not receive it in their hearts (verse 19). A hard-hearted person does not allow the Word of the kingdom to take root in the heart. Just as birds quickly snatch the seed from the hardened path, the devil quickly snatches Jesus' teaching from the hearer.

The seed that falls on the rocky path exemplifies the person who readily receives Jesus' preaching about the kingdom but does not endure as a disciple (verses 20-21). Scholars remind us that the rocky places were not spaces with scattered stones on or near the surface. The rocky places were spaces with solid rock a few inches below the surface. Hence, the shallow soil would become warm and moist after a short rainy season and become an incubator for seeds that would sprout up quickly and produce tiny green plants. However, the sun would eventually dry out the moisture of the shallow soil, and the plants would wither. This soil is a picture of the individual who initially responds excitedly and energetically to the message of Jesus but later discovers that life with Jesus is not easy and unfortunately withers away. The presence of "trouble and persecution" causes the person to stumble. Interestingly, the trouble and persecution come because of the Word. The word translated "trouble" (Greek: *thlipsis*) speaks of pressure or oppression or pressure. The word translated "persecution" (Greek: *diogmos*) speaks of an individual's being pursued by an enemy. Hence, persons who get excited about the kingdom of God and drop out of the kingdom race almost as quickly as they get excited are persons whose hearts are like the soil of the rocky places. These persons do not understand that God's kingdom threatens the power structure and is in tension with the values and structures of the dominant culture. Sadly, trouble and persecution withers these persons' devotion to Christ and His kingdom.

The seed choked by thorns represents the person who hears Jesus' proclamation, but "the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke and nullify the Word" (see verse 22). Scholars remind us that the seed that fell among thorns was not sown among thorn bushes, but among thorns that were only seeds hidden in the ground. Hence, the thorns grew just as the seed grew. The thorns actually grew thicker, stronger, and faster than the seed. Consequently, the thorns crowded out and choked the seeds. The "cares of the world" and the "preoccupation with power, position, popularity, and profits" are reminiscent of seeds' growing into thorns and choking out the Word of God in one's life.

The seed sown on good soil represents those who hear, understand, receive, and

live the Word (verse 23). These persons are individuals who embrace the Good News with their hearts. They fight off the devil and withstand difficulties and persecutions. These individuals do not allow themselves to be defined by worldly cares and wealth. They join the community formed by and committed to God's kingdom and God's will. Therefore, they live fruitful lives, signified by an abundant crop.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Jesus, as the Master Teacher, had a unique way of communicating truth to those who had "ears to hear." The subject of His parables was truth not revealed in the Old Testament. Scholars suggest that Jesus spoke in parables so that those who had rejected Him would hear but not understand what He was saying. However, Jesus explained the details of the parables privately to His disciples. As believers today, we have "20/20 theological vision" because we are blessed to have insight into what Jesus was teaching. How can we grow strong as believers? We can grow strong by looking closely at Jesus' teachings and appropriately applying His teachings to our daily lives. This parable of the sower is really the parable of the soils. The sower did his part. However, the results were based upon the soil that received the seed. Of what kind of soil is your heart made?

PRAYER

Our Father, this parable reminds us that Your Word will not return void. The seed that fell on good soil brought forth a plentiful harvest. Please help our hearts to be made of good soil. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 10-16, 2023)

The Sower and the Seed

MONDAY, July 10: "The Kingdom's Small Beginnings" (Mark 4:21-32)
TUESDAY, July 11: "The Wind and Sea Obey Jesus" (Mark 4:33-41)
WEDNESDAY, July 12: "Listen to God's Voice" (Psalm 95)
THURSDAY, July 13: "God's Wisdom Is Unconventional" (1 Corinthians 2:1-8)
FRIDAY, July 14: "The Spirit Reveals God's Ways" (1 Corinthians 2:9-16)
SATURDAY, July 15: "God's Harvest of Righteousness" (Isaiah 61)
SUNDAY, July 16: "Receiving and Understanding the Word" (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

July 23, 2023 **Lesson 8**

WEEDS AMONG THE WHEAT

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Growing Together**
Youth Topic: **Good and Evil**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Growing to Follow Jesus**
Children's Topic: **Weeds among the Wheat**

Devotional Reading
2 Corinthians 13:1-10

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: **Matthew 13:24-43**
Print Passage: **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**
Key Verse: **Matthew 13:30**

Children
Background Scripture: **Matthew 13:24-43**
Print Passage: **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**
Key Verse: **Matthew 13:24**

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43—KJV

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:
25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.
26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.
27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?
28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?
29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.
30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43—NIV

24 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.
25 "But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.
26 "When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.
27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'
28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'
29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.
30 "'Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

. . . . .

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.
37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;
38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;
39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.
40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.
41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;
42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

. . . . .

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."
37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.
38 "The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one,
39 "and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.
40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.
41 "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.
42 "They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
43 "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: The world is a spectrum of good and evil. How will people be recompensed? Jesus' parable of the weeds teaches that the Son of Man will distinguish between evil and righteous people.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand the kingdom principle at the heart of Jesus' parable of the weeds.
2. Trust that the reward of good and the punishment of evil are part of God's plan.
3. Persist in kingdom work when it appears that those who do evil will not be brought to justice.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The particular Palestinian weed (darnel) looks just like wheat until the wheat develops its ear (i.e., until the plant is mature enough to bear fruit).

—Jesus describes Satan's activity not only in terms of his attempts to oppose God's work directly (see Matthew 12:22-30; 13:19), but also in terms of his attempts to disguise his opposition so that it

looks like God's work (see Matthew 7:21-23), yet can be recognized by its fruit (see Matthew 3:8).

—God's patience and love for His people extend to allowing some of the enemy's plans to continue in order to safeguard the maturing of His people. Compare 2 Peter 3:8-9; also, consider Isaiah 10 and God's allowance of evil for the discipline of His disobedient people (compare Hebrews 12:7-11). See Revelation 21:22–22:5 for God's ultimate victory over evil.

—There is no uncertainty in God's ability to distinguish between His people and those who oppose Him, even when they seem to look alike (see 13:41-42; compare also Matthew 7:15; 25:32-33).

—Jesus seems to echo Daniel 3:6 in Matthew 13:42, combining it with a traditional description of life after death without God.

—Jesus echoes Daniel 12:3 in Matthew 13:43, picking up on God's promise to Daniel of a final and full restoration of God's people, a future fulfillment further affirmed in Revelation 21:1; 22:5.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The Intertestamental Period is the period between the Old Testament and New Testament. Humanity's pointless attempt to deal with the fluctuating political dynamics and religious beliefs during the Intertestamental period did little to bring about lasting significant changes. Hence, the world in which Matthew wrote his gospel witnessed Israel in spiritual bondage worse than its political bondage. All of humanity's efforts failed to rectify the challenges. Culturally, it was a dark period. There was no prophetic voice heard for approximately four hundred years. Amid this spiritual oppression, God broke His silence with the announcement of the coming of Jesus Christ, the faithful Servant of the Lord and King of the Jews. Scholars inform us that Matthew wrote an Aramaic edition of his gospel to win over the Jews to Jesus Christ. Aramaic was the language that was commonly spoken during this time. Later, a Greek edition was written. Some scholars maintain that the Greek edition came into existence between AD 50 and 55. Unlike modern scholars, conservative scholars estimate that the book of Matthew was written around AD 48–50. Liberal scholars contend that the gospel of Matthew was not by Matthew as an eyewitness of Jesus but, rather, by someone writing within the Antioch church community toward the end of the first century. Hence, liberal scholars estimate that the book of Matthew was written around AD 80–90. Nevertheless, one can conservatively estimate that the gospel of Matthew was written between AD 48 and AD 90. Regardless of the exact date, the kingdom of God is a core tenet of the gospel of Matthew. The word *kingdom* is used twenty-eight times throughout the book of Matthew.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Today's lesson is a selection from a much longer discourse that consists mostly of parables where Jesus addressed misconceptions concerning the kingdom of God and the misplaced desire to receive a nationalistic kingdom with military and political overtones. In the previous two lessons, we established that Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, is the author of this book that bears his name. The book of Matthew leads the list of gospels for many reasons—as it introduces the One who would be recognized as the King of the Jews. Scholars suggest that the book of Matthew contains narrative history, genealogy, parables, sermons, and prophetic oracles. The word *kingdom* is used twenty-eight times in the gospel of Matthew. This parable appears only in the gospel of Matthew. The parable illuminates two ecclesiological claims regarding the

church in the earthly realm: (1) it is a mixed body of two types of disciples; and (2) the ultimate destiny of every disciple will not be revealed until the end of the age via God's judgment.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Matthew: the apostle Matthew, also known as Levi, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He is traditionally regarded as the author of the gospel of Matthew. When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, Matthew was a tax collector (or "publican")—one of the most reviled professions in ancient Judaism. However, little is known about Matthew.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Gnashing (verse 42)—Greek: *brugmos* (broog-mos'): a biting; a grinding.

Weeds (verse 25)—Greek: *zizanion* (dziz-an'-ee-on): zizanium (a kind of darnel or false grain resembling wheat); "tares" (KJV).

Weeping (verse 42)—Greek: *klauthmos* (klowth-mos'): crying; lamentation; "wailing" (KJV).

Wheat (verse 29)—Greek: *sitos* (see'-tos): a generic term for any edible grain (barley, etc.).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Let Them Grow Together
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. The Sower's Diligence (Matthew 13:24)
- B. The Sower's Discovery (Matthew 13:25-28)
- C. The Sower's Dilemma (Matthew 13:29)
- D. The Sower's Decision (Matthew 13:30)
- E. Jesus Explains the Parable (Matthew 13:36-43)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Let Them Grow Together

Today's lesson focuses on two everyday realities in the period and the setting in which Jesus ministered. Jesus used two everyday items to present profound truth. The items were *wheat* and *tares* (darnel seeds). Jesus' audience would have been remarkably familiar with these items. In Jesus' day, wheat was useful. However, tares or darnel seeds were useless. Interestingly, darnel seeds looked like wheat at the beginning of their growth cycle. In the parable highlighted today, the field owner instructed his servants to let the wheat and tares grow together until harvest time.

In life, there are occasions in which we must allow certain functional societal elements to grow together with useless features until the proper time for differentiating them. This is imperative because some things are hidden from us as human beings, which only God knows. Therefore, we need to acknowledge His omniscience and allow those things to grow together. What may

appear useless to us may be something useful that only God knows. This applies to our inability to differentiate between genuine Christians and those perpetuating as Christians. Let them grow together! At the proper time, God will separate.

B. Biblical Background

Brian Chilton wrote the following: "In my humble opinion, I believe the First Gospel came to us in three phases. First, the apostle Matthew wrote the teachings of Jesus in Aramaic. Then, Matthew added the miracles and deeds of Jesus to his Aramaic and/or Hebrew edition of his Gospel, adding his eyewitness testimony and the testimony of Simon Peter as found in Mark's Gospel. Finally, either Matthew himself or a highly trained scribe translated the Gospel in Greek" (crossexamined.org/wrote-gospel-matthew/).

In Matthew's gospel, chapters 5–25 consist of the ministry of Jesus from the closing ministry of John the Baptist up to Jesus' death at Calvary. These chapters are vital to our knowledge of Jesus Christ, and they reveal much of what we know about God's living as a perfect man on Earth—in the person of Jesus Christ. Those chapters include Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, numerous miracles, and priceless teachings to all who would listen to Him and follow His directives.

Matthew was a young man when Jesus called him to be a disciple. He was a Jew by birth and was trained as a tax collector representing the Roman government. When Jesus called him, Matthew gave up all to follow Jesus. This was notable because his position as a tax collector was a lucrative arrangement.

When one examines the parables of Jesus, he or she will discover that Jesus periodically used seeds in His parables. Scholars believe that He did so because of their usefulness in depicting God's kingdom that grows quietly and persistently in the same way that seeds grow. Like seeds, the growth of the kingdom of God is the result of divine power, not human effort. When a seed is planted, nothing that the planter can do can make the seed grow; it is entirely within the realm of God's economy and design.

