

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 24 OF 104

What Will Not Pass Away

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Deuteronomy 6–15
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 27–28
Gospels	Matthew 24:1–35
General New Testament	Acts 27

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to help a comfortable people decide, in advance, what they are actually standing on. Moses tells Israel that the real test is not the desert behind them but the vineyards ahead. Proverbs takes tomorrow out of their hands and tells them to go count their flocks. Jesus looks at the most impressive religious structure on earth and says it is coming down, and then says His words are not. Paul stands on a disintegrating deck and says the only sentence that matters: I believe God.

Doctrinally, Matthew 24 carries the week and must be handled with care. Teach verses 4 through 35 as referring primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, anchored by verse 34 and by Luke's plain wording in Luke 21:20. Show the class how Isaiah and Ezekiel use sun and star language for the fall of nations. Then rule out, plainly and kindly, the whole premillennial system: no earthly thousand-year reign, no secret rapture, no tribulation timetable, no date-setting. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13), and His return brings the resurrection, the judgment, and the end (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:23–26; 2 Peter 3:10–13). Deuteronomy adds two more: God's choice of Israel was national and for a redemptive purpose, not individual unconditional election, and the Old Covenant legislation in these chapters is not binding on Christians.

Formationally, the thread is memory and means. Israel was told to remember God when the barns were full. Paul told the crew that God's promise did not excuse anyone from staying in the ship. Ask your class this, and give them time to answer it honestly: if everything visible in your life were taken away this year, the house, the job, the health, the reputation, what would you still have that you could name out loud? Then ask what you are doing this week to make sure of it.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 24:1–35. Begin with the disciples' question in verse 3 and end with verses 34 and 35, and read Luke 21:20–24 aloud early so the class has the interpretive key in hand. Reserve ten minutes at the end to state plainly what we do not teach about the millennium and the rapture, and why.

Second session: Take up Acts 27. It reads aloud beautifully, and it gives the week its warmth after a demanding gospel lesson. Center the discussion on the decision at Fair Havens, on verse 31, and on Paul giving thanks for bread in a hurricane.

The other two readings: Deuteronomy 6–15 is long; ask the class to read chapters 6 and 8 slowly and to skim the rest, marking every occurrence of "remember" and "forget." Suggest they read Proverbs 27 and 28 one chapter a day twice through, and take 27:23 into a conversation with their spouse about which flock has gone uninspected.

Do Not Forget the Lord

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Deuteronomy 6 is the theological center of the Old Testament for a devout Jew. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words shall be in your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. The faith is not a weekly event. It is the running conversation of an ordinary day.

Then Moses turns to the peculiar danger of a good land. When the Lord brings you into large and beautiful cities you did not build, houses full of good things you did not fill, wells you did not dig, vineyards you did not plant, when you have eaten and are full, then beware lest you forget. Chapter 8 names the exact temptation: you will say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. Chapter 9 removes the other prop, telling them three times that this is not about their righteousness, and then rehearsing the golden calf to prove it.

Chapters 10 through 15 work out the practical shape of that love. Circumcise the foreskin of your heart. God shows no partiality and loves the stranger, so love the stranger. Worship where and how God says, and not by copying the nations or doing what is right in your own eyes. Do not follow a prophet even if his sign comes true, if he calls you after other gods. And open your hand wide to your poor brother, because the poor will never cease out of the land. Love for God, in Deuteronomy, always ends up in the hands.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Still the plains of Moab, still Moses preaching in the last month of his life to the generation that will cross the Jordan.
- The Shema (6:4–9) is named for its first Hebrew word, “hear,” and was recited daily by devout Jews. Jesus quotes it as the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29–30).
- Jesus answered all three temptations in the wilderness from these chapters: Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13 (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).
- Deuteronomy 7:6–8 is national and covenantal election, God choosing a people to bring the promised Seed into the world, and it is grounded in His love and His oath, not in their worth. It is not individual unconditional election to salvation.
- The dietary rules of chapter 14, the tithes, the year of release, and the regulations about the chosen place of worship belong to the Old Covenant, fulfilled and taken out of the way in Christ (Mark 7:18–19; Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:6–13).
- Deuteronomy 12:32 repeats 4:2: whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is the Shema, and Jesus called the command in verse 5 the first and greatest of all (Matthew 22:37–38). What does it actually mean to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and how is that handed to children in the way verses 7 through 9 describe?*

Take the words apart. Heart, soul, and strength is not a technical division of the person; it is a way of saying all of you, with nothing held back and no reserved compartment. Notice that it is commanded, which means it cannot

be primarily an emotion, since emotions cannot be commanded. Biblical love for God is loyal, chosen, whole-life devotion that produces affection, not the other way around. Jesus put it simply in John 14:15: if you love Me, keep My commandments.

