

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 30 OF 104

What We Could Not Do

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Judges 1-7
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 7-8
Gospels	Matthew 27:57-28:20
General New Testament	Romans 7:1-8:11

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to bring the class to the end of its own resources on purpose. Judges shows a nation that could not keep what God had given it. Psalm 8 shows a man who cannot even account for God's interest in him. The guards could not keep a sealed tomb shut. And Romans 7 shows the best that knowledge plus willpower can produce, which is a man crying out for rescue. Every reading is clearing the ground for one sentence: what the law could not do, God did.

Doctrinally, three things need care. First, the Old Covenant is fulfilled and taken away, which settles the Sabbath question and every attempt to bind Moses on Christians. Second, Romans 7 must not be turned into total depravity or into an excuse for continuing in sin; Romans 6 and 8 stand on either side of it. Third, teach what Scripture says about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit without adding to it, and be plain that the confirming miraculous gifts served their purpose when revelation was complete.

Formationally, the thread is what God does with people who know they are not enough. Gideon hid in a winepress. The women went to a tomb with spices, expecting a corpse. Paul cried out for someone to deliver him from a body of death. None of them started from strength. Ask your class this: what is the one area of your life where you have quietly concluded you will never change, and what would it look like this week to stop managing it alone and bring somebody else into it?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 27:57-28:20 first. Give half the hour to the evidence for the resurrection, which many members have never been walked through carefully, and the second half to the commission. End at 28:20 and connect it back to Matthew 1:23, the same promise at both ends of the book.

Second session: Take up Romans 7:1-8:11. Spend ten minutes on the marriage illustration and what it settles about the Old Law, then read 7:14-25 aloud and let the room feel it before you resolve it. Land the hour on 8:1-4 and do not leave the class in chapter 7.

The other two readings: Judges 1-7 and Psalms 7 and 8 fit the extended questions. Give the class the cycle of Judges 2:11-19 in writing so they can track it for the next several weeks. Encourage them to do the Psalm 8 exercise outdoors; it is the one assignment this quarter that people actually enjoy and remember.

The Cycle Begins

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Judges begins where Joshua ended and immediately goes wrong. Chapter 1 reads like a military report with a growing stain on it: Judah did well, but this tribe did not drive out the inhabitants, and that tribe did not, and another put the Canaanites to forced labor instead of removing them. Compromise always looks like management. The angel at Bochim in 2:1–5 names what has happened and its consequence: these nations will be thorns in your sides and their gods a snare. Israel weeps, sacrifices, and does nothing about it.

Then comes 2:10, one of the saddest verses in the Old Testament. Another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work He had done for Israel. One generation saw the Jordan stop and Jericho fall. The next generation had heard about it. The one after that did not even have the stories. From there the book settles into its cycle, and the writer states it in 2:11–19 before he illustrates it, so that we will recognize it every time it turns.

Watch how God works inside that cycle. He raises up unlikely people: a left handed assassin, a woman holding court under a palm tree, another woman with a hammer, and a farmer hiding his grain in a winepress. Gideon's account is the centerpiece, and every detail of it is designed to strip away human credit. He is from a weak clan and is least in his father's house. His first act is to tear down his family's idol. His army is cut by ninety nine percent. His weapons are trumpets, pitchers, and torches. God is not being whimsical; He says why in 7:2, lest Israel claim the glory.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Judges covers roughly three hundred years between the death of Joshua and the rise of Samuel and the monarchy.
- A "judge" here is a military and civil deliverer raised up for a region and a crisis, not a courtroom official and not a king. Several of them are deeply flawed, and the book reports the flaws without approving them.
- The recurring phrase "the Spirit of the Lord came upon" certain judges describes a temporary empowering for a task, and it is not the same as the indwelling promised to Christians in Acts 2:38 and Romans 8:9.
- Baal was the Canaanite storm and fertility god and Asherah his consort; worship of them involved ritual prostitution and, in some forms, child sacrifice, which is part of why God ordered their removal.
- The book's refrain, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25), is the thesis it is building toward, and the reader is meant to feel the need for a king and finally for the King.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Judges 2:10 says a generation arose that did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel. Where exactly did the handoff break down, and where is the same break happening in our homes and congregations right now?*

The handoff broke down in the ordinary places. Joshua 24 shows a generation that had seen God act and had publicly chosen Him. What was missing was the deliberate teaching of Deuteronomy 6:6–9: words on the heart, taught diligently to children, talked about when you sit in the house, walk by the way, lie down, and rise up. The parents in Judges did not renounce God. They simply stopped telling the stories, and one generation of silence was enough.

