

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 16 OF 104

Hear Him

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Leviticus 21-27
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 18-19
Gospels	Matthew 16:1-17:13
General New Testament	Acts 17

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to teach your class the difference between hearing about God and listening to Him. Every reading offers the contrast. Israel receives a calendar and vows it will obey. Solomon describes the man who answers before he hears. Peter confesses beautifully and then tries to correct the Son of God. The Bereans hear something new and go check it, every day, until they are sure.

Doctrinally this is one of the more demanding weeks of the quarter. You will need to handle the rock and the keys of Matthew 16 clearly and without heat, showing that Christ is the foundation and that the keys were used in Acts 2. You will need to settle Matthew 16:28 with Mark 9:1 and Acts 2, so that the kingdom is understood as established and Christ as reigning now. You will need to say that the feasts, the Sabbath, the Jubilee, and the tithe belonged to a covenant fulfilled in Christ. And Acts 17:30 gives you the occasion to say kindly that sincerity is not the same as truth.

Formationally, the thread is the willingness to be corrected. The Bereans could be corrected by Scripture. Peter had to be corrected twice in six days. The Athenians who deferred could not be corrected at all, because they were never going to get to the second conversation. Ask your class this: what is one thing you believe or practice that you have never actually looked up, and when this week will you open the Bible and check it?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 16:1-17:13. It is the center of the week and the most likely to raise questions your students hear from neighbors. Give roughly a third of the hour to the confession, a third to the rock and the keys with Acts 2 open, and a third to the cross and the voice on the mountain.

Second session: Take up Acts 17, and organize it around the three cities. Spend the most time on Berea, since it gives the class a practice rather than only a lesson. Close with the Athens sermon and the three responses, and ask which response is sitting in the room.

The other two readings: Leviticus 21-27 and Proverbs 18-19 work well for home reading, but say two things before the class scatters. First, Leviticus 23 is God claiming the calendar, and it is worth reading with a family. Second, Leviticus 26:12 is the sentence Paul applies to the church in 2 Corinthians 6:16, so the promise is ours.

Feasts, Jubilee, and Covenant

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The last third of Leviticus widens out from the altar to cover the priests, the calendar, the land, and the future of the nation. Chapters 21 and 22 hold the priesthood to a stricter standard than everyone else, which is a principle the New Testament keeps when James warns that teachers receive a stricter judgment. What is offered to God must be without blemish, and those who handle holy things live under closer scrutiny.

Chapter 23 is the chapter to teach. God gives Israel a year: a weekly Sabbath, then Passover and Unleavened Bread in the spring, Firstfruits and Weeks fifty days later, and then in the seventh month Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles. The nation's memory, its harvest, its guilt, and its gratitude were all built into the calendar. Israel did not organize its worship around its work; it organized its work around its worship.

Chapters 25 and 26 press further still. Every seventh year the land rested and every fiftieth year it went home, which meant no family in Israel could be permanently dispossessed and no debt could run forever. Then chapter 26 lays out the two roads, with the extraordinary promise in verse 12, "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people," and the long, escalating discipline for a nation that will not listen. Read verse 12 aloud. It is the sentence the whole Bible is heading toward.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Moses is completing the covenant instruction given at Sinai; chapter 27 closes the book, and Numbers picks up with the nation preparing to move.
- The seven feasts of chapter 23 governed Israel's year. Three of them (Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Tabernacles) required the men to appear before the Lord (Deuteronomy 16:16).
- The Jubilee combined land reform, debt release, and the freeing of Israelite servants. Scripture does not record Israel ever keeping it faithfully, and 2 Chronicles 36:21 ties the exile to unkept sabbath years.
- The blasphemer of chapter 24 and the law of "eye for eye" belong to the civil code of a theocratic nation, given to judges to limit vengeance, not to individuals to authorize it (compare Matthew 5:38–39).
- Leviticus 26:12 is quoted by Paul of the church in 2 Corinthians 6:16, and its final form appears in Revelation 21:3.
- None of this calendar binds Christians. Colossians 2:16–17 names festivals, new moons, and sabbaths as a shadow of things to come, the substance being Christ.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Leviticus 23 hands Israel a calendar rather than asking for one. Look at how much of their year God claimed, and talk about what a family or a congregation would look like today if God set the schedule instead of fitting into it.*

