

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 2 OF 104

Called Out

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Genesis 8–16
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 2
Gospels	Matthew 2:13–3:17
General New Testament	Acts 2:14–47

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim of week two is to let your class feel what it costs to be called out, and to be honest that the cost is always paid before the view clears. Noah walks into an empty world. Abram walks away from a city. The wise man in Proverbs 2 digs in the dark. Joseph runs at midnight. Three thousand Jews in Jerusalem publicly identify with a man their own leaders executed seven weeks earlier. None of them had the whole picture; all of them moved.

Doctrinally, the weight of the week is in Acts 2. If your class gets this chapter, they have the gospel: Jesus of Nazareth crucified, raised, exalted, reigning now at God's right hand, and the terms of pardon stated by inspiration to people who asked what to do. Genesis 15:6 and James 2 will keep you honest about what kind of faith God counts, and Matthew 3 will keep baptism connected to repentance rather than floating free of it. Guard the kingdom question here too: Peter's use of Psalm 110 puts Christ on the throne already.

Formationally, watch the gap between knowing and moving. Abram believed God and packed. The Pharisees came to John's baptism and were told to show fruit. The crowd at Pentecost asked what to do and then did it that same day. Put this question to your class before they leave: what is the one thing God has already made plain to you that you have been treating as a subject for further discussion, and what would obeying it look like before next Sunday?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Acts 2:14–47. It is the doctrinal center of the week and one of the most important chapters in the Bible for your class to own. Give the whole hour to Peter's argument and to the question in verse 37, and let the text answer it.

Second session: Take up Genesis 8–16. It carries the narrative forward and gives you the call of Abram, the covenant of Genesis 15, and the honest failures of chapters 12 and 16. If your class needs the change of pace, Matthew 2:13–3:17 works well here instead.

The other two readings: Proverbs 2 and Matthew 2:13–3:17 fit the extended questions well. Ask the class to read Proverbs 2 twice, once for the structure of the if and then, and once slowly for themselves, and mention that Matthew 3 will connect directly to what they studied in Acts 2.

The Rainbow and the Call

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These nine chapters swing on a hinge. Chapters 8 through 11 finish the story of the whole human race: the flood recedes, God covenants with every living creature, the nations spread out from Noah's sons, and humanity gathers on a plain in Shinar to build a tower and make a name. Chapter 11 ends with the human family scattered and speaking past each other. It is a bleak picture, and Moses means it to be.

Then, in Genesis 12, God narrows His work down to one childless man in Ur and makes him a promise with the whole world in it: in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Everything after this verse, all the way to Matthew 1, is God keeping that promise. Abram's life becomes the pattern of faith, and it is a realistic pattern. He obeys magnificently in chapter 12 and then lies about his wife in Egypt before the chapter ends.

Genesis 15 is the theological center of the reading. God takes Abram outside, shows him the stars, and Abram believes. Then God alone passes between the pieces of the sacrifice while Abram sleeps, which is to say God binds Himself and stakes His own existence on the promise. Chapter 16 follows immediately, and the contrast is deliberate: a promise God has guaranteed, and a couple who cannot stop managing it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Moses is writing to a nation freshly out of Egypt and headed toward Canaan. The call of Abram tells them who they are and why that particular land was ever theirs.
- The covenant of Genesis 9 is made with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature. It is unconditional and universal, and the rainbow is its sign.
- Genesis 10 is the table of nations, and Genesis 11 explains how those nations came to be scattered. The two chapters belong together and are not in the wrong order.
- Abram leaves Ur of the Chaldeans, a settled and prosperous city in southern Mesopotamia, for a land he does not own. Hebrews 11:8–10 reads his life as that of a man looking for a city with foundations.
- The promise to Abram has three parts: a land, a nation, and a blessing on all families of the earth. The New Testament says the third part is fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:8, 16, 29) and that the land promise was fully kept in the days of Joshua (Joshua 21:43–45).
- Circumcision, the sacrifices, and the Law are still centuries away. Read these chapters for what they say about God, faith, and sin, and do not read later covenants back into them.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Genesis 9:8–17 records the first covenant God makes after the flood. Trace what God promises, whom He promises it to, and talk about why He chose a sign that hangs in the sky where everyone can see it.*

The covenant of Genesis 9 is remarkable for how little it asks. God speaks it to Noah, to his descendants after him, and to every living creature that came out of the ark. He requires no performance to keep it in force. He simply promises that the waters will never again destroy all flesh, and He gives a sign. Point out that God says the bow is a reminder for Him (9:15–16), not merely for us, which is a striking way of saying that the promise rests entirely on His own faithfulness.

