

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 48 OF 104

The Veil Torn

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	1 Chronicles 6-11
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 42-44
Gospels	Mark 15:21-16:20
General New Testament	2 Corinthians 2:5-3:18

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is access. For fifteen centuries, worship in Israel meant a curtain, a priesthood, and a long list of people whose job was to keep the arrangement running. The Chronicler lists them by name. A psalmist who could not get to the house of God wept about it and asked his own soul why it was cast down. Then Mark records six words in a single verse, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and Paul tells the Corinthians that the veil has come off our faces too. By the end of the week the class should understand what it cost to open the way in, and should be ashamed of ever calling prayer inconvenient.

Doctrinally, this is a heavy week and you should not rush it. The torn veil and 2 Corinthians 3 together settle the Christian's relationship to the Old Law: honored, inspired, written for our learning, and no longer our covenant (Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8:13). Mark 16 requires you to be honest about the manuscript question and then to teach 16:15-16 plainly, showing that the same doctrine stands on Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:26-27, and 1 Peter 3:21. Verses 17 and 18 give you the occasion to explain that the signs confirmed the word and have served their purpose (Hebrews 2:3-4). And 1 Chronicles 6 through 9 should not be used to argue for instruments in worship; that service belonged to the sanctuary that has passed away.

Formationally, watch what these readings say about being seen. God recorded the name of the man who baked the showbread. He preserved the prayer of a man whose neighbors asked all day long where his God was. He let a Roman centurion say the truest sentence in the Gospel. And Paul told a difficult congregation that they were his letter of recommendation, known and read by everybody. Ask your class this: if the people closest to you read your life this week as a letter about Jesus, what would the letter have said, and what one sentence would you want to rewrite before Sunday?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Mark 15:21-16:20 and give it the whole hour. Build the first half on the crucifixion and the torn veil, reading Hebrews 10:19-22 beside it. Save the last twenty minutes for chapter 16, deal with the manuscript question briefly and honestly, and then teach 16:15-16 alongside Acts 2:38 and Romans 6:3-4.

Second session: Take up 2 Corinthians 2:5-3:18. It pairs so naturally with the torn veil that the class will feel the connection before you point it out. Spend ten minutes on restoring the repentant brother, then build the rest of the hour on the two covenants and land on 3:18.

The other two readings: First Chronicles 6-11 and Psalms 42 through 44 fit the extended questions. Tell the class to read chapter 9 slowly and to notice the job descriptions, and to read Psalms 42 and 43 together as the single poem they were. Mention that Psalm 44:22 shows up in Romans 8 and let them go find it.

Singers, Gatekeepers, and a King

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 6 is the Levites, and it matters more than it looks. The Chronicler traces the high priestly line from Levi to the captivity, then turns to something that would have thrilled his first readers: the men David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark came to rest, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, who ministered with music before the tabernacle until Solomon built the temple, and who served in their office according to their order. A community rebuilding worship needed to know that the music had a history and an authorization.

Chapter 9 is the one to teach. It lists the people who came back and what they did, and the list is gloriously unglamorous. Gatekeepers at the four sides. Men in charge of the chambers and treasuries. Others appointed over the furnishings and all the implements of the sanctuary, and over the flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices. One man whose trust was the things baked in the pans. Levites who opened the house of God every morning. And the singers, who were employed in that work day and night and were free from other duty. Somebody kept the keys. Somebody counted the utensils. God wrote their names down.

Then two verdicts. Saul died for his unfaithfulness, because he did not keep the word of the Lord and because he consulted a medium for guidance, and he did not inquire of the Lord; so God turned the kingdom over to David. And David, made king over all Israel at Hebron, takes the stronghold of Zion and grows great, because the Lord of hosts was with him. The chapter closes with his mighty men, including the three who broke through an enemy camp because David said out loud that he was thirsty, and the king who would not drink what had been bought that way.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Chronicles was compiled after the return from Babylon, and chapters 6 and 9 serve the restored community directly: who may serve as priests and Levites, and who has a claim to live in Jerusalem.
- The Levites had no tribal territory; they were given cities scattered through the other tribes (6:54–81; Joshua 21), so that instruction in the law was distributed throughout Israel.
- Heman, Asaph, and Ethan appear in the headings of several psalms (Psalms 50, 73 through 83, 88, 89), which means the men named in chapter 6 wrote and led music your class has already been reading.
- Chapter 10 is the only narrative in Chronicles about Saul, and it exists mainly to explain why the kingdom passed to David. First Samuel 28 gives the fuller account of the medium at En Dor.
- Jerusalem, called Jebus here, had remained in Canaanite hands since the conquest. David's capture of it (11:4–9) gave Israel a capital that belonged to no single tribe.
- The lists of mighty men in chapter 11 parallel 2 Samuel 23, with the Chronicler adding names of men who joined David later.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Chapter 9 names gatekeepers, men in charge of the utensils, the keepers of the keys who opened the house every morning, and singers who were on duty day and night. Talk about the dignity of an assignment nobody applauds, and name the people in our own congregation doing that kind of work right now.

