

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 9 OF 104

The Line God Draws

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Exodus 9–16
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 11
Gospels	Matthew 10
General New Testament	Acts 10:1–33

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to help the class see where God draws His lines and why. In Egypt the line was blood on a doorframe, and it ran between life and death. In Proverbs it runs between the crooked and the upright. In Matthew 10 it runs through households, drawn not by hostility but by the sheer weight of Christ's claim. And in Acts 10 God takes down a line He had drawn Himself, because it had finished its work. By the end of the week a student should know that God has always been building one people, and that He has always told them exactly how to come.

Doctrinally, three matters deserve deliberate attention. First, the Passover as a type of Christ, which the New Testament itself teaches (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 19:36), including the point that the blood had to be applied to a particular door. Second, the temporary restriction of Matthew 10:5–6, which is a matter of sequence and must not be allowed to support a doctrine of two separate peoples of God or a coming earthly kingdom for national Israel. Third, Cornelius, who was devout and sincere and still needed words by which he could be saved (Acts 11:14). Handle that last one tenderly; there are people in your class thinking about their own relatives.

Formationally, the thread is trust when the supply is daily. Israel had to walk out of the tent every morning for manna they could not store. The Twelve went out with no money and no spare tunic. Cornelius had to send messengers thirty miles and then wait three days without knowing what he would hear. Proverbs 11 says the man who scatters is the man who increases. Ask your class a specific question and let them answer it out loud: what would you have to stop stockpiling this month in order to find out whether God actually provides?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Exodus 9–16. Passover is the single most important Old Testament passage your class will read this quarter, and it deserves a full hour. Spend the first twenty minutes on chapters 9 through 11, then give the rest to Exodus 12 and the blood on the door.

Second session: Take up Acts 10:1–33. It pairs directly with the week's Old Testament reading, since the same God who separated Israel from Egypt now sends Peter through a Gentile doorway. It also sets up next week's reading, which finishes the account, so do not try to preach Peter's sermon early.

The other two readings: Proverbs 11 and Matthew 10 make good personal reading. Point the class to the merchant's scale in 11:1 and ask them to look for it in their own week. For Matthew 10, warn them in advance that verses 34 through 39 are hard, and ask them to read the chapter through to the cup of cold water before they decide what they think.

The Lamb and the Sea

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These chapters bring the contest to its conclusion. The plagues grow more severe and more targeted: boils that even the magicians cannot stand under, hail that destroys the crops and the livestock left in the field, locusts that finish the job, and a darkness so heavy that no one rose from his place for three days. Pharaoh's own servants beg him to relent in 10:7, and still he will not. Notice how often God gives warning before He strikes, and how often God's stated purpose is "that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth."

Chapter 12 is the theological heart of the Old Testament, and the class should feel that. God does not simply spare Israel because they are Israel. He gives them a lamb, a date, and a doorframe, and He says, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." The blood had to be applied. A family that believed God and left the basin sitting by the door would have buried a son that night. This is where Israel's calendar begins (12:2) and where her identity is formed: a people who were slaves and were bought out.

Then comes the sea, and then comes reality. Israel sings one of the oldest poems in Scripture in chapter 15, and three days later they cannot find drinkable water and they turn on Moses. By chapter 16 they are remembering Egypt fondly, which is astonishing until you notice how quickly we do the same. God's answer is not a rebuke but bread from heaven, given daily, with a test built into it: gather enough for today, and trust Me for tomorrow.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread become the founding memorial of Israel's national life, kept annually and explained to each new generation (12:26–27).
- The death of the firstborn strikes at Pharaoh himself, since the Egyptian king's heir was regarded as divine. The final plague is the last and clearest judgment on the gods of Egypt (12:12).
- The route out of Egypt avoided the coastal road toward the Philistines (13:17), which tells you God was protecting a people not yet ready for war.
- The pillar of cloud and fire is God's visible presence leading and, at the sea, standing between Israel and the Egyptian army (14:19–20).
- The Sabbath appears in Exodus 16 before Sinai, connected to the manna. It is given to Israel as a sign of the covenant (31:13, 16–17) and is nowhere bound on Christians.
- Paul treats these events as written for our instruction and our warning (1 Corinthians 10:1–12; Romans 15:4).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Exodus 12 the lamb must be without blemish, kept four days, killed at twilight, its blood applied to the door, and not one of its bones broken. Read 1 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Peter 1:18–19, and John 19:36, and talk through what those details teach us about the cross.*