Verses 7 through 9 tell you how it is transmitted, and the method is almost aggressively ordinary. Teach them diligently to your children, talk of them when you sit in your house, walk by the way, lie down, and rise up. Bind them on your hand, write them on your doorposts. Not a program, a saturation. Ask the class how many minutes a week their children hear them talk about God outside a church building, and then ask what one ordinary slot could be converted this week: the drive to school, the last ten minutes of the evening, the table. Faith is handed down in conversation more than in curriculum.

Question 2. *Moses says repeatedly that the danger is not the wilderness but the good land (6:10–12; 8:11–18). Why is a full stomach harder on faith than an empty one, and where has prosperity quietly reshaped your own devotion without your noticing?*

Because hunger keeps you honest and abundance lets you lie to yourself. In the wilderness there was nothing between Israel and God, and they knew it every morning when the manna appeared. In the land there would be barns, wells, cellars, and walls, and God would be just as responsible for the harvest and just as invisible. Deuteronomy 8:17 names the sentence a prosperous person says in his heart: my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth. Almost nobody says it aloud. Most of us just quietly stop asking.

Then make it personal, and be gentle, because this hits nearly everyone in an American congregation. Ask where prayer has gone from urgent to decorative. Ask what they prayed about ten years ago that they now simply handle. Ask what would have to happen financially before they would pray the way they did in a lean year. Then point to the antidote in 8:10, which is not poverty but gratitude: when you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. A thankful man rarely forgets.

Question 3. *Three times in 9:4–6 God tells Israel that they are not receiving this land for their righteousness, and He calls them a stiff-necked people in the same breath. Why insist on that before they have even crossed the river, and what would have become of them if He had let them believe otherwise?*

Because self-righteousness would have ruined them faster than Canaan could. If Israel entered believing they had earned it, every blessing would have confirmed their superiority and every command would have felt negotiable. So God cuts it off in advance and says it three times in three verses, then makes them relive the golden calf, the day they built an idol while Moses was still on the mountain receiving the law. You are a stiff-necked people. Do not forget. Do not provoke.

Balance it carefully, because this text is often pushed into a doctrine it does not teach. God is not saying Israel is incapable of obedience; the whole book commands obedience and expects it, and 30:11 says the commandment is not too hard for them. He is saying they have no claim. The Canaanites are being driven out for their own wickedness after centuries of patience (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24–25), not because Israel deserves a reward. Ask the class where the same attitude creeps into a faithful congregation: the quiet assumption that God owes us something because we have been here a long time and have the doctrine right.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Deuteronomy 6:20–25 and write out the answer a father was to give his son when the boy asked what the commandments meant. Notice how much of the answer is story and how much is rule, and think about what that ratio should teach us.*

The father answers with history. We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand, and showed signs and wonders, and brought us out to bring us in, and commanded us to do all these statutes for our good always, that He might preserve us alive. The rule is not explained by the rule; it is explained by the rescue. That ratio should govern how we teach children: story first, then the obedience that makes sense because of the story. A child raised on commands without the rescue ends up with a religion he cannot love.

2. Trace the words “remember” and “forget” through chapters 6, 8, and 9. Make two lists: what they were to remember, and what they were most in danger of forgetting.

They were to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord brought them out (6:12; 15:15), the whole way He led them in the wilderness (8:2), how He humbled and fed them (8:3), that He gives the power to get wealth (8:18), and how they provoked Him at Horeb (9:7). They were in danger of forgetting the Lord Himself (6:12; 8:11, 14, 19) and of forgetting that they had ever been anything but comfortable. The whole book assumes that memory is a spiritual discipline and that forgetting is the first step of apostasy.

3. Deuteronomy 8:3 says God humbled them and fed them with manna so they would learn that man does not live by bread alone. Read Matthew 4:1–4 and note how Jesus used this verse, and what it suggests about the purpose God has for a hard season.

Jesus quoted it to the tempter at the end of forty days without food, refusing to use His power to meet a legitimate need on the devil’s schedule. That tells you what hardship is for. God let Israel hunger, and then fed them in a way that made them depend on Him daily, so they would learn something they could not have learned full. A hard season is not proof of God’s absence; Deuteronomy 8:5 says it is how a father treats a son. The lesson is not that food does not matter, but that the word of God matters more.

