

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 10 OF 104

Burdens and Rest

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Exodus 17-23
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 12
Gospels	Matthew 11:1-12:8
General New Testament	Acts 10:34-11:18

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to let the class feel the weight before they hear the invitation. Moses is crushed under a workload no one man could carry. Israel stands in front of a mountain so terrifying they beg not to hear God's voice again. Proverbs describes a heart bent double with anxiety. Then Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden." If you preach the rest without the weight, the rest sounds like a slogan. Let the first half of the week ache a little, and the invitation will land.

Doctrinally, this week hands you three matters. The first is the Law of Moses: given to Israel at Sinai, fulfilled and taken away in Christ, with the Sabbath as the one commandment never repeated for Christians. The second is the kingdom, which Matthew 11:11 opens up plainly, since John was great and yet outside it, and the least member of the Lord's church stands inside it today. The third is Acts 10:44-48, which is regularly used to argue that baptism is unnecessary, and which in fact records the apostle who saw the sign commanding water baptism anyway. Take each of the three deliberately rather than in passing.

Formationally, the thread is sharing the load. Jethro tells Moses to hand work to capable men. Aaron and Hur hold up arms that could not stay up alone. Proverbs says a good word lifts a heart that anxiety has bent. Jesus offers a yoke built for two. And in Acts, six brethren travel with Peter so that he is not standing alone when the questions come. Ask your class a direct question and wait for a real answer: name the one thing you are carrying by yourself right now, and name the one person you are going to tell about it this week.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 11:1-12:8 first this week. The invitation in 11:28-30 is the center of everything the four readings touch, and leading with it lets you read the other passages in its light. Give at least fifteen minutes to the yoke.

Second session: Take up Exodus 17-23. Focus the hour on two scenes: Jethro's counsel in chapter 18 and the mountain in chapters 19 and 20. Use Hebrews 12:18-24 to set Sinai beside Zion, and handle the question of the Law and the Sabbath before someone asks it.

The other two readings: Proverbs 12 and Acts 10:34-11:18 are well suited to personal study. Ask the class to mark every verse in Proverbs 12 about the tongue and to notice how domestic the chapter is. In Acts, ask them to read Acts 11:14 first and then read the sermon, and to watch what Peter does after the Spirit falls.

The Mountain That Shook

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapters 17 and 18 are about weight. Israel is thirsty and turns on Moses hard enough that he fears for his life. Amalek attacks the stragglers at the rear, and the outcome depends on a pair of eighty year old arms, which is God's way of making sure nobody credits the victory to Joshua's tactics. Then Jethro arrives, sees his son in law sitting alone from morning until evening, and asks the question every overworked servant of God needs to hear: "Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you?" The advice is practical, structural, and inspired common sense.

Chapter 19 is one of the great scenes in Scripture. God reminds Israel what He has already done, offers them a covenant, and calls them a special treasure, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Notice that grace comes first. He did not rescue them because they kept the Law; He gave them the Law because He had already rescued them. Then the preparation, the boundary, and the theophany: smoke, fire, an earthquake, a trumpet growing louder and louder. Israel had every reason to be terrified, and they were.

The Ten Commandments follow, spoken audibly by God to the whole nation, and then the people beg for a mediator. Chapters 21 through 23 work out the covenant in specifics: servants, injuries, property, restitution, justice for the poor and the stranger, the feasts. Some of it will feel remote. Read it as a picture of a God who cares about the details of ordinary life, about a neighbor's lost ox and a widow's cloak, and who was building a nation that would look different from every nation around it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Sinai is where Israel becomes a covenant nation. Everything from Exodus 19 through Numbers 10 takes place at this mountain.
- The Law was given to Israel, not to the nations. Deuteronomy 5:2–3 makes the point explicitly: the covenant was made with the generation standing there.
- The covenant code of chapters 21 through 23 regulated an ancient near eastern society, restraining practices already in place rather than establishing them.
- "Eye for eye" (21:24) is a judicial limit on penalties in court, designed to stop escalating blood feuds. Jesus addresses its misuse as a rule for personal retaliation in Matthew 5:38–42.
- Christians are not under the Law of Moses. It was fulfilled in Christ and taken out of the way at the cross (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10; Matthew 5:17), and it was never given to us in the first place.
- Jethro was a Midianite priest, a descendant of Abraham through Keturah. The counsel he gives is sound, and Moses acts on it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Exodus 19:4–6 is God's offer before a single commandment is given. Trace what He says He has already done for them, and then what He asks of them. Why does that order matter for how we understand obedience?*