As for the sign, ask the class where else God has attached a visible, tangible sign to an invisible promise. The bread and the cup on the Lord's table come to mind at once (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). God knows how we are built. He gives His people something they can see, at intervals they cannot control, so that memory does not depend on mood.

Question 2. *In Genesis 12:1–3 God tells Abram to leave his country, his kindred, and his father’s house before He ever tells him where the road ends. What would that have cost a man his age, and where is God asking you to move before you can see the whole route?*

Abram was seventy-five and settled. Leaving meant walking away from extended family, from the security of a known city, from the graves of his ancestors, and from every social arrangement that made a man safe in that world. Notice the order in Genesis 12:1: country, kindred, father’s house. God moves from the general to the intimate, and each step costs more than the one before. Notice too that the destination is withheld: “a land that I will show you.” Hebrews 11:8 makes a point of it, that he went out not knowing where he was going.

Do not let this stay in the ancient world. Every adult in the room has something God has already made clear that they are still negotiating with: a habit, a relationship, a career decision, a grudge, a Sunday morning pattern. Ask them to name the first step rather than the whole route. Faith almost never gets the whole route.

Question 3. *Genesis 15:6 says Abram believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Read James 2:21–23 beside it. How do those two passages fit together, and what kind of faith is it that God counts?*

Genesis 15:6 does not say Abram earned righteousness, and it does not say a bare mental assent saved him. The verse sits between a promise and an act: God tells him to count the stars, Abram believes God, and in the very next chapter the writer shows us what believing God looks like when it wavers. James 2:21–23 points to Genesis 22, the offering of Isaac, and says that by works faith was made perfect and the Genesis 15 statement was fulfilled. Faith and obedience are not two things in a race with each other. Obedience is what faith looks like when it is awake.

This is the place to say plainly what the New Testament teaches about how a person comes into Christ, without turning the hour into a sermon. The faith that saves is a faith that acts: it hears, it believes, it turns, it confesses, it is buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Acts 2:38). Abram is the pattern precisely because his believing had feet on it. He packed.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything God says to Noah in Genesis 9:1–17. Which of those words are promises, which are commands, and which of them still stand over the whole human race today?*

God blesses Noah and tells him to be fruitful and fill the earth, gives animals as food while forbidding the eating of blood, establishes the sanctity of human life on the ground that man is made in God’s image, and promises never again to destroy all flesh with a flood, sealing it with the bow. The prohibition of murder grounded in the image of God (9:6) and the covenant not to flood the earth again both stand over the whole race still.

2. *Read Genesis 11:1–9 beside Acts 17:26–27. What were the builders at Babel actually after, and what good was God pursuing in scattering them?*

The builders say it plainly in 11:4: “let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered.” They are after reputation and self-sufficiency, and they are refusing the command to fill the earth. Acts 17:26–27 says God determined the boundaries of the nations so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach for Him and find Him. The scattering was not spite; it was mercy that kept humanity from consolidating its rebellion.

3. *Trace Abram’s altars in Genesis 12:7–8 and 13:4, 18. What do those markers tell you about how a man lives in a land that is promised to him but not yet his?*

Abram builds at Shechem, at Bethel, back at Bethel after Egypt, and at Hebron. He owns no ground in Canaan but he keeps marking it with worship. A tent and an altar, over and over: he lives lightly in the land and heavily before God. Hebrews 11:9–10 says he dwelt in tents because he was waiting for a city whose builder and maker is God.