Read a few of the entries aloud and let their ordinariness land. Shallum and his brothers were gatekeepers, and they were in charge of the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle. Some were appointed over the articles of service, to count them when they came in and went out. Some were appointed over the furnishings;

others over the flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices; and Mattithiah had the trust over the things baked in the pans. They lodged around the house of God because they had charge of it and opened it every morning. Nobody wrote a psalm about Mattithiah.

Then bring it home with names. Every congregation runs on people whose work is invisible until it stops: whoever unlocks the building, whoever prepares the Lord's Supper, whoever washes the linens, whoever calls the sick, whoever drives the widow. Ask the class to name them out loud, and let the naming take a few minutes, because that is the lesson. Then press the harder half: most of us want to serve where we will be seen, and 1 Corinthians 12:22–24 says God deliberately arranged the body to honor the parts that seem less honorable. Ask who is willing to take a job no one will thank them for.

Question 2. *First Chronicles 10:13–14 sums up Saul's entire reign in two sentences and names two reasons he died. Read them carefully. Why does the Chronicler single out those two things, and what would it be like to have your life summarized that way?*

The Chronicler compresses a forty-year reign into two sentences, and the two reasons he gives are precise. Saul died for his unfaithfulness, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. Then the devastating clause: but he did not inquire of the Lord. The two failures are one failure. A man who will not listen when God speaks will eventually go looking for someone else who will tell him something. Saul had spent years disregarding the word he had, and on his last night he went to a witch to get a word he wanted.

That makes this more than an ancient curiosity about mediums. The modern forms are respectable: the counselor chosen because he will agree, the verse hunted for until one can be made to fit, the friend consulted because we already know what he will say. Ask the class where they have shopped for a word instead of submitting to the one they had. And then ask the sobering question in the discussion prompt, and give them silence for it. If your life were summarized in two sentences by an honest writer, what would the sentences say?

Question 3. *Three of David's men broke through a Philistine garrison to bring him a drink from the well at Bethlehem, and David poured it out on the ground (11:15–19). Discuss what he was saying by refusing it, and whether you would have understood if you had been one of the three.*

Put the scene in the room. David is in the cave of Adullam, the Philistines have a garrison in Bethlehem, his hometown, and he says out loud, longingly, that he wishes somebody would give him a drink from the well by the gate. It is not an order. Three men hear it, break through the Philistine camp, draw the water, and carry it back. And David will not drink it. He pours it out to the Lord and says, Far be it from me that I should drink the blood of these men who put their lives in jeopardy.

He is saying that what they did was too costly to be consumed on his own thirst, and so it belongs to God. That is not a rejection of the gift; it is the highest possible valuation of it. Let the class feel both sides. Some of them have poured themselves out for people who drank it without noticing. Some of them have received sacrifices, a parent's, a spouse's, a congregation's, that they have used up on themselves. Then ask the question the passage forces: who has spent themselves on you, and what have you done with it? Romans 12:1 asks us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, which is the same instinct as David's pouring.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read 6:31–48 and 9:33 on the singers. Write down who appointed them, what they were appointed to do, where they did it, and what 9:33 says about their schedule and their other responsibilities.*

David appointed them, after the ark came to rest, over the service of song in the house of the Lord. They ministered with music before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of meeting until Solomon built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they served in their office according to their order. Heman, Asaph, and Ethan led, with their families behind them. First Chronicles 9:33 adds that the singers, heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, remained in the chambers and were free from other duties, for they were employed in that work day and night. Music in the worship of God was an appointed, ordered, full-time trust, not a casual arrangement.

2. List the specific duties described in 9:17–32. Count how many of them involve doors, keys, furniture, flour, spices, and counting. Then write a sentence about what God apparently considers worth recording.

The duties include keeping the gates on the east, west, north, and south; being in charge of the chambers and the treasuries of the house of God; lodging around the house because the watch was committed to them; opening it every morning; overseeing the articles of service and counting them in and out; caring for the furnishings, the flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices; mixing the spices; and preparing the showbread for every Sabbath. Doors, keys, inventory, flour, and baking. God considered the maintenance of His house worth recording by name, which is a quiet rebuke to every definition of important work we carry around.

3. Read 1 Chronicles 10:13–14 next to 1 Samuel 15:22–23 and 1 Samuel 28:5–7. Explain what Saul did, what he failed to do, and how the two failures are connected.

First Samuel 15:22–23 has Samuel telling Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice, and that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, which is a chilling anticipation of where Saul would end. First Samuel 28:5–7 shows him afraid of the Philistine army, inquiring of the Lord and receiving no answer, and then telling his servants to find him a woman who is a medium. The Chronicler joins the two: he did not keep the word of the Lord, he consulted a medium, and he did not inquire of the Lord. Disobedience came first. The witch was the final symptom of a man who had spent a lifetime refusing the word he already had.

