

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 11 OF 104

A Place to Dwell

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Exodus 24-30
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 13
Gospels	Matthew 12:9-50
General New Testament	Acts 11:19-12:25

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to help the class see that God has always been after nearness. The tabernacle exists because God said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." Jesus warns about a house that gets cleaned out and left empty, and then draws a new family around obedience to the Father. Antioch becomes a home for a church that gets a name. By the end of the week a student should understand that Christianity is not primarily a set of behaviors removed but a Presence received, and a household joined.

Doctrinally, the tabernacle and the priesthood carry the weight this week. Teach them as shadows fulfilled in Christ, exactly as Hebrews does: one High Priest who carries our names, one sacrifice offered once, one Mediator, and access for every Christian rather than for one man once a year. Along the way, draw the abiding principle that God specifies acceptable worship, and support it from New Testament passages rather than by binding Old Covenant practice on anyone. Matthew 12 gives you two more matters to handle with care: the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which needs accuracy and tenderness in the same breath, and the plain fact that Jesus had brothers. Acts 11:26 gives you the name Christian, and a gracious way to talk about wearing no other.

Formationally, the thread is what fills the space. Israel's tabernacle was filled with God's glory only after the work was finished and done His way. The swept and empty house was reoccupied because nothing good moved in. Barnabas filled a new congregation with a year of teaching. The praying church filled a midnight with petitions it could scarcely believe were answered. Ask your class this, and make them answer out loud: you have quit some things since you became a Christian, so name what has moved into that space, and if nothing has, name what you are going to put there this month.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Exodus 24-30. Spend the first fifteen minutes on chapter 24, which most students have never really seen, and then organize the rest of the hour as a walk from the gate to the ark. Use Hebrews 8 through 10 throughout so nobody leaves thinking these chapters are a museum tour.

Second session: Take up Matthew 12:9-50. Give the largest block to the Beelzebub exchange and the warning about blaspheming the Spirit, and reserve at least ten minutes at the end for the swept and empty house, which is where the passage lands on your members personally.

The other two readings: Proverbs 13 and Acts 11:19-12:25 read well on their own. Point the class to 13:12 and ask them to think of one person in a long wait. In Acts, ask them to notice that the men who first preached to Greeks are never named, and to consider what that means for what God can do through them.

That I May Dwell Among Them

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 24 is one of the most extraordinary scenes in the Old Testament and it is easy to read past. The covenant is ratified with blood, the people say twice that they will obey, and then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders go up and see the God of Israel, with something like a paved work of sapphire stone under His feet. “He did not lay His hand on the nobles of the children of Israel; so they saw God, and they ate and drank.” A meal in the presence of God. That image tells you where the whole book is heading.

Then come seven chapters of specifications, and modern readers find them tedious. Help your class read them as architecture with meaning. There is a gate, a bronze altar where something dies, a basin where hands and feet are washed, a holy place with light and bread and incense, and beyond a heavy veil, a box containing the covenant with a blood sprinkled lid, where God said He would meet with Moses. The whole arrangement teaches one thing over and over: God is holy, and approach is possible, but only on God’s terms and never casually.

The priesthood chapters deserve real attention. Aaron’s garments are described as being for glory and for beauty, and two of the details stand out. Twelve stones engraved with the names of the tribes are set on his shoulders, the place of burden, and twelve more over his heart, the place of love. The turban carries a gold plate reading “HOLINESS TO THE LORD.” Every time the high priest walked into that room he was carrying the whole nation with him, and he had to be consecrated with blood before he could do it. Hebrews will spend three chapters showing you who this was pointing to.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Moses is on Sinai for forty days receiving these instructions while Israel waits below, which is what makes Exodus 32 so devastating.
- The tabernacle was portable by design, made to be carried. God moved with a traveling people rather than waiting in a fixed temple.
- The Most Holy Place was entered once a year by one man with blood (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:7). Access was real and severely restricted.
- Hebrews 8:5 says the tabernacle was a copy and shadow of heavenly things, built exactly according to the pattern shown to Moses on the mountain.
- The Old Covenant priesthood has been replaced, not relocated. Christ is our high priest (Hebrews 4:14), every Christian is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9), and there is one Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).
- Do not carry the tabernacle’s apparatus into Christian worship. The New Testament, not the Old, specifies how the church worships.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Exodus 25:8 states the purpose of the entire project in one sentence. Read it aloud and sit with it. What does it reveal about what God actually wants, and where in Scripture does that desire finally arrive?*

“Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” God’s stated aim is not a building; it is proximity. He had already brought them out of Egypt, fed them, and given them His law, and what He says He wants is to live in the middle of the camp. That is remarkable on its own terms, and it is even more remarkable when you follow the line forward. John 1:14 says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, using the verb for pitching a tent. 1

Corinthians 3:16 says the church is God's temple. Revelation 21:3 closes the Bible with, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men."

Let the class feel the size of that. From Genesis 3, where people are put out of God's presence, to Revelation 21, where He moves in permanently, the entire Bible is the story of God closing the distance. Ask what difference it makes to a Tuesday afternoon to believe that God's settled desire is to be near them rather than merely to be obeyed by them.

Question 2. *The high priest carried the names of the twelve tribes on his shoulders and again over his heart whenever he went into the holy place (28:9–12, 28:29). What is being pictured there, and how do Hebrews 7:24–25 and 4:14–16 fill it out?*

The picture is representation. The high priest did not enter for himself; he entered carrying names. Onyx stones on the shoulders bore the names of the tribes as a memorial, and the breastplate over his heart bore twelve engraved stones, one per tribe, so that Aaron carried the names of the sons of Israel "over his heart before the Lord continually." Burden and affection, both.

Hebrews takes this up directly. Our High Priest continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood, and is therefore able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. And because He was tempted in every point as we are, He can sympathize with our weaknesses. Ask the class to put those two together: right now, at this hour, your name is over the heart of a High Priest who understands exactly what you are dealing with. That is not sentiment; it is the plain claim of Hebrews 4:15–16.

Question 3. *Everything is specified: dimensions, materials, colors, and even a recipe for the incense that no one was permitted to duplicate for personal use (30:37–38). Why that level of detail, and what does it say about worship designed according to our own preferences?*

The detail is the lesson. Twelve times in these chapters some form of "according to the pattern" or "as the Lord commanded" appears, and Hebrews 8:5 highlights it. God specified the materials, the measurements, the colors, the arrangement, and the compound of the incense, and then forbade anyone to make that incense for himself. Worship was never a matter of what Israel found meaningful. Nadab and Abihu will discover in Leviticus 10 exactly how seriously God meant it.

Apply the principle without binding the practice. Christians are not under the Law of Moses and do not build tabernacles, burn incense, or install a priesthood. But the principle that God specifies acceptable worship runs straight through the New Testament: John 4:24, in spirit and truth; Colossians 3:17, in the name of the Lord Jesus; Matthew 15:9, worship made vain by the commandments of men. That is why we sing rather than play (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), why we eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), and why we ask for authority rather than for preference. Teach it calmly, as a matter of respect for God, not as a list of prohibitions.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Walk in from the courtyard gate to the Most Holy Place, listing each piece of furniture in the order you would meet it and naming what happened there.*

Through the gate of the court you meet the bronze altar of burnt offering, where the sacrifice died and was consumed. Next the bronze basin, where the priests washed their hands and feet. Inside the holy place, the table of showbread on the north, the golden lampstand on the south, and the altar of incense before the veil, where prayer rose morning and evening. Beyond the veil, the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat and the cherubim, where God said, "There I will meet with you." Sacrifice, washing, light and bread and prayer, and then the presence of God.

2. *Read Hebrews 9:1–14 alongside Exodus 25 and 26. Which elements does the writer call a copy and a shadow, and what does he say the reality turned out to be?*

Hebrews 9 names the lampstand, the table, the showbread, the veil, the golden censer, the ark with the tablets, Aaron's rod, and the manna, and then says the Holy Spirit was signifying that the way into the Holiest was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle still stood. It calls these things symbolic, imposed until the time of

reformation. The reality is Christ, who entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not with the blood of goats and calves but with His own blood, obtaining eternal redemption.

