

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 22 OF 104

Rendering What Is Due

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Numbers 30–36
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 25
Gospels	Matthew 22:15–46
General New Testament	Acts 24:1–25:12

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to make obligation feel like something other than a burden. Every reading is about what one party owes another: a vow owed to God, protection owed to a brother, justice owed to the dead, a fair word owed to a neighbor, bread owed to an enemy, taxes owed to Caesar, and a whole self owed to God. A class that leaves this week thinking mainly about what it is owed has missed it entirely.

Doctrinally, the weight falls on Matthew 22:41–46. Psalm 110:1 puts Christ at the right hand of God until His enemies are made His footstool, and the apostles read that as a present reign begun at the resurrection and enthronement (Acts 2:33–36; Hebrews 10:12–13; 1 Corinthians 15:25). Settle that clearly and you have answered premillennialism from Jesus' own lips. The Sadducee exchange also matters: Jesus grounds the resurrection on the precise wording of Scripture, which is a standing rebuke to careless reading. And Numbers 31 and 33 will raise the conquest question; handle it as long-deferred judgment on entrenched wickedness, executed under a theocracy that no longer exists, and be clear that Christians wage no such war.

Formationally, watch for the ones who quietly did not pay. Reuben and Gad might have settled comfortably and let their brothers fight. Felix might have released an innocent man any day for two years. The men of Hezekiah could have let Solomon's proverbs disappear, and they copied them instead. Ask your class this, and give them time: name one thing you owe somebody, a word, an apology, a debt, a promise, a visit, that has been outstanding long enough that you have stopped noticing it. Then name the day you will pay it.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 22:15–46. It is the richest reading of the week and carries the doctrinal weight. Give ten minutes to the coin, fifteen to the Sadducees and the resurrection, ten to the great commandment, and save the last fifteen for Psalm 110 and where Christ is seated right now.

Second session: Take up Acts 24:1–25:12. Read the two speeches aloud with two different readers so the class hears the contrast, then spend the second half on Felix trembling and on the convenient season that never arrived. Be prepared for someone to respond.

The other two readings: Numbers 30–36 covers a great deal of ground; tell the class to read for the cities of refuge in chapter 35 and the agreement in chapter 32, and offer a short answer in class to anyone troubled by chapter 31. Proverbs 25 is best taken a handful of verses at a time through the week.

Vows, Boundaries, and Refuge

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Numbers ends with logistics, and the logistics are full of theology. Chapter 30 treats vows as binding, with provisions for a vow made by a daughter still in her father's house or by a wife whose husband hears of it. The arrangement protects a household from being bound by a rash promise while still insisting that words matter. Chapter 31 is the hardest chapter in the book, the judgment on Midian for the seduction at Peor, in which Balaam himself is killed and the spoil is divided and purified.

Chapter 32 is a study in how to handle a request that looks like retreat. Reuben and Gad have large herds and see good grazing land east of the Jordan. Moses hears it as the spirit of Kadesh returning and says so bluntly. Their answer is the right one: we will build folds for our flocks and cities for our little ones, and then we will go armed before our brothers until every man has his inheritance. Moses accepts, with a warning attached: if you do not, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.

Chapters 33 through 36 map the future. The itinerary of the whole wilderness route is written down, stage by stage, so the nation will remember where God brought them from. The borders of the land are fixed. Forty-eight cities are given to the Levites, who have no tribal territory, and six of those become cities of refuge where a man who killed without intent may live until the death of the high priest. The book ends with a small property case being settled so that no tribe's inheritance is moved.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Israel is still in the plains of Moab. Nothing in these chapters happens in the land; everything is preparation for it.
- The judgment on Midian in chapter 31 is explicitly tied to the counsel of Balaam and the seduction at Peor (31:16), which had already cost twenty-four thousand Israelite lives.
- The cities of refuge assume the ancient practice of the avenger of blood, a family member responsible for pursuing a killer. God does not abolish the custom; He regulates it by requiring a trial before the congregation (35:12, 24).
- The manslayer stayed in the city until the death of the high priest (35:25, 28), an appointed death that released him. The writer of Hebrews works the same territory with a better High Priest (Hebrews 6:18–20; 7:23–27).
- Levites received cities and pasture rather than territory, because the Lord was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20; Joshua 13:33).
- Numbers 33:52 and 55 command Israel to drive out the inhabitants and destroy their images, with a warning that whoever remains will be irritants in their eyes and thorns in their sides. That warning is precisely what Judges reports.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Numbers 30:2 says that when a man vows a vow he shall not break his word. Read that beside Ecclesiastes 5:4–5 and Matthew 5:33–37. Why does God attach such weight to what we say, and where are we most casual about promises we have already made?*

God takes words seriously because He is a God who keeps His own. Numbers 23:19 has just told us that He is not a man that He should lie, and the entire hope of Israel rests on promises He spoke centuries earlier. A people made in His image and carrying His name are expected to speak the same way. Ecclesiastes 5:4–5 says better not to vow than to vow and not pay, and Jesus goes further in Matthew 5:33–37, telling His disciples to be the kind of people whose plain yes and no need no reinforcement.