Count it with the class. One day in seven, then roughly a week in the spring for Passover and Unleavened Bread, then a day of Firstfruits, then Pentecost, then three separate observances crowded into the seventh month, plus a whole year off every seventh year. God claimed an enormous portion of Israel's time, and He claimed it in advance, before the harvest was in and before anyone knew whether the year could spare it.

Bring it home without binding an Old Testament calendar on anybody. Christians are not under these feasts, but the principle that God sets the schedule has not changed. Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 put the first day of the week at the center. Ask the class the honest question: is the Lord's Day a fixed point that everything else is arranged around, or the first thing surrendered when a tournament, a shift, or a lake house comes up? The calendar is the most reliable statement of what a family actually believes.

Question 2. *Every fiftieth year land returned to the family that had lost it and Israelites who had sold themselves went free (Leviticus 25:8–17, 39–43). What was God protecting with that law, and what does it show about how He regards land, debt, and people?*

God was protecting families from permanent ruin. In an agricultural society land was livelihood, inheritance, and identity, and one bad decade could wipe out a family line forever. The Jubilee meant that no loss was final and no dynasty of wealth could consolidate the whole country. It also meant that what changed hands was really the crops until the next Jubilee, priced accordingly (25:15–16), which is a striking way to think about ownership.

The reason God gives is in 25:23: “The land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.” Everything else follows from that. He regards property as entrusted rather than owned, debt as temporary rather than defining, and people as His before they are anyone’s employee. Be careful not to turn this into a modern economic program; it was law for a particular nation in a particular land. But do press the ownership question. Ask what a Christian would do differently this month if he genuinely believed the deed was in God’s name.

Question 3. *Leviticus 26 sets blessing beside discipline and warns repeatedly that God will chasten “seven times more” if they still will not listen. How is that different from simple punishment, and how does Hebrews 12:5–11 take up the same idea for Christians?*

Leviticus 26 is not an angry God losing His temper. Notice the structure: each stage of discipline is followed by “if you will not yet listen,” and the stated aim is that they would confess their iniquity and their uncircumcised hearts be humbled (26:40–41). Then comes verse 42, where God says He will remember His covenant. Discipline in this chapter has a destination; punishment merely settles accounts.

Hebrews 12:5–11 makes exactly this argument to Christians. The Lord chastens those He loves, He deals with us as with sons, He does it for our profit that we may be partakers of His holiness, and it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those trained by it. Ask the class to consider, carefully and privately, whether a hard stretch in their lives is discipline they have been reading as abandonment. Guard against the opposite error too: not every hardship is a spanking (John 9:1–3).

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the seven appointed feasts of Leviticus 23 in calendar order, noting the month of each and what the nation was told to do.*

Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month; Unleavened Bread from the fifteenth for seven days; Firstfruits on the day after the Sabbath of that week; the Feast of Weeks fifty days later; then in the seventh month the Feast of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth, and the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth for seven days, with an eighth day assembly. The weekly Sabbath heads the list in 23:3 as the foundation of the whole calendar.

2. *Read Colossians 2:16–17 and Hebrews 10:1 with that list in front of you. Then connect Passover to 1 Corinthians 5:7, Firstfruits to 1 Corinthians 15:20, and Weeks to Acts 2:1.*

Colossians 2:16–17 calls festivals, new moons, and sabbaths a shadow of things to come, the body being Christ, and Hebrews 10:1 says the law had a shadow of good things and not the very image. Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us. He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. And the Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, is the day the church began. The shadows all fall in the same direction.

3. *Leviticus 25:23 gives God’s own reason the land could never be sold permanently. Copy His words exactly, and consider what claim they make on anything you currently call yours.*

God says, “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.” The claim reaches past real estate. If Israel held their fields as tenants, the Christian holds his house, his salary, his health, and his years the same way (1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Peter 2:11). Answers should get specific about one possession or one account.

