

DIRECTION[®]

THE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULTS



Partners in a
New Creation



MISSION STATEMENT



*We are called
of God to create, produce, and distribute
quality Christian education products;
to deliver exemplary customer service;
and to provide quality Christian
educational services, which will empower
God's people, especially within the Black
community, to evangelize, disciple,
and equip people for serving Christ,
His kingdom, and church.*

Direction® Student, Vol. 52, No. 3. June, July,
August 2022. ISSN: 0890-3476. Published
quarterly by UMI (Urban Ministries, Inc.), PO
Box 436987, Chicago, IL 60643-6987. Found-
er: Melvin E. Banks Sr., LittD; CEO: C. Jeffrey
Wright, JD; Managing Editor: Daschell M.
Phillips, MS; Senior Editor: Adonijah Oke-
chukwu Ogbonnaya, PhD; Editor: Beth Pot-
terveld, MA; BSG Writers: Domeniek Harris,
EdD; Angela Lampkin, PhD; Ramon Mayo;
Victoria McAfee, MDiv.

Lessons based on International Sunday
School Lessons, the International Bible Les-
sons for Christian Teaching. Copyright © 2017
by the Committee on the Uniform Series.
Used by permission. Supplementary Lesson
Development. Copyright © 2022 by UMI. All
rights reserved. \$4.50 per copy. Single sub-
scriptions: one year \$35.99 (postage includ-
ed). Printed in South Korea. All proper names
mentioned in this publication are fictional
unless otherwise indicated. **NO PART OF
THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRODUCED
IN ANY FORM WITHOUT THE WRITTEN
PERMISSION OF THE PUBLISHER.**

To order: Contact your local Christian book-
store; call UMI at 1-800-860-8642; or visit
our website at www.urbanministries.com.

THEME: Partners in a New Creation

June 2022 Quarter At-A-Glance1

BIBLE STUDY LESSONS

UNIT 1: GOD DELIVERS AND RESTORES

June

5	God Foretells Destruction	2
12	God Foretells Redemption	7
19	God's Restored People Shall Prosper	12
26	God Offers Deliverance	17

UNIT 2: THE WORD: THE AGENT OF CREATION

July

3	The Creating Word Becomes Flesh	22
10	The Word Heals	27
17	The Word Resurrects the Dead	32
24	The Word Saves	37
31	The Word Gives Peace	42

UNIT 3: THE GREAT HOPE OF THE SAINTS

August

7	A New Home	47
14	A New City	52
21	The River of Life	57
28	Come and Enjoy	62

Quarter At-A-Glance

June 2022

Partners in a New Creation

Members of Christ's body have the grand opportunity to be co-laborers with the ever-abiding Spirit of God in reconciling, re-creating, and rightly restoring all things in the eternal reign of God. This summer quarter considers ways in which believers are partners with God in creation.

UNIT 1 • God Delivers and Restores

This unit has four lessons. Using three chapters of Isaiah, this study explores God's predictions of the future destruction of Babylon and deliverance for Israel. These events were evidence of God's power at work to grant mercy and redemption to the penitent and to restore God's people to a state of peace and prosperity.

UNIT 2 • The Word: The Agent of Creation

This unit has five lessons taken from John's Gospel. The lessons stress how the Creating Word, at work in and with humanity, became flesh, healed the sick, saved the lost, resurrected the dead and granted—through the Holy Spirit—peace.

UNIT 3 • The Great Hope of the Saints

In this unit, a four-lesson study draws from Revelation to help learners envision the new home and city God has prepared for the redeemed. In this new heavenly environment, the saints will enjoy the new water of eternal life.

God Foretells Destruction

Bible Background • ISAIAH 47

Printed Text • ISAIAH 47:10–15 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 137

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND why God would destroy Babylon; GRAPPLE with the destructiveness of delighting in power and pleasure; and REPENT from thoughts, actions, and feelings that separate us from God.

In Focus

Jeremy's life turned around when he earned a free ride scholarship to Yale. When he graduated, he went into investment banking. His salary was more than anything his family had imagined. He could afford the finer things in life, and he wasn't ashamed to flaunt it.

Time passed and Jeremy got married and had kids of his own. He rose up in the ranks at his company and even became vice president. Soon Jeremy abandoned going to church, claiming he was too busy and that the preacher only wanted money. He also rarely visited home and often talked down about the neighborhood where he came from.

One day his wife, Judy, said, "Your mom called earlier. Wanted to see if we could come over for dinner on Friday."

"We'll see her on the Fourth," Jeremy said. "Isn't that soon enough?"

"Maybe she just wants to see her son," Judy said.

Jeremy doubted it. "Or maybe Aunt Pearl wants to ask me again if I'll cover her rent."

"Times have been hard for people in your old neighborhood."

"They were hard for me, too, but I got out of it. Why can't they? They're poor because they're just lazy and wouldn't take advantage of the opportunities they have like I did."

One day everything Jeremy trusted in came crashing down. His doctor told him he had a brain tumor. Now he wished he had a stronger relationship with God, and in the corner of his office, he knelt down to ask God to forgive him for his pride.

Has your pride ever separated you from God?

Keep in Mind

"Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee."

(Isaiah 47:15, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 47:10** For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.

13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

The People, Places, and Times

Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet during the eighth century. His prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Manasseh. Scholars have argued that Isaiah was more than likely connected to the king's court in some way, based on his call narrative. Throughout his ministry, Isaiah's prophecies are directed at Judah and its idolatry and oppression. Isaiah's prophetic ministry can be summarized as judgment, renewal, and hope as he foretold Judah's Babylonian captivity as well as its return from exile and the coming of the Messiah. Tradition tells us Isaiah was eventually sawn in half during the reign of Manasseh.

Babylon. Babylon is an ancient city, and the name Babylon can be translated as "the gate of gods." It is mentioned in the Bible, along with Egypt, as the antithesis to God's people. When Israel sinned against God through idolatry and injustice, God allowed the Babylonians to punish Israel by sending Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Judah and send the Jews into exile. Babylon remained a superpower until the

Medes and Persians conquered Babylonia in 539 BC.

Background

Isaiah prophesies the demise of Babylon (Isaiah 45). Isaiah announces the conquest of Babylon by King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire. This prophecy is linked to the salvation and restoration of Israel as they return from exile under Cyrus' reign. Babylon is condemned for its idolatry (Isaiah 46). The idols of Babylon are deemed powerless. They are made from created things and cannot save their worshipers. The reign of Babylon is over, and its gods cannot protect its people.

God calls the Babylonian sorcerers and astrologers to account (Isaiah 47). Their knowledge is world-renowned, but it is powerless against the sovereign judgment of the Lord. None of their astrological understanding or spells of witchcraft can prevent the disaster coming upon them. The once proud city will be humbled through the divine arrangement of its conquest by a foreign power.

What is bad news for the Babylonians is good news for the Jews. Because of Babylon's conquest, they will gain an ally in Cyrus who will give them freedom to return to their homeland and rebuild their capital Jerusalem as well as their Temple. God assures them no idol could have foretold these things and establishes His superiority over the gods and idols of other nations (Isaiah 48). He is God and He is in control of the destiny of not only Israel but all the nations of the globe.

At-A-Glance

1. The Pride of Babylon and Its Consequences (Isaiah 47:10–11)
2. False Trust in Babylon's Expertise (vv. 12–13)
3. The Ultimate Demise of Babylon (vv. 14–15)

In Depth

1. The Pride of Babylon and Its Consequences (Isaiah 47:10–11)

God, through Isaiah, calls out Babylon's prideful attitude. They have committed wickedness brazenly as if they were accountable to no one. The Babylonians were renowned for their knowledge, and this knowledge was the source of Babylon's pride. Because of this they put themselves in the place of God by saying, "I am, and none else beside me" (v. 10). These are proud, blasphemous words which display the inward attitude of the heart.

God would not allow Babylon to remain unpunished for this sin of pride. Calamity and disaster would come upon the city in the form of the Medo-Persian Empire and King Cyrus. None of Babylon's sorcery and knowledge could conjure an escape from the Medes and Persians.

Their kingdom would be taken over, and they could do nothing about it. As believers we have no reason to despair when proud and wicked rulers or leaders are in power. Eventually all of us will come before the judgment seat of God. There none of our knowledge, wealth, or social standing will be of any use—only whether we were righteous and humble before Him.

What is your response when you see wicked and proud people in power?

2. False Trust in Babylon's Expertise (vv. 12–13)

Isaiah mocks the knowledge and abilities of Babylon's sorcerers and astrologers. No matter what they do, they could not stop the judgment of God. Isaiah taunts them by pointing out that although they are experienced in enchantments and sorceries, they still will not withstand God's disaster. Astrology and sorcery were ways to control destiny. Babylon would soon face the truth that it was not in control of its destiny.

With all of their counselors, they weary themselves. They cannot figure a way out of their situation. Their astrologers try to predict an overturning of their fate, but it will not make a difference. Babylon's wisdom and knowledge will not be able to help it. Nothing they take pride in will pull them out of the ditch they dug for themselves through blasphemous pride and wickedness.

This same understanding of reality needs to be imprinted on our own hearts and minds. We are not in control, and any attempt to control our destiny is empty and vain. God is sovereign over our lives, and we need to look to Him for help. He controls our future and our destiny.

How do you respond to the fact that God controls your future and your destiny?

3. The Ultimate Demise of Babylon (vv. 14–15)

The astrologers and sorcerers of Babylon are compared to straw or stubble burning in the fire. They will not be able to save Babylon. Their fate was with the city and its empire. Looking to them for help would be fruitless. Sitting by their fire would bring no warmth. They can't save Babylon because they can't save themselves.

The nations who have dealt with Babylon since its origin will turn their backs on it. They will not help Babylon when calamity strikes. The pride of Babylon will be broken by the sovereign will of God. Babylon will have no way to escape it, no one to turn to, and no resources to meet this disaster.

Where do you turn when you are facing an impossible situation?

Search the Scriptures

1. What is Babylon's declaration of pride (Isaiah 49:10)?
2. What did Babylon rely on in times of disaster (vv. 12–13)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are the modern equivalents in our country to Babylon's knowledge and witchcraft? What do we trust in as a nation?
2. Why do people turn to things like astrology and witchcraft?

Liberating Lesson

We may be tempted to despair as we see the world and its leaders walk in pride and wickedness. When it comes to our own nation, hyper-patriotism and blind allegiance has puffed up many with misplaced pride. They believe we as a nation are superior to others and continually progressing toward increasing splendor. Our Scriptures tell us God is in control of the nations. He lifts up some and casts down others. Loyalty

to your country is a good thing but blind loyalty and pride absent of dependence on God is a path to ruin. We may despair at the injustice we see in the world, but God will call the nations to account for their pride and wickedness. Oppressive regimes and unjust laws are a result of human pride. But human pride will always be brought low under the sovereignty of God.

Application for Activation

No nation is beyond the pride we read about in Isaiah's description of Babylon. As individuals, we are equally in danger of exhibiting this kind of pride. In the coming week, take some time to pray for our nation and its leaders. Also make a plan to serve others. This is a surefire way to root out pride in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001.
- Goldingay, John. *Isaiah: New International Biblical Commentary*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001.
- Köhler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Study Edition. 2 vols. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. Boston: Brill, 2001.
- Life Application Study Bible, King James Version*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997. 2154-2155, 2170-2172.
- Motyer, J. Alec. *Isaiah*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999.
- Nsiku, Edouard Kitoko. "Isaiah." Pages 809–52 in *Africa Bible Commentary*. Tokunboh Adeyemo, Ed. Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006.
- Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Tenney, Merrill C., ed. *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible Volume 1: A–C*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975. 439–448.
- Walton, John H., Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000.

Say It Correctly

Jotham. JAW-thum.
Ahaz. AYE-hazz.
Manasseh. Mah-NAH-suh.
Antithesis. an-TIH-thuh-siss.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Babylon's Days Are Numbered
(Jeremiah 29:8–14)

TUESDAY

Let Your Compassion Come Speedily
(Psalm 79)

WEDNESDAY

Persecution Foretold
(Mark 13:1–13)

THURSDAY

Keep Awake!
(Mark 13:28–37)

FRIDAY

Rise Up, O God!
(Psalm 74:10–23)

SATURDAY

The Humiliation of Babylon
(Isaiah 47:1–9)

SUNDAY

No Security in Wickedness
(Isaiah 47:10–15)

Notes

God Foretells Redemption

Bible Background • ISAIAH 49:1-17

Printed Text • ISAIAH 49:1-11 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 111:9-10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND that God's mission for the people of Israel is to show all people the way to God, CELEBRATE that all people who serve God are included in God's promises, and TELL others about God's never-ending love and salvation for all people.

In Focus

For two centuries, African Americans were slaves with seemingly no hope of deliverance. As they toiled in wretched conditions, they sang songs and prayed prayers, hoping for relief. God heard their cries, and He allowed someone to rise among them. Her name was Harriet Tubman, and she was known as the "Moses" of her people.

Tubman was born in slavery and experienced many hardships. Unlike some who had accepted their lot, she longed for freedom. God did indeed allow her to escape the bonds of slavery. She enjoyed her freedom, but she couldn't forget her brothers and sisters who were still in bondage. She returned to the South many times and led her people to freedom, just as Moses had done in Egypt for his people.

The slaves were clever. They included coded escape signals in their songs. After dark, "Steal Away" was the song used to signal slaves to move to a meeting place from which to escape to the North via the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman helped more than 300 slaves escape to freedom this way. And though she only delivered relatively few from the bonds of slavery, her heroic deeds focused attention on the need for emancipation. Moses, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., and others were powerful leaders led by God. Each came to lead a particular people at a particular time. However, Jesus came for ALL people and His great work has and will be felt through all eternity.

How have you helped spread the Word of God's deliverance to all people?

Keep in Mind

"Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." (Isaiah 49:8, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 49:1** Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.