The application is close to home. Most of us do not make formal vows; we make ordinary promises and let them quietly expire. Marriage vows. A promise to a child. A pledge to give. A commitment to teach a class or visit a widow. An agreement with an employer. Ask the class to name one specific promise that has been sitting unpaid, and then note that Numbers 30 gives no category for a vow that simply got inconvenient.

Question 2. *Reuben and Gad ask for the land on the near side of the Jordan, and Moses responds as though Kadesh were happening all over again (32:6–15). What was he afraid of, and what does the agreement they finally reach show about what they owed their brothers?*

Moses hears an echo. Thirty-eight years earlier ten men came back from this same land and discouraged the heart of the whole congregation, and everybody died in the desert because of it. So he says it outright in 32:6–7: shall your brothers go to war while you sit here, and why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel? His fear is not that they want good pasture. His fear is contagion, that one group opting out will hollow out the resolve of the rest.

The solution they reach is worth writing down. They will secure their families, then cross over armed and stay at the front until every other tribe has received its inheritance, and only then go home. Their own comfort waits on their brothers' inheritance. Ask the class where that principle applies now: the member who has his own family settled and considers the congregation's work finished, the class nobody will teach because everyone's children are grown, the mission point that has no supporters left. Being settled is not the same as being finished.

Question 3. *The cities of refuge protect the man who killed accidentally and refuse to shelter the murderer (35:9–34). Walk through how the system worked. How does it hold justice and mercy together, and what does it say about the worth of a single human life?*

Walk the system through. A man kills another without hatred or lying in wait, perhaps an axe head flying off a handle. The avenger of blood, a relative, is coming. The man runs to one of six designated cities, and the congregation judges between him and the avenger (35:24). If it was accidental he lives in that city, safe but confined, until the death of the high priest, after which he may return to his own possession. If it was murder, the city gives him no protection at all, and no ransom may be taken for his life.

Two convictions hold the system together. First, human life bears God's image, so blood is not a thing that can be paid off (35:31–33; Genesis 9:6). Second, intent matters, so a tragedy must not be punished as a crime. God builds both into the law of the land. Then point gently to the shadow: a place of safety appointed by God, entered by running to it, and a release that comes at the death of a high priest. Hebrews 6:18 speaks of those who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, and our High Priest died once for all.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the six cities of refuge from Numbers 35:13–14 and Joshua 20:7–8, and note where each sits on the map. Why did their placement matter so much to a frightened man running for his life?*

Kedesh in Galilee, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron, west of the Jordan; Bezer in the wilderness, Ramoth in Gilead, and Golan in Bashan east of the Jordan. Three on each side of the river, spaced so that no one in Israel lived an impossible distance from safety. Jewish tradition holds that the roads to them were kept clear and marked. The placement matters because a man running for his life has no time to search, and because God wanted mercy to be reachable from anywhere in the land.

2. *Numbers 32:23 contains the famous line, "be sure your sin will find you out." Read it in its full context, then compare Galatians 6:7–8 and Hebrews 4:13. Who exactly was Moses warning, and about what?*

Moses is warning Reuben and Gad, and the sin in view is very specific: the sin of failing to keep the promise they had just made to cross over armed and fight beside their brothers. The verse is usually quoted about secret sin in general, and that application is fair enough in light of Hebrews 4:13, which says all things are naked and open before Him, and Galatians 6:7, which says whatever a man sows he will also reap. But notice the original force. The sin Moses had in mind was the quiet abandonment of a commitment, which is exactly the sin most likely to be considered invisible.

3. *Skim the stages recorded in Numbers 33 and pick out three places you remember from earlier in the story. Write a sentence on what happened at each. Why would God have Moses keep the list?*

Answers will vary; the list runs from Rameses to the plains of Moab. Most classes will recall the Red Sea crossing, Marah with its bitter water made sweet, Elim with its twelve wells and seventy palms, Sinai, Kibroth Hattaavah where the graves of craving were dug, Kadesh where they refused the land, and Mount Hor where Aaron died. God had it written down for the same reason a family keeps photographs. A people about to be prosperous in a good land needed a record of who fed them when there was nothing.