Walk the details slowly. The lamb was to be without blemish, a male of the first year, taken on the tenth day and kept until the fourteenth, so the family lived with the animal for four days before it died for them. It was killed at twilight, its blood applied with hyssop, its flesh eaten, and none of its bones broken. Paul says flatly, "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us." Peter says we were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." John records that the soldiers did not break His legs, and says it happened so the Scripture would be fulfilled.

Then make the point the text makes about application. The lamb's death was necessary and it was not sufficient by itself; the blood had to be on the door of that house. Nobody was saved by admiring the lamb in the yard. Ask the class what corresponds to the doorframe now, and take them to Romans 6:3–4 and Galatians 3:27, where a

person is buried with Christ and puts Him on. Say it without heat: the blood saves, and God has always said where He wants it applied.

Question 2. *Israel walks through the sea on dry ground and sings in chapter 15, and by 15:24 they are grumbling about the water. Three days. What happened in those three days, and where do you see that same three day pattern in yourself?*

Between the song and the grumbling lies a stretch of hot, dry road with no water. That is all it took. Exodus 15:22 says they went three days in the wilderness and found no water, and when they found water at Marah it was bitter. Their worship in chapter 15 was real; it simply had no roots yet. Gratitude formed by a single spectacular rescue does not survive an ordinary week of thirst.

Bring it home without scolding. Every person in the room has had a Sunday where God felt near and a Thursday where He felt absent, and the distance between them was not doctrine but circumstance. Ask what practices would have carried Israel across those three days, and then ask what would carry the class across theirs. Notice that God's response at Marah is not condemnation; He shows Moses a tree, sweetens the water, and then gives them a promise and a statute.

Question 3. *God gave manna one day at a time and forbade storing it overnight (16:19–20). Why would God deliberately design a provision that could not be stockpiled, and what would it actually cost you to live on that arrangement?*

The manna arrangement is a deliberate schooling in dependence. God could have filled their tents once a year. Instead He required a walk out of the camp every morning, and He built in a spoilage clause so that hoarding produced worms and a stench. The one exception, a double portion before the Sabbath, proved the rule: the supply was under God's hand, not theirs. Deuteronomy 8:3 gives the stated purpose, that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

For the class the cost is real, because our entire economy is built on stockpiling. Nobody is suggesting they empty the savings account; Proverbs commends the ant. The question is subtler: what have we accumulated precisely so that we will never again have to ask God for anything? Point them to the petition Jesus taught, "Give us this day our daily bread," and ask when they last prayed it and meant it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the plagues in chapters 9 and 10 and mark every place where God makes a distinction between Israel and Egypt (9:4, 9:26, 10:23; then 11:7). What is God teaching by the distinction itself?*

The distinction begins with the livestock in 9:4, continues with the hail that does not fall in Goshen (9:26), moves to the darkness that does not touch Israel's dwellings (10:23), and culminates in 11:7, where not even a dog will bark against the children of Israel, "that you may know that the Lord makes a difference between Egypt and Israel." God is teaching that deliverance is not an accident of geography or good luck. He knows His people by name and He acts with precision.

2. *Read John 1:29 and 1 Corinthians 5:7 alongside Exodus 12. List every point at which the Passover lamb corresponds to Christ, and then find one point where the correspondence stops.*

The lamb is without blemish (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19), chosen in advance (1 Peter 1:20), killed at the appointed hour, its blood applied for protection from death (Hebrews 9:22), its bones unbroken (John 19:36), and it is eaten by the household. Where the correspondence stops is instructive: the Passover lamb had to be repeated every year, while Christ was offered once for all (Hebrews 9:25–28; 10:10–14). The old memorial pointed forward; the Lord's Supper looks back and proclaims His death until He comes.