4. *Melchizedek occupies three verses in Genesis 14:18–20 and then disappears. Read Hebrews 7:1–10 and write down every point the Hebrews writer draws out of those three verses.*

Hebrews 7 draws out his name (king of righteousness), his city Salem (king of peace), the silence of the record regarding his parentage, birth, and death, the fact that Abraham paid him a tenth, and the fact that he blessed

Abraham, and therefore the lesser is blessed by the greater. From all of it the writer argues that the priesthood of Christ, after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the Levitical priesthood that came out of Abraham's loins.

5. Genesis 16 records Abram and Sarai trying to help God keep a promise He had already guaranteed. Name one situation where you are tempted to force an outcome God has told you to wait for, and decide before Sunday what faithful waiting will actually look like this week.

Answers will vary. Listen for real situations rather than abstractions: an unmarried member tempted to settle, a couple pushing a decision God has not opened, a parent managing an adult child's life. Sarai's plan was culturally normal and entirely reasonable, and it produced a family wound that outlasted everyone in the room. Faithful waiting should be given a shape: what will be prayed, what will be left alone, what will be done instead.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Noah's drunkenness and the cursing of Canaan (9:18–27): the text records Noah's sin without approving it, and the curse falls on Canaan, not on Ham or on any race. This passage was shamefully misused in America to defend slavery. Say so plainly and move on.
- Abram's half-truth about Sarai in Egypt (12:10–20): Scripture reports the failures of its heroes without excusing them. Resist the urge to defend him. The Bible's honesty about its people is one of the evidences of its inspiration.
- Hagar and Ishmael (16:1–16): concubinage and polygamy are recorded, never commanded. God's design was stated in Genesis 2:24 and restated by Jesus in Matthew 19:4–6. Note also God's tenderness toward Hagar, a used and discarded slave whom He sees and names.
- Genesis 15:6 will invite the faith-only question. Handle it with James 2 open, calmly, and without heat toward neighbors who have been taught otherwise.

Dig Like It Is Silver

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 announced that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Chapter 2 tells you how a person gets there. The structure is worth putting on the board: verses 1 through 4 are the conditions, verses 5 through 11 are the results, and verses 12 through 22 describe the two rescues wisdom performs. Hebrew poetry loves this kind of architecture, and once your class sees it, the chapter opens up.

The verbs in the opening verses are active and strenuous. Receive, treasure up, incline your ear, apply your heart, cry out, lift up your voice, seek, search. The last two are mining words. A man does not stumble across a silver vein on a walk; he digs, and he keeps digging in the dark on the conviction that something is there. Solomon is saying that the wisdom of God is available to anybody and cheap to nobody.

Then verse 6 says the Lord gives wisdom. That is not a contradiction; it is the whole point. The digging does not produce the silver, it only reaches what God has already put in the ground. Wisdom is a gift, and diligence is how we come to possess it. The same shape appears all over Scripture: God gives the increase, and Paul still plants and Apollos still waters (1 Corinthians 3:6–7).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Proverbs 1 through 9 is a series of extended parental appeals rather than a collection of individual sayings. The short, punchy proverbs begin in chapter 10.
- The repeated address “my son” frames these chapters as instruction from a father to a young man on the edge of adult life, when his choices are about to set his direction.
- Hebrew wisdom literature observes how life normally works under God’s moral order. It is not law, and it is not prophecy.
- The “strange woman” or “immoral woman” of 2:16–19 is a literal danger in the chapter and also functions in Proverbs as a picture of every attractive path that leads away from God.
- Solomon, who wrote this, is the same man who was eventually ruined by exactly the temptation he warns against (1 Kings 11:1–8). Knowing the truth and living it are not the same achievement.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Read Proverbs 2:1–5 aloud and count the conditions before the promise arrives. What sort of effort is Solomon describing, and how does it differ from the way most of us actually approach the Bible?*

There are five or six conditional clauses depending on how you count, and they escalate. Receiving words is passive enough. Treasuring them up requires memory. Inclining the ear and applying the heart require attention. Crying out and lifting up the voice require desperation. Seeking and searching require labor. The chapter does not describe a man who reads a devotional thought at a red light; it describes a man who has decided that this matters more than his comfort.