4. *Numbers 35:31 forbids accepting a ransom for the life of a murderer. What does that statute say about the worth of the victim, and how does it differ from the way people usually speak about the death of a stranger?*

It says the victim is priceless. In the surrounding cultures a wealthy man could often pay compensation for a killing, which meant that in practice the poor were cheap and the rich were above the law. God forbids it outright: the land cannot be cleansed of innocent blood except by the blood of the one who shed it. People today often speak of a stranger's death as a statistic, a headline, or an argument. Scripture speaks of it as the destruction of an image-bearer that heaven notices.

5. *Reuben and Gad promised not to return to their own houses until every Israelite had received his inheritance (32:18). Name one commitment you made to a brother or sister in Christ that you never finished, and set the date you will finish it.*

Answers will vary. Listen for unfinished commitments rather than large new ones: a class promised, a visit promised, a debt owed to a brother, a job half done for a widow, a young Christian someone agreed to study with and then dropped. The Reubenites' promise had a clear end point, and a date is what turns intention into obedience.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Numbers 31 is genuinely hard. Teach it honestly: this is judicial judgment on a people who had deliberately seduced Israel into idolatry and immorality (31:16), executed by a theocratic nation under direct divine command after long patience (compare Genesis 15:16). Do not sensationalize it, do not apologize for God, and do not leave it hanging. Say plainly that no such command exists for anyone today. The Christian's warfare is spiritual, and his weapons are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:12).
- Numbers 30 on the vows of daughters and wives belongs to a household order under the Law of Moses and to a legal system of property and inheritance. Do not press it into a modern argument, and do not bind Old Covenant practice on Christians (Colossians 2:14–17).
- The cities of refuge illustrate God's justice and mercy beautifully, and the high priest connection is legitimate (Hebrews 6:18–20). Keep the typology restrained; do not assign meaning to each of the six names.
- The command to drive out the Canaanites (33:52–56) will come up again in Deuteronomy and Joshua. Frame it now as judgment on entrenched, centuries-old wickedness (Leviticus 18:24–25; Deuteronomy 9:4–5), not as ethnic warfare, and note that God warned Israel He would treat them the same way if they imitated it.

A Word Fitly Spoken

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The heading in verse 1 is worth noticing. These are Solomon's proverbs, "which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied." Two and a half centuries after Solomon, during a reformation, men sat down and preserved wisdom that might otherwise have been lost. That is a small picture of how God has kept His word for us, and a reminder that somebody always has to do the unglamorous work of copying what matters.

The chapter is unusually rich in images, and they mostly concern how to live with other people: how to behave before a king, how to conduct a dispute, how to speak, how to visit a neighbor without wearing out your welcome, how to treat an enemy, and how to recognize an unreliable man. Verse 11, apples of gold in settings of silver, is about a word spoken at the right time, and verse 20 gives the mirror image, taking away a garment in cold weather or singing cheerful songs to a heavy heart. Timing is not a minor part of kindness; it is most of it.

The chapter ends with the sentence that hangs over everything else: whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls. In the ancient world an unwallled city was not merely vulnerable; it was finished. Anyone could walk in and take anything. That is the picture Solomon leaves with the reader, and it makes self-control a matter of survival rather than of politeness.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Chapters 25 through 29 form the Hezekiah collection, gathered around 700 B.C. during a period of national reform (2 Chronicles 29–31).
- Several proverbs here assume life around a royal court, which is why so many involve kings, patience, and the danger of self-promotion.
- Coals of fire in 25:22 is a figure, not a curse. Paul quotes it in Romans 12:20 as the Christian alternative to vengeance.
- Remember the genre. These are general observations about how life normally runs, and they are meant to be read one at a time and chewed, not skimmed as a chapter.
- The proverbs about honey (16 and 27) and about a neighbor's house (17) are about limits inside good things, which is a theme worth pointing out explicitly.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 25:11 compares a word fitly spoken to apples of gold in settings of silver. Think of a time someone said exactly the right thing to you at exactly the right moment. What made it land, and what mistake does verse 20 describe when we get the timing wrong?*

Apples of gold in settings of silver is a picture of something beautiful, valuable, and fitted exactly to its place. Notice that the proverb does not praise a true word or a clever word but a word fitly spoken, a word right for this person at this moment. That is why verse 12 follows with a wise rebuke landing on an obedient ear like a gold earring, and why verse 13 compares a faithful messenger to the cold of snow in harvest time. All three are about fit.