God rehearses His own record first: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." Only then comes the condition, "if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant." The redemption precedes the requirement. Israel was not asked to earn a rescue that had already happened; they were asked to live as the people of the God who had rescued them.

That order is still the order. Titus 2:11–14 says the grace of God that brings salvation appeared, and it teaches us to deny ungodliness. Obedience is never the price of God's favor; it is the shape of a life that has received it. Ask

the class where they still secretly operate on the other order, trying to accumulate enough obedience to feel acceptable. That is a heavy way to live, and it is not what Exodus 19 describes.

Question 2. *At the foot of the mountain the people beg Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (20:19). What were they right about, and what were they missing? Read Hebrews 12:18–24 before you answer.*

They were right that a holy God is terrifying and that sinful people cannot stand in His unmediated presence. Exodus 20:20 records Moses' careful answer: do not be afraid, for God has come to test you, that His fear may be before you so that you may not sin. There is a fear that drives you away and a fear that keeps you from sin, and Moses is distinguishing them.

What they were missing is what Hebrews 12 supplies. Christians have not come to a mountain that may be touched, burning with fire, with blackness and darkness and tempest. We have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant, and to blood that speaks better things than that of Abel. The terror at Sinai was real, and it was never the last word. Let the class feel both mountains in the same hour.

Question 3. *Jethro tells Moses that he will wear himself out because the work is too heavy for one man (18:18). Where are you doing alone what God intended to be shared, and who could you actually hand a piece of it to this week?*

Jethro's diagnosis is worth reading aloud: "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out." Notice that the people were being worn out too, standing around all day waiting their turn. Doing everything yourself is not humility; it is a slow failure that harms the people you are trying to serve. His solution is to appoint capable, God fearing, trustworthy men over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, and to let Moses handle only the hard cases.

This lands squarely on the preacher, the elders, the one deacon who does everything, and the mother who will not let anyone help. Ask for the specific task, not the general principle. Who is the capable person you have never asked? What are you afraid will happen if they do it differently than you would? Acts 6:1–7 shows the apostles making exactly this move, and the word of God spread as a result.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the Ten Commandments in order (20:1–17) and mark which ones govern our relationship with God and which govern our relationship with people. Where exactly does the list turn?*

The first four concern God: no other gods, no carved images, not taking His name in vain, and remembering the Sabbath. The last six concern people: honor father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet. The turn comes at the fifth, honoring parents, which sits like a hinge between the two tables, since parents stand toward a child in the place of authority. Jesus summarized the same two directions in Matthew 22:37–40.

2. *Read Colossians 2:14–17 and Hebrews 8:6–13. Which nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated as binding on Christians in the New Testament, and which one is never repeated?*

Nine of the ten appear again as binding on Christians: idolatry, images, God's name, honoring parents, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and covetousness are all addressed in the New Testament letters. The Sabbath command is the single one never repeated as a requirement for Christians, and Colossians 2:16–17 specifically says to let no one judge us regarding sabbaths, which were a shadow of things to come. Christians assemble on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) because that is the apostolic pattern, not because a Sabbath was moved.

3. *Exodus 21 through 23 contains laws that sound strange to a modern ear. Choose three of them and work out what each one was protecting and from whom.*

Answers will vary depending on the laws chosen. Exodus 21:2–6 limited the term of a Hebrew servant to six years, which restrained a practice universal in that world. Exodus 22:26–27 required a poor man's cloak taken in pledge to be returned before sundown, because he sleeps in it. Exodus 23:10–11 rested the land every seventh year so the poor could eat from it. Each law protects a specific vulnerable person from a specific predictable harm.

