

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 45 OF 104

When the Walls Fall

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	2 Kings 9-17
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 37
Gospels	Mark 13:14-14:11
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 15:1-34

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to teach the class how to tell what is permanent from what only looks permanent. Samaria had every visible mark of a nation that would continue, and 2 Kings 17 lists the reasons it did not. The temple looked eternal and had forty years left. The wicked in Psalm 37 spread themselves like a green tree and then could not be found. Meanwhile the things that actually endure in these readings are almost invisible at the time: a baby hidden in a temple room, a jar of ointment broken over a head, an empty tomb outside a city wall.

Doctrinally, the weight is in 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 and in Mark 13. Teach the resurrection as the historical event everything else rests on, including the conditional clause in 15:2 that assumes a Christian must hold fast. Teach 15:24-26 as the end of Christ's present reign rather than the beginning of an earthly one, and handle Mark 13 as you handled Matthew 24, as the fall of Jerusalem, with no premillennial framework and no date-setting. Second Kings 17 also gives you a clean opportunity to speak about worship that follows God's pattern rather than personal preference.

Formationally, watch the theme of half measures. Jehu destroys Baal and keeps the calves. Joash strikes the ground three times and stops. The resettled peoples fear the Lord and serve their own gods. Set all of that beside a woman who broke the flask so it could never be used again, and beside Jesus saying, "She has done what she could." Ask your class this: name the one place where you have been giving God most of it, and say out loud what the rest would cost you.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 1 Corinthians 15:1-34 first and give it the hour. Begin with the four clauses of the gospel in verses 1 through 4, walk the class down the staircase of verses 13 through 19, and land on verse 20. Deal with verses 24 through 26 directly so the kingdom question is settled and not merely implied.

Second session: Take up 2 Kings 9-17, but organize the whole lesson around chapter 17. Summarize the narrative in fifteen minutes, then read 17:7-23 aloud and let the class build the list of reasons. Finish at 17:33, "they feared the Lord, and served their own gods," and let that sentence do the applying.

The other two readings: Psalm 37 and Mark 13:14-14:11 fit the extended questions. Tell the class before they read Mark that this is the same discourse they studied in Matthew 24 and that it concerns the fall of Jerusalem, so nobody reads it through a chart. Suggest they read Psalm 37 slowly, a section a day, since it was written to be taken in small doses.

Why Samaria Fell

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These nine chapters are the long slide, and they move fast. Jehu is a whirlwind: anointed by a young prophet who then runs for his life, driving furiously toward Jezreel, killing two kings in one afternoon, ordering Jezebel thrown from a window, collecting seventy heads in baskets, and gathering every Baal worshiper in the land into one building so he can be finished with them in an hour. God commends the work (10:30) and promises him four generations. And then the verdict lands in the very next verse: he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

In Judah the line of David nearly ends. Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, destroys the royal offspring, and only Jehosheba's quick hands save one infant, Joash, hidden in the house of God for six years while his grandmother reigns. Then a priest, a Sabbath changing of the guard, a crown, a scroll, and a shout. Meanwhile the north burns through kings at a terrible rate, Assyria appears on the horizon, and Ahaz of Judah sees an altar he admires in Damascus and has a copy built for the temple in Jerusalem.

Chapter 17 is the heart of the reading, and it is one of the most important explanatory passages in the Old Testament. The narrative stops and the writer tells you why. Israel sinned against the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt. They built high places in every city. They did secret things against God. They followed the nations God had cast out. They rejected His statutes and His covenant. And through it all, the Lord testified against them by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways." They would not hear. Teach that verse, 17:13, and let the class sit with how long God argued before He acted.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Jehu's coup occurs around 841 B.C. and fulfills what God had told Elijah in 1 Kings 19:16–17 and what He had said about Ahab's house in 1 Kings 21:21–24.
- Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. under Shalmaneser and Sargon II, ending the northern kingdom after roughly two hundred years and nineteen kings, not one of whom the writer calls good.
- The Assyrian policy was deportation and resettlement, mixing conquered peoples to break national identity. The mixed population of 17:24–41 is the background to the Samaritans of the Gospels (John 4:9, 20).
- "The sins of Jeroboam" is the writer's shorthand throughout Kings for the golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:28–33), a home-made worship that claimed to honor the Lord.
- Judah continues for another one hundred and thirty-six years after Samaria falls, which is next week's reading. The writer keeps both kingdoms in view so the reader can see the warning Judah ignored.
- Ahaz's altar (16:10–16) is worship by personal preference rather than by God's pattern; compare Exodus 25:40 and Hebrews 8:5, where the pattern matters.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jehu wipes out Baal worship with remarkable thoroughness and even says, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord" (10:16), and then 10:29–31 tells us he never left the golden calves and did not take care to walk in God's law with all his heart. Talk about selective zeal, and about how a person can be fierce against one sin while protecting another.*

Jehu is a case study in zeal without submission. What he did against Baal was commanded, thorough, and commended by God in 10:30. He even invites a man to come along and watch his zeal for the Lord, which is the kind of sentence people say when they have started enjoying the work. But Baal worship was Ahab's religion, imported from Sidon, and destroying it also destroyed the dynasty Jehu was replacing. The golden calves at Bethel

and Dan were a different matter. They were popular, they were domestic, and they kept the northern people from traveling to Jerusalem to worship. Removing them would have cost Jehu his own kingdom.