Verse 20 gives the failure mode, and every one of us has committed it: singing songs to a heavy heart, which the proverb likens to taking off a man's coat in cold weather or pouring vinegar on soda. Cheerfulness aimed at someone in grief does not comfort; it isolates. Ask the class what they actually needed from people at their lowest point. Usually the answer is presence, a short honest sentence, and a willingness to sit still, which is precisely what Job's friends did well for seven days and then ruined by talking.

Question 2. Verse 28 says a man with no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down and without walls. Picture that literally for a moment. What walks into an undefended city, and where in your own life are the walls lowest right now?

A city without walls loses everything by degrees and without a battle. Anything that wants in, gets in. Apply it: an unruly temper lets in ruined relationships; an unruly appetite lets in debt, disease, and shame; an unruly tongue lets in conflict that takes years to undo; unruly eyes let in what cannot be unseen. Nobody storms the gate. The gate is already down.

Then point at the good news. Self-control is fruit of the Spirit, not the product of willpower alone (Galatians 5:22–23), and it is something Christians are told to add on purpose (2 Peter 1:5–6). Paul describes disciplining his body and bringing it into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27). Ask each person to name the lowest section of his own wall and one brick he will lay this week: a time the phone goes away, a route that avoids a place, a sentence he will not say, a friend who is allowed to ask.

Question 3. Verses 21 and 22 tell you to give your hungry enemy bread and your thirsty enemy water, and Paul quotes the passage in Romans 12:20. Work out together what the coals of fire mean, and then say what this would actually require of you toward the person you find hardest to love.

The coals of fire are almost certainly a figure for the burning shame and softening of heart that undeserved kindness produces. Some have connected it to an ancient practice of carrying live coals to a neighbor whose fire had gone out. Either way, the intent is plain from the second half of the verse, “and the Lord will reward you,” and from Paul’s use of it in Romans 12:20–21, which ends, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. This is not a subtle method of revenge; it is the refusal of revenge.

Make the class be specific, because this is where the passage stops being admirable and starts being costly. Who is the person? What does bread and water look like in that relationship, a message, a meal, help with a move, a public defense of his reputation, an end to telling the story about him? Then remind them of the ground the New Testament gives: God fed us while we were His enemies (Romans 5:8–10), and Jesus prayed for the men driving the nails.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. Collect every proverb in this chapter that deals with speech, and sort your list into three columns: what to say, when to say it, and when to say nothing at all.

Answers will vary in arrangement, but the chapter is thick with it: verse 9 on keeping a confidence, verse 11 on the right word at the right time, verse 12 on a wise rebuke and a hearing ear, verse 13 on a faithful messenger, verse 14 on boasting of a gift never given, verse 15 on a soft tongue breaking a bone, verse 18 on false witness, verse 20 on cheerfulness misapplied, verse 23 on a backbiting tongue, and verse 24 on a contentious woman in a shared house. Taken together the chapter teaches that content, timing, and audience are all part of whether a word is good.

2. Read Proverbs 25:6–7 and then Luke 14:7–11. Note how Jesus uses the proverb and what He adds to it that Solomon does not say.

Solomon gives it as court wisdom: do not exalt yourself before the king or stand in the place of great men, because it is better to be told come up here than to be put lower in front of a noble. Jesus takes the same counsel and turns it into kingdom truth at a Sabbath dinner, watching guests pick out the best seats. What He adds is the principle underneath it in Luke 14:11, whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Solomon gives good manners; Jesus reveals the way God actually runs the universe.

3. Verse 2 says it is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to search one out. Compare Deuteronomy 29:29. Which things has God kept to Himself, and how should that shape the way we handle questions Scripture never answers?

God has kept to Himself such things as the timing of the end (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7), the full explanation of His providence (Romans 11:33–34), and a great deal about the unseen world. Deuteronomy 29:29 draws the line exactly: the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may

do them. The revealed things are given for obedience, not for speculation. A class that learns to say “Scripture does not say” has been given a great gift, and it will keep them out of a dozen ditches.

4. *Verses 16 and 27 both warn about eating too much honey. Name three genuinely good things in your life that turn harmful in excess, and describe how you can tell when you have crossed the line in each one.*

Answers will vary. Common and honest answers include food, rest, work, entertainment, exercise, hobbies, even study or service that crowds out the family. The usual markers of crossing the line are these: it starts requiring defense, it starts requiring concealment, it begins to cost someone else, and it is no longer something you choose but something that chooses you. Verse 27 adds a sharp one, that seeking one’s own glory is not glory, which suggests that even good reputation becomes sickly in excess.