The honest comparison will sting a little, and that is fine. Most of us approach Scripture the way we approach a weather app: quickly, for information, to see whether we need to change anything today. Ask the class what would have to change in an ordinary week for verses 1 through 4 to be a fair description of them. Then ask what has kept them from it. Usually it is not unbelief; it is fatigue and a phone.

Question 2. *Verse 6 says the Lord gives wisdom, while verse 4 says to search for it like hidden treasure. Hold those two together: how can wisdom be both a gift from God and something we have to dig for?*

Hold both halves or you will lose something important. If wisdom were purely a gift dropped in the lap, there would be no reason for the commands in verses 1 through 4, and Scripture study would be optional. If wisdom

were purely the fruit of effort, then the sharpest and most educated would be the wisest, and every pastor knows that is not how it goes. Verse 6 grounds it: out of His mouth come knowledge and understanding. The vein of silver is there because God put it there.

The practical payoff is freedom from two errors. The lazy man says he is waiting on God when he has never opened the book. The proud man reads constantly and credits himself. Ask the class which of the two they drift toward. Then point them to James 1:5, where the asking and the receiving sit in the same verse.

Question 3. *Proverbs 2:10–19 says wisdom delivers a man from two particular dangers, the man whose words are crooked and the woman whose words are smooth. Which of those two traps is set most skillfully for the people in this room, and how does wisdom actually do the delivering?*

Verses 12 through 15 describe the crooked man: he speaks perverse things, he leaves the straight paths, he walks in ways of darkness, he takes pleasure in evil, and his ways are twisted. Verses 16 through 19 describe the seductive woman: she flatters with her words, she has abandoned her own covenant, and her house sinks down toward death. One trap is bad counsel; the other is illicit desire. Nearly every ruined life your class knows fell through one of those two doors.

Make the application specific to the room without embarrassing anyone. For many men, the second snare now arrives on a screen at eleven at night, alone, for free. For many people of both sexes, the first arrives as a friendly voice normalizing something God has already settled. As for how wisdom delivers, verse 10 answers it: wisdom enters the heart and knowledge becomes pleasant to the soul. Deliverance is not mainly a matter of gritting your teeth; it is a matter of coming to want the right thing.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the chapter as one long sentence in your own words: every “if” from verses 1 through 4, then every “then” from verses 5 through 11.*

Something like: if you will take in what I say, store it up, listen hard, set your heart on understanding, beg for insight, and dig for it like buried treasure, then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord and you will find the knowledge of God, because He is the one who gives wisdom, and He stores up sound judgment for the upright, guards their paths, and preserves them, so that you will understand what is right and just and every good path.

2. *Compare Proverbs 2:6 with James 1:5. What is alike in the two promises, and what condition does James attach that Solomon assumes?*

Both say that God is the source and that He gives generously to those who ask. James adds the condition of asking in faith without wavering (James 1:6–8), which Solomon assumes in the crying out and lifting up of the voice in 2:3. Neither passage promises wisdom to a man who has not asked for it.

3. *List the five things said in 2:12–15 about those who leave the paths of uprightness. Which of the five begins first in a person’s life?*

They speak perverse things, they leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, they rejoice in doing evil, they delight in the perversity of the wicked, and their ways are crooked and devious. As for which comes first, note that speech leads the list. A person usually talks his way into a path before he walks it.

4. *Verses 21 and 22 promise that the upright will dwell in the land while the wicked are cut off. Since a proverb states how life generally goes rather than issuing a guarantee, how should you read that promise, and what does Psalm 73:1–17 add to it?*

Read as an iron guarantee, it collapses the first time a righteous man loses his house, which is precisely the mistake Job’s friends made. Read as a general principle it holds: the upright life tends toward stability and the wicked life toward ruin. Psalm 73 says the same thing from the other side, admitting that the wicked often prosper in plain sight until the psalmist goes into the sanctuary of God and sees their end.

