

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 21 OF 104

Called and Chosen

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Numbers 24-29
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 24
Gospels	Matthew 21:28-22:14
General New Testament	Acts 22:22-23:35

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to make the class feel the difference between hearing an invitation and answering it. Four readings drive at the same nerve. A generation that was called out of Egypt is counted out of the record in Numbers 26. A son who said the right words never reaches the vineyard. A guest who accepted the invitation is put out for coming on his own terms. And a prisoner who has answered every call God ever gave him is told, in the dark, that there is one more country to go.

Doctrinally, the load is carried by Matthew 21:43 and 22:14. Be clear that the vineyard was given to the church, the holy nation of 1 Peter 2:9, and that no future earthly political kingdom is owed to national Israel; Christ reigns now from David's throne (Acts 2:33-36; Colossians 1:13). Be equally clear that "many are called, but few are chosen" is not unconditional election. God calls through the gospel, and the chosen are those who answer it, put on Christ, and keep the garment on (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Galatians 3:27; 2 Peter 1:10). Numbers 25 and 1 Corinthians 10:12 supply the other half: those who have been blessed can still fall.

Formationally, the thread is what a person does after he has been counted in. The Israel of Numbers 25 had just been declared blessed four times over and went to the wrong dinner. The second son agreed and stayed home. Proverbs shows you a field ruined by a little more sleep. Put this to your class and let it sit: name the one assignment from God you have been agreeing with for years without ever going out to the field, and say out loud what day this week you will begin.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 21:28-22:14. Three parables in one sitting give you a clean arc, and the class will supply the applications. Budget your time so that the wedding garment and 22:14 get a full fifteen minutes, since that is where the doctrinal work of the week is done.

Second session: Take up Numbers 24-29, concentrating on chapters 25, 26, and 27. Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-12 aloud at the beginning so the class hears Paul's own reason for studying Peor, and close with Moses asking God for a shepherd.

The other two readings: Acts 22:22-23:35 reads well on its own; encourage the class to read it in one sitting and notice how many times God preserves Paul through ordinary people. Proverbs 24 works best a few verses at a time during the week, with verses 11 and 12 saved for a family discussion.

A New Generation Numbered

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The first half of this reading is one of the sharpest reversals in Scripture. Balaam's final oracles are magnificent, culminating in a Star out of Jacob and a Scepter out of Israel. Then chapter 25 opens with Israel at Shittim, eating at Moab's sacrifices, bowing to Moab's gods, and joined to Baal of Peor. Numbers 31:16 later tells us this was Balaam's counsel, the back door he found when the front door was barred. Twenty-four thousand die. Phinehas acts decisively, the plague is stayed, and God gives him a covenant of peace.

Chapter 26 then takes a second census, and the arithmetic preaches. The totals are roughly the same as at Sinai, a little over six hundred thousand, so God has not diminished His people. But verses 64 and 65 say that among all these there was not a man numbered at Sinai, except Caleb and Joshua, because God had said they would surely die in the wilderness. An entire generation is simply gone, and the promise is untouched. God buries His workmen and continues His work.

The rest of the reading looks forward. The daughters of Zelophehad ask for an inheritance and God grants it, establishing a statute. Moses is shown the land he will not enter and asks God to appoint a shepherd, and Joshua is set before Eleazar and the congregation with a hand laid on him. Chapters 28 and 29 then lay out the whole calendar of worship, the daily lamb morning and evening, the Sabbath, the new moons, Passover, Weeks, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. A new generation is going into the land with its worship already ordered by God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Israel is camped in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho. Everything in the rest of the Pentateuch happens here.
- Baal of Peor was a local Moabite and Midianite cult whose worship involved sexual immorality, which is why the seduction and the idolatry are one act, not two. Israel never forgot it (Deuteronomy 4:3; Joshua 22:17; Psalm 106:28–31; Hosea 9:10).
- Phinehas is Aaron's grandson, acting in a theocracy where God had just commanded judgment on the offenders (25:4–5). This is an act of official zeal under divine command, not private vengeance.
- The census of chapter 26 is taken for two purposes, military service and the division of the land by lot according to size (26:52–56).
- The feast calendar of chapters 28 and 29 belongs to the covenant fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 10:1–10). Christians are not bound to it, and it is not a pattern for Christian worship.
- Paul takes the whole Peor episode as a warning written for us (1 Corinthians 10:6–12), which is exactly how to teach it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Chapter 25 follows immediately on four oracles declaring Israel blessed and untouchable, and within a few verses the nation is at Moab's tables and twenty-four thousand are dead. How do people who have just been assured of God's favor end up there, and where does that same pattern show up in a congregation that considers itself sound?

