

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 8 OF 104

Called and Sent

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Exodus 1-8
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 9-10
Gospels	Matthew 9:9-38
General New Testament	Acts 9

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to let four calls land on people who did not expect them. Moses had settled into a second life in Midian. Matthew had made his peace with being hated. Saul was certain he was already serving God. Every one of them was interrupted, and every one of them was sent. The week is not primarily about their greatness; it is about the God who calls, and about what it costs and gains to answer.

Doctrinally, two matters deserve careful handling. The first is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which must be taught from the whole text, showing that Pharaoh hardened himself first and that God is not the author of any man's sin. The second is Saul's conversion, which lays out belief, prayer, and fasting followed by the command to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins. Take the time to walk through it slowly and graciously; there is no clearer passage in Acts for showing when forgiveness comes. Alongside both, Matthew 9:16-17 gives you the opportunity to say that the old covenant has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ.

Formationally, watch for the pattern of the ordinary person God uses. Midwives who would not kill. A disciple named Ananias whom nobody has heard of before or since. Barnabas, who took a risk on a man with a reputation. None of them preached a sermon that got recorded, and the story does not move without them. Ask your class this: who is the one person, this week, that God is nudging you toward, and what is the first sentence you are going to say to them?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Exodus 1-8. It carries the most narrative weight and raises the week's hardest question, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Give the first half of the hour to the burning bush and Moses' four objections, and reserve fifteen minutes at the end for the hardening.

Second session: Take up Acts 9. It pairs beautifully with Moses at the bush: another man interrupted, another man who did not volunteer. It also gives you the clearest conversion account in Acts, so plan to spend real time laying out the sequence from the road to the baptistry.

The other two readings: Proverbs 9-10 and Matthew 9:9-38 work well as personal reading. Point the class to the two dinner invitations in Proverbs 9 and ask them to notice how similar the opening lines are. In Matthew, ask them to read 9:36 slowly and then look at the people in their own week.

The God Who Came Down

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Exodus opens with a list of names and a single devastating sentence: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” The family of seventy has become a nation, and the nation has become a threat. Pharaoh’s policy escalates from forced labor to infanticide, and God’s answer to a king who kills babies is to save one. Take your time with chapter 1. It sets up everything: a God who works through midwives, a mother, a sister, and a basket, long before He works through a staff and a sea.

The burning bush is the theological center of these chapters. God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which means He is not starting something new but keeping something old. He says He has seen, heard, and known the affliction of His people, and then He says the words that change everything: “I have come down to deliver them.” When Moses asks for a name, God gives him “I AM WHO I AM,” a name that says God simply is, dependent on nothing, accountable to no one, and unchanged by four centuries of silence.

From chapter 5 forward the conflict is not really between Moses and Pharaoh. It is between the Lord and the gods of Egypt, and the repeated purpose statement tells you so: “that you may know that I am the Lord.” Pharaoh has asked the question in 5:2, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?” The rest of the book is the answer. Notice too that things get worse before they get better; obedience did not immediately make Moses popular, even with Israel.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Moses is the writer. Exodus continues the narrative of Genesis directly, picking up with the sons of Jacob who went down into Egypt.
- Roughly four hundred years separate Genesis 50 from Exodus 1, exactly as God told Abraham in Genesis 15:13–14.
- Exodus is the defining act of the Old Testament. Israel will look back on this rescue for the rest of her history, and the prophets will call her to remember it.
- The ten plagues strike at the heart of Egyptian religion: the Nile, the frog, the cattle, the sun, and finally Pharaoh’s own firstborn, who was regarded as divine.
- All of this is well before the Law of Moses is given at Sinai. Draw timeless truths about God’s character, faith, and deliverance, and do not read New Testament specifics back into the lives of these people.
- Where it is natural, point forward: Stephen calls Moses a deliverer whom Israel rejected the first time (Acts 7:35), and Hebrews 3:1–6 sets Moses beside Christ.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Exodus 2:23–25 says that God heard, remembered, looked, and knew. Israel had been groaning for generations before that sentence was written. How do you hold on to a God who hears when the rescue has not come yet?*

Four verbs stack up in 2:24–25: God heard, God remembered, God looked, God knew. “Remembered” does not mean God had forgotten; it is covenant language, meaning God acted on what He had promised. The point is that the silence was never absence. God had been present through four hundred years that produced no visible miracle and no prophet on record.