Make this concrete without shaming young parents. Ask what the children in your congregation could tell a stranger about what God has done in their own family. Ask whether anyone at your dinner tables ever hears a specific answered prayer named out loud. And ask the older members, kindly, whether they have ever told the

younger ones their own story. Faith is not inherited genetically; it is handed over deliberately, and it is only ever one generation from being dropped.

Question 2. *Gideon asks the angel, “If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?” (6:13). Look carefully at how the Lord responds, and discuss what He answers, what He refuses to answer, and what He tells Gideon to do instead.*

Gideon’s question is honest, and it is the question every suffering believer asks. Notice that the Lord does not defend Himself, and He does not explain the Midianites. Israel’s own history in chapter 6:7–10 has already given the answer: they did not obey His voice. Instead of arguing, He turns Gideon around and says, “Go in this might of yours,” and then, when Gideon protests his weakness, “Surely I will be with you.” The answer to the question is a commission.

That pattern is worth naming for the class, because we often want an explanation when God is offering a call. Some of our “why” questions have answers we would rather not hear, and some have answers we will not receive in this life (Deuteronomy 29:29). What God consistently gives is Himself and a next step. Ask the class where they have been waiting for an explanation before obeying, when the next step has been clear for a long time.

Question 3. *God cuts Gideon’s army from thirty two thousand to three hundred and tells him exactly why (7:2). Where does God do that kind of reducing in our lives, and how do we usually interpret it while it is happening to us?*

God gives the reason in plain words: “lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’” Twenty two thousand leave because they are afraid, and nine thousand seven hundred more are sent home over how they drank. The criteria almost do not matter; the reduction is the point. And notice that God does this after Gideon is already outnumbered, which means the reduction happens in the direction of greater absurdity, not less.

In our lives the reducing looks like lost income, failing health, a smaller congregation, a plan that falls apart, an ability that goes away. While it is happening we almost always read it as abandonment. Ask the class to name a time they later saw God working through a subtraction. Then be careful: this is not a promise that every loss has a visible payoff in this life. The promise is that God is not embarrassed by small numbers and does not need our resources to keep His word.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the repeating cycle described in Judges 2:11–19 in four or five steps, then mark where each stage appears in the accounts of Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, and Gideon.*

The cycle runs: Israel forsakes the Lord and serves other gods; the Lord’s anger burns and He delivers them to plunderers and enemies; they are greatly distressed; they cry out to the Lord; He raises up a judge and delivers them; the land has rest while the judge lives; and when the judge dies they revert and behave worse than their fathers. Every account in this week’s reading follows the pattern, and 2:19 notes the downward drift.

2. *List the reasons Judges 1 gives for the tribes failing to drive out the inhabitants. How many of those reasons are about ability, and how many are about willingness?*

The text mentions Canaanites who were determined to dwell in the land, chariots of iron, and repeatedly says a tribe simply “did not drive out” the inhabitants, later putting them under tribute when Israel grew strong. Judges 1:28 is the giveaway: when they became strong enough to remove them, they chose to tax them instead. The failure was nearly all will, not ability, and Judges 2:1–3 treats it as disobedience rather than misfortune.

3. *Deborah, Barak, and Jael all act in Judges 4 and 5. Read Hebrews 11:32 to see who is named there, then describe what each of the three actually contributed to the victory.*

Deborah was the prophetess and judge who summoned Barak and delivered God’s word to him; Barak led ten thousand men into battle but insisted Deborah go with him; Jael killed Sisera with a tent peg in her tent. Hebrews 11:32 names Barak among the faithful, and Judges 4:9 says the honor of the day would go to a woman because of Barak’s hesitation. God accomplished the victory through all three, and the song of chapter 5 credits Him for it.