4. Trace the promises of Leviticus 26:3–13 and stop at verse 12. Find where Paul quotes that verse in 2 Corinthians 6:16–18, and note whom he is describing.

God promises rain in season, harvests that overlap each other, bread to the full, peace in the land, sleep without fear, victory over enemies, fruitfulness, His covenant established, and then verse 12, “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” Paul quotes it in 2 Corinthians 6:16 and applies it to the church, the temple of the living God. The promise of God dwelling with His people lands on Christians.

5. Chapter 27 deals with vows, with what a person promised God in a moment of feeling and had to pay later. Name one promise you have made to God and not kept, and settle it before next Sunday.

Answers will vary. Listen for vows made in hospital waiting rooms, at gravesides, at the end of a bad year: I will read the Bible daily, I will talk to my brother, I will give more, I will teach that class. Ecclesiastes 5:4–5 says it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Encourage one specific act this week rather than a renewed general promise.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not bind any of this calendar on Christians, including the Sabbath. Colossians 2:16–17 settles it. Teach also that the Lord’s Day is not a Christian Sabbath; it is the day the church met to break bread and give (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- The Jubilee is sometimes used as a blueprint for modern economic policy. It was covenant law for Israel in the land God gave them. Draw the principle about stewardship and mercy, and do not turn the class into a political discussion.
- The blasphemer of chapter 24 and the “eye for eye” standard were civil law administered by judges to limit retaliation. Jesus addresses personal vengeance in Matthew 5:38–42, and Romans 12:19 and 13:4 keep the distinction between personal and civil.
- Chapter 21 excludes priests with physical defects from certain service. Handle this carefully; it concerns ceremonial fitness under a system of types and shadows and says nothing about the worth of disabled people, who bear God’s image like everyone else.
- Chapter 27 mentions tithes. The tithe belonged to the law of Moses; Christians give as they purpose in their hearts, cheerfully and as prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6–7).

A Strong Tower and Good Counsel

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These two chapters belong to the long collection of Solomon's individual sayings, and their center of gravity is the ear. Proverbs 18 opens with a man who has cut himself off and a fool who would rather express himself than understand anything, and it keeps returning to the damage done by people who talk first. Verse 13 is the summary: answering a matter before hearing it is folly and shame to him.

Chapter 18 also holds some of the most quoted lines in the book. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run into it and are safe. Death and life are in the power of the tongue. A man who finds a wife finds a good thing. A man who has friends must himself be friendly, and there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Read these slowly; a class will engage them immediately.

Chapter 19 turns toward poverty, parenting, anger, and counsel, and ends the section with verse 21, which quietly governs the whole book: many plans are in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel, that will stand. Solomon is not against planning. He is against planning as though your own judgment were the final authority, which is the same error the isolated man of 18:1 has already made.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is still the collection of individual sayings that runs from 10:1 to 22:16, mostly two-line units without connection to their neighbors.
- Hebrew wisdom is descriptive of how life normally runs under God's moral order; it is not a set of guarantees, and Job exists in the canon partly to keep us from reading it that way.
- Speech is the single most frequent subject in Proverbs. James 3 is the New Testament's extended treatment of the same theme.
- Proverbs 18:10 uses "the name of the Lord" in the Hebrew sense of His revealed character and reputation, not a magic word.
- The sayings on wealth and poverty in chapter 19 must be read alongside each other; the book acknowledges both poverty caused by laziness (19:15) and poverty suffered unjustly (19:17, 22).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 18:1 says a man who isolates himself seeks his own desire and rages against all wise judgment. How does isolation actually creep up on a busy adult, and what does it do to a person over time?*

Isolation rarely announces itself as a decision. It happens through a series of small withdrawals: a class skipped because the week was hard, an invitation declined twice until they stop coming, a hurt never addressed, a work schedule allowed to swallow Sunday. Then one day a person realizes nobody knows what is actually going on in his life, and nobody has standing to say anything about it.