Bring this down where people live. Somebody in your class has been praying about a marriage, a child, or a diagnosis for years. The Exodus does not promise them a specific timetable, but it does tell them what kind of God they are dealing with: one who hears long before He acts, and whose delays are never indifference. Ask what it would change about this week if they truly believed God had already heard.

Question 2. *At the burning bush Moses raises four objections (3:11; 3:13; 4:1; 4:10). Walk through them one at a time and notice how God answers each. Which of those excuses sounds most like the ones you use?*

Moses says, in order, “Who am I?” (inadequacy), “What shall I say to them?” (no authority), “They will not believe me” (fear of rejection), and “I am not eloquent” (lack of gifts). God answers every one with something about Himself: I will be with you; I AM has sent you; here is My power in your hand; who made man’s mouth? Notice that God never once tells Moses that Moses is better than he thinks he is.

That is the pastoral gold in this passage. Our excuses assume the work depends on us. God’s answers all relocate the work to Himself. Ask the class to name the specific service they have declined (teaching a class, visiting the sick, speaking to a neighbor about Christ), and then ask which of God’s four answers applies to it.

Question 3. *Exodus says both that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15, 8:32) and that the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart (4:21; 9:12). How do those two statements fit together without making God the author of a man’s sin?*

Handle this carefully and plainly. Scripture uses three expressions: Pharaoh hardened his own heart, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Chronologically, Pharaoh hardens himself first (7:13, 22; 8:15, 32), and only later is the Lord said to harden him (9:12 onward). The same sun that melts wax hardens clay. God applied pressure, and Pharaoh’s own resistance did the hardening.

Do not let this become a proof text for Calvinistic reprobation. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23, 32) and wills all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Pharaoh was never a puppet; he was a man given ten opportunities to bend, who chose ten times not to. The sober warning for the class is Hebrews 3:13: hearts harden by increments, and the increments feel small.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *In Exodus 8, trace the two compromises Pharaoh offers Moses (8:25 and 8:28). Write down what each one would have cost Israel if Moses had accepted it.*

Pharaoh first says, “Go, sacrifice to your God in the land” (8:25), which would have kept Israel inside Egypt and under his thumb. Then he says, “Only you shall not go very far away” (8:28). Both offers grant the form of worship while keeping the worshiper in reach. Moses refuses because partial obedience to God is simply disobedience wearing better clothes.

2. *The plagues are not random disasters. Read Exodus 12:12 and then look back at the Nile, the frogs, and the livestock. Whom was God actually putting on trial?*

Exodus 12:12 makes it explicit: “Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment.” Egypt worshiped the Nile, revered frogs, venerated cattle, and prayed to the sun. God struck each in turn and finally took the firstborn of the one man Egypt regarded as a god in the flesh. The plagues are an argument, not a tantrum, and the conclusion is “that you may know that I am the Lord.”

3. *Read Hebrews 11:23–27 alongside Exodus 2. What was Moses choosing, and what was he seeing that the narrative in Exodus never mentions?*

Hebrews 11 says Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Exodus records the action; Hebrews records the faith behind it. He endured “as seeing Him who is invisible,” which is the only way anyone ever walks away from Egypt.

4. *Moses asks “Who am I?” and God answers with a promise about Himself rather than a compliment about Moses (3:11–12). Why does that answer strengthen a man more than reassurance would?*

Reassurance about ourselves runs out at the first hard moment, because we know better than anyone how thin our résumé really is. “I will certainly be with you” does not depend on Moses at all. God then gives him a sign that will only be verified after he obeys, which is nearly always how it works. Confidence in service rests on the character of the One who sends, never on the qualifications of the one sent.