3. *Exodus 12:38 mentions that a mixed multitude went up with Israel. Who were they, and what does that small detail tell you about who was welcome under the blood?*

The mixed multitude were non Israelites, presumably Egyptians and others who had watched ten plagues and concluded that Israel's God was the true God. Exodus 12:48–49 makes provision for a stranger to keep the Passover,

on the same terms as the native born. From the first night, the blood was available to anyone willing to come under it on God's terms. That instinct runs all the way to Acts 10 and Ephesians 2:13.

4. *Set Israel's words in 14:11–12 next to their song in 15:1–18. Describe what changed, and be honest about how long the change lasted.*

In 14:11–12 they accuse Moses of bringing them out to die and say they would rather have served the Egyptians. In 15:1–18 they sing that the Lord is a man of war, that He has triumphed gloriously, and that He will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of His inheritance. The change took one afternoon and one miracle, and it lasted three days. Feelings follow evidence; convictions have to be built. That is precisely why God gave Israel memorials, statutes, and a weekly rhythm rather than relying on the memory of a good day.

5. *Israel gathered manna every morning before the sun grew hot (16:21). Choose a time and a place this week for gathering from God's word daily, then tell one person so that somebody will ask you about it.*

Answers will vary. Listen for specificity, a time, a place, and a passage, rather than a general intention to read more. Note that the manna required a walk, an early start, and a daily decision, and that Israel had to do it six mornings a week for forty years. Accountability matters here; ask the class to report back next week.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The Passover as a type of Christ is taught by the New Testament itself (1 Corinthians 5:7; John 19:36), so teach it confidently. But do not press every detail into an allegory the Scriptures never draw. Stay with the correspondences the New Testament actually names.
- The death of the firstborn troubles people, and it should. Keep the class in context: Egypt had enslaved a nation and drowned its infant sons for generations, and God warned Pharaoh repeatedly before the final blow. God is Judge, and He gave nine warnings before the tenth.
- The Sabbath introduced in Exodus 16 is a sign of the covenant with Israel (Exodus 31:16–17). It is not binding on Christians, and the Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath. Christians assemble on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) because the Lord rose then, not because a Sabbath moved.
- Paul's language about Israel being "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1–2) is a comparison he draws to warn Christians against presumption. Use it as he uses it, and do not build a doctrine of baptism from the sea crossing.

The Weight of Integrity

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 11 is a gallery of contrasts, and almost all of them are moral rather than intellectual. The first verse sets the tone by taking the reader into the marketplace. A false balance was the ordinary fraud of the ancient world, a merchant with one set of weights for buying and another for selling, and the word the text uses for God's reaction is the strongest word in the vocabulary of Hebrew worship. God cares about what happens at the counter.

A second thread runs through the chapter: the effect a righteous person has on everyone around him. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted (11:11). When it goes well with the righteous the city rejoices (11:10). The righteous is delivered out of trouble (11:8). Proverbs refuses to treat character as a private matter. A person's integrity is a public good, and a person's corruption is a public loss.

The third thread is the surprising economics of verses 24 through 26, where scattering leads to increase and hoarding leads to want. Solomon is not promising a return on investment. He is describing the way God has ordered a world in which open handed people are woven into a community that carries them, and tight fist people slowly find themselves alone with their grain.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This chapter belongs to the collected sayings of Solomon that run from 10:1 through 22:16, built almost entirely on two line antithetical parallelism.
- Standard weights were kept in a pouch and were subject to no regulation. Honest business depended entirely on the character of the merchant, which is why the Law addresses it directly (Leviticus 19:35–36; Deuteronomy 25:13–16).
- The word translated “abomination” is the same word used of idolatry. God does not have a religious category and a separate business category.
- Proverbs describes how life generally goes under God's moral order. It is not a schedule of guaranteed outcomes, and no verse here is a prosperity promise.
- The tree of life imagery in 11:30 reaches back to Genesis 2:9 and forward to Revelation 22:2, a picture of life that gives life to others.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The chapter opens with dishonest scales, and God calls them an abomination (11:1). Why would God use such strong language about a rigged measurement, and where do respectable people still keep two sets of scales?*

The scale is the point at which a man's theology meets his wallet. A merchant with rigged weights has decided that a small, invisible, unprosecutable theft from a neighbor is acceptable, and God puts that decision in the same category as idolatry. Why so severe? Because the fraud is repeated daily, it preys on people who cannot check, and it is done by a man who will worship at the appointed feast with the profits in his pocket.