4. *During the battle with Amalek, Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands until sundown (17:12). Name the person who has held up your hands, and name the person whose hands you are currently holding up.*

Answers will vary. Push past the obvious answer of a parent or spouse to somebody who did something unglamorous: a teacher, an older member who called, someone who sat with them in a hospital hallway. Then dwell on the second half of the question, which is where the growth is. Aaron and Hur do not speak in the account. They just found a stone, sat him down, and held.

5. *Exodus 23:4–5 requires an Israelite to return a straying ox belonging to his enemy and to help lift the load of a donkey owned by a man who hates him. Name your Exodus 23:4 person, and settle on one concrete kindness you will do for him this week.*

Answers will vary. The point of the law is that it names an enemy and then requires an act of practical help anyway, before any reconciliation has occurred. Jesus draws on the same principle in Matthew 5:43–48. Listen for concrete, small, and soon: a message sent, a task quietly done, a debt forgiven.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments as a covenant unit, was given to Israel and has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ. Say this plainly and without ever disparaging the Law itself, which Paul calls holy, just, and good (Romans 7:12).
- The Sabbath: expect a question about it. Answer from Colossians 2:16–17 and Hebrews 4, and be clear that the Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath. Be gracious with anyone who has been taught otherwise.
- The servant laws of Exodus 21 will trouble some readers. Explain that the Law regulated and limited an existing institution, protecting servants in ways no surrounding nation did, and that the New Testament plants the principles that dissolve it (Galatians 3:28; Philemon 15–16).
- "Eye for eye" is a courtroom limit on punishment, not a license for personal revenge. Take the class to Matthew 5:38–42 and Romans 12:17–21.

Roots That Hold

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 12 has a domestic feel to it. The house shows up again and again: a wife who is a crown or a case of rot in the bones, a household that stands because it has roots, a man who is satisfied by the fruit of his mouth, a man who feeds his own animals well. Solomon is not writing about grand public virtue here. He is writing about what a person is like at seven in the morning in his own kitchen.

The chapter is also organized around permanence. Verse 3 says a man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous cannot be moved. Verse 7 says the house of the righteous will stand. Verse 19 says truthful lips endure forever, while a lying tongue lasts only a moment. Solomon keeps asking a single question of every behavior: will this hold up over time? That is one of the most useful questions a person can be taught to ask.

Then there is the tongue, which appears in at least seven verses. The most striking is verse 18: rash words are like sword thrusts, and the tongue of the wise brings health. The imagery is medical. Words do damage that requires healing, and words are themselves the medicine. Teach that verse and your class will hear it in their heads the next time they open their mouths in an argument.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This chapter belongs to the Solomonic collection running from 10:1 to 22:16, composed almost entirely of two line contrasts.
- Hebrew wisdom teaches by accumulation rather than by argument. The same theme returns from a dozen angles until it has shaped the way the reader sees.
- “Stupid” in verse 1 translates a Hebrew word for brutish, the word used of cattle. It describes a man who will not be taught, not a man of low intelligence.
- Proverbs describes how life generally goes under God’s moral order. It is not a set of guarantees, and it must never be turned into a prosperity formula.
- Verse 22 puts lying lips among the things the Lord finds detestable, tying this chapter back to the list in 6:16–19.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 12:1 says that the one who hates correction is stupid, which is unusually blunt even for Solomon. Why would he put teachability at the very head of the chapter, ahead of every other trait he names?*

Teachability comes first because everything else in Proverbs depends on it. A man who will not receive correction cannot be helped by a book of instruction, no matter how good the instruction is. Solomon has already made the point in 9:8–9, and here he sharpens it to a point that stings. The word is deliberately harsh, comparing the man who hates reproof to an animal that cannot reason.

Draw out the practical test. Teachability is not measured by whether you agree with correction; it is measured by what you do in the first minute after receiving it. Do you explain, defend, and supply context, or do you ask a question? Ask the class who is permitted to correct them. A person with no one in that role is not humble; he is simply unprotected.