2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

5 And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles,

that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

The People, Places, and Times

The Suffering Servant. Arising out of the complex prophecies of Isaiah, this enigmatic figure serves God and will suffer for others (see Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–7; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). In their original context, these passages attempt to explain the harsh suffering the Israelites would pass through during their exile.

One song explicitly identifies the servant as Israel (Isaiah 49:3). But the servant was also said to be God's perfect Servant, which can only be Jesus. This paradigm makes sense of the most difficult aspect of the Jesus tradition—His suffering. Equally important, it pointed to

the Gentiles as the object of God's healing and forgiveness alongside the Jews.

Background

God instructed His prophet, Isaiah, to write concerning Israel's captivity in Babylon. For seventy years, the nation suffered under this oppression. Then the Lord allowed them to return to Jerusalem. He gave them the resources to rebuild the Temple and establish themselves once again as God's representative.

But the Israelites got comfortable in Babylon. They became accustomed to the Babylonian ways and their gods. Most of the Israelites

refused to move. Only a small remnant traveled back to Judah.

God speaks through Isaiah about these upcoming problems (Isaiah 48). In the first part of the chapter, he rebukes their negative attitudes and behaviors. However, God changes His tone in the last half of the chapter. In several of the later chapters of Isaiah, the Lord offers hope and help with the promise of the Messiah's coming. Like a loving mother attempting to get her cranky toddler to take a nap, the Father begins to speak softly. He highlighted promises about a coming Savior, Jesus, to save Israel and the entire world.

Are you willing to move forward on God's promises? Or are you staying behind, enjoying Babylonian, worldly comforts?

At-A-Glance

1. The Servant's Call and Mission
(Isaiah 49:1-7)
2. The Servant Saves and Restores
(vv. 8-11)

In Depth

1. The Servant's Call and Mission (Isaiah 49:1-7)

In the book of Isaiah, four passages are called "the Servant Songs" (Isaiah 42-50). The second song found here outlines the coming Messiah's mission on earth. Jesus, God's redeemer, brings light, healing, and restoration. He offers His salvation promises to the Jewish people and the entire world.

God speaks through the Messiah in the first person. He asks for listening ears. His calling started in the womb of His mother. Before the Holy Spirit placed Jesus' embryo in Mary's body, the angel said, His name is Jesus, the Savior of all humanity (Luke 1:31).

Isaiah compared Jesus' mouth, His words, to instruments of war. The well-polished sword and the shaft pierces the intended target. God kept Jesus out of the main limelight until a particular time in history. At the appointed time, He introduced the Savior and His penetrating message (Galatians 4:4-5).

Isaiah calls the Servant, whom we now understand to be the Messiah, by the name Israel. This nation originally carried God's salvation message. When the Jewish people rebelled, the Messiah picked up the baton, committed to completing God's assignment.

God called Jesus to draw back the Israelites to Jehovah. God raised Him and gave Him the might and power to carry out the task. The first Christian missionaries and the authors of the Bible were Jewish people, God's instruments to introduce salvation to the world. The Servant fulfilled the covenant God made with the Israelites, and He is the actual covenant. Some of the Jewish people pushed Jesus aside, denying His claim as Messiah. They looked down upon Him, calling Him unclean, a liar. However, God viewed Him as valuable and deemed worthy of praise (1 Peter 2:4).

Jesus respected those in positions of authority in the secular government and within the Jewish religion. But both plotted against Him. When Jesus returns to the earth for the second time, He will be honored and worshiped. Rulers and every human being will prostrate before Him (Philippians 2:10-11).

How did Jesus complete the work that Israel was supposed to do?

2. The Servant Saves and Restores (vv. 8-11)

Jehovah heard the prayer of the Servant and helped Him fulfill a fruitful ministry. God is committed to lifting this universe out of its critical condition, placing His Spirit in desolate, godless places. His desire is for the

entire human race to know the truth through His Son Jesus.

God frees captives. God freed the captives in Babylon, and He offers freedom to all humanity bound in sin. It is now possible to bask in the presence of a Holy God—no sin hinders or divides (Isaiah 61:1).

Messiah bids everyone come openly to the light. Christ found the Jews enslaved to the law, covered in the darkness, and separated from God. Christ lifted their burdens. The Compassionate Shepherd is always leading to greener pastures. Jesus keeps His sheep away from the scorching sun, leads them to lush feeding grounds and fresh water. Even in places that are downtrodden and barren—God provides for His sheep.

These promises are not only for the Jewish nation or people in biblical days. Jesus still saves and restores anyone willing to come to Him.

In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul references these verses and explains that “today is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). How does this affect our reading of Isaiah?

Search the Scriptures

1. Use the Scripture verses in Isaiah 49:1–11 to describe the characteristics and mission of the Lord’s servant. (Example characteristics, v. 1 called before birth, v. 2 words of judgment are sharp, v. 3 a Servant; Example mission points: v. 1 wants people in distant and faraway lands to listen, v. 4 work seems useless)

2. In verse 1, Isaiah addresses the “isles,” meaning a place far, far away from him. What expression would we use today to confer this understanding?

Discuss the Meaning

The Scriptures clearly state Jesus’ job description. He came to seek and save humanity. His death on the Cross allowed freedom from the bondage of sin. This lesson reminds

Christians that the Savior is light out of darkness, He restores and is our Shepherd to lead us into His beautiful pastures. Think about the past couple weeks. How have you seen Jesus do this in your life? What kinds of people or things have you or others turned to instead of Christ to foster a better life?

Liberating Lesson

The word “servant” does not always sit well with African Americans. It rakes up pictures in our minds of Black people as slaves or only getting a job as a maid, driver, or butler. Yet, when the word “servant” is used in the Bible, God desires for Christians to have a different picture. Jesus came to serve all humanity. He, too, was mistreated and unappreciated. But He kept placing Himself in God’s protective hands, being assured of God’s watchful eye.

Get alone with God and express any anger or hostility you may feel about the mistreatment of people of color. Ask God to begin a transformation in your heart about how to be a true servant.

Application for Activation

Many individuals today continuously wonder, “What about me? What about me?” God saw the need for salvation. He sent Jesus to meet that need in our world, and Jesus completed God’s assignment. As Christians, we are to answer the same call. Pray for more sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as we go through our daily activities. How can I help those around me foster the same attitude and be less selfish and self-centered?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Barr, David L. *The New Testament Story: An Introduction*. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987, 27.
Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001.
Motyer, J. Alec. *Isaiah*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999.
Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
Walton, John H., Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000.

Say It Correctly

Enigmatic. eh-nig-MAH-tik.
Eunuch. YOU-nik.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God's Redemption Defies
Human Wisdom
(1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

TUESDAY

Righteousness, Sanctification,
and Redemption
(1 Corinthians 1:26–31)

WEDNESDAY

God Sent Redemption to God's People
(Psalm 111)

THURSDAY

Christ Brings Eternal Redemption
(Hebrews 9:11–14)

FRIDAY

Pardon My Guilt, O Lord
(Psalm 25:1–11)

SATURDAY

Redeem Israel, O God
(Psalm 25:12–22)

SUNDAY

The Lord Will Have Compassion
(Isaiah 49:1–11)

Notes

God's Restored People Shall Prosper

Bible Background • ISAIAH 49:18–26

Printed Text • ISAIAH 49:18–23 | Devotional Reading • PROVERBS 25:21–26

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY relationships in which individuals or congregations have experienced God's restoration, FIND comfort in the plans God has for their lives, and PROCLAIM God's justice and mercy for His people.

In Focus

Jakiesha, an accountant, was going through a difficult time in her life. She was angry with God and the church. No one was doing things the way they should, so she thought. She became so angry she refused to pray anymore. She even made the decision to no longer attend church. Lastly, she gave Pastor Fred a piece of her mind.

Concerned, Jakiesha's Gran-gran, persuaded her to come over for dinner one evening. They talked about all God had provided in Jakiesha's life: her safe home, her scholarship to an HBCU, her first job. "What are you even mad about, baby?" Gran-gran asked.

Jakiesha felt ashamed now even mentioning it to her grandmother. "There's just a certain way I know things can be done. The church doesn't want to take the shortcuts I show them, even though—trust me—EVERYONE else saves themselves money that way."

"Baby," Gran-gran said, "I love you, but that sounds like some shady dealings in my book."

Jakiesha couldn't keep up her excuses to her grandmother. God changed her heart. She and her grandmother prayed for forgiveness.

After prayer, Jakiesha told her grandmother, "God has forgiven me and restored me in right relationship with Him. He is a God of justice and mercy and I am a recipient. I'm going to apologize to Pastor Fred and to the entire congregation."

After speaking with Pastor Fred, he told her, "We thank God for answering our prayers. Now that we know you have repented, Jakiesha, we do need an accountant again."

After experiencing difficult challenges, being restored back to God, are you a witness to God's indescribable faithfulness?

Keep in Mind

"And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me."

(Isaiah 49:23, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 49:18** Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost

my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

The People, Places, and Times

The Progeny Blessing. Having children as heirs to continue the covenant people of God has always been a major theme of God's story with humanity. Scholars call this aspect of God's promise to His people the "progeny blessing." When Abram first arrived in Canaan, God promised to give the land to his descendants, even though at the time, he was 75 years old and had no heir. Later, God again promises Abram an heir of his own flesh and blood, and as many descendants as stars in the sky (Genesis 15:4–5). By the time Abram is 99 years old, he has fathered a son who will indeed become a great nation, but God makes a further promise. Abram will be the father of many nations, and is renamed Abraham. Sarai is renamed Sarah, and named as the one who will mother the child of God's covenant with Abraham. Isaac fulfills this promise. Isaac and Rebekah struggle for many years to have children before God blesses them with twins. The elder son, Esau, fathers his own nation, and the younger son, Jacob, ends

up with four wives. For a time, the favored wife Rachel is concerned that she will not bear, and though she does give birth to two sons, she dies in bearing the second. This gives Jacob a total of 12 sons, who each have multiple children themselves. The nation of Israel blossoms from this point.

The rollercoaster drama of the difficulty of conceiving, bearing, and raising one (let alone many) children is a constant narrative thread from Genesis 12 through chapter 30. It continues to play a large role in later sacred stories of Samson's family, Hannah, Bathsheba, and others. Even in less drastic stories, children are always seen as a blessing from God. Throughout Scripture, Israel can judge if it is being blessed or not by how many children they are having.

In the pre-industrial age, more children meant more workers to help bring in food or trade to help the family survive. Children were their parents' only financial safety net in old age. In an economic system like this, losing

one's children was financially devastating, in addition to being heartbreaking. This is why it is a major theme in the prophecies of returning from exile that they will have many children.

Background

God's people were in captivity because they were obstinate and stubborn (Isaiah 48:4). He told Israel if they disobeyed, He would scatter them. Then He would restore them back (Deuteronomy 30:1-3). God placed His people in a place of affliction (Isaiah 48:10). Through Isaiah, God is speaking to His people with comfort and mercy (Isaiah 48:20; 49:13). He says, "All things begin and end with me" (Isaiah 48:12).

God declares to His people they should flee from the Chaldeans (Isaiah 48:20). This was similar to the charge given their ancestors who had fled from Egypt while depending on God to sustain them (Isaiah 48:21). God's people are given the promise to be released, restored, and prosperous once again. God's people are promised a temporary freedom from their earthly captivity and a permanent freedom through Jesus Christ from captivity of sin. Restoration will be given on the day of salvation. This is in reference to Christ's kingdom when God's people will be restored and prosper (Isaiah 48:8-9).

At-A-Glance

1. Promise of Restoration (Isaiah 49:18-20)
2. Questioning Restoration (v. 21)
3. Confirming Restoration and Prosperity (vv. 22-23)

In Depth

1. Promise of Restoration (Isaiah 49:18-20)

Look all around and see all the people gathering back to the Lord. They are the children of the people of captivity. Coming from many different places to meet in one place, they will make one body and join themselves to glorify God. These words spoken during the exile were intended to encourage God's people. He implies that the land of Judea was lying in waste during the Babylonian captivity. "Thy land of destruction" contrasts with what was to come.

The increase of people will be so great in number. This will come after many have been killed in wars and died in captivity in a faraway land. There will be a great increase as if these children had been given to a widowed mother.

The added people would be a blessing and strength as an ornament to God's people. The Lord wanted to assure them of His commitment to what He was saying. "As I live, saith the LORD" was a solemn promise between God and His people. The bride, wearing fancy jewelry, indicated these children will portray beauty and glorify the Lord.

Likewise, when the people of God were in a wasted, desolate, and unproductive state, there manifested the Savior of the world, the introduction of the Gospel, and the transformation of the Gentiles.

How do we see God fulfilling this kind of restoration throughout salvation history?

2. Questioning Restoration (v. 21)

This describes the great increase of the true people of God. The image given is of a mother who had been robbed of her children and made a widow. She had seen the devastation of ruin that was spread all around her. She felt alone. Then all of sudden the mother sees herself completely surrounded with more children than she lost. She is home and blessed by the happy

family that surrounds her. Then the mother asks, “Who hath begotten me these?” She wants to know where they had been. God’s restoration would be beyond what we could hope for.

Why does God choose the image of children to illustrate the overflowing blessing of restoration He has in store?

3. Confirming Restoration and Prosperity (vv. 22–23)

God will call His people to Himself, like a general calling the troops together. He will set the standard for His people. Those that God has adopted as His own and those that claim Him for their Father will be in His arms. Those He adopts will be given great care, devotion, and loving-kindness, as a nurse would care for babies. The daughters will be carried as a sick and weak person might be carried. Nonbelievers will give to the increase, protection, and maintenance of these children. Even those in high positions such as kings and queens will have a heartfelt love and caring concern toward God’s people.

How does God use non-Christians to aid His Church today?

Search the Scriptures

1. What shall cause the desolate places to become too small (Isaiah 49:19)?
2. Who can ask for another place to dwell (v. 20)?
3. When kings and queens become nursing fathers and mothers to God’s people, what shall they know (v. 23)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God restores and prospers His people. Should His people do anything to help secure their prosperity?
2. When God grants restoration, what is our responsibility? How do we show our gratitude? How do we maintain our blessings?