4. *Gideon asks for confirming signs more than once (6:17, 36–40). Read Judges 6:14–16 and Matthew 12:38–39, then work out when asking God for proof is weak faith being helped and when it is unbelief looking for an excuse.*

In 6:14–16 God has already spoken plainly, and Gideon still asks for a sign, then twice more with the fleece. God accommodates him, which is a mercy, but the fleece is never commended as a method. Jesus calls the demand for a sign the mark of an evil and adulterous generation when the evidence has already been given. The difference is roughly this: a frightened believer asking God to strengthen him is one thing; a person demanding proof in order to avoid obeying what he already knows is another.

5. *Gideon's first assignment was to tear down his own father's altar, and he did it at night because he was afraid (6:25–32). Name the idol closest to home in your own life, set a date this month, and tear it down even if you have to do it afraid.*

Answers will vary, and the phrase to press is “closest to home.” Gideon’s first battle was not against Midian; it was against his own father’s altar, and his own townsmen wanted to kill him for it. Listen for something inside the house: a screen, a schedule, a spending habit, a relationship, a family tradition that quietly competes with God. Ask for a date.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The fleece is not a model for guidance today. God spoke directly to Gideon before the fleece was ever laid out; we have His completed word (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Jude 3). Teach decision making by Scripture, prayer, wisdom, and counsel rather than by signs.
- The judges’ sins are reported, not endorsed. Jael’s deception, Ehud’s assassination, and Gideon’s later ephod are narrative, not instruction. Draw timeless truths about God, faith, and obedience, and let the flaws stand as warnings.
- Deborah will raise the question of women’s roles. Handle it honestly: she was a prophetess and judge in Israel under the Old Covenant, God used her, and Scripture honors her. That narrative does not set aside the New Testament’s instructions about the assembly and the oversight of the church (1 Corinthians 14:34–35; 1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–7). Teach both texts as they stand, without embarrassment and without exaggerating either.
- “The Spirit of the Lord came upon” a judge describes empowerment for a specific task in that era. Do not read the Christian’s indwelling of the Spirit, or any claim of modern miraculous gifts, back into these accounts.

The Judge and the Night Sky

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 7 carries an unusual heading: a meditation which David sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite. Someone has said something about him that could destroy him, and David does the thing few of us do. Instead of answering the accuser, he opens himself to examination by God: search me, and if I have done this, let the enemy trample my life into the earth. That is either reckless or it is the confidence of a man who has already dealt honestly with God about his sins.

The center of the psalm is verse 11: “God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.” Modern readers flinch at that, and they should not. A judge who is not angry at evil is not good; he is indifferent, and indifference is no comfort to the wronged. Then comes the psalm’s picture of how judgment often works in this life: the man who conceives trouble and digs a pit falls into the ditch he made. His violence comes down on his own head. God does not always have to intervene from outside; He has built consequences into the world.

Psalm 8 is a different kind of prayer. It is the only psalm addressed entirely to God from beginning to end, and it is framed by one sentence repeated: “O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!” Between those bookends David looks at the heavens, the work of God’s fingers, and asks the question every honest person asks under a clear sky. And the answer he gets is not that we are insignificant but that we are crowned. The Creator of the galaxies has entrusted this planet to creatures who need eight hours of sleep.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 7 is an individual lament with elements of an appeal for vindication; Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise built on the creation account.
- “Cush, a Benjamite” is otherwise unknown; the heading likely refers to an incident during Saul’s pursuit of David, Saul being a Benjamite.
- Psalm 8 is quoted in the New Testament at Matthew 21:16, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Ephesians 1:22, and Hebrews 2:6–9, more often than most psalms.
- The phrase in Psalm 8:5, rendered “a little lower than the angels,” is applied in Hebrews 2:9 to Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death.
- Dominion over creation (8:6–8) restates Genesis 1:26–28. It is stewardship on God’s behalf, not ownership.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Psalm 7:8 David asks God to judge him according to his righteousness and integrity. How can a man say that to God, and how is it different from claiming to be sinless?*

David is not claiming to be without sin; Psalm 51 makes that impossible. He is answering a specific charge. Verses 3 through 5 name it: if I have done this, if there is iniquity in my hands, if I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me. In this matter, he is innocent, and he is willing to have God verify it. That is a form of integrity most of us avoid, because we would rather defend ourselves than be examined.