In our lesson today, the kingdom of heaven takes center stage. The kingdom of heaven refers to God's reign and rule over His people. Sometimes, the phrase "kingdom of God" is used interchangeably with the kingdom of heaven. Matthew often used the term *kingdom of heaven*. Matthew 13 contains several parables concerning the kingdom of heaven. Although the first parable focused on the sower and the various results that came from the seed of the Gospel's being sown (see Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23), the parable in today's lesson focuses on the wheat and the tares and it highlights that Satan will plant tares (weeds) in the very place where the seed of the kingdom has been sown (see Matthew 13:24-30). The explanation of the second parable is contained in verses 36-43.

The parable after the parable in today's lesson is the parable of the mustard seed. This third contains profound truth. The mustard seed is tiny, but the resultant tree is large. The kingdom of God may begin small, but it will expand from a local phenomenon to an international reality encompassing people of various ethnicities, races, and nationalities (see Matthew 13:31-32). This will be accomplished quietly and sometimes clandestinely, meandering its way into the hearts and minds of humanity as many people are confronted with the profound truths of the Gospel.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Sower's Diligence
(Matthew 13:24)

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

In continuing His discourse, Jesus told a second parable about sowing seeds. In this parable, He focused on two sowers. One of the sowers sowed the good seed to grow wheat, and the enemy (the other sower) sowed weeds among the wheat. The word *sowed* (Greek: *speiro*) speaks of scattering seed in soil that has been prepared. This suggests that the owner of the field had to exert tremendous effort to prepare the soil to receive the seed. The word *good* (Greek: *kalos*) speaks of the character, quality, usefulness, and profitability of the seed. Hence, the owner had every expectation that the seed would produce a harvest because the farmer did all the necessary things to produce a harvest of wheat. Like the parable of the sower, the parable of the wheat and weeds offers a perspective on opposition to Jesus and speaks more generally to the persistence of evil in the world. The sower was diligent in sowing good seed for a healthy wheat harvest in his field. He knew his seeds, and he knew what the soil could produce. Therefore, there would be no question at harvest time.

B. The Sower's Discovery
(Matthew 13:25-28)

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

Verse 25 highlights that the effort of the farmer was not insufficient and did not keep the enemy out of his field. It is important to note that the one who sowed the tares in the field is referred to as the enemy of the farmer. Interestingly, the word *enemy* (Greek: *echthros*) speaks of one who is hostile, hateful, and in opposition to another. Interestingly, the enemy sowed the tares in the farmer's field while the farmer's helpers were engaged in the normal routine of rest or sleep.

The phrase "while men slept" refers to "in the night or nighttime" when the enemy's actions could occur without being noticed. The "enemy came and scattered bad seed on the newly plowed field, perhaps before the good seed had been harrowed in.

The word *tares* (Greek: *zizanion*) refers to a degenerate kind of wheat or the darnel-grass growing in Palestine. Its growth and form have a strong resemblance to real wheat. However, tares either produce no grain or that of very inferior and hurtful quality. This is a reminder that Satan continuously endeavors to counterfeit the things of God. It was extremely difficult to separate the tares from the actual wheat because of its similarity while growing. Consequently, the tares did not become visible until the wheat sprung up. Hence, the tares had plenty of time to do damage because they grew out of sight as tares because they grew in the midst of the wheat.

There is something significant in the phrase "went his way." The enemy knew the

soil, and he knew how the seed would take root and grow. The enemy only had to sow the seed and leave it alone. Interestingly, Satan knows the soil where he plants his erroneous and false doctrine. Satan also knows that it will take deep and rapid root in the human heart. Hence, Satan plants his deception, and then he simply goes his way and leaves it alone waiting for it to bear satanic fruit.

Interestingly, the *tare* appeared when the wheat matured, having previously been not noticeable. Interestingly, the tares or darnel-grass are not recognizable until the wheat mature. Only then can one notice the difference. What Matthew most likely refers to, however, is darnel or cockle, a noxious weed that closely resembles wheat and is plentiful in Israel. The difference between darnel and natural wheat is evident only when the plant matures and the ears appear. The ears of the natural wheat are heavy and will droop, while the ears of the darnel stand up straight.

When the servants noticed the weeds, their first response was to question the quality of the seed (verse 27). It is clear from the servants' question that the difference between the wheat and the tares was now noticeable. Botanists inform us that the grain of the tares is smaller than wheat, and it "is arranged along the upper part of the stalk, which stands perfectly erect. The 'taste' is bitter, and when eaten separately, or even when diffused in ordinary bread, it causes dizziness, and often acts as a violent emetic. . . . In short, it is a strong soporific poison, and must be carefully winnowed, and picked out of the wheat grain by grain, before grinding, or the flour is not healthy"; not only would it be possible to mistake good grain for the tares, but also, very commonly, the roots of the two would be so intertwined that it would be impossible to separate them without plucking up both—hence, they both must be left to grow together until harvest time arrives (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/13-25.htm).

C. The Sower's Dilemma (Matthew 13:29)

But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

"When the master replies that an enemy has sown the weeds, the slaves are anxious to take care of the problem, to root those nasty weeds right out" (https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-16/commentary-on-matthew-1324-30-36-43-2). However, the sower recognized a problematic predicament. The weeds or tares resembled the true wheat so much that it would be difficult to separate. By gathering them, they would tread down the grain, loosen and disturb the earth, and injure the crop. However, at harvest time, they could be separated without injury.

D. The Sower's Decision (Matthew 13:30)

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

The sower's decision may have sounded strange to his servants, but it was the correct

decision. The master restrained his servants, saying that they would uproot the wheat along with them in gathering the weeds. The master ordered the servants to allow both the wheat and the snares to grow together until the harvest. After harvest, the master would send out his reapers to collect and burn the weeds and gather the wheat into his barn.

E. Jesus Explains the Parable

(Matthew 13:36-43)

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

In verse 36, one will notice that the setting changed. Jesus presented the parable in public. However, He answered the disciples' questions concerning the parable in private.

The word *answered* (Greek: *diasapheo*) means "to make fully known." Jesus explains to His disciples in a clear and concise way what almost every element of the parable represents: "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels" (see verses 37-39). Jesus does not, however, directly indicate who the servants represent.

Perhaps the servants represent the disciples or anyone who hears this parable and its interpretation. Interestingly, Jesus states that the reapers would take care of things at harvest time instead of the servants. The end of the age represents the consummation of all things. The angels, not any human beings, are authorized to pluck out the weeds from the wheat. Angels are messengers of God who separate the wheat and the tares. Jesus will separate the children of the kingdom of heaven from the children of the Evil One.

In verse 40, Jesus highlighted the destiny of the tares with the word *fire*, which represents the punishment of the children of the Evil One at a time determined by God. Hence, the existence of the children of evil is temporary instead of permanent. Verse 42 highlights the severity of the judgment of the wicked. The weeping and gnashing of teeth speak of wholistic pain and anguish in a place of eternal separation and sorrow. Verses 41 and 43 illuminate the destiny of the children of the kingdom of heaven and their reward. The Son of Man will preserve His children and give them a bright future.

Jesus' parable clarifies that any attempt to root out the weeds will do more damage to the crop. This has played out far too many times in congregations and denominations where some are determined to root out anyone who does not agree with the "right" views, practices, or stances on particular issues. Sadly, some pronounce judgment on people outside

the church—on people of other faiths, for instance—declaring them destined for eternal damnation. Whether judgment is focused within the church or without the church, it damages the church and its mission.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In today's lesson, we come to the profound realization that, unlike God, we cannot know people's hearts—or where their lives might take them—or their potential for conversion. God has not equipped us with the insight necessary to weed the garden. Jesus informs us that only in the harvest will the good be separated from the bad. Humanity cannot determine who is "in" and who is "out." God's judgment about these matters will take many by surprise (see Matthew 7:21-23; 8:11-12; 21:31-32; 25:31-46). Hence, we should not attempt to be judge and jury and attempt to weed out those we think are bad and not a part of the kingdom of God. While we should not be surprised that the devil sows evil people among righteous people in opposition to the work of God, we can rest assured that the reapers will accomplish the separation at harvest time—in God's own time. Thank God it is not up to us! We can leave the weeding to the angels and get on with the mission that Jesus has given us—to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God.

PRAYER

Father, we thank You that You are all sovereign and have authority. You are the One who determines who goes to heaven. We do not have that privilege. Help us be faithful to You in all that we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 17-23, 2023)

Weeds among the Wheat

MONDAY, July 17: "Preparing for God's Harvest" (Matthew 3:1-12)
TUESDAY, July 18: "The Righteous Yield Their Fruit" (Psalm 1)
WEDNESDAY, July 19: "Examine the State of Your Faith" (2 Corinthians 13:1-10)
THURSDAY, July 20: "'Search Me, O God'" (Psalm 139:11-18, 23-24)
FRIDAY, July 21: "God Brings Every Deed into Judgment" (Ecclesiastes 12)
SATURDAY, July 22: "God Will Deal with the Weeds" (Matthew 13:24-33)
SUNDAY, July 23: "The Righteous Will Shine" (Matthew 13:34-43)

July 30, 2023 **Lesson 9**

FINDING AND GATHERING

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Searching for Buried Treasure
Youth Topic: Stories of the Kingdom

Children
General Lesson Title: Stories Describing Heaven
Children's Topic: Treasures, Pearls, and Fish

Devotional Reading
Job 28:1-2, 12-19

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: Matthew 13:44-52
Print Passage: Matthew 13:44-52
Key Verse: Matthew 13:52

Children
Background Scripture: Matthew 13:44-52
Print Passage: Matthew 13:44-52
Key Verse: Matthew 13:44a

Matthew 13:44-52—KJV

44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.
45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:
46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.
47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:
48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.
49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

Matthew 13:44-52—NIV

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.
45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.
46 "When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.
47 "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.
48 "When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.
49 "This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous

50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.
52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

50 "and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
51 "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.
52 He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People express a desire for some wisdom to direct their lives. What inspires clarity when choosing between traditional paths and new teaching? Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven offer a connection between the old (wisdom of ancient of Israel) and the new (Jesus' fresh understanding of spiritual things).

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Synthesize and explain the relationship between kingdom metaphors.
2. Reflect on the joy of discovering the kingdom of God in everyday life.
3. Make righteous choices in daily life consistent with having a place in the future kingdom of God.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—These stories function as mini-parables in that Jesus uses familiar themes and storylines to communicate truths about the kingdom of God. Jesus uses the most effective tools for communication available.

—The theme of the first two mini-parables (see 13:44-45) is the surpassing value of the kingdom of God: each character devoted all of his resources to gain the treasure (the kingdom) and rejoiced in his success. Compare Mark 12:41-44; Philippians 4:14-20.

—The final parable picks up themes from the parable of the weeds (13:24-30): while many claim to belong in God's kingdom, God Himself knows His own and is fully able to distinguish between those who are and are not His (compare Matthew 7:15; 25:32-33). Note the link to bearing fruit (see Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33-35; John 15:1-8; and James 1:22-23).

—Again, the fate of those who do not follow God is this place of pain, darkness, and sorrow, separated from God forever (see 13:49). See also Matthew 8:12; 25:30. Jesus offers a way to God through Himself (see John 14:6-11; 17:20-26).

—Here (see 13:52) is one of the few positive portrayals of scribes in the Gospels (compare 23:15, 29): in this case, "every scribe" has opportunity to experience God's kingdom as a disciple and to bring his training to bear for the sake of the kingdom (consider Paul in Acts 9:20-22).

—First-century cultures in the Mediterranean area valued ancient things and values that stood the test of time. Things that were new were suspect. Identifying new objects as treasures would require discernment, training, and a willingness to take a risk in reputation.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Matthew was one of the twelve apostles present with Jesus throughout almost all of His earthly ministry. Only Peter, James, and John witnessed more of Jesus and what He could do through miracles than Matthew. The gospel of Matthew is the most Jewish-centric gospel of the four gospels. Matthew regularly cited Old Testament prophets' writings to illuminate Jesus's identity as Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

Although there is no way to determine with absolute certainty when the book of Matthew was written, most scholars agree that it was before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. Scholars base this view on the fact that Jesus spoke of many events as though they had not happened yet.