The seduction works precisely because it comes wrapped in hospitality. No one announced an idolatry campaign. There was an invitation to a meal, a festival atmosphere, a friendly people, and the worship slid in behind the food. Notice the verbs in verses 1 and 2: the people began to commit harlotry, the women invited, the people ate

and bowed down. Each step is small and sociable. By verse 3 Israel is joined to Baal of Peor and the anger of the Lord is kindled.

Paul makes the application for us in 1 Corinthians 10:6–12: these things are our examples, and let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Press the class past the obvious. Assurance of God's favor is a wonderful thing and a dangerous pillow. The congregation most at risk is often the one most confident it could never happen there. Ask for the specific invitations that come to your people wrapped in friendliness: the calendar, the entertainment, the relationship, the business arrangement. Then ask what an actual refusal would look like.

Question 2. *Numbers 26 counts a whole new generation, and verses 64 and 65 note that not one man numbered at Sinai remains except Caleb and Joshua. Sit with that a moment. How does the second census display God's patience, God's seriousness, and God's faithfulness to His promise all at the same time?*

All three are in the numbers. Patience, because thirty-eight years passed and God fed, watered, and led a people under sentence the entire time, and their children grew up on manna. Seriousness, because what He said in Numbers 14:29 happened exactly: every man numbered at Sinai from twenty years old and upward died in the wilderness, with the two exceptions He Himself named. Faithfulness, because the total is still over six hundred thousand. God did not scale down the promise to match the failure.

Draw out the pastoral weight of this. Every family in that camp had buried people. A generation of funerals is what unbelief cost. And yet the young man standing in the counting line in chapter 26 is standing there because God kept a promise made to Abraham centuries earlier. Ask the class what they are handing to the generation behind them, and whether the young people in their congregation are being shaped mostly by their parents' faith or mostly by their parents' regrets.

Question 3. *At the end of his life Moses asks God to set a man over the congregation so that the people will not be as sheep without a shepherd (27:15–17). What does that request reveal about what mattered most to him, and who are you preparing to pick up what you are currently carrying?*

Moses has just been told again that he will not enter the land, and he is shown it from a mountain. His response is not to argue for himself or to ask for a legacy. He asks for a shepherd, so the congregation will not be scattered. That is the request of a man whose heart finally belongs to the people God gave him rather than to his own record. Jesus looks at a crowd in Matthew 9:36 and uses the same phrase, sheep having no shepherd, and it moves Him to send workers.

Then make it concrete. Every teacher of a class, every elder, every parent, every man who leads singing is holding something that will need to be held by someone else. Ask by name: who is sitting beside you learning to do what you do? A congregation dies one unreplaced worker at a time. Point out that Moses' answer came in the form of a man he had been training for forty years, and that Joshua did not appear out of nowhere.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Numbers 25:1–13 and list the steps by which Israel moved from a shared meal to idolatry to judgment. Where in an ordinary week does that sequence usually begin for a person today?*

The steps are plain and fast: Israel stayed in Shittim among Moab, the people began to commit harlotry with the women, the women invited them to the sacrifices of their gods, the people ate, the people bowed down, and Israel was joined to Baal of Peor. Judgment followed. The sequence starts long before the bowing, at the point of comfortable proximity and an accepted invitation. For most people today it begins the same way, not with a decision to abandon God but with a slow acceptance of company that assumes He does not matter.

2. *Compare the tribal totals in Numbers 26 with those in Numbers 1. Note which tribes grew and which shrank, and then write a sentence on the significance of 26:64–65.*

Several tribes shifted noticeably. Simeon dropped from fifty-nine thousand three hundred to twenty-two thousand two hundred, the steepest fall in the list, which is worth noting in light of Numbers 25:14 where the man killed at Peor was a leader of a Simeonite family. Manasseh grew substantially. The overall total moved only slightly, from

603,550 to 601,730. The real point is 26:64–65: an entire adult generation died under God’s sentence, and only Caleb and Joshua, the two who had believed, stood in both lists.

3. *Five sisters bring a hard case to Moses in 27:1–11 and God rules in their favor. Note carefully how they came, what they said, and what they did not do. What does their approach model for someone who believes he has been wronged?*

They came together, they came publicly to the proper place, standing before Moses, Eleazar, the leaders, and the congregation at the door of the tabernacle. They stated the facts without slandering their father, acknowledging that he died in his own sin and not in Korah’s rebellion. They made a specific request rather than a general complaint. And they accepted the outcome and later accepted the further ruling of chapter 36. That is how a believer brings a grievance: openly, to the right people, in the right spirit, with a definite request.