Take the class into their own week. Two sets of scales look like an expense report with a little padding, an hour on the time sheet that was not worked, a product described more favorably than the seller knows it to be, a tax return with a generous memory. Ask directly: is there any place where you measure yourself with one weight and everyone else with another? The verse applies to judgment as well as to commerce.

Question 2. *Verses 24 through 26 describe a man who scatters and yet increases, and another who withholds and comes to poverty. How does that arithmetic work, and what is it in us that refuses to believe it?*

Solomon is not teaching a technique for getting rich by giving. He is describing a design in the world. Generous people end up embedded in relationships of mutual care; verse 26 shows a community that blesses the man who sells his grain in a shortage and curses the one who holds it back for a better price. Beyond that, there is God's own involvement: "He who waters will also be watered himself." Paul says the same in 2 Corinthians 9:6–11, and he is careful to say the increase is given so that we can be generous again.

What resists this in us is fear, not greed, and naming that helps a class enormously. We withhold because we are running numbers about a future we cannot see. Ask what specific fear stands behind the last gift they decided not to give. Then read Matthew 6:31–33 and ask whose job it is to run those numbers.

Question 3. *Proverbs 11:30 says the one who wins souls is wise, and verses 9, 12, and 13 describe how people use their mouths. How is a person's ordinary, everyday speech connected to whether he ever wins anyone to Christ?*

Verse 30 does not describe a program. It describes a person: the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the wise one wins souls. The chapter has already shown us what that person sounds like. He does not destroy his neighbor with his mouth (11:9). He holds his peace rather than despising someone (11:12). He is faithful and conceals a matter rather than revealing a confidence (11:13). People who talk like that become people others will talk to.

This is worth pressing, because many Christians believe evangelism is a matter of arguments and courage, and it is more often a matter of trustworthiness. The neighbor who has watched you keep a confidence for three years will eventually bring you something that matters. Ask the class to name one person who trusts them, and then ask what would happen if they invited that person to study.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every verse in this chapter that deals with money or possessions. What single conviction ties all of them together?*

The money verses include 11:1, 4, 15, 16, 18, 24, 25, 26, and 28. The conviction tying them together is that money is not ultimate. It cannot buy security on the day of wrath, it rewards the one who handles it honestly and openly, and the man who trusts in it will fall. Proverbs never treats wealth as evil, but it consistently refuses to treat it as safety.

2. *Proverbs 11:4 says riches do not profit in the day of wrath. Read Luke 12:16–21 and note how Jesus tells the same truth in the form of a story rather than a proverb.*

Jesus tells of a man whose ground yielded so well that he tore down his barns and built greater ones, and planned years of ease, and lost his soul that night. The proverb states the principle in eight words; the parable makes you watch it happen to a specific man with a specific plan. Both end at the same place: what a man owns has no purchasing power at the moment he most needs help.

3. *Trace what this chapter says about the tongue in verses 9, 11, 12, and 13. Which of those four describes your own particular weakness most accurately?*

Verse 9 warns of the hypocrite who destroys his neighbor with his mouth. Verse 11 says the mouth of the wicked overthrows a city. Verse 12 describes the man who despises his neighbor and the man of understanding who holds his peace. Verse 13 contrasts the talebearer who reveals secrets with the faithful spirit who conceals a matter.

Answers about personal weakness will vary; listen for members who recognize gossip dressed up as a prayer request.

4. *Proverbs 11:14 says that in a multitude of counselors there is safety. Name the two or three people you actually let speak into your decisions, and be honest about whether you chose them because they tell you the truth or because they agree with you.*

Answers will vary. Press the second half of the question. Many people have advisers and no counselors, because they have quietly selected for agreement. The safety in this verse comes from the plurality, from hearing an objection you had not thought of. Ask whether any of their counselors has told them no in the last year.