4. Go through the mighty men in chapter 11 and list the individual deeds recorded: a spear against three hundred, a field of barley defended, a lion killed in a pit on a snowy day. Note how many of these men you had never heard of before this week.

Jashobeam lifted his spear against three hundred at one time. Eleazar stood with David in a field of barley when the people fled, defended it, and the Lord brought about a great victory. Benaiah killed two lion-like heroes of Moab, went down and killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day, and took a spear out of an Egyptian's hand and killed him with it. Then a long list of names, thirty and more, most of whom appear nowhere else in Scripture. Answers about which ones were unfamiliar will vary, and that is the point. The kingdom of David was built by men whose names most Bible readers have never once said out loud, and God wrote every one of them down.

5. Find out who does one of the unnoticed jobs in your congregation, the building, the bulletin, the communion preparation, the nursery, the ride given to someone who cannot drive. Thank that person by name this week, and then take one such job yourself for the next month.

Answers will vary. Watch for the second half of the assignment, since thanking somebody is easy and taking a job is not. Suggest concrete options in your own congregation so nobody has to invent one: preparing the Supper, cleaning, sending cards, transportation, nursery, visiting a shut-in on a set day. Follow up in a month and ask what the work did to the person who took it. Most people discover that unnoticed service is where they finally stop performing.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not build a case for instrumental music from the temple singers. The service of song here belongs to the Old Covenant sanctuary with its priesthood, altar, and sacrifices, all of which were fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13; 10:1–10). The New Testament pattern for the church is singing, teaching and admonishing one another (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
- Saul's consultation of a medium (10:13) should be handled soberly. Scripture forbids all such practice (Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Isaiah 8:19–20; Galatians 5:20), and the passage is not an occasion for speculating about what happened at En Dor.
- Do not allegorize the gatekeepers and singers into modern church offices. Draw the principle, that God values and records unnoticed service, and leave the offices where the New Testament puts them (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).
- Chronicles presents David favorably and omits much of his sin, because it is written from the perspective of the temple and the promise. Do not let the class conclude that Chronicles contradicts 2 Samuel; the two books have different purposes.

Why Are You Cast Down

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalms 42 and 43 are one poem. Psalm 43 has no heading of its own, the vocabulary continues, and the refrain that appears at 42:5 and 42:11 appears a third time at 43:5. Read them together in class. The writer is a Levite of the sons of Korah, apparently far from Jerusalem in the north country near the headwaters of the Jordan, and what he misses is not scenery but the assembly. My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, Where is your God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me, for I used to go with the multitude to the house of God.

What makes the poem so useful is its honesty about the pattern of a low season. It does not move steadily from despair to faith. It cycles. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls, all Your waves and billows have gone over me. Then, the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me. Then again, why have You forgotten me, why do I go mourning? Anyone who has been through a genuinely hard year will recognize that rhythm, and anyone who has not will learn what to expect.

Psalm 44 changes the voice from one man to a nation and raises the stakes. It begins beautifully, with fathers telling children what God did in the old days, and then it turns: but You have cast us off and put us to shame, You have given us up like sheep intended for food. And then the claim that makes this psalm so difficult and so necessary: all this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant. The psalm never receives an explanation. It ends with a request, redeem us for Your mercies' sake, and Paul will later pick up its hardest verse and set it inside the safest passage in the New Testament.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 42, 43, and 44 belong to the sons of Korah, Levitical singers descended from the Korah of Numbers 16, whose family was preserved (Numbers 26:11) and later appointed to the service of song (1 Chronicles 6:31–38).
- Psalms 42 and 43 form a single poem in the Hebrew, sharing a refrain and a common vocabulary; many manuscripts join them.
- The geographical references in 42:6, the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, and Mount Mizar, place the writer in the far north, away from the sanctuary.
- Psalm 44 is a community lament, sung by the nation rather than an individual, and it belongs to the same family of psalms as Psalm 74 and Psalm 80.
- Psalm 44:22 is quoted by Paul in Romans 8:36 and applied to Christians under persecution, which is how the New Testament teaches us to read it.
- Old Testament believers had limited light on what lies beyond death, which is part of why the laments press so hard for vindication within this life (2 Timothy 1:10).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Three times the psalmist stops and asks his own soul why it is cast down, and then tells it to hope in God (42:5, 42:11, 43:5). Talk about the difference between listening to yourself and preaching to yourself, and about what a person actually says in that conversation.*

The distinction is worth the whole ten minutes. Listening to yourself means letting the running commentary in your head set the terms: you are alone, nothing will change, God has moved on. Preaching to yourself means interrupting that commentary and putting truth in front of it. The psalmist does exactly that, out loud, three times: Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise

Him. Notice that he does not deny the feeling or scold himself for having it. He questions it, and then he gives it something to hold.