That is the pattern worth naming in class, because it is almost never conscious. We go hardest after the sins that cost us nothing to oppose, especially other people's sins, and we quietly leave in place the ones that hold our life together. Ask the class to name, not the sin they preach against, but the one they have decided is load-bearing: a temper that gets results, a schedule that keeps them from their family, a way of talking about people that makes them entertaining. Second Kings 10:31 is a terrifying epitaph: he did not take heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart.

Question 2. *Second Kings 17:7–23 stops the narrative and lists the reasons Israel fell. Read the list slowly as a class and notice how many times the word “yet” or “still” appears in God’s dealings with them. What does that say about how long He waited, and about how we misread patience?*

Have someone read 17:7–18 aloud while the class listens for the shape of it. The charges pile up: they feared other gods, walked in the statutes of the nations, built high places in all their cities, set up sacred pillars on every high hill and under every green tree, burned incense there, did wicked things, served idols, made their sons and daughters pass through the fire, practiced divination, and sold themselves to do evil. And in the middle of the indictment, verse 13: “Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, Turn from your evil ways.” Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Jonah, and others, over two centuries.

We misread patience as approval. Nothing happened for so long that they concluded nothing would. Ecclesiastes 8:11 names it exactly: because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Second Peter 3:9 says the delay is mercy, not indifference, and 2 Peter 3:15 says to count the longsuffering of our Lord as salvation. Ask the class where they have mistaken God’s silence for God’s permission, and what they would change if they knew the account was still open and still being kept.

Question 3. *The resettled peoples “feared the Lord, and served their own gods” (17:33, 41), and the writer clearly considers that a disaster rather than a compromise. Where does that same arrangement show up in a modern Christian’s life, and why is it so much easier to live with than open rebellion?*

The formula in 17:33 is precise: they feared the Lord and served their own gods. It is not apostasy and it is not faith. It is addition. The new residents were frightened into adding the God of the land to a portfolio they already owned, and the writer says flatly in 17:34 that to this day they do according to their former customs and do not fear the Lord in truth. God has never accepted a place in a rotation. The first commandment is not that He be first among several.

Push the class past the obvious. Nobody in the room keeps a household idol. But a man can attend faithfully, give regularly, teach a class, and still make every real decision, about money, career, children, and time, by a different set of gods entirely: security, reputation, comfort, the approval of people. Ask each person to name the god that actually decides his calendar. It is easier to live with than open rebellion because it feels like devotion. Jesus put it without softening in Matthew 6:24: no one can serve two masters.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out every reason given in 17:7–18 for the fall of Israel. Sort them into three columns: wrong worship, wrong conduct toward people, and refusal to listen. Note which column is longest.*

Wrong worship dominates: fearing other gods, walking in the statutes of the nations, high places in every city, pillars and wooden images on every high hill, burning incense at all the high places, serving idols, making a molded image and two calves, worshiping all the host of heaven, serving Baal. Wrong conduct appears in making their sons and daughters pass through the fire, using divination and enchantments, and selling themselves to do evil. Refusal to listen is the shortest column and the deadliest: they would not hear, they stiffened their necks like their fathers who did not believe, and they rejected His statutes and His covenant. Idolatry is the charge, but deafness is the cause.

2. Trace what Jehosheba does in 11:1–3 and what Jehoiada does in 11:4–12. Then read Matthew 1:8–9 and Luke 1:32–33, and describe what was riding on one hidden child and one faithful aunt.

Jehosheba, the king's daughter and sister of Ahaziah, takes Joash from among the king's sons who were being murdered, hides him and his nurse in a bedroom, and keeps him concealed in the house of the Lord for six years. Jehoiada the priest then organizes the captains, arms them, brings out the child, puts the crown on him, gives him the Testimony, anoints him, and executes Athaliah. Matthew 1:8–9 carries that same line forward to Joseph, and Luke 1:32–33 says the child born to Mary would receive the throne of His father David and reign over a kingdom with no end. The line through which Christ came hung, at that moment, on one woman's courage and one priest's care.

3. Compare 2 Kings 17:13 with 2 Chronicles 36:15–16 and Jeremiah 25:4. List the words these passages use for how God sent His messengers and how the people responded.

