

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 17 OF 104

Counted and Carried

Week 17 of 104 • 16% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Numbers 1-4
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 20
Gospels	Matthew 17:14-18:20
General New Testament	Acts 18-19:10

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

God is not impressed by crowds, and He does not lose people in them. This week opens with a census in which every fighting man in Israel is counted by name and by family, and every Levite is handed a specific load to carry when the camp moves: this family the curtains, that family the boards and sockets, the other family the holy furniture, covered by Aaron's own hands. Solomon says the Lord weighs hearts the way an honest merchant weighs grain. Jesus sets a child in the middle of an argument about greatness, warns that not one little one is to be despised, and describes a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine to go after one. And at Ephesus a gifted preacher and twelve obscure disciples each get careful, personal attention. Nobody here is a statistic.

How to use this guide: Read all four passages during the week. Your teacher will take up two of them in class, one in each session. For the other two, work through the "Extended Class Discussion or Self-Study" questions on your own and write your answers in the space provided.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT Numbers 1-4

Every Man in His Place

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

A year after Sinai, God orders a census of every man in Israel twenty years old and upward who can go to war, tribe by tribe, family by family. The Levites are counted separately and exempted from the army because the tabernacle is their assignment. Chapter 2 arranges the camp in four divisions around the tent, with the Levites in between. Chapters 3 and 4 take the Levites in place of Israel's firstborn and give each Levite family its specific duties and its specific load for the march.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Numbers 1 counts the men one at a time, by name, by family, by their fathers' houses, in a book most of us skim. Talk about what that much attention to individual names tells you about how God looks at a crowd of six hundred thousand.

2. Numbers 4 hands each Levite family a specific load: one takes the holy furniture, one the curtains, one the boards and sockets. Nobody chose his own assignment. How should a Christian think about a job in the Lord's work that he did not pick and does not particularly enjoy?
3. The Kohathites carried the holiest objects and were warned they would die if they touched them or looked at them uncovered (4:15, 20). Why would God attach that much danger to the highest privilege, and where does the same principle operate now?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Sketch the camp from Numbers 2. Put the tabernacle in the center and set each tribe where God placed it, then note who stands between the tent and the people.
2. Numbers 3:12–13 says God took the Levites instead of all the firstborn of Israel. Read Exodus 13:1–2 with Exodus 12:29–30 and explain why the firstborn belonged to Him to begin with.
3. List the three Levite families and exactly what each was responsible to carry (Numbers 4:4–33). Mark which family had the heaviest work and which had the most dangerous.
4. The Levites served from thirty years old to fifty (4:3, 23, 30). Set that beside 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, and describe what God consistently looks for in people who handle holy things.
5. Somebody had to carry the sockets. Name the least visible job in your congregation, find out who actually does it, and this week either thank that person by name or take a turn doing it.

WISDOM LITERATURE Proverbs 20

Honest Weights and Clean Hearts

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Solomon opens with wine as a mocker and closes with the spirit of a man as the Lord's lamp, searching his inward parts. Between them come the sluggard who will not plow because of the weather, the man who advertises his own goodness, the buyer who runs down the price and then brags, and two verses calling dishonest weights an abomination to the Lord. In the middle sits a question no one has ever been able to answer: who can say, I have made my heart clean?

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Proverbs 20:1 says wine is a mocker and strong drink a brawler. Beyond the obvious, describe what that verse says alcohol does to a person's judgment, and talk about how a Christian should think about it in light of Ephesians 5:18 and 1 Peter 4:3.
2. Verse 9 asks a question no one can answer: who can say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin"? If you answer honestly, how should that change the way you treat the people who annoy you most?
3. Twice in this chapter (20:10, 23) God calls unequal weights and measures an abomination. Where do modern versions of the crooked scale turn up in ordinary work, business, and family life?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Collect the verses in this chapter about laziness and diligence, beginning with 20:4 and 20:13. Write out what the sluggard's reasoning actually sounds like when he says it out loud.
2. Proverbs 20:27 calls the spirit of a man the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths. Add 1 Corinthians 2:11 and Hebrews 4:12–13, and describe what God sees that no one else ever will.
3. Verse 6 says most men proclaim their own goodness, but a faithful man who can find. Name three people you know to have been faithful over a long stretch of years, and write down what they have in common.
4. Verse 14 pictures a buyer running the price down and then boasting about his bargain as he leaves. Read Leviticus 19:35–36 and 1 Thessalonians 4:6, and decide where the line falls between shrewdness and defrauding.
5. Verse 22 says do not say "I will recompense evil," but wait on the Lord. Name the person you are keeping a private score against, and do something specific and good for that person this week.