5. Verse 25 promises that the generous soul will be made rich. Settle on one specific act of generosity this week, one you will actually feel in your budget or your calendar, and do it without telling anyone but God.

Answers will vary. Insist on a specific amount, a specific recipient, and a specific day. Note the last clause of the instruction: doing it without telling anyone is not extra credit, it is the safeguard Jesus puts on giving in Matthew 6:3–4. A gift that has already been paid for in admiration has been spent.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verses 24 through 26 must not become a giving formula. Proverbs describes the general shape of life under God's order; it does not guarantee a financial return, and nothing here supports a prosperity teaching.
- Proverbs 11:21, that the descendants of the righteous will be delivered, is a general principle. Faithful parents in your class have children who have walked away, and they do not need a proverb weaponized against them.
- Proverbs 11:30 is sometimes turned into pressure and technique. Keep it where the chapter puts it, in the character and speech of a righteous person whose life produces fruit others want.

Sheep Among Wolves

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Matthew 10 follows directly on the compassion of 9:36–38. Jesus told the disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers, and then He sent the men who prayed. That connection is worth naming out loud, because it is how God usually answers prayer about a need: He sends the one who noticed it. The Twelve are named here for the first time as a group, in pairs, including a tax collector and a zealot, which is a combination that should not have survived a week.

The instructions fall into three movements. First, the immediate mission: where to go, what to take, how to behave in a house, what to do when rejected. Second, a longer view that clearly reaches past this trip into the persecution the church would face: councils, synagogues, governors, and kings, and the promise that what they should say would be given them. Third, the cost, stated so bluntly that no one could later claim he had not been warned.

The end of the chapter turns the warning inside out. Yes, there is a cross to take up. But there is also this: the one who receives you receives Me, and the one who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. And the smallest act of kindness toward a disciple, a cup of cold water, is seen and kept. Jesus never softens the cost, and He never leaves His people without a reason to bear it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the second of the five great discourses in Matthew, each closing with a formula like the one in 11:1, “when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples.”
- The restriction to Israel is temporary and strategic. The gospel goes to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16), and the Great Commission removes the restriction entirely (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8).
- Shaking the dust from the feet was a gesture Jews used on returning from Gentile territory. Used toward an Israelite town, it was a solemn statement that the town had placed itself outside.
- Much of the persecution described in verses 17 through 23 is fulfilled in Acts: beatings before councils, appearances before governors and kings, and flight from city to city.
- The Twelve are apostles, uniquely commissioned eyewitnesses. Their authority and the signs that confirmed them belong to the founding of the church (Ephesians 2:20; Hebrews 2:3–4).
- Matthew includes the detail of his own name with the label “the tax collector” (10:3), a description none of the other gospel writers attach to him.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus sends the Twelve only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and specifically not to Gentiles or Samaritans (10:5–6). Why that limitation at this moment, and how do you square it with what He says in Matthew 28:19?*

The limitation is one of sequence, not of favoritism. Jesus ministered under the Law, to the covenant people, fulfilling the promises made to them, and the gospel was to be preached beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Israel had the prophets, the covenants, and the promises, and they had first claim on hearing that the promises had arrived. Romans 1:16 states the order: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Be explicit about what this does not mean. It does not mean God has two separate programs, one for Israel and one for the church, still running on parallel tracks. Ephesians 2:14–16 says Christ made the two into one new man, breaking down the middle wall of separation. Galatians 3:28–29 says those who belong to Christ are Abraham’s

seed and heirs according to the promise. The restriction in 10:5 lasted a few months; the commission in 28:19 has no expiration.

Question 2. *Three times in this chapter Jesus says do not fear (10:26, 28, 31), and in between He describes floggings, betrayal, and death. How can both of those be true at once, and which fear is He actually going after?*

Jesus is not telling them that nothing bad will happen. He has just told them a great deal of bad will happen. He is relocating fear to its proper object. Verse 28 is the hinge: do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. The cure for the fear of men is not confidence in a good outcome; it is a larger fear of God.