Notice also what he preaches. Not “cheer up,” not “count your blessings,” but hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. The content is God and the future. Ask the class what they actually say to themselves at three in the morning, and then ask what they would have to believe to say this instead. Some in the room need to be told plainly that this is not a technique for making sadness go away, since the psalmist repeats the sermon because the sadness came back. It is how a believer survives a long season without lying about it.

Question 2. *In 42:3 and 42:10 his enemies say to him all day long, “Where is your God?” while his tears are his food. Discuss why that particular taunt cuts so deeply when a believer is already low, and how a person answers it when he has no evidence to show.*

It cuts because it goes after the one thing he has left. Take everything else away from a believer and he still has the conviction that God is there and God is his. The taunt aims directly at that. Where is your God? It implies that his whole life has been built on nothing and that everyone else can see it. And it comes “all the day long,” which is the detail that makes it unbearable. A single insult can be shrugged off; a drip cannot.

How does he answer it? He does not, not with evidence. He has no argument to make and no rescue to point at. What he does instead is three things worth naming for the class: he tells God about it directly (42:9), he preaches to his own soul (42:11), and he remembers what he has already seen (42:4, 42:6, 44:1). That is the whole toolkit, and it is enough. Then point to where Psalm 42 lands the believer’s hope: I shall yet praise Him. Not I can prove Him now, but I shall yet. Ask who in the room is currently being asked that question, whether by a neighbor, a family member, or their own head.

Question 3. *Psalm 44 insists that all this has come upon the nation although they had not forgotten God or dealt falsely with His covenant (44:17–19), and it ends by asking God to wake up. How should a class handle a prayer like that, and what does it protect us from believing about suffering?*

Handle it by letting it say what it says. The psalm does not claim national sinlessness in some absolute sense; it claims that this particular disaster did not come from covenant unfaithfulness, and the writer is willing to submit that claim to God, who searches the secrets of the heart (44:21). Then he says the thing that shocks readers: for Your sake we are killed all day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. And then, awake, why do You sleep, O Lord? That is not irreverence. It is the language of a covenant partner who believes God is real enough to be addressed that way.

What it protects us from is the tidy formula that suffering always indicates sin. Job’s friends taught that formula and God rebuked them for it. The disciples assumed it in John 9:2 and Jesus corrected them. Whole congregations have wounded their own members with it. Then show the class what the New Testament does with the hardest verse: Paul quotes 44:22 in Romans 8:36, in the middle of a passage about being more than conquerors, and he includes it precisely because Christians do get slaughtered and are still not separated from the love of God. The psalm’s question is never answered in the psalm. It is answered at the cross.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Find the refrain in 42:5, 42:11, and 43:5. Write out what is identical in all three and what comes immediately before and after each one, and describe what the repetition does over the course of the poem.*

The refrain is identical each time: Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him. The endings vary slightly, with the help of His countenance, my God, and in 43:5, the help of my countenance and my God. What comes before each one differs: in 42:1–4 it is thirst and tears and memory; in 42:6–10 it is deep calling to deep, waves and billows, and the taunt; in 43:1–4 it is a plea for vindication and for light and truth to bring him back to the altar. The repetition shows that this is not a one-time victory. He has to say it again, and the third time he says it he has moved from missing the altar to asking to be led back to it.

2. *In 42:4 the writer remembers going with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise. List everything he says he remembers, and note what he is doing with memory in the middle of a hard season.*

He remembers going with the multitude, going with them to the house of God, the voice of joy and praise, and a multitude keeping a pilgrim feast. Later he says he will remember God from the land of the Jordan and the heights of Hermon. He is deliberately using memory as ballast. Note what he remembers: not private experiences but corporate worship, the crowd and the noise and the festival. That is a quiet argument for the assembly. A Christian who has never given himself to the gathered church has nothing to remember when he cannot get there.

3. *Psalm 43:3 asks God to send out His light and His truth to lead him. Compare Psalm 119:105 and John 8:12, and write down where Scripture says that light actually comes from.*

Psalm 119:105 says God's word is a lamp to the feet and a light to the path. John 8:12 has Jesus saying He is the light of the world, and that whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. So the light and truth the psalmist asks God to send are not an inner impression or a feeling of clarity; they are God's revelation and, ultimately, God's Son. That matters pastorally. A person in the dark should be pointed to Scripture and to Christ rather than encouraged to wait for a private signal.

4. *Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 in Romans 8:36, in the middle of the most triumphant passage he ever wrote. Read Romans 8:35–39 and explain what he does with the verse and why it strengthens rather than weakens his argument.*

Paul is arguing that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and he lists tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Then, instead of softening it, he quotes Psalm 44:22: for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. He includes the worst case rather than excluding it, and then says that in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. The verse strengthens the argument because it concedes everything the skeptic would raise. Christians really do suffer and die, and the love of God is not thereby refuted. Nothing in the list is powerful enough to separate us.