5. *Verse 9 says to debate your case with your neighbor himself and not to reveal another’s secret. Think of a conflict you are currently discussing with people who are not part of it. Decide who you will go to directly this week, and stop talking to everyone else about it.*

Answers will vary. The point of the exercise is to stop the sideways conversation. Proverbs 25:9–10 warns that the one who spreads a matter will carry lasting shame, and Matthew 18:15 says to go tell him his fault between you and him alone. Look for a commitment to one direct conversation and an explicit decision about whom the person will stop talking to. Most church trouble is not caused by conflict; it is caused by conflict discussed with everyone except the person involved.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Keep reminding the class that a proverb is a general principle. Verse 15 does not guarantee that a soft tongue always wins over a hard ruler.
- Verse 22, coals of fire, is sometimes taught as a clever revenge. Romans 12:19–21 forbids that reading outright. Make the correction plainly.
- Verse 24 about the contentious woman can turn into a joke that wounds somebody in the room. Handle it evenhandedly; Proverbs has just as much to say about a harsh, lazy, or dishonest man.

Four Questions in the Temple

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This is a coordinated campaign. Matthew says the Pharisees took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk, and they send disciples along with Herodians, two groups that agreed on almost nothing except their dislike of Jesus. The tax question is a perfect trap: say yes and the crowd turns on Him as a collaborator, say no and the Herodians deliver Him to Rome. Jesus asks for the coin, asks whose image is on it, and answers, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. The coin bears Caesar's image; you bear God's.

The Sadducees come next with a story they have probably used for years, a woman married successively to seven brothers, designed to make the resurrection look ridiculous. Jesus does not argue with the story. He says they are mistaken on two counts, not knowing the Scriptures and not knowing the power of God, and then proves the resurrection from the Pentateuch, the only part of Scripture they fully accepted. God said, "I am the God of Abraham," long after Abraham died, and God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

A lawyer then asks which commandment is greatest, and Jesus answers from Deuteronomy and Leviticus: love God with everything you are, love your neighbor as yourself, and on these two hang all the Law and the Prophets. Then He takes His turn. Whose Son is the Christ? David's, they say. Then how does David, writing by the Spirit in Psalm 110, call Him Lord? The answer is the incarnation and the enthronement, and they cannot give it. Matthew notes that from that day nobody dared ask Him anything more.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Still the last week, still in the temple, with the arrest only days away.
- The Herodians supported the family of Herod and Roman arrangements generally; the Pharisees resented Roman rule. Their alliance here shows how badly they wanted Him gone.
- The Sadducees accepted the authority of the books of Moses and denied the resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8), which is why Jesus answers them from Exodus rather than from Daniel or Isaiah.
- The levirate marriage of their story comes from Deuteronomy 25:5–10, where a brother raised up seed for a dead brother.
- Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage most frequently quoted in the New Testament, and it is the foundation of the apostolic preaching that Jesus reigns now at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34–36; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 10:12–13).
- The Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4–5 was recited daily by devout Jews, so Jesus answers the lawyer with the words already in his mouth.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The Pharisees and Herodians try to catch Jesus between Rome and the crowd (22:15–22), and His answer separates what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God. Where do those two claims overlap in your own life, and how do you tell the difference between an inconvenience and an actual conflict?*

Start with the image on the coin, because that is where Jesus starts. The denarius carried Caesar's likeness and inscription, so it could be handed back to Caesar without loss. Then let the class supply the unspoken half: Genesis 1:27 says whose image you carry. Caesar can have the coin. God gets the man. Taxes, obedience to law, respect for office, honest dealing, these are real obligations (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17), and Jesus does not treat them as spiritually trivial.

The overlap is where most of the discussion will go. Time, money, allegiance, speech, and the way we treat people we disagree with politically all sit in both columns. Give the class a working rule: obey the government in

everything that does not require you to disobey God, and when the two genuinely conflict, Acts 5:29 settles it. Then ask the uncomfortable question. Is there anything in your life you would not give to God because Caesar, meaning a career, a schedule, a benefits package, or a political loyalty, has a stronger claim on it?

Question 2. *Jesus tells the Sadducees they are mistaken because they know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (22:29), and then proves the resurrection from the tense of a verb in Exodus 3:6. What does His argument assume about the Bible, and how carefully does it suggest we ought to be reading it?*

His argument assumes that Scripture is exact. He rests the entire doctrine of the resurrection on the present tense of a verb God spoke at a burning bush centuries after Abraham was buried: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." If those men were simply gone, God would have said "I was." That is a level of confidence in the precise wording of Scripture that no careless reader would ever have. Compare John 10:35, where He says the Scripture cannot be broken, and Galatians 3:16, where Paul's argument turns on a singular noun.