The practical lesson is where to take an accusation. Our instinct is to go to the people who will take our side. David goes to the only One who knows the truth and has the authority to settle it. Ask the class what they habitually do when someone misrepresents them, and what it would take to pray Psalm 139:23–24 about the accusation before answering it. Some accusations turn out to contain something we need.

Question 2. *Psalm 7:14–16 pictures a man conceiving trouble, digging a pit, and falling into the hole he made. Where have you watched that actually happen, and how should it reshape our appetite for getting even?*

The image is precise: conceiving mischief, going into labor with it, and delivering falsehood; digging a pit, hollowing it out, and falling into the hole he made. Scripture repeats the principle elsewhere, in Proverbs 26:27, in Haman built for Mordecai (Esther 7:10), and in Galatians 6:7. It is not magic. It is the moral shape of a world made by a just God, and it works slowly enough that people mistake the delay for immunity.

The application is to our own appetite for revenge. If God has built this into the world and has said vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19), then taking it ourselves is both unnecessary and disqualifying. Ask the class where they are currently keeping a ledger. Then ask what it would mean to hand that ledger over. Note carefully that trusting God's justice is not the same as pretending nothing happened, and it does not require a Christian to stay in danger.

Question 3. *Psalm 8 asks what man is that God should be mindful of him, and then gives an answer that is larger than the question. Trace the answer, and discuss what Hebrews 2:6–9 adds that the psalm alone does not say.*

The psalm answers its own question in verses 5 and 6. You have made him a little lower than the angels, crowned him with glory and honor, given him dominion over the works of Your hands, put all things under his feet. Human value is not measured by size against the cosmos but by the God who assigns it. That is the ground of every claim the Bible makes about human dignity, from the unborn to the dying.

Hebrews 2:6–9 then adds the part David could not have seen. We do not yet see all things put under man; but we see Jesus, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He might taste death for everyone. The psalm is about humanity, and it finds its full answer in the Man who took our place. Ask the class what it changes to know that God's mindfulness of us was proved not by the stars but by a cross.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every picture Psalm 7 uses for God, from the one who saves to the judge to the warrior who sharpens His sword. Which of those images almost never appears in our prayers, and why?*

God is the one in whom he takes refuge, the one who saves and delivers, the judge of the peoples, the righteous God who tests hearts and minds, the defense of the upright, a just judge, one angry with the wicked every day, and a warrior who sharpens His sword and bends His bow. The images almost never heard in modern prayers are the last several, God as judge and as armed warrior, largely because we are uncomfortable with divine anger. The psalm treats that anger as a mercy to the wronged.

2. *Psalm 8 opens and closes with the same sentence. Write it out, and explain what that frame does to everything said in between.*

"O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!" The frame means that everything inside, including the dignity of humanity and our dominion over creation, is finally about the greatness of God rather than the greatness of man. Take away the frame and Psalm 8 becomes a hymn to human potential, which is exactly what it is not.

3. *Set Psalm 8:4–6 beside Genesis 1:26–28 and Hebrews 2:6–9. Who is this passage finally about, and how does the writer of Hebrews use it?*

Genesis 1 gives humanity dominion as God's image bearers; Psalm 8 celebrates it; Hebrews 2 acknowledges that we do not presently see everything subject to man, and points instead to Jesus, the true Man, who was made lower than the angels, tasted death for everyone, and is now crowned with glory and honor. The passage is about humanity and it is fulfilled in Christ, in whom our intended place is finally realized.

4. *Psalm 8:2 says God has ordained strength out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants. Read Matthew 21:15–16 and describe how Jesus used that verse and against whom.*

Jesus quotes it in the temple after cleansing it, when children were crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David" and the chief priests and scribes were indignant. He answers them with Psalm 8:2: out of the mouth of babes and nursing

infants You have perfected praise. The praise of children is presented as strength ordained by God, and as a rebuke to religious experts who should have known better.