Many conservative biblical scholars believe that Matthew wrote this book in the AD 70s. However, some biblical scholars give an earlier date of the AD 50s or 60s. The gospel of Matthew bridges the Old and New Testaments.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

According to Matthew, the first thing Jesus did after His experience in the wilderness was to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:2, NIV). Jesus illuminated that nearness each time He healed the sick, opened His arms to the outcasts, respected the marginalized, and cared for the poor. Jesus also highlighted the nearness of the kingdom of God through the use of parables. Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is not an esoteric kingdom far away in the sweet by and by but is, rather, an up-close kingdom as close as a seed. Jesus' images of the kingdom of God echo the farewell address of Moses to the Israelites concerning the nearness of the Word of God (see Deuteronomy 30:14).

Matthew's gospel answers the question that was probably on the mind of every Jewish reader: "If Jesus is the King of the Jews, then where is God's promised kingdom?" In answering that question, Matthew highlights that Jesus did offer the kingdom to Israel, but the offer was rejected (see Matthew 4:17; 16:13-28; and 21:42-43). After this rejection, God decided to bring about a divine change of strategy; His primary work in the world would now be accomplished by His church, after which Jesus will come again to Earth and establish His kingdom—ruling the world from Israel.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Matthew: also known as Levi, he was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He is traditionally regarded as the author of the gospel of Matthew. When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, Matthew was a tax collector (or "publican")—one of the most reviled professions in ancient Judaism. However, little is known about Matthew.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Righteous (verse 49)—Greek: *dikaios* (dik'-ah-yos): correct, righteous, by implication innocent; "just" (KJV).

Treasure (verse 44)—Greek: *thésauros* (thay-sow-ros'): a storehouse for precious things—hence, a store; riches.

Wicked (verse 49)—Greek: *ponéros* (pon-ay-ros'): toilsome; bad; evil; malicious.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Hidden FOR You
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Kingdom Is like Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)
   B. The Kingdom Is like a Priceless Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46)
   C. The Kingdom Is like a Net (Matthew 13:47-50)
   D. Do You Understand? (Matthew 13:51-52)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Hidden FOR You

A prominent preacher in the Atlanta, Georgia, area once said in a sermon that there are times when God hides things *for* you and not *from* you. Most of us are familiar with things' being hidden *from* us. When we were young, many of us played hide-and-seek. A person or object was hidden, and we were tasked with finding who or what was hidden. As we journey through life, we experience situations in which things feel hidden from us only to realize that God supernaturally held what we thought was hidden. Hence, what we thought was hidden *from* us was actually hidden *for* us. In other words, God set it up so that many people overlooked it so that it could come into our plain view.

When Jesus spoke in parables, persons who were opposed to His ministry did not understand the meaning of His parables. Pharisees often looked for opportunities to trick Jesus or trip Him up (see Luke 11:53-54). Hence, by speaking in parables, Jesus made it extremely difficult for Pharisees to trick Him. However, by phrasing His teachings in parables, Jesus made His teachings clearer to His true followers. Plain language was a covert way for Jesus to get profound truths across to His supporters. Their speaking indirectly and figuratively made it difficult for the Pharisees to make their accusations stick. By utilizing parables, Jesus hid the truths of the kingdom of God in plain sight!

B. Biblical Background

Matthew's gospel provides Old Testament testimony concerning the birth of Jesus, the location of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt, the slaughter of infants by Herod, and the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's intense dedication to the setting of Jesus' life and its connection to Old Testament prophecy differentiated Jesus and His uniqueness from the false messiahs prevalent during that time.

The subject of Matthew's gospel is Jesus Christ. Matthew highlighted Jesus as the Messiah who is God's fulfillment of the promise of a King and Messiah who would reign forever. Jesus utilized parables to enlighten His disciples on truths concerning the kingdom of God. The parables in today's lesson are a part of a larger section of discourses concerning the kingdom of God (see Matthew 13:1-53). The first discourse (see Matthew 13:1-23) highlights the mixed response to the ministry of Jesus. The middle discourse (see Matthew 13:24-43) illuminates the poisonous work of the Evil One and its effect on the responses to Jesus' ministry. The final discourse (see Matthew 13:44-53) discusses the response to the discovery of the kingdom of God.

The central foci of the lesson today are the parable of the hidden treasure, the parable of the priceless pearl, and the parable of the net. The parables highlight the value of the kingdom of heaven, and they portray the kingdom of heaven as worthy of everything, including life itself. Consequently, there is no sacrifice too great for the sake of God's kingdom. Hence, the kingdom of heaven required a first-priority commitment from the followers of Jesus Christ. Both parables were given to encourage a higher level of commitment in following Jesus.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Kingdom Is like Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44)

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Some scholars surmise that perhaps no parable in the whole series of Jesus' parables came closer to the disciples' imagination than this parable. Biblical historians suggest that almost every village had a story of men becoming suddenly rich by finding hidden treasure that had been hastily concealed in a time of war or tumult. Subsequently, men lived in the expectation of finding those hidden treasures. Hence, many travelers were seen searching the ruins of ancient towns to find hidden treasure. As such, this parable would have immediately captured the imagination of the followers of Jesus Christ. The details of the parable resonated with Jesus' followers.

The dynamics of first-century life are instructive in understanding this parable. First, the people in the first century did not have banks or other public depositories to store their wealth. Hence, there was increased risk of robbery. Second, Israel was the land between the world's great powers. Egypt was to the south, and Babylon and the Medo-Persian Empire were located in the east. Assyria was located in the north. Hence, when these nations went to war, the land of Israel was caught in the middle. People learned how to protect their wealth from thieves and the plundering of enemy soldiers by burying items—including food, clothing, various household objects, and gold, silver, and jewels. Jewish historian Josephus observed that the gold, silver, furnishings, and other valuable items were buried underground as treasures of war.

If the person who buried the treasure died or was taken away as a captive, the treasure

would remain buried until someone stumbled upon it—which is the backdrop to this parable.

We are not explicitly told why the man was in this field. The inference is that he stumbled upon the treasure. He did not specifically search for it. He was filled with joy over what he found. To prevent others from stealing it, the man hid the treasure again. This highlights the fact that the man comprehended the value of what he found. He sold everything he had in order to buy the field that would house his newly found treasure. In this parable, the field represents the world. Interestingly, the treasure was hidden and discovered in the world. The word *treasure* (Greek: *thesaurus*) carries with it the idea of wealth laid up. Interestingly, the field does not recognize the value of the treasure laid up in it. Likewise, the kingdom of heaven is laid up in the world, and the world does not recognize the value of God's kingdom in its midst.

Some scholars question the man's ethics "because he did not take the treasure to the owner of the field. However, his character is validated by three facts. First, if he was dishonest, he would have simply stolen the treasure outright. . . . Second, rabbinic law provided that if a man found something that had obviously been lost and the owner was dead or unknown, the finder could keep it. [Additionally], if the owner had been aware of the treasure, he would have either refused to sell the field or removed the treasure prior to the sale. Third, this man went to great expense—selling all that he owned—to secure the treasure so that there would not be any question [of] his legal right to it" (https://www.gracebibleny.org/parables-of-the-kingdom-its-value-matthew-1344-52). In this parable, Jesus affirmed that the kingdom of God required great sacrifice, and it had to be personally appropriated. This is important because the Jewish people expected to be part of the kingdom simply because of their blood relationship to Abraham. The parable also teaches that the kingdom of heaven adds tremendous value to the world, and Jesus paid the ultimate price for the kingdom to grow and flourish in the world.

B. The Kingdom Is like a Priceless Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46)

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

This parable is similar to the parable in the preceding section. Both parables teach that the kingdom of heaven is of inestimable value. Additionally, both parables involve a man who sold all he had to possess something of great value. However, the difference between the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the priceless pearl reinforces that he man was not seeking the treasure in the parable of the hidden treasure . . . it was literally found by grace—unlike with the man who found the pearl of great price, who was actively seeking the pearls. The word *seeking* (Greek: *zeteo*) means "to intentionally learn the location of something in order to take possession of it." Nevertheless, the parable of the priceless pearl reinforces the parable of the hidden treasure. The widespread interpretation of these two parables is that the treasure and pearl represent Jesus Christ and His salvation. And while we cannot pay for salvation by selling all our possessions, we must be willing to give up everything to possess it once we have received the prize of salvation. In both parables,

the treasures are hidden, indicating that spiritual truth is missed by many and cannot be found by intelligence, power, or worldly wisdom alone.

It is important to note that once the merchant found the pearl of great price, he stopped seeking pearls. When Jesus Christ is received, further searching for things of value is unnecessary. Jesus Christ fulfills our greatest needs and satisfies our earthly and eternal longings. He makes us whole and clean before God. He calms and quiets our hearts, and He gives us hope for the future. It is also important to note that some scholars equate the merchant's seeking fine pearls as a picture of the kingdom of heaven at work, where Jesus is the merchant who comes looking for sinners because sinners are valuable to Jesus. The love of Jesus for sinners compelled and motivated Him to do what sinners could not do for themselves. Hence, it was the love of Jesus for lost humanity that caused Him to give up the glories of heaven for the sake of fallen humanity.

C. The Kingdom Is like a Net

(Matthew 13:47-50)

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like, unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

"Jesus prefaced this parable by saying it illustrates an aspect of the kingdom of heaven. The story concerns fishermen using a dragnet, a weighted net dragged along the bottom of a body of water to collect an assortment of fish. In the parable, the dragnet is cast into the sea and pulled onto shore full of all kinds of fish. [After the catch, the fishermen sat down and sorted the fish between fish that was 'good' and fish that was 'bad.' This required great effort, intentionality, and examination.] The fish worth keeping were gathered into containers, and the rest were tossed away" (https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-dragnet.html). This parable easily resonated with Jesus' listeners because they were fishermen in a fishing village that witnessed this type of activity daily.

Jesus interprets the parable and likens it to how things will be at the end of the age. Just as the net was cast into the sea drawing much fish, the Gospel message is to be cast into the world, drawing many people to it. Just as the net gathered all types of fish, regardless of their value, the Gospel will attract many people who neither repent nor desire to follow Christ. Just as the fish could not be sorted until the net was pulled ashore, false believers masquerading as true Christians will not be revealed until the end of the age. In the end of time, there will be a separation of the righteous from the wicked by the angelic messengers of God—where the wicked will be condemned to a fiery place of severe mental and physical suffering, and the righteous will live out their eternal salvation with Jesus. The parable's main point can be stated as follows: "A day of reckoning will come in which God will separate the true believers from mere pretenders, and those found to be false will be cast into hell" (https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-dragnet.html). Hence, the believers' job is to simply cast the Gospel net out into the world. The believer is to be a light on a hill. The believer's job is to be good and faithful to people—loving them, forgiving them, and treating them with integrity, dignity, respect, and compassion.

D. Do You Understand?
(Matthew 13:51-52)

Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

It was important to Jesus that the disciples understood the principles of the parables He had shared up to this point. The disciples responded in the affirmative. Jesus likened the disciples to scribes. The word *scribe* (Greek: *grammateus*) in verse 52 has reference to one who is a teacher or an interpreter. A scribe was one who was skilled in the Law of Moses. Hence, Jesus informed His disciples that they had a responsibility to not only understand the principles that were taught in the parables, but also to take what they learned and share it with and teach it to others. Jesus suggested that the disciples were to see themselves as householders in spiritual things. In other words, they were to exercise good stewardship over the treasure of the Good News of the kingdom of God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Today's lesson contained parables that likened the kingdom of God to various types of treasure. Jesus shared with His disciples secrets concerning the kingdom of God. He has also shared those secrets with twenty-first-century disciples. The secrets of the kingdom of God are to be shared with everyone. The Good News of the kingdom of God is priceless and should have the highest priority in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. We now have the awesome and gracious responsibility to share those secrets with the world around us. God has tasked us with the responsibility to teach the kingdom principles that have enlightened our journey thus far. Do you have a secret today? Please do not allow your secret to be the secret of the kingdom of God. The treasure that you now have is to be shared with the whole world. Don't keep it a secret. Teach and share the principles of the Good News of the kingdom of God.