GOSPELS Matthew 17:14–18:20

Little Ones and Lost Sheep

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

A father brings a son the disciples could not help, and Jesus heals him and then speaks to them about mustard-seed faith. He tells them again that He will be killed and raised. A tax collector asks about the temple tax, and Peter finds the money in a fish. Then the disciples ask who is greatest in the kingdom, and Jesus stands a child in

front of them. From there come the millstone, the ninety-nine left behind for one, and the steps for going after a brother who has sinned.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The disciples ask privately why they could not cast the demon out, and Jesus answers, “because of your unbelief” (17:19–20). How does faith the size of a mustard seed move a mountain, and what is this passage not promising?
2. Asked who is greatest in the kingdom, Jesus sets a child in the middle of the room. Which quality of a child is He holding up in 18:3–4, and which qualities of children is He plainly not commending?
3. Matthew 18:15–17 lays out four steps for dealing with a brother who has sinned. Walk through them in order, then be honest about which step congregations most often skip, and why.

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace the temple tax episode in 17:24–27. Note the argument Jesus makes about kings, sons, and strangers, and then note the reason He gives for paying it anyway.
2. Read Matthew 18:6–9 slowly, then set 1 Corinthians 8:9–13 beside it. What does Scripture say about the weight of causing another person to stumble, and what does it ask you to give up?
3. Jesus says the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to look for the one (18:12–14). Compare Luke 15:3–7 and identify who the one is in Matthew’s setting, and how that changes who the parable is aimed at.
4. Matthew 18:19–20 is usually quoted about small prayer meetings. Read verses 15 through 20 as one unbroken paragraph, and say what the two or three are actually doing when Christ promises to be among them.
5. There is a person who has drifted from the Lord whose name came to mind while you read the parable of the lost sheep. Write the name down, and go see that person this week.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Paul arrives in Corinth alone, meets Aquila and Priscilla, and makes tents while he reasons in the synagogue every Sabbath. Opposition drives him next door, the ruler of the synagogue is converted, and a vision keeps him there eighteen months. Gallio throws the case out of court. Later, at Ephesus, a gifted preacher named Apollos is quietly taken aside and taught more accurately. When Paul reaches Ephesus he finds twelve men who had never heard of the Holy Spirit, and their story is worth your full attention.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Apollos was eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and teaching accurately the things of the Lord, and he still needed correcting (18:24–26). Look at how Priscilla and Aquila did it, and talk about what it would take for someone to do that for you.
2. In Acts 19:1–5 twelve men who had already been baptized were baptized again. Work carefully through Paul's questions and their answers, and discuss why the first baptism was not sufficient.
3. The Lord told Paul, "I have many people in this city," and Paul stayed eighteen months in Corinth, a place with a reputation across the empire (18:9–11). How should that promise change the way you look at the community you live in?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List everything Acts 18:1–11 tells you about how Paul supported himself, who worked with him, and how he divided his time.
 2. Acts 18:8 says Crispus believed with all his household and that many Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Read Paul's own comment in 1 Corinthians 1:14–17, and explain why he personally baptized so few and what that does not mean.
 3. Compare the baptism of John (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:4) with the baptism Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38). List every difference you can find, and note what Ephesians 4:5 says about how many baptisms there are now.
 4. Acts 19:6 says the Holy Spirit came upon these men when Paul laid his hands on them. Set that beside Acts 8:14–18 and Romans 1:11, and identify who was able to impart such gifts and what follows for us.
 5. Priscilla and Aquila took a preacher home and taught him. Name one person you could sit down with in that same spirit this month, and set the date before you close this book.
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NEXT WEEK'S READING: Numbers 5-9 · Proverbs 21 · Matthew 18:21-19:30 · Acts 19:11-20:16

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