3. *In Exodus 24:3 and 24:7 the people answer Moses twice. Write down exactly what they promised, then set that promise beside Exodus 32:1–6 and consider what it teaches about our own sincere intentions.*

They said, “All the words which the Lord has said we will do,” and then again, “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.” Within forty days they were dancing around a golden calf. The lesson is not that their promise was insincere; it was entirely sincere. Good intentions made in a moment of emotion are not the same thing as formed character, which is exactly why God gave them a tabernacle, a priesthood, feasts, and daily rhythms. Feelings do not survive forty days. Habits sometimes do.

4. *List the requirements for Aaron’s consecration in chapter 29. Count how many of them involve blood, and explain why blood is so central to approaching God (Hebrews 9:22).*

Chapter 29 requires washing, robing, anointing with oil, a bull for a sin offering, a ram for a burnt offering, a second ram of consecration whose blood was put on the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe, blood sprinkled on the garments, wave offerings, and seven days of repetition. Blood appears at nearly every stage. Hebrews 9:22 gives the reason: without shedding of blood there is no remission. Even the men who served God had to be cleansed before they could stand near Him.

5. *The lamp was to burn continually, tended morning and evening, and it required beaten olive oil that somebody had to prepare in advance (27:20–21). Name one unseen habit of your own spiritual life that has quietly gone out, and relight it this week.*

Answers will vary. Listen for the small, unglamorous things nobody sees: a morning reading, a prayer list, a note written to someone, an offering given thoughtfully rather than automatically. The detail that the oil had to be beaten and pure is worth naming; the light depended on labor done long before anyone lit a wick.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The tabernacle and its priesthood are shadows fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 8:5; 9:11–14; 10:1). Teach the correspondences the New Testament itself draws, and resist the urge to allegorize every loop and socket into a spiritual meaning Scripture never assigns.
- Do not bind Old Covenant worship on Christians. There is no earthly priesthood, no incense, no altar of sacrifice, and no holy place in the church. Christ is the priest and the sacrifice, and every Christian has direct access (Hebrews 10:19–22).
- Do teach the abiding principle that God specifies acceptable worship, and support it from New Testament passages rather than from the Law. Keep the tone reverent rather than combative.
- Someone will ask about the sapphire pavement and the elders seeing God in 24:9–11, given John 1:18. Answer that they saw a manifestation of God’s glory, not His essence, as with Moses in Exodus 33:20–23.

The Lamp That Stays Lit

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 13 keeps returning to consequences that arrive later. Wealth gotten hastily dwindles; wealth gathered slowly grows. A man who guards his mouth keeps his life; a man who opens it wide is ruined. Whoever despises the word is destroyed; whoever fears the commandment is rewarded. Solomon is training a young man to think past the end of the week, which is the single hardest thing to teach anyone and the single most valuable.

The lamp image in verse 9 is worth building a lesson around. The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out. In a house without electricity a lamp going out was not an inconvenience; it was the end of the evening. Proverbs uses the picture again in 20:20 and 24:20. A life can be lit or unlit, and the fuel is character.

Verse 12 is the pastoral heart of the chapter and deserves real time. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.” Solomon is not moralizing here; he is simply naming something true about people. Waiting wears us out. Every congregation contains somebody in the middle of a long wait, and the hour you spend on this verse may be the most useful of the quarter.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Part of the Solomonic collection (10:1 to 22:16), built on two line contrasts marked by “but.”
- The “rod” language of 13:24 is part of a larger family of sayings in Proverbs (22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15, 17), all of them concerned with correction that shapes a child rather than with the venting of a parent’s temper.
- Proverbs regularly links diligence to provision and laziness to want, describing tendencies under God’s ordering of the world, not guarantees for any individual.
- Verse 13 sets despising “the word” against fearing “the commandment,” the closest this chapter comes to naming revelation directly.
- These are general principles, not promises. Verse 21, that evil pursues sinners while good repays the righteous, describes the way life ordinarily runs, and Job exists in the canon to keep us from absolutizing it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 13:12 says hope deferred makes the heart sick. Name the kinds of waiting that actually do that to a person, and talk about what a congregation can do for somebody in the middle of one.*

Name the waits out loud: a prodigal child who has not called in two years, a spouse who will not come to services, infertility, a job search in its eleventh month, a diagnosis with no clear answer, a widow’s second year, which is usually harder than the first. Solomon does not say hope deferred is sinful or faithless. He says it makes the heart sick, which is a physical word. Long waiting takes something out of a person.