5. *Somebody you know is living in Psalm 42 right now, and probably has not said so. Identify that person, and this week do the one thing that helps most, which is to sit with them without trying to fix it, and then keep showing up.*

Answers will vary, and the instruction is deliberately restrained. People in a Psalm 42 season are usually worn out by advice and starved for company. Job's friends did their best work in the seven days they sat and said nothing (Job 2:13). Encourage a specific person, a specific day, and a plan to return, because the second and fourth visits are the ones that matter. Warn the class gently against demanding progress from someone who is grieving, and against quoting Romans 8:28 too early.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Handle discouragement pastorally rather than clinically. These psalms show that a faithful believer can be genuinely low without being faithless, and a class member may need to hear that said plainly. Where there is danger to someone's life or health, urge appropriate help privately and promptly.
- Psalm 44:23, "Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?" is covenant language, not irreverence. God preserved this prayer in His own songbook, which is itself a pastoral gift.
- Do not use Psalm 44 to teach that the righteous never suffer for their own sin, and do not use it to teach that suffering never has a cause. It teaches that suffering does not always have the cause we assume (John 9:1–3).
- Resist tidy resolutions. Psalms 42 through 44 end without an explanation, and a class that is taught to expect explanations will be badly prepared for real life.

The Veil Torn in Two

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Mark tells the crucifixion in short, hard sentences with no commentary. Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, is pressed into service, and Mark names his sons as though the readers would know them. The wine mixed with myrrh is refused; He will not dull it. They crucify Him and divide His garments, casting lots. The inscription reads, The King of the Jews. Two robbers, one on each side, and from every direction the same taunt: save Yourself. He saved others, Himself He cannot save. That last sentence, meant as mockery, is the most accurate theology anyone spoke that day.

At the sixth hour darkness covers the whole land until the ninth hour. Then the cry, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, the first line of Psalm 22, a psalm that begins in abandonment and ends with all the ends of the world remembering and turning to the Lord. He cries out with a loud voice and breathes His last, and Mark immediately records two things. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And the centurion, who stood opposite Him and saw how He cried out and died, said, Truly this Man was the Son of God. A Gentile soldier is the first human being in Mark's Gospel to say it after the cross.

Then the women watching from a distance, Joseph of Arimathea taking courage and asking for the body, a linen cloth, a stone. And on the first day of the week, very early, three women coming with spices and worrying about the stone, and finding it already rolled away. A young man in a long white robe says the sentence that changes everything: Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. The rest of the chapter reports the appearances, the commission to preach to every creature, the ascension, and the apostles going out everywhere with the Lord working with them and confirming the word.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Crucifixion was a Roman execution reserved for slaves, rebels, and the worst criminals, designed to be public, prolonged, and shameful. Roman citizens were normally exempt.
- Simon of Cyrene came from North Africa; Mark alone names his sons Alexander and Rufus, which suggests they were known to his readers (compare Romans 16:13).
- The veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, which only the high priest entered, once a year, with blood (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:6–7). Tearing it from top to bottom indicates it was torn from God's side, not man's.
- The third hour is about nine in the morning, the sixth about noon, and the ninth about three in the afternoon.
- Mark 16:9–20 is absent from two of the oldest surviving Greek manuscripts and present in the great majority of the rest, and it is quoted by Christian writers as early as the second century. Faithful scholars have differed. The doctrine taught in 16:15–16 does not rest on this passage alone, since Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, and 1 Peter 3:21 teach the same thing.
- The signs of 16:17–18 and the summary of 16:20 belong together: the signs confirmed the word as it was first preached (Hebrews 2:3–4), and Acts records exactly such confirmations.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *At the moment Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (15:38). Read Hebrews 10:19–22 and Hebrews 9:6–12, and talk about what that curtain had meant for fifteen centuries and what its tearing announced.*

Make sure the class knows what the veil was before you say what the tearing meant. It was a heavy curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, where the ark had stood. Only one man could go behind it, the high priest; only one day a year, the Day of Atonement; and never without blood, which he offered for himself first and then for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:6–7). Every Israelite who ever walked into the temple courts understood the message of that curtain: God is holy, you are not, and this far and no farther.

Then Hebrews 10:19–22: therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. The tearing was from top to bottom, which is to say from God's side, and at the moment of the death rather than at the resurrection. The way in was opened by the blood, and the Old Covenant system of priest, altar, and curtain had finished its work (Hebrews 8:13; 9:11–12). Ask the class what it costs us that we can pray at any hour with no priest and no ceremony, and whether we treat that access as cheap because it was free to us.