5. Go outside after dark one night this week, look up for ten uninterrupted minutes, and then read Psalm 8 aloud. Write one sentence about what it did to the size of the thing you have been worrying about.

Answers will vary, and the exercise is worth actually assigning. What the teacher should listen for is perspective rather than dismissal. Psalm 8 does not say your worry is small; it says God is large and He is mindful of you. Those two facts together are what shrink a problem to its real size.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 7 contains strong appeals for God to judge the wicked. Handle it as an appeal to divine justice placed in God's hands, never as a warrant for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19).
- "God is angry with the wicked every day" should not be softened into sentimentality, nor turned into a picture of a God who enjoys wrath. Keep 2 Peter 3:9 and Ezekiel 33:11 alongside it.
- Psalm 8's dominion language is stewardship under God, not a license to exploit creation or to exalt humanity apart from its Maker.

He Is Not Here

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Matthew builds his resurrection account like a man anticipating objections. Joseph of Arimathea, a known man with a known tomb, takes the body. Two women watch where it is laid, so there can be no confusion about the location. The next day the chief priests, who apparently understood Jesus' predictions better than His disciples did, ask for a guard, and Pilate grants it. They seal the stone. Every precaution taken against fraud became, three days later, part of the evidence.

The resurrection itself is described with enormous restraint. There is no account of Jesus rising; there is an earthquake, an angel whose countenance is like lightning, a stone rolled away, and guards who become like dead men. The stone was not moved to let Him out but to let the witnesses in. "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Then: "Go quickly and tell." Notice that the first preachers of the resurrection were women, in a culture that did not accept a woman's testimony in court, which is not how anyone invents a story.

Then the two endings Matthew sets side by side. In the city, a lie is manufactured and paid for, with a promise to protect the soldiers if word reaches the governor. On a mountain in Galilee, the risen Lord tells eleven ordinary men that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him, and sends them to disciple the nations, baptizing and teaching. And the last words of the book answer the first chapter: the One named Immanuel, God with us, says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Roman crucifixion victims were usually denied burial; Joseph's request and Pilate's consent are unusual and fulfill Isaiah 53:9, a grave with the rich in His death.
- The seal was a cord and clay or wax bearing an official stamp; breaking it was a crime against Rome. The guard may have been Roman soldiers assigned to the priests or the temple guard.
- The first day of the week is when the tomb was found empty, which is why Christians assemble and break bread on that day (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- "Make disciples" is the single imperative in 28:19; "going," "baptizing," and "teaching" are participles describing how disciples are made.
- The baptismal formula names one name shared by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Acts consistently records baptism performed by the authority of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48), which is the same thing said another way.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Matthew carefully records the sealed stone, the guard, and the bribe afterward (27:62–66; 28:11–15). Why does he include all of that, and how would you answer someone today who says the disciples stole the body?*

Matthew includes it because the counter story was circulating when he wrote, and he says so in 28:15. His answer is not an argument; it is a set of facts anyone in Jerusalem could check. The tomb was known, the body was placed there by a member of the council, the stone was sealed, soldiers guarded it, and the official explanation for the empty tomb required those soldiers to confess that they slept through a grave robbery, which is not a thing a soldier says unless he is paid.

Give the class the practical answers for today. Sleeping witnesses cannot testify to what happened while they slept. The disciples had nothing to gain and were executed one by one for refusing to recant. The women were the first witnesses in a culture that discounted their testimony. The preaching began in the very city where the tomb was, seven weeks later, where the body could have been produced. And the transformation of frightened men

into public preachers requires an explanation. Then ask what difference it makes to them personally that this is history rather than sentiment (1 Corinthians 15:14–20).