What it does to him is exactly what verse 1 says: he begins to seek only his own desire, and he rages against all wise judgment, meaning he cannot receive correction anymore. Hebrews 10:24–25 and 3:12–13 treat this as a spiritual emergency, not a personality preference. Ask the class who would notice if they disappeared for a month, and who has permission to ask them a hard question. If the honest answer to both is nobody, verse 1 is describing them.

Question 2. *Verse 18:13 calls it folly to answer before hearing, and 18:17 says the first to plead his case seems right until the other side arrives. Where have you watched those two verses prove true, and what habits would keep you out of them?*

Verse 13 is the daily version and verse 17 is the courtroom version, and both say the same thing: the first version of any story is incomplete. Every elder who has ever taken a phone call knows verse 17 by heart. Every parent who has punished the wrong child knows verse 13. It is not that people always lie; it is that everyone narrates from inside his own case.

The habits are unglamorous and effective. Ask questions before forming a verdict. Say "I would like to hear the other side before I think about this." Refuse to relay a complaint that you have not heard firsthand. Wait a day before responding to the message that made you angry. Ask the class for one habit each is willing to adopt, and note that James 1:19 says the same thing in eleven words.

Question 3. *Proverbs 18:21 puts death and life in the power of the tongue. Name the ways an ordinary tongue gives life, and be specific about the last time yours actually did.*

Life-giving speech is more ordinary than people expect. It is the specific compliment rather than the general one. It is telling a young person you noticed what he did. It is saying to a spouse the sentence you have been assuming they already know. It is a note to a widow. It is telling somebody the gospel. Proverbs 18:21 adds that those who love it will eat its fruit, meaning we live in the world our words create.

The second half of the question is where the work happens. If a class member cannot remember the last time his words gave life, that is his answer. Get names and get sentences, the way Proverbs keeps doing. Then point to Ephesians 4:29, which says no corrupt word should proceed from our mouths, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Go through both chapters and collect every verse about speech. Sort them into three columns: what to say, when to say it, and when to say nothing at all.*

The list is long; among others, 18:2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 13, 17, 20, 21, 23 and 19:1, 5, 9, 28. Sorting them exposes the pattern: Proverbs has far more to say about restraint and about listening than about eloquence. The sayings about the talebearer (18:8) and about answering too soon (18:13) usually generate the most honest conversation in a class.

2. *Compare Proverbs 18:10 with Psalm 61:3 and Philippians 4:6–7. Explain what "the name of the Lord" stands for, and describe what running into that tower looks like on a Wednesday afternoon.*

The name of the Lord means His revealed character, everything He has made known about Himself. Running into it is not a slogan but an act: taking a real situation to God in prayer, resting on what He has actually promised, refusing to handle it alone. Psalm 61:3 calls Him a shelter and a strong tower from the enemy, and Philippians 4:6–7 describes the practical result, a peace that guards the heart and mind.

3. *Proverbs 19:2 warns about zeal without knowledge. Read Romans 10:1–3 and give one example, from Scripture or from life, of religious zeal that was sincere and sincerely wrong.*

Romans 10:1–3 is Paul on his own countrymen: they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own. Paul himself is the best example, since he persecuted the church in good conscience (Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:13). Sincerity is necessary and it is not sufficient, which is why the Bereans checked.

4. *Proverbs 19:17 says pity on the poor is a loan to the Lord. Set Matthew 25:34–40 beside it, then list by name the people within reach of you who qualify.*

Matthew 25:34–40 has the King saying that what was done for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned was done for Him. Proverbs 19:17 says the Lord will repay what is given to the poor. Both make God the actual recipient. The list should contain names: a single mother in the congregation, a neighbor out of work, an elderly member whose furnace failed, a family in the church directory nobody has asked about in a year.