Second Kings 17:13 says the Lord testified by all His prophets and every seer. Second Chronicles 36:15–16 says He sent word by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place, but they mocked His messengers, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets until there was no remedy. Jeremiah 25:4 repeats that He sent all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending, but they did not listen or incline their ear. The picture is of a God who gets up early to warn people who will not turn their heads, and the phrase “until there was no remedy” marks where warning finally ends.

4. In 13:14–19 the dying Elisha tells Joash to strike the ground with arrows, and Joash strikes three times and stops. Explain what was being tested, and what the prophet's anger says about half-hearted obedience.

Elisha had already told Joash that the arrow shot eastward was the arrow of deliverance from Syria. When he tells the king to strike the ground, he is inviting an act of faith with no stated limit, and Joash gives it three perfunctory taps and stops. The prophet is angry because the king's hands revealed the king's heart: he wanted just enough deliverance to be comfortable, not enough to finish the enemy. His victories are limited to exactly what he asked for. The lesson is not that God rewards enthusiasm, but that our expectations of God are often the ceiling we build over our own lives.

5. Name one command of Christ you have been keeping at about sixty percent, the way Jehu kept his. Say specifically what full obedience would look like, and do that this week rather than next.

Answers will vary, and the sixty percent is the part to press. Listen for the specific: prayer that happens when convenient, giving that is generous but calculated to stay painless, a marriage where the hard conversation is always postponed, forgiveness offered in principle and withheld in practice, an evangelistic intention that has never involved an actual invitation. Ask for the concrete shape of full obedience and for a day this week. Jehu did a great deal right and is remembered for what he refused to touch.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The violence in chapters 9 and 10 is reported, and part of it is explicitly commissioned (9:6–10; 10:30), yet Hosea 1:4 later holds the house of Jehu accountable for the blood of Jezreel. Teach that God used Jehu's act to fulfill His word while Jehu's own motives and excesses remained his. Do not turn this into a model for anyone's conduct today; under Christ the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4; Romans 12:19).
- Do not draw a straight line from national judgment on Israel to the fortunes of any modern nation. Israel was in covenant with God under a specific arrangement that has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13). What transfers is God's character, not Israel's national status.
- Guard against reading the survival of David's line as a promise of a future political Israel. The promise runs to Christ and is fulfilled in His reign and His church (Acts 2:29–36; Luke 1:32–33; Colossians 1:13).
- Chapter 16 will raise the question of worship by preference. Use Ahaz's altar to establish the principle of divine authority in worship without turning the hour into a list of contemporary grievances.

Fret Not Yourself

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 37 is wisdom literature set to music, an acrostic in which each section begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That form tells you something about its purpose: it was built to be memorized and carried around, a psalm for people who need the same truth repeated in slightly different words about forty times before it settles. The problem it addresses is as old as faith itself. Wicked people prosper, and watching it corrodes the soul of someone trying to live right.

The psalm's answer has two parts, and it refuses to give the second without the first. The first is perspective on time: they shall soon be cut down like the grass, they shall vanish like smoke, yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more, you will look carefully for his place and it shall be no more. The second is a set of things to do while waiting, and they are strikingly active. Trust in the Lord and do good. Delight yourself also in the Lord. Commit your way to Him. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Cease from anger and forsake wrath.

Then, near the end, the voice changes and an old man speaks in the first person: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread." Teach that verse as what it is, the settled testimony of a long life under God's ordinary providence, stated in the proverbial manner of Hebrew wisdom. It is not a contract, and Hebrews 11 will not let us read it as one. It is a man who has watched for seventy years and is telling you what he has seen.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 37 carries a Davidic heading and belongs to the wisdom psalms, closer in style to Proverbs than to the laments around it.
- The acrostic structure, one section for each Hebrew letter, marks it as deliberately instructional and designed for memory.
- Hebrew wisdom speaks in general principles about how life usually goes under God's order. Read as absolute guarantees, its statements collapse the first time a faithful person suffers, which is precisely the mistake Job's friends made.
- "Inherit the earth" or "inherit the land" originally pointed to secure possession of the land of promise; Jesus takes up the phrase in Matthew 5:5 and applies it to the citizens of His kingdom.
- The psalm's repeated "fret not" is the same instinct Paul addresses in Philippians 4:6–7 and Peter in 1 Peter 5:7, redirected from anxious comparison to prayer and trust.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The psalm opens by commanding us not to fret, which sounds like being told not to have a headache. Read 37:1–8 together and describe what fretting actually is, and why God can command it to stop.*

Fretting is not a mood that happens to us; it is an activity we perform. The Hebrew word carries the sense of heating up, growing agitated, burning inside. And in this psalm it is always paired with a second verb: do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. The heat comes from comparison. We are not merely troubled that evil exists; we are troubled that it seems to be paying better than obedience. Verse 8 puts anger, wrath, and fretting in the same sentence and says all three lead only to harm.