Then He piles up reassurance around that fear. Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, so the truth will out eventually. Two sparrows sell for a copper coin, and not one falls without your Father. The very hairs of your head are numbered. God is not promising the disciples safety; He is promising them that nothing happens to them outside His notice and His care. Ask the class which they would rather have, and press them on whether they mean it.

Question 3. *Matthew 10:34–39 is among the hardest things Jesus ever said. Read it aloud, slowly. Whom in your own family would putting Christ first cost you something with, and what have you been doing to avoid that cost?*

Read the passage aloud before anyone comments; it needs to land. Jesus is not commending family conflict, and He is not describing a goal. He is describing an effect. When one member of a household follows Christ and the others will not, there is now a line in the house, and it did not exist before. Luke 12:51–53 records the same saying. The claim in verses 37 through 39 is staggering: He must be loved more than father, mother, son, or daughter.

Only a man who believed Himself to be God could say that sentence without blasphemy. That is worth pointing out. Then bring the class to the practical question. Most of us handle this pressure not by denying Christ but by quietly editing ourselves at the family table, never mentioning the assembly, never raising a matter of conviction. Ask what specific conversation they have been avoiding for the sake of peace, and whether peace is what they have actually purchased.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the list of the Twelve in 10:2–4 with whatever you know about each man. What sort of group did Jesus assemble, and what is missing from it that you might have expected?*

The list includes fishermen, a tax collector who had worked for Rome, and Simon the Zealot, whose party wanted Rome thrown out by force. There is no scribe, no priest, no man of rank or wealth or formal training, and no one from Jerusalem's religious establishment except no one at all. Jesus built the foundation of His church out of ordinary working men, which is exactly the point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29.

2. *List everything Jesus tells the Twelve to take and everything He tells them not to take (10:9–10). Then read Luke 22:35–36, where He reverses the instruction, and explain what changed.*

They were to take no gold, silver, or copper, no bag, no extra tunic, no sandals, no staff, because the worker is worthy of his food. It was a short trip among their own countrymen, and dependence was part of the lesson. In Luke 22:36 Jesus reverses it, telling them now to take a money bag and a knapsack, because the setting had changed: they were going into a hostile world, far from home, after His death. The principle of trusting God did not change; the prudence appropriate to the circumstance did.

3. *Read Matthew 10:19–20 together with John 14:26 and 2 Peter 1:20–21. To whom was that promise of given words made, and what did it accomplish?*

The promise was made to the apostles, facing courts, and it was fulfilled in the inspiration that guided them (John 14:26; 16:13). What it accomplished was the confirmed, recorded word we now hold. It is not a promise that modern Christians may skip preparation and expect God to supply sermons or answers, and it is not a warrant for new revelation. The Spirit gave the apostles the words; the apostles gave us the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:20–21; 3:15–16).

4. Trace the chain of receiving in 10:40–42, from the one sent, to Christ, to the Father. Note what Jesus says a cup of cold water is worth and to whom it must be given.

The chain runs in both directions: to receive the one sent is to receive Christ, and to receive Christ is to receive the Father who sent Him. Then Jesus descends the scale, from prophet, to righteous man, to “one of these little ones,” and from a household to a single cup of cold water. The qualifier is “in the name of a disciple,” meaning the kindness is shown because of who the person belongs to. God keeps a record of small kindnesses done for Christ’s people.

5. Jesus says, “Freely you have received, freely give” (10:8). Name one thing you have received from God without earning it that you are currently rationing out to others, and give some of it away this week.

Answers will vary. Look for things that cannot be bought: forgiveness, patience with a slow learner, a second chance, time. The phrase “freely you have received” is the standing rebuke to a Christian who is stingy with mercy, since every ounce of mercy in his account was a gift.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The restriction to Israel in 10:5–6 is temporary. Do not let it become a foothold for dispensational teaching about two peoples of God or a future earthly kingdom for national Israel. Ephesians 2:14–16 and Galatians 3:28–29 are the corrective.
- Matthew 10:19–20 is a promise to the apostles under trial, not a promise of modern inspiration or an excuse for unprepared teaching.
- Matthew 10:23, that they would not finish the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes, is best understood of the Lord’s coming in judgment on Jerusalem and the establishment of His reign in power, not of a still future earthly kingdom. Handle it briefly and do not let it consume the hour.
- “Not peace but a sword” has been badly abused. Jesus is describing the division His claims create, not authorizing a Christian to be harsh at home. Read it beside Romans 12:18 and 1 Peter 3:1–2.