PRAYER

Lord, in Your Word we have been exposed to what the kingdom of heaven is like. Thank You for those revelations. Please help us to faithfully live so that we will inherit the kingdom of heaven. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 24-30, 2023)

Finding and Gathering

MONDAY, July 24: "Wisdom Is Better than Jewels" (Proverbs 8:1-12)
TUESDAY, July 25: "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" (Job 28:1-2, 12-19)
WEDNESDAY, July 26: "A Miraculous Catch of Fish" (Luke 5:1-11)
THURSDAY, July 27: "Praise the Lord from the Heavens" (Psalm 148)
FRIDAY, July 28: "Store Up Treasures in Heaven" (Matthew 6:19-33)
SATURDAY, July 29: "God's Word Is Great Treasure" (Psalm 119:161-176)
SUNDAY, July 30: "Heaven's Hidden Treasures" (Matthew 13:44-52)

August 6, 2023 **Lesson 10**

INHERITING THE KINGDOM

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: **Inner Struggles**
Youth Topic: **Inner Struggles**

Children
General Lesson Title: **Living in the Spirit**
Children's Topic: **Love Well**

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 44:21-28

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: **Galatians 5:13-26**
Print Passage: **Galatians 5:13-26**
Key Verse: **Galatians 5:13**

Children
Background Scripture: **Galatians 5:13-26**
Print Passage: **Galatians 5:13-26**
Key Verses: **Galatians 5:22-23a**

Galatians 5:13-26—KJV

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.
14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.
16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.
17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.
19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

Galatians 5:13-26—NIV

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.
14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.
16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.
18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;
20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.
24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.
25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.
26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.
26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People may experience conflict in their decision making. What moves people toward life-giving choices? The book of Galatians contrasts the healthy fruit of choices guided by the Holy Spirit with the unhealthy consequences of choices that oppose the Spirit.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore the guidance of the Spirit and the good fruit that comes from life-giving choices.
2. Experience the presence of the Spirit and the blessings that come from making Spirit-led choices.
3. Follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit through spiritual practices that nurture obedience.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Paul consistently used a term (here translated "flesh") to indicate the parts of the self that function in opposition to God (compare Galatians 3:3; Romans 6:12-14; 7:5, 18). He did not thus label the physical body inherently evil; rather, he reflected on the degree to which sin had pervaded and perverted our created existence on every level.

—The self-sacrificial goodness of love (see John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 13) makes love the antithesis of self-absorption. Love is the truest expression of God's character (see 1 John 4). This quotation of Leviticus 19:18 echoes Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:37-40 and Mark 12:31.

—Paul makes it graphically clear that following the selfish desires of the "flesh" is ultimately destructive to self and all those in the self's sphere of influence. Compare Proverbs 30:14; James 3:14–4:2; Psalms 14:4; 57:4.

—Paul consistently set law and freedom in opposition (see 5:18; compare Galatians 5:1 and

Romans 8:2). He particularly emphasizes the role of the Spirit in delivering believers from an ineffective system of religion and from the natural law of death (see Romans 8:1-7).

—Following Jesus' example (see Matthew 7:16-20), Paul looks to the results and qualities of a person's life to identify whether one follows God (see 5:24-25). A life that bears fruit reflecting God's character is a life lived by the power of the Spirit and proof of one's status as a child of God.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Galatians is considered a book of Christian liberty directed to the Christians in Galatia. Paul had visited the churches in Galatia on each of his three missionary journeys. Paul addressed the issue that some Jewish teachers had begun to influence his converts to accept a different kind of teaching. The Jewish teachers were called "agitators" or "troublemakers," and they endeavored to add circumcision as a requirement for salvation. Paul vehemently spoke out against this teaching, and he referred to it as a perversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see Galatians 1:7). Paul also believed that adding any works to the Gospel message was akin to turning away from God (see Galatians 1:6) and falling from grace (see Galatians 5:4).

Bible scholars suggest an approximate date range for the writing of this letter. Specifically, several scholars date its writing before the establishment of the Jerusalem Council (a conference of the Christian apostles in Jerusalem, occurring around AD 50, decreeing that Gentile Christians did not have to observe the Mosaic Law of the Jews). It was occasioned by the insistence of certain Judaic Christians from Jerusalem that Gentile Christians from Antioch in Syria obey the Mosaic custom of circumcision. A delegation, led by the apostle Paul and his companion Barnabas, was appointed to confer with the church's elders in Jerusalem (www.britannica.com). Therefore, some scholars believe that Paul wrote Galatians just before AD 50. Other scholars believe that the book was written between AD 48 and AD 53. Hence, many scholars conclude that the book of Galatians was written somewhere between AD 48 and AD 56.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is believed that the name *Galatia* comes from the Gauls, described as erratic and unstable. Galatia was a mountainous region that was not hospitable to persons of faith. Paul and Barnabas had completed their first successful missionary journey. During that journey, they established many new churches in Asia and the southern region of the Roman territory of Galatia. Some scholars believe that Paul stopped in Galatia due to an illness on his way to Rome (see Galatians 4:13-14). And while in Galatia, Paul evangelized the area. When Paul and Barnabas returned to their home base of Antioch, they discovered that some men came to Antioch from Judea and were teaching the new Christians that unless they became circumcised according to the Law of Moses, they could not be saved. This group of "teachers" intended to impose the Law of Moses onto the Gentile Christians. These teachers were called Judaizers or legalists.

The dispute between Paul, Barnabas, and the Judaizers gave rise to the Jerusalem council (see Acts 15). What was subsequently discovered was that the apostles of the Jerusalem church did not send these Judaizers. They came on their own to sow discord and disagreement among the Gentiles within the newly established churches. The Jerusalem council decided that the Law of Moses and the Jewish lifestyle could not be imposed on

Gentile Christians. The book of Galatians came as a theological shock to many in the early church who insisted that believers add the Law of Moses to their faith. Paul proclaimed freedom from the Law and emphasized faith alone.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: Paul the apostle, commonly known as Saint Paul and known by his Hebrew name (Saul of Tarsus), was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. Generally regarded as one of the most prominent figures of the Apostolic Age, he founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-30s to the mid-50s AD.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Contrary (verse 17)—Greek: *kata* (kat-ah'): down from; against; over against.

Indulge the flesh (verse 13)—Greek: *ikanopoió* (i-ka-no-pi'-o): satisfy; gratify; become content; "occasion to the flesh" (KJV).

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Free to Be Me
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Free to Love Each Other (Galatians 5:13-15)
- B. Free to Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18)
- C. The Works of the Flesh (Galatians 5:19-21)
- D. The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- E. Living in the Spirit (Galatians 5:24-26)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Free to Be Me

One of the clamoring cries of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was/is the cry of people wanting to be "free to be me!" Many people who uttered this cry felt that various societal restraints limited them from expressing their inner feelings. They saw freedom as being able to do as they felt without regard to the feelings of others. Contemporary Christian singer-songwriter Francesca Battistelli sang the song "Free to Be Me" on the album *My Paper Heart*. Ms. Battistelli said that she wrote the song after she backed into a lawyer's car in her driveway. She noted that it was a crazy moment. She started writing and singing the song to cheer herself up, and she felt that God was telling her that it was okay, that He knew her, and that He made her who she is. Francesca also said that she heard from many young girls who were vulnerable to the idealized images on TV and hoped that this song would help free them from those comparisons. The backdrop to the song is relatable to many people as they seek to understand Jesus Christ's freedom. People do not have to be held in bondage to the expectations of others

who expect them to adhere to laws developed from an extra-biblical perspective.

The Judaizers in Paul's day wanted the Galatian Christians to conform to their way of salvation. Paul vigorously fought against the Judaizers' way of thinking and proclaimed that "free to be me" is found in being in Christ.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Galatians, like the book of Romans, explores righteousness and examines how persons not under the Law of Moses could experience personal holiness. In this book, Paul encourages the Galatians to hold firm to the principles through which they, as believers, had been taught. Paul reminded the believers in Galatia that salvation was not found in the Law but entirely in Jesus Christ through faith.

In his book *Richards' Complete Bible Handbook*, Lawrence O. Richards states, "The Judaizers who demanded Christians live under the Law attacked Paul's gospel of freedom on three grounds. First, they attacked Paul personally by denying he was an apostle; second, they pointed out that God authored the Law—how then can Paul say it should be set aside; and third, they accused Paul of licensing sin." Paul answered each attack in the book of Galatians. Paul defended his apostleship in 1:6–2:11. In 3:1–4:31, Paul affirmed that justification is by faith alone. In 5:1–6:10, Paul reflected on the morality of freedom.

Scholars agree that Paul wrote the book of Galatians to denounce and correct false teachings that had infiltrated the churches. Paul was insulted and felt a stinging personal attack from those questioning his integrity as an apostle. He also thought it was essential to reemphasize his love for the Galatians. Paul reaffirmed the critical and crucial answer to the Gospel, how a person receives it, and how believers can apply it in their daily lives. Paul used every available tool in his theological arsenal to persuade the Galatians to return to the pure Gospel: the idea that salvation comes through a personal belief in Jesus Christ and accepting Him as Lord and Savior.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Free to Love Each Other

(Galatians 5:13-15)

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

In verse 13, Paul reminded believers that their freedom in Christ was the aim of salvation. Paul repeatedly emphasized that the Christian life is a life of liberty. However, the believers in Galatia misunderstood the true nature of their freedom derived from salvation. Hence, Paul endeavored to clarify that their liberty in Christ was not a license to sin but, rather, was a license to love and serve. The word *liberty* (Greek: *sarx*) is a military term that suggests a base of operations and an incentive for doing something. Paul suggested that believers should not allow their flesh to become the base of operations to satisfy sinful desires. Instead, they were/are free to serve each other. The word *serve* (Greek: *douleuo*) is a word that means "to be a slave or to do a service." It suggests that we are bondservants free to serve

each other because of the freedom we have in salvation. In verse 14, Paul quoted Leviticus 19:18 to highlight that the love for God and the love for one another is the summary of the Law in its entirety. In verse 15, Paul reminded the Galatians that the rights of others restrict each believer's rights. In other words, Christian freedom is governed by love. The word *bite* (Greek: *dakno*) suggests a wounding of the soul, and the word *devour* (Greek: *kateshio*) means "stripping away, squandering, or wasting." Hence, when believers are not motivated by love, they have the potential to act out of self-interest and destroy others.

B. Free to Walk in the Spirit
(Galatians 5:16-18)

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the Law.

In verse 16, Paul instructed the Galatians to live by the Spirit and not by the flesh. To live by the Holy Spirit is to become *accessible* and *responsive* to the influence of the Holy Spirit; it means *patterning one's life* after the influence of the Holy Spirit (https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/galatians-5/). The word *walk* (Greek: *peripateo*) is in the present tense, and it suggests regulating one's life on an ongoing basis. In verse 17, Paul pushed back against the notion that one could have victory over the flesh by living according to the rules and regulations of the Law. Paul argued that the Holy Spirit was the one who could empower believers to overcome the power of the flesh. Paul warned the Galatians in verse 18 not to allow the Judaizers to lead them astray in attempting to please God solely by keeping the Law. In essence, Paul argued that the Holy Spirit freed them from the obligation of the Law.

C. The Works of the Flesh
(Galatians 5:19-21)

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

In verses 19-21, Paul contrasted the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Paul highlights realities that the believer struggles with daily. Paul suggests that whenever one is not walking by the Spirit, he or she is engaged in the deeds of the flesh. The word *works* (Greek: *ergon*) speaks of that which occupies a person's time and effort.