The second half of the question is where the class should land. Congregations are generally good at the first two weeks of a crisis and poor at month fourteen. Ask for practical commitments: a name on a calendar, a recurring call, a meal in the eighth month rather than the first week. Then read Galatians 6:2 and Romans 12:15 and point out that both verbs are ongoing. Somebody in the room is in month fourteen right now.

Question 2. *Verse 20 says the one who walks with wise men will be wise, and the companion of fools will be destroyed. Look honestly at your own calendar from the last month. Who have you actually been walking with, and what has it been making you?*

Solomon states it as a mechanism, not a threat. Walking with the wise makes you wise; the process is slow and largely invisible, which is why the verse warns about companions rather than about single decisions. We absorb

the assumptions, the vocabulary, the humor, and the tolerances of the people we spend hours with. Paul quotes a similar proverb in 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Make the class do the arithmetic. Who are the five people you spend the most unstructured time with? What do they assume about money, about marriage, about God? This is not a call to isolation; Jesus was the friend of sinners and went to their dinners. It is a call to notice the difference between people you are influencing and people who are influencing you, and to know honestly which is happening.

Question 3. *Verse 24 says the one who spares the rod hates his son. How do you hold that verse together with Ephesians 6:4, and what does discipline look like when it is genuinely done in love rather than in anger?*

Handle this pastorally, because you may have people in the room with hard histories. The proverb is about the necessity of correction, using the shepherd's rod as an image of loving direction. Proverbs 3:11–12 ties discipline directly to love, and Hebrews 12:5–11 applies the same logic to God's dealings with us: He disciplines those He loves, for our profit, that we may share His holiness, and it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness afterward.

Then set Ephesians 6:4 beside it: fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Both halves matter. Discipline that comes from a parent's anger, humiliates a child, or is inconsistent teaches nothing except that power is arbitrary. Discipline that is calm, explained, proportionate, and followed by affection teaches a child that the world has a moral shape. If anyone raises the question of abuse, say plainly that nothing in Scripture excuses it, and that this proverb is the opposite of it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace every verse in this chapter that deals with the mouth or with words (verses 2, 3, 5, 13). What single warning do all of them share?*

Verse 2 says a man eats well by the fruit of his mouth; verse 3 says he who guards his mouth preserves his life while he who opens his lips wide comes to ruin; verse 5 says a righteous man hates lying; verse 13 warns the one who despises the word. The shared warning is that words commit you. What comes out of your mouth sets consequences in motion that you cannot call back, which is precisely the point James makes about the rudder and the spark in James 3:3–6.

2. *Compare Proverbs 13:7 with Luke 12:15 and 2 Corinthians 6:10. Describe the difference between actually having something and merely appearing to.*

Proverbs 13:7 observes that one man pretends to be rich and has nothing, while another pretends to be poor and has great riches. Jesus says a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Paul describes himself as poor yet making many rich, having nothing and yet possessing all things. The common thread is that appearance and reality frequently run in opposite directions, and that the accounting that matters is not visible from the driveway.

3. *Proverbs 13:11 says wealth gained hastily dwindles while wealth gathered little by little increases. List the modern versions of hasty wealth that this verse would have you walk away from.*

Answers will vary: lottery tickets, get rich quick schemes, day trading treated as a hobby, multi level marketing pitched to friends, borrowing against a future that has not arrived, gambling of every sort. The verse is not condemning wealth; it is condemning shortcuts. Compare Proverbs 20:21 and 28:20, and note that the slow method requires the one virtue the shortcuts are designed to avoid, which is patience.

4. *Verse 22 speaks of a good man leaving an inheritance to his children's children. Set money aside for a moment and write down what else you are currently leaving them.*

Answers will vary. Listen for things like a working knowledge of Scripture, a marriage children watched and want to imitate, a reputation for honesty in a small town, a habit of hospitality, the memory of a father who apologized. Point out that an inheritance of character requires the same slow accumulation verse 11 describes. Nobody leaves this in a will; they leave it in ten thousand ordinary evenings.