Question 2. *Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (15:34), the opening line of Psalm 22. Read that psalm through to its end, and discuss why He would quote it and what a person hearing it should have understood.*

Read the whole psalm aloud, because this is one of those cases where the answer is in the text and most people have never seen it. Psalm 22 opens with the exact words Jesus spoke. It goes on to describe mockery in words the crowd was using that very afternoon, He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him. It describes a body pulled out of joint, a tongue clinging to the jaws, thirst, being encircled, hands and feet pierced, bones that can be counted, and men dividing His garments and casting lots for His clothing. Then at verse 22 it turns, and by the end all the ends of the world remember and turn to the Lord, and a people yet to be born are told that He has done this.

So the cry is a genuine cry of abandonment, and it is also a pointer. He is bearing sin, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 53:6 tell us what that means. Do not overreach into speculation about a rupture within the Godhead; Scripture does not describe it that way, and John 16:32 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 should keep us careful. What a Jewish hearer should have understood is that the man on the middle cross was quoting the psalm that was being fulfilled in front of them, and that the psalm does not end in darkness. Ask the class what it means to them that the Lord, in the worst hour anyone has ever had, reached for Scripture.

Question 3. *In 16:15–16 Jesus tells them to go into all the world and preach the gospel, and says that he who believes and is baptized will be saved. Walk through that sentence carefully, and then set it beside Acts 2:38 and Romans 6:3–4 and discuss what all three passages say together.*

Begin by dealing with the manuscript question honestly, because someone in your class will have read a footnote about it. Mark 16:9–20 is missing from two of the oldest Greek manuscripts and present in the overwhelming majority of the others, and it was quoted by Christian writers in the second century. Good and faithful people have come to different conclusions. Say that plainly, and then say the thing that settles the practical matter: not one syllable of what we teach about salvation depends on this passage alone. If Mark 16:16 were set aside entirely, the doctrine would stand exactly where it stands now, because Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, and 1 Peter 3:21 teach it.

Then teach the verse. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. Notice the order, belief then baptism, and notice that the second clause names only unbelief, for the obvious reason that a man who does not believe will not be baptized. There is no salvation before faith and none apart from the obedience faith produces. Peter told the crowd at Pentecost to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Paul says we were baptized into Christ's death and raised to walk in newness of life. Ananias told

Saul to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Set them side by side, let the class see the agreement, and keep the tone warm. Many sincere people have been taught otherwise, and this is a conversation, not a contest.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the mockery in 15:29–32. Write down what the passersby said, what the chief priests and scribes said among themselves, and what those crucified with Him said. Note what all three groups had in common.*

The passersby blasphemed, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself and come down from the cross. The chief priests with the scribes mocked among themselves, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And even those crucified with Him reviled Him. All three groups demanded that He prove Himself by coming down, which is exactly the temptation Satan had offered in the wilderness. Had He answered any of them, no one would have been saved. The mockery in 15:31 is unintentionally the clearest statement of the gospel spoken that day.

2. *Read Psalm 22 beside Mark 15. List every correspondence you can find: the words, the mockery, the hands and feet, the clothing, the thirst, and how the psalm ends.*

Psalm 22:1 supplies the words He cried. Verses 7 and 8 describe them shooting out the lip and shaking the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him. Verse 14 describes being poured out like water with bones out of joint and a heart like wax. Verse 15 describes strength dried up and the tongue clinging to the jaws, which matches the thirst of John 19:28. Verse 16 says they pierced My hands and My feet. Verse 17 says they look and stare, and the bones can be numbered. Verse 18 says they divide My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing, which Mark records in 15:24. And the psalm ends in triumph, with the great assembly, the nations worshiping, and a people yet unborn being told what He has done.

3. *The centurion had watched many men die, and he said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God” (15:39). Identify from the text what he had just seen and heard, and describe what made this death different from every other one he had supervised.*

He had seen a man refuse the drug that would have dulled the pain. He had seen three hours of darkness at midday. He had heard the cry to God in words he may not have understood, and then a loud voice from a man who by that stage of crucifixion should not have had the breath for it, followed immediately by death. Mark says he saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last. Crucifixion normally ended in slow suffocation and silence. This man gave up His life with a shout. The centurion, who had presided over many executions, concluded that he had just watched something different in kind, and said so.

4. *Set Mark 16:16 beside Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, and 1 Peter 3:21. Write down what each passage says baptism is for and what it puts a person into.*

Mark 16:16 says he who believes and is baptized will be saved. Acts 2:38 says repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Acts 22:16 says arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Romans 6:3–4 says we were baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into His death, buried with Him by baptism into death, and raised to walk in newness of life. Galatians 3:26–27 says as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. First Peter 3:21 says baptism now saves us, not the removal of the filth of the flesh but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Together: it is preceded by faith and repentance, it is for the forgiveness of sins, and it puts a person into Christ and into newness of life.

