

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 34 OF 104

To Obey Is Better

Week 34 of 104 • 33% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	1 Samuel 9–15
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 18
Gospels	Mark 4
General New Testament	Romans 13–15:7

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

This week you watch a man lose a kingdom over ten percent. Saul keeps most of God's instruction, offers a sacrifice God never asked for, spares a king God told him to destroy, and then explains himself so smoothly that you almost believe him. Samuel answers with one of the great sentences of the Old Testament: to obey is better than sacrifice. Meanwhile David sings about a God who bent the heavens and came down to pull one man out of deep water. Jesus tells a story about four kinds of soil and then sleeps through a storm. His terrified friends are certain will drown them. And Paul says the debt of love is never paid off, so stop judging your brother and start carrying him.

How to use this guide: Read all four passages during the week. Your teacher will take up two of them in class, one in each session. For the other two, work through the "Extended Class Discussion or Self-Study" questions on your own and write your answers in the space provided.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT 1 Samuel 9–15

A King Who Almost Obeyed

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Samuel meets a tall young man looking for lost donkeys and pours oil on his head. Saul hides among the baggage at his own coronation, then wins a victory, and Samuel gives his farewell address while thunder and rain fall during harvest. Then the cracks appear. At Gilgal Saul grows tired of waiting and offers the burnt offering himself. He binds the army with a rash oath that nearly kills Jonathan. Finally he spares Agag and the best of the sheep, and God takes the kingdom from him.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. At Gilgal Saul explains his unauthorized sacrifice by saying he felt compelled (13:11–12). Samuel calls it foolishness and says his kingdom will not continue. Why was doing something God had not authorized treated as seriously as doing something God had forbidden?

2. Samuel tells Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice (15:22), and Saul had in fact obeyed most of the command. Talk about where ninety percent obedience shows up in our own lives, and why we so easily count it as the whole thing.
3. Read Saul's answers in 1 Samuel 15:13–24 in order. How does a man travel from “I have performed the commandment of the Lord” to “I have sinned,” and what finally pushed him there?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace Saul's decline across chapters 13, 14, and 15. Write down what he does wrong in each chapter, and notice how each failure is a little bolder than the one before it.
2. Compare 1 Samuel 13:8–14 with Numbers 18:7 and 2 Chronicles 26:16–21. What pattern emerges when men take up priestly work God never assigned to them?
3. 1 Samuel 15:22–23 sets rebellion beside witchcraft and stubbornness beside idolatry. Explain in your own words why God speaks that strongly about a man who kept most of the instruction.
4. Read Leviticus 10:1–2 and Hebrews 7:14 alongside 1 Samuel 13:8–14. How should the silence of Scripture shape the way a congregation decides what it will and will not do?
5. Name one instruction from Scripture you have been keeping at about ninety percent. Write down exactly what the last ten percent would cost you, and pay it this week.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 18

My Rock and My Deliverer

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

This is David's thanksgiving for a lifetime of rescues, sung after the Lord delivered him from all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. It opens with a pile of names for God, moves into a storm scene in which God bends the heavens and comes down, and describes a man drawn out of deep water and set in a wide open place. The second half credits God with every skill David has, and ends looking forward to God's anointed and his descendants.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 18:1–2 stacks up names for God: strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold. Which one of those would you have chosen for the season you are actually in, and what is it about that image that fits?
2. In 18:6–15 David describes smoke, fire, hail, thunder, and the foundations of the world laid bare, all to rescue one man. Discuss why the poetry is so enormous for a deliverance that the history books record as an escape.
3. Psalm 18:35 says, “Your gentleness has made me great.” Talk about what gentleness from God has looked like in your own life, and why we usually credit our progress to something else.