5. Verse 20 ties your character directly to your company. Name one friendship that is quietly pulling you downward and one you have neglected that would build you up, and make one phone call before the week ends.

Answers will vary. Insist on both halves, because most people will do the second and avoid the first. Note also that the verse does not say to abandon people who need Christ; it says to be honest about who is forming whom. Ask for a specific call, made this week, and ask someone to follow up next Sunday.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The rod passages require a pastoral touch. Teach loving, measured correction; say plainly that Scripture never sanctions abuse or discipline administered in anger, and be alert to the person in the room for whom this is not theoretical.
- Keep the general principle rule in view. Verse 21 and verse 22 describe how life usually goes, not what God has guaranteed to any individual. Faithful people sometimes die poor.
- Verse 11 is not a condemnation of wealth or of legitimate business. It is a warning about shortcuts and the character they fail to build.

A House Swept and Empty

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The hostility that has been building since chapter 9 breaks open here. A man with a withered hand is present in the synagogue, and the Pharisees ask a question designed as a trap. Jesus answers with a sheep in a pit, which every one of them would have pulled out on a Sabbath without a second thought, and then says the sentence that ends the argument: “Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep?” He heals the hand, and they leave to plan a murder. Matthew wants you to notice that they were more disturbed by a healing than by a conspiracy.

Matthew’s response is to quote Isaiah 42, the longest Old Testament quotation in his gospel. In the middle of rising violence he shows you a Servant who will not quarrel or cry out, who will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking wick, and in whose name the Gentiles will trust. That is a portrait of restraint, and it is placed exactly where the reader is tempted to expect thunder.

The Beelzebub accusation is the hinge of the chapter. These men cannot deny the miracle, so they attribute it to Satan, and Jesus warns that such a charge, deliberately calling the work of the Holy Spirit the work of the devil, places a man beyond forgiveness while he persists in it. From there the chapter moves quickly: a tree known by its fruit, an account for every idle word, the sign of Jonah, Nineveh and the queen of the South rising in judgment, the empty house reoccupied, and finally the redefinition of family around obedience to the Father.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Pharisaic tradition permitted healing on the Sabbath only when life was in danger. A withered hand could have waited a day, which is precisely why they asked.
- Isaiah 42:1–4, quoted here, is the first of the Servant songs, and Matthew applies it directly to Jesus.
- Beelzebub was a mocking Jewish name for Satan, derived from a Philistine deity name meaning lord of the flies.
- The sign of Jonah is the resurrection. Jewish reckoning counted any part of a day as a day, so Friday afternoon through Sunday morning is “three days and three nights.”
- Jesus’ brothers named in Matthew 13:55 are His mother’s later children. Scripture nowhere teaches that Mary remained a virgin, and Matthew 1:25 says the opposite.
- His brothers did not believe in Him during His ministry (John 7:5) but are present with the disciples after the resurrection (Acts 1:14), and James becomes a leader in the Jerusalem church.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The Pharisees watch a man’s withered hand restored and then go out and plot how to destroy Jesus (12:10–14). How does a person get to the point where somebody else’s mercy makes him angry?*

The mechanism is worth naming carefully. These men had built their identity, income, and standing on a system of rules, and Jesus kept demonstrating that God cared about something their system had lost track of. Every act of mercy He performed was also an exposure of them. When a person’s sense of self is tied to a position, evidence against the position feels like an attack on the person, and so goodness itself becomes threatening.

Ask the class where they feel a flash of resentment at somebody else’s good news: the couple whose marriage got better, the younger man asked to teach, the family whose prodigal came home. Resentment at mercy is one of the surest signs that we have begun measuring ourselves against people instead of against Christ. Note as well that Jesus does not stop doing good because it will cost Him; verse 15 says He withdrew and healed them all.

Question 2. *Jesus speaks of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as the sin that will not be forgiven (12:31–32). In the context of this chapter, what exactly were these men doing, and what would you say to a Christian who lies awake afraid he has committed it?*

Set the context first. These men were not ignorant, not doubting, and not confused. They had watched miracle after miracle, could not deny the evidence, and deliberately ascribed the power of the Holy Spirit to Satan in order to protect their position. That is the sin in view. It is not a careless word, not a season of doubt, and not a sin committed in weakness. It is settled, informed, willful rejection of the only testimony that could lead a person to repentance.