God can command it to stop because fretting runs on a belief, and beliefs can be examined. The belief is that the current arrangement is the final arrangement. Replace that belief and the heat has nothing to burn. That is exactly what the psalm does: it hands you a set of actions that reset your assumptions, trust, do good, delight, commit,

rest, wait. Notice that the cure is not introspection. Ask the class what they do when the fretting starts at eleven at night, and offer them verse 3 as a genuinely practical instruction: trust in the Lord, and do good.

Question 2. *In 37:25 the psalmist says he has been young and now is old, and has not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread. Given Hebrews 11:36–38 and the life of Job, how should we understand that sentence, and what goes wrong when we treat it as an absolute guarantee?*

Start with the genre, because this is the single most important reading skill your class will use in Psalms and Proverbs. Hebrew wisdom states the way life normally runs under God's order. It is true, reliable, and general. It is not a contract that God has signed. Read as an absolute promise, verse 25 would mean that any righteous person who ends up hungry has proved God false, which is exactly the argument Job's friends made and exactly the argument God rebuked.

Then set the verse beside Hebrews 11:36–38, where faithful people were tortured, sawn in two, destitute, afflicted, and tormented, and of whom the world was not worthy. Both passages are inspired and both are true. What the psalmist is saying is that across a long life he has watched God care for His people in a thousand quiet ways that skeptics never count. What goes wrong when we absolutize it is twofold: we set people up for a collapse of faith when suffering comes, and we hand them a prosperity theology that Scripture nowhere teaches. Say both things in class, plainly.

Question 3. *Three times this psalm says the meek, the blessed, and those who wait on the Lord will inherit the earth, and Jesus picks it up in Matthew 5:5. Discuss what meekness actually is, and name a situation this week where it will look like weakness to everyone watching.*

Meekness is not timidity and it is not a soft personality. It is strength that has accepted a higher authority, which is why Moses is called the meekest man on earth in Numbers 12:3 and why Jesus calls Himself gentle and lowly in Matthew 11:29. The meek man in Psalm 37 is not the man with no options; he is the man who will not grab, will not fret, and will not repay, because he has handed his case to God. Verse 7 is the definition in action: rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, do not fret because of him who prospers in his way.

Then get specific, because meekness is invisible until there is a cost. It looks like not answering the email you have already composed in your head. Like letting a coworker take credit while you keep doing the work. Like declining to defend yourself with a story that is technically true. Ask each person to name the situation coming this week where doing it God's way will read as weakness to everyone watching, and then read Matthew 5:5 to them again. The world holds the deed today; the Lord holds the title.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the imperatives of 37:1–8 in order, from “do not fret” through “cease from anger.” Then write beside each one what a person would have to believe about God in order to obey it.*

The imperatives run: do not fret, do not be envious, trust in the Lord, do good, dwell in the land, feed on His faithfulness, delight yourself in the Lord, commit your way to Him, trust also in Him, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, do not fret because of the one who prospers, cease from anger, forsake wrath, do not fret, it only causes harm. Behind them lie a few convictions: that God sees, that God will act, that the present picture is not the finished picture, and that He is a better provider than my own scheming. Every command in the list is impossible without those beliefs and reasonable with them.

2. *Collect every image the psalm uses for the end of the wicked: grass, herbs, smoke, a bow broken, a tree that could not be found. Note how many of them involve something that looked impressive right up until it did not.*

The wicked shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb (37:2), shall perish and vanish like smoke (37:20), shall have their sword enter their own heart and their bow be broken (37:15), shall be cut off (37:9, 22, 28, 34, 38), and shall be looked for and not found, like a green tree spreading itself that is suddenly gone (37:35–36). Nearly every image involves something that looked healthy, established, and impressive right up to the end. Grass is green before it is hay. Smoke is visible before it is nothing. The psalm is not denying that the wicked prosper; it is telling you how to read prosperity.

3. Read 37:23–24 next to Proverbs 24:16 and Micah 7:8. Describe the difference between a righteous man who falls and a wicked man who falls, and what the passages say God does in the first case.

Psalm 37:23–24 says the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds him with His hand. Proverbs 24:16 says a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity. Micah 7:8 has the believer telling his enemy not to rejoice, because when I fall, I will arise, and when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. The difference is not that the righteous never fall; it is that they get up, because Someone has hold of them. The wicked man's fall is terminal because he has nothing outside himself to hold on to.

4. Trace generosity through the psalm: 37:21, 37:26, and the contrast with the wicked who borrows and does not repay. Then read 2 Corinthians 9:6–8, and write down what the two passages assume about God's supply.