5. *The midwives feared God rather than the king (1:17–21). Name one place this week where you will have to answer to God while somebody with power over you wants something else, and decide now what you will do.*

Answers will vary. Listen for something concrete: a report the boss wants shaded, a customer who needs to be told the truth, a family decision that will not be popular. The midwives were not heroic in some abstract way; they simply declined to do one specific thing on one specific day. Press for that level of specificity, and note that God dealt well with them.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The hardening of Pharaoh's heart: teach both halves of the text. Pharaoh hardened himself before God is ever said to harden him. This is not unconditional reprobation, and God is not the author of any man's sin.
- The midwives' answer to Pharaoh in 1:19: Scripture commends their fear of God and their refusal to kill, not the details of their speech. Do not build a doctrine of acceptable lying out of a narrative that never comments on it.
- Moses killing the Egyptian (2:11–12) is recorded, not approved. Acts 7:25 says he assumed his brothers would understand, and they did not. Deliverance on our own terms and our own timetable usually ends in a forty-year detour.
- The plagues raise the question of God's judgment on a nation. Keep the class in the text: Egypt had enslaved a people and drowned their infants for generations, and God warned Pharaoh before every single blow.

Two Invitations, Two Roads

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 9 closes the long opening section of Proverbs, the ten lectures and interludes that began in chapter 1, and it closes it with a choice. Two women, two houses, two invitations, two destinations. Wisdom's invitation costs preparation and offers life. Folly's invitation costs nothing up front and ends in the depths of Sheol. Solomon has spent eight chapters teaching his son how to tell them apart, and now he simply sets the two side by side and lets the young man choose.

Notice the detail in 9:4 and 9:16. Both women address "him who is simple," and both use the identical opening line. Folly does not advertise herself as folly. She borrows Wisdom's script. That is worth stating out loud in class, because most of your members are not going to be tempted by something that looks obviously evil. They will be tempted by something that sounds almost exactly like wisdom.

Chapter 10 begins "The proverbs of Solomon," and the style shifts abruptly from sustained speeches to standalone couplets, most of them built on contrast. Do not try to cover all thirty-two verses. Pick a thread and follow it. The mouth is the most obvious one in this chapter, and it is the one your class will use before the day is over.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Chapters 1 through 9 are extended parental appeals; chapter 10 begins the collected sayings of Solomon proper, which run through 22:16.
- Wisdom and Folly personified as women are poetic device, a vivid way of setting two ways of life in front of a young man. They are not created beings or persons of the Godhead.
- Hebrew poetry works by parallelism. In chapter 10 the second line usually stands in contrast to the first, marked by "but." Teaching the class to read the contrast is teaching them to read the book.
- The "fear of the Lord" refrain in 9:10 ties this chapter back to 1:7 and forward to 31:30. It is the hinge on which everything else turns.
- Proverbs describes how life generally goes under God's moral order. It is not a promise of outcomes, and it is not a prosperity formula.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Wisdom and Folly call out to the same people in nearly identical words (9:4 and 9:16). Compare the two invitations line by line. What is actually different between the two tables, and why is that difference so easy to miss in the moment?*

Set the two tables next to each other on the board. Wisdom has built a house, hewn seven pillars, slaughtered meat, mixed wine, set a table, and sent servants out to call publicly. Folly is simply sitting at her door being loud. One has prepared something; the other has prepared nothing. One calls from the high places in the open; the other calls to people passing by who were already headed somewhere else. And what Folly offers is not even hers: stolen water, secret bread.

The difference is hard to see in the moment because the opening line is the same and the immediate experience of Folly is genuinely pleasant. Verse 18 is the only place the difference shows, and it shows too late: "he does not know that the dead are there." Ask the class how a person is supposed to tell the two apart before verse 18. The answer the chapter gives is verse 10, the fear of the Lord, formed in advance, before the invitation arrives.