Now the pastoral half, which matters enormously. The person who is afraid he has committed this sin has by that very fear given evidence that he has not. A hardened heart does not lie awake worrying about a hardened heart. Take such a person to 1 John 1:9 and Acts 8:22, and then to 1 Timothy 1:13, where Paul, a blasphemer and persecutor, obtained mercy. The unforgivable sin is unforgivable because the sinner will not come, not because God will not receive him.

Question 3. *The man in 12:43–45 gets the unclean spirit out, leaves the house swept and put in order and empty, and ends up worse than he started. Where are you trying to be a Christian by subtraction, and what needs to move in and take up residence?*

Jesus describes a reformation without a replacement. The spirit leaves, the man cleans up, and the house sits empty, so the spirit returns with seven others and the last state is worse than the first. Applied to that generation, it is a warning about a national revival under John's preaching that produced tidiness rather than repentance. Applied to us, it is a warning about a Christianity made of things we have quit.

Press this, because it is where many sincere members live. They have stopped some things, and that is genuinely good, and there is nothing occupying the space. Emptiness does not hold. Paul's pattern is always put off and put on (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:8–14). Ask each person to name the thing they quit and then to name what has moved in, and if nothing has, to decide today on a practice, a service, and a relationship that will fill it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Isaiah 42:1–4 and set it beside Matthew 12:18–21. List what the prophecy says about how God's chosen Servant would conduct Himself, and where you see each trait in this chapter.*

Isaiah says God's Servant is chosen and beloved, that God's Spirit is upon Him, that He will declare justice to the Gentiles, that He will not quarrel or cry out or let anyone hear His voice in the streets, that He will not break a bruised reed or quench smoking flax, that He will bring justice to victory, and that in His name Gentiles will trust. You see the restraint in verse 15, where He withdraws rather than escalating, in verse 16, where He tells people not to make Him known, and in the way He answers accusations with argument rather than force.

2. *Trace the three answers Jesus gives to the Beelzebub charge in 12:25–29, and write out each argument in your own words.*

First, a kingdom, city, or house divided against itself cannot stand; if Satan casts out Satan, his kingdom is finished. Second, the Jewish exorcists among their own people cast out demons too, so by their reasoning their own sons stand condemned. Third, if He casts out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has arrived upon them, and no one plunders a strong man's house without first binding the strong man. He is not merely defending Himself; He is claiming to have bound Satan.

3. *Jesus says men will give account for every idle word on the day of judgment (12:36). Compare James 3:2–12, and explain why God takes ordinary speech that seriously.*

Because speech is involuntary testimony. A prepared statement can be managed, but the idle word, the offhand comment, the thing said when you were tired, comes from the overflow of the heart (12:34). That is why Jesus links the tree and the fruit in the preceding verses. James adds that the tongue is small and sets a forest on fire, that no man can tame it, and that blessing God and cursing men made in His likeness ought not to come from the same mouth.

4. *Identify the sign of Jonah in 12:39–41, and then read 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 and show how that sign turns out to be the center of the gospel itself.*

The sign of Jonah is that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. That is the resurrection. Paul says the gospel he delivered as of first importance is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The one sign Jesus promised to a demanding generation is the same fact the gospel rests on.

5. *Jesus stretches out His hand toward His disciples and says whoever does the will of His Father is His brother and sister and mother (12:50). Name one member of your congregation you have been treating as an acquaintance rather than as family, and do something about it this week.*

Answers will vary. Look for a specific name and a specific action: an invitation to a meal, a visit, a question asked and actually listened to. Make the point that Jesus defines family by obedience to the Father, which means the person two pews back has a stronger claim on you than ancestry does.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The unpardonable sin: teach it accurately and then deal tenderly with the anxious. Anyone afraid of having committed it has not. Have 1 Timothy 1:13 and Acts 8:22 ready.
- Demon possession: the New Testament records it during the ministry of Christ and the apostles as part of the conflict His coming provoked. Avoid both flat denial and modern deliverance practices, and keep the class in the text.
- Matthew 12:33, a tree known by its fruit, warns about evaluating teaching and conduct; it is not a license to pronounce on anyone's heart, which God alone reads (1 Samuel 16:7).
- The mention of His brothers and mother is a natural place to say, kindly and briefly, that Scripture presents Mary as a faithful woman who later had other children (Matthew 1:25; 13:55–56), and that she is nowhere presented as an object of prayer or veneration (1 Timothy 2:5).