Liberating Lesson

Today, there are many people who need to be restored to God because of sin. Who can restore us? Jesus will lift us up when we feel neglected, abandoned, and bereaved. God restored Israel; He will also restore us. He will give us freedom when we’re enslaved by our own choices and disobedience. Jesus is waiting to restore us so that we can have a relationship with God. We must repent, pray, and wait on the restoration of the Lord! We must depend on God’s promises to bring the Gentiles and His people together into one people of God through Jesus Christ.

Application for Activation

This week think of how you can overcome discouragement from the enemy who creeps into your peace. Ask God to restore you to Himself when you have allowed the enemy to take your joy. Remember that Jesus Christ has come to redeem you and wants you to have the right relationship with Him and others. He’s coming back!

Think of what you can do to restore a broken friendship with a family member or a friend who you consider to be your enemy. Ask yourself, “Am I the enemy?” What should you do to become a better Christian?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Blenkinsopp, J. *Isaiah* 40-55. New York: Doubleday. 2002.
Kissane, E. *The Book Of Isaiah*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1960
Knight, G. *Servant Theology*. Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1984.
Roberts, J. and Machinist, P. *First Isaiah*. Baltimore, MD: Fortress Press, 2016.

Say It Correctly

Nebuchadnezzar. neh-buh-kad-NEZZ-zer.
Zedekiah. zeh-deh-KIE-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Puts Down and Lifts Up
(Psalm 75)

TUESDAY

God Protects a Restored, Holy People
(Leviticus 26:3-13)

WEDNESDAY

Blessings upon God's People
(Luke 6:20-26)

THURSDAY

God Has Turned Mourning into Dancing
(Psalm 30)

FRIDAY

God Gives Good Gifts
(James 1:13-18)

SATURDAY

Blessings for Obedience
(Deuteronomy 28:9-14)

SUNDAY

Wait for the Lord
(Isaiah 49:18-23)

Notes

God Offers Deliverance

Bible Background • ISAIAH 51

Printed Text • ISAIAH 51:1–8 | Devotional Reading • 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1–4

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE Isaiah's example of God's rich faithfulness in Israel's spiritual history, TRUST God even when others speak disparagingly about our faith, and SHARE the goodness and deliverance of God with others.

In Focus

Kaylynn had been incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. He believed the day would come when God would clear his name and he would be delivered from his bondage. He held close to the words found in Isaiah, "The Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be put to shame, He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me!" (Isaiah 50:7–9).

He trusted God. He had gotten into some situations in the past, being accused falsely and misjudged, and God delivered him every time.

But, this time, the setup led to his imprisonment. His friends and associates felt sorry for him. But they didn't believe Kaylynn would get out of this one easily and they told him to plead guilty and he would get a lesser charge. Kaylynn stood his ground and said, "How can I confess to what I have not done? God has never failed me and neither will He this time."

Kaylynn was given the maximum sentence of 20 years without a chance of parole.

That was two years ago. Today he was preparing to leave prison. All charges had been dropped. He was exonerated. As he was singing and praising God, Paul and Silas's jail experience came to mind. After their release they told the brethren all about it. Kaylynn could hardly wait to meet up with his former friends and associates to share with them how God delivered him out of prison.

When we are in a jam and things don't look good, do we still keep the faith? Do we still believe and hope in God to deliver us?

Keep in Mind

"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged."
(Isaiah 51:1, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Isaiah 51:1** Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD; look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the

people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

The People, Places, and Times

Abraham and Sarah. Abraham did not always follow God's plan as God had intended. On occasion, he and Sarah both seemed to have an urge to give God a helping hand. At other times, the two acted out of cowardice, not out of faith in the God who called them.

From the time of his call, Abraham had no knowledge of where he would be going. He stepped out on the word of God. He never stopped believing in God's purpose, even when it seemed that everything was working against him.

Eden. The name Eden is derived either from the Hebrew root word meaning "to be fruitful, plentiful" or from a Sumerian word meaning "steppe, flatland." After creating the entire universe, God consecrated the particular garden called Eden as a place of paradise and

worship. He placed His newly created human beings to care for it, and communed with them there. There was still work to do to care for Eden, but no weeds or thorns to make the work especially hard. Many prophecies of the end times pull on images of Eden to indicate that God will heal the world so completely as to restore the paradise we knew before the Fall.

Background

Even though the Israelites are worried that foreign countries will conquer them, God reassures His people He is willing, able, and capable of providing for their release from their captives. In Isaiah 50, the one who is responsible for delivering this message of hope shows he has been commissioned by God and he is ready to carry out his mission, God's message, out to the fullest (Isaiah 50:4–5).

Jesus also fulfilled this prophecy when He was commissioned by God and carried out His duties in securing salvation for mankind to the fullest. Some Jews rejected Jesus as Christ on their own accord. We make a choice to accept what God offers. In Isaiah's message, the people of God are encouraged to trust in Him, while sinners are discouraged not to trust in themselves (Isaiah 50:11).

At-A-Glance

1. The Offer of Deliverance
(Isaiah 51:1–3)
2. The Way to Deliverance (vv. 4–6)
3. An Everlasting Deliverance (vv. 7–8)

In Depth

1. The Offer of Deliverance (Isaiah 51:1–3)

This conversation is to those who follow after righteousness, seriously yearning to practically obey God's law. They are told, "Listen to Me!" God is making them an offer of deliverance. God's people are seeking Him because they want His favor brought back to them.

They are told to look back to Abraham and Sarah. You are Sarah's daughters, if you strive for righteousness. To encourage the captives in Babylon, God calls them to remember when and how He called Abraham by His Word He blessed and increased him. They, too, were very small in number, but the Lord has promised to increase them also (Isaiah 49:19).

The Lord shall comfort Zion: God will restore it from despair. He will make them happy—giving them hearts that are glad. Their gladness will lead to their satisfaction making them thankful to God. They will sing from their hearts songs of joy and thanksgiving unto their God.

What role models of righteousness do you identify in your life?

2. The Way to Deliverance (vv. 4–6)

God is speaking to a specific group, His people. This isn't for everyone. This is for the people of God. The ones who have the law of God within them. In addition to knowing what is right, God's people do what is right. God wants His people to listen and be attentive. He wants His people to adhere to what He is saying and take notes on their hearts.

God's righteousness is near; He will soon come to their rescue. Those that He has made promises to will see the fulfillment of those promises. God's arms will judge the people, because He has the power to judge all. He has the ability to draw them together, and He has the ability to scatter them. They should put their trust in Him.

Heaven and earth are going to pass away (Matthew 24:35). The description here is the heavens will disappear like a vapor, or smoke, into thin air. The earth will fall off like an old piece of clothing no one wants to wear. Just as the earth and the heavens will no longer exist, this will be true of people. In contrast, the way to deliverance, salvation and righteousness will remain.

How do you remind yourself to chase after eternal things, rather than passing earthly things?

3. An Everlasting Deliverance (vv. 7–8)

Isaiah is requesting the attention of the righteous, God's people, the keepers of the Law. God's people are told to not fear the rebuke and criticism of men. We have the assurance of God's promises. Others might say anything to attempt to destroy our faith in God, but God has given His promise. He will not turn back on His Word. God is faithful.

People will become food for the insects and animals when they die. As time goes on, those same people won't be around to express disapproval. In contrast, the salvation and righteousness of God will always be. Salvation

and righteousness will continue to exist, from generation to generation, forever.

What would you be able to do for God if you weren't afraid of others' scorn?

Search the Scriptures

1. Is God offering deliverance to all (Isaiah 51:1)?
2. Who shall comfort the people of Zion (v. 3)?
3. Who are they that know righteousness (v. 6)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God shows He is willing and able to deliver us from our captivity, which is sin. But He does not force us to accept His offer. Should He or should He not? Why?

2. God tells His people, "hearken unto me" three times. When something is told to us repeatedly should we consider it? Should we pay more attention to what's being said or should we find the person to be a nuisance trying to force us to accept what they are saying?

Liberating Lesson

In spite of what we see, we must remember God is faithful and He will deliver us, just as He did the remnant of Israel. He encourages us to listen to Him and to look back at what He did for Abraham and Sarah. Abraham believed God and became a great nation, we too must believe God and trust Him. God comforts and consoles us as we fear Him. If we are faithful, God will deliver us. We must be willing to tell others that God's Word will last forever. We should encourage others to trust Jesus for deliverance and salvation.

Application for Activation

This week, pray and trust God daily to deliver you from any situation that will cause you not to demonstrate your faith in God. Do not let anyone discourage you from believing

that God can deliver you from those that speak negatively. You can ask God to speak to your heart so the Holy Spirit will remind you that God is faithful and He will deliver you.

Ask God to help you encourage others because Jesus loves you and wants everyone to be saved. Tell others that those who reject the Lord will be judged by God, not man.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Benson, Joseph. *Commentary of the Old Testament and New Testament*. New York: T. Carlton & J. Porter, 1857.
- Blenkinsopp, J. *Isaiah 40-55*. New York: Doubleday, 2002.
- Harrison, R. K. Editor. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988. 1382-1383
- Kissane, E. *The Book of Isaiah*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1960.
- Knight, G. *Servant Theology*. Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1984.
- Life Application Study Bible, King James Version*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997. 2154-2155, 2170-2172.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group 2002. 1755
- Roberts, J. and Machinist, P. *First Isaiah*. Baltimore, MD: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Walvoord, John F. And Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Old Testament. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983.

Say It Correctly

Hearken. HAR-ken.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Will Vindicate His Servant
(Isaiah 50:4–9)

TUESDAY

Remember God's Mighty Deeds
(Isaiah 51:9–16)

WEDNESDAY

God Defends Israel's Cause
(Isaiah 51:17–23)

THURSDAY

God Rescues Us from Peril
(2 Corinthians 1:7–14)

FRIDAY

Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath
(1 Thessalonians 1:6–10)

SATURDAY

Deliverance Belongs to the Lord
(Psalm 3)

SUNDAY

God's Deliverance Is Coming
(Isaiah 51:1–8)

Notes

The Creating Word Becomes Flesh

Bible Background • JOHN 1:1–14

Printed Text • JOHN 1:1–14 | Devotional Reading • GENESIS 2:1–3

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the meaning of the Word for the world, FIND true inspiration for life in Jesus, and LIVE in relationship with Creator God because of the “light” (grace and truth) that Jesus gives.

In Focus

Sister Nancy is a gifted Christian who serves on her church’s Board of Trustees. However, this was not always the case. She is a recovering alcoholic who used to verbally abuse her husband and children. After years of tolerating Nancy’s behavior, her husband had finally had enough. One weekend Nancy arrived home drunk as usual and found her husband, children, and all their possessions gone.

Nancy had been miserable without her family. One of her coworkers, Mitch, noticed her downward spiral and invited her to come to church with his family the next Sunday. After service, they all went out for lunch together. Mitch’s wife, Bea, asked Nancy what she thought about coming to church with them more often. Nancy said she probably wouldn’t be able to make it. Mitch and Bea pressed her, and Nancy confessed she didn’t feel comfortable going to church when her life was so messed up.

Her co-worker, Mitch, told her about the life-changing relationship he had with Jesus. Jesus was Mitch’s light and life, and from what Nancy could see, it was a glorious light and life. Then Bea asked Nancy if she would like to become a new person in Christ. Right there in the restaurant, Sister Nancy gave her life to Christ. She no longer drinks; she and her family are reunited and happy.

Sister Nancy did not just turn over a “new leaf.” She actually became a new person in Christ.

How would your life have been different if you didn’t have new life in Christ?

Keep in Mind

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”
(John 1:3, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The People, Places, and Times

Gnosticism. Many of the early Gentile believers had been exposed to varying strains of Gnosticism (an early heresy) and did not believe in the humanity of Jesus. As people from diverse backgrounds became part of the church, it became necessary for the apostles to correct errors in doctrine as well as encourage the existing believers. In the Gospel of John, the writer seems to be addressing a mixed audience of believers and unbelievers, Jews, and Greeks. The other Gospels had already been written and circulated. John used his writing not to simply tell stories about Jesus, but to explain Christian theology, especially the place of Christ Jesus.

Background

The author of the book of John identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20). Most scholars agree that the apostle John is the author of this

book. John was well-known in the early church and was intimately familiar with Jewish life. He would have been an eyewitness to many of the events recorded in the Gospel of John.

Dating of the Gospel of John is a matter of debate, with dates ranging from AD 50 to 95 or later. However, most scholars accept the later date of AD 95. Although we may not know the exact date of the writing, we do know that the first-century church was thriving. Even amid the threats of persecution and heresy, the church continued to grow.

John wrote to encourage the believers, most of whom were Jewish. He affirms their Jewishness as well as their faith in Jesus Christ, contrasting them with the Pharisees, who claimed to be the true or real Jews. The first 14 verses of the book of John summarize the whole Gospel. In these verses, we are introduced to Jesus—who He is, what He does, and the role He plays in the eternal plan of God for the world.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Is the Word (John 1:1–3)
2. Jesus Is the Light (vv. 4–9)
3. Jesus Reveals God's Character (vv. 10–14)

In Depth

1. Jesus Is the Word (John 1:1–3)

John introduces Jesus as the “Word.” The word used here is *logos*. The Greeks understood *logos* to mean not only the written or spoken word, but also the thought or reasoning in the mind. Jewish believers also used the word *logos* to refer to God and would have connected this concept to the wisdom personified in the Old Testament (see Proverbs 8). In tandem with wisdom was ability; in this case, God’s wisdom was used to create the universe. Jesus is that wisdom personified. Through Jesus, all things were created. To understand the creation, we must know the Creator. All of these concepts are bound up in the word *logos*.

As believers today, we may not realize all the nuances that the author intended. But what we must learn is clear: Jesus was, is, and always will be. He is God. He is the Creator and the Source of all life. The entirety of our Christian faith rests upon accepting these truths.