4. Deuteronomy 10:12–13 asks what the Lord requires and answers with a short string of verbs. List them, then compare Micah 6:8 and John 14:15, and write one sentence about what all three have in common.

Fear the Lord your God, walk in all His ways, love Him, serve Him with all your heart and soul, and keep His commandments and statutes. Micah 6:8 compresses it to doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God. John 14:15 compresses it further: if you love Me, keep My commandments. All three refuse to separate affection from obedience. God has never asked for feeling without conduct or conduct without heart, and every attempt to have one without the other collapses.

5. Deuteronomy 15:7–11 commands an open hand toward a poor brother and forbids a grudging heart and a wicked thought about the coming year of release. Identify one person you could genuinely help this month, decide on the amount or the act, and do it before the month is out.

Answers will vary. Look for a decision rather than a sentiment, and for a real person rather than a category.

Deuteronomy 15:9 is remarkably searching: it warns against a wicked thought in the heart that calculates how close the year of release is before deciding whether to lend. Most stinginess is calculated, not cruel. Encourage a definite amount, a definite act, and a deadline, and remind the class of Galatians 6:10 and 1 John 3:17.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The command to drive out and destroy the nations (7:1–5; 12:2–3) is judgment on centuries of entrenched wickedness (Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24–25; Deuteronomy 9:4–5), executed by a theocratic nation under direct command, with the explicit warning that Israel would be treated the same way if they imitated it (8:19–20). No such command exists for anyone today; the Christian’s warfare is spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:12).
- Deuteronomy 7:6–8 is the choice of a nation for a redemptive purpose, not the unconditional election of individuals to salvation. Say so plainly, and note that God’s promises to that nation were conditional all through the book (7:12; 8:19–20; 11:26–28).
- Tithes, food laws, the year of release, and the central place of worship are Old Covenant legislation and are not binding on Christians. Draw the principles about generosity, authority, and worship; do not bind the practice (Colossians 2:14–17).
- Deuteronomy 12:8 and 12:32 make an excellent lesson on authority in worship. Keep it textual and positive rather than turning it into a list of complaints about others.

Sharpened by a Friend

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 27 is largely about relationships and self-knowledge. It opens by taking tomorrow away from you, and it closes by telling you to pay attention to what you actually have. In between it deals with praise, provocation, jealousy, rebuke, friendship, hunger, wandering from home, counsel, and the sharpening effect of one person on another. Verse 19 gives the quiet key to the whole chapter: as in water face reflects face, so a man's heart reveals the man. You find out what you are by paying attention.

The friendship material here is some of the best in Scripture. Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. A full soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity, since a neighbor nearby is better than a brother far away. Proverbs takes friendship seriously as a means God uses to shape a person.

Chapter 28 shifts toward law, money, and rulers. The wicked flee when no one pursues, a line that describes guilt better than a psychology textbook. Those who forsake the law praise the wicked. He who turns his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. He who trusts in his own heart is a fool. And a warning for prosperous people, repeated twice: he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both chapters belong to the Hezekiah collection of Solomon's proverbs (25:1).
- Chapter 27:23–27 assumes an agricultural economy where flocks were the family's capital. The principle is attentive stewardship of whatever God has actually put in your hands.
- Chapter 28 uses "the law" to mean God's instruction generally, not merely a legal code. To forsake it is to abandon the standard by which good and evil are told apart.
- Proverbs 28:13 is the Old Testament's clearest statement of the principle John states in 1 John 1:8–9.
- As always, read these as general principles about how life usually runs under God's order, not as guarantees. Chapter 28 has a great deal to say about wealth, and none of it amounts to a prosperity formula.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 27:5–6 says an open rebuke is better than love that stays hidden, and that the wounds of a friend are faithful while an enemy's kisses are deceitful. Who in your life currently has permission to wound you, and what makes a rebuke faithful rather than merely painful?*

Start with the hidden love of verse 5, because that is the surprising half. Love that never says the hard thing is not kindness; it is cowardice wearing kindness as a coat. The proverb says an open rebuke is better than that. Then verse 6 explains why the rebuke can be trusted: the wounds come from a friend, someone who has already proved he wants your good. An enemy can be perfectly pleasant, and his kisses are the deceitful thing in this pair, not his criticism.

The practical question is the one about permission. Most adults have carefully arranged their lives so that nobody can say anything to them. Ask each person to name one human being who could tell him he is wrong about his temper, his spending, his marriage, or his drift, and be heard. If nobody comes to mind, that is the most important thing they will learn this week. Then flip it: whom have you loved secretly rather than honestly, letting someone walk into trouble because saying something would have been awkward? Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19–20 are the New Testament version of this proverb.