Some scholars organize the works of the flesh into four categories: sensual sins, religious sins, interpersonal sins, and social sins. Sensual sins encompass adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness. Although these sins were to some extent acceptable to the pagan culture, they were unacceptable for a follower of Christ. *Uncleanness* (Greek: *akatharsia*) speaks of ritual impurity, and lasciviousness (Greek: *aselegia*) speaks of filthiness.

Religious sins include idolatry and witchcraft. These are sins of worship. Idolatry (Greek: *eidololatreia*) references the worship of false gods, and witchcraft (Greek: *pharmakeia)* speaks of sorcery and magical arts. Interpersonal sins encompass hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, and murders. Social sins include drunkenness and

revellings. The term *revelries* (Greek: *komos*) speaks of unrestrained partying. Paul used the phrase "and such like" to indicate that his list was not exhaustive.

Paul affirms that to walk in the works of the flesh continuously is to walk in open rebellion against God. Paul itemized the various works of the flesh to show the Galatians the seriousness of their allowing their freedom in Christ to become a license to sin. Paul issued a strong and sobering warning—individuals engaged in the aforementioned works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God (verse 21).

D. The Fruit of the Spirit
(Galatians 5:22-23)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

In verses 22-23, Paul contrasts the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Paul provides a portrait of a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. He highlights the fruit of the Spirit, and he illuminates nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. The characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit are categorized into three groups. The first category, which consists of love, joy, and peace, refers to an individual's well-being. The second category, which encompasses longsuffering, kindness, and goodness, highlights our relationship with others. The third category, which consists of faith, meekness, and temperance, illuminates our relationship with God.

Interestingly, Paul uses the plural in explaining living after or in the flesh (*works of the flesh*), but he uses the singular (fruit, not *fruits*, of the Spirit) in explaining being guided by the fruit of the Spirit. It is important to note that the fruit of the Spirit is not one of the *gifts of the Spirit* that are distributed on an individual basis by the will of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit, however, is for every Christian.

It is appropriate that love is mentioned first because it undergirds the other characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. The ancient Greek word *agape* is translated as "love." *Agape* illustrates the kind of love that is more of a decision than of the spontaneous heart. It expresses the essential nature of God. It is a sacrificial expression that is the greatest virtue of the Christian life. It describes the posture of God toward His Son and the human race. *Joy* (Greek: *chara*) speaks of cheerfulness and calm delight. The word *peace* (Greek: *eirene*) suggests rest and contentment resulting in harmonious relationships accomplished through the Gospel. *Longsuffering* (Greek: *makrothumia*) indicates the ability to bear adversity, injury, and reproach. It speaks of self-restraint and being long-tempered. The word *kindness* (Greek: *chrestotes*) suggests gentleness, integrity, and moral goodness in character. Closely akin to kindness is *goodness* (Greek: *agathosune*), which speaks of love in action. It expresses kind activity on behalf of others. *Faith* or *faithfulness* (Greek: *pistis*) has reference to reliability, dependability, and trustworthiness. It speaks of the character of the believer. *Gentleness* (Greek: *prautes*) has reference to mildness of nature or meekness. Some scholars refer to it as an inward grace where one is under the control of God. One mustn't confuse gentleness with weakness. Gentleness refers to one who is God-taught, God-tamed, and God-treasured. *Self-control* (Greek: *egkrateia*) has reference to mastering personal desires and lusts. It suggests having the power

to take hold of (something). It is essential to understand that the source of the fruit of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit and not the individual believer. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to live by and be led by the Holy Spirit as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in the world around us.

E. Living in the Spirit
(Galatians 5:24-26)

And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

In verse 24, the word *crucified* (Greek: *stauroo*) means "to destroy utterly." The tense of the verb suggests an actual event, and Paul indicates that the destruction of the flesh encompasses purposeful and intentional action that results in intense and agonizing pain. The flesh is crucified by daily communion with God.

In verse 25, the word *live* (Greek: *zao*) means "breathing and being active in God's kingdom agenda." The word *walk* (Greek: *stoicheo*) references the onward march of a soldier. Hence, in verses 24-26, Paul suggests that the Holy Spirit also directs believers whom the Holy Spirit activates. Therefore, believers are to strive for unity and shun pride and envy.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

When we recognize our true position in Jesus Christ, we experience the true meaning of freedom. True freedom is a release from the power of sin over our lives, and it is a release from the need for external regulations because of our inner relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are set free to concentrate on loving Jesus and loving others, and experiencing God's changes in us. Paul's teaching concerning freedom in Christ is an invitation to live as empowered Christians in the world around us. The fruit of the Spirit actually "frees us to be us" and frees us to reflect the vision of the kingdom of God.

PRAYER

Father, there are many times when the flesh tries to hold us hostage. Help us to allow the Spirit to have complete control in our lives so that we will live according to Your will and way. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 31–August 6, 2023)

Inheriting the Kingdom

MONDAY, July 31: "You Must Be Born Again" (John 3:1-9)
TUESDAY, August 1: "God Loves the World" (John 3:10-21)
WEDNESDAY, August 2: "Take Up Your Cross" (Matthew 16:21-28)
THURSDAY, August 3: "God Sweeps Away Our Sins" (Isaiah 44:21-28)
FRIDAY, August 4: "God's Spirit and Words Remain" (Isaiah 59:1-8, 16-21)
SATURDAY, August 5: "Rebirth and Renewal through the Spirit" (Titus 3:1-8)
SUNDAY, August 6: "Called to Freedom" (Galatians 5:13-26)

August 13, 2023 **Lesson 11**

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Build Up One Another
Youth Topic: Kingdom Living

Children
General Lesson Title: Life in the Kingdom
Children's Topic: Help Each Other Do What Is Right

Devotional Reading
Proverbs 2:1-11

Adult/ Youth
Background Scripture: Romans 14:10-23
Print Passage: Romans 14:10-23
Key Verse: Romans 14:19

Children
Background Scripture: Romans 14:10-23
Print Passage: Romans 14:13-23
Key Verse: Romans 14:19

Romans 14:10-23—KJV

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.
12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.
13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.
14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Romans 14:10-23—NIV

10 You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.
11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'"
12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.
13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.
14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.
15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.

15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.
16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:
17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.
18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.
19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.
20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.
21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.
22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.
23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.
16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.
17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,
18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.
19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.
20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.
21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.
22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves.
23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People sometimes judge the flaws and faults of others rather than focusing on their own shortcomings. What is it people hope to prove when passing judgment on others? Romans 14 offers an alternative to passing judgment on one another, suggesting that we resolve, instead, to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Discern the difference between religious rule following and love-based obedience.
2. Repent of their tendency to judge based on legalism and embrace following God's rules.
3. Confess their judgmental tendencies and seek to build up one another in love.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—The question of forbidden food was really a question of following the Mosaic Law: the followers of Jesus are not required to obey the purity laws God laid down for his people Israel through Moses. Instead, they are to follow the law of love (see also Matthew 22:32-40).

—Paul's point is that acting in love for one another

makes questions of food and in-group required behavior null and void: our loving one another seeks to encourage others toward maturity, not to destroy one another's faith by arguments made out of pride and self-righteousness. See Galatians 5:1-12; Acts 15:19-31; 1 Corinthians 8; 1 Timothy 4:3-5.

—Although Paul was deeply concerned to communicate the freedom that believers enjoy in Christ (see Galatians 5:1-6), his greatest concern wass the developing of godly character in believers, specifically in experiencing and demonstrating God's character in their actions (see Galatians 5:13-14): as believers experience more of God, they will also comprehend more of the freedom He has bought for them.

—Paul prioritized character and fruit over specific codes of behavior because he knew that when God's character is replicated in His people, the resulting behavior will reflect God, honor God, and demonstrate to onlookers that God is present and active in His kingdom (see Romans 14:17-18; see also Galatians 5:22-23 and James 3:11-18).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Although some modern scholars question the authorship of the book of Romans, the contents of the book and its expository caliber suggest that the author of the book of Romans is one of the greatest theological thinkers in the early church—the apostle Paul. It is important to note that Paul's name is mentioned in the first verse of the first chapter of the book of Romans. It is believed that Paul wrote this epistle during his third missionary journey, which took place in the spring of AD 56 or 57, as he made plans to visit Rome. Many scholars date the writing of this book around AD 58. The book of Romans was written to believers, most of them Gentiles, in the capital city of the Roman Empire. Paul wrote from his experience as a believer in Jesus Christ. Paul was educated at the feet of Gamaliel (Rabban Gamaliel). Rabban Gamaliel was president of the Great Council and the spiritual leader of his people during the last decades before the destruction of the Temple around 25–50 BC. Gamaliel was a New Testament Pharisee, a lawyer who belonged to the Pharisee sect. He was also on the Council that sat in judgment of the apostles. He was highly respected in the Sanhedrin and was a liberal Jewish teacher who encouraged moderation in dealing with the apostles. Paul's educational background is apparent in his technical, theological, philosophical, and practical presentation of the book of Romans.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

It is interesting to note that the book of Romans was written to a church that Paul did not establish and had not visited. The reason for his writing this epistle was to give an account of the Gospel he preached as he prepared for a visit to Rome. Most scholars believe that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, collecting money from the Macedonian and Achaian Christians for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Many scholars suggest that Paul wrote the book to introduce himself and establish his authority as an apostle to the believers in Rome. The *Quest Study Bible* suggests that Paul wrote the book of Romans (1) to introduce himself to the believers in Rome and enlist their help in spreading the Gospel; (2) to develop and defend the truth of the Gospel he had been preaching; and (3) to encourage the believers to rely totally on God's grace for salvation.

What is interesting is that much of the book of Romans prior to the lesson for today contends with the relationship between Israel and Gentiles in God's work of salvation and the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles within the church. However, the relationship expresses itself in the practice and observation of dietary practices. Living out our salvation plays itself out in every area of life. Perhaps that's why the central theme of this book is God's salvation power. Although the book of Romans is a deep theological treatise, it is also a very practical book. Its practical teachings illustrate the tension between faith and works and between grace and Law. Historically speaking, the book of Romans helped guide Martin Luther to discover that faith alone justifies, which generated the Reformation. Many scholars refer to the book of Romans as "The Gospel According to Paul."

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: Paul the apostle, commonly known as Saint Paul and known by his Hebrew name (Saul of Tarsus), was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. Generally regarded as one of the most influential figures of the Apostolic Age, he founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-30s to the mid-50s AD.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Judge (verse 10)—Greek: *krinó* (kree'-no): to decide, whether privately or in court; condemn; conclude; act as judge.

Stumble(th) (verse 20, NIV/verse 21, KJV)—Greek: *proskomma* (pros'-kom-mah): a stumbling; an occasion of stumbling; undergo moral embarrassment.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
- A. Relationship Construction
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
- A. Don't Be an Illegitimate Judge (Romans 14:10-12)
- B. Don't Be a Stumbling Block (Romans 14:13-18)
- C. The Mature Christian Should Be a Steppingstone (Romans 14:19-23)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Relationship Construction

Did you know that a house can be built in approximately six months? Obviously, the size of the house must be taken into consideration. Additionally, the foundation must be laid. The plumbing PVC pipes are laid within the foundation. After the foundation is laid, the framing is put in place. The roof normally follows the framing, and windows are then installed. The insulation follows the installation of the windows. Normally, the drywall is placed inside the home after insulation at this stage, and the siding or brick is laid. The interior is then assembled, as well as the various appliances, kitchen sink, bathroom

fixtures, and other items. The total process encompasses many details. At each step, building inspectors perform their duties by ensuring that each building area meets the established codes. Amazingly, what took six months to build can be demolished in a matter of months or years.

Consider the months and years it takes to build emotional construction and how what is constructed can be destroyed in minutes. The Message Bible (MSG) provides a unique perspective on Romans 14:19-22; it states, "So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words; don't drag them down by finding fault. You're certainly not going to permit an argument over what is served or not served at supper to wreck God's work among you, are you? I said it before, and I'll say it again: All food is good, but it can turn bad if you use it badly, if you use it to trip others up and send them sprawling. When you sit down to a meal, your primary concern should not be to feed your face but to share the life of Jesus. So be sensitive and courteous to the others who are eating. Don't eat or say or do things that might interfere with the free exchange of love. Cultivate your own relationship with God, but don't impose it on others." Many relationships are under construction. Others have been demolished after construction. Perhaps we can build better relationships by following the instructions as presented by Paul in Romans 14:19-22.