4. *Read Numbers 24:15–19 and then Revelation 22:16 and Acts 2:33–36. What finally comes of the promise of a Scepter rising out of Israel, and how does the New Testament describe the reach of that dominion?*

Balaam’s oracle points beyond David to Christ, who calls Himself the Bright and Morning Star in Revelation 22:16 and who is the Root and Offspring of David. Numbers 24:17–19 speaks of dominion, and Acts 2:33–36 says that dominion began when God raised Him and seated Him at His own right hand. The reach is not a strip of territory in the Middle East but every nation under heaven (Matthew 28:18–20; Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25). Be careful with the details; the oracle is poetry, and its fulfillment is spelled out by the apostles, not by newspaper headlines.

5. *Phinehas acted while everyone else stood weeping at the door of the tabernacle (25:6–8). Without imitating his spear, name one situation you have been grieving over and have the standing to address, and set a day this week to address it.*

Answers will vary. Listen for the difference between grieving and acting. Many Christians feel deeply about a wandering child, a drifting friend, a sin in the family, and mistake the feeling for a response. Phinehas is not a model for violence, but he is a model for someone who stops weeping at the door and does the thing that is actually his to do. Ask for a date, not an intention.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Phinehas: his act was official zeal inside a theocracy, immediately after God had commanded the execution of the guilty leaders (25:4–5). It is not a warrant for private violence or vigilante action. Christians fight with different weapons (Romans 12:19; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5).
- The daughters of Zelophehad: this is a just ruling about property in a specific legal system. Do not press it into a modern argument about roles in the church, which the New Testament addresses on its own terms (1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–13).
- The feasts of chapters 28 and 29 are not binding on Christians and are not the model for our worship. The New Testament gives the pattern: the first day of the week, the Lord’s Supper, singing, giving, prayer, and teaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Ephesians 5:19).
- The Star out of Jacob: point forward to Christ, but do not build a chain of speculation connecting it to the star of Matthew 2. The text does not make that link.

By Wisdom a House Is Built

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 24 completes the collection called the words of the wise and then adds a short appendix beginning at verse 23. The opening verses return to a theme the book will not let go of: do not envy evil men, do not desire to be with them, because their heart plans violence. Over against that, verses 3 and 4 give one of the loveliest pictures in Proverbs, a house built by wisdom, established by understanding, and filled with precious and pleasant riches. Wisdom is domestic here. It shows up in a home that works.

The center of the chapter is verses 10 through 12. If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Then comes the command that has haunted good people for three thousand years: deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. And then the anticipated excuse, “Surely we did not know this,” answered by the God who weighs the heart, who keeps the soul, and who renders to each according to his work. Ignorance is not accepted as a plea because it is usually manufactured.

The last third of the chapter gives short, vivid pictures: honey and the sweetness of wisdom to the soul, the righteous man who falls seven times and rises, the warning against gloating, the counsel not to fret over evildoers because the lamp of the wicked will be put out, and finally the field of the slothful. That closing scene is the best teaching in the chapter. The writer walks past, looks, considers, receives instruction, and only then speaks. Wisdom is what you get when you actually pay attention to what you have seen.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Proverbs 22:17 through 24:22 is the section headed “the words of the wise”; 24:23 begins a brief further collection, “these things also belong to the wise.”
- As always, these are general principles about how life normally runs under God’s order, not absolute guarantees. Verse 16 is a good example: it describes the resilience of a righteous life, not a promise that no fall will ever be final.
- Verse 27 reflects an agricultural economy, where the field had to be producing before a man could afford to build and marry. The principle is priority and sequence.
- Verses 11 and 12 were quoted for generations in debates over slavery, abortion, and rescue, and rightly so. The wording envisions people actually being taken to their deaths.
- The sluggard appears repeatedly in Proverbs (6:6–11; 13:4; 19:24; 26:13–16). Here he is shown by his field rather than described, which is more devastating.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 24:11–12 tells you to deliver those being led away to death and then refuses the excuse, “we did not know this.” Who in your life is being drawn toward death right now, and how does this passage answer the excuses we usually reach for?*

Start with the plain sense. The verse pictures people being taken to execution and tells the reader to intervene. Then it removes the escape hatch. “If you say, surely we did not know this,” does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? God is described in three ways in verse 12, as the one who weighs hearts, the one who keeps your soul, and the one who renders to every man according to his work. In other words, He knows what you knew, He is the reason you are still breathing, and He will settle accounts.