Question 2. *Proverbs 28:13 says the one who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will find mercy. Why are both verbs needed, and what does covering a sin quietly cost the person who is doing the covering?*

Because confession without forsaking is merely a report, and forsaking without confession leaves the relationship unrepaired. The Hebrew picture is a man covering something over, hiding it so nobody sees. Scripture's answer is not that hiding is ineffective, it is that hiding does not prosper, which means it slowly corrodes everything around it. David describes the cost in Psalm 32:3-4: while he kept silent his bones grew old, and God's hand was heavy on him day and night.

Name the costs for the class. Energy, because concealment takes constant maintenance. Intimacy, because nobody can be close to a man with a locked room. Usefulness, because a hidden sin quietly dictates where you will and will not go. And boldness in prayer, because you cannot ask freely from someone you are hiding from. Then hold out the promise: whoever confesses and forsakes will have mercy. Point them to 1 John 1:9 and James 5:16, and be available afterward. Somebody in the room has been covering something for years and is exhausted.

Question 3. *Proverbs 27:23 tells you to know well the condition of your flocks and to attend to your herds, because riches are not forever. What are the flocks in your life, and which of them has gone longest without an honest inspection?*

The flocks are whatever God has actually placed in your care, and the proverb assumes you will drift into inattention. For most people the list includes a marriage, children, a body, finances, a job, a congregation, and a soul. What makes the verse sting is the word "know." Not assume, not hope, not intend. Herds require counting, inspection, and time spent among them, and verse 24 gives the reason: riches are not forever, and a crown does not endure to every generation. Nothing maintains itself.

Push for an honest inventory. Ask what each person could report right now, with actual numbers or facts, about his giving, his children's spiritual condition, his physical health, his debts, or his time in Scripture. Usually the area nobody can report on is the area quietly failing. Then ask for one inspection this week: a real conversation with a spouse, a look at the bank statement, a doctor's appointment, an evening with a child, an honest hour with the Bible and a notebook.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Proverbs 27:1 and then James 4:13-16. Explain what is actually wrong with boasting about tomorrow, and write out the sentence James says we ought to say instead.*

The problem is not planning; Proverbs commends planning everywhere. The problem is boasting, speaking about tomorrow as though it belonged to you. Verse 1 says you do not know what a day may bring forth. James 4:13-16 takes the same thought and adds that our life is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes, and that we ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." James calls the alternative arrogance and boasting, and says all such boasting is evil. The corrective is not anxiety about the future but humility about it.

2. *Proverbs 27:17 says iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. Make two lists: the people who sharpen you, and the people you are currently sharpening. If either list is empty, write down honestly why.*

Answers will vary. The image is two blades struck against each other, which is noisy and produces sparks; sharpening is not a gentle process. Look for real names in both columns. Many Christians have a list of people who sharpen them and nobody they are sharpening, which usually means they have never invited anyone younger into their life. If both lists are empty, the reason is almost always the same: the person has never allowed anyone close enough. Hebrews 10:24-25 assumes we are provoking one another to love and good works, which requires proximity.

3. *Trace the proverbs in chapter 28 about the law and about listening to it (28:4, 7, 9, 18). Taken together, what do they say about a person who stops listening, and what happens to his prayers?*

Proverbs 28:4 says those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep it contend with them. Verse 7 says whoever keeps the law is a discerning son. Verse 9 is the sharpest: one who turns his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. Verse 18 says whoever walks blamelessly will be saved, but he who is perverse in

his ways will suddenly fall. Together they say that a man who stops listening loses his moral compass, then his discernment, then his standing with God, and finally his footing. Prayer is not a substitute for obedience, and God says so bluntly.

4. *Proverbs 28:1 says the wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. Compare 1 John 3:19–21 and Hebrews 10:22. Where does that kind of boldness before God come from, and where does it not come from?*

It comes from a clear conscience before God, which is why 1 John 3:21 says if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. It does not come from self-esteem, from a strong personality, or from never having sinned. Hebrews 10:22 says we draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. The blood of Christ is what makes the conscience clean, and confession and forsaking, as Proverbs 28:13 says, are how a Christian keeps it that way.