Question 2. *Proverbs 9:7–9 says a scoffer hates the one who corrects him while a wise man loves him for it. Think back to the last time somebody corrected you. Which of those two men did you sound like, and what did the people around you learn from your reaction?*

These three verses are among the most searching in the book. Correction is the test that sorts people. The scoffer will hate you for it, so verse 8 says do not waste your breath. The wise man will love you for it, and verse 9 says he will be wiser still. The difference is not intelligence or even maturity. It is teachability, and the person who possesses it keeps growing for a lifetime.

The class will naturally think of someone else. Turn them back on themselves with a concrete memory: the last performance review, the last time a spouse said “you always,” the last time an older Christian offered a word about how something came across. Ask not what they thought, but what they said in the first ten seconds. The first ten seconds are where the scoffer shows up.

Question 3. *Chapter 10 keeps returning to the mouth (verses 11, 19, 20, 21, 31, 32). Read those verses aloud in order and describe the portrait of speech they add up to. Where does that portrait press hardest on how we talk at home?*

The picture that emerges is striking: the mouth of the righteous is a well of life (11), a choice silver (20), a source of food for many (21), and it brings forth wisdom (31). Against that, the wicked conceal violence, the fool spreads ruin, and the many-worded man cannot avoid sin (19). Speech in Proverbs is not a minor matter of etiquette. It is the overflow of what a person is, which is exactly what Jesus says in Matthew 12:34.

Take it home before the hour ends. Most of us reserve our worst speech for the people who cannot leave us: a spouse, a child, a parent. Verse 12 says love covers all sins, and verse 19 says restraint is wisdom. Ask each person to name one habit of speech in their own house that they would not want recorded and played back on Sunday.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out everything Proverbs 9:1–3 says Wisdom has already done before she issues a single invitation. What does her preparation suggest about how seriously God takes the offer?*

She has built her house, hewn out her seven pillars, slaughtered her meat, mixed her wine, furnished her table, and sent out her maidens to call from the highest places of the city. Six actions of costly preparation before one word of invitation. God’s offer is never casual and never improvised; He prepares a feast and then sends messengers into public places. Compare the banquet Jesus describes in Luke 14:16–24.

2. *Compare Proverbs 9:10 with Proverbs 1:7 and Psalm 111:10. Why do you think this same refrain keeps returning at the seams of the book?*

It returns because it is the foundation, and foundations get restated at every level of the building. Proverbs 1:7 opens the book with it, 9:10 closes the opening section with it, and 31:30 seals the book with it. Every practical instruction between those markers assumes a person who has already settled the question of who God is. Remove the fear of the Lord and Proverbs collapses into mere prudence.

3. *Proverbs 10 speaks about wealth in verses 2, 4, 15, and 22. Hold those four together with 1 Timothy 6:17–19 and state plainly what Proverbs is promising and what it is not.*

Verse 2 says treasures of wickedness profit nothing. Verse 4 says a slack hand brings poverty and a diligent hand brings wealth. Verse 15 observes, without approving, that wealth is the rich man’s fortress. Verse 22 says the blessing of the Lord makes rich and He adds no sorrow. Together they teach that diligence and integrity generally tend toward provision. They do not promise that every faithful person will be comfortable, and 1 Timothy 6:17–19 shows the New Testament treating riches as a trust to be used generously, never as a scoreboard of God’s approval.

4. *Folly’s entire pitch is in 9:17: stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. Name the specific appeal hidden in that sentence, and name three places our culture makes the same pitch.*

The appeal is secrecy, not the water. Folly is not selling a better product; she is selling the thrill of getting away with something. Stolen water tastes exactly like every other water. What makes it sweet is that nobody knows. That is precisely why hidden sin is so hard to fight, and why Ephesians 5:11–13 says the cure is to bring things into the light.

Let the class name the modern versions: the private browser tab, the expense report nobody audits, the conversation nobody at home knows about.