How have you seen loaded words used or abused in your life?

2. Jesus Is the Light (vv. 4–9)

John speaks of Jesus as “the light.” Jesus is Life itself, and that Life is our Light (v. 4). When we receive this life Jesus offers, His light replaces our spiritual darkness, and we become more like our Creator. However, many people live in deep darkness, which often connotes sin in the Bible. Even though Jesus is the light to dispel darkness, many people refuse to accept

the light of salvation. It’s the same today. People are so thoroughly entrenched in their sin and ignorance that they are blind to the light.

God can use anyone to pierce through the darkness. In Jesus’ time, God sent John the Baptist to bear witness to Jesus (vv. 6–7). John the Baptist did not want people to believe in him; he pointed the way to Jesus. Today, God uses His written Word and the power of the Holy Spirit to testify to the Light. He also uses believers. Every believer should view himself or herself as a testimony to the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ.

What has the Light of Christ made clear to you?

3. Jesus Reveals God's Character (vv. 10–14)

Although Jesus created the world (Colossians 1:16), the world did not recognize Him as Savior (John 1:10). Jesus came to the Jews first, but most of them rejected Him as their Messiah. His gift of salvation is offered freely to all. When we do receive Jesus, God gives us the right to become His children (v. 12), not physically, but spiritually. We are considered His heirs (Galatians 3:29), eligible to receive all of His promised blessings.

We cannot become God’s children by any means other than through salvation in Jesus Christ whom God sent to the earth to take on human flesh. He came to live with us, to feel our pain, to experience our joy, and to know our sorrow.

John’s Jewish readers would have understood the word “dwelt” to be connected to the word for “tabernacle,” where God’s presence dwelt. As modern-day believers, we can’t physically touch Jesus, yet we can see His glory. We can testify to the miracles He has worked in our lives and the lives of others. We can bear witness to the power of salvation.

Why did Jesus need to become a human to understand humanity?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who is the “Word” (John 1:1)?
2. What is the “light of men” (v. 4)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus came to give meaningful, real life to all who will receive Him. He is the living revelation of God, who expressed God's truth in a way we can understand. It is our task to share this light with others. What are effective ways to be witnesses to Jesus' light today?

Liberating Lesson

Jesus came into this world in the form of human flesh, yet those around Him did not acknowledge Him for who He is: God. They chose to continue living in darkness rather than receiving the Light. Things aren't so different in our world today. In modern society, many people have become accustomed to a fast-paced, hectic lifestyle. They are easily distracted, often bored, or generally dissatisfied with life.

Jesus came to free us from the rat race. His light reveals that we are in fact human beings, made in the glorious image of God. Jesus' light burns away our ignorance and reveals our worth. It is then up to us to embrace that worth instead of taking the darker, but easier, path.

Application for Activation

This week, ask God to reveal Himself to you in a new way. Spend time praying, reading the Word, and meditating on what you have read. Let God's Word permeate your spirit so that

you might know God more deeply. Rejoice in the fact that God has revealed Himself to you through Jesus, the Word made flesh, and that He will continue to do so.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. 261.

Tenney, Merrill C. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (John and Acts). Electronic edition. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1992.

Vincent, Marvin R. *Vincent's Word Studies*, Vol. 2: The Writings of John. Electronic edition. Hiawatha, IA: Parsons Technology, 1998.

Say It Correctly

Incarnation. in-car-NA-shun.
Gnosticism. NOSS-tih-siz-um.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Created the World
through Wisdom
(Proverbs 8:22–31)

TUESDAY

In Christ All Things Hold Together
(Colossians 1:13–17)

WEDNESDAY

Christ, the Head of All Things
(Colossians 1:18–22)

THURSDAY

God's Well-Ordered Creation
(Psalm 104:1–15)

FRIDAY

Praise God for Creation
(Psalm 104:24–35)

SATURDAY

The Son Reflects God's Glory
(Hebrews 1:1–4)

SUNDAY

The Word Became Flesh
(John 1:1–14)

Notes

The Word Heals

Bible Background • JOHN 4:46–54

Printed Text • JOHN 4:46–54 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 4:31–34

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND the definition of faith and how Christ honors faithfulness, ACCEPT that faith in Christ strengthens the relationship between Christ and the believer, and TRUST Jesus, by faith and action, to do what we cannot do.

In Focus

Thomas, who was partially blind, walked into HOPE church on a Sunday afternoon. Visitors often walked in off the street at HOPE church. During this special time at HOPE, Pastor Hill was teaching on miracles. As Pastor Hill ended his teaching, he made the call for salvation, and Thomas walked to the front of the church. The pastor asked him his name as he was a visitor. He said, “My name is Thomas. I need food to feed my daughters; my wife died, and we are having a hard time.”

Pastor Hill responded, “We have a food kitchen that will help you with food. Is there anything else we can do for you?” he asked.

Thomas responded, “Just pray for me!” Since Pastor Hill had been teaching on miracles, he prayed to God for a miracle on Thomas’ behalf. The congregation had been seeing them manifest in their own lives. Their faith was activated to believe God for miracles.

Pastor Hill prayed specifically for Thomas’ eyes, “Father, we know You are a miracle worker, You have restored sight to the blind, and that nothing is impossible for You. God, we believe that Thomas’s eyes are healed. We believe by faith, that when he opens his eyes that he will be able to see.”

When the pastor finished praying, the man opened his eyes. He began to cry and blink several times. Thomas said his eyes did not burn, and he could see. The congregation, pastor, and man all rejoiced because God had performed a miracle!

In today’s lesson, believers testify that faith in God’s Word produces healing. Can you recall your faith in God’s Word producing healing in your life and others?

Keep in Mind

“So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.” (John 4:53, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **John 4:46** So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word

that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

54 This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

The People, Places, and Times

Capernaum. Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, a city in the Galilean province, was a central location for Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus lived in Nazareth until He came to Galilee and was baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:9). After John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus returned to Galilee and resided in Capernaum (Matthew 4:12–16). Here, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the Lord called His first disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matthew 4:18–22). Peter's home in Capernaum became the residence for Jesus and the apostles when they were not traveling (Mark 1:29; Luke 4:38). The Lord often preached in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21; John 6:52–59) and performed many miracles in the city. These miracles included the healing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5–13), the healing of the man with palsy (Mark 2:1–12), and the casting out of a demon in a man in the synagogue (Luke 4:31–36). Even though Jesus performed so many miracles in Capernaum, the people still had not repented (Matthew 11:23–24).

Why do people who have so much evidence of God's work refuse to see it?

Background

Cana of Galilee is the birthplace of miracles in Jesus' ministry. The healing of this nobleman's son is notable as Capernaum is approximately 16 miles away from Cana. This miracle is not only notable because of the geographic distance but because it marks Jesus' return to Galilee.

Prior to Jesus' arrival in Cana, Jesus had taken a journey through Judea and Galilee. Jesus was compelled to go to Samaria. Historically, the Samaritans were condemned by the Jewish people. Yet, Jesus needed to go to Samaria. Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1–6). Jesus' natural thirst was used to fulfill the spiritual thirst of the Samaritan woman, leading Jesus and the Samaritan woman to have a life-changing exchange.

Jesus revealed His identity to the Samaritan woman. The Samaritan woman found saving, believing faith in Jesus. Her encounter with

Jesus caused a revival in Samaria. The Samaritan woman was the first recorded female evangelist in the Bible (John 4:39–42). Jesus was recognized as the Messiah and was honored accordingly.

Yet, Jesus' next journey was into Galilee. Jesus was received though not accepted or honored (John 4:43–45). In Galilee, belief was challenged, and miracles were hindered. The miracle healing of the nobleman's son was an announcement that Christ was in Cana and He was indeed the Messiah.

At-A-Glance

1. Flawed Believing Faith (John 4:46–47)
2. The Challenge of Faith (v. 48)
3. Dismantling Earthly Expectation (vv. 49–51)
4. The Healing Word of Jesus (vv. 52–54)

In Depth

1. Flawed Believing Faith (John 4:46–47)

The very existence of Jesus is a manifestation of the power of an unhindered and unrestrained spoken word. The nobleman was familiar with Jesus' miracles and believed in what Jesus could do. When the nobleman learned that Jesus was in Cana, he traveled for an entire day uphill to beckon Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son.

The nobleman had the faith to approach Jesus knowing He could heal his son, but his faith was flawed because he believed the healing required His presence, believing Jesus' authority and power was relegated to His bodily form. Oftentimes, our faith can be flawed in desperation indicating the need for the flaws to be worked by our faith being challenged.

Have you encountered times in your walk of faith, when your desperation revealed the flaws in your faith?

2. The Challenge of Faith (v. 48)

It is evident that the nobleman had believing faith, yet his faith was hindered by his thinking and experience. The nobleman believed the sickness of his son is what brought him to Jesus, but Jesus knew that the nobleman needed to be challenged in his faith to accept the reality of Him being Messiah and to demonstrate that His Word is as powerful as His presence when believed.

The nobleman's faith in Jesus was sparked by what he heard, but his faith needed to mature so that it could be strengthened by his own experience with Jesus. The challenge of his son's illness brought him to Jesus so that his reality of Jesus could be challenged.

How many times have we hindered God, because we were unwilling to allow God full access to move in a situation?

3. Dismantling Earthly Expectation (vv. 49–51)

Often crisis reveals our expectation of God. Jesus' encounters on earth were designed to shift our perspective from the earth to heaven. The nobleman had an earthly expectation of what Jesus could do: heal. It could only happen if Jesus came in person. Jesus needed the nobleman to understand that the power of God is unhindered by time or space. Jesus gave a direct order that dismantled the nobleman's expectation and increased his faith, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." The nobleman believed what Jesus said and obediently followed His directive (John 4:50).

The obedient response indicates that his faith increased. The nobleman journeyed to Capernaum and was met by his servant to confirm the words of Jesus, "Thy son liveth."

What can we do to dismantle our earthly expectations and exchange them for the answered prayer?

4. The Healing Word of Jesus (vv. 52–54)

The power embedded in the spoken word of Jesus shines out when the nobleman inquires at what time his son became well. The servants confirmed the exact timing of the word of healing that manifested for the son. The nobleman immediately recognizes the power in the healing word of Jesus, and the faith of the nobleman matured. The timing of healing words, “Thy son liveth” showed the nobleman the correlation between faith and miracles. He believed, his household believed, and his son lived.

Can you identify times when your faith and the word of God worked together to produce miracles?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Jesus challenge the nobleman regarding signs and wonders (John 4:48)?
2. Compare and contrast the centurion’s (Matthew 8:5–13) and the nobleman’s encounters with Jesus and the sending of the word to heal.

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why is it important to examine our expectation of healing?
2. How does what we believe impact what we receive from God?

Liberating Lesson

Many of us have had desperate situations when we needed God to heal us or someone that we love. Often times we have responded desperately to those needs and were often left defeated because we did not receive the answer we had hoped for. The result of unanswered prayers pushes believers into a posture of begging, even though God does not require that or even want that from us. God desires our prayers to be fervent and persistent which results in mature faith. Mature faith is what

gives glory to God. Answered prayer also gives glory to God and serves as a testament to God’s faithfulness to us. Not only does answered prayer witness God’s faithfulness to us, but it also demonstrates to unbelievers the reality of God. God is trying to shift our expectation of Him. Earthly expectations of heavenly encounters would often weaken the demonstration of God’s power in our lives.

Application for Activation

“Jesus heals” is an infallible truth. The Word’s ability to heal is not bound by time, distance, circumstance, or the grave. We need to shift our perspective for the reality of these truths to manifest in our lives through Christ Jesus.

- Ask God to reveal to you areas of flawed faith.
- When you pray, are you begging or persisting in fervency?
- Discern whether your expectations of God are earthly focused or heavenly focused.
- Examine whether you are responding to God in obedience only or is your obedience coupled with faith and trust.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Full Life Holy Bible, King James Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 1992. 802-804.

Guzik, David. *The Enduring Word Bible Commentary.* 2019.

MacLaren, A. Expositions of Holy Scriptures. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/john/4-54.htm> (accessed September 17, 2020).

Nelson, Thomas. *New Spirit Filled Life Bible.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers. 2002. 1519.

Perome, J. J. S. *The Cambridge Bible for schools and colleges.* <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/john/4-48.htm> (accessed September 17, 2020).

Radmacher, Earl D., ed. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary: Spreading the Light of God's Word into Your Life.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. 1648-1653.

Spence-Jones, H. D. M. *The Pulpit Commentary.* <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/john/4-53.htm> (accessed September 17, 2020).

Say It Correctly

Cana. KAY-nah

Capernaum. kah-PER-nay-um.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jesus Reveals His Glory

(John 2:1–11)

TUESDAY

O Lord, Heal Me!

(Psalm 6)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

(Matthew 8:5–13)

THURSDAY

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

(John 5:1–9)

FRIDAY

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

(John 9:1–7)

SATURDAY

God Heals Their Infirmities

(Psalm 41)

SUNDAY

Jesus Heals a Royal Official's Son

(John 4:46–54)

Notes

The Word Resurrects the Dead

Bible Background • JOHN 11:17–44

Printed Text • JOHN 11:17–27, 38–44 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 3:18–21

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE Mary's and Martha's faith relationships with Jesus; EMBRACE with the confident expectation that Jesus has the power of God to save, heal, and raise people from the dead; and ENGAGE with Jesus honestly and faithfully, even when faced with impossible situations.

In Focus

Franklin hesitantly ascended the steps of the church. It had been a long time since he'd been in any church, but he couldn't stay away from DeShawn's funeral. He still couldn't believe that his friend had died so suddenly. He knew that DeShawn was in heaven, but that didn't help the ache in Franklin's heart.

The funeral started, and one by one, people shared how much DeShawn had meant to them. Franklin was touched when he heard the many testimonies of how DeShawn had shown God's love to others. His cousin said, "DeShawn lived his life in the certain hope that he had a place in heaven ready for him. But he also had hope that his mighty God could change this world, too. That's why he fought so hard for change in our community."