5. *Proverbs 27:2 says to let another praise you and not your own mouth. For the next seven days keep a quiet count of how often you steer a conversation toward your own accomplishments, and then name one specific thing you will say instead.*

Answers will vary, and most people are startled by the count. Look for an alternative practice rather than mere silence: asking a second question about the other person, telling a story in which you are not the hero, giving credit by name to someone who helped, or letting a compliment land with a simple thank you instead of an anecdote. Proverbs 27:21 adds a warning worth mentioning, that a man is tested by the praise he receives.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Proverbs 28 says a great deal about wealth and poverty. Guard the class against two errors: treating every poor person as lazy and treating every prosperous person as blessed. These are general observations, and Job and Psalm 73 exist for a reason.
- Proverbs 28:9 should not be taught as though God ignores the prayers of anyone who has ever sinned. The picture is a settled refusal to listen to God's word while still expecting Him to listen to us.
- Rebuke is commanded here, and it is easily misused by people who enjoy it. Pair 27:5–6 with Galatians 6:1, in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself.

Not One Stone Left

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Begin with the question that prompted the discourse, because everything depends on it. Jesus has just finished the woes and said that Jerusalem's house is left desolate. Walking out of the temple, the disciples gesture at the stonework, some of it enormous, on a complex Herod had been rebuilding for decades. Jesus says not one stone will be left on another. On the Mount of Olives they ask when these things will be, and what the sign of His coming and of the end of the age will be. They assumed those events were one event. Jesus answers in a way that untangles them.

Verses 4 through 35 deal primarily with the destruction of Jerusalem, and the text itself gives the anchors. There are local, specific instructions that make no sense on a worldwide scale: those in Judea are to flee to the mountains, the man on the housetop is not to go down for his goods, they are to pray that their flight will not be in winter or on the Sabbath. Luke's parallel identifies the sign as Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20). And verse 34 closes the section: assuredly, this generation will not pass till all these things take place. Within forty years Titus took the city, the temple burned, and the stones came down.

History records that Christians who took Jesus at His word survived. The dramatic language of verses 29 through 31, the sun darkened, the stars falling, the powers shaken, is the standard prophetic vocabulary for the fall of a nation, used of Babylon in Isaiah 13 and of Egypt in Ezekiel 32. Then comes the fig tree and the promise that carries the whole chapter: heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. Everything they were looking at came down. The only thing in that scene still standing today is what He said.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Olivet Discourse is Tuesday of the last week, spoken privately to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, across the valley from the temple.
- Herod's temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world, and its destruction was unimaginable to a first-century Jew. Some foundation stones weighed many tons.
- The Roman siege under Titus ended in A.D. 70 with the burning of the temple and enormous loss of life. Josephus, a Jewish eyewitness, describes it in detail.
- Early writers, including Eusebius, record that the Christians of Judea left the city before the siege closed and withdrew to Pella beyond the Jordan.
- Sun, moon, and star imagery for national collapse is standard Old Testament prophetic language (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:30–31; Amos 8:9).
- Matthew 24:36 begins a new subject, "that day and hour," which is the final coming of Christ. That portion is next week's reading.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The disciples point out the temple buildings and Jesus answers that not one stone will be left on another (24:1–2). Why would that have been almost unthinkable to them, and what does it say about the confidence we place in anything visible, however magnificent and however religious?*

Because the temple was not merely a building; it was the proof that God was with them. It had stood in some form for a thousand years, it had been rebuilt after exile, and Herod had spent forty-six years making it magnificent. To say that not one stone would remain was, in effect, to announce the end of a whole world. Jeremiah had made the same announcement about the first temple and was nearly killed for it (Jeremiah 7:1–15; 26:1–11), which is exactly the passage Jesus had quoted when He cleansed the courts.

Now press the application without being cynical. Nothing visible is permanent, including things that are genuinely good and genuinely from God. Buildings, programs, reputations, congregations, and nations all have an expiration date. Hebrews 12:27–28 says the shaking is precisely so that what cannot be shaken may remain, and that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved. Ask the class what they would still have if the building burned, the account emptied, and the health failed. That answer is what they actually own.

Question 2. *Jesus gives His followers strikingly practical instructions for the crisis: do not be deceived, do not be troubled, flee to the mountains, do not go back for your clothes (24:4–20). Read Luke 21:20–24 beside this. How did those instructions actually save lives, and what does that say about attending carefully to what Jesus said rather than to what people say He said?*

The instructions are local, urgent, and practical, which is the first clue about what this section is describing. When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, those in Judea flee to the mountains. Do not come down to take anything out of the house. Do not go back for your clothes. Pray that it is not winter, when roads are impassable, or the Sabbath, when gates would be shut. Luke states the sign plainly: when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is near.

And it worked. The early historians record that the church in Judea got out and went to Pella, while the city filled with people who believed the prophets promising deliverance. Jesus even warned about those men in verses 23 through 26. Draw the lesson carefully. The people who survived were the people who did what He said rather than what sounded reasonable or patriotic at the time. Ask the class where they are currently preferring a comfortable interpretation over the plain words of Christ, and what it will cost them later.