Draw two applications. First, for our own reading: slow down. The difference between a verse skimmed and a verse studied is often the difference between a right and a wrong conclusion, and most of the errors in the religious world are built on verses read quickly. Second, for our confidence: Jesus also says they do not know the power of God. Some of the class carry a quiet doubt about resurrection because they have stood at a graveside. The answer is not sentiment. It is that the God who spoke at the bush still speaks of Abraham in the present tense.

Question 3. *The last question is the one Jesus asks: how can the Christ be both David's son and David's Lord (22:41-46)? Read Psalm 110:1 with Acts 2:33-36 and Hebrews 10:12-13. Where is Christ seated right now, and what difference should that make to you on a hard Tuesday afternoon?*

Walk it through slowly, because this is the doctrinal center of the week. David wrote Psalm 110 by the Spirit: "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." A father does not call his descendant Lord, so the Christ must be more than David's son. Jesus is both: son of David according to the flesh, Lord according to His deity and His enthronement. The Pharisees have no answer because they have made Messiah into a national politician.

Now press the enthronement, because Peter does. On Pentecost he quotes this exact psalm and says God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ, and that He is now exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-36). Hebrews 10:12-13 says He sat down and is waiting until His enemies are made His footstool. He is not waiting to begin a reign; He is reigning. There is no future earthly throne in Jerusalem still owed to Him, and Christians have already been translated into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13). For the hard Tuesday, that means the King is not campaigning. He is seated, He is not surprised, and He is praying for you (Hebrews 7:25).

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the four questions in this passage, who asked each one, and what each questioner was hoping to gain. Then note how Jesus answered each: with a coin, with a text, with two commandments, and with a question.*

One, the Pharisees and Herodians on paying tribute to Caesar, hoping to trap Him with either Rome or the crowd. Two, the Sadducees on the woman with seven husbands, hoping to make the resurrection absurd. Three, a lawyer among the Pharisees on the great commandment, testing Him. Four, Jesus Himself on whose Son the Christ is, exposing how little His opponents understood the Scriptures they professed to guard. He answered with a coin, with a text from Moses, with two commands from Moses, and finally with a psalm of David.

2. *Read Exodus 3:6 and then Matthew 22:31-32. Write out Jesus' argument for the resurrection step by step in your own words, and explain why the present tense matters.*

The steps are these. God spoke to Moses at the bush long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died. He said, "I am the God of Abraham," not "I was." God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living, and therefore the dead are raised. The present tense carries the argument, because a covenant relationship God still holds with a man implies that the man still exists, and the covenant included promises reaching beyond his lifetime.

3. *Jesus says all the Law and the Prophets hang on two commandments (22:37-40). Look up Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18, and then Romans 13:8-10 and 1 John 4:20-21. How do the two commands relate, and can either be kept while the other is neglected?*

They are distinct and inseparable. The first is the source and the second is the evidence. Romans 13:8-10 says love is the fulfilling of the law because love works no ill to a neighbor. First John 4:20-21 says flatly that a man who says he loves God while hating his brother is a liar, since he who does not love the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. Neither can be kept while the other is neglected. Love for God that never reaches a neighbor is sentiment, and love for a neighbor without love for God finally has no foundation.

4. *Trace the reaction of the crowd and the questioners through 22:22, 22:33, 22:34, and 22:46. What is the cumulative effect, and why does the silence of verse 46 matter for the week that follows it?*

In 22:22 they marvel and leave Him; in 22:33 the multitudes are astonished at His doctrine; in 22:34 the Pharisees hear that He has silenced the Sadducees and gather again; in 22:46 no one can answer a word, and from that day no one dares ask Him anything more. The effect is a complete public defeat of the religious establishment on its own ground in its own temple. It matters for what follows because it explains chapter 23, where He speaks without interruption, and because it explains why the leaders now abandon debate and turn to treachery.

5. *Loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind is not a feeling you can summon on command. Choose one of the three, name the specific area where you have been holding something back from Him, and hand it over this week in a way you could point to on a calendar.*

Answers will vary. Listen for real specificity and for evidence that could be checked: an hour on the calendar for Scripture and prayer, a resentment surrendered, an expense cut and the money given, a habit of thought confronted, a conversation with God about something never named out loud before. Loving God with the mind, in particular, often goes unnoticed; some in the class need permission to think hard about what they believe and why.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 110 and Matthew 22:44 are your strongest defense all quarter against premillennial teaching. Be plain: Christ is reigning now at the Father's right hand, His kingdom is the church, and the second coming brings the end and the judgment, not the start of an earthly reign (Acts 2:33-36; 1 Corinthians 15:23-26; Hebrews 10:12-13; Colossians 1:13).
- Matthew 22:30 says that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Handle this tenderly. It does not say we will not know one another; it says the institution of marriage belongs to this life. Somebody in the room has buried a husband or wife.
- Render to Caesar can drift into a political argument in a hurry. Keep it on Romans 13 and Acts 5:29 and off current candidates.
- The great commandment must not be preached as if love replaced obedience. Jesus Himself said, if you love Me, keep My commandments (John 14:15), and He said all the Law and the Prophets hang on these, not that they are cancelled by them.