Finally, the preacher came up to give the message. "Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' Those of us who have believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior know that we will see DeShawn again. We do not mourn as those who have no hope! We do have hope, and His name is Jesus."

Franklin thought about the preacher's words for several days afterwards. It had been a long time since he had hope of any kind. Maybe now was the time to gain new hope—the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus has conquered death, we have hope. What can we do to keep our hope vibrant in the face of impossible situations?

Keep in Mind

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25–26, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV John 11:17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

The People, Places, and Times

Martha. Most scholars believe that Martha was the elder sister of Mary and Lazarus. This is because she is referred to as the owner of the house (Luke 10:38). In an earlier meeting with Jesus, it was Martha who became distraught when her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet instead of helping her serve (Luke 10:39–42).

Bethany. This is a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, almost two miles east of Jerusalem. It appears that Jesus preferred to lodge there instead of in Jerusalem while He was in the area for the pilgrimage festivals of

Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost. It was here in the house of Simon the Leper that Jesus was anointed days before his death. The name means "house of figs." Today, it is known as *el-Azariyeh* (i.e., "place of Lazarus").

Background

Only in the book of John do we find the recounting of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This is a family that Jesus loved, and He was loved by them. When He needed a rest, He knew He could find it with these three adults.

At the start of John 11, Martha and Mary notify Jesus that their brother Lazarus is deathly sick (v. 3). But instead of rushing to Bethany, Jesus stays where He is for two more days. Therefore, by the time Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead four days.

Obviously, Jesus was not in a rush to get to Bethany. He informs His disciples that Lazarus is in fact dead and that He is glad that He was not there to keep Lazarus from dying, so that they may believe (John 11:15). This statement shapes the theological heart of today's lesson.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Is in Control (John 11:17–20)
2. Jesus Is Always Right on Time (vv. 21–24)
3. Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life (vv. 25–27)
4. Jesus Is Lord over Death (vv. 38–44)

In Depth

1. Jesus Is in Control (John 11:17–20)

When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead four days. The professional mourners had arrived, and the situation looked hopeless to the human eye. Everything around Martha and Mary was telling them that it was time to give up hope—that there was nothing more to be done. Ultimately, Jesus is in complete control of the situation. His delay is for the benefit of His disciples and Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, so they may come to trust in the Lord with all their hearts, instead of leaning on their own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

Jesus wants us to put our complete confidence in Him because He is in control of all the affairs of life. When things look bad and we cannot see any way out, Jesus wants us to

run to Him, like Martha, and place all of our trust in Him alone.

What benefit do we think we gain by handling things ourselves rather than trusting Jesus?

2. Jesus Is Always Right on Time (vv. 21–24)

Some scholars suggest Martha's first remarks to Jesus were ones of reproach instead of grief. In a positive light, however, we recognize Martha's faith in Jesus' ability to heal her brother is undiminished. She knows God will do whatever Jesus asks, which implies she believes Jesus is a righteous man for whom nothing is impossible.

When Jesus tells her, "thy brother shall rise again" (v. 23), Martha's response implies that she does not yet grasp Jesus' full implication. She understood that in the "last day" all would rise, but she does not expect an immediate miracle.

The way Martha addresses Jesus is similar to how we often address Him when things do not go the way we think they should. The Lord may not show up when we think He ought to, but we can be sure that He is always right on time.

How have you misunderstood God's meaning when He tries to comfort you?

3. Jesus Is the Resurrection and the Life (vv. 25–27)

When Jesus heard Martha's reply, He responded to her by stating emphatically, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (v. 25). In essence, Jesus was telling Martha, "You keep looking forward to some event in the future, but what you are looking for is standing right in front of you." Jesus challenged Martha to place her trust in Him as the One who holds the power of life and death in His hands. The Lord wants us to know that all power in heaven and on earth is in Jesus' hand (Matthew 28:18), and for this reason we should place all of our trust in Him.

Placing faith in Jesus has implications for the present and is not relegated to the afterlife. Jesus

wants to effect change in our lives right now. As Christians, we must reach the point where our trust in Christ transcends our understanding of the world around us.

When has God surprised you when you thought the situation was beyond hope?

4. Jesus Is Lord over Death (vv. 38–44)

Mary comes to meet Jesus on the road and interacts with Him much as Martha did. Seeing the sorrow of the sisters and the mourners, Jesus is still upset when He comes to the grave. There, He begins to work a miracle. Martha still objects pragmatically, but Jesus insists.

Jesus' prayer to God here is largely for the benefit of those listening rather than for God Himself. Jesus will have it known that this miracle is to bring glory to God, above anything else. Then using only His voice, which created all things and therefore has authority over all things, He calls for Lazarus to come out.

Lazarus obediently comes out. He is still dressed as a corpse and must be freed from his wrappings, but his resurrection is a lasting testament to the power of Jesus' words.

Why do we, like Martha, object when God wants to work a miracle for us?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Martha understand Jesus' words about her brother rising again (v. 24)?
2. What does Jesus say are the results of believing in Him (vv. 25–26)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Jesus tells Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again" (from John 11:23), and raises him. Do you think that Jesus wants to demonstrate His resurrecting power in our lives even today? Give some examples of His power at work in your life.

2. What did Jesus mean when He said, "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet

shall he live" (from v. 25)? How does this affect our lives right now?

Liberating Lesson

We have many euphemisms when discussing death. We care for our health, take security precautions, create safety devices, and so much more, because we fear our death. And when we are faced with death, we do not always know how to comfort others during times of grief. The whole situation makes us uncomfortable. This is largely because of all the uncertainty surrounding death.

Christians know, however, that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. He came to show us the way to an abundant life of bringing glory to God. We can trust Him to bring Christians a bodily resurrection and a heavenly home. The exact details of what that looks like are unclear, but the Christian's hope for eternal life frees us from fear of death.

Application for Activation

We have all been in situations that looked hopeless. Undoubtedly, we have been tempted to give up hope and count our losses. Think about some of the times that you have given up hope and the Lord came in and "resurrected" the situation. Think about the effect this had on you and what effect it should have on your faith. What would it look like for you to trust Jesus to resurrect the situation today?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Adeyemo, Tokunboh, ed. *Africa Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John*. Vol. 2. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1956.

"Bethany." *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/smiths-bible-dictionary/bethany.html> (accessed January 8, 2011).

Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company. n.d.

Say It Correctly

Furlongs. FUR-longs.

Eschatological. ess-ka-toe-LOG-ih-kal.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Awake, O Dead, and Sing!

(Isaiah 26:12–19)

TUESDAY

The Dead Shall Be Raised

(1 Corinthians 15:12–19)

WEDNESDAY

In Christ All Are Made Alive

(1 Corinthians 15:20–28)

THURSDAY

Wake Up!

(Daniel 12:1–4)

FRIDAY

The Dead Will Hear Christ's Voice

(John 5:25–29)

SATURDAY

Jesus Travels to Lazarus

(John 11:1, 3–16)

SUNDAY

The Raising of Lazarus

(John 11:20–27, 38–44)

Notes

The Word Saves

Bible Background • JOHN 12:27–50

Printed Text • JOHN 12:44–50 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 5:19–24

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will **RECOGNIZE** that Jesus is God, **DESIRE** a closer relationship with God through choosing to follow Christ, and **SHARE** with others the opportunity to come into the light of Christ.

In Focus

Dr. Tiffany Garrett had been a physician for many years. She believed medicine was her calling and could not see herself doing anything else. In Tiffany's relationship with God, she viewed God's ways as truth and best. She often prayed, "God, let Your will be done in my life." However, as God began to reveal the light of His will, Dr. Garrett struggled with living out her prayer.

She wanted to obey what God was revealing to her through prayer, but she did not agree with God's plan. God was calling Tiffany to the mission field in Uganda. She would serve as a team member with the missionary team from her local church. She toiled within herself about what her parents, friends, colleagues, and everybody that knew her as a medical doctor would think. Dr. Garrett was divided in her heart about the decision. She could hear this Scripture in her head, "But all who reject me, and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken." Tiffany willingly surrendered.

Twenty years later, Tiffany reminisced on her struggle to follow the direction God revealed to her. She reflected on all the miracles God performed in her personal life, the people who received salvation from one decision to follow God's will for that season of her life. She reminisced about all the times she wondered if she had made the right decision. Dr. Garrett concluded that trust, belief, and obedience to the Lord is never a mistake.

What miracles or divine opportunities are you missing out on because you are rejecting the directions of the Lord? Who might come to know Jesus if you say YES?

Keep in Mind

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." (John 12:46, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **John 12:44** Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.

45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

The People, Places, and Times

The Trinity. One thing we know about God is that He is a God of relationship. In some ways God is a relationship. We can see this in God as Trinity. The Father relates to the Son. The Son relates to the Father. The Spirit relates to the Father and Son. They are a divine community so connected that they are one in essence. Although it is hard for our minds to comprehend, God is community and wants nothing less than for the people He created to dwell in community.

Background

Jesus gives His farewell sermon to the Jewish people six days before the Passover. Jesus had returned to Bethany, where He had performed one of the greatest miracles: raising Lazarus from the death. The chief priests had deep-seated issues with Jesus and because of that miracle. Too many people had come to a believing faith in Jesus. The Pharisees plotted to kill Jesus (John 11:45–48).

Jesus laments over the unbelief in the land. The people had witnessed Jesus perform countless miracles, yet they persisted in unbelief. There were those who believed Jesus but would not confess their belief because of fear of the

Pharisees; they loved the praises of men rather than God (John 12:42). Jesus mourns within Himself over the rejection of the words He has spoken and their ultimate rejection of God. He commends those that accept the light that He bears, and the redemption provided to them because they believe (John 12:44).

At-A-Glance

1. Believing and Seeing Jesus (John 12:44–45)
2. Jesus Is Light in Darkness (v. 46)
3. Jesus the Rejected Savior (vv. 47–48)
4. Jesus Speaks as the Father Speaks (vv. 49–50)

In Depth

1. Believing and Seeing Jesus (John 12:44–45)

Jesus had been the miracle worker in the eyes of the people. He did not work miracles behind closed doors or in an obscure fashion. Jesus worked miracles where everyone could see Him. In His farewell address to the Jewish people, Jesus laments over their unbelief in Him

and who sent Him. Jesus desperately desired for the people to believe on the God that sent Him.

Jesus mourned over their blindness to see Him and ultimately see the Father who sent Him. Unbelief is regarded in Scripture as sin. It hinders salvation, deliverance, and the working of miracles in the lives of individuals but most importantly the lives of believers (John 8:24). The sin of unbelief severs the community of believers from God.

Jesus was brokenhearted because the people He was sent to save could not believe and see the goodness of God though it dwelt among them. Jesus could have demonstrated the power of God so much more and performed more miracles if only the people could see and believe. The Jewish people believed the prophecies that foretold of the coming of the Messiah and believed God would keep His word, but when God fulfilled the word of prophecy, the Jews were blinded to the excellence of Christ although He dwelt among them.

How much have you limited God's power from working in your life because you could not see or believe in Him?

2. Jesus Is Light in Darkness (v. 46)

Darkness is the absence of light and truth in the world. It can be embedded in the lives of people as an environment where sin festers and Satan has access to steal, kill, and destroy. God sent Jesus into the world to free mankind from the bondage of sin. Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12). Jesus came so that people would not have to succumb to the darkness of this world. When Jesus is accepted as light, darkness must yield its grip so that we can live in freedom and live abundantly.

Jesus is the only source that provides light in dark circumstances. Jesus is the only way to God who is also light (1 John 1:5). Those who truly desire light will believe Jesus is the light of the world and will no longer live in

darkness. Believing on Jesus means to accept Jesus as the Son of God and the Father who sent Him. Accepting Jesus as the light ensures power over the darkness of the world, and grants us fellowship with God the Father. Receiving Jesus as the light of the world means the power and blessing of salvation can be realized.

In what areas of your life does darkness permeate and the light of Christ need to dwell?

3. Jesus the Rejected Savior (vv. 47–48)

Jesus has been called the rejected cornerstone (Psalm 118:22). Jesus understood that His purpose for being sent into the world was to redeem humanity back to God. Jesus reminded the Jewish people that even if they rejected His words and staggered in unbelief, He did not judge them (John 12:47). Jesus affirms that He came to be salvation for the world. Jesus lamented over the rejection of the people not receiving the word of God, because the word of God was salvation.

Jesus needed those who rejected Him and His words to understand that there was a cost. Rejecting Jesus as Savior has the penalty of death. The judgment would come on the last day should rejection be their final decision. The penalty of death could be avoided by accepting Him.

Do you have a loved one that is rejecting Jesus as the Savior? What steps can you take to help them see and believe Jesus?

4. Jesus Speaks as the Father Speaks (vv. 49–50)

Throughout Jesus' ministry He reminds everyone that His purpose is only aligned to what the Father speaks and desires (John 5:19; 6:38). Every word that Jesus spoke came directly from God the Father. Every action Jesus performed is what the Father commanded.

God sent Jesus with a message to preach forgiveness of sin, the Gospel of salvation, and eternal life. Jesus spoke exactly what the

Father said without deviation or flaw. Jesus proclaimed the Father's desire for everlasting life (John 12:50). Jesus came to fulfill His purpose of salvation from sin despite the rejection and persecution.

How has God commanded you share the Gospel of salvation? Have you followed the command?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was it important that when people believe on Jesus and His words, they believe God (John 12:44)?

2. Why did Jesus emphasize salvation and not judgment although they rejected Him (v. 47)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. John 12 was ultimately Christ's message of salvation and His fulfilling the command to be a sin offering for humanity. Jesus lamented over the rejection of God's words through Him, yet Jesus focused on the assignment to preach everlasting life. What relevance does Jesus' commitment to the Gospel of salvation have on our own evangelism?

2. Reflect on your life before salvation, do you remember how desperately you needed a Savior? Reminisce on your salvation experience and the impact salvation has had in your life. With whom could you share your testimony of salvation within your neighborhood?