Question 2. *Verse 18 sets rash words that stab like a sword next to the tongue of the wise that brings healing. Think honestly about the last week inside your own house. Which of those two did your family hear more of, and what made the difference?*

The imagery deserves a moment. A rash word is a sword thrust, a single fast motion that goes deep and does damage the speaker never intended to inspect. The tongue of the wise is medicine, which works slowly and has to

be administered on purpose. That asymmetry is the whole problem: a cutting sentence takes one second, and healing takes weeks of consistent kindness.

Households are where this matters most, because at home we are tired and unguarded and confident of being forgiven. Ask the class to recall one sentence they said this week that they would not have said to a visitor. Then ask what would change if they treated their own family with the courtesy they extend to a customer. Ephesians 4:29 gives the standard: only what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Question 3. *Proverbs 12:25 says anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad. Who in this congregation is carrying something heavy right now, and what would a genuinely good word look like for that person rather than a polite one?*

Notice the mechanism in the proverb. Anxiety is internal and invisible; the remedy is external and spoken. A man bent double under worry cannot usually talk himself upright. Somebody else has to say something. Paul describes the same dynamic in 2 Corinthians 7:6, where God comforted him by the coming of Titus. God's ordinary method of encouraging His people is to send them another person.

Get names. Then get specific about what a good word is. It is not a cliché, not a verse quoted at someone to end the conversation, and not a promise God has not made. A good word names the burden accurately, says something true about God, and usually includes an offer of presence. Ask each member to leave with one name and one concrete plan for reaching them before Wednesday.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace every verse in this chapter that deals with truth or lying (verses 5, 6, 17, 19, 20, 22). What picture of God's own character emerges from them taken together?*

Verse 5 contrasts righteous thoughts with deceitful counsels; verse 6 shows wicked words lying in wait for blood; verse 17 says he who speaks truth declares righteousness; verse 19 says truthful lips endure forever while a lying tongue lasts a moment; verse 20 puts deceit in the heart of those who devise evil; and verse 22 says lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight. The picture is of a God whose own nature is truth, who cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and who therefore finds deception repulsive rather than merely inconvenient.

2. *Proverbs 12:10 says a righteous man regards the life of his animal. Read Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Corinthians 9:9–10, and consider what a man's treatment of those beneath him reveals about him.*

Both New Testament passages take a law about oxen and apply it to how God's people treat those who serve them. The principle in Proverbs 12:10 is that character shows most clearly toward those with no power to complain. An animal, an employee, a server, a child: the way a man behaves when nothing can be done to him is the way he actually is. Compare Matthew 24:45–51, where the servant's treatment of his fellow servants in the master's absence is the test.

3. *Verses 4, 7, and 12 use images of a house and a root. List what this chapter says makes a household stand and what makes one fall.*

It stands on an excellent wife who is her husband's crown (4), on roots that go down into righteousness (3, 12), and on a house that God preserves (7). It falls through a wife who behaves shamefully (4), through wickedness that cannot establish a man (3), through the overthrow of the wicked (7), and through deceit devised in the heart (20). The chapter locates the strength of a home in the character of the people in it, not in its circumstances.

4. *Proverbs 12:16 says a fool's wrath is known at once while a prudent man covers shame. Describe the difference between covering shame and simply being dishonest about what you feel.*

Covering shame is choosing not to broadcast your reaction or someone else's failure. It is self control and discretion, and 1 Peter 4:8 says love covers a multitude of sins. Being dishonest about your feelings is pretending you have no reaction at all, which is not restraint but concealment, and it eventually comes out sideways. The prudent man knows exactly what he feels; he simply does not need everyone else to know it within four seconds.

5. Verse 25 hands you an assignment. Choose one person, and this week say or send a good word that is specific, true, and about them rather than about you.