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Psalm 18 appears almost word for word as 2 Samuel 22. Read the two side by side and note the setting given in 2 Samuel 22:1. Where does this psalm belong in the story of David’s life?
2. List every name David gives God in 18:1–2, then list everything he says God did for him in 18:16–19. How do the names and the actions match up?
3. Verses 20 through 24 speak of God rewarding David according to his righteousness. Read them with Psalm 51:1–4 in mind. How can the same man honestly say both things?
4. Trace the military language in 18:31–45. What does David credit to God, and what, if anything, does he claim for himself?
5. Psalm 18:19 says God brought him out into a broad place because He delighted in him. Name the narrow place you are in right now, and write one sentence you will pray about it every day this week.

GOSPELS Mark 4

Soil, Seed, and Storm

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus pushes a boat out from shore and teaches the crowd on the beach in parables. He tells about a farmer scattering seed on four kinds of ground, explains to His disciples why He teaches this way, and then adds a lamp,

a measure, a seed that grows while the farmer sleeps, and a mustard seed. That evening they cross the lake, a windstorm nearly swamps the boat, and Jesus is asleep on a cushion in the stern until they wake Him.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Jesus explains the four soils in Mark 4:14–20. Which of the four best describes how you have received God’s word over the last month, and what made the difference?
2. Mark 4:11–12 sounds at first as though Jesus teaches in parables in order to keep people from understanding. Read it with Isaiah 6:9–10 and Matthew 13:13–15 and work out what He is actually saying.
3. The disciples wake Jesus with, “Do You not care that we are perishing?” What does that question reveal about what they believed, and where does the same question surface in our own praying?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the four soils and the specific reason the seed fails in each of the first three. Which failure is most dangerous because it looks longest like success?
2. Mark 4:26–29 describes seed that grows while the farmer sleeps and he does not know how. Read it with 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 and state plainly what is our work and what is God’s.
3. Trace what happens to the word in Mark 4:15–19: who takes it away, what withers it, and what chokes it. Which of those three is most active in your house right now?
4. Read Mark 4:35–41 and write down every detail Mark gives about Jesus in the boat. Then read Psalm 107:23–30 and explain what the disciples’ question in verse 41 really means.
5. Mark 4:24 warns, take heed what you hear. Name one thing you will stop listening to this week and one thing you will start, and put both on the calendar.

GENERAL NEW TESTAMENT Romans 13–15:7

Owe No One But Love

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Paul turns to the Christian’s life in public. Be subject to governing authorities, pay what you owe, and let the only outstanding debt be love, which fulfills the law. Then wake up: the night is far spent, so put on the Lord Jesus

Christ. The rest of the reading handles a congregation divided over food and days. Receive the one who is weak in faith, stop judging and stop despising, do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died, and bear with one another as Christ did.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Romans 13:1–7 was written while Nero ruled Rome. Read it carefully, then read Acts 5:29 and Daniel 3:16–18. How do those passages fit together, and where exactly does the line fall?
2. Romans 14 forbids two opposite sins: the weak brother judging and the strong brother despising. Which of the two are you more prone to, and what does your version of it actually sound like out loud?
3. Romans 14:15 says do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Name a liberty you genuinely have, and talk about what would make you willingly give it up for somebody else.

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List everything Romans 13:1–7 says a Christian owes the civil government. Compare 1 Peter 2:13–17 and 1 Timothy 2:1–2 and note what is added there.
2. Romans 13:8–10 says love fulfills the law. Write down which commandments Paul names, and explain how love keeps each one without needing a separate rule.
3. Read Romans 14:1–12 and work out the difference between a matter of opinion and a matter of faith. Give two current examples of each from congregational life, and state how you can tell them apart.
4. Romans 14:17 says the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Compare Colossians 1:13 and Mark 9:1. When did the kingdom begin, and who is in it now?
5. Romans 15:1–3 says the strong ought to bear the scruples of the weak, because even Christ did not please Himself. Name one preference you will surrender this month for a brother's sake, and then do it without announcing it.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 1 Samuel 16–23 · Psalm 19 · Mark 5 · Romans 15:8–16:27

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