5. *Searching for wisdom costs hours you currently spend on something else. Pick the specific half hour this week that you will give to Scripture, write it on your calendar, and tell one person so that it is not a private good intention.*

Answers will vary. The point is the calendar and the witness. Look for a named time rather than a vague resolve, and follow up next week. A stated intention with no hour attached is how most Bible reading plans die in February.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Keep reinforcing that proverbs are general principles about how life usually goes, not guarantees. Verses 21 and 22 are the test case in this chapter.
- The immoral woman of 2:16–19 is frank material. Handle it directly and without leering or embarrassment, and remember that in a mixed class the temptation cuts both directions.
- Do not let the conditions of verses 1 through 4 slide into the idea that wisdom, or salvation, is earned. God gives; we seek. Both are true and neither cancels the other.

Out of Egypt, Into the Jordan

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The first half of this reading is dark. Matthew has just shown us Gentile wise men worshiping, and now he shows us a Jewish king murdering toddlers to protect his throne. The contrast is deliberate and it will run through the whole gospel. Meanwhile Joseph appears three more times, always at night, always obeying immediately, always without a recorded word. Matthew wants you to notice the ordinary righteousness of a carpenter while kings rage.

The three fulfillment quotations do different work. Hosea 11:1, spoken originally of the nation called out of Egypt, is applied to the Son who relives and redeems Israel's story. Jeremiah 31:15, Rachel weeping for her children, is drawn from a passage about exile and eventual restoration and is applied to Bethlehem's grief. The Nazarene reference in 2:23 is not a quotation of any single prophet; Matthew says "the prophets," and the likeliest sense is the despised, lowly origin the Messiah was expected to have.

Then Matthew skips thirty years without apology and drops us in the wilderness. John preaches repentance because the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the word "at hand" matters: near, not present, not centuries away. Crowds come. Pharisees and Sadducees come and get no welcome at all. And then Jesus comes, and heaven opens, and the Father says out loud what Matthew has been arguing since 1:1.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Herod the Great died in about 4 B.C. Bethlehem was a small village, and the number of boys under two would likely have been a handful rather than thousands, which is why no secular historian bothered to record it.
- Nazareth was a small, unremarkable town in Galilee with no prophetic pedigree, which is exactly the point of John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"
- John the Baptist is the forerunner promised in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, and he is the last prophet of the old order (Matthew 11:13; Luke 16:16).
- "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" means the reign of Christ was about to be established. It was established on Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13), not postponed.
- John's baptism was for Jews, looking forward to the Christ, and it passed away when the gospel went out. The baptism commanded in Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 is for all nations, into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the remission of sins.
- Both John and Jesus were immersed in the Jordan. The word itself means to dip or immerse, and Matthew 3:16 says Jesus came up from the water.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Matthew stops three times in this reading to say a prophecy was fulfilled (2:15, 2:18, 2:23). Walk through each one and talk about what Matthew is building toward for his Jewish readers.*

Take them one at a time. Hosea 11:1 originally described the exodus, and Matthew applies it to the child brought back out of Egypt, presenting Jesus as the true Israel who will do faithfully what the nation did faithlessly. Jeremiah 31:15 pictures the mothers of Israel weeping as their children go into exile, and Matthew hears that same cry in Bethlehem; worth noting that the Jeremiah context goes on to promise a new covenant and a return. The Nazarene statement in 2:23 cites no single verse and is introduced as what "the prophets" said, pointing to the theme of a despised and lowly Messiah (Isaiah 53:2–3; Psalm 22:6).

What Matthew is building is a case, not a decoration. His Jewish reader wants to know whether this man is the promised one. Matthew keeps answering: the genealogy fits, the birthplace fits, the flight fits, the grief fits, the

obscurity fits. Ask the class what it does to their confidence to see that God was writing this story centuries before anybody in Bethlehem woke up.