The psalm keeps returning to it: the wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives (37:21); he is ever merciful and lends, and his descendants are blessed (37:26). Generosity is treated as evidence of trust, because a man who believes God will provide can afford to open his hand. Second Corinthians 9:6–8 says the same thing from the other side: he who sows sparingly reaps sparingly, God loves a cheerful giver, and God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that you have sufficiency in all things. Both passages assume the supply is God's and the distribution is ours.

5. Envy is the sin this psalm treats as the real danger. Name one person whose life you have envied. Thank God for that person specifically in prayer this week, and do them one good turn they will not see coming.

Answers will vary, and the assignment is deliberately awkward. Envy hides better than almost any other sin because we call it ambition or discouragement. Look for a real name: a brother whose family is easier, a friend whose career took off, a neighbor with less faith and more money. Thanksgiving is the specific antidote because it forces us to call the other person's good a gift from God rather than an injustice. Then the good turn makes the prayer cost something. Follow up next week and ask what praying for that person did to the feeling.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Teach the genre before you teach the verses. Psalm 37 speaks in general principles about how life usually goes under God's order, not absolute guarantees. This is especially necessary at verses 4, 25, and 34.
- Verse 4, "He shall give you the desires of your heart," is not a promise that God grants our wish list. Delighting in the Lord reshapes the desires themselves. Do not let the class walk out with a prosperity reading.
- Do not use this psalm to imply that suffering indicates hidden sin. Job, Jeremiah, the prophets, and the Lord Himself settle that question, as does John 9:1–3.
- The inheritance of the land points forward in Christ to the kingdom, not to a future earthly restoration of national Israel (Matthew 5:5; Hebrews 11:13–16; 1 Peter 1:3–4).

Take Heed and Watch

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This is the second half of the Olivet Discourse, and it should be taught the way Matthew 24 was taught in week 24 of this program. The subject is the destruction of Jerusalem, and the text supplies its own anchors. The instructions are local: let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let the man on the housetop not go down into the house, let the man in the field not go back for his garment, pray that it may not happen in winter. Luke's parallel account removes all doubt about the sign, saying plainly, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near."

Verses 24 through 27 use the standard prophetic vocabulary for the collapse of a nation, a darkened sun, a moon without light, falling stars, powers shaken. Isaiah used it of Babylon and Ezekiel of Egypt, and in neither case did the solar system change. It is the language of a world ending. Then verse 30 sets the boundary: this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Within forty years Titus took the city, the temple burned, and the stones came down exactly as Jesus said in 13:2. The early historians record that the Christians of Judea, who took Him at His word, got out before the siege closed.

At verse 32 the subject shifts to a day nobody can calculate, not the angels, not the Son in the days of His flesh, only the Father. For the fall of Jerusalem there were signs. For this there are none, and the response commanded is not calculation but watchfulness. Then chapter 14 opens the passion narrative. Two days before Passover the chief priests are looking for a quiet way to kill Him, and in Bethany a woman breaks an alabaster flask over His head. The room is indignant about the waste. Jesus says she has anointed His body beforehand for burial, and that wherever the gospel is preached, this will be told. Then Judas goes out.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Olivet Discourse is delivered on Tuesday of the last week, privately to four disciples on the Mount of Olives, looking across the valley at the temple.
- 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 at length.
- Early writers, including Eusebius, record that the church in Judea withdrew from the city to Pella beyond the Jordan before the siege closed.
- 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).
- Spikenard was an imported ointment from far to the east; three hundred denarii was roughly a year's wages for a laborer, which explains the reaction in the room.
- John 12:3–8 identifies the woman as Mary of Bethany and names Judas as the one who raised the objection about the poor.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The instructions in 13:14–18 are startlingly local and urgent: those in Judea flee to the mountains, do not go down into the house, do not go back for a garment, pray it is not winter. Read Luke 21:20–24 alongside them and discuss what event Jesus is describing and how those instructions actually saved lives.*

Read the instructions as a first-century Christian in Judea would have read them. When you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not, get out. Do not climb down for your belongings. Do not turn back for your coat. Pray that it is not winter, when the wadis flood and the roads are impassable. These are evacuation orders for a particular region, and they make no sense as a description of a worldwide event at the end of history.

Luke states the sign without prophetic imagery: when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, its desolation is near.

And the orders worked. The historical record indicates that the Christians left, while the city filled with people who believed prophets promising deliverance, the very men Jesus warns about in verses 21 through 23. Draw the lesson without cynicism. The people who lived were the people who did what Jesus said instead of what sounded patriotic, reasonable, or hopeful at the time. Ask the class where they are currently preferring a comfortable interpretation of a plain command of Christ, and what that choice will cost them later.