Now make it local and specific. Who is drifting toward death in your congregation, and who has decided it is not his place to say anything? The young man nobody has visited since he stopped coming. The couple whose marriage everyone can see is failing. The friend who is drinking again. Ask the class to name one person, and then

ask what they have been telling themselves in order not to act. Usually it is “I do not know the whole story” or “someone closer should do it.” Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19–20 leave very little room for either.

Question 2. *Verse 16 says a righteous man falls seven times and rises again. How is that different from the way many Christians handle their own failures, and what practically makes it possible for a person to get back up rather than quit?*

The difference is usually in what a person believes about God’s attitude toward a repentant failure. Many Christians handle a fall by hiding, by quitting, or by lowering their view of themselves until they expect nothing. Verse 16 assumes something else entirely: falling is not what disqualifies a man, staying down is. Peter denied the Lord three times with cursing and was preaching seven weeks later. Compare Micah 7:8, the verse this proverb echoes, where the one who has fallen says to the enemy, do not rejoice over me, when I fall I will arise.

Practically, three things get a person up. First, confession that is honest and specific rather than general (1 John 1:9). Second, other Christians who know and will help, which is what James 5:16 is for. Third, a fixed decision made in advance about what to do on the day after a failure. Ask the class what their habit is on the day after they have sinned. That habit, more than anything else, determines whether they rise seven times.

Question 3. *Verses 17 and 18 forbid rejoicing when your enemy falls. Why would God care what goes on inside us when someone who hurt us finally gets what is coming to him, and what does that concern say about the kind of people He is making?*

Because God is not only interested in the outcome; He is interested in you. The warning in verse 18 is startling: lest the Lord see it and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him. God will not let your gloating make you a partner in your enemy’s judgment. Something goes wrong in a person who enjoys another person’s ruin, even a deserved ruin, and God is guarding you from it.

This is one of the clearest places in the Old Testament where the heart, not the behavior, is the target. It leads straight into Matthew 5:43–48 and Romans 12:17–21, where we are told to feed a hungry enemy and to leave vengeance to God. Ask the class about the smaller version of this, which is where most of us live: the quiet satisfaction when a critic gets embarrassed, when a rival’s plan fails, when someone who wronged us gets a bad report. Then ask what it would cost to pray honestly for that person’s good this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the building imagery through 24:3–4, 24:15, and 24:27. Note what is being built in each verse, and write out the order verse 27 gives for doing it.*

In 24:3–4 wisdom builds a house and knowledge fills its rooms, which is about a household, not masonry. In 24:15 the wicked man is warned not to lie in wait against the dwelling of the righteous or plunder his resting place. In 24:27 the order is given: prepare the work outside, make it fit for yourself in the field, and afterward build your house. The field comes before the house. Provision, character, and diligence come before the visible structure everyone admires.

2. *Read Proverbs 24:11–12 alongside James 4:17 and Luke 10:30–37. Write two sentences on the sin of doing nothing, and name the place it most often shows up in your own week.*

James 4:17 says that to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. The Samaritan in Luke 10 is commended not for avoiding harm but for crossing the road, and the priest and the Levite are condemned for doing nothing at all while being perfectly respectable. Put together with Proverbs 24:11–12, the Bible treats informed inaction as a sin of commission, not a minor failure of enthusiasm. Answers on where this shows up will vary; look for honesty rather than eloquence.

3. *List everything 24:30–34 tells you about the sluggard’s field, the condition it was in, and how it got that way. How long does that kind of ruin actually take?*

The field belonged to a man void of understanding. It was grown over with thorns, its surface covered with nettles, and its stone wall broken down. Nobody attacked it. The explanation is in verses 33 and 34: a little sleep, a little

slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty comes like a prowler. Ruin of this kind takes a season or two of small permissions. That is exactly how a marriage, a Bible habit, a body, or a congregation goes to thorns.

4. *Verses 21 and 22 join fearing the Lord and honoring the king. Read Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–17, then describe the honor a Christian owes a government whose decisions he dislikes.*

Romans 13 calls civil authority God's minister, appointed by Him, and commands taxes, respect, and honor. First Peter 2 says to submit for the Lord's sake, to honor all people, to fear God, and to honor the king, and Peter wrote that while Nero reigned. The honor a Christian owes is not agreement but respect, obedience in everything that does not require sin (Acts 5:29), prayer for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–2), and speech about them that he would be willing to have God hear.