Liberating Lesson

The most compelling way to convey the message of salvation is to share the purpose of Christ's coming. It is also important to express the benefits of eternal life granted by the light of Jesus Christ. There is so much darkness in the world, with global disease, the senseless killing of marginalized people, corrupted government, and a divided church. All of this darkness can cause people so much pain and grief. Jesus came to provide solutions for all of these issues.

When Christ is presented as Savior rather than a judge, more people freely see and believe God. Testimonies of salvation and conversion stories help make Christ reachable. As the church becomes more relatable, reachable, and tangible so does the message of Christ. Christ's message was simple and simple is what people need right now.

Application for Activation

- Individual believers must share their testimonies with unbelieving family members, friends, and neighbors. Pray for opportunities to share testimonies with unbelievers. Commit to individual evangelism.

- The Church must show how Christ has liberated them from darkness so that the world will know Christ's freedom. Create opportunities and forums to share about the good the Church has done, and the evils the Church used to permit but now has rejected.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John*. The New Daily Study Bible. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press. Reprint, 1975. 2:135.
Criswell, W. H. *The Scarlet Thread through the Bible*. Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, Reprint, 2014.
Gossip, Arthur John. *The Interpreter's Bible: The Gospel According to St. John (exposition)*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Reprint, 1980. 8:676.
Kittel, G., G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, eds. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 3, p. 898). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, N.D. 5:1086.
Lenski, R. C. H. *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. 4:895.

Say It Correctly

Transfiguration.
trans-FIG-yur-AH-shun.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

You Must Be Born from Above
(John 3:1–8)

TUESDAY

Jesus Brings Eternal Life
(John 3:9–17)

WEDNESDAY

My Rock, Fortress, and Deliverer
(2 Samuel 22:2–7)

THURSDAY

Salvation Comes from God
(Psalm 62)

FRIDAY

Don't Neglect God's Message of Salvation
(Hebrews 2:1–9)

SATURDAY

Father, Glorify Your Name!
(John 12:27–36)

SUNDAY

Jesus, the Light of the World
(John 12:44–50)

Notes

The Word Gives Peace

Bible Background • JOHN 14:15–31

Printed Text • JOHN 14:15–29 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 6:1–14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit; BE ENCOURAGED that Jesus offers us peace in the Holy Spirit, and COMMIT to obeying Christ rather than the prince of darkness.

In Focus

James and Trina had been experiencing tension in their marriage ever since their youngest had left the nest. Trina seemed less joyful lately. James asked if everything was OK. Trina insisted that she was fine. One night, James awoke to discover that Trina wasn't in bed. He noticed a light in the hallway. He listened closer and could hear muffled sobbing coming from their guest room. James' heart sank. He wanted to help fix it, but he didn't know how.

On his drive to work the next day, James prayed for Trina. James prayed that the Holy Spirit would show him what to do. That afternoon, James remembered the deep feeling of love and appreciation he had for Trina on their wedding day. *I wonder if she knows that?* he thought. He knew what he needed to do.

That night at dinner, James told Trina how much he still appreciated and loved her. "I want you to know that I see you. I see how you've always made sure the kids know they can still come by to be loved on by their Mama. I see how you work so hard at your job. I was thinking just this afternoon how lovely you were on our wedding day, and I think you're just as lovely today."

Trina's eyes filled with tears. "I didn't know you felt that way." Trina explained she'd been sad because it seemed that James loved her less now. They talked about how they could show love toward each other more often.

How have you felt the Holy Spirit communicate with you?

Keep in Mind

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." (John 14:16, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

The People, Places, and Times

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called by many names: the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter or Counselor, and simply, the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God. He is not a part of God, an influence from God, or an agent of God. He is God. God is Spirit (John 4:24). The distinction between God and "His Spirit" is an artificial one. It is our way of talking about God in motion. Strictly speaking, God does not move. He is everywhere. Therefore, He cannot go anywhere because He is already there. God does not move, but God moves things as a magnet draws things to it. When God causes motion, we speak of this power to move things not simply as God, but as

God's Spirit. To distinguish between our *human* spirits and *evil* spirits, we speak of God as the *Holy* Spirit.

Background

The disciples were upset. Jesus' disciples were becoming both sad and scared. They were sad because over the past two to three years, they had come to love Jesus. True, they had not understood many of the things He had said and done, but through His love for them and their constant close association, a bond of respect and affection had grown between them. They did not want to break a friendship they had come to enjoy. They were scared because this same friendship meant they had

an intimate identification with Jesus. They felt that if the authorities were after Jesus, the disciples' lives were also in danger. They were scared also because Jesus' death would mean they would be left alone in an extremely hostile environment.

It was to these sad and scared disciples that Jesus reaffirmed the active, powerful presence of God. Undoubtedly, the disciples felt better after Jesus' words of assurance (16:29, 30).

At-A-Glance

1. The Counselor as Teacher
(John 14:15–20)
2. The Counselor as Prosecutor
(vv. 21–24)
3. The Counselor as Gift (vv. 25–29)

In Depth

1. The Counselor as Teacher (John 14:15–20)

Jesus tells His disciples that the Counselor would reveal the truth about Jesus. Jesus was painfully aware that most of His contemporaries did not know who He truly was. Despite Peter's confession, not even His disciples really knew Him (John 14:7–12, 20). One denied Him. Another betrayed Him, and all the others ran and hid when He needed them most. But Jesus told them that after a while, they would know Him because the Counselor would throw the spotlight on Him and reveal to them who He really was.

They would know the deep beauty of His words and deeds and begin to understand the universal significance of His life and teachings. They would know Him because God, the Holy Spirit, would make the real Jesus stand out in their experiences (John 14:20; 16:14, 15).

How can we let the Holy Spirit guide us?

2. The Counselor as Prosecutor (vv. 21–24)

Another of the Counselor's ministries was to convince people that Jesus was right and they were wrong. The Holy Spirit convinces unbelievers that: (1) Jesus was right about His Messianic claims, (2) they had been wrong in rejecting Him, and (3) if, like Satan, they deliberately chose to continue doing wrong in spite of their knowledge of right, then they would share Satan's fate (John 16:8–11).

God has been pictured as having two arms—one of love and the other of justice. Those who refuse the forgiveness and security of His arm of love are doomed to feel the crush of His arm of justice. The Counselor has both positive and negative ministries. For the believer, He is an Advocate; for those who refuse to believe, He is a Prosecutor.

What rewards have you experienced from keeping God's commandments?

3. The Counselor as Gift (vv. 25–29)

Jesus assures His disciples that the Holy Spirit will work as an Advocate for them, by teaching them and reminding them of Jesus' teaching. Not only will the Holy Spirit help the disciples remember all that happened in Jesus' ministry over the past three years, but the Spirit will also teach so that the disciples can more fully understand what they have seen.

This understanding grants them peace. This is a peace from God, and so it will always be available. Peace from the world comes and goes, but since God has sent the Holy Spirit to be with His followers all the time, they may have a peace that lasts.

How can we enjoy the Holy Spirit as our constant companion?

Search the Scriptures

1. What kind of warning did Jesus give His disciples before He left them (John 14:18–20)?

2. What else did Jesus promise His disciples before He left them (v. 27)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Is the Holy Spirit's work confined only to the Church and the lives of believers, or is the Holy Spirit at work in the general society? How can we tell where the Holy Spirit is at work in the world?

2. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of Soviet Communism, and the ending of the Cold War—were these events the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, or did these events result from the “strength of democracy,” the military might of the United States, and/or an unusual stream of good luck?

Liberating Lesson

Many today will insist that we can never know certain things, especially events from long ago history. They say the Bible cannot be trusted to be an accurate account of Jesus' ministry.

As we learned in this week's lesson, however, Christians do not rely solely on the abilities of flawed humans to retain knowledge of God's Incarnation. Jesus assures the disciples that the Holy Spirit will help them remember all that happened. So when the disciples recorded Jesus' message, even though it was decades later, we can trust they did so with faithfulness according to the Spirit's guidance. Believers firmly trust the vital teachings of the church were kept unchanged throughout history because of the work of the Spirit.

Application for Activation

Look around this week in your community and find out where the Holy Spirit is at work

empowering people to do the work of Jesus (See Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:34–40). Ask the Lord for a way you can give your support to this group either by giving time, money, or other tangible resources (not just prayer). Share your experience in class next week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Paraklete. PARE-uh-kleet.
Thaddaeus. THAD-ee-us.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Seek Peace and Pursue It
(Psalm 34:4–14)

TUESDAY

Rest for the Weary
(Matthew 11:25–30)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Has Conquered the World
(John 16:23–27, 32–33)

THURSDAY

Peace for the Upright
(Psalm 119:161–176)

FRIDAY

God's Unmoveable Covenant of Peace
(Isaiah 54:6–10)

SATURDAY

Don't Let Your Hearts Be Troubled
(John 14:1–4)

SUNDAY

Peace to the Disciples
(John 14:15–29)

Notes

A New Home

Bible Background • REVELATION 21:1–8

Printed Text • REVELATION 21:1–8 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 15:1–8

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE the unique genre of “apocalypse” that characterizes Revelation in order to discern how to understand its message, CONTEMPLATE the creation of a new heaven and a new earth for the hope that this vision holds for the faithful, and EMBRACE the peace of God that begins in this life with Jesus and continues in God’s new creation.

In Focus

Randy’s phone rang, and he buried his head in the hard hospital pillow. He didn’t want to talk to anyone, even on his 50th birthday. He was too ashamed and too broken. He thought over the past few decades of his life. What had gone wrong?

His life had started out so promising—marrying his high school sweetheart, graduating from one of the country’s best universities, landing his dream job. But then, the addictions took control of his life. Drugs, gambling, adultery—he had done them all. He sighed deeply. Now he was alone. He was just an old, broken, bitter man. If only he had never taken that first hit. If only he had never bet that first dollar. If only he had never cheated on Shari...if only...if only...

He let the tears come, rolling down his cheeks. “God, what I wouldn’t give for a second chance,” he prayed. “I’ve made such a mess of my own life. If You’re really there, please help me. Help me!”

Now, Randy thinks of that day, a full decade ago, as the time when he really began to live. God heard his prayer and sent someone who shared the Gospel with him. God gave him the new beginning he had prayed for so desperately. God has restored Randy’s family, and he thanks God every day with the assurance that he will one day dwell with God for all eternity.

Many people would like to have a new beginning. What is it like to begin anew? How can Robert’s testimony demonstrate the hope of a new beginning to others?

Keep in Mind

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Revelation 21:4, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Revelation 21:1** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The People, Places, and Times

John. John, whose name in Hebrew means “Jehovah is gracious,” was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples, and he is believed to be the author of the Gospel of John, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. The son of Zebedee and brother of James, he was one of the three in Jesus’ inner circle (along with James and Peter) who witnessed the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and he was present with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His arrest (Mark 14:32–33). John is recorded as the only disciple present at the Crucifixion and was instructed by Jesus to care for His mother, Mary (John 19:25–27). Of all 12 disciples, he was the only one not martyred (according to tradition). However, he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos for his faith. It was there that he wrote the book of Revelation.

Bride. The imagery of the bride is used widely in the Bible as a description of the people of God. In the Old Testament, the prophets presented Israel as a bride who had committed repeated adulteries (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 3). The

prophets also proclaimed that God was faithful to His unfaithful bride and would restore her (Isaiah 61:10). In the book of Revelation, bride imagery is used for the Church and her relationship to Christ. The bride belongs to Christ, who is the Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15). In Revelation, the Church, as the bride of the Lamb, has prepared herself for marriage by performing righteous deeds (19:7–8). In the last days a great wedding is portrayed with the Church prepared for her Bridegroom (21:2, 9). The bride pictured here has not earned her status through righteous deeds. These acts were the Church’s obedient response to God’s saving grace. The garments of righteousness were given to her.

Background

The book of Revelation records four visions of John. The first vision (1:12–3:22) is of Jesus and His messages to the seven churches. The second vision (4:1–13:18) depicts Jesus Christ at the Throne of God, the opening of the seven seals, and the seven trumpet blasts. The third vision

(14:1–16:21) describes Christ on Mount Zion. Our lesson today opens with the beginning of the fourth vision, in which we will learn about the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise in Christ—the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

At-A-Glance

1. The Presentation (Revelation 21:1–2)
2. The Proclamation (vv. 3–4)
3. The Promises (vv. 5–8)

In Depth

1. The Presentation (Revelation 21:1–2)

Genesis 1 gives us the account of the creation of the world. God divided the light from the darkness and the land from the seas. He created fish, birds, plants, animals and then He created humans. In Revelation 21, God reveals His creativity by first presenting the church, the Body of Christ, as the “bride.” He then goes on to describe the place where the Bride will dwell—a new heaven and new earth. The old world will have passed away, with all of its problems, especially the chaotic sea. The new heaven and the new earth will be a fitting place for the Bride, the redeemed of the Lord, to dwell.

What kinds of images and feelings does “bride” bring to mind? Why are those helpful in understanding the relationship between Christ and the Church?

2. The Proclamation (vv. 3–4)

In the Garden of Eden, God came down and physically fellowshiped with Adam and Eve. They walked with Him and conversed with Him on a regular basis. But sin destroyed this fellowship. Now in verse 3, after presenting the New Jerusalem, God joyfully proclaims His intention to dwell with His people in the new

city. In Scripture, the idea of God dwelling with His people and being their God is covenant language.

Perfect peace and joy result from God’s eternal presence with His people. In God’s perfect presence, there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, and no more suffering for all eternity. Verse 4 echoes Revelation 7:17; both verses promise that God Himself will tenderly care for His people, as a bridegroom cares for his bride. He will dry our tears and comfort us with the fact that the old has passed away. All is new. Never again will we experience the trials and tribulations of the old world.

Previously whenever a follower of God saw Him or was in His presence, it was a fearful thing (Exodus 20:18–19; Isaiah 6:5). What has changed that God dwelling with His Bride is now joyful?