5. *Proverbs 19:20 says listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days. This week ask one person for honest counsel about a decision you have already made, and listen all the way through without defending yourself.*

Answers will vary. The hard part is the last clause. Most people ask for advice as a way of recruiting agreement. Listen for whether anyone comes back next week having actually changed a decision, and be ready to say that receiving counsel without obeying any of it is what 19:20 is warning against.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Proverbs 18:22 will land hard on the single and on those in painful marriages. Say plainly that the verse is a general observation about God's good gift, not a measure of anyone's worth, and remember 1 Corinthians 7:7–8.
- Proverbs 19:18 on chastening a son is not permission for harshness or anger. Read it with Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21, and make the point that discipline aims at the child's good, never at the parent's relief.
- Keep the sayings about wealth and poverty in balance. Proverbs does not teach that the prosperous are righteous or that the poor deserve it; it observes tendencies and elsewhere defends the poor fiercely (14:31; 19:17; 22:2).
- Proverbs 18:24 is often preached as a direct prophecy of Christ. It is a proverb about friendship. The application to the Lord is legitimate and beautiful, but say which you are doing.

The Confession and the Cross

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This section is the pivot of Matthew's gospel. Up to now Jesus has been demonstrating who He is; from here on He is walking toward Jerusalem to die. The hinge is Caesarea Philippi, a town at the foot of Mount Hermon full of pagan shrines, where Jesus asks the question that sorts everyone. The crowds have opinions, all of them respectful and all of them wrong. Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Then comes the promise: "on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it," with the keys of the kingdom given to Peter. Two chapters of Acts later Peter is standing in Jerusalem using them, telling three thousand people what to do to be saved. Notice that Jesus says "I will build," future tense. The church was still ahead of them, and the kingdom was near but not yet come with power.

What follows is the shock. The Messiah must suffer and be killed and be raised, and Peter, who has just confessed rightly, rebukes Him for it. Jesus answers with the sharpest words He ever spoke to a disciple. Then six days later the same three men see the glory, and Peter, characteristically, starts making plans about tabernacles. The Father interrupts him mid-sentence: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" The whole section is about listening to a Christ who will not be edited.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Caesarea Philippi lay about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee, a center of pagan worship, which makes the confession there all the more pointed.
- The "sign of the prophet Jonah" (16:4) refers to the resurrection, as Jesus states explicitly in 12:40.
- Leaven was a standard image for pervasive influence; Jesus explains in 16:12 that He meant the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
- The keys of the kingdom are the authority to announce the terms of entry. Peter uses them first to Jews in Acts 2 and first to Gentiles in Acts 10.
- The transfiguration is recorded in all three synoptic gospels and referenced by Peter himself in 2 Peter 1:16–18.
- Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets, both of which pointed to Christ, and both of which fall silent when the Father says "Hear Him."

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *At Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks two questions, one about what the crowds are saying and one about what the disciples themselves say. Why does He ask them in that order, and why will the second question not stay answered only once?*

The order matters because the first question is safe and the second is not. Reporting what other people believe costs nothing, and the answers the disciples relay are all complimentary: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. Every one of them puts Jesus in a category that leaves the hearer's life unchanged. Then He turns and says, "But who do you say that I am?" The pronoun is emphatic.

It will not stay answered once because the confession gets tested. Peter answers correctly in verse 16 and is speaking for Satan by verse 22. He confesses again at the fire in the courtyard and denies it three times. The question comes back at every decision where the answer would cost something. Ask the class where their confession of Christ was most recently under examination, and whether it was a doctrinal setting or an ordinary Tuesday.

Question 2. *In 16:18–19 Jesus promises to build His church and to give Peter the keys of the kingdom. Read Acts 2 next to that promise and talk about when and how it was kept.*

Be plain and be kind. The rock on which Christ builds is not Peter's person; it is the confessed truth Peter had just spoken. Jesus says elsewhere that He Himself is the stone the builders rejected (Matthew 21:42), Paul says no other foundation can be laid than Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11), and Peter himself calls Christ the chief cornerstone and all Christians living stones (1 Peter 2:4–8). There is no hint anywhere of a successor, and Peter never claims one.