Answers will vary. Listen for words that cost the speaker something: a specific observation, a memory, a named strength, an offer of help with a date attached. A general text message saying “praying for you” is not what verse 25 has in mind, though it is better than silence.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Keep reminding the class that these are general principles. Verse 21, that no grave trouble will overtake the righteous, is not a promise of a trouble free life, as John 16:33 and 2 Timothy 3:12 make clear.
- Verse 4 will be heard personally by the women in your class. Teach it as a description of the honor a wife can bring, and never as a club. Ephesians 5:25–29 places the heavier obligation on husbands.
- Verse 24 about diligence and forced labor is an observation about tendencies, not a verdict on every poor person. Proverbs elsewhere condemns those who oppress the poor (14:31; 22:22–23).

The Easy Yoke

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

John's question is one of the most human moments in the gospels. This is the man who saw the Spirit descend and heard the voice from heaven, the man who said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Now he is in a cell, the Messiah he announced is not overturning anything, and he sends to ask. Jesus does not scold him. He sends back a report of works drawn straight from Isaiah, because what John needed was not reassurance about his feelings but evidence about Jesus. Then He turns to the crowd and defends John's reputation in the strongest possible terms.

The middle section is a study in responses. The generation is like children in a marketplace who will not play whatever tune is offered: John came fasting and they called him demon possessed, the Son of Man came eating and they called Him a glutton. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum saw more of Jesus than any towns on earth, and did nothing. Against all that, Jesus thanks the Father that these things are revealed to babes, meaning people without status or pretense who are still willing to be taught.

Then comes 11:28–30, which should be read aloud slowly and not hurried past. The rest He offers is not the absence of work; it is the presence of a good Master. A yoke is for working, but a well fitted yoke distributes the load, and the one He offers is worn beside Him. Set that against 12:1–8, where religious men have turned God's Sabbath into a weight nobody can carry, and Jesus says three times over that mercy is what God wanted all along.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas at Machaerus for condemning his marriage to Herodias (Matthew 14:3–4), and he would be executed there.
- Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum sat within a few miles of each other on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, the center of Jesus' Galilean ministry.
- Plucking heads of grain while passing through a field was expressly permitted by the Law (Deuteronomy 23:25). The Pharisees objected to the day, not the act, on the basis of their own oral tradition about what counted as work.
- The showbread incident is from 1 Samuel 21:1–6, and the priests serving on the Sabbath is from Numbers 28:9–10. Jesus argues from Scripture, not around it.
- Hosea 6:6, quoted in 12:7, is the same verse Jesus quoted in 9:13. He tells the Pharisees twice in four chapters that they do not understand it.
- "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" is a claim of authority over the Law itself, which is why it provoked what follows in chapter 12.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *John the Baptist, of all people, sends from prison to ask whether Jesus is the Coming One (11:2–3). Why might a man in that situation begin to doubt what he had once publicly announced, and how does the answer Jesus sends back actually help him?*

Two things press on a man in John's situation. The first is simple suffering: he had prepared the way for a King, and the King had left him in a dungeon. The second is expectation. John had preached an axe laid to the root and a winnowing fan in His hand, and what he was hearing about instead was healings and dinners with tax collectors. The timetable did not match. Honest doubt usually comes from exactly there, from the gap between what we expected God to do and what He is doing.

Jesus answers with evidence rather than emotion: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. That is a nearly verbatim list from Isaiah 35 and 61, and John would have recognized it instantly. Then Jesus adds a gentle line, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” Teach the class to take their doubts to the evidence and not to their feelings, and to notice that Jesus did not think less of John for asking.

Question 2. *Jesus says that no one born of women is greater than John, and then says the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (11:11). Given who John was, what has to be true about the kingdom for that sentence to make sense?*

The greatness of John is a matter of role: he was the last and greatest of the prophets, the forerunner, the one privileged to point at the Messiah with his finger. The greatness of the least in the kingdom is a matter of position: he stands on the other side of the cross and the empty tomb, in the kingdom itself, with sins forgiven and access to the Father. John died before the kingdom came. He preached that it was at hand; he did not enter it.