Antioch and the Prison Door

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke has been tracking the persecution of Acts 8:1 like a fuse, and here it detonates in the best possible way. The scattered disciples preached as they went, and in Antioch, the third largest city in the empire, some of them began speaking to Greeks. Antioch becomes the second great center of the faith and the launching point for everything from chapter 13 onward. The men who started it are anonymous, which is one of the most encouraging facts in the book.

Barnabas is the quiet hero of this section. Sent from Jerusalem to evaluate what was happening, he arrives, sees the grace of God, and is glad. Luke describes him as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Then he does something no insecure man would do: he travels to Tarsus, finds Saul, and brings him back to a work that was already going well. It is at Antioch, under those two teachers, that the disciples are first called Christians.

Chapter 12 is a different kind of story, told with a touch of humor and a hard edge. Herod kills James, and Scripture gives that execution one sentence. He seizes Peter, and the church prays. The deliverance is almost comic: Peter has to be struck to wake up, thinks he is dreaming, arrives at the prayer meeting, and stands outside knocking while the believers argue with a servant girl. Then Herod, dressed in royal apparel and accepting the crowd's shout that he speaks as a god, is struck down. Luke's summary is the point of the whole chapter: "But the word of God grew and multiplied."

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Antioch of Syria was a large, cosmopolitan city with a substantial Jewish population, roughly three hundred miles north of Jerusalem.
- Herod Agrippa the First was the grandson of Herod the Great, ruling Judea from A.D. 41 to 44, and he cultivated Jewish support carefully.
- This James is the apostle, the brother of John (Mark 3:17), the first apostle to be martyred. The James who later leads in Jerusalem is the Lord's brother.
- The famine under Claudius is attested outside Scripture, and the relief sent from Antioch is the first recorded instance of one congregation sending help to another.
- Josephus records Herod Agrippa's death at Caesarea in terms strikingly similar to Luke's account, including the royal garment and the crowd's flattery.
- Peter drops out of Luke's narrative after this chapter, apart from Acts 15, as the focus shifts to Paul and the mission to the Gentiles.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene did what no apostle had yet attempted and preached to Greeks (11:20). Why do you suppose Luke never tells us their names, and what does that suggest about who actually carries the gospel into new places?*

Luke names Barnabas, Saul, Agabus, Peter, James, Rhoda, and Herod, and leaves the men who first preached to Greeks anonymous. The most consequential evangelistic decision in the first fifteen years of the church was made by people whose names no one recorded. They were not apostles, not elders, and not officially sent; they were refugees who kept talking about Jesus in a new city.

This is enormously freeing for a class. Most members assume the real work belongs to preachers and elders, and Acts 11:20 quietly disagrees. Ask who in the room has moved to a new town, changed jobs, or started at a new

school in the last two years, and whether they have thought of that change the way Luke describes these men. Then ask what stops them, and be ready for honest answers.

Question 2. *James is killed with the sword and Peter is delivered by an angel, in the same chapter, under the same king, during the same persecution (12:2, 12:7). How do you hold those two facts together, and what should it do to the way we pray?*

Resist smoothing this over. James prayed too. James had a family. The church presumably prayed for him as well, and he died anyway, and Scripture spends one sentence on it. Then God sends an angel for Peter. The text offers no explanation, and that silence is itself instruction: God is not obligated to tell us why, and He does not run His kingdom on a formula we can reverse engineer.

What it should do to our praying is make it more honest and less transactional. We ask boldly because God delivers; we submit genuinely because He does not always, and He remains good either way. Take the class to Hebrews 11:33–38, where by faith some escaped the edge of the sword and by faith others were sawn in two, and both groups are commended in the same breath. Then ask how they would pray differently this week if they believed both halves.