The keys are the authority to declare the terms of entrance, and Acts 2 is where they are used. Jesus said "I will build"; on Pentecost the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Peter preached the resurrection, the crowd asked what to do, and he told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. That is what binding and loosing on earth what has been bound in heaven looks like: not making the rules, but announcing heaven's rules. Daniel 2:44, Mark 9:1, Acts 2, and Colossians 1:13 together close the case that the kingdom came then and that Christ reigns now.

Question 3. *Six days after Peter tries to talk Jesus out of the cross, the voice from the cloud gives one command: "Hear Him." What had just happened that made that command necessary, and where do we make the same mistake Peter made?*

Peter had just told the Son of God that He was wrong about the cross. "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" It was affectionate, protective, and entirely of men rather than of God. Jesus answers, "Get behind Me, Satan," because the suggestion was the same one the devil made in the wilderness: take the crown without the cross. Then on the mountain Peter starts arranging three tabernacles, putting Jesus on a level with Moses and Elijah, and the Father cuts him off.

We make the identical mistake whenever we accept Jesus as Lord and then explain to Him which parts will not work in our situation. We do it about money, about forgiveness, about marriage, about what we are willing to suffer for the truth. Ask the class to finish this sentence honestly: "Lord, I believe You are the Christ, but this particular thing You said cannot apply to my case because." Then read the two words from the cloud again.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out Peter's confession in 16:16, then read what Jesus says about its source in 16:17. Explain why flesh and blood could not have produced that sentence.*

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus says flesh and blood did not reveal it but His Father in heaven. Human observation could produce the crowd's answers, since a great prophet is what a man looks like from the outside. The full confession, that this carpenter is the Anointed One and the Son of the living God, required God to reveal it, and He had been doing so through the prophets, through John, through the works Jesus did, and through the voice at the baptism.

2. *Trace the four things Jesus says in 16:21 must happen to Him. Then find the same prediction in 17:22–23 and 20:17–19 and note what He adds each time.*

He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. In 17:22–23 He adds that He will be betrayed into the hands of men, and the disciples are exceedingly sorrowful. In 20:17–19 He adds condemnation to death, delivery to the Gentiles, mocking, scourging, and crucifixion. The picture sharpens each time, and the resurrection is included every time.

3. *Read Matthew 16:28 together with Mark 9:1 and Acts 1:8 through 2:4. When did the kingdom come with power, who was standing there to see it, and what does that settle?*

It came with power on Pentecost, Acts 2, as Mark 9:1 said it would, in the lifetime of some who were standing there. This settles that the kingdom is not a future earthly political reign still awaited. Daniel 2:44 said it would be set up in the days of those kings; Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into it; Revelation 1:9 has John already a companion in the kingdom. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25).

4. Compare the transfiguration with Peter's own account in 2 Peter 1:16–18. He says the experience proved something; identify it, and then read 2 Peter 1:19 and note what he calls even more reliable.

Peter says they did not follow cunningly devised fables but were eyewitnesses of His majesty, and he cites the voice from the Excellent Glory. The experience proved the truth of what the apostles preached about Christ's power and coming. Then in verse 19 he says, "we have the prophetic word made more sure," and tells his readers to heed it as a light shining in a dark place. Even a man who saw the transfiguration points his readers to the written word rather than to more experiences.

5. Jesus says the only way to follow Him is to deny yourself and take up a cross (16:24). Name one thing you want that following Christ this year will not permit you to have, say it out loud to one person, and let go of it.