This is your opportunity to say clearly what the kingdom is. Daniel 2:44 said God would set up a kingdom in the days of those kings. Jesus said in Mark 9:1 that some standing there would not taste death until they saw it come with power. Acts 2 is that coming, and Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into it. It is not a political arrangement still awaiting a future establishment, and the least member of the Lord’s church today enjoys a standing that John the Baptist never had on earth.

Question 3. *Jesus offers rest to people who labor and are heavy laden, and in the next breath hands them a yoke (11:28–30). How is that not a contradiction, and which burden are you carrying right now that He never asked you to pick up?*

The offer is not a life without labor. It is a change of masters and a change of harness. What Jesus removes is the crushing weight of a religion that can never be finished, the kind the scribes had built and that 12:1–8 exposes. What He gives instead is a yoke that fits, carried alongside a Master who is gentle and lowly, and a burden proportioned to the one carrying it. Compare 1 John 5:3, His commandments are not burdensome.

Press for the specific burden. Some in the class are carrying a self imposed weight of perfectionism, convinced God is barely tolerating them. Some are carrying a load of responsibility God never assigned, including responsibility for other adults’ choices. Some are carrying unconfessed sin. The invitation of verse 28 addresses all three, and the verb is simply “come.” Ask what it would look like to actually come this week rather than to admire the verse.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the evidences Jesus tells John’s disciples to report back (11:4–5), then read Isaiah 35:5–6 and 61:1. Why would that particular list have settled the question for John?*

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Isaiah 35:5–6 promised opened eyes and ears and a leaping lame man in the day when God would come and save; Isaiah 61:1 promised good tidings preached to the poor. Jesus is not offering John an opinion; He is handing him a checklist from the prophets and letting him do the arithmetic himself.

2. *Trace the three cities Jesus reproaches in 11:20–24 and the comparison He draws for each one. What does privilege do to a person’s accountability?*

Chorazin and Bethsaida are compared to Tyre and Sidon, pagan Phoenician cities, and Capernaum to Sodom, and in each case Jesus says the notorious city would have repented had it seen what these towns saw. Privilege raises accountability. Luke 12:48 states the principle directly: to whom much is given, from him much will be required. This is a sobering word for people who have grown up with Bibles, sermons, and the assembly available every week.

3. *Jesus says these things are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes (11:25). Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–29 and describe the kind of person God is actually able to teach.*

Not people who are simple minded, but people without pretense, who are willing to be told something they do not already know. Paul says God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak to shame the mighty,

and the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in His presence. The disqualifying trait is not education but self sufficiency.

4. *In Matthew 12:1–8 Jesus makes three separate arguments in defense of His disciples. Write them out and identify the Old Testament passage standing behind each one.*

First, David and his men ate the showbread when they were hungry, which only the priests were permitted to eat (1 Samuel 21:1–6), and Scripture does not condemn him. Second, the priests in the temple labor on the Sabbath every week and are blameless (Numbers 28:9–10), which shows the command was never an absolute prohibition of all activity. Third, He cites Hosea 6:6, that God desires mercy and not sacrifice, and then makes the decisive claim: something greater than the temple is here, and the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

5. *Verse 29 says to learn from Jesus because He is gentle and lowly in heart. Name one relationship in which you have been neither gentle nor lowly, and take one specific step this week to repair it.*

Answers will vary. Listen for a named relationship and a concrete step, an apology without qualifiers, a conversation initiated, a pattern named out loud. Note that Jesus describes His own heart as gentle and lowly, which means gentleness is not weakness or a personality type; it is the disposition of the strongest person who ever lived.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The kingdom: 11:11–12 gives you a natural opening to teach that the kingdom was established at Pentecost and that Christ reigns now. Take it, and avoid any hint that the kingdom is still future or political.
- The Sabbath controversy: be clear that Jesus is exposing Pharisaic tradition, not abolishing the command during His lifetime. Christians today are not under the Sabbath at all (Colossians 2:16–17), but this passage is not the text that proves it.
- Do not caricature John's question as unbelief or sin. Jesus praises him immediately afterward. Honest questions asked of Christ are welcome; the class needs to hear that from you.
- Matthew 11:21–24 teaches degrees of accountability based on opportunity. Teach what the text says and resist speculation beyond it.