B. Biblical Background

The doctrinal themes of faith, grace, righteousness, and justification are foundational to the book of Romans presented by Paul. These themes are highlighted in the first eleven chapters. In chapter 12, Paul connects the doctrinal themes with our relationship to God in the presentation of our bodies as "living sacrifices to God." In chapter 13, Paul highlights our relationship to civil government. In chapter 14, Paul discusses the relationships between Christians and how Christians should guard against having a judgmental attitude.

Specifically, Romans 14 deals with Christian liberties. It highlights how God's righteousness is applied to everyday life. The salvation Paul describes in the previous chapters is designed to transform a Christian's life with God, one's neighbor, and society in general. Paul's mission in writing the book of Romans is to present a theological treatise that fully explains the dynamic nature of God's righteousness for the Jewish and Gentile Christians living in Rome. Historically, Israel unsuccessfully tried to obtain righteousness through the Law of Moses, even though Moses' purpose for the law was misunderstood. Paul profoundly declared that true righteousness is made available to all through faith in Jesus Christ, not in the adherence to the Law of Moses.

Chapter 14 provides additional instructions concerning living together in harmony as believers. Paul addressed two significant issues. He focused on believers' judging others, and Paul also focused on believers' causing others to sin. Because God will eventually judge all people, believers should not "usurp" God's prerogative by seeking to judge others. Every person will stand before God one day and give an account for his/her actions in this life. Regarding the second issue of causing others to sin, Paul highlighted how persons should not purposely eat or drink things that cause others to stumble in their walk with the Lord.

In other words, believers do not have the right to force their liberties on others. Scholars question whether Paul addressed issues pertaining to the information he had gathered concerning the Roman churches or whether he was writing more broadly and in a general sense. Regardless, Paul's message was that the one true God redeems all of humanity through Jesus Christ and that we have access to that redemption through faith and not through human practices. Hence, this truth should guide and guard us in our relationships with each other.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Don't Be an Illegitimate Judge
(Romans 14:10-12)

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Paul raised a profound question designed to challenge the Christians in Rome to look closely at their relationship with each other: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?" The word *nought* (Greek: *exoutheneo*) means "to despise or to treat with contempt." Paul challenged the thinking of both sides of a dispute concerning the eating of meat. Apparently, the weak brother attempted to judge the strong brother with accusations of sin, and the strong brother endeavored to judge the weak brother with ridicule and accusations that a vegetarian lifestyle had no merit. By questioning both parties, Paul reminded all concerned that judgment belongs to God. Hence, believers should welcome all sinners because God is the one who has the final word. Scholars suggest that the judgment seat (also known as a bema seat) is likened to where the winners of the Olympic Games come before the judge and receive crowns. Similarly, Christians' works will be tested by fire, and they will be rewarded for the works that remain. It is important to remember that the judgment seat of Christ is only concerned with Christians' rewards and positions in the kingdom, not with their salvation.

In verse 11, Paul referred to Isaiah 45:23 in highlighting God's final judgment. The phrase "bowing the knee" is a portrait of submission. Paul suggests that in the final analysis, every individual will submit to God, even those who rejected God. Likewise, the phrase "every tongue shall confess" indicates that every person one day will recognize and acknowledge God as the Sovereign ruler of the universe. Paul provides a sobering reminder in verse 12 of the personal responsibility and accountability all will have and take on the final day.

B. Don't Be a Stumbling Block
(Romans 14:13-18)

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but

righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

Paul highlights that Christians are to live in a manner that does not cause others to stumble. The freedoms Christians have in Christ are to encourage believers to live upward toward God and outward toward humanity. Because judgment belongs to God alone, believers are to discontinue judging others and remember that judging others is an act of superiority. In verse 13a, the word *judge* (Greek: *krino*) means "to condemn." However, in verse 13b, the word *judge* means "to determine or make a decision." Hence, believers are to be sensitive and loving enough to avoid causing pain to another brother or sister. In verses 14-16, Paul cautioned the believers in Rome against hurting the spirituality of others in word or in deed. The word *hurt* (Greek: *lupeo*), related to verse 15, speaks of causing agony, sorrow, or pain. Paul illuminated that believers should guard against becoming for others obstacles that cause pain, agony, and sorrow.

Although Paul emphasized that everything God created in its natural form was clean and only contaminated by humanity, Paul recognized that the conscience of others could lead persons to different conclusions. In other words, nothing justifies the destruction of a Christian brother or sister over food. The issue is no longer a person's personal liberty. What becomes important is to walk in love toward those whom Jesus loves and for whom He died. Hence, Paul instructed the believers in Rome to consistently examine themselves and to intentionally guard against compromising the consciences of others. The consciences of others keep them sensitive to sin. Hence, Christians should also be sensitive to the consciences of others and not allow their good to be spoken of as evil. Paul affirms that the liberty we have in Jesus Christ and freedom from the Law is good; however, that good becomes null and void if we use it to destroy the faith and witness of others.

C. The Mature Christian Should Be a Steppingstone (Romans 14:19-23)

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

In verses 19-21**,** Paul challenged the believers in Rome to rearrange their priorities and focus on things that produce peace and resulted in the edification of others. Paul encouraged his readers to emphasize that which is internal and deemphasize that which is external. Paul shared this wisdom because he understood that misplaced priorities hindered the work of God. Specifically, Paul cautioned the believers in Rome to not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. Christians do not have the liberty to cause a brother or sister to stumble, be offended, or be weakened. It is important to note that Paul is not emphasizing legalism. Paul is emphasizing love, consideration, and God's kingdom agenda.

In verses 22-23, Paul highlighted how misalignment with the things of God results in harm to the believer. In other words, our words and our deeds are to be in concert with the word of God. In asking the question regarding faith,

Paul suggests that if a person has a strong faith and feels at liberty to partake of certain things, praise God! However, the person should practice his or her strong faith before God and not cause others to stumble. In concluding his discourse, Paul presents a principle in judging gray areas. Paul states that what is not of faith is sin. In other words, believers are to be "stepping stones" and not "stumbling blocks" to the world around them.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The church in Rome encompassed a diverse membership. There were Jews and Gentiles with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. The diversity resulted in many problems that threatened the unity of the body of Christ. Paul suggests that in all things love should be center stage. It has been stated that "in matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love." However, liberty does not mean compromise, and it is vitally important that believers say "yes" to what God says yes to, and "no" to what God says no to—while remaining sensitive to the consciences of others and consistent with the Word of God. Relationships with God, self, and others are constructed better when they are built on the Word, work, and witness of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Eternal God, just as You have forgiven us and have shown mercy toward us, help us to do likewise in our relationships with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 7-13, 2023)

The Nature of the Kingdom

MONDAY, August 7: "God Guards the Paths of Justice" (Proverbs 2:1-11)
TUESDAY, August 8: "Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness" (Matthew 5:3-12)
WEDNESDAY, August 9: "Righteousness in God's Kingdom" (Matthew 5:13-20)
THURSDAY, August 10: "God Keeps the Steadfast in Peace" (Isaiah 26:1-11)
FRIDAY, August 11: "Rejoice in God's Word" (Nehemiah 7:73–8:3, 5-6, 9-12)
SATURDAY, August 12: "Rejoice in Hope" (Romans 12:9-21)
SUNDAY, August 13: "Righteousness, Peace, and Joy" (Romans 14:10-23)

August 20, 2023 **Lesson 12**

JUDGMENT IN THE KINGDOM

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Commended!
Youth Topic: Total Disclosure

Children
General Lesson Title: Focusing on God's Kingdom
Children's Topic: Love and the Kingdom

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 41:1-14

Adult/Youth
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:1-21
Print Passage: 1 Corinthians 4:1-6, 17-21
Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:5

Children
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:1-21
Print Passage: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, 17-21
Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:4

1 Corinthians 4:1-6, 17-21—KJV

LET A man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.
2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.
3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.
4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.
5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.
6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above

1 Corinthians 4:1-6, 17-21—NIV

THIS, THEN, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.
2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.
3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.
4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.
5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.
6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will

that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

. . . . .

17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.
18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.
19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.
20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.
21 What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

. . . . .

17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.
18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.
19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.
20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.
21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: It is easier for us to pronounce judgment on the wrongs of others than to make our own wise choices. How can we remain focused on the right things? The First Letter to the Corinthians indicates that God's people are subject to the same judgment and discipline as everyone else.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Realize that God's people are subject to the same judgment and discipline as everyone else.
2. Value God's impartiality as a basis for their own humility.
3. Submit to living in humble relationship with others.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—Stewards were often slaves or freedmen entrusted with the financial and day-to-day affairs of the owner's estate. The future success and well-being of all those in the household depended on their wisdom and honesty—their trustworthiness (see Luke 12:42; 1 Peter 4:10).

—Only God is the final Judge when it comes to sin (see John 5:22-27; 16:8-11; Romans 2:1-16; 2 Timothy 4:1): judging oneself or another essentially usurps the place that only God has the right to claim.

—"Going beyond what is written" refers to Paul's teachings, the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) as already affirmed by the church. Believers are not to demand more of one another than God Himself requires of them (see Romans 14:13, 22-23).

—Living subject to the same standards and with only God as judge develops humility in God's people—no one is better than or above another—and thus makes us more effective in our mission, in wholehearted obedience to God (see Galatians 3:26-28; Luke 10:38-42; Matthew 20:1-16).

—True discipleship looks only to replicate Christ's character and lifestyle, not establish credentials to lord it over others: see Paul's confidence in his disciple Timothy's ability to demonstrate the humility and godliness of Jesus (see 4:17).

—In Paul's theology, the power of God's kingdom is demonstrated best in God's salvation (through Jesus' death and resurrection) and transformation (through the work of the Spirit) of His people (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5); this itself is cause for humility (see 1 Corinthians 1:28-31).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The Romans destroyed the ancient Greek city of Corinth in 146 BC; it was rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. The Romans repopulated Corinth with Roman military veterans and formerly enslaved people. By Paul's day, the city had become a major commercial center. Scholars suggest that I Corinthians was written between AD 52 and 57 by the apostle Paul. Paul identifies himself as the author (see 1:1; 16:21). Paul identifies Apollos (3:5) and Timothy (4:17) as his ministry associates. The book of Acts alludes to the establishment of the Corinthian church during Paul's second missionary journey as he traveled from Athens to Corinth (see Acts 18:1-17). On that missionary journey, Paul labored with Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish-Christian couple who had been expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius because of their Jewish heritage. Paul visited Corinth several times. The letter to the Corinthians was written in Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey. Scholars suggest that it was written during the last year of Paul's three-year abode in Ephesus. Hence, the Corinthian church was approximately four years old when the letter was written.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The city of ancient Corinth was in southern Greece, west of Athens, and strategically situated on the commercial trade routes in Paul's day. Corinth became a great center for international commerce, leading to exposure and notoriety. In Paul's day, the city of Corinth was characterized as the finest city in Greece. It had a reputation of being an industrial trade center. It was also the capital of Achaia. The city's diverse population consists of approximately 250,000 residents. The city's reputation as an industrial center brought a lot of notoriety. However, a lot of depravity also came with notoriety. The decadence of the city was astounding. Sexual immorality and many other expressions of corruption were the norms.

The believers in Corinth exercised their faith in this pluralistic society full of distractions. It was challenging to offer a unique, authentic, Christian alternative to the Corinthian culture. The Corinthian congregation mainly consisted of former pagans, who had a divisive tendency to elevate those who led them to Christ and develop factions based on their favorite personalities. They

misunderstood the proper view of the minister and the relationship between the minister and the people. By educating the Corinthians on the correct view of ministers and ministry, Paul endeavored to decrease the Corinthian church's immorality, carnality, and arrogance and its tendency to operate in factions.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Apollos: an evangelist, apologist, church leader, and friend of the apostle Paul's. Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, described as "eloquent," "mighty in the Scriptures," "fervent in the spirit," and "instructed in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:24). In AD 54, he traveled to Ephesus, where he taught boldly in the synagogue.