Answers will vary. Look for something actual: a relationship God has fenced off, a business practice, a promotion that would cost the family's spiritual life, a grudge held for years, a habit defended for years. Denying yourself is not adding a discipline; it is losing something. If someone cannot name a single thing, that itself is worth a gentle follow-up conversation.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The rock of 16:18 will come up. Answer it from Scripture rather than from polemics: Christ is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:4–8), the confession is what Peter had just spoken, and the New Testament knows nothing of apostolic succession or a universal earthly head of the church.
- Matthew 16:28 is used both by premillennial teachers and by skeptics who claim Jesus predicted His return in that generation. Answer it with Mark 9:1 and Acts 2. The kingdom came with power at Pentecost.
- Do not use the transfiguration to support modern visions or continuing revelation. Peter's own conclusion is that the written prophetic word is the surer light (2 Peter 1:19; see also 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- The appearance of Moses and Elijah is a unique act of God, not a warrant for contacting the dead, which Scripture forbids (Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Isaiah 8:19).

Reasoning from the Scriptures

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Acts 17 gives you three cities and three receptions, and Luke clearly intends them to be compared. In Thessalonica Paul reasons in the synagogue from the Scriptures for three Sabbaths and a church is born, but the opposition turns into a mob that drags Jason before the rulers with the wonderful accusation that these men have turned the world upside down. The gospel had been in the city about a month.

Berea is the quiet center of the chapter. Luke says they were more fair-minded, meaning more noble in disposition, because they received the word with all readiness and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. That is the model your class should carry out of this week: not credulity, not cynicism, but eagerness plus verification. Therefore many of them believed, Luke says, and the “therefore” is doing real work.

Athens is Paul alone in a city of monuments, and Luke says his spirit was provoked within him when he saw it given over to idols. He reasons in the synagogue and in the marketplace daily, is brought to the Areopagus, and preaches a sermon that starts with an altar to an unknown god and moves through creation, providence, and human accountability to a fixed day of judgment by a Man whom God raised from the dead. At the resurrection they interrupt him. Some mock, some defer, some believe, including a member of the council and a woman named Damaris.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is still the second preaching tour, about A.D. 50 to 51, with Silas and Timothy, in the Roman province of Macedonia and then Achaia.
- Thessalonica was the provincial capital and a free city; the charge in 17:7 of acting contrary to Caesar's decrees was politically dangerous, not merely religious.
- Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians shortly after this, from Corinth, which makes those letters a natural follow-up reading.
- The Areopagus was the ancient council of Athens, meeting on Mars Hill; it exercised oversight of religion and education, so Paul is being examined, not merely given a platform.
- Epicureans held that the gods were distant and that pleasure rightly understood was the goal; Stoics held that a divine reason pervaded all things and that virtue meant living in accord with it. Paul's sermon addresses both.
- The signs and wonders worked by the apostles confirmed the word they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). Note that in Athens Paul argues from Scripture, creation, and the resurrection rather than performing a sign for the philosophers.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Luke describes Paul's method in Thessalonica with three verbs: reasoning, explaining, and demonstrating from the Scriptures (17:2–3). How is that different from the way belief is usually recommended to people today?*

Reasoning, explaining, and demonstrating are the language of argument. Paul opened the Scriptures and showed, text by text, that the Messiah had to suffer and rise, and then said, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” He expected his hearers to weigh evidence and reach a conclusion. That is also how he spoke to Felix about righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, and how Peter told Christians to be ready to give a defense (1 Peter 3:15).

Today belief is more often recommended as a private experience, a feeling, or a choice that works for you. The gospel is presented as something that helped somebody rather than something that is true. Ask the class how they would actually show a coworker from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ, and whether they could do it without a study guide. Then ask what they will do this month to be able to.

Question 2. *The Bereans are called more fair-minded because they received the word eagerly and then searched the Scriptures daily to check it (17:11). How do eagerness and scrutiny belong together, and what happens to a congregation that has one without the other?*

They belong together because the word is worth both. Eagerness without scrutiny produces people who believe whatever the last confident speaker said, and churches that follow personalities. Scrutiny without eagerness produces people who use the Bible to win arguments and never let it change them. The Bereans did both in the same breath, daily, and the result was faith.

Ask what it would mean for your congregation. It means a preacher who is pleased rather than threatened when someone brings a passage that seems to say otherwise. It means members who look things up rather than repeating what they have always heard. It means 1 Thessalonians 5:21, test all things, hold fast what is good. Say plainly that a teacher who discourages checking is telling you something about himself.