Question 3. *In 24:34 Jesus says this generation will not pass away till all these things take place, and in 24:35 He says heaven and earth will pass away but His words will not. Taken together, how do those two verses protect us from panic on one side and from date-setting on the other?*

Verse 34 is the anchor. Whatever else the discourse touches, Jesus says the things He has just described would occur within the lifetime of the people standing there, and they did. That single verse dismantles a great deal of speculation. It means the wars, famines, false christs, and the abomination were not signs of an event still two thousand years away. They were signs of a judgment that fell in A.D. 70, exactly as He said.

Verse 35 guards the other flank. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not. If His words are that durable, then we do not need a chart, a headline, or a date. Be plain with your class about what we do not teach: no earthly millennial reign, no secret rapture, no timetable derived from current events. The New Testament says the Lord will come as a thief, unannounced, and that the day brings the end of the world and the judgment, not the beginning of an earthly kingdom (2 Peter 3:10–13; 1 Corinthians 15:23–26; John 5:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13). Our business is readiness, which is exactly where the Lord goes next week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Jesus says must happen before the end comes in 24:4–14. Then use Acts and the letters to identify which of those items the apostles actually saw in their own lifetimes.*

The list includes false christs and deceivers, wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution and death, betrayal and hatred among believers, false prophets, lawlessness abounding, love growing cold, and the gospel preached in all the world as a witness to all nations. The apostles saw all of it. Acts 5:36–37 and 8:9 mention pretenders; Acts 11:28 records a famine; Acts 7, 12, and 21 record persecution and martyrdom; 2 Timothy 4:10 and 1 John 2:18–19 record defection; and Colossians 1:6 and 1:23 say the gospel had gone into all the world and been preached to every creature under heaven.

2. *Compare Matthew 24:15 with Luke 21:20. How does Luke describe the same sign, and what would that have looked like to a Christian living in Jerusalem?*

Luke says, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.” The abomination that makes desolate is the Roman army with its standards, closing on the holy city and finally on the temple itself. A

Christian in Jerusalem would have recognized it the moment the legions appeared over the hills. The point of comparing the two accounts is that Scripture interprets Scripture; Luke tells plain readers what Matthew states in prophetic language borrowed from Daniel.

3. *Read Isaiah 13:9–13, spoken about Babylon, and Ezekiel 32:7–8, spoken about Egypt. Note how the Old Testament uses sun, moon, and star language for the fall of nations, and then read Matthew 24:29 again in that light.*

Isaiah says of Babylon that the stars will not give their light, the sun will be darkened, and the heavens will tremble.

Ezekiel says of Egypt that God will cover the heavens and make the stars dark, and cover the sun with a cloud.

Neither of those happened astronomically; both nations fell. The language is the prophets' way of saying that a world is ending, that the lights a people steered by are going out. Read that way, Matthew 24:29 describes the collapse of the Jewish state and its temple order, not a rearrangement of the solar system.

4. *Jesus says in 24:13 that he who endures to the end will be saved. Read Hebrews 3:12–14 and Revelation 2:10. What do these passages assume is possible for someone who does not endure?*

They assume that a person who has genuinely belonged to Christ can fail to endure and be lost. Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brethren against an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and says we are partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. Revelation 2:10 says be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. The promise is glorious and it is conditional. Endurance is not the cause of salvation, but Scripture never treats it as optional (Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20–22).

5. *In 24:12 Jesus says that because lawlessness abounds, the love of many will grow cold. Name one specific way your love for Christ or for people has cooled over the past year, and one specific thing you will do this week to warm it again.*

Answers will vary, and this one deserves a quiet moment. Look for honesty about specifics: prayer that has become a formality, a Bible read out of duty, a brother avoided, a service given up, a bitterness kept warm, a screen that has slowly taken the evenings. Then look for a warming action that is small enough to actually happen: one visit, one call, one confession, one morning given back to God. Revelation 2:4–5 gives the pattern for a cooled love, remember, repent, and do the first works.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- This is the most abused chapter in Matthew. Teach verses 4 through 35 as referring primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, anchored by verse 34 and by Luke 21:20–24, and note honestly that faithful brethren differ about exactly where the discourse turns to the final coming. Hold the certainties firmly and the details loosely.
- Reject newspaper prophecy and date-setting outright. Verse 36, next week's reading, says no one knows the day or the hour. Every chart that has ever been drawn from this chapter has failed.
- There is no premillennial framework here and no room for one: no secret rapture, no seven-year tribulation, no earthly reign from Jerusalem. The second coming brings the resurrection of all, the judgment, and the end of the world (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:23–26; 2 Peter 3:10–13). Christ reigns now, and His kingdom is His church.
- Verse 14 says the gospel would be preached in all the world before the end comes, and Colossians 1:23 says it was. Do not turn verse 14 into a modern missions timetable for the second coming.