Paul: Paul the apostle, commonly known as Saint Paul and known by his Hebrew name (Saul of Tarsus), was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. Generally regarded as one of the most prominent figures of the Apostolic Age, he founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-30s to the mid-50s AD. He established the Corinthian church around AD 50 to 52.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Faithful (verse 2)—Greek: *pistos* (pis-tos'): reliable; trustworthy; believing; trustful.

Heart(s) (verse 5)—Greek: *kardia* (kar-dee'-ah): mind(s); character; inner self; will; intention; center.

Shame (verse 14 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *entrepó* (en-trep'-o): to turn about, reverence, put to shame.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. A Corinthian Soap Opera
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Criteria for Being a Servant of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1-6)
   B. A Display of Authority (1 Corinthians 4:17-21)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Corinthian Soap Opera

Have you ever enjoyed or been intrigued by a good soap opera? Soap operas are melodramas that highlight family life, personal relationships, emotional conflicts, moral failures, sexual dramas, domestic challenges, and many other topical issues that speak to the cultural challenges of the day. The Corinthian church could be seen as a soap opera in many ways. The Corinthian church was full of fights, factions, and rumors. Pride, arrogance, division, and factions were on full display. Relationship issues, moral failings, leadership struggles, marriage challenges, and divorce rumblings permeated the church. Lust, sexual cravings, lawsuits, doctrinal battles, religious egos, and other deviant behaviors were displayed. The humanity of the Christians in Corinth was on full display. Only mature followers and faithful leaders could transform a soap opera into a mighty force for God. God used Paul

to set some standards for ministry and ministers to assist the Corinthian church in becoming an effective witness for Christ rather than a melodrama soap opera for the world.

B. Biblical Background

Leadership for the Christian church has been a challenge throughout its existence. Unfortunately, the church has stumbled over leadership issues since its genesis. Questions often surfaced concerning the correct model for spiritual leadership. For example, some see the Christian leader as a pastor, bishop, shepherd, or elder. Others see the church leader as a priest, rabbi, prophet, or presbyter. Others liken the religious leader to a CEO, counselor, mentor, coach, or friend. Nevertheless, Paul informed the Christians in Corinth that Christian leaders are "servants" and "stewards" of God's mysteries (see 1 Corinthians 4:1).

After leveling fierce criticism against the Corinthian church in chapter 3, Paul utilized a sober tone in chapter 4 to warn the Corinthian Christians of the coming judgment. Paul challenged the ongoing personal criticism and continuous popularity skirmishes between factions that developed within the church. Questions concerning minister authority and human self-evaluation led to Corinthian factionalism. Paul connected the issue of minister authority with the challenge concerning the limitations of human judgment.

This lesson speaks to a church community void of mature spiritual leadership. The lack of spiritual leadership left the Corinthian church vulnerable to power struggles, popularity contests, and extreme expressions of sensuality. In chapter 4, Paul highlighted the role of the Christian minister. Because of the spiritual immaturity of the believers in Corinth, they became susceptible to false ministers. The Corinthians were challenged with false ministers who abused their role as ministers and were motivated by personal greed and vainglory. Paul differentiated himself from the false ministers who were misleading the believers in Corinth. Ministers are servants of God, and they are stewards of the Gospel.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Criteria for Being a Servant of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1-6)

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

Paul utilized images of humility to describe the Christian leader. The images suggest subordination and dependence. Paul was concerned that the believers in Corinth had an inadequate understanding of the role and function of the minister. In verse 1, Paul clarified his role and, by association, that of other ministers. The pronoun "us" in verse 1 speaks of Paul, Apollos, and (Peter) Cephas,

and the word *man* has reference to Christians in general. Paul provides wisdom on how to observe and evaluate ministers. Paul utilized two images in referring to ministers: servants and stewards. The word *servants* (Greek: *huperetes*) speaks of an under-oarsman or an under-rower.

Under-rowers were the lowest-galley slaves on ships. They rowed on the bottom tier of a ship, and they were the individuals who performed the most menial tasks. The word *stewards* (Greek: *oikonomos*) speaks of a "house manager" or one in complete control of a household. The steward managed the property and financial affairs of the master. Additionally, the steward managed other servants on behalf of the master. Both images highlight matters of supreme importance entrusted to ministers by someone far greater than the servant or steward. Unlike the Greco-Roman world with its hierarchical distinctions and competing power centers, ministers are primarily fellow servants not in competition but, rather, in partnership to advance God's agenda. With the word *account* (Greek: *logizomai*), Paul was speaking of taking inventory, calculating, or estimating. He suggested that the ministers see themselves as mere slave subordinates and subject to God, entrusted with the tremendous responsibility of accurately dispensing the Word of God with the full knowledge that there will be a divine accounting one day (see 2 Timothy 2:15).

Verse 2 establishes the fundamental requirement for ministers of the Gospel to be found faithful. Ministers are to be (1) faithful to the Lord of their calling/appointment as ministers, (2) faithful to the assignment of rightly dividing God's Word, and (3) faithful in their deportment as it relates to edifying believers and being a living example of God's Word. Since ministers are faithful, who should judge that faithfulness (verse 3)? Paul cautioned his readers against judging ministers. In Paul's view, the judgment of others should have little influence over the ministers' fidelity to their assignment. The chief aim of the minister is to please God, not people. Paul questioned the qualifications of mere mortals to judge ministers. Paul wanted his readers to know that while human beings should be able to assess the character of ministers, only God can judge. Paul did not express great concern about the criticisms and judgments levied against him. Paul did not see judging as the be-all and end-all aspect of the Christian witness. Because Jesus Christ is the most qualified judge, Paul refused to allow the judgments of people to detour, dissuade, or distract him from his mission (verse 3).

In verse 4, Paul highlighted his clear conscience in performing his ministerial duties. Although his conscience was clear, Paul suggested that he was not free from judgment. It is important to note that although Paul indicated that he had a clear conscience in his exercise of ministerial leadership, he was not suggesting that he was not guilty of mistakes. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that his own judgment about himself was insufficient to justify him. He strongly advised the Corinthians to understand that their human evaluations were no more than mere human judgments. In essence, Paul wanted his readers to realize that neither he nor others had the authority to determine his faithfulness as a minister. Only the Lord could make an

accurate judgment of the faithfulness of him or any minister. In a climatic fashion, Paul suggested that God will one day judge the life and deeds of every individual. Hence, there will be a reckoning one day, and that reckoning will occur at God's last judgment. Therefore, in verse 5, he concludes that the appropriate posture to take concerning the judgment of a minister is to wait until the Lord Jesus Christ returns (see Matthew 25:31-46 and 2 Timothy 4:1). When the Lord returns, that which is concealed will be revealed. Partial and imperfect human knowledge will become complete (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; and 1 John 3:5). Evil works that were once hidden will be brought to light. Immoral deeds, hidden motives, and ungodly intentions will be revealed. However, those who have been faithful will receive praise and commendation from God. Jesus will judge righteously and reward His followers for their faithfulness.

In verse 6, Paul warned against conceit. The believers in Corinth were intoxicated with pride concerning their human wisdom and spiritual leaders. Paul reminded his readers that he utilized agriculture, architecture, and servants as metaphors to illustrate the correct approach to Jesus' church and Jesus' ministers (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-15). Additionally, Paul highlighted his service and the service of Apollos as examples to follow in laboring together in the ministry of the Gospel. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that ministers should not be separated into rival factions. Paul taught that ministers are co-laborers united together in following the teachings of Scripture and submitting to the authority of Scripture for kingdom purposes.

B. A Display of Authority
(1 Corinthians 4:17-21)

For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

Paul urged his readers to be imitators of him regarding his unselfish devotion to Jesus Christ and his unwavering love and support of his fellow laborers (see verse 16). Paul was so concerned about the Corinthians' modeling him as he modeled Christ that he sent Timothy to them to remind them of his approach to ministry and to fellow laborers (verse 17). Timothy was not sent to offer instructions about new things; he was sent to "remind" the Corinthians of what they already knew.

In communicating to the Corinthians, Paul highlighted the sin of pride that had surfaced and expressed itself again in eloquent speech and prideful lifestyles (verse 18). The sin of arrogance remained a stubborn evil in the life of the Corinthian congregation. It manifested itself in the form of a spirit of division and a lack of respect for apostolic authority. Some of the leaders in Corinth were so arrogant that they suggested that Paul would not return to Corinth out of fear. However, they underestimated Paul and his concern for the church and the church's witness. Paul addressed the sin of pride directly and highlighted how it was antithetical to spiritual maturity and spiritual leadership

(verse 19). Paul was very concerned about these arrogant leaders' influence on the church members. Paul informed the Corinthians of his return and the importance of ministering in the power of God to advance a kingdom agenda (verse 20). This is the first time that Paul utilizes the word *kingdom* in his letter. In using this word, Paul intentionally highlights the lordship of Jesus Christ, which has no room for prideful earthly leaders.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to repent and discontinue creating divisions in the church and displaying arrogance. Paul informed the Corinthian church that he could either deal with them gently if they changed their ways, or confront them aggressively with a rod to punish them (verse 21). Scholars debate whether Paul was referencing a *literal rod* or a *figurative rod*. Regardless, in communicating correction to the Corinthians, Paul exercised spiritual authority.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

It is fundamentally true that the Corinthian church had its share of problems and issues that needed to be addressed. However, we should not think of Paul's letter to the Corinthian church as only relevant in addressing the issues of the local Corinthian church. On the contrary, 1 Corinthians speaks to pride, arrogance, division, and sin on display in the modern church. Paul's letter to the Corinthians contains a treasure trove of practical Christian instructions designed to help Christians of any age imitate Jesus Christ for the glory of God. As we practice the teachings of Paul, we will gain a more accurate view of the church, the minister, and the ministry. Let us endeavor to do our part to make sure that the church is not seen as a religious soap opera by the culture but, rather, is seen as a mighty force for good in a world gone wild.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the ministers who faithfully perform their duties. Please encourage them to remain faithful and exercise proper authority when needed. Help us appreciate, support, and pray for the ministers You have placed in our lives in a more significant way. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 14-20, 2023)

Judgment in the Kingdom

MONDAY, August 14: "'Fear Not; God Is with You'" (Isaiah 41:1-14)
TUESDAY, August 15: "No More Condemnation" (Romans 8:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, August 16: "Wait for Redemption with Patience" (Romans 8:16-25)
THURSDAY, August 17: "The Spirit Helps in Our Weakness" (Romans 8:26-39)
FRIDAY, August 18: "Rescue the Weak and Needy" (Psalm 82)
SATURDAY, August 19: "Stewards of God's Mysteries" (1 Corinthians 4:1-6)
SUNDAY, August 20: "God's Power Is Exhibited in Weakness" (1 Corinthians 4:7-21)

August 27, 2023 **Lesson 13**

GOD'S KINGDOM WILL BE ALL IN ALL

Adult/Youth
Adult/Young Adult Topic: Total Power!
Youth Topic: Total Power!

Children
General Lesson Title: The Power of the Cross
Children's Topic: Sharing Good News

Devotional Reading
Isaiah 6:1-8

Adult/ Youth
Background Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; Ephesians 1:15-23
Print Passage: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:28

Children
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-28
Print Passage: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19
Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:18

1 Corinthians 15:20-28—KJV

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.
21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.
24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.
25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.
26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.
27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest

1 Corinthians 15:20-28—NIV

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.
22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.
24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.
25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.
26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.
27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under

that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People frequently question the order of power in the world. Where can we find an authority whom we can trust to control the universe? The letter to the Corinthians declares that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all creation is ultimately subjected under God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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

1. Explore aspects of God's authority and power.
2. Trust in God's authority throughout all of life's circumstances.
3. Declare the limits of worldly power and rest in the assurance that God will be "all in all."