Before Felix and Festus

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The hearing in Caesarea is a small masterpiece of contrast. Tertullus begins with an extravagant compliment to Felix, a governor whose record was brutal enough that even Roman historians said so, and then stacks three charges: Paul is a plague, a mover of sedition among all the Jews in the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes who tried to profane the temple. Paul answers without flattery, sticks to verifiable facts, points out that his accusers from Asia are not even present, and cheerfully concedes the one charge that matters.

That concession is the heart of the passage. “This I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets, and I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” He is not defending a new religion. He is claiming that the hope of Israel has arrived, and that he is the one being consistent.

Then comes the private scene. Felix sends for Paul with his wife Drusilla, herself a Jew and by all accounts taken from a previous husband, and Paul reasons with them about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Felix trembles and says, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” He called for Paul often over two years, hoping for money, and then left him bound to please the Jews. Festus replaces him, the ambush plan resurfaces, and Paul, seeing that Jerusalem means death, says the words that will carry him to Rome: “I appeal to Caesar.”

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Antonius Felix governed Judea roughly A.D. 52 to 59. Tacitus said he wielded the power of a king with the disposition of a slave. Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, and Felix had persuaded her away from her husband.
- Roman law allowed a governor wide discretion to detain a prisoner without verdict, and bribery was common enough that Paul’s two years are entirely believable.
- Porcius Festus succeeded Felix about A.D. 59 and appears in the record as a more competent and less corrupt man, though still eager to please the local leadership.
- The appeal to Caesar was the right of a Roman citizen to have his case transferred to the emperor’s court. Once made, it could not be withdrawn (25:11–12).
- “The Way” is Luke’s regular name for the Christian faith (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22). Paul accepts the substance while rejecting the label “sect.”
- These two years in Caesarea are the setting from which Paul will address Agrippa, and they immediately precede the voyage of Acts 27.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Compare the speech of Tertullus (24:2–8) with Paul’s answer (24:10–21). What is different about how each man handles the truth, and which of Tertullus’s habits show up in ordinary conversation among good people?

Tertullus handles truth as a tool. He opens with praise he does not mean, in order to buy goodwill. He inflates: Paul is a “plague” and a mover of sedition “among all the Jews throughout the world,” which is not a claim anyone could verify and is not meant to be verified. He asserts the temple charge, the one thing actually at issue, without a shred of evidence and without the witnesses who supposedly saw it. Paul, by contrast, dates his arrival at twelve days ago, invites Felix to check it, names exactly what he did in the temple, and points out that the Asian Jews who started the riot ought to be standing there.

Now bring it into the pews, because this is not only a courtroom problem. Flattery to soften someone before you use him. Exaggeration that makes a story better. Repeating a serious accusation while the accuser stays anonymous. Describing a brother's position in a way he would not recognize. Ask the class which of these they have done in the last month, and put Ephesians 4:15 and 4:25 in front of them: speaking the truth in love, and putting away lying, because we are members of one another.

Question 2. *Paul reasons with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, and Felix trembles and puts him off until a convenient season (24:24–25). Why those three subjects for this particular man, and what finally happened to the convenient season?*

Paul preached to the man in front of him. Felix was a governor known for cruelty and graft, sitting beside a woman he had taken from another man, with authority to free a prisoner and no intention of doing it justly. Righteousness confronted his public conduct, self-control confronted his private life, and the judgment to come confronted the assumption that a man in his position never has to answer to anyone. Paul did not scold him and did not flatter him; Luke says he reasoned with him.

The convenient season never came. Two years of easy access to an apostle, many conversations, and Felix leaves office and leaves Paul bound to do the Jews a favor. That is how most people are lost, not by a defiant refusal but by a polite postponement. Put 2 Corinthians 6:2 in front of the class, now is the accepted time, and James 4:13–14. Then ask, kindly and directly, whether anyone in the room has been having a two-year conversation with God about something he already knows he needs to do. Be ready to talk with someone afterward about being baptized or being restored, and do not turn the invitation into a formula; tell them what Scripture actually says to do.