Question 2. *John tells the Pharisees and Sadducees to bear fruits worthy of repentance (3:8). Put that in ordinary words: what separates being sorry from repenting, and how would the people who live with you know which one had happened to you?*

Sorrow is a feeling; repentance is a change of mind that turns the feet around. Paul distinguishes them exactly in 2 Corinthians 7:9–10: godly sorrow produces repentance, while the sorrow of the world produces death. Judas was sorry. Peter repented. John is not asking the Pharisees for an emotion. He is asking for fruit, visible evidence, and in Luke's parallel (Luke 3:10–14) he gets very practical about it: share your coat, stop cheating people, stop extorting, be content with your wages.

The second half of the question is where the hour gets useful. Ask each person to think of the one human being who would notice first if repentance were real, a wife, a teenager, a coworker, a brother. Sorrow is invisible to that person. Fruit is not. Do not let the class answer in generalities; ask for the kind of change someone else could describe.

Question 3. *Jesus had no sin to confess, yet He insisted on being baptized to fulfill all righteousness (3:15). Why would the sinless Son of God submit to that, and what does His answer to John say to us about obeying God before we fully understand Him?*

John's objection was sensible. His baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and Jesus had nothing to repent of. Jesus does not argue the theology; He says, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." He was placing Himself under everything God required of a faithful Israelite, identifying Himself with the people He came to save, and publicly receiving the Father's endorsement at the start of His ministry. It was also the moment John was given to identify Him (John 1:31–34).

The formational point is in the phrase "permit it to be so now." Jesus obeyed in a matter John could not make sense of, and the understanding came afterward. Ask where the class is currently waiting for an explanation before they obey. Many people treat a command as optional until it makes sense to them. Jesus reversed the order, and He is the one who had the least to learn.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List each time an angel speaks to Joseph in 2:13–22 and write down what Joseph does next and how long he waits before doing it.*

Three times: flee to Egypt (2:13), return to the land of Israel (2:19–20), and, warned in a dream, withdraw to Galilee (2:22). In the first two the text says he arose and took the young child and His mother, and in the first instance it says he did it by night. The waiting time is essentially zero every time. Obedience in Joseph is immediate, costly, and silent.

2. *Read Hosea 11:1 in its own setting, then read Matthew 2:15. In what sense is Jesus being presented as the true and faithful Israel where the nation had failed?*

Hosea 11:1 looks back to the nation God called His son and brought out of Egypt, a son who then went after Baals. Jesus goes down into Egypt and comes out, faces the wilderness where Israel failed, is tested and does not fall, and keeps the covenant faithfully. He is the Israel that Israel was supposed to be, which is why Matthew can apply the nation's verse to Him without strain.

3. *The baptism John preached and the baptism the apostles later preached are not identical. Read Acts 19:1–5 and write down exactly what changed and why it mattered.*

In Acts 19 Paul finds about twelve men who had received John's baptism but had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism pointed forward to the Christ who was coming; now He had come, died, risen, and commanded baptism in His name. When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. John's baptism was right for its moment and insufficient afterward, which shows that baptism is not a generic religious act but obedience to a specific command.

4. *All three Persons of the Godhead appear at the Jordan in 3:16–17. Identify each one and what each is doing, and note what that scene settles about who Jesus is.*

The Son is in the water; the Spirit descends like a dove and alights on Him; the Father speaks from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Three distinct Persons act at the same moment in the same scene. Whatever else the passage settles, it settles that Jesus is not merely a good teacher, and it settles it with the Father’s own voice.

5. *Fruit is specific, never general. Name one sin you have confessed more than once, decide on one concrete change this week that would count as fruit worthy of repentance, and tell someone who will ask you about it.*

Answers will vary. The two things to listen for are specificity and accountability. “I will do better” is not fruit. “I am deleting the app tonight and asking Dale to check on me Thursday” is. Be ready to receive a confession gracefully and to keep it quiet.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The children of Bethlehem: someone will ask where those babies went. Say plainly what Scripture teaches, that children are not born guilty and are safe with God (Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 18:3; 19:14; 2 Samuel 12:23). There is no inherited guilt to condemn them.
- Do not blur John’s baptism with the baptism of the Great Commission. Acts 19:1–5 keeps them distinct, and confusing them muddies what the New Testament teaches about baptism into Christ.
- Matthew 3:11, baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire, is not a promise of a personal experience for every Christian. The Spirit baptism was promised to the apostles and came at Pentecost (Acts 1:4–5; 2:1–4); the fire in context is the fire of judgment in the very next verse.
- “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” must not be handled as though the kingdom were postponed to a future earthly reign. It was near then and it came on Pentecost.