God Shows No Partiality

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Peter's opening sentence is the point of the whole episode: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality." The word means He does not receive a man's face, does not judge by appearance or status. Then note verse 35 carefully, because it is often misquoted. God accepts, in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness. That is not a statement that sincere people are saved without the gospel; it is a statement about whom God is willing to receive, and Peter is standing in that room precisely because such a man still needed to hear the message.

The sermon itself is a compressed summary of the gospel: Jesus of Nazareth, anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and with power, doing good and healing, crucified on a tree, raised by God on the third day, shown openly to witnesses who ate and drank with Him, commanded to preach, ordained as Judge of the living and the dead, and offering remission of sins through His name to whoever believes. Every apostolic sermon in Acts contains the same spine: who Jesus is, what was done to Him, what God did about it, and what you must do now.

Then the Spirit interrupts. The household begins speaking with tongues and magnifying God, and the Jewish believers who came with Peter are astonished. Peter's response is immediate and instructive: he does not conclude that baptism is now unnecessary, he concludes that no one can forbid it. In Jerusalem he has to defend himself, and he simply narrates what happened, ending with the unanswerable line about withstanding God. The council falls silent and then glorifies God: "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the second and last recorded instance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the first being Pentecost in Acts 2 (compare 11:15–17).
- The purpose of the sign was evidential. It convinced the Jewish believers present, and later the church in Jerusalem, that God had accepted the Gentiles on the same terms.
- The six brethren who accompanied Peter (11:12) came along as witnesses, which is why Peter can appeal to them in his defense.
- "Hanged on a tree" (10:39) deliberately echoes Deuteronomy 21:23, a phrase Paul also uses in Galatians 3:13.
- Peter commands baptism "in the name of the Lord," meaning by His authority. Compare Acts 2:38 and Matthew 28:19.
- This account becomes the precedent cited at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15:7–11, where the question of binding the Law on Gentiles is settled.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Peter's sermon is remarkably short. Trace what he actually says about Jesus in 10:36–43, and notice what he does not say. What are the irreducible elements of a gospel sermon?*

Peter covers the ministry, the death, the burial by implication, the resurrection, the witnesses, the coming judgment, and the offer of remission of sins through the name of Jesus. He also grounds it in the prophets. What he does not do is tell stories about himself, argue philosophy, or spend time on peripheral matters. The sermon is about a person and what God did with Him.

Use this to ask a searching question about the congregation's own preaching and teaching, and about the personal conversations members have. Could each person in the room give this sermon in three minutes at a lunch table? Have somebody try it out loud. Most Christians who say they do not know how to share their faith actually do know the content; they have simply never said it in their own words while anyone was listening.

Question 2. *The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his household while Peter was still speaking, and Peter then commanded them to be baptized in water (10:44–48). Why was water baptism still necessary after a sign that unmistakable?*

This is the passage most often used to argue that baptism is unnecessary, so handle it directly and calmly. Notice what Peter concludes from the sign. He does not say, “They have the Spirit, so baptism would be redundant.” He says, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized?” and he commanded them to be baptized. The one man present who witnessed the outpouring drew the opposite conclusion from the one often drawn today.

The sign was not their salvation; it was God’s proof to the Jewish believers that these Gentiles were to be received. Acts 11:14 is the interpretive key: the angel had said Peter would tell Cornelius words by which he and his household would be saved, and the words Peter spoke ended in a command to be baptized. Keep the New Testament together on this: Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:27, 1 Peter 3:21, and Mark 16:16 all say the same thing, and Acts 10 does not contradict any of them.

Question 3. *The first reaction in Jerusalem was not rejoicing but an objection about eating with uncircumcised men (11:2–3). Where do we respond to God’s work the way those brethren did, and what finally changed their minds?*

The objection in 11:3 is worth reading with sympathy. These were men who loved God and had spent their lives inside a covenant that drew a hard boundary, and the boundary had come from God. They were not being petty; they were being conservative about something they believed God had commanded. And they were wrong, because God had now spoken further.