5. *Jesus said to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Name one person in your world who has never heard you say plainly what you believe and why, and have that conversation before the month ends.*

Answers will vary, and the assignment is a conversation rather than a presentation. Listen for a real name and a realistic setting. Encourage people to begin with their own account rather than an argument, since almost nobody is offended by a person explaining why he believes. Have them report back. Some will find the conversation went

better than they feared, and a few will find it went badly and need to hear that Mark 16:15 says preach it, not guarantee the response.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Be honest about Mark 16:9–20 rather than silent. Say that it is missing from two very old manuscripts, present in the great majority, and quoted in the second century, and that faithful brethren have differed. Then teach 16:15–16 as Scripture, and show that the same doctrine rests independently on Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, and 1 Peter 3:21. Honesty here builds more confidence than avoidance ever does.
- Verses 17 and 18 describe signs that confirmed the word to the first generation (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; Acts 28:3–6). They are not a program for testing God today, and they give no warrant whatever for handling snakes or drinking poison. Say that plainly.
- Handle the cry of 15:34 with care. He was genuinely bearing our sin (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21), and He was quoting a psalm that ends in worldwide triumph. Do not speculate about a division within the Godhead; Scripture does not put it that way.
- Guard against any suggestion of hostility toward Jewish people. Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27–28 spread the responsibility widely, and Isaiah 53:5–6 puts it on all of us.

Unveiled Faces

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The reading opens with a piece of pastoral instruction that congregations still find harder than discipline itself. A man had caused grief, the church had acted, the punishment inflicted by the majority had done its work, and now Paul says the opposite is required: forgive him and comfort him, lest such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Reaffirm your love to him. And then the reason, which should stop a class cold: lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices. The devil is perfectly happy to work either side of a discipline case.

Then two of Paul's most arresting images. First the triumph: thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. In a Roman victory parade the incense filled the street, and it smelled like glory to the soldiers and like death to the captives walking behind. We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? Then chapter 3 opens with the Corinthians themselves as his letter of recommendation, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

The rest is a sustained comparison of two covenants, and it is one of the most important passages in the New Testament for understanding what a Christian does with the Old Testament. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious enough that Israel could not look at Moses' face, and that glory was passing away. How much more glorious is the ministry of the Spirit, which remains. Then the veil: on Moses' face, then on the minds of those who read the old covenant, and finally the promise that when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. And the last verse, which is where the whole chapter has been going: we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The offender of 2:5–11 is most likely the man addressed in the severe letter referred to in 2:3–4 and 7:8–12. Paul's concern now is restoration rather than further correction.
- The image in 2:14 is the Roman triumph, a victory procession in which incense was burned along the route; the same smell meant celebration to the victors and execution to the prisoners.
- "Peddling" in 2:17 translates a word used of merchants who watered down wine. Paul is denying that he handles God's word for profit or advantage.
- Letters of recommendation were standard practice for traveling teachers; Paul's rivals apparently carried them and questioned why he did not.
- The comparison in 3:7–11 is between the covenant given at Sinai, engraved on stone, and the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and established by Christ (Hebrews 8:6–13; 9:15).
- Exodus 34:29–35 is the background for the veil: Moses covered his face after speaking with God, and Paul makes a point of the glory that was fading.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul tells the church to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm love to a man who had caused real grief, lest he be swallowed up with too much sorrow, and he says Satan gains an advantage when we do not (2:5–11). Talk about how a congregation can be right about a sin and still be outmaneuvered on the far side of repentance.*

A congregation can be entirely right about a sin, act with courage, see the person repent, and then lose him on the way back. That is what Paul is guarding against. He says the punishment inflicted by the majority is sufficient, that they ought rather to forgive and comfort him, and that they must reaffirm their love to him, so that he is not swallowed up with too much sorrow. Note the verb. Sorrow that leads to repentance is good (7:10); sorrow with no way home drowns a man.

Then name Satan's two strategies out loud, because Paul says we are not ignorant of his devices. On one side he works to keep a church from ever addressing sin, so that a congregation becomes a place where nothing is ever said. On the other side he works to keep a repentant person permanently on probation, remembered forever as what he did, greeted politely and never trusted again. Both outcomes serve him. Ask the class whether there is someone in their own history the congregation never really brought back, and what it would take to reaffirm love this month rather than in principle.

Question 2. *In 3:2–3 Paul says the Corinthians are his epistle, known and read by all men, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God on tablets of flesh. Who is reading your life this week, and what has it been saying?*

Paul is answering a challenge about credentials, and his answer is that his credentials walk around Corinth. You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. His argument for the truth of the gospel is a group of changed people in a city famous for not being changed.

Then make it personal without making it sentimental. The people reading your life this week are specific: a spouse who sees the version of you that never gets edited, children who are learning what God is like from how you handle a bad day, a coworker who knows where you go on Sunday and is watching how you treat the person nobody likes. Ask the class to name one reader and one thing that reader has seen recently. Some answers will be uncomfortable, which is why the question is worth asking. First Peter 2:12 and Matthew 5:16 say the same thing from another direction: they see, and then they glorify God.