Question 2. *The women are told to go quickly and tell, and it is on the way that Jesus meets them (28:8–10). What does that order of events suggest about how obedience and experience are related in the Christian life?*

The order is striking. They are given a message they do not yet fully understand and told to go, and Jesus meets them while they are on the way obeying. Scripture repeatedly puts experience on the far side of obedience: the priests' feet touched the Jordan before it parted, the lepers were cleansed as they went, the water became wine after it was drawn. We usually want the assurance first and the obedience afterward.

Say clearly what this does and does not mean. It does not mean God owes us an experience if we obey, and it is not a formula for producing feelings. It means that the Christian life is generally learned in motion. Ask the class what they have been waiting to feel before they act: before they teach, before they forgive, before they give, before they apologize. Then point them to Matthew 28:9. He met them on the road.

Question 3. *Jesus opens the commission with, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (28:18). Work through everything that authority covers, and discuss what it settles about how we worship, teach, and organize as the Lord's church.*

All authority means all. Authority over sin, death, the grave, the nations, the terms of salvation, the worship of His people, and the shape of His church. It is why the commission can be given to eleven men without armies or money, and it is why the conditions He names are not negotiable by anyone afterward. Colossians 1:18 says He is head of the body; Ephesians 1:22 says God gave Him to be head over all things to the church.

Draw the practical conclusion gently but plainly. If all authority belongs to Christ, then the question in every matter of faith and practice is not what we prefer, what we grew up with, or what draws a crowd, but what He has authorized (Colossians 3:17). That principle protects a congregation from the tyranny of personal opinion in both directions, the innovator's and the traditionalist's. Ask the class to name one thing their congregation does out of habit, and to consider together where its authority comes from.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every detail Matthew supplies about the burial and the tomb in 27:57–66. How many of them make the theory of a stolen body harder rather than easier to believe?*

A named, prominent man asked for the body; it was wrapped in clean linen; it was placed in Joseph's own new tomb cut from rock; a large stone was rolled against the door; Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sat opposite the tomb watching; the priests requested a guard; Pilate granted it; they sealed the stone and set the watch. Nearly every detail closes a loophole, which is why Matthew lists them.

2. *Copy out Matthew 28:19–20 and underline the verbs. Identify the one main command and the three participles that describe how it is to be carried out.*

The one command is "make disciples of all the nations." The three participles are going, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things He commanded. Disciples are not made by going alone or by baptizing alone; the teaching continues after the baptizing, which is why a congregation that only evangelizes and a congregation that only instructs are both half obedient.

3. *Set Matthew 28:19 beside Mark 16:15–16, Luke 24:46–47, and Acts 2:38. What is preached, what is required of the hearer, and in what order do these passages put it?*

The preaching is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and repentance and remission of sins in His name. What is required is belief, repentance, confession, and baptism. Mark 16:16 says he who believes and is baptized will be saved; Luke 24:47 says repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name; Acts 2:38 says repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. The order across the passages is consistent: hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized.

4. *Matthew 28:17 says that when they saw Him they worshiped, but some doubted. Note where that sentence sits, what Jesus does about it, and compare John 20:24–29.*

It sits at the moment of worship on the mountain, which tells us that honest doubt can coexist with genuine worship in the same group of people. Jesus does not rebuke them; He comes near and speaks and gives them work to do. With Thomas He offers the evidence directly and then calls him to stop being unbelieving and believe. God is not fragile about honest doubt, though He will not leave anyone comfortable in it.

5. *The commission ends with teaching people to observe all things Christ commanded. Write down the name of one person you will personally invite to study the Bible with you, or to worship, before this month ends, and then do it.*

Answers will vary, and the assignment is a name and a date. The most common reason a congregation does not grow is not opposition but that nobody asks anybody. Follow up the next week, warmly and without shaming, and let those who did it say what happened.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The resurrection was bodily and historical. Do not allow it to be reduced to a symbol of hope or to a spiritual experience of the disciples (Luke 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, 14–20).
- Matthew 28:19 names the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in one name. It is not an incantation whose exact syllables produce an effect, and it does not conflict with Acts, where baptism is done by the authority of Jesus Christ.
- Baptism is part of the commission itself, not an optional addition afterward. Say so plainly from the text, and pair it with Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38.
- The commission is to make disciples by preaching and teaching. It is not a promise of miraculous signs to Christians today; the signs confirmed the word while revelation was being given (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).