5. *Proverbs 10:19 warns that where words are many, sin is not far behind. Pick one conversation you know is coming this week and decide right now what you are not going to say in it.*

Answers will vary. Look for a decision made in advance rather than a general resolution to be nicer. The chapter's counsel is restraint before the moment, not regret after it. Note that deciding what you will not say is far more useful than deciding to watch your tongue, because the first is a plan and the second is only a wish.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Keep reminding the class that proverbs are general principles, not guarantees. Verses like 10:3, 10:22, and 10:27 collapse if they are read as absolute promises, and that reading is the seed of prosperity theology.
- Do not let Wisdom personified become a created being or a separate person of the Godhead. It is poetry. Where it is natural, point forward to Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Colossians 2:3).
- Proverbs 10:4 must not be turned into a tool for judging poor people. The book itself insists elsewhere that the poor are often oppressed rather than lazy (13:23; 22:22–23).

The Physician and the Harvest

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The call of Matthew is told with almost no decoration, which is itself remarkable. Matthew is a tax collector, which in first century Galilee meant a Jew who had contracted with Rome to collect from his own neighbors, with a legal license to overcharge. He was not merely disliked; he was regarded as a traitor. Jesus says, “Follow Me,” and the man leaves the booth. Luke tells us Matthew then threw a great feast, which means the first thing he did with his new life was introduce his old friends to Jesus.

The middle of the chapter is a cluster of questions, and the answers form a unit. To the Pharisees: the sick need a physician, and God has always wanted mercy more than ritual. To John’s disciples: you cannot fast at a wedding while the bridegroom is present. Then the patch and the wineskin, which say that what Jesus brings cannot be sewn as a repair onto the old order. Something new is arriving, and it will require new forms.

The closing paragraph is the hinge into chapter 10. Jesus goes through all the cities and villages teaching, preaching, and healing, and then Matthew tells us what He felt. The word rendered “moved with compassion” is a strong one, describing something felt in the gut. He saw exhausted, scattered people, and He called them a harvest rather than a mob. The command that follows is not “go recruit,” but “pray the Lord of the harvest.” Then, in the very next verse, He sends the men who prayed.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Matthew, also called Levi, is the writer of this gospel. This is the only place he names his own occupation in the list of the Twelve (10:3), and he does it without softening it.
- Chapters 8 and 9 are a deliberate collection of miracles, demonstrating the authority of the King whose teaching was given in chapters 5 through 7.
- The Pharisees objected to table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners because eating together signified acceptance. The offense was social and religious, not dietary.
- Only one fast was required by the Law of Moses, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29–31). The twice-weekly fasting the Pharisees practiced was tradition added to the Law.
- The old wineskin imagery anticipates what Hebrews will argue at length: the first covenant was becoming obsolete and was ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:13).
- Jairus is not named here, though Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41 supply the name. Matthew regularly compresses accounts he shares with the other gospels.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus tells the Pharisees to go and learn what “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” means (9:13). If our congregation actually went and learned that lesson, name three things that would look different about us next month.*

The quotation is from Hosea 6:6, and the command “go and learn” was a rabbinic put-down: it was what a teacher said to a beginner. Jesus is telling the professional religious experts that they have missed the first lesson. God has never been satisfied by ritual performed by people whose hearts are cold toward their neighbors. He did not abolish sacrifice; He ranked it.

Push the class toward specifics, or the conversation will stay comfortable. A congregation that learned this verse would find itself eating with people who make it uncomfortable, would stop measuring faithfulness by attendance alone, and would have a plan for the visitor who walks in with a hard past. Ask for three concrete changes, and write them down where everyone can see them.

Question 2. *In 9:16–17 Jesus talks about unshrunk patches and old wineskins. What is He claiming about the relationship between what He is bringing and the old order, and why could the two not simply be stitched together?*

Both pictures make the same point from opposite directions. New, unshrunk cloth sewn onto an old garment will shrink and tear the garment worse than before. New wine still fermenting will burst a brittle old skin. What Jesus brings is not a patch on Judaism and not a reform movement inside the existing system. It is a new covenant, and it requires new forms.