Question 3. *Paul spent two years in custody while a governor waited on a bribe (24:26–27). Two years of an apostle's life, and nothing visible got done. How do you keep serving God faithfully in a stretch where nothing appears to be moving?*

Answer this one honestly, because most of your class is in some version of it. Two years in Caesarea produced no recorded sermon, no congregation planted, no letter we can identify with certainty. From the outside it looks like waste. From the inside, Paul was where God had told him he would be, en route to the Rome he had been promised in 23:11, and along the way a governor, a governor's wife, a king, and a garrison heard the gospel from a man in chains.

Give the class practical handles. Faithfulness in a slow season looks like doing the small duty in front of you, keeping the conscience clear (24:16), taking the opportunities that come to the person you can actually reach, and refusing to measure by visible results. Paul later wrote from prison that the things which happened to him had turned out for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12). Ask who in the room is in a Caesarea right now: unemployed, sick, caring for a parent, in a congregation where nothing seems to grow. Then ask what the small duty in front of that person is this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the charges Tertullus brings in 24:5–6, then find Paul's answer to each one in 24:10–21. Which charge does Paul admit, and how does he reframe it?*

Tertullus charges that Paul is a plague and a creator of dissension among Jews everywhere, that he is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and that he tried to profane the temple. Paul answers that his accusers cannot prove the things they allege (24:13), that he came to Jerusalem to worship and to bring alms, that he was found purified in the temple with no crowd and no tumult, and that the Asian Jews who actually saw whatever happened are absent. The charge he admits is the second, and he reframes it: what they call a sect he calls the Way, and in it he worships the God of his fathers and believes everything written in the Law and the Prophets.

2. *Paul states his own faith in 24:14–15. Write out his confession in three parts, and compare it with Acts 26:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 15:12–22.*

Three parts: he worships the God of his fathers according to the Way; he believes all things written in the Law and in the Prophets; and he has hope toward God of a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Acts 26:6–8 repeats the

third point to Agrippa, tying it to the promise made to the fathers. First Corinthians 15:12–22 shows why he will not let the point go: if there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ is not risen, and if Christ is not risen our preaching and our faith are empty and we are still in our sins.

3. Read Acts 24:16, where Paul says he strives to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. What daily practices would that require, and how would a person know if his conscience had quietly drifted?

It requires daily attention rather than an annual inventory. Paul's word means to exercise or train himself. Practically it means dealing with wrongs quickly rather than filing them (Ephesians 4:26), apologizing to people as well as confessing to God (James 5:16; Matthew 5:23–24), refusing small dishonesties in work and speech, and keeping the conscience informed by Scripture so it warns accurately. A drifting conscience shows itself in the excuses that have become automatic, in the things you no longer feel and once did, and in your reluctance to have a particular area examined.

4. Trace the political calculations of Felix in 24:26–27 and of Festus in 25:9. What was each governor trying to gain, and at whose expense? Compare Proverbs 29:25.

Felix wanted money and, at the end, wanted to leave office with the goodwill of the Jewish leadership, so he left an innocent man bound. Festus, newly arrived and wanting to establish himself with the people he had to govern, asked Paul if he would go up to Jerusalem to be judged, which would have delivered him to the ambush. Both men spent another man's freedom to buy their own convenience. Proverbs 29:25 names the disease exactly: the fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.

5. Felix trembled and did nothing. Write down the last time a passage of Scripture or a sermon genuinely convicted you, and what you actually did about it. If the honest answer is nothing, do that thing this week.

Answers will vary, and this question is deliberately pointed. Listen for the difference between being moved and being changed. Felix trembled, which is more emotion than many people ever feel, and it produced nothing. Encourage a specific action with a date. If someone in the class realizes he has never obeyed the gospel, do not leave it at the level of feeling; show him Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 and be ready to help him that day.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Felix trembling is a good illustration of conviction without obedience. Use it to teach urgency, but be careful not to imply that a person is saved by an emotional response. Scripture tells the convicted what to do (Acts 2:37–38; 22:16).
- “The Way which they call a sect” (24:14) is a good place to say plainly that the church of the New Testament is not a denomination and wears no party name (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13). Say it without taking shots at neighbors.
- Paul's appeal to Caesar shows a Christian lawfully using the civil courts. Do not build a sweeping rule about lawsuits from it; 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 addresses disputes between brethren, which is a different matter.
- Resist speculation about what Paul wrote or did during the two years at Caesarea. The text does not say, and the silence itself is part of the lesson.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Deuteronomy 1–5 · Proverbs 26 · Matthew 23 · Acts 25:13–26:32

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