The Day the Church Began

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This is the first gospel sermon ever preached, and everything about how the church responds to the gospel is set here. Peter, the man who denied the Lord to a servant girl, stands up in the same city seven weeks later and accuses a crowd of crucifying the Son of God. Note the structure: he explains the phenomenon (2:14–21), preaches Jesus of Nazareth crucified and raised (2:22–32), declares Him exalted at God’s right hand (2:33–35), and delivers the verdict (2:36).

The whole sermon is an argument from Scripture and eyewitness. Joel explains the tongues. Psalm 16 proves that David was speaking of someone whose flesh would not see corruption, and Peter points out that David’s tomb is a short walk away. Psalm 110 proves the Messiah would be seated at God’s right hand. This is enthronement language, and it means the kingdom has come. Do not rush past 2:33–36; it is one of the clearest statements in Scripture that Christ reigns now.

Then comes the hinge of the book. The crowd is cut to the heart and asks what to do, and Peter tells them: repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Three thousand gladly received his word and were baptized that same day. The last five verses show what a converted life looked like within twenty-four hours: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayers, generosity, gladness, and daily growth.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is Pentecost, about A.D. 30, fifty days after the Passover at which Jesus was crucified. Jerusalem was full of Jews and proselytes from across the Roman world.
- The audience is Jewish and knows the Scriptures. Peter does not have to establish that there is a God or that the prophets spoke; he only has to show them that the prophets spoke of Jesus.
- Joel 2:28–32 is quoted as beginning its fulfillment that day. “The last days” is the New Testament’s term for the Christian age, from Pentecost to the return of Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2), not a modern end-times countdown.
- Acts 2:38 is the first time the terms of pardon are stated under the new covenant, and they are stated by the apostle to whom the keys of the kingdom were promised (Matthew 16:19).
- The church is not organized here by a vote or a charter. The Lord adds the saved to it (2:47). Membership in the Lord’s body is a divine act, not a human procedure.
- The temple courts were still the natural gathering place for Jewish Christians; the breaking of bread from house to house indicates they also met in homes. Neither detail establishes a binding pattern beyond what the New Testament elsewhere teaches.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Peter’s sermon moves from Joel to David to Jesus and lands hard in 2:36. Follow the argument step by step. What is he proving, and what evidence does he put in front of the crowd?*

Peter’s argument runs like this. What you are seeing is what Joel said God would do. The Jesus of Nazareth you knew was approved by God through miracles you yourselves witnessed. You crucified Him by the hands of lawless men, and God raised Him up. David could not have been talking about himself in Psalm 16, because his tomb is right there. We are witnesses of the resurrection. Being exalted to the right hand of God, He poured out what you now see and hear. Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Two things carry the sermon: fulfilled Scripture and eyewitness testimony. That is still what the faith rests on, and it is worth telling a modern class that Christianity is not asking them to believe without evidence. Note also what Peter does not do. He does not soften the accusation, and he does not invite anyone to a private experience. He preaches a fact and asks for a verdict.

Question 2. *The crowd interrupts in 2:37 and asks, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Read Peter’s answer in verse 38 slowly. What exactly does he tell them to do, and for what stated purpose?*

Peter names two commands and one stated purpose, and a promise follows. Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Read it in more than one translation if you like; the purpose clause is “for the forgiveness of sins,” looking forward to a result, exactly as the same phrase does in Matthew 26:28 where the blood was shed for the remission of sins. Nobody argues that Jesus shed His blood because sins were already forgiven.

