

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 20 OF 104

By What Authority

Week 20 of 104 • 19% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Numbers 17-23
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 23
Gospels	Matthew 21:1-27
General New Testament	Acts 21:27-22:21

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Somebody is always asking who put you in charge. This week the question surfaces in four places at once. A dead almond branch buds overnight in front of the tabernacle because Israel will not stop arguing about who may serve as priest. Moses, who has carried this people for forty years, loses Canaan in one angry moment at a rock because he did not treat God as holy in front of them. A hired prophet opens his mouth to curse and blessing comes out, because no fee on earth can outbid the word of God. And in Jerusalem the chief priests corner a carpenter's son in the temple courts and demand, "By what authority are You doing these things?" Read them together and you will feel how steady God's authority is, and how carefully it must be handled.

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 17-23

The Rod, the Rock, the Serpent

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Israel's quarrel over the priesthood ends when Aaron's dead staff buds, blossoms, and bears almonds overnight. Then the chapters turn hard. Miriam dies, the people cry for water, and Moses strikes the rock he was told to speak to, forfeiting the land. Aaron dies on a mountain. Snakes come among the people and a bronze serpent is lifted up for anyone who will look. Israel defeats Sihon and Og, Moab panics, and Balak hires a foreign diviner named Balaam to curse the nation he cannot defeat.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. In Numbers 17 God ends a long argument about the priesthood with an almond branch that buds overnight, and then has the branch kept permanently before the testimony. Why answer a rebellion with a sign like that, and what was the rod meant to keep saying to Israel long after the argument was over?

2. Read Numbers 20:1–13 slowly. God told Moses to speak to the rock; Moses struck it twice and spoke to the people in anger. Why was this such a serious failure in a man who had served God faithfully for forty years, and what does God say the real issue was in verse 12?
3. Balaam could not curse a people God had blessed, and yet Numbers 31:16 tells us he later found another way to wound them. Which has done more damage to Christians you have known, open opposition or a friendly invitation to compromise?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace Aaron through these chapters: his rod in chapter 17, his portion in chapter 18, and his death on Mount Hor in 20:22–29. What does the sequence say about both the honor and the cost of serving God?
2. Numbers 19 prescribes the ashes of a red heifer for anyone defiled by contact with a dead body. Read Hebrews 9:13–14 and write out what the writer says the blood of Christ accomplishes that those ashes never could.
3. Read Numbers 21:4–9, then John 3:14–15. List every point of comparison Jesus draws between the bronze serpent and Himself, and then name the point at which the comparison stops.
4. God had already told Balaam plainly in 22:12 not to go and not to curse Israel. Trace how Balaam got around that answer in 22:13–21, and compare what the angel says about his way in 22:32.
5. Moses lost the land over one unguarded moment in front of a crowd. Name the specific place this week where you are most likely to speak out of frustration, and decide now, in writing, what you will do instead when you get there.

WISDOM LITERATURE Proverbs 23

Appetites and Their Price

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

This chapter goes straight at what you want. It warns you about a rich man's table where the hospitality is a transaction, about wearing yourself out to get money that sprouts wings and flies away, about moving a boundary stone at the expense of the fatherless, and about envying sinners. It urges a father to correct his child