I Believe God

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Acts 27 is one of the finest pieces of narrative writing in the ancient world, and Luke was on board for it. The details are those of an eyewitness: the ports, the winds, the sailing season, the undergirding of the hull with cables, the soundings at twenty and then fifteen fathoms, the four anchors from the stern, the precise number of souls. Luke is not writing an allegory. He is telling you what happened on a grain ship in the autumn of about A.D. 59.

The human decisions are worth watching. At Fair Havens the season is dangerous, and Paul, who has already been shipwrecked three times (2 Corinthians 11:25), warns of loss to cargo, ship, and life. The centurion weighs the advice of a prisoner against the advice of the helmsman and the owner, and chooses the professionals; the harbor is inconvenient for wintering, and a south wind blows softly, which always looks like confirmation. Then Euroclydon comes down off the island, and for fourteen days neither sun nor stars appear and all hope is abandoned.

What changes everything is verse 23. There stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar, and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you. Then Paul's great sentence: therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. From that moment a chained prisoner is the most authoritative man aboard. He stops the sailors from escaping, feeds the crew, and two hundred and seventy-six people who deserved nothing come ashore alive because one man on their ship belonged to God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The "we" of chapter 27 shows Luke was present, along with Aristarchus of Thessalonica.
- The Fast in 27:9 is the Day of Atonement, in late September or early October. Sailing on the open Mediterranean was considered dangerous after that and suspended entirely by November.
- This was a grain ship of the Alexandrian fleet, large enough to carry 276 people plus cargo. Egyptian grain fed Rome, and such vessels were substantial.
- Euroclydon, or Euraquilo, was a violent northeaster. Undergirding involved passing cables under the hull to keep the ship from breaking apart.
- Roman soldiers were liable for the escape of prisoners in their custody (compare Acts 12:19; 16:27), which is why the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners.
- The centurion Julius has already treated Paul kindly at Sidon (27:3), and it is his regard for Paul that saves every prisoner on board (27:43).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul warns that the voyage will end in loss, and the centurion believes the pilot and the ship's owner instead (27:9–12). It was a perfectly reasonable decision by the experts on board. When is the judgment of competent people the wrong place to put your trust, and how would you know?*

Notice first that the experts were not fools and Paul was not credentialed. The pilot and the owner knew ships, and Paul was a tentmaker in chains. Luke even records the reasonable considerations: the harbor was not suitable to winter in, and the majority advised sailing. The problem is that expertise can tell you how to sail a ship and cannot tell you what God has said. When those two sources of guidance are actually in conflict, competence loses, every time.

Give the class a usable test, because this cuts both ways and we do not want them ignoring doctors and accountants. Ask: is this a matter of technique, where skill and experience should govern, or a matter of right and wrong, where God has spoken? Nobody should consult a majority about whether to be honest, whether to forgive, whether to assemble with the saints, whether marriage is for life. Add the soft south wind of verse 13. Circumstances that seem to confirm a decision are not the same as God's approval, and that gentle breeze fooled everyone on board.

Question 2. *After the promise that not one life would be lost, Paul tells the soldiers that unless the sailors stay in the ship they cannot be saved (27:22–31). God had already promised, and yet the means still mattered absolutely. How do God's promises and our obedience fit together, and where does that same principle show up in how a person is saved?*

This is one of the clearest illustrations in Scripture that a divine promise does not make human action optional. God said in verse 24 that He had granted Paul all who sailed with him, and in verse 22 that no life would be lost. Then in verse 31 Paul says, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved. Both are true. God had determined the end, and the means He intended were sailors at the ropes, men eating, and everyone staying aboard until the ship struck.

Take this straight to the gospel, because that is where it matters most. God has promised salvation, and Christ has done everything necessary for it. That has never meant a person may do nothing. The same God who promised says to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Romans 10:17; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27), and then to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10). Noah was promised deliverance and still had to be in the ark. Naaman was promised cleansing and still had to go down into the Jordan. The promise is God's; the obedience is ours, and neither cancels the other.