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS, YOUTH, and CHILDREN

—In Paul's theology, being "in Christ" or "in Adam" is an identity statement born of a deep spiritual affiliation with that person: on the one hand, being "in Adam" places the individual squarely in the context of Adam's sin of rebellion against God, and sin pervades the very nature of that person; thus, that individual is destined to die like Adam did (see 15:22; compare Romans 5; Ephesians 2:1-3).

—On the other hand, being "in Christ" indicates the transformation of the person's nature by the Spirit through faith, establishing him or her as God's child in the context of God's righteousness and holiness through Christ, along with the daily continual sanctification of the person until God's character, not sin, pervades him or her (see Romans 6; 12:1-2; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:4-10); thus, that individual is destined for life with God (see 15:22).

—God's power revealed in Jesus' resurrection is the beginning and foreshadows the completion of God's utter victory over all opposition, since in the Resurrection, the God of life demonstrated His authority over death, while at the final moments of God's victory, He will vanquish death entirely (see 15:24-26, 54-57).

—In the same way that humility is born of understanding our equality before God's throne and God's generosity with His power, so is trust born of understanding God's complete authority as King, God's absolute power over all God has made, and God's unfailing love toward His people (see Philippians 4:5-7; Psalm 8; Colossians 1:16-18; Revelation 4:11; 15:3-4).

—In both 1 Corinthians 15:27 and Ephesians 1:22, the writer quotes Psalm 8:6, which in turn references Genesis 1:28-30 (see also Genesis

2:19-20), applying—specifically to Jesus—God's command to steward and have authority over creatures. Compare to Paul's description of Jesus as the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45-49), the one who successfully fulfills God's command upon Him.

—Being seated at the right hand of the ruler indicated that the individual bore both the honor and authority of the ruler (see Ephesians 1:20; see also Mark 10:35-40); this bestowal is demonstrated in Jesus' authority over all else, including the church.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Although some scholars surmise that Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians was written around AD 55, the general consensus is that the letter was written between AD 52 and AD 57. The city of Corinth was reestablished as a Roman colony in 44 BC, which eventually became a burgeoning social and economic power center. The pluralistic and secular Corinthian culture provided many challenges and divisions for the believers in Corinth. The believers in Corinth were divided over ministerial loyalty (see 1:12), the importance of human intellect (see 8:1), socio-economic status (see 11:19-21), and religious practices (see chapters 12–14).

After spending considerable time with the Corinthian believers and receiving several word-of-mouth reports concerning their conduct, Paul wrote this letter to provide guidance concerning a range of issues—from sexual practices to meal practices to worship life—all of which Paul addressed within the overall context of the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

Questions concerning the veracity of the Resurrection permeated the Corinthian church (see 15:12). The more enlightened believers maintained that there was no resurrection of the dead. These individuals were characterized as "spiritual ones." They argued that the resurrection of the dead stemmed from ignorance and misplaced hope. Nevertheless, Paul argued that the resurrection of the dead is an eschatological promised reality connected to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Utilizing his rhetorical skills, Paul established a mutual understanding with the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. He then transitioned to the reality of the resurrection of the dead (see verses 12-14) and the reality of Jesus' resurrection (see verses 20-23).

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Paul: Paul the apostle, commonly known as Saint Paul and known by his Hebrew name (Saul of Tarsus), was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. Generally regarded as one of the most influential figures of the Apostolic Age, he founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-30s to the mid-50s AD. He established the Corinthian church around AD 50–52.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Firstfruits (verse 20)—Greek: *aparché* (ap-ar-khay'): the beginning of a sacrifice (i.e., the first fruit); the earliest crop of the year; the first converts.
Reign (verse 25)—Greek: *basileuó* (bas-il-yoo'-o): to be king; reign over; exercise dominion (rule).
Resurrection (verse 21)—Greek: *anastasis* (an-as'-tas-is): a standing up; a raising up, rising; a rising again.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. The Power of Real Power!
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Meaning of Christ's Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)
   B. Then Comes the End (1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Power of Real Power!

"I want power!" That's the rallying cry of many in our modern culture. Who has the power and what are the secrets to attaining power? These questions are on the minds of many in twenty-first-century America. Many people in our culture are obsessed with power. They liken power to influence, wealth, prestige, status, and position. Because many persons desire position, popularity, status, prestige, and wealth, they mistake those things for real power. The irony, however, is that those descriptions are mere aspects of power. The manifestation of *real power* is the degree to which one can control destiny, circumstances, and nature. If that's the case, then which human beings really possess real power?

In today's lesson, Paul gives another perspective on power. He describes real power. He discusses power from a spiritual perspective. In his discussion, Paul highlights the power of sin and death. However, he also highlights a power that is greater than sin, death, and the grave. Paul discusses real power. According to Paul, the Resurrection is real power! Although we might be powerless to do or have some things in this world right now, there is coming a time when the power of real power will be on full display. Hence, believers do not have to settle for incomplete depictions of power such as position, status, prestige, and money. Believers can look forward to the effects of real power. Paul reminds us that the past resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection of the saints *display the power of real power,* and believers are partakers in that power. The power of real power is not limited to this world. The power of real power is out of this world.

B. Biblical Background

The fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is an anchor chapter in Holy Scripture. It encompasses the earliest detailed written narrative of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the earliest preserved Christian witness concerning the Resurrection. The word *resurrection* comes from the Greek word *anastasis*, which means "to stand up again" or "to raise to life again." The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the good news of the Gospel, which is foundational to the Christian faith—that Jesus Christ died and was buried and raised

from the grave to give humanity salvation and an opportunity to become "fully alive" (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). There were believers in Corinth who denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection as a future event (see 1 Corinthians 15:12). Perhaps they were influenced by Greek philosophers who taught that the soul was immortal and the body had no need to be resurrected. Believers in Corinth could have also been influenced by Gnostics, who believed that the material world is evil and resurrection was antithetical to a materially evil world. Regardless of the influence, some Corinthians denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus and other saints. Hence, they denied a core tenet of the Christian faith. In response, Paul reiterated the past resurrection of Jesus in a resurrected body and the future resurrection of believers in resurrected bodies. Paul wrote this letter from the perspective of having had his own encounter with the risen Christ (see Acts 9). He boldly preached and taught through the lens of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:3). In his argument concerning the veracity of the Resurrection, Paul also highlighted other witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:4-6). Because of Christ's victory over death, hell, and the grave, all people have the possibility of living meaningful and purposeful lives in a broken world. Paul believed that belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the future bodily resurrection of believers is at the heart of the Christian faith and at the heart of believers' current and future hope.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Meaning of Christ's Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

The ringing affirmation of the risen Savior is the emphasis of Paul's argument in these verses. Jesus is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (verse 20, NIV). Paul utilized the metaphor, first fruits, to signify the first of the pledge that God promised for the final eschatological harvest of all believers. Christ's resurrection was the assurance that all who had fallen asleep in Him would be physically resurrected as He was. When Paul uses the phrase "*of them that slept*," he references the death of all believers. Christ's resurrection was God's warranty or guarantee that believers who die in the Lord will be physically raised as Christ was physically raised. Although death, tragedy, and suffering entered the human experience through one man's disobedience (verses 21-22), life, peace, and resurrection would become the experience of believers through the obedience and sacrifice of another man—Jesus Christ—the second Adam. Paul alludes to the Adam-Christ typology briefly in these verses. Just as Adam's sin and death altered the earthly experience of all humanity, Christ's obedience and resurrection altered the eternal alternatives for all humanity. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to appreciate that just as Adam's fall resulted in sin and

death for all, Christ's resurrection creates the possibility for redemption and eternal life for all people. Although Paul briefly discusses the Adam-Christ taxonomy in these verses, he provides a detailed discussion in his epistle to the Romans (see 5:15-21). The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees that all who die in Jesus shall be raised so that Jesus might judge the world in righteousness (see Acts 17:31).

It is important to understand that the phrase "so in Christ shall all be made alive" (verse 22) does not have a reference to universalism. The general principle behind universalism is that all humanity will eventually be saved. Paul teaches that only those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior by faith will receive the gift of resurrection to eternal life. In verse 23, Paul informs the Corinthians that the resurrection of believers will occur at Jesus' coming. *Afterward*—the Greek word described a military unit properly organized to proceed strategically. Paul suggests that the resurrection of those who die in the Lord will proceed according to God's divine plan, with Christ as the head of the procession.

B. Then Comes the End

(1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

In this section, Paul highlights dynamics that will characterize the end of times. Although persons have attempted to predict the exact date of the end of times, no one knows the precise date of the end of time. However, we do know that the end of times will occur after believers have been resurrected. The kingdom of God will be turned over to God the Father by Jesus at the end of times. God will restore the world to His original design and intent for a world where there will no longer be sin, and God shall reign supreme. Jesus Christ will procure victory over every enemy, authority, rule, and power. The phrase *put down* (Greek: *katargeo*) means "to render idle, deactivate, or put to an end." It means to render powerless. Paul echoes the vision shared in the book of Revelation, where the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of God (see Revelation 13:8). Paul utilizes the phrase "put all things under his feet" to symbolize the enemy's total submission to Jesus Christ. Hence, when Jesus returns, He will return with absolute authority, dominion, and power. As Paul highlights in Philippians 2:10-11, every knee will then bow at the name of Jesus, and every tongue will confess Him as Lord. Therefore, we must live our lives in a manner that we will be ready whenever Jesus Christ returns.

In verse 26, Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that the last enemy that shall be conquered and abolished is death. Although Scripture records the resurrection of several persons, it is essential to remember that each of those persons died again. However, with the coming of Christ, death will be destroyed. As powerful as death is right now, it will one day be rendered powerless with no further efficiency. In verse 27, Paul echoes Psalm 8:6.

However, it is essential to understand that the phrase "all things under him" does not literally mean *everything*. God, the one who put everything under Christ, is the exception to all things. Although Christ will subject all things to His authority, He remains subordinate to God the Father (verse 28). Therefore, God is the only one who will not be under subjection to Christ. At Jesus' return, the resurrection of all believers, the general judgment, and the new heavens and new earth will commence. In a real sense, the eternal reign of Christ will start its course, and the restoration of all creation will commence.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Lord's return reveal God's ultimate power over death, hell, and the grave. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a reminder that we do not have to live under the heavy weight of guilt, shame, and death any longer. Our sins can be forgiven, and our hope can be restored. Jesus Christ's resurrection allows us to experience newness and transformation in a world full of contradictions, divisions, fears, wickedness, greed, evil, darkness, exploitation, phobias, and "isms" of every kind. Jesus Christ's resurrection gives us the power to become victorious over things and systems that kill our spirit, undermine our hope, and destroy our joy. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an invitation to become liberated from anything and anyone who hinders a life of flourishing, freedom, and faithfulness. The future resurrection of believers and the ushering in of the end of time is a reminder that real power rests only in Jesus Christ, who is our hope on Earth and in all of eternity.

PRAYER

Our Father, because Your Son, our Savior, has defeated death, we can look forward to eternal life with You. We need Your power and wisdom to navigate a world that has gone wild. Thank You for Jesus. Give us the confidence to live in the power of the Resurrection. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 21-27, 2023)

God's Kingdom Will Be All in All

MONDAY, August 21: "Earth Is Full of God's Glory" (Isaiah 6:1-8)
TUESDAY, August 22: "In Him We Have Our Being" (Acts 17:22-31)
WEDNESDAY, August 23: "Many Will Go to God's House" (Micah 4:1-7)
THURSDAY, August 24: "Jesus Is Able to Save Forever" (Hebrews 7:11-25)
FRIDAY, August 25: "Awake and Sing for Joy!" (Isaiah 26:12-21)
SATURDAY, August 26: "The Most Important Message" (1 Corinthians 15:1-14)
SUNDAY, August 27: "The First Fruits of the Dead" (1 Corinthians 15:15-28)

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