The Law Could Not, God Did

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The illustration in 7:1–6 is about jurisdiction. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives; when he dies she is free to be married to another. Paul says we became dead to the law through the body of Christ, so that we could be married to Him who was raised from the dead. The point is not that the law was bad but that its claim on us has ended, and that we now belong to Someone else. Christians are not under the Law of Moses. We are under Christ, and we serve in newness of the Spirit rather than in the oldness of the letter.

Then Paul defends the law against the conclusion people would draw. Is the law sin? Certainly not. The law showed him what coveting was; sin took the commandment and used it, as a rule always provokes what it forbids in a rebellious heart. The law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good. The problem was never the mirror. The problem was the face.

Romans 7:14–25 is the paragraph everyone remembers: what I will to do, I do not practice; what I hate, that I do. Interpreters divide over whether Paul describes his life under the law before Christ, or the ongoing struggle of a Christian, or a man trying to be righteous by rule keeping in any age. Handle all three fairly, and make sure the class sees where the paragraph goes. It ends with a question, “Who will deliver me?”, and an answer, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Then 8:1: no condemnation. And 8:3: what the law could not do, because it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Romans 7 continues the argument of chapter 6. Having said we died to sin, Paul now says we died to the law, and both deaths happened in Christ.
- “The law” in this section is primarily the Law of Moses, which was given to Israel, served until Christ came, and was taken out of the way at the cross (Galatians 3:19, 24–25; Colossians 2:14).
- Romans 8 mentions the Holy Spirit roughly twenty times, after almost no mention in chapter 7. The shift is deliberate and is the key to reading the two chapters together.
- The indwelling of the Spirit is promised to every Christian (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9), and it is not the same as the miraculous gifts given by the laying on of apostles’ hands (Acts 8:18; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- “Walk according to the Spirit” describes a manner of life governed by the mind of the Spirit, which the Spirit revealed in the Scriptures (Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul uses marriage and death to explain our relation to the law (7:1–6). Trace the illustration carefully, and say what it settles about whether Christians today are under the Law of Moses.*

The illustration works like this: death ends the jurisdiction of a law. A married woman is bound while her husband lives and free when he dies. Paul then applies it with a twist: we are the ones who died, through the body of Christ, so that we might belong to another, namely the risen Christ, and bear fruit to God. Verse 6 says we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by.

The doctrinal conclusion should be stated without heat. Christians are not under the Law of Moses. Colossians 2:14 says the handwriting of requirements was nailed to the cross; Hebrews 8:13 says the first covenant is obsolete and vanishing away; Galatians 5:4 warns those seeking justification by law that they have fallen from grace. That settles the Sabbath, the feasts, circumcision, the tithe as law, and the temple system. It does not make us lawless; we are under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). Ask the class where they still quietly operate under Moses without realizing it.

Question 2. *Romans 7:14–25 is one of the most debated paragraphs in Scripture. Whatever you conclude about who is speaking, discuss what it teaches about the limits of willpower and about where deliverance actually comes from.*

Whatever view you hold, notice what the paragraph does not contain: it never says the man wins by trying harder, and it never mentions the Holy Spirit. It is a portrait of a divided person armed with nothing but knowledge of what is right and a desire to do it. That combination is exactly what most people mean by morality, and Paul shows it losing. Willpower is real, and it is not enough.

Now guard two errors as you teach this. Do not let anyone use Romans 7 as permission to keep sinning, because Romans 6 and Romans 8 both stand in the way, and because this passage is a cry for deliverance rather than a settled state. And do not let anyone conclude that human beings are utterly incapable of responding to God, which is total depravity rather than what Paul says; the very man in this passage delights in the law of God according to the inward man (7:22). The point is that deliverance is a Person: “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Question 3. *Romans 8:1 says there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Walk through how a person comes to be in Christ, and then look at what the rest of verse 1 and verse 4 add about how he goes on walking there.*