and a son to give his father his heart. And it closes with the most vivid portrait of drunkenness anywhere in Scripture, a man stung by a serpent who wakes up looking for another drink.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Proverbs 23:4–5 tells you not to wear yourself out to get rich, because riches make themselves wings and fly away. How would an honest person tell the difference between diligent work, which this book praises, and the exhausting pursuit this verse forbids?
2. Verses 29 through 35 walk a man through an evening and into the next morning, ending with him saying he will seek the drink again. Trace what the passage says alcohol does to his judgment, his perception, his safety, and his will, and discuss why so many people still consider this a small matter.
3. In 23:26 the father says, “My son, give me your heart.” Why does he ask for the heart rather than for better behavior, and how does that change the way we raise children and teach new Christians?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List everything in this chapter the son is told not to desire, not to envy, and not to set his eyes on. What do the items on your list have in common?
2. Proverbs 23:17–18 answers envy with the fear of the Lord and a settled hope. Read Psalm 73:2–3 and 16–17, and identify what changed Asaph’s mind and the exact place where it changed.
3. Read 23:13–14 alongside Ephesians 6:4 and Hebrews 12:5–11. Write one paragraph describing correction that is firm, patient, and free of anger.
4. Verses 22 through 25 describe what a parent most longs to see in a grown child. Write down what those verses say it is, and compare it honestly with what most parents today say they want for their children.
5. Choose the appetite in this chapter that has the strongest hold on you, whether money, food, drink, status, or something else, and name one concrete limit you will put on it before next Sunday, along with the person you will tell.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus arranges His own arrival. He sends for a donkey and a colt, and rides into Jerusalem while crowds spread garments on the road and shout Hosanna to the Son of David. The whole city is shaken. He goes straight to the temple, drives out those buying and selling, quotes Isaiah and Jeremiah, and then heals the blind and the lame in the same courts. A fig tree with leaves and no fruit withers at His word. And the chief priests come demanding to know who authorized any of it.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Jesus has avoided public acclaim for most of His ministry, and now He deliberately arranges the donkey, the colt, and the crowd (21:1–11). Why this moment, and what kind of king is He announcing by the manner of His arrival?
2. In the temple courts Jesus overturns tables and then heals the blind and the lame in that same space (21:12–14). What had the temple become in practice, and what did He restore it to in a single afternoon?
3. The chief priests ask by what authority He acts, and Jesus answers with a question about John's baptism (21:23–27). Watch them calculate the cost of each possible answer and then plead ignorance. Where are we tempted to say "I don't know" about something we already know is true?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Read Zechariah 9:9 and compare it with Matthew 21:4–5. Which details did Matthew see fulfilled, and what does the prophecy itself say about the character of this King?
 2. Trace the words "Hosanna" and "Son of David" in 21:9 and 21:15. Note who says them in each verse and who objects, and explain why the second group's objection is so revealing.
 3. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 in verse 13. Look up both passages in their own settings and describe what each original context adds to the charge He is making.
 4. The fig tree in 21:18–22 had a full canopy of leaves and no fruit at all. Compare Luke 13:6–9. What is the tree standing for, and what warning does it carry for a church or a Christian who looks alive?
 5. The same city that shouted Hosanna on Sunday shouted Crucify by Friday. Identify one place where your enthusiasm for Christ has outrun your obedience, and name the single act of obedience you owe Him before this week is over.
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A Defense on the Stairs

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jews from Asia spot Paul in the temple, assume he has brought a Gentile past the barrier, and the city erupts. The mob drags him out and beats him until Roman soldiers rescue him. On the barracks stairs, bound in two chains, Paul asks permission to speak, switches to Hebrew, and the crowd goes quiet. He tells them his own story: raised at the feet of Gamaliel, zealous, a persecutor of this Way, stopped by a light on the Damascus road, and told by Ananias to rise and be baptized and wash away his sins.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The riot begins with an assumption that turns out to be false (21:28–29). Trace how fast a guess became a charge and a charge became a mob, and talk about where that same sequence still happens among brethren today.
2. Paul had seen the Lord, believed Him, called Him Lord, prayed, and fasted three days before Ananias arrived and said, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:16). If Paul’s sins were still there to be washed away at that point, what does that settle about when a penitent believer receives forgiveness?
3. Standing before a crowd that had just tried to kill him, Paul begins with his own story rather than with an argument. Why does he start there, and how would you tell the story of what God has done in you to someone convinced you have abandoned something?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the specific charges the crowd brings against Paul in 21:28. Mark which were false outright, which were distortions, and then note in 21:29 exactly how the crowd arrived at them.
2. Compare Paul’s account in 22:6–16 with Luke’s narrative in Acts 9:1–19. Write down what each account supplies that the other leaves out, and why Paul might have emphasized what he does before this audience.
3. Read Acts 22:16 together with Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, and 1 Peter 3:21. In one sentence of your own words, state what the New Testament says baptism is for.
4. Paul says in 22:3 that he was zealous toward God, and in 22:4 that he persecuted this Way to the death. Read Romans 10:1–3 and explain how a person can be completely sincere and completely wrong at the same time.

5. Paul spoke respectfully to people who had just beaten him. Name one person in your life who would find your faith unwelcome, and decide on one specific and respectful thing you will say or do for that person this week.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Numbers 24-29 · Proverbs 24 · Matthew 21:28-22:14 · Acts 22:22-23:35

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