Two Visions, One Meeting

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke gives this episode more space than almost anything else in Acts, telling it in chapter 10 and then having Peter retell it in chapter 11 and refer to it again in chapter 15. That repetition signals the size of what is happening. The gospel has gone to Jerusalem, to Samaria, and to an Ethiopian on a desert road, but this is the first household of uncircumcised Gentiles brought into the body of Christ, and it required a vision, an angel, and the personal intervention of the Holy Spirit to get Peter through the door.

Watch how carefully God prepares both men. Cornelius receives an angel with an unusually specific set of directions, right down to the name of the man, the name of his host, and the address by the sea. Peter receives a vision at noon the following day, timed so that he is still perplexed by it when the knock comes. Neither man could have manufactured this, and neither could have arranged it. God works both ends of the road and brings them together at a doorway.

Notice what Peter actually learns from the sheet. It was full of unclean animals, so on the surface it concerns food. But Peter states the interpretation himself in verse 28: “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” The dietary law had served as a wall, keeping Israel separate from the nations. With the Law fulfilled in Christ, the wall had no more purpose. The reading ends with Cornelius saying one of the most beautiful sentences in Acts: “We are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Caesarea was the Roman administrative capital of Judea, roughly thirty miles up the coast from Joppa, a thoroughly Gentile city with a Roman garrison.
- A centurion commanded about eighty to one hundred men. Cornelius belonged to the Italian Regiment and was a man of standing and means.
- A “God fearer” was a Gentile who worshiped the God of Israel, attended the synagogue, and gave alms, but had not become a proselyte through circumcision.
- The dietary distinctions came from Leviticus 11 and had become, over centuries, the most visible boundary marker between Jew and Gentile.
- Peter’s hesitation is not personal bigotry so much as a lifetime of covenant conviction. He had never in his life eaten anything common or unclean, and he says so.
- This event is the hinge on which Acts 15 turns. When the question of binding the Law on Gentiles arises, Peter appeals back to this house (Acts 15:7–11).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Cornelius is devout, generous, and prays to God continually (10:2), and an angel still sends him thirty miles to fetch a preacher. What does that tell us about the value of sincerity and about what even a good man still lacks?*

Cornelius is presented in the warmest possible terms: devout, God fearing with all his household, generous with alms, praying always, and of good reputation among the whole Jewish nation. Any congregation would be glad to have him. And Acts 11:14 says the angel told him to send for Peter, “who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.” He was not yet saved. His sincerity had brought him to the point of asking; it could not tell him about Jesus.

This must be handled with care and kindness, because everybody in the room has a good, moral, sincere relative who is not a Christian. The lesson is not that Cornelius’ goodness counted for nothing. God noticed his prayers and

his alms and sent him an angel. The lesson is that goodness is not the gospel, and that no amount of sincerity supplies the information a person must have to obey. It also tells us God will move heaven and earth for an honest heart, which should make us bolder, not more discouraged.

Question 2. *Peter answers the voice with “Not so, Lord” (10:14), which is a sentence that cannot actually hold together. Where are we most likely to say those same words, and how does God normally go about changing a mind that made up long ago?*

“Not so, Lord” is a contradiction in terms. If He is Lord, the answer is not no; if the answer is no, He is not Lord. Peter has real reasons for his resistance: a lifetime of obedience to the Law, a conscience trained from childhood, and the settled conviction that this distinction came from God Himself. It had come from God. It had also served its purpose and ended in Christ.

God changes Peter’s mind the way He usually changes ours: by repetition and by circumstance. The vision comes three times, and then three men are standing at the gate, and then the Spirit says go. Peter obeys before he fully understands, and the understanding arrives in verse 28, in a Gentile living room. Ask the class where they have said “Not so, Lord” about something plainly taught, and whether they are waiting for understanding before obedience. It usually comes the other way around.