5. *Verse 27 says to prepare your work outside, make it ready in the field, and afterward build your house. Name one thing in your life you have been building before its foundation was laid, and write down the one step you will take this week to put it back in order.*

Answers will vary. Common answers are a marriage built before either person had the character to sustain it, a lifestyle built on credit, a ministry built before a private walk with God, or a reputation built ahead of a real character. Look for one identifiable step: a budget, an appointment, a conversation, a habit begun this week rather than a resolution made for someday.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verse 16 is not a promise that a Christian can never be lost. Falling and rising describes the resilience of the righteous; Scripture is equally plain that a believer can fall away and be lost if he does not rise (Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:26–31; 2 Peter 2:20–22; Galatians 5:4). Teach both.
- Keep the genre in front of the class. Verses 3 and 4 do not guarantee a prosperous household to every wise person, and verses 33 and 34 do not mean every poor person is lazy.
- Verses 21 and 22 can turn a class into a political discussion in ninety seconds. Keep it on Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, and keep current officeholders out of it.

Three Parables of Refusal

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These three parables are one answer, delivered in the temple to the men who had just demanded Jesus' credentials. The first is short and disarming. A father tells two sons to go work in the vineyard; one refuses and later regrets it and goes, the other says "I go, sir," and does not. Jesus makes them render the verdict themselves, and then applies it: tax collectors and harlots are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you, because John came in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him even after you saw them believe.

The second parable is an indictment built on Isaiah 5. The landowner plants, hedges, digs, builds, leases, and goes away. He sends servants for his fruit and they are beaten, killed, and stoned. Finally he sends his son, saying, "They will respect my son," and the tenants kill him to seize the inheritance. Again Jesus makes the leaders pronounce sentence on themselves. Then He quotes Psalm 118 about the stone the builders rejected and says plainly in verse 43 that the kingdom will be taken from them and given to a nation bearing its fruits.

The third is the largest. A king makes a wedding for his son, and the invited guests will not come, one going to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seizing and killing the servants. The king sends armies, burns their city, and fills the hall with whoever can be found on the highways, both bad and good. Then comes the scene that unsettles every reader: a guest without a wedding garment, speechless when asked, bound and cast out. "For many are called, but few are chosen." The invitation is wide open, and it is still on the King's terms.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- All three parables are spoken in the temple during the last week, to chief priests, elders, and Pharisees who are already planning to arrest Him (21:45–46).
- The vineyard was a standing figure for Israel (Isaiah 5:1–7; Psalm 80:8–16), so the leaders knew exactly who the tenants were, which is why verse 45 says they perceived He was speaking of them.
- Psalm 118 was sung at Passover, and the crowd had just quoted the preceding verses in the triumphal entry. Jesus picks the psalm right up where they left it.
- The burning of the city in 22:7 corresponds to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which Jesus will describe directly in Matthew 24.
- The kingdom given to "a nation bearing the fruits of it" is the church, described in exactly that language by Peter, a chosen generation, a holy nation, His own special people (1 Peter 2:9–10).
- Wedding customs assumed appropriate dress for the occasion; refusing it before a king was an insult, not a misunderstanding.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In the parable of the two sons (21:28–32) one says no and goes, and the other says yes and stays home. Which of the two is a long-established congregation more likely to produce, and what would have to change for the second son to become the first?*

Established congregations are very good at producing second sons, and everyone in the room knows it. The second son's answer is polite, prompt, and public. "I go, sir." Nothing about him is scandalous. He simply never gets to the vineyard. The first son is the person whose life has told God no out loud, and who is now, awkwardly and late, walking out to the field. Jesus says the second man should envy the first.

The change is named in 21:32: they did not relent and believe. The word describes a change of mind that arrives after seeing evidence. The first son "regretted it and went." So ask the practical question: what actually moves a comfortable person from agreement to obedience? Usually it is honesty about one specific thing, a date on the

calendar, and someone who will ask. Have each person write down the assignment he has been agreeing with for years and has never gone out to do.

Question 2. *At the end of the vineyard parable Jesus says the kingdom of God will be taken from these leaders and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it (21:43). Who receives the vineyard, and what specific fruits is the owner looking for?*

The vineyard goes to “a nation bearing the fruits of it.” Peter tells Christians that they are that nation, using the same vocabulary, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who once were not a people (1 Peter 2:9–10). The Lord’s church, made up of Jew and Gentile in one body (Ephesians 2:14–16), is the tenant now. Be plain about what this excludes: there is no future return of the vineyard to a political Israel awaiting a reinstated earthly kingdom. The promises to Abraham and David are fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:16, 26–29; Acts 2:29–36; Colossians 1:13).

Then press the warning, because verse 43 is not only about them. The vineyard was taken from tenants who had it and produced nothing. Fruit in the New Testament is the character of Christ formed in us (Galatians 5:22–23), souls brought to Him (Romans 1:13), good works (Colossians 1:10), and praise (Hebrews 13:15). Ask the class what the owner would find if he came to your congregation for His fruit this quarter. Not what He would find on the calendar, but what He would find in the basket.

