

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 54 OF 104

It Is Written

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	2 Chronicles 30–36
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 56–57
Gospels	Luke 4:1–30
General New Testament	Galatians 1–2

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to put the word of God back in the center of the room as the thing that settles arguments. Josiah found it, read it, and tore his clothes. David praised it while hiding from men who wanted him dead. Jesus answered the devil with it three times and would not be moved. Paul refused to let even an angel amend it. If your class leaves with one conviction, let it be that what God has said outranks what we prefer, what we assume, and what everyone around us is doing.

Doctrinally, three points want care. First, keep Galatians 2:16 in its own argument: Paul denies justification by the Law of Moses and by human merit, and he does not deny the obedience of faith that includes baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:26–27; James 2:24; Mark 16:16). Second, note that baptism is God's work on us, not a meritorious work of ours (Colossians 2:12; Titus 3:5). Third, be clear that the Old Law was fulfilled and taken away in Christ, so we do not bind it, and we also do not treat the New Testament pattern as optional.

Formationally, the thread is what a person reaches for under pressure. Judah reached for alliances and idols and ran out of remedies. David reached for God's word in a Philistine city and in a cave. Jesus reached for Deuteronomy on an empty stomach. Peter, for one bad afternoon, reached for the approval of the men who had just walked in. Ask your class this: when you were last under real pressure, what did you actually reach for first, and what would have to change this month for it to be the Scriptures?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Galatians 1–2 first. It is the doctrinal center of the week and it needs your best hour. Build it on three texts: the anathema in 1:8–9, the confrontation in 2:11–14, and the summary in 2:16 and 2:20. Settle faith and works carefully, and tie 2:20 to Romans 6:3–6.

Second session: Take up Luke 4:1–30 second. Read the temptations aloud with the Deuteronomy passages open beside them, and spend real time on how Jesus used Scripture. Close at Nazareth, where the same people who admired Him tried to kill Him twenty minutes later.

The other two readings: 2 Chronicles 30–36 and Psalms 56 and 57 carry the extended questions. Ask the class to read 2 Chronicles 34:14–21 slowly and to sit with the fact that the book had been in the building the whole time, and encourage them to memorize Psalm 56:3 this week.

The Book They Had Lost

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The Chronicler gives Hezekiah more space than any king but David and Solomon, and the centerpiece is a Passover held in the second month because the priests were not ready. Hezekiah sends runners into the territory of the northern tribes, and 30:10 says the people laughed them to scorn and mocked them, but some humbled themselves and came. Then a curious thing happens. Many eat the Passover without being cleansed as prescribed, and Hezekiah prays, may the good Lord provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, and God heard and healed the people. Mercy, in the middle of a book obsessed with order.

Manasseh is the extreme case in all of Scripture. He rebuilt the high places, raised altars to Baal, put a carved image in God's house, consulted mediums, and made his sons pass through the fire. He reigned fifty five years. Then Assyrian captains took him with hooks, bound him in bronze, and carried him to Babylon, where he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. God was moved, brought him back to Jerusalem, and, the text says, then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God. The damage was not undone. Josiah would fight it the rest of his life. But the man himself was forgiven.

Josiah is the last light. A boy king who begins seeking God as a teenager, purges the land in his twenties, and then, in the middle of a construction project, is handed a book that had been lost inside the very building he was repairing. His response is the measure of the man: he tore his clothes, sent for a word from the Lord, read the book aloud to the whole nation, and made a covenant. After him the lamp goes out quickly. Four kings in twenty two years, a mocked warning, a burned temple, and a seventy year silence, ending with one sentence of hope from a Persian king.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This section covers roughly 715 to 538 BC, from Hezekiah through the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the decree of Cyrus.
- Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 BC, which is why Hezekiah could invite the remnant of Israel to come south to Jerusalem.
- Huldah the prophetess (34:22) was consulted privately by the king's messengers; there is no suggestion that she taught publicly over the assembly.
- The seventy years of exile fulfilled Jeremiah 25:11–12 and satisfied the sabbath years the land had not been given under Leviticus 25 and 26.
- Chronicles ends where Ezra begins, with the decree of Cyrus, and the two books share the final paragraph almost word for word.
- The genre remains theological history. God's dealings here are with Israel as a covenant nation and should not be transferred to modern nations.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Manasseh shed innocent blood, set an idol in the house of God, and seduced the nation into worse evil than the Canaanites, and when he humbled himself in captivity God was moved by his prayer and brought him home (33:9–13). Who have you quietly written off as beyond reach, and what does Manasseh's story ask you to do about that?*

Let the class feel how bad Manasseh was before you talk about his forgiveness, or the mercy will not land. He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, put an idol in the house of God, and led the people to do worse than the nations God had destroyed. 2 Kings 21 records that his sin was part of why Judah finally fell. And in prison he

humbled himself greatly, prayed, and was heard. God was entreated by him. The word used is the language of a father moved by a son.