This is the place to state clearly what the New Testament teaches about the Law of Moses. It was holy, just, and good (Romans 7:12); it was a tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24–25); and it was fulfilled and taken out of the way at the cross (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10; Matthew 5:17). Christians are not under it. Say that plainly, and also say what it means practically: we do not go to the Old Testament for our worship, our priesthood, or our calendar. We go to it for instruction about God and about ourselves (Romans 15:4).

Question 3. *Matthew 9:36 says Jesus was moved with compassion because the crowds were weary and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. When did you last look at a crowd of strangers that way, and what is it about our ordinary week that keeps us from seeing people like that?*

The verb Matthew uses is visceral. Jesus did not merely disapprove of the crowd's condition; He felt it. And notice what He saw: not a market, not an audience, not a nuisance, but sheep harassed and thrown down, with no shepherd to lead them. Their religious leaders were present in abundance. That is exactly the point. They had leaders who were not shepherding them.

For most of us the obstacle is not cruelty but velocity. We move through parking lots and checkout lines and inboxes at a speed that turns people into obstacles. Ask the class to name the specific crowd they will be in this week, the school pickup line, the job site, the waiting room, and to name one thing they could do to actually see the people in it. Compassion begins with slowing down enough to look.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the four miracles in 9:18–34 and note in each case who took the initiative: Jesus, the person in need, or someone acting on their behalf.*

The ruler comes and asks on behalf of his daughter (9:18); the woman with the flow of blood takes the initiative herself, and secretly (9:20–21); the two blind men follow Him and cry out, and He questions them before healing (9:27–29); and the mute demoniac is brought to Him by others and says nothing at all (9:32–33). Four miracles, four different doorways in. Some people come themselves, some are carried, and some can only be brought. That has obvious implications for how a congregation reaches its community.

2. *Matthew's account of his own call takes one sentence (9:9). Read Luke 5:27–29 and write down what Matthew leaves out about himself, then consider why he might have left it out.*

Luke tells us it was a great feast in Matthew's own house and that Matthew left all. Matthew tells us none of that. He mentions the dinner without saying whose house it was, and he never mentions what he gave up. Instead, he is careful to record his own profession, which was the shameful part. That is the instinct of a converted man: quiet about his sacrifice, honest about his sin.

3. *Look up Hosea 6:6, the verse Jesus quotes in 9:13. What was Hosea confronting in Israel, and how does knowing that sharpen the rebuke Jesus is delivering?*

Hosea was confronting a nation whose repentance was shallow and short-lived, whose loyalty was "like a morning cloud." They kept the sacrifices going while the covenant faithfulness that the sacrifices were supposed to express had evaporated. When Jesus quotes it against the Pharisees, He is placing them in the same line: meticulous about religious performance, careless about people. The rebuke is not that they valued worship too much, but that they valued mercy too little.

4. *The woman in 9:20–22 believes that touching the hem of His garment will be enough. Where is the line between faith and superstition, and how does Jesus draw that line in verse 22?*

Jesus draws the line in verse 22 by crediting her faith, not her touch: “Your faith has made you well.” The garment had no power. She had a mistaken idea about the mechanism and a right idea about the Man, and Jesus corrected the first without rejecting her because of it. Superstition trusts an object or a formula; faith trusts a person. It is worth noting how gently Jesus handled someone whose theology was imperfect but whose trust was real.

5. *Jesus’ remedy for a plentiful harvest and too few laborers is prayer (9:38). Choose one person by name to pray for every day this week, and decide on one thing you will actually do about them.*

Answers will vary. Insist on a name rather than a category. The point of verse 38 is that concern for the lost begins in prayer and does not stay there, since the men who were told to pray in verse 38 are the men sent out in 10:5. Listen for a plan with a date attached: an invitation to a meal, a ride offered, a study proposed.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- “I did not come to call the righteous” (9:13) is irony, not a statement that some people are righteous apart from Christ. Romans 3:23 settles that. Jesus is describing people who think they are well.
- Fasting: Jesus predicts that His disciples will fast, but the New Testament nowhere binds a fasting calendar on Christians. Treat it as a personal practice, not a required observance.
- The wineskins: use this to teach that the Old Law has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ, without ever speaking of the Law itself as bad. It was good, and it finished its work.
- The miracles here confirmed who Jesus was (John 20:30–31). Be prepared for the question about miracles today, and answer it kindly from Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 without letting the hour turn into a debate.