Question 2. *Jesus says in 13:32 that no one knows the day or the hour, and then tells a small story about a man who leaves home and a doorkeeper told to watch. If watching does not mean calculating dates, describe what it looks like on an ordinary Tuesday afternoon.*

Jesus deliberately separates the two subjects. He has just told them the sign, the urgency, and the generation. Now He says that concerning that day and hour no one knows, and He tells a small parable about a man traveling to a far country who leaves authority to his servants and commands the doorkeeper to watch. The householder may come at evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning. The list of watches is the point: there is no hour that can be ruled out, so there is no hour that can be slept through.

So watching is not scanning headlines; it is being found doing your assigned work. Notice that each servant in the parable was given his work. The doorkeeper watches by standing at the door, not by predicting arrivals. Ask the class what their assigned work actually is: a marriage to tend, children to raise, a widow to check on, a class to teach, a job done honestly. Then ask what the coming week would look like if they lived it as men and women who expect to give an account, without a single date on the calendar changing.

Question 3. *A woman pours out ointment worth a year's wages and the room turns on her, while Jesus says she has done what she could (14:3-9). What made her gift offensive to the people watching, and what have you been holding back because someone might call it waste?*

Her gift was offensive for two reasons. First, it was extravagant beyond any accounting: an alabaster flask of pure nard worth three hundred denarii, and she broke the flask so it could never be used for anything else or sold later. Second, it was public and undignified, a woman pouring oil over a man's head at a dinner table. Mark says they criticized her sharply. John tells us Judas led the objection and tells us why: he kept the money box. The language of stewardship makes a wonderful cover for a heart that has other plans.

Then hear what Jesus says. She has done a good work. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. And wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she did will be told as a memorial to her. He does not say she was efficient. Ask the class what they are holding back because it might be criticized as impractical: a costly gift, a sacrifice of time, a decision to give up income for the sake of the Lord's work. Somebody in the room has been talked out of something by the word "waste," and this text is for that person.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the instructions in 13:14-20 and mark how many of them only make sense for people living in one place at one time. Then state what that observation contributes to understanding the passage.*

Flee to the mountains; the man on the housetop must not go down into the house or take anything out; the man in the field must not go back for his garment; woe to pregnant and nursing women in those days; pray that your flight may not be in winter. Almost every one of them assumes a specific geography, a specific climate, and the possibility of running somewhere. They are not instructions that a Christian in another country or another century could obey. That observation does most of the interpretive work in this passage: Jesus is telling people in Judea how to survive a coming siege, and history records that those who obeyed lived.

2. Read Isaiah 13:9–13, spoken about Babylon, and Ezekiel 32:7–8, spoken about Egypt. Note how the prophets use sun, moon, and star language, and then read Mark 13:24–25 again in that light.

Isaiah says of Babylon that the stars of heaven 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 event happened astronomically, and both nations fell. This is the prophets' way of saying that a world is ending and the lights a people steered by are going out. Read that way, Mark 13:24–25 describes the collapse of the Jewish state and its temple order rather than a rearrangement of the heavens.

3. Write out 13:30 and 13:31 side by side. Explain how the first verse anchors the timing of what Jesus has just described and how the second one guards us against date-setting about anything else.

Verse 30 says assuredly, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Verse 31 says heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. The first verse fixes the timing of what has just been described, which means these events are history rather than headlines waiting to happen. The second verse tells us what to do with everything not yet described: rest on His words rather than on a chart. A generation has an ordinary meaning of about forty years, and Jerusalem fell roughly forty years later.

4. Set the woman of 14:3–9 beside Judas in 14:10–11. Both scenes involve money and both involve a decision about Jesus. Trace what each person gave, what each received, and how Jesus describes the outcome of each.

The woman gave an entire year's wages and could never get the flask back; she received the Lord's defense, the promise that her act would be told wherever the gospel is preached, and the dignity of having prepared His body for burial. Judas gave the Lord away and received an unnamed sum of money the chief priests were glad to promise; he received, in the end, what Matthew 27:3–5 describes. One person poured out everything for Christ and is remembered forever; the other sold Christ for a payment nobody bothered to record in Mark's account. The two scenes are placed on either side of one another on purpose.

5. Jesus says of the woman, "She has done what she could." Identify the good thing you keep postponing because you cannot do it perfectly or completely, and do the portion you actually can do before this week ends.

Answers will vary, and the phrase to hold up is "what she could." She did not do everything; she did what was in her hands at the moment she had. Listen for the postponed good: the letter unwritten because it would not be adequate, the visit not made because an hour seems too little, the study not started because the person is not ready to teach, the apology not offered because it cannot undo the damage. Ask for the partial act and a day.