Question 3. *The wedding invitation went to everyone on the streets, both bad and good (22:9–10), and yet one man is bound and cast out for not wearing a wedding garment. Why is he put out when he was invited like everyone else, and how does a person make sure he is clothed?*

This is where the parable gets personal. Everyone in that hall came in off the street; nobody earned an invitation, and the text says both bad and good were brought in. So the garment cannot represent merit. It represents coming on the King’s terms rather than your own, receiving what the King provides and wearing it. The man is speechless in verse 12 because he has no answer; he wanted the feast without the King’s conditions.

The New Testament tells us how a person is clothed. Galatians 3:27 says as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Colossians 3:10–14 says to put on the new man, and above all things to put on love. Revelation 19:8 says the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Now handle 22:14 carefully. “Many are called, but few are chosen” does not teach that God arbitrarily selects individuals for salvation. The call goes out to all through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14), and the chosen are those who answer it and remain clothed. That is precisely why Peter says to make your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Election is real, it is in Christ (Ephesians 1:4), and it is entered and kept by obedient faith.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Isaiah 5:1–7 before you read Matthew 21:33–41. List every detail Jesus borrows from Isaiah, and then name the detail He adds that Isaiah does not have.*

From Isaiah 5 Jesus takes the planting of the vineyard, the hedge, the winepress dug in it, the tower built in it, and the owner’s expectation of fruit. What He adds is the tenants. In Isaiah the vineyard itself fails and produces wild grapes; in Matthew the vineyard is fine and the caretakers are the problem. That shift moves the indictment from the nation in general to its leadership in particular, which is exactly why 21:45 says the chief priests and Pharisees knew He was talking about them.

2. *Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22–23 in 21:42. Look up Acts 4:10–12 and 1 Peter 2:4–8 and trace how the apostles used the very same verse. Who is the stone, and who are the builders?*

The stone is Christ. Peter says so twice, in Acts 4:11 with the rulers standing in front of him, and again in 1 Peter 2:4–8 where he stacks Psalm 118 together with Isaiah 28:16 and Isaiah 8:14. The builders are the men whose whole business was to know what God was building, the religious leadership. The irony is complete: the professionals examined the stone, rejected it, and God made it the head of the corner. Acts 4:12 adds that there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

3. Take the three parables in order, the two sons, the vineyard, and the wedding. Write one sentence on what each adds to the one before it.

The two sons exposes the gap between saying and doing. The vineyard raises the stakes from personal disobedience to the murder of the owner's son and the loss of the vineyard itself. The wedding feast widens the scope, showing that when the invited will not come the invitation goes to everyone on the highway, and then narrows it again to the one man who came on his own terms. Together they move from hypocrisy, to rejection, to the surprising breadth of grace, to the seriousness of its conditions.

4. Matthew 21:32 says tax collectors and harlots believed John, and that the leaders, having seen it, did not afterward relent and believe. Why is it harder for a respectable person to repent than for a notorious one? Read Luke 18:9-14 before you answer.

The respectable person has more to lose and less that is obvious to confess. Repentance requires admitting that your entire self-presentation has been wrong, and the more successfully religious a person has been, the more that admission costs. The tax collector in Luke 18:13 has nothing to protect, so he can say, God be merciful to me a sinner. The Pharisee is comparing himself upward and has nothing to repent of that he can see. Matthew 21:32 adds the hardening factor: they saw the evidence and still did not relent, and every refusal makes the next one easier.

5. The first son said no and then went. Identify one thing you have already told God no about, whether with words or simply by putting it off, and go do it this week before you tell anyone you have changed your mind.

Answers will vary, and this one should be slightly uncomfortable. Listen for things people have been agreeing with for years: being baptized, being restored, apologizing to a family member, teaching a class, giving as they have prospered, ending a relationship. The instruction to go before announcing it is deliberate. The second son's problem was that talking about it felt like doing it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Matthew 21:43: the kingdom is given to the church, which is the nation bearing fruit (1 Peter 2:9-10). Do not leave room for a future restoration of an earthly political kingdom to national Israel. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33-36; Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25).
- Matthew 22:14 is not a proof text for unconditional election. God calls through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), and the chosen are those in Christ who answer and continue (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10). Say so plainly, because someone in the room has heard otherwise.
- The wedding garment: do not build an elaborate system on it. The point is that the man came on his own terms. Connect it to putting on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27) and to the new man of Colossians 3:10-14.
- The burning of the city in 22:7 refers to the judgment that fell on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Keep it there and away from modern speculation about end-time events.