3. The Promises (vv. 5–8)

God, seated on His throne, directs John to write down His words. God says He is even now working on our behalf, transforming us into the image of His dear Son (2 Corinthians 3:18) and readying us for the day when we will be completely new. Our hope for that day is certain, for God always finishes what He has begun. In the same sense that Jesus spoke the words, “It is finished” (from John 19:30), God announces that His plan is accomplished. All has proceeded according to His will and for His glory.

God promises abundant, life-giving water to all who are thirsty. For Middle Eastern people living in the desert, water was often a scarce and valuable commodity. This promise of plenteous water therefore symbolizes life and prosperity.

Those who overcome, who fight the good fight of faith, will enter the Holy City and be richly rewarded as God’s heirs, entitled to all of the benefits of a son or daughter. Those who reject God, however, will experience a “second death” (v. 8). The first death is physical death on earth. The second death is an eternal dying—a

perpetual burning in the lake of fire. Instead of dwelling with God, these people will be eternally separated from Him.

In what ways can the water of life be read figuratively or literally? In what ways is the lake of fire figurative or literal?

Search the Scriptures

1. What physical aspect of the new heaven and earth will be different from today's world (Revelation 21:1)?
2. To what was the Holy City compared (v. 2)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What is the significance of the symbolism of New Jerusalem appearing as a bride?
2. Why did God want John to write down His words?

Liberating Lesson

What would it be like to be able to begin anew? People today are always longing for a fresh start—a new diet, a new job, a new house, a new school, a new marriage, etc. Some will take drastic measures to try to change their lives for the better. As Christians, we know that God offers the ultimate new beginning, which is salvation through Jesus Christ. When we are a new creation in Christ, we have the power to stop believing Satan's lies about ourselves and others, we have the power to think of others before ourselves, and we have the power to truly commune with God. We also understand that the joy and peace we experience briefly in this world is just a taste of what we will experience in God's presence forever.

Application for Activation

Remember that God's promises are sure. You can count on Him to keep every promise. As you live your life of faithfulness before God, you can be assured that He will complete what He started in you.

Others need to know this assurance as well. But people need to know they are sinners before they can recognize their thirst for what it is: a need for relationship with God. This week, pray for your unsaved loved ones and acquaintances. Pray that God will reveal to them their need for salvation. Pray that God will give you opportunities and wisdom to share the Good News of a true new beginning.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- NIV Study Bible*, 1446.
- Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Zebedee. ZEH-beh-dee.
Gethsemane. Geth-SEH-mah-nee.
Omega. Oh-MAY-gah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Lord, Our Dwelling Place
(Psalm 90:1–12)

TUESDAY

To Love God Is to Know God
(1 John 2:12–17)

WEDNESDAY

Faith Is the Victory
(1 John 5:1–5)

THURSDAY

God Will Do a New Thing
(Isaiah 43:14–21)

FRIDAY

Come, You Who Thirst
(Isaiah 55:1–5)

SATURDAY

More Than Conquerors
(Romans 8:31–39)

SUNDAY

God Will Dwell with God's People
(Revelation 21:1–8)

Notes

A New City

Bible Background • REVELATION 21:9–27

Printed Text • REVELATION 21:9–21 | Devotional Reading • REVELATION 10:1–11

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the possibility of living in a new place, IMAGINE the richness and serenity of living in the New Jerusalem, and CELEBRATE God's provision of a new city for believers throughout eternity.

In Focus

When Katheryn entered her new home, she had to fight back the tears. Everything was so beautiful. As she walked from room to room, she marveled at the softly colored walls, the hanging plants, and the lovely marble floors. Barry had painted all of the rooms in her favorite colors. The kitchen was large and airy, and she could tell that the windows had been replaced. Small containers of herbs planted in brightly-colored ceramic bowls lined the large kitchen window.

Katheryn and Barry had only been married seven days and were just returning from their honeymoon. She knew he had picked out a house for them, but she was unprepared for how wonderful her new home was. Barry's job had transferred him to California right after they had started dating, but he had flown home faithfully twice each month.

While Katheryn knew that she would miss her family and friends back in New Jersey, there was no doubt in her mind that her Barry loved her and wanted to make her happy in their new life together.

Some of Katheryn's friends had teased her about waiting so long to get married. "You'll be an old maid before you know it," they teased.

Katheryn understood now that she had done the right thing by waiting. It may have taken her longer to get married than her friends, but God had provided her with a godly man.

Christians, the bride of Christ, can look forward to a wonderful home prepared by our Lord. How does thinking about the Christian's heavenly home affect your daily outlook?

Keep in Mind

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:14, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Revelation 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

The People, Places, and Times

New Jerusalem. The Israelites of old, along with all of God's people down through the ages, longed for the coming time when we will live in complete, eternal peace. The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1–2) was predicted even before the exile ended (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). Devout Jews prayed regularly for the restoration of Jerusalem. Eventually, the idea of “New Jerusalem” came to symbolize hope for the Jewish nation. This new city would be a place built by God, where the righteous would dwell with Him in perfect peace forever. When speaking of a city, we are speaking of not only

the physical infrastructure, but also the people who dwell in that city. In this sense, the new Holy City of Jerusalem is symbolic of the church as the redeemed Bride of Christ.

Background

After John's vision of the new heaven and the new Earth, the believer's final and eternal habitation, the angel, shows him a more specific picture: the church, here described as “the bride” (Revelation 21:9) and “the holy Jerusalem” (v. 10). The “new Jerusalem... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2) is now shown to be a realm of perfect life, beauty, bounty, and

wholeness. This passage explains in graphic detail the implications of that glorious statement, “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them” (v. 3). The rich imagery used here and elsewhere in the Scriptures seeks to portray in shimmering detail how great the believer’s inheritance is: being with God Himself in all His glory! One might imagine the apostle Paul had this passage in mind when he said, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

At-A-Glance

1. Beautiful Bride (Revelation 21:9–11)
2. Beautiful Foundations (vv. 12–17)
3. Beautiful Walls (vv. 18–21)

In Depth

1. Beautiful Bride (Revelation 21:9–11)

The apostle John describes the Church as the Bride. What do we learn about the Church’s glorious identity from this term? If the church is Jesus’ Bride (for He indeed is the “husband” of v. 2), then she is bound and betrothed to Him in a holy and unbreakable covenant. This suggests that her duty is to love and respond to her husband, but more importantly it communicates the overwhelming love and commitment of Jesus Christ to His Bride. If human beings consider themselves bound by the vows they take on their wedding day, how much more will Jesus consider Himself bound to His people, since in Him all God’s promises are “yea” (2 Corinthians 1:20), and since He has sealed the covenant of marriage between God and His people with His own blood?

In the Old Testament, God’s presence dwelt in Jerusalem and the people were blessed by His holiness and His favor. In the new heaven and the new earth, God will dwell in the midst

of His people as never before. Christ, the great Mediator, will usher them into God’s presence with robes of righteousness, and they will be thoroughly acceptable in His sight. How great is the love of the Father, and how secure is the identity of the saints!

What are the implications of the New Jerusalem, which is the bride and the church, descending out of heaven?

2. Beautiful Foundations (vv. 12–17)

The heavenly city that John saw is a picture of perfection. It has perfect dimensions, beautifully adorned with precious gems and gold. The heavenly city is protected with high, fortified walls. The 12 gates to the city are covered by 12 angels in order to ensure the city remains pure and unspoiled. The 12 gates echo the 12 tribes of Israel, which represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the complete inclusion of God’s people (Ezekiel 48:30–35).

However, one of the most interesting facts about the city is that it is built on 12 foundations, each one bearing the name of one of the 12 apostles, the first bearers of the Gospel. This is because only through the Gospel can one become a citizen of this heavenly city.

Why does the City of God need walls? To defend from attack? To exclude people from God’s presence?

3. Beautiful Walls (vv. 18–21)

Twice in this small section of verses, John describes parts of the city both as being made of gold, and being clear as glass. As there is no such thing as transparent gold, we must assume John is using figurative language to try to describe just how amazing and wonderful this sight is. Here again, the number twelve is prominent, although John does not explicitly say what the number is to represent this time.

John describes the city’s walls and gates, naming the beautiful precious stones that adorn

them. The specific stones John names adorning the city's walls are meant to remind his audience of the twelve stones on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:17–20). They are presented in a different order, and some names have changed, but the colors of the stones are consistent.

What is the purpose of sections of Scripture like this if they are figurative and not literal descriptions of heaven?

Search the Scriptures

1. How is John shown to be carried away to his vision of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10)?

2. What is the significance of the tribes of Israel and of the apostles to the New Jerusalem?

Discuss the Meaning

It is easy to get lost in the details of this passage, and to wonder to what extent the prophecy will be fulfilled literally or figuratively. It is important to remember, though, that the point and goal of all Scripture is to reveal God to His people. What does this passage teach us about God? What kind of Person is He to make a city like this?

Liberating Lesson

Many of us seek to provide a good life for our families and loved ones. During times of economic and political uncertainty, that goal can seem far out of reach. We must understand that prosperity and peace are not the same thing. True stability and peace are found by relying on God for guidance. The Word of God is a solid foundation that will allow us to find peace and build a good life both now and for eternity.

Application for Activation

The heavenly city had twelve gates that were always open. This image serves as a reminder of God's desire for everyone to come into His

presence and have a relationship with Him. As we strive to build our lives on a solid foundation, let us not forget to reach out to someone else and let him or her know that God is welcoming them to also come into His presence with open arms.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Cheyne, Thomas Kelly and J. Sutherland Black. *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. 1899.
- Elliott, C. J. *Elliott's Commentary for English Readers*. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/revelation/21-12.htm> (accessed September 17, 2020).
- Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/revelation/21-9.htm> (accessed September 17, 2020).
- McDonald, H.D. "Lamb of God." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, 618–619. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Nelson, Thomas. *New Spirit Filled Life Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers. 2002. 1598.
- Poole, M. Matthew. *Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible*. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/revelation/21-18.htm>. (accessed September 17, 2020).
- Smith, C. *Sermon Notes for Revelation 21:9-27*. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/smith_chuck/SermonNotes_Rev/Rev_57.cfm (accessed September 17, 2020).
- Westcott, Ben. "Is this the world's largest pearl? It's been under a bed for 10 years." CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/largest-pearl-philippines-amurao/index.html>. Accessed November 27, 2020.

Say It Correctly

Chalcedony. kal-SHE-duh-nee.

Sardonyx. sar-DAW-nix

Sardius. SAR-dee-us.

Chrysolyte. KRIS-uh-lite.

Beryl. BER-el.

Chrysoprasus. KRIS-oh-pra-sus.

Jacinth. JAY-sinth.

Amethyst. AH-muh-thist.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

You Shall Be Comforted in Jerusalem
(Isaiah 66:6–14)

TUESDAY

God's Glory Revealed in Jerusalem
(Isaiah 66:18–22)

WEDNESDAY

City of the Living God
(Hebrews 12:18–29)

THURSDAY

Jerusalem, Joy of All the Earth
(Psalm 48)

FRIDAY

The Faithful City, the Holy Mountain
(Zechariah 8:1–8)

SATURDAY

God, Who Dwells
in Unapproachable Light
(1 Timothy 6:11–16)

SUNDAY

The Holy City
(Revelation 21:9–21)

Notes

The River of Life

Bible Background • REVELATION 22:1-7

Printed Text • REVELATION 22:1-7 | Devotional Reading • GENESIS 1:1-13

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will RESEARCH the biblical references to the “river of life” to learn its spiritual, symbolic, and material effect on creation; IMAGINE God’s provisions to be found in the river of life, which will nourish and heal people and nations in the New Jerusalem; and RESPOND to the river of life through acceptance, faith, and entrance into the fullness of God’s kingdom.

In Focus

Ms. Cattie knew growing old was a blessing. She had accumulated plenty of wisdom and experience throughout the years. However, growing old had its share of challenges too. Joints began to ache. Strength and speed diminished. Wrinkles and gray hair became her prominent features. One of the main problems with growing old, Ms. Cattie thought, was suffering a lot of loss. At 95 years old, Ms. Cattie had seen her share. She had buried both of her parents and two of her four children. Most of her closest friends had passed, and those who remained struggled to remember the great times they had together.

Most recently, she had lost her husband of 70 years. However, as God would allow it, she was eagerly preparing to celebrate the arrival of her first two great-great-grandsons. Twins! It was a tangible reminder that one day God would wipe away all tears and ease sorrows, replacing them both with all things new. These days, Ms. Cattie thought a lot about heaven. As grateful as she was for the life she lived, the experiences she had, and the family she had raised, she yearned for the day when all of the pain and heartache of this life would be left behind. She knew it was coming sooner rather than later. And she was ready. One day all things would become new.

In this lesson, we will learn about God’s redemptive plan for heaven and earth. What is the thing you most look forward to in God’s new heaven and new earth?

Keep in Mind

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Revelation 22:1, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Revelation 22:1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

The People, Places, and Times

Lamb. In the book of Revelation, the designation “Lamb” occurs many times in symbolic reference to Christ and unites the two ideas of redemption and kingship. On one side are statements referring to a Lamb that has been slain (5:6, 12); those who “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14); and “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (12:11). The stress here falls upon the redeeming work of Christ as the Lamb of God. On the other side, also connected with the title is the idea of sovereignty. It is the Lamb that was slain that has power to take the book and loose its seals (5:6–7); there is reference to the wrath of the Lamb (6:16); and the Lamb is seen in the midst of the throne (7:17). In the general term, “Lamb,” two ideas unite: victorious power and vicarious suffering. At the heart of God’s sovereignty, there is sacrificial love.