What changed their minds was evidence, told plainly. Peter did not argue; he narrated, step by step, with witnesses present, and he finished with a question nobody could answer. Ask the class where they hold a preference so tightly that they have begun to treat it as a command, and how they would respond if someone laid the Scriptures out for them the way Peter laid out the facts. Then notice the ending: they held their peace and glorified God. That is what a good heart does when it is shown it was wrong.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the elements of Peter’s sermon in 10:34–43 in the order he gives them, then set them beside Acts 2:22–38. What do the two sermons hold in common?*

Peter’s sermon includes God’s impartiality, the word sent to Israel, Jesus anointed with the Spirit and power, His doing good and healing, the witnesses, His death by hanging on a tree, His resurrection on the third day, His appearances to chosen witnesses who ate and drank with Him, the command to preach, His appointment as Judge, the prophets’ testimony, and remission of sins through His name. Acts 2 has the same spine: Jesus attested by God, crucified by lawless hands, raised up, witnessed, exalted, made Lord and Christ, and then the command to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. The consistent center is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, followed by what the hearer must do.

2. *Acts 11:15 has Peter comparing this event to what happened “at the beginning.” Which event is he pointing back to, and how many times does Scripture actually record the baptism of the Holy Spirit?*

He is pointing back to Pentecost in Acts 2, saying the Spirit fell on them “as upon us at the beginning.” Scripture records the baptism of the Holy Spirit only twice: on the apostles at Pentecost and on the household of Cornelius. Both were extraordinary, both served an evidential purpose at a hinge point in the church’s history, and neither is presented as the normal experience of a Christian. The one baptism commanded of every person is baptism in water, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.

3. *Peter says God gave them “the like gift” (11:17). Trace what happened, what it proved, and who needed to be convinced by it.*

They spoke with tongues and magnified God, exactly as the apostles had at Pentecost, which is why Peter calls it the like gift. What it proved was that God had accepted uncircumcised Gentiles on the same footing as Jews. Who needed convincing was not Cornelius, who already believed, but the circumcised believers who came with Peter

(10:45) and the brethren in Jerusalem who would question him (11:2-3). God gave the sign to the people who needed it.

4. Read Acts 11:14 beside Acts 10:48. State in your own words when this household was saved, and what part each step played in getting them there.

Acts 11:14 says Peter would speak words by which the household would be saved; Acts 10:48 records the last of those words, a command to be baptized in the name of the Lord. They heard, they believed, God confirmed His acceptance of them by an unmistakable sign, and then they were baptized. Their sins were remitted when they obeyed the gospel, exactly as Acts 2:38 describes. Every step mattered, and Peter did not treat any of them as optional.

5. Peter asks, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" (11:17). Name one place where you are currently resisting something you already know God has said, and end the resistance before this week is out.

Answers will vary. Look for honesty rather than eloquence. The value of Peter's question is that it ends the argument: once a person concedes that God has spoken, further resistance has no ground to stand on. Listen for a specific area, a relationship, a habit, an act of obedience postponed, and press gently for a date.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Acts 10:35 is not universalism. It says God accepts, in every nation, those who fear Him and work righteousness, and the very next paragraph has Peter preaching so that such a man can be saved. Read verse 35 with Acts 11:14 always beside it.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit here is one of only two recorded instances. It was evidential and extraordinary. Do not blur it with the water baptism commanded for the remission of sins in Acts 2:38 and 10:48.
- Tongues here are the same phenomenon as Acts 2: real languages, given as a confirming sign (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4), which ceased when revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). State this plainly and kindly.
- This passage is frequently used to argue that baptism is unnecessary. Answer it from the passage itself: Peter, who watched the Spirit fall, commanded them to be baptized.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Exodus 24-30 · Proverbs 13 · Matthew 12:9-50 · Acts 11:19-12:25

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