Getting into Christ is not a mystery Paul leaves undefined. He has just told us: as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death (6:3–4), and Galatians 3:27 says those baptized into Christ have put on Christ. “No condemnation” is a statement about a location, and the location has a doorway. That is why the gospel is preached with conditions the hearer must obey (Acts 2:38; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Then read the rest of the verse and 8:4, because they describe those who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Being in Christ is not a status that floats free of a life. Paul is not making our walking the ground of our acceptance, which would undo everything he has argued since chapter 3. He is describing who the people without condemnation actually are. Pair it with 8:12–13, where he says if you live according to the flesh you will die, and with Hebrews 3:12–14. Say plainly that a Christian who turns back is in danger, and say just as plainly that a Christian walking with the Lord may have real assurance today.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Paul insists the law is holy, just, and good (7:12) while also saying we died to it. Write out how both statements can be true at once, and compare Galatians 3:24–25.*

Both are true because the law was good at what it was given to do and was never given to do what only Christ could do. It revealed God’s will, defined sin, and served as a tutor to bring us to Christ, and having brought us, its custody ended. A mirror is a good thing and a failure as a shower. Galatians 3:24–25 says exactly that: after faith has come, we are no longer under the tutor.

2. *Count how many times the word “I” appears in Romans 7:14–25 and how many times the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Then count both in Romans 8:1–11, and describe what the contrast shows.*

In Romans 7:14–25 the first person pronoun appears roughly forty times and the Holy Spirit is not mentioned at all. In Romans 8:1–11 the Spirit appears about a dozen times and the desperate “I” has disappeared. The contrast is the argument. A life measured by self effort and a rule is exhausting and losing; a life in Christ, governed by the Spirit through His word, has a different center of gravity.

3. *Romans 8:3 says God did what the law could not do. Using 3:20, 7:7, and 8:3–4, list what the law could accomplish and what it never could.*

The law could reveal God’s character and will, define and expose sin (3:20; 7:7), restrain evil, and point forward to Christ. It could not justify anyone (3:20), could not give life (Galatians 3:21), and could not deal with the power of sin in the flesh (8:3). What it could not do, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, condemning sin in the flesh.

4. Read Colossians 2:14–17 and Hebrews 8:6–13 alongside Romans 7:4–6. What has happened to the Old Covenant, and what does that mean for questions about Sabbath keeping today?

Colossians 2:14 says the handwriting of requirements against us was wiped out and nailed to the cross, and verses 16 and 17 say therefore let no one judge you regarding a festival, a new moon, or sabbaths, which were a shadow of things to come. Hebrews 8:13 says the first covenant is obsolete and ready to vanish away. Christians therefore do not keep the Sabbath as law; we assemble on the first day of the week following the apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), and the Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath.

5. Romans 8:5 says those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Name one habit of mind you feed every day, and replace it this week with something specific from Scripture that you will actually read.

Answers will vary. The verse is about what the mind is habitually set on, and habits of mind are fed daily by what we watch, read, and rehearse. Listen for a real substitution rather than a vague intention to think better: a specific podcast replaced with a specific chapter, a specific scroll replaced with a specific psalm. Colossians 3:1–2 and Philippians 4:8 are the natural cross references.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Romans 7:14–25 is used to teach total depravity and also to excuse settled sin. Reject both. The man in the passage delights in God's law in his inward man, and the passage ends in deliverance through Christ, not in resignation.
- Present the interpretive options for Romans 7 fairly and do not let the class spend the hour there. The pastoral point, that self effort under a rule cannot save or sanctify, holds under every view.
- Be careful and clear about the Holy Spirit. Scripture says He dwells in Christians (Romans 8:9, 11) and that He leads us through the word He revealed (Ephesians 6:17; 2 Peter 1:20–21). Do not teach miraculous gifts, new revelation, or guidance by impressions apart from Scripture, and do not overcorrect into denying what Romans 8 plainly says.
- Romans 8:1 is often quoted without its qualifying clauses. Read the whole verse and 8:4 and 8:12–13 together. Assurance in Christ is real; unconditional security is not (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26–31).

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Judges 8–15 · Psalm 9–10 · Mark 1:1–34 · Romans 8:12–39

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