Background

The first part of Revelation 22 portrays, in visions and images, the wonderful future awaiting God’s people in the new heaven and the new earth. Drawing heavily on the book of

Isaiah, John’s vision concludes by showing the certainty of the promise. Just as the prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Christ’s first coming, so the prophecy of Revelation will be ultimately fulfilled through Christ’s Second Coming. And just as Christ’s first coming was great news for some (the poor in spirit who believed in Him) and bad news for others (the proud of heart who rejected Him), so also His unstoppable Second Coming will be wonderful news for those who belong to Christ, and woeful news for those who spurn the message of His Gospel. Revelation, like the Bible as a whole, is a book of both promise and warning. John’s remarkable vision calls the Church to take comfort in the incomparable power and mercy of Christ, who comes for the redemption of His own.

At-A-Glance

1. God’s Glorious People (Revelation 22:1–2)
2. God’s Glorious Presence (vv. 3–5)
3. God’s Glorious Promise (vv. 6–7)

In Depth

1. God's Glorious People (Revelation 22:1–2)

The new heavens and new earth are a place of perfect abundance, a world fit for God and His people to reign. This is true, redeemed urban living! To paint a picture of the greatest possible abundance and blessing, John's vision returns to the place of God's original purpose: the Garden of Eden. Just as in Eden (Genesis 2:10), a life-giving river flows in the New Jerusalem. This "water of life" symbolizes the everlasting life given by Jesus through the Spirit (see John 7:37–39) and the "abundant life" He promised (John 10:10).

Just as the tree of life stood in Eden (Genesis 2:9), it will also stand in the New Jerusalem amidst the river, represented by 12 trees (a number symbolizing divine government and completeness). Here, God will provide to heal and bind up all wounds—especially sin and spiritual brokenness (21:3–4), washed away as the nations partake of the water and the tree of life (22:2).

Humanity was not commanded to leave the earth as an untilled garden, but to work the ground and produce good things, thereby mirroring the creativity and benevolent reign of God over His creation. God brings about this purpose, redeeming not only His chosen remnant, but also the earth itself!

In what ways might the tree of life be used "for healing of the nations"?

2. God's Glorious Presence (vv. 3–5)

All this Edenic abundance is possible, because, like Eden, the New Jerusalem does not suffer from the curse anymore! The curse has been canceled out by the very presence of God. In the new city, God now dwells in perfect purity with a pure people.

Even as God exists in loving fellowship with Himself in three persons, so now all His people

will be enfolded in that perfect triune love and communion. He claims us as His own with His name on our foreheads. Even though throughout the Scriptures, seeing the face of God had been a frightful thing, now we are pure enough to meet His gaze, which illuminates heaven.

Jesus is the light of the world, and of heaven. How have you seen His light in your life?

3. God's Glorious Promise (vv. 6–7)

God in His mercy frequently gives added testimony to the certainty of what He reveals. To call the Lord the "God of the holy prophets" (v. 6) is to show that these words, just like the prophets' words, are breathed out by God and cannot be false. Just as the prophets were able to say, "Thus says the LORD," so also the angel, with the same authority, promises that these words are "faithful and true," and that these things "must shortly be done" (v. 6). Likewise, when John is commanded not to seal up the prophecy, but write it down, God shows us that the vision is true. The record of that vision is also inspired by Him, and utterly reliable.

The promise is also given a specific urgency. Christ promises to come quickly, signaling to the believer that the words of the book should be not only read but immediately obeyed. This admonishes all believers to expect Christ's return and the glorious fulfillment of God's promises.

How do we know that God's words are trustworthy and true?

Search the Scriptures

1. How will we benefit from the curse being removed from everything (Revelation 22:3)?

2. How would you evaluate your awareness and expectancy that Jesus is coming soon (v. 7)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What did God mean by saying these things "must shortly be done" (v. 6), when this was recorded so long ago?

2. Why is it often hard to have a true longing for heaven?

Liberating Lesson

The human race continues to encounter injustice, oppression, and misery. In particular, the African American community possesses a history of oppression—one that continues today through racism and economic injustice. God provides opportunity to redress wrong and injustice through political or social means. Although we should act and live as God's agents for present change, social justice can become an idol; bitterness may ensue when cruelty and oppression continue. This passage reminds us that hope for a paradise on this earth is a misguided hope.

We will face setbacks and difficulties in trying to perfect systems run by flawed humans. We must not lose heart, though. We do what we can now, and trust that in the end, God will fix everything better than we ever could manage ourselves. The Christian's hope is set immeasurably high. In the new heavens and new earth, God's bride, the Church, becomes as perfectly radiant as the New Jerusalem; there will true healing take place.

Application for Activation

Think about circumstances or relationships in your life that leave you feeling bitter or resentful because of the way you've been treated. How do you respond when you feel slighted? Does a focus on making things right in this world keep you from longing for

the next? Take this opportunity to repent of your misplaced hope and turn to Christ for forgiveness. In light of the incredible promises of God about your identity and your abundant inheritance, take time each day to intentionally rejoice and give thanks for the glory that awaits you in God's presence.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources: Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition*. Vols. 1-6. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009.
Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1889.

Say It Correctly

Johannine. joe-HAH-nine.
Apollyon. ah-PAH-lee-on.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

My Soul Thirsts for You
(Psalm 63)

TUESDAY

Living Waters Shall Flow
from Jerusalem
(Zechariah 14:6–11)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Promises Living Water
(John 4:4–14)

THURSDAY

Worship God in Spirit and Truth
(John 4:15–26)

FRIDAY

Rivers of Living Water
(John 7:37–40)

SATURDAY

Water on the Thirsty Land
(Isaiah 44:1–8)

SUNDAY

For the Healing of the Nations
(Revelation 22:1–7)

Notes

Come and Enjoy

Bible Background • REVELATION 22:8–21
Printed Text • REVELATION 22:10–21 | Devotional Reading • GENESIS 1:26–31

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will SURVEY the biblical references to the “second coming” in order to see the importance of this hoped-for reality, REJOICE that the invitation from Jesus to be a part of the new creation continues through the end of all things, and EMBRACE the call to become part of God’s kingdom.

In Focus

Chris laughed along with the audience as he listened to his friend, Jason, a popular comedian, deliver his punch lines with ease. A phone call interrupted him in mid-laughter. It was Jason.

“Are you watching the show I did last week?” Jason asked.

“Yeah, I told you I would. Pretty funny stuff. I can never figure out where you’re headed.”

“That’s the secret of a good punch line.” He chuckled.

“Now I got a good one for you. I told you I would start reading the Bible; today I have just finished the last chapter,” Jason said.

“You started with the last chapter?” Chris asked nervously. It wasn’t that unusual. Jason always read the ending before considering any book. But Chris was thinking of the end-of-the-world horrors, which might be too much for a new Christian. “Jason, why would you do that?” Chris asked.

“Nobody told me where to start, so I figured I’d find out how everything was going to come out. You know, to see if the ending was worth it,” Jason replied.

Chris tried to explain, “But Genesis and the walk of Christ.” Before he could finish, he heard Jason howling in laughter.

“Don’t worry, the ending told me what I needed to know. We win in the end! Now I want to know more about how and why.”

In the book of Revelation, Christians are assured of the ultimate happy ending—a triumphal procession with Christ! How does this joyful knowledge affect your life?

Keep in Mind

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

(Revelation 22:18–19, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Revelation 22:10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the

root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

The People, Places, and Times

Alpha and Omega. Alpha and omega are, respectively, the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. Jesus claims the title “Alpha and Omega” at the very beginning of the vision He reveals to John (Revelation 1:11), here at the revelation of the Church, and one last time near the very end of the vision (22:13). By referring to Himself as “Alpha and Omega,” God is making it clear that He is the source of everything. He is the Beginning and the End; He is sovereign, reigning over every aspect of His creation.

Background

Revelation 21 and the first part of chapter 22 portray, in visions and images, the wonderful

future awaiting God’s people in the new heaven and the new earth. And just as Christ’s first coming was great news for some (the poor in spirit, who believed in Him) and bad news for others (the proud of heart, who rejected Him), so also His unstoppable Second Coming will be wonderful news for those who belong to Christ, and woeful news for those who spurn the message of His Gospel. Revelation, like the Bible as a whole, is both a book of promise and a book of warning. John’s remarkable vision calls the church to examine itself, to “give diligence to make [its] calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10), and to take comfort in the incomparable power and mercy of Christ, who comes for His own and for their redemption.

At-A-Glance

1. Christ Is Coming Certainly and Quickly (Revelation 22:10–11)
2. Christ Is Coming as King and Lord (vv. 12–16)
3. Christ Is Coming for the Faithful Who Belong to Him (vv. 17–21)

In Depth

1. Christ Is Coming Certainly and Quickly (Revelation 22:10–11)

An angel guiding John through his vision warns John not to close up the record of this revelation, because it will all soon take place. It is almost not worth a person changing their actions, because there is that little time to repent, so the angel encourages the unjust and the filthy to continue in their sinful ways. A significant amount of narrative space is taken up in Revelation by opening the seals of another book, so John leaving his own record open is significant. With it open, anyone is allowed to read it. Everyone may be encouraged to read it, to see the fate that awaits the faithful and the unfaithful, and mend their ways.

What may we imply about the character of God since He does not want people stopped from hearing this prophecy?

2. Christ Is Coming as King and Lord (22:12–16)

Hear the powerful, kingly language of Jesus as He promises His coming! Only a king would speak this way, promising a “reward” (v. 12) and daring to examine and understand the fullness of a person’s deeds. In the language of Isaiah (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12), Christ’s voice thunders in testimony to His preeminence. In the Old Testament, this kind of language beginning and ending, first and last (v. 13)—could apply to Yahweh alone. Can

there be any doubt that Jesus is laying claim to the same divine status? He sends His angel to do His will (v. 16). He lays claim to David’s lineage (v. 16) and the promises concerning the eternal King to come (Isaiah 11:1). This testimony matters greatly to the Christian not only that Christ might be rightly worshiped, but also that the believer may know the certainty of His coming! When Christ comes as King and Lord, He will “give every man according as his work shall be” (v. 12). Each person acts according to his true nature and the state of his heart toward Christ, and each person is judged by the fruit of that nature.

Why is it important that Jesus announces His identity in verses 13–16? How does His identity relate to the hope of the Christian?

3. Christ Is Coming for the Faithful Who Belong to Him (vv. 17–21)

The book of Revelation, with all its vivid imagery and difficult symbolism, is simply a letter. It begins like a letter, with a greeting and a blessing to the seven churches (Revelation 2–3); and it ends like a letter, with a benediction (22:21). Fittingly, this letter concludes with an invitation: in light of the sure coming of Christ as King and Lord, will you be found to belong to Him? Verse 17 reminds us of the full, free offer of Christ in the Gospel. The Holy Spirit extends the invitation to accept Christ as Lord, and even the bride, the true church, is pictured urging all to come unto Christ. Echoing Jesus’ invitation during His ministry (John 7:37–39), John beseeches those in the seven churches and beyond to recognize and satisfy their thirst by receiving the water of eternal life in the Gospel.

This closing passage pictures a great law court with four faithful witnesses: the angel, John, the Holy Spirit, and finally Jesus Himself (v. 20). And where there is a law court, there is accountability and justice; all who hear are

accountable to respond to the message! John demonstrates the beautiful, simple response of faith: “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Why do you think the gracious invitation of verse 17 and the stern warning of verses 18–19 are put next to each other?

Search the Scriptures

1. For what purpose does Jesus say He will return quickly (v. 12)?
2. To whom does Jesus give the message of Revelation (v. 16)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How is this last part of Revelation a happy ending? What do you find surprising or unexpected about this ending?
2. How does this passage help you understand the book of Revelation as a whole?

Liberating Lesson

Throughout church history, countless individuals and communities have predicted with confidence the exact date on which Jesus will return. Without exception, they have been wrong. As a result, the whole idea of expecting a miraculous return of Christ has been largely discredited in the minds of many. The book of Revelation, when it focuses on the return of Christ, does not list a series of mysterious hints that the church is left to decode. Nor does it merely tell us what we want to hear, flattering us by sparing any sense of accountability and judgment at Christ’s return. Before a world that mocks its expectation as “pie in the sky” and a church that often misunderstands its message as a riddle to solve, the book of Revelation focuses on the faithfulness and preeminence of Christ. Because Jesus is the first and the last, the King of Kings, and the true descendant of David, the Christian can rest in His promises. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Application for Activation

If you could have written the last chapter of the Bible, how would you have written it? Often the Spirit uses the parts of the Bible we find most surprising to drive home the Word’s significance. Read through these last few verses of Revelation and write down the parts you find unexpected. Think through what each surprising part means for the church and for you individually, and resolve to make that meaning part of your regular prayers and conversation with others in the church.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Beale, Gregory K. *Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998.
Henry, Matthew. “Commentary on Revelation 22.” In *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Peabody, Mass.: Henderson Publishers, 1991.

Say It Correctly

Apocalyptic. ah-pah-kah-LIP-tic.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Invited to the Heavenly Banquet
(Luke 14:16–24)

TUESDAY

Preparing for God to Appear
(Exodus 19:9–15)

WEDNESDAY

The Alpha and Omega
(Revelation 1:3–8)

THURSDAY

The Ending Declared from
the Beginnings
(Isaiah 46:8–13)

FRIDAY

God Is Your Husband
(Isaiah 54:1–5)

SATURDAY

God's Steadfast Love Never Ceases
(Lamentations 3:21–31)

SUNDAY

Come, Lord Jesus!
(Revelation 22:10–21)

Notes



JOIN US ON THE JOURNEY TO

EVANGELIZE DISCIPLE EQUIP

people of the African diaspora
for Kingdom impact.




Meet Us Online!

urbanministries.com

800.860.8642



 @umi  @umichicago

 @UrbanMinistriesInc

ISBN 978-1-68353-783-0 \$4.50
50450>



9 781683 537830

Precepts

DIGITAL

TRANSFORM

how you do Bible
Study on your own or
in a group with digital
resources to make your
lessons fresh, relatable,
and interactive.



Bring empowering Bible stories to life for yourself and your community through a rich multimedia experience.

*Stop missing out on everything
the Word has to offer.*



Subscribe today at preceptsdigital.com