Question 3. *In 3:7–11 Paul calls the law written and engraved on stones a ministry of death that was nevertheless glorious, and says its glory was passing away. Read that with Colossians 2:14–17 and Hebrews 8:13, and discuss what a Christian's relationship to the Old Testament actually is.*

Start by protecting the Old Testament from a misreading of this passage. Paul calls the law glorious. It came with such glory that Israel could not look steadily at the face of the man who delivered it. It was given by God, it was holy, just, and good (Romans 7:12), and it was written for our learning (Romans 15:4). Nothing here permits contempt for the first three-quarters of your Bible. What Paul says is that its glory was a fading glory, because it was always meant to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24–25).

Then say clearly what changed. Colossians 2:14 says He wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross, and 2:16–17 says therefore let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival, a new moon, or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come. Hebrews 8:13 says that in calling this a new covenant, He has made the first obsolete. So the Christian reads the Old Testament constantly, learns from it, loves it, and does not go to it for his law. Our authority is Christ and the covenant He gave through His apostles (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1–2). Be specific where the class needs it: the Sabbath, the tithe, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the instruments of the temple service all belonged to the old order.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. Read 2:14–16 and trace the two responses to the same aroma. Write down who smells death and who smells life, and note what that says about why the same gospel produces such different reactions.

The same fragrance is smelled by two groups. To those who are being saved it is the aroma of life leading to life; to those who are perishing it is the aroma of death leading to death. The scent does not change; the noses do. That explains why one person weeps at a sermon and the man beside him is irritated by the same sentences. It also removes a burden from the preacher and the personal worker, since Paul immediately asks, and who is sufficient for these things, and answers in 3:5 that our sufficiency is from God. We are responsible for carrying the fragrance faithfully, not for controlling how it is received (Acts 17:32–34).

2. Paul says in 2:17 that he does not peddle the word of God. Look up 1 Thessalonians 2:3–6 and 1 Peter 5:2, and list the motives all three passages rule out for anyone who handles Scripture publicly.

Second Corinthians 2:17 rules out handling the word for profit or adulterating it to suit the buyer. First Thessalonians 2:3–6 rules out error, uncleanness, deceit, pleasing men, flattering words, a cloak for covetousness, and seeking glory from people. First Peter 5:2 rules out serving by compulsion and for dishonest gain. Together they forbid using Scripture for money, for status, for the approval of an audience, or under grudging obligation. What is required instead is sincerity, as from God, in the sight of God, speaking in Christ.

3. Make a two-column list of everything 3:6–11 says about the first ministry and the second: what each was written on, what each produces, and what happened to the glory of each.

The first ministry: the letter, engraved on stones, a ministry of death and of condemnation, glorious, and passing away. The second: the Spirit, written on hearts, a ministry giving life, of righteousness, far more glorious, and remaining. The law exposed sin and pronounced sentence, which is why Paul calls it a ministry of death, and it could not give life (Galatians 3:21). The glory of Moses' face was real and temporary; the glory of the new covenant is greater and permanent. Both are God's work; only one is the covenant Christians live under.

4. In 3:14–16 Paul says a veil lies on the heart when Moses is read, and that it is taken away in Christ. Read Romans 10:1–4 and describe what Paul says was missing in his countrymen and what removes the veil.

Paul says that to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Romans 10:1–4 says his heart's desire and prayer for Israel was that they might be saved, that they had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge, and that being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to the righteousness of God, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. What was missing was not sincerity or effort; it was submission to God's way of making people righteous. The veil comes off when a person turns to Christ.

5. Second Corinthians 3:18 says we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory as we behold the Lord. Set a specific daily time and place this week to behold Him in the Scriptures, write it on your calendar, and keep it every day, not most days.

Answers will vary, and the discipline is the assignment. Note for the class that 3:18 describes a process, from glory to glory, and a means, beholding the Lord. Transformation in this verse is not achieved by resolving to be different; it happens to people who keep looking at Him. Push for a specific time and place, since a plan without an hour is a wish, and ask the following week who kept it every day. Most people will have missed a day and should be told that starting again is part of the practice, not evidence against it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (3:6) contrasts two covenants, not two ways of reading the Bible. It gives no license for loose handling of Scripture or for setting aside what the New Testament plainly says. Compare 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:20–21.
- Teach that the Old Law has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 5:17), while holding just as firmly that the Old Testament is inspired and written for our instruction (Romans 15:4). Do not let the class leave with either error.

- “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (3:17) is freedom from the condemnation and the shadows of the old covenant, not freedom from the authority of Christ. Compare Galatians 5:13 and 1 Peter 2:16.
- The transformation of 3:18 is gradual and comes through beholding Christ in the revealed word. Do not turn it into a claim of direct, unmediated experience or present-day revelation; the Spirit works through the word He gave (Ephesians 6:17; Romans 10:17).

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 1 Chronicles 12-19 · Psalm 45-46 · Luke 1:1-38 · 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10

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