Perfectionism is one of the most respectable ways to do nothing at all.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Handle this exactly as Matthew 24 was handled in week 24. Verses 14 through 31 describe the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, anchored by the local instructions, by Luke 21:20–24, and by 13:30. Note honestly that faithful brethren differ about precisely where the discourse turns to the final coming; hold the certainties firmly and the details loosely.
- There is no premillennial framework here and no room for one: no secret rapture, no seven-year tribulation, no rebuilt temple, 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 (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).
- Reject date-setting outright. Verse 32 says no one knows, not even the angels. Every chart ever drawn from this chapter has failed, and the failures do real damage to people's faith.
- "Nor the Son" in 13:32 describes what Christ voluntarily accepted in becoming flesh (Philippians 2:5–8) and says nothing against His deity. After the resurrection He declares that all authority is His (Matthew 28:18).

If Christ Is Not Risen

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Something had gone wrong in Corinth. Some among them were saying there is no resurrection of the dead, probably under the influence of a Greek culture that considered the body a problem to escape rather than something God intends to raise. Paul does not begin by arguing; he begins by reminding. I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast. Then four clauses, each of them public and checkable: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and He was seen.

The list of witnesses is not decoration. Cephas, then the twelve, then over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, then James, then all the apostles, and last of all by Paul himself, whom he calls one born out of due time. He is inviting verification. Most of those five hundred could still be asked. And then a note of humility that keeps the whole chapter from being merely an argument: I am the least of the apostles, because I persecuted the church of God, but by the grace of God I am what I am.

Verses 12 through 19 are one of the boldest passages Paul ever wrote, because he grants the premise and follows it. If there is no resurrection, Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, preaching is empty, faith is empty, the apostles are liars, you are still in your sins, and those who have died in Christ have perished. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are of all men the most pitiable. Then the hinge at verse 20: but now Christ is risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Everything after that verse is what follows from an empty tomb.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- First Corinthians was written by Paul around A.D. 55 to a congregation he had established, and chapter 15 addresses the last of the problems in the letter: some were denying the resurrection of the dead.
- Greek thought generally regarded the immortality of the soul as desirable and the resurrection of the body as absurd, which is why Athens laughed in Acts 17:32.
- “Firstfruits” (15:20, 23) is harvest language from Leviticus 23:10: the first sheaf brought in is the pledge and sample of the whole crop yet to come.
- Paul’s appeal to more than five hundred living witnesses is an invitation to investigate; this letter was written within roughly twenty-five years of the events.
- Verses 24 through 28 describe the end of Christ’s mediatorial reign and the delivering up of the kingdom to the Father. The reign is present, beginning at His enthronement (Acts 2:33–36), and ends at His coming, not begins with it.
- Verse 29 refers to a practice Paul mentions in passing as part of his argument; he neither describes nor endorses it, and no New Testament passage authorizes baptism for the dead.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul summarizes the gospel in 15:1–4 as died, buried, rose, and appeared, and adds in 15:2 that they are saved by it “if you hold fast.” Discuss both halves of that: what the gospel is, and what that conditional clause assumes is possible.*

The gospel here is not a set of principles; it is news about events. Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He rose the third day, He was seen. Notice that two of the four clauses are about a body, which is exactly Paul’s point against people who wanted a spiritual resurrection with no grave involved. Notice also the phrase “according to the Scriptures” attached to both the death and the resurrection. This was not improvised. It had been promised.

Then take the conditional clause seriously, because it is easy to read past. You are saved by it, Paul says, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. Colossians 1:23 says the same thing: you will be presented holy and blameless if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast. Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brethren about an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Say clearly what this rules out: the doctrine that a person once saved cannot fall away is not the doctrine of the New Testament (Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20–22). Say just as clearly what it does not mean: God is not looking for an excuse to drop anybody.

Question 2. *In 15:12–19 Paul works out what follows if there is no resurrection. Trace the consequences one by one as a class. Which of them would be the hardest to live with, and why does verse 19 call us the most pitiable of all men?*

Walk it down the staircase with the class. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, our preaching is empty and your faith is empty. We are found false witnesses of God, because we testified that He raised up Christ. Your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. And if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. Paul does not soften a single step. He is willing to put the entire faith on one historical claim.

Ask which consequence lands hardest. For many it will be “you are still in your sins,” because it means nothing was ever actually dealt with. For others it will be the perishing of the dead, because it puts a name and a face on the loss. Verse 19 calls us the most pitiable of all men because Christians deliberately give things up, hold to a costly ethic, suffer for a name, and stake everything on a future. If the tomb was not empty, that is not noble; it is tragic. Then let the class feel verse 20 as the relief it is. But now Christ is risen.

Question 3. *Read 15:24–26 slowly. Christ reigns until all enemies are under His feet, then the end comes, and He delivers the kingdom to the Father. Compare Acts 2:33–36 and Colossians 1:13, and discuss when that reign began and what it rules out about the future.*

Take the sequence exactly as written. Christ the firstfruits. Afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power, for He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. There are three items in that order, not four. There is no earthly kingdom inserted between the coming and the end, because at His coming the kingdom is handed over, not set up.