Question 3. *At Athens Paul starts with an altar the Athenians built and ends with a resurrection and a command to repent. Walk through the speech and talk about what he was willing to grant them, what he would not grant, and how the sermon ends.*

What Paul grants is real and generous. He grants that they are religious. He grants that God has not left Himself without witness and is not far from any of us. He grants that their own poets stumbled onto something true about humanity being God's offspring. He begins on ground they can stand on. What he will not grant is any of the content: God does not live in temples made with hands, He is not served by human hands as though He needed anything, and He is not like gold or silver or stone shaped by art and man's devising.

Then the sermon turns. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has ordained, and He has given assurance of this by raising Him from the dead. Paul does not soften the ending to keep the room. Ask the class where they are tempted to stop a conversation just before the part that would require a response.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every claim Paul makes about God in 17:24–29, and mark which ones an educated Athenian would already have accepted.*

God made the world and everything in it, He is Lord of heaven and earth, He does not dwell in temples made with hands, He is not served by human hands as though He needed anything, He gives to all life and breath and all things, He made from one blood every nation to dwell on the whole face of the earth, He determined their appointed times and boundaries, He is not far from any one of us, and in Him we live and move and have our being. A Stoic would have nodded at several of these. None of them left room for the idols standing all around them.

2. *Paul quotes two of their own poets in 17:28. Read 1 Corinthians 9:20–22 and Titus 1:12 alongside it, and describe what this shows about how Paul approached an audience.*

The quotations are from Epimenides and Aratus, poets the Athenians knew. Paul uses a line his audience already accepted as a bridge to a truth they had not accepted, exactly as he describes his practice in 1 Corinthians 9:20–22 and as he does with a Cretan poet in Titus 1:12. Quoting a writer is not endorsing his religion. Paul meets people where they stand and then asks them to move.

3. *Acts 17:30 says God overlooked the times of ignorance but now commands all men everywhere to repent. Explain what changed, and say what the word “everywhere” rules out.*

What changed is that God has now spoken finally in His Son and raised Him from the dead (Hebrews 1:1–2; Acts 17:31). Before, God bore with human ignorance; now the evidence has been given publicly and the command has

gone out. The word “everywhere” rules out the idea that some people or cultures are exempt, that sincerity in a false religion is sufficient, or that a person may remain as he is because he never heard the fine points. The command is universal because the judgment is.

4. *Three different responses follow the sermon in 17:32–34. Name all three, and identify which of them you meet most often in the people you know.*

Some mocked, some said “we will hear you again on this matter,” and some joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris. The most common response in most communities is the middle one, polite deferral, which is also the most dangerous, since it feels like openness and functions as refusal (compare Acts 24:25).

5. *The Bereans checked the preacher against the Scriptures every day. Choose one thing you believe mainly because you were taught it, study it out for yourself this week, and write down what you actually find.*

Answers will vary. Push for something specific rather than a general resolution to read more: what must a person do to be saved, why the church sings without instruments, when the Lord’s Supper is observed and why, what happens at death. The aim is not doubt but ownership. A faith that has been checked is much harder to talk a person out of.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The Athens sermon is sometimes used to argue that Paul changed his approach and failed, or that he preached philosophy instead of Christ. He preached creation, providence, repentance, judgment, and the resurrection, and he was interrupted before he finished. Men and women believed.
- Acts 17:30 on times of ignorance is misused to suggest that sincere people in false religions are safe. Read the rest of the verse: God now commands all men everywhere to repent.
- Verse 26, that God determined preappointed times and boundaries of nations, is about providence over history, not about the eternal destiny of individuals being fixed in advance. Verse 27 gives the purpose: that they should seek the Lord.
- Verse 28, “we are also His offspring,” speaks of creation, not of salvation. Christians become children of God by faith and baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:26–27; John 1:12–13).

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Numbers 1–4 • Proverbs 20 • Matthew 17:14–18:20 • Acts 18–19:10

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