Question 3. *The church is praying earnestly for Peter, and when he knocks at the gate they tell the girl she is out of her mind (12:13–16). Be honest with each other: what are you praying for right now that you would be astonished to actually receive?*

The scene is gently funny and painfully familiar. They are praying without ceasing. Peter knocks. Rhoda is so glad she forgets to open the gate. And the praying church says, “You are beside yourself,” and then, “It is his angel.” They believed God could do it, in some general sense, and they did not expect Him to do it tonight, at this gate.

Do not turn this into a rebuke; God answered the prayer of people whose faith was mixed with astonishment, which ought to encourage everyone in the room. But do ask the honest question. Many of our prayers are shaped so that we will not be disappointed: general, hedged, safely vague. Ask each person to name one specific thing they would actually be shocked to see God do, and then to pray for it by name this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Acts 11:22–26 tells you about Barnabas, including what he did and how Luke describes him. Why was he exactly the right man to send to Antioch?*

Luke says he was sent by the Jerusalem church, that when he came and saw the grace of God he was glad, that he encouraged them all to continue with the Lord with purpose of heart, and that he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Then he went to Tarsus to seek Saul and brought him to Antioch, and they taught there for a year. He was the right man because he could recognize God’s work in an unfamiliar form, he built people up rather than inspecting them, and he was secure enough to recruit someone more gifted than himself. His name means Son of Encouragement (Acts 4:36), and he keeps earning it.

2. *The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (11:26). Look up Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16, and consider what the New Testament does with that name and what it implies about wearing any other.*

Agrippa uses it in Acts 26:28, and Peter says that if anyone suffers as a Christian he should not be ashamed but glorify God in this name. The New Testament knows the disciples as Christians, disciples, saints, brethren, and believers, and it calls the body the church of God, the body of Christ, and the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). What it never does is divide believers into parties named after men or doctrines, and 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 rebukes precisely that impulse. We wear the name of the One who died for us, and we need no other.

3. *Trace the relief effort in 11:27–30. Note who decided, how much each gave, who carried it, and to whom it went.*

Agabus stood up and signified by the Spirit that a great famine was coming. The disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren in Judea. They did send it, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, to the elders. Note three features: the giving was individual and proportional, it was organized rather than impulsive, and it traveled from a largely Gentile church to a Jewish one, which says a great deal about what had happened in Antioch.

4. Set Herod's end in 12:21–23 beside Peter's deliverance in 12:6–11, and describe what Luke is showing his readers about who actually governs history.

Peter, in chains between two soldiers, asleep, is awakened by an angel and walked out through an iron gate that opens of its own accord. Herod, in royal robes on a throne, accepting the acclamation of a god, is struck down and eaten by worms. Luke sets the two scenes back to back deliberately. The man with all the power ends in the ground; the prisoner ends at a prayer meeting; and the chapter closes with the observation that the word of God grew and multiplied. Real authority was never where the crowd was looking.

5. Barnabas encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord (11:23). Name one newer or struggling Christian in your congregation, and this week do for them exactly what Barnabas did.

Answers will vary. Barnabas did three specific things: he came, he saw the good and said so, and he stayed long enough to teach. Listen for members who intend to do more than send a message. Note that his encouragement had content, urging them with purpose of heart to continue with the Lord, which is more than cheerfulness.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The name Christian (11:26) is your natural opening to talk about wearing no divisive party names. Do it positively, from 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 and 1 Peter 4:16, and without taking shots at neighbors.
- The angelic deliverance was part of the confirming work of the apostolic age. Do not turn it into an expectation of similar deliverances now, and do not let anyone conclude that faithful prayer guarantees rescue; James died in the same chapter.
- Agabus and the prophets at Antioch exercised inspired gifts during the period when revelation was still being given. Those gifts served their purpose and ceased when the revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Jude 3).
- Acts 12:15, “It is his angel,” records what the disciples said, not a doctrine Luke is teaching. Do not build a theology of guardian angels out of a startled remark at a midnight door.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Exodus 31–40 • Proverbs 14 • Matthew 13:1–30 • Acts 13

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