Handle this without belligerence. Many good people in your community have been taught that they were saved at the moment they believed and that baptism came afterward as a testimony. The kindest thing you can do is let the text say what it says: they believed, they asked, they were told, and they obeyed the same day, and only then does Luke say the Lord added them. Belief was the beginning of their obedience, not the end of it (compare Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

Question 3. *Acts 2:42–47 describes the life of the church in its first days. Which of those practices is hardest for our congregation to sustain right now, and what would it take from you personally, not from the elders, to strengthen it?*

Verse 42 gives the four: the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers. Verses 43 through 47 fill it out with awe, shared possessions, daily gathering, gladness, simplicity of heart, and favor with people. Let the class name honestly which one has thinned out. In most congregations it is fellowship in its real sense, life genuinely shared, or it is prayer, which tends to be the first thing squeezed out of a busy church.

The second half of the question is the important half. It is easy for a class to critique the congregation in the abstract. Push for first person. Who will you invite to your table this month? Whose name will you actually pray for by name this week? What class will you attend that you have been skipping? Formation happens when somebody in the room says a name and a date out loud.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every Old Testament passage Peter quotes in 2:14–36 and write beside each one what he proves from it.*

Joel 2:28–32 in verses 17 through 21, to explain the outpouring of the Spirit and to announce that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Psalm 16:8–11 in verses 25 through 28, to prove that the Holy One would not be left in Hades or see corruption, which cannot be David. Psalm 132:11 is echoed in verse 30 regarding the oath to David. Psalm 110:1 in verses 34 and 35, to prove that the Christ is now seated at God’s right hand until His enemies are made His footstool.

2. *Trace the language of salvation through 2:21, 2:40, and 2:47. Who does the saving, who is added, and what are they added to?*

Verse 21 says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; verse 40 urges them to be saved from this perverse generation; verse 47 says the Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved. God does the saving and God does the adding. The saved are added to the church, which means a person is not saved and then separately decides whether to join a church. Notice too that “calling on the name of the Lord” in verse 21 is explained by verse 38, and Acts 22:16 says it plainly.

3. *Peter says the promise is to you and your children and to all who are afar off (2:39). Read Acts 2:38 beside Romans 6:3–4 and Galatians 3:26–27. Into what, and into whom, is a person baptized?*

Romans 6:3–4 says we are baptized into Christ Jesus and into His death, buried with Him and raised to walk in newness of life. Galatians 3:26–27 says those baptized into Christ have put on Christ and are sons of God by faith.

Baptism is not a badge worn after salvation; it is the point at which a believing, repentant person is united with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

4. *Acts 2:44–45 says the believers had all things in common. Read Acts 5:4 and 2 Corinthians 9:7 and decide whether this was commanded or voluntary, and what it shows about their hearts.*

It was voluntary. Acts 5:4 has Peter telling Ananias that the land was his own before he sold it and the money was under his control afterward, which means no rule compelled anyone to surrender anything. Second Corinthians 9:7 says each should give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity. What it shows is a church in which need in one member created immediate action in another, which is a heart matter and not an economic system.

5. *The new Christians continued steadfastly in four things (2:42). Pick the one you have grown most casual about, name the specific change you will make before the Lord's Day, and make it.*

Answers will vary. The four are teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. Listen for concreteness and for something that costs an evening or an early morning. If nobody names prayer, ask about it directly; it is usually the quietest casualty.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Acts 2:38 will be the center of gravity for this session. Teach it plainly, from the text, with the parallel of Matthew 26:28 in hand, and without scorn for those taught otherwise.
- Acts 2:39 is sometimes used to support infant baptism. The context answers it: the same crowd had to hear, be cut to the heart, repent, and receive the word, none of which an infant can do. The promise is to their children as those children come to faith and obedience.
- The gift of the Holy Spirit in 2:38 is promised to every obedient believer; the miraculous manifestations of 2:4 were given to the apostles. Do not merge the two, and do not let the class build a doctrine of modern tongues out of this chapter.
- "The last days" of Joel is the Christian age, not a modern countdown. Keep the class away from newspaper eschatology, and keep the kingdom firmly in the present: Christ reigns now (2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Genesis 17–24 · Proverbs 3 · Matthew 4:1–5:12 · Acts 3:1–4:22

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