Question 3. *In the middle of a two-week storm Paul takes bread, gives thanks in front of everyone, and eats, and the whole ship's company cheers up (27:33–36). Why did such a small act change the mood of nearly three hundred exhausted people, and where could your steadiness do that for somebody this week?*

Because two weeks without food, without sun, and without hope had left them incapable of doing anything for themselves, and Paul's calm was contagious. Look at what he actually did: he waited until daybreak, urged them all to eat, pointed out that not a hair would fall from their heads, took bread, gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, broke it, and began to eat. A Roman crew watched a Jewish prisoner pray over a meal in the middle of a hurricane. Then Luke says they were all encouraged and also took food.

Draw the application gently and concretely. Most people will never preach a sermon to two hundred and seventy-six people, but everyone has been in a room where someone stayed steady and it changed the air. The ingredients are simple and reproducible: refusing panic, saying out loud what God has said, giving thanks openly, and attending to ordinary needs like food and rest. Ask each person who is in a storm right now and needs someone to be calm in front of them. Then ask what would have to change in his own prayer life for that calm to be real rather than performed.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the voyage from 27:1 through 27:44, listing each port and each major decision. Identify the last point at which the disaster could still have been avoided.*

Caesarea to Sidon, then under the lee of Cyprus to Myra in Lycia, where they change to an Alexandrian ship; slowly to Cnidus, then under Crete past Salmone to Fair Havens near Lasea. There the decision is made to sail for Phoenix; Euroclydon strikes near Clauda, where they hoist the skiff and undergird the ship; fourteen days of drifting in the Adriatic Sea end near Malta, where they run aground and all reach shore. The last point at which the disaster could have been avoided is Fair Havens, in verses 9 through 12, and the decision turned on convenience, expert opinion, and a pleasant wind.

2. List everything thrown overboard, and in what order (27:18–19, 38). What does that sequence tell you about how people rank their possessions once their lives are actually at stake?

First the cargo, on the second day. Then the ship's tackle, thrown out with their own hands on the third day. Finally, at the very end, the wheat itself, the thing the entire voyage existed to deliver. The order is exact and human: we part with the least valuable first, we hold the essential until last, and we discover that everything is expendable when life is in the balance. It is a good picture of what Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26, and a good question for people who have spent years accumulating things they would throw overboard in an hour.

3. Read Acts 27:23–25 and write out Paul's stated reason for confidence, word for word. Compare Romans 4:20–21 and 2 Timothy 1:12. On what exactly was his faith resting?

"For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you. Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me." His faith rested on the character of the God who spoke, not on the weather, the crew, or his own record. Romans 4:21 says Abraham was fully convinced that what God had promised He was able to perform, and 2 Timothy 1:12 says Paul knew whom he had believed.

4. Paul was a prisoner with no authority whatever on that ship, and by the last paragraph everyone is doing what he says. Trace how that shift happened, and note what earned him the hearing he did not get at Fair Havens.

It happened in stages. He was already respected enough that Julius let him visit friends at Sidon. His warning at Fair Havens, ignored at the time, was proved right by the storm, and he says so in verse 21 without gloating. Then he brought them a word from God and stood by it. Then he acted on it, insisting the sailors stay, urging them to eat, and eating first himself. What earned the hearing was not eloquence but a track record: he had been right, he was unafraid, and he had done them good. Reputation is built in the order Luke records it.

5. Name the storm you are actually in right now, whether financial, medical, relational, or spiritual. Write down what you are certain God has said about it, and then name one thing you will do this week because you believe Him.

Answers will vary. The three parts of this question are deliberate. Naming the storm keeps it honest; writing what God has actually said keeps it scriptural rather than sentimental, since God has promised His presence, His sufficiency, and His purpose but has not promised calm seas; and the action keeps it from being merely a feeling. Look for someone to move from "I hope it works out" to "God has said this, therefore I am going to do that this week."

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The angel appearing to Paul is revelation given to an apostle. Nobody today should expect an angel or a private message; God speaks to us through the completed Scriptures (Hebrews 1:1–2; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- Acts 27:24 says God granted Paul all those who sailed with him. This is physical preservation, not the salvation of their souls. Do not let it be read as universalism or as a promise that a believer's presence guarantees his family's safety.
- The bread of 27:35 is an ordinary meal with a prayer of thanks in front of a pagan crew, not the Lord's Supper. Say so, since the language is similar.
- The narrative preaches well, but keep the allegory restrained. The clear, textual lesson is that God's promise and appointed means belong together (27:24 with 27:31), and that principle carries straight to how the New Testament says a person is saved.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Deuteronomy 16–25 · Proverbs 29 · Matthew 24:36–25:30 · Acts 28

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com