Be of Good Cheer, Paul

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The crowd listens until Paul reaches the word Gentiles, and then the whole thing detonates again. They throw off their clothes and fling dust in the air. The Roman commander, who has understood none of the Hebrew speech, falls back on standard procedure and orders Paul stretched out for examination by scourging. Paul's quiet question to the centurion, whether it is lawful to scourge a Roman uncondemned, stops the proceeding instantly and frightens the officer who had bound him. Roman citizenship, which Paul holds by birth, becomes the thread God uses to carry him all the way to Rome.

The next day the commander convenes the Sanhedrin, and the hearing goes badly from the first sentence. Paul claims a good conscience, the high priest orders him struck, and Paul answers with a flash of anger he immediately retracts when he is reminded of Exodus 22:28. Then, knowing the council is half Sadducee and half Pharisee, he declares that he is on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead, and the room comes apart. The soldiers have to extract him by force. It is a scene of complete human disorder.

And then comes verse 11, the quiet center of the passage. That night the Lord stands by him and says, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

Everything after that is God keeping His word through completely ordinary means: a conspiracy of forty men, a nephew in the right corridor, a commander who takes the boy seriously, two hundred soldiers, a night ride, and a letter to Felix.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Roman citizens were legally protected from examination by scourging and from punishment without trial. Falsely claiming citizenship was a capital offense, which is why the claim was believed.
- The Sanhedrin was composed of Sadducees, largely the priestly aristocracy, and Pharisees. Luke notes the theological fault line in 23:8: Sadducees denied the resurrection, angels, and spirits.
- Ananias the high priest served roughly A.D. 47 to 59 and was known for greed and violence. He was killed by Jewish zealots at the start of the war with Rome.
- Claudius Lysias's letter is a small masterpiece of self-presentation. Compare 23:27 with what actually happened in 21:33 and 22:24.
- Antipatris and Caesarea: Caesarea was the Roman administrative capital of Judea, where Felix the governor resided. Paul will be held there roughly two years.
- This is about A.D. 57. From this arrest until the end of Acts, Paul is a prisoner, and from prison the gospel reaches governors, a king, a ship's company, and Rome itself.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Twice in this reading Paul uses a legal protection instead of quietly accepting mistreatment (22:25 and 23:6, and again through his nephew in 23:16–22). How does that square with turning the other cheek, and how would you decide which response a situation calls for?*

There is no contradiction, but there is a judgment to make. Turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:38–42) forbids personal retaliation; it does not forbid using lawful means for protection or for the advance of the gospel. Paul never strikes back, never organizes resistance, and never curses his attackers. What he does is invoke a legal right that stops an unlawful act, and the result is that he lives to preach in Caesarea, on Malta, and in Rome. Jesus Himself, struck in John 18:23, did not silently absorb it; He asked for the legal basis of the blow.

Help the class find the dividing line. Ask three questions of any situation: Am I seeking vengeance or protection? Does this serve the gospel or only my pride? Can I do this without hating the person? Paul absorbed a great deal without protest, beatings, stonings, and imprisonments, and the times he pressed his rights were the times a principle or a mission was at stake (compare Acts 16:37). Give the class a live example, such as an unjust accusation at work, and let them reason it out.

Question 2. *In 23:11 the Lord stands by Paul at night and says, “Be of good cheer.” Look carefully at what had just happened and at what was about to happen. Why would Paul need that word on that particular night, and what exactly did the Lord promise him and not promise him?*

Consider the night he had just had. He had come to Jerusalem with a gift for the poor and had been beaten in the temple, nearly scourged, nearly torn apart in the council, and rescued twice by pagan soldiers. His own people wanted him dead, and the last thing he heard was shouting. He may well have concluded that his whole plan, his hope of going to Rome and on to Spain (Romans 15:23–25), was finished. That is the night the Lord stood by him.

Now note carefully what is promised. Not safety, not release, not comfort, not a short wait. He is promised that he will bear witness at Rome. Two years in Caesarea, a storm, a shipwreck, a viper, and a chain are all included in the promise being kept. Teach the class the difference between God’s promise that His purpose will stand and our assumption about how it will feel. Then ask what they have been calling a dead end that God may be calling a route. Add the caution plainly: this was a revelation given to an apostle, not a pattern for expecting visions today. We have His word standing by us instead (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:3).