The Road to Damascus

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke has been building toward this chapter since 7:58, where a young man named Saul held the coats of the men who stoned Stephen. In 8:3 he was ravaging the church, dragging men and women off to prison. Chapter 9 opens with him still at it, “breathing threats and murder,” and asking for extradition papers. Luke wants you to understand that this is not a sincere seeker having a religious experience. This is the persecution itself being intercepted.

The conversion account is precise, and the class should be walked through it slowly. Saul sees the Lord and hears His voice; that makes him an eyewitness and qualifies him as an apostle (9:17; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8). He asks what he should do and is told to go into the city where he will be told. He believes; he prays; he fasts for three days; and he is still not forgiven. Ananias comes with the missing word, and only then does Saul rise and get baptized. The order is not incidental. It is the same order Peter preached in Acts 2:38.

The last third of the chapter shows what the new man did with his new life: he preached Christ immediately in the very synagogues he had come to purge, and within days people were trying to kill him. Then Luke turns the camera back to Peter for Aeneas and Dorcas, partly because chapter 10 is coming and Peter needs to be in the story, and partly to show the church at peace, edified, and multiplying while the man who once hunted it now belongs to it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Damascus lies roughly one hundred forty miles north of Jerusalem, a week’s walk, with a substantial Jewish population and synagogues under the reach of the high priest’s authority.
- Saul was a Pharisee trained under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), a Roman citizen by birth, from Tarsus in Cilicia, and by his own later account the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).
- Luke records this conversion three times, which tells you how much weight he places on it. No other event in Acts is repeated that way.
- Ananias is described as a devout man well spoken of by all the Jews in Damascus (Acts 22:12). He is an ordinary disciple, not an apostle, and he is the one God uses.
- The persecution had already scattered the disciples (8:1, 4), which is how the gospel reached Damascus ahead of Saul.
- Galatians 1:15–24 fills in a stay in Arabia and a period of about three years before Saul went up to Jerusalem.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus asks, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” though Saul had never laid a hand on Jesus Himself. What is Jesus claiming about His relationship to His church, and how should that claim change the way we handle one another?*

Jesus does not say, “Why are you persecuting My people?” He says, “Me.” The church is His body (Ephesians 1:22–23; 1 Corinthians 12:27), and what is done to the body is done to the Head. This is the same logic as Matthew 25:40, and it is the beginning of an idea Paul will spend his letters unfolding. The man who wrote most of the New Testament theology of the body first learned it on the ground with his eyes shut.

Turn the point toward the class. If persecuting the church is persecuting Christ, then wounding a brother is not a private matter between two members. Gossip, cold shoulders, factions over preferences: each of them lands on Christ. Ask what it would change in a business meeting or a hallway conversation to believe that literally.

Question 2. *Saul saw the Lord, believed, prayed, and went without food for three days, and yet Ananias still told him, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16). Walk carefully through what that sequence tells us about when a person’s sins are actually forgiven.*

Lay the timeline on the board from the three accounts. On the road Saul sees the Lord, calls Him Lord, and asks what he must do (9:5–6; 22:10). He is led into Damascus blind. For three days he neither eats nor drinks, and he prays (9:9, 11). Then Ananias arrives and says, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:16). If Saul had already been forgiven on the road, that sentence is impossible.

Say it plainly and kindly. Belief, sorrow, and prayer are all present in Saul before baptism, and his sins are still there. The New Testament is consistent: baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), it puts a person into Christ (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27), and it saves (1 Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16). There is no sinner’s prayer anywhere in Acts, and no case of anyone being told he was already saved and should now be baptized as a symbol. Teach it from the text, not from argument, and expect that some in the room were taught otherwise in good conscience.