Now connect it to what your class already knows. Daniel 2:44 said the kingdom would be established in the days of those kings. Mark 9:1 said some standing there would not taste death till they saw it come with power. Acts 2:33–36 says Christ was exalted to the right hand of God and made both Lord and Christ, and Peter quotes Psalm 110:1, the same “till I make Your enemies Your footstool” that Paul is using here. Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into the kingdom of God's dear Son. So He is reigning now, and He reigns until the end, and then the reign is delivered up. State plainly that this leaves no room for a future thousand-year earthly reign, and do it kindly, because many sincere people have been taught otherwise from childhood.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every resurrection appearance Paul names in 15:5–8, in order. Note how many witnesses are involved and how many of them were still alive when he wrote, and explain why he mentions that detail.*

He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve, after that by over five hundred brethren at once, then by James, then by all the apostles, and last of all by Paul. The five hundred are the striking detail, and Paul adds that the greater part of them remained alive at the time of writing, with some having fallen asleep. He mentions it because the claim was open to investigation. He is writing roughly twenty-five years after the event to a city in regular contact with Jerusalem, and he is effectively telling his readers that the witnesses can still be found and questioned.

2. *Write out 15:2 and read it with Colossians 1:23 and Hebrews 3:12–14. Describe what all three passages assume about a person who does not continue in the faith.*

First Corinthians 15:2 says you are saved by the gospel if you hold fast, unless you believed in vain. Colossians 1:23 says you will be presented blameless if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved

away from the hope of the gospel. Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brethren to beware of 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. All three assume that a person who has genuinely begun can fail to continue, and none of them treats that possibility as remote or theoretical.

3. *Make a numbered list of everything Paul says would be true if Christ were not raised (15:13–19). Then write one sentence explaining how the whole argument hangs on a single historical event.*

One, Christ is not risen. Two, our preaching is empty. Three, your faith is empty. Four, the apostles are found false witnesses of God. Five, your faith is futile. Six, you are still in your sins. Seven, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. Eight, we are of all men the most pitiable. The entire argument hangs on whether one specific man came out of one specific tomb on one specific morning, which is exactly why Paul opened with a list of people who saw Him.

4. *Set out the sequence of 15:22–26 in order: Christ the firstfruits, then those who are His at His coming, then the end. Read Daniel 2:44, Acts 2:33–36, and Colossians 1:13, and state when the kingdom began and who is reigning now.*

Christ the firstfruits; afterward those who are Christ's at His coming; then the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, having reigned until all enemies are under His feet, the last of which is death. Daniel 2:44 said the God of heaven would set up a kingdom in the days of the Roman kings that would never be destroyed. Acts 2:33–36 says Jesus was exalted to God's right hand, made both Lord and Christ, and seated according to Psalm 110:1. Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been translated into that kingdom. The reign began at the ascension and continues now; it does not begin at His coming, it is handed over then.

5. *First Corinthians 15:33 warns that evil company corrupts good habits, and verse 34 says to awake to righteousness. Name the specific influence that has been quietly lowering your standards, and make one concrete change to it this week.*

Answers will vary, and the sharper question is the one hiding inside it. Paul quotes a line from a Greek playwright because it was common sense that his readers had stopped applying. Listen for the specific: a friendship that makes coarseness comfortable, a screen that has redefined what is normal, a workplace where the standard has drifted, an appetite fed by what is watched late at night. Then look for a concrete change rather than a resolution: an account closed, an evening reassigned, a conversation had, a different set of people invited into the week. Verse 34 is blunt, and blunt is what the situation called for.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verses 24 through 28 are a decisive passage against premillennialism. Christ reigns now and delivers the kingdom up at His coming. Teach it plainly and graciously, and let Acts 2:33–36, Colossians 1:13, and Daniel 2:44 carry the weight with you.
- Verse 28, that the Son Himself will be subject to the Father, describes role and function within the Godhead, not inferiority of nature. Compare John 1:1, Philippians 2:5–8, and Colossians 2:9.
- Verse 29 on baptism for the dead has produced a long list of proposed explanations, and honesty requires admitting that. Paul is making an argument from the practice of others, not establishing a doctrine; the passage neither describes nor commands proxy baptism, and no other Scripture supports it. Baptism in the New Testament is always the personal act of a believing, penitent person (Acts 2:38; 8:36–38; Romans 6:3–4).
- Verse 2 and the conditional language throughout the chapter should be used to teach that a Christian can fall away, without turning the lesson into a lecture on insecurity. The same Paul says in Romans 8:38–39 that nothing outside us can separate us from God's love.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 2 Kings 18–25 · Psalm 38–39 · Mark 14:12–50 · 1 Corinthians 15:35–16:24

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