Question 3. *Paul says in 23:1 that he has lived in all good conscience before God to this day, then in 23:3 calls the high priest a whitewashed wall, and in 23:5 backs down the moment Scripture is brought to bear. What do those three verses together teach about conscience, temper, and submitting to the Word even when you are in the right?*

Three things stand together here. First, a good conscience is a real and good thing to have, and Paul claims it repeatedly (Acts 24:16; 2 Timothy 1:3). But a clear conscience is not proof of being right; Paul had a clear conscience while he was dragging Christians to prison (Acts 23:1 with 26:9–11). Conscience must be trained by the word of God, or it will simply certify whatever we already believe.

Second, a good man can lose his temper. Whatever explanation we give for 23:3, whether Paul did not recognize the high priest in an irregular setting or did not acknowledge such conduct as befitting the office, his own response in verse 5 treats it as needing correction. Third, and best, look at how fast he yields. He does not defend himself, explain his feelings, or point out that he was right about the man. He quotes Scripture against himself and stops. Ask your class when they last did that in an argument, and what it would do to their marriages and their eldership meetings if it became a habit.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything that happens to Paul from 22:22 through 23:35 in order. Count how many times his life is preserved, and note the means God used each time.*

In order: the crowd erupts at the word Gentiles and calls for his death; the commander takes him into the barracks and orders scourging; Paul claims Roman citizenship and the examination stops; the Sanhedrin is convened; he is struck at the high priest’s order; he raises the resurrection and the council divides; the soldiers pull him out by force; the Lord stands by him at night; forty men vow to kill him; his nephew hears and reports it; the commander sends him to Caesarea by night with a large escort; he is delivered to Felix with a letter and kept in Herod’s judgment hall. His life is preserved at least four times, by soldiers, by a legal right, by soldiers again, and by a boy who was listening.

2. *Read Acts 23:6–10. Decide whether Paul’s statement about the resurrection was a maneuver or the truth, and support your answer from Acts 24:15 and 26:6–8.*

It was the truth, and Luke expects us to see that. Paul does know the council will divide, and he says so deliberately, but the statement itself is exactly what he affirms under oath elsewhere. In Acts 24:15 he tells Felix he has hope toward God that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. In Acts 26:6–8 he tells

Agrippa he is judged for the hope of the promise made to the fathers. The resurrection of Jesus was in fact the whole issue between Paul and the Sadducees, and it always had been (Acts 4:1-2).

3. *Paul is struck at the high priest's command and answers sharply, then quotes Exodus 22:28 when corrected. Compare how Jesus answered the same treatment in John 18:22-23, and read 1 Peter 2:21-23. What is the difference, and what is the same?*

Jesus answered with a question that exposed the injustice, calmly and without insult: if I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me? Paul answered with an accusation, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall," and then retracted it. What is the same is that neither man retaliated and neither surrendered the truth. The difference is in the heat of the words, and Peter tells us which of the two is the standard: Christ, who when He was reviled did not revile in return, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

4. *Forty men bound themselves under a curse not to eat until they had killed Paul (23:12-15). Trace step by step how God undid that plot, and note how ordinary every one of the means was.*

The means were entirely unremarkable. Someone talked where a young man could hear. The young man had the courage to go to the barracks. Paul asked a centurion for an introduction rather than trying to handle it himself. The commander listened to a boy, took him aside privately, and believed him. Then Roman military procedure did the rest with two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen. No angel appeared, no chains fell off. God kept the promise of verse 11 through a nephew, an officer, and a night march. That is how most of His providence looks.

5. *Paul's young nephew did a brave thing with information he happened to overhear. Name one thing you know that someone else needs to hear, decide who it is, and set the day this week you will tell them.*

Answers will vary. Look for something real that the person has been sitting on out of fear or awkwardness: a warning, an apology, a piece of news, a confession, an invitation, a word of encouragement he has meant to say for a year. Press for the name and the day. The nephew in this chapter is unnamed, gets one paragraph in Scripture, and saved the apostle to the Gentiles.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Acts 23:11 is a revelation given to an apostle. Do not let the class conclude that Christians should expect visions or a voice today. God now speaks to us through the completed Scriptures (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10).
- Rights and government: this passage can drift into politics fast. Keep it on Paul's example, on Romans 13, and on 1 Peter 2:13-17.
- Paul's good conscience (23:1) must not be taught as a test of truth. He had one while persecuting the church (26:9). Conscience is a wonderful servant and a poor authority.
- Do not use the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection to make a general point about skeptics without noting that Jesus answered them from Scripture (Matthew 22:29-32), which is the subject of next week's gospel reading.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Numbers 30-36 • Proverbs 25 • Matthew 22:15-46 • Acts 24:1-25:12

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