Question 3. *Ananias argues with God about this assignment (9:13–14), then goes and opens with the words “Brother Saul.” Who is the person you would least want to see walk into the assembly next Sunday, and what would it cost you to call him brother?*

Ananias is being asked to walk unarmed into a house and lay hands on a man holding a warrant for his arrest. His objection in verses 13 and 14 is entirely reasonable, and God does not scold him for it. God simply gives him more information: “he is a chosen vessel of Mine.” And then Ananias goes, and the first word out of his mouth is “Brother.” Not “I have heard about you.” Not “I hope this is real.” Brother.

Every congregation has a category of person it quietly hopes will never come. The man who left a wreckage of a marriage behind him. The woman with the arrest record. The son who humiliated his parents publicly. Ask the class to picture that person in the third pew, and then ask what obedience looks like in that moment. It usually looks like a handshake and a name.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Acts 9:1–9 tells you about Saul before the light on the road, then list everything it tells you about him in the three days after.*

Before: he is breathing threats and murder against the disciples, he goes to the high priest, he asks for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, and his stated purpose is to bind both men and women and bring them to Jerusalem. After: he is on the ground, he is speechless, he is blind, he is led by the hand, he neither eats nor drinks for three days, and he is praying. Luke has reduced the most formidable enemy of the church to a man who has to be led by the hand and cannot feed himself. Then God sends him a brother.

2. *Compare the three accounts of Saul’s conversion in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. Note the detail that each account adds and what all three hold in common.*

Acts 9 is Luke’s narrative account. Acts 22 is Saul’s defense before a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, and it adds Ananias’ character and his words in verse 16 about being baptized and washing away sins. Acts 26 is his defense before Agrippa, and it adds the fullest statement of his commission to the Gentiles, to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light. All three hold the same core: the light, the voice, the question, the identification “I am Jesus,” and the command to go on and be told what to do.

3. *Acts 9:31 gives a four-part description of the churches at that moment. Write out the four things Luke says about them, and decide which one your congregation most needs right now.*

The churches had peace, they were edified, they walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and they were multiplied. Notice that growth is the last item, not the first, and that it follows edification and reverence. Answers about which one is most needed will vary; listen for members who recognize that a congregation cannot multiply what it has not first built up.

4. Read Galatians 1:15–24 alongside Acts 9:19–30 and work out the timeline of Saul’s first few years as a Christian.

What surprises you about how long the quiet part lasted?

Galatians says Saul did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, went to Arabia, returned to Damascus, and only after three years went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, staying fifteen days. Acts compresses all of that into “many days were past” (9:23). The surprise for most students is the length of the quiet: the most gifted man in the first century spent years in relative obscurity before the work Acts 13 describes. God is rarely in the hurry we are.

5. Barnabas took Saul in when the Jerusalem disciples were still afraid of him (9:26–27). Name one person on the edges of your congregation, and this week do for them exactly what Barnabas did.

Answers will vary. What Barnabas did was specific: he took hold of him, brought him to the apostles, and told them the facts. That is three actions, not a feeling. Press for the same three: make contact, bring them in, and speak well of them to people who are wary. Note also that Barnabas risked his own reputation to do it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Conversion: this is one of the clearest conversion accounts in Scripture. Teach it plainly, including Acts 22:16, and avoid a combative tone. Many sincere people have been taught a sinner’s prayer and have never been shown this text.
- “A chosen vessel of Mine” (9:15) describes a man chosen for a work, not an individual unconditionally elected to salvation apart from his own obedience. Saul himself later speaks of the possibility of becoming disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27).
- The vision given to Ananias and the appearance to Saul were revelation given before the New Testament was complete. They are not a pattern for expecting visions today (1 Corinthians 13:8–10; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Jude 3).
- The raising of Dorcas: teach it as an apostolic sign confirming the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4), and be ready to answer gently why we do not see such things now.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Exodus 9–16 · Proverbs 11 · Matthew 10 · Acts 10:1–33

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