Question 3. *Peter tells Cornelius it had been unlawful for a Jewish man to keep company with a foreigner (10:28). Which people would our congregation find it hardest to sit down and eat with, and what is really underneath that difficulty?*

Peter’s statement is honest, and so is his admission that God had to show him. There was a genuine barrier here, not a trivial preference. Then note what replaced it: “In every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (10:35). The line God kept is not ethnic, cultural, or economic. It runs between those who will hear and obey and those who will not.

Ask the class to be specific and let the silence sit. Every congregation has an unspoken list: a different economic class, a different racial or national background, people with visible addictions, people whose politics grate. What is underneath is almost always fear of discomfort rather than doctrine. Then ask the practical question: whose living room would you have to walk into this month for Acts 10 to be more than a story?

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Acts 10:1–8 tells you about Cornelius before he had ever heard the gospel. Then read Acts 11:14 and note what he still needed.*

He is a centurion of the Italian Regiment, devout, one who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. Verse 22 adds that he was a just man, of good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, and divinely instructed by a holy angel. And Acts 11:14 says Peter would tell him words by which he and his household would be saved. He lacked the gospel, and nothing else he possessed could substitute for it.

2. *The angel did not preach to Cornelius; he sent him after a man. Compare Acts 8:26–35 and Acts 9:6, and state the pattern God follows in getting the gospel to people who want it.*

In every case God uses a human being to preach the message. The Spirit sends Philip to the chariot rather than explaining Isaiah to the eunuch directly. The Lord tells Saul to go into the city and be told what he must do. The angel tells Cornelius to send for Peter. God has committed the preaching of the gospel to people (Romans 10:13–17; 2 Corinthians 4:7). That is both a comfort and an assignment.

3. *Trace the movements of both men from 10:1 to 10:33 and count the separate steps God arranged to bring these two into the same room.*

Count them: Cornelius prays at the ninth hour; an angel appears with specific directions; Cornelius sends three men; they travel roughly thirty miles; Peter goes up to pray at the sixth hour the next day; he becomes hungry; the vision comes three times; the men arrive at the gate at precisely that moment; the Spirit tells Peter three men are seeking him and to go without doubting; Peter invites Gentiles to lodge in the house; and the next day they travel back together with six brethren. God arranged at least a dozen distinct steps, none of them accidental.

4. Read Ephesians 2:11–22 alongside this chapter. Which wall was being taken down, when was it taken down, and what was put in its place?

The wall was the Law of Moses with its commandments and ordinances, which had kept Israel separate and had left the Gentiles strangers to the covenants of promise. Ephesians 2:15–16 says it was abolished in Christ's flesh, at the cross, so that He might create in Himself one new man from the two and reconcile them both to God in one body. What replaced it is the church, in which both have access by one Spirit to the Father, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

5. Cornelius gathered his relatives and close friends to hear whatever Peter would say (10:24). Write down who would actually come if you invited them, and settle on what it will take for you to ask one of them this week.

Answers will vary. Listen for names rather than categories, and press gently on the second half. Cornelius' move is worth imitating: he did not go door to door, he gathered the people already in his life into one room and let the preacher do the preaching. Most members can do that. Ask who will host something before the quarter ends.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not let Cornelius become an argument that a sincere person is saved without the gospel. Acts 11:14 is decisive: Peter came to speak words by which he would be saved. Teach this gently; it touches family members people love.
- The vision of the sheet concerns far more than diet. Peter himself interprets it about people (10:28). Use it to teach that the Law of Moses, including its dietary boundaries, was fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17), and do not bind Old Covenant food rules on anyone.
- The angel and the vision were revelation given while the New Testament was being delivered. They are not a pattern for expecting angelic guidance today (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- Peter refuses worship in 10:25–26, and so does the angel in Revelation 22:8–9. This is a good place to say plainly that no man, living or dead, is to be venerated, and that there is one Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Exodus 17–23 · Proverbs 12 · Matthew 11:1–12:8 · Acts 10:34–11:18

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