The pastoral question is the second one, and it deserves names rather than categories. Most of us carry a short private list of people we have stopped expecting anything from: a sibling, a former member, an ex son in law, a child who has not been to services in fifteen years. Paul was on somebody's list (Acts 9:13, 21). Ask the class to name one person, silently if necessary, and to take one specific action this month: a letter, a meal, a phone call with no agenda. Manasseh's conversion did not begin with a sermon. It began with chains and a prayer, which means our job is often simply to remain reachable when the chains come.

Question 2. *The Book of the Law was found in the temple, which means it had been in the building all along while the nation drifted (34:14–19). What are we in danger of possessing without reading, and what did Josiah do the moment he heard it?*

The detail is almost painful. The scroll was in the temple. It had not been stolen or burned; it had been misplaced under decades of neglect, and a generation grew up managing religious activity without it. When Shaphan reads it aloud, Josiah tears his clothes, because he suddenly sees the distance between what God said and what Judah had become. Then look at what he does: he inquires of the Lord, he gathers all the people great and small, he reads it in their hearing, and he makes a covenant to perform the words.

The modern parallel is not subtle. Most Christians own more Bibles than any generation in history and read them less than their grandparents did. Ask the class, without shaming anyone, how many days in the last month they actually opened it, and then ask what they would do if they read something tomorrow that exposed a real gap. Josiah's sequence is a good pattern: hear it, take it seriously enough to grieve, find out what God says about it, tell your household, and then commit in a way that other people know about.

Question 3. *Second Chronicles 36:15–16 says God sent His messengers, rising up early, until there was no remedy. How does a person, or a congregation, get to a place where there is no remedy, and what are the early warning signs?*

The chilling phrase is until there was no remedy. Notice that the hardening took a long time and that God kept sending. He sent by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. The remedy was refused, not withheld. They mocked the messengers, despised the words, and scoffed at the prophets until judgment was the only thing left.

The warning signs are visible earlier than people think. A person begins to find reasons why each rebuke does not apply. Conviction that used to sting stops stinging. Sermons become performances to evaluate rather than words to obey. Hebrews 3:13 tells Christians to exhort one another daily lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, which means hardening is gradual and preventable and that we are supposed to help each other. Ask the class when they last felt genuinely convicted, and whether the trend in their own life is toward a softer heart or a more practiced defense.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Hezekiah's prayer in 30:18–20 for people who ate the Passover without being ceremonially cleansed. What does it show about God's mercy, and what does it not authorize us to conclude about obeying His instructions?*

It shows that God looks at the prepared heart and will grant mercy where there is genuine seeking, even when a person falls short of a ceremonial requirement he did not have time or knowledge to meet. Hezekiah asks for pardon rather than declaring the requirement void, and the text says the Lord healed the people. What it does not authorize is deliberate disregard of God's instructions with the assumption that sincerity covers everything. Nadab and Abihu were sincere (Leviticus 10:1–3), and Uzzah meant well (1 Chronicles 13:9–10). Mercy for the ignorant who are seeking is not permission for the informed who are not.

2. Build a timeline of Josiah from 34:1–8: what he did at eight, at sixteen, at twenty, and at twenty six. What does that sequence say about how reform actually happens?

At eight he began to reign; at sixteen, while still young, he began to seek the God of his father David; at twenty he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, wooden images, and molded images; at twenty six he began repairing the house of the Lord. Reform started on the inside and worked outward, and it took years. A teenager seeking God became a young man clearing out idols and then a man rebuilding what had been ruined. Nothing in that sequence is instant, which is worth saying to a class that wants change to happen in a weekend.

3. Second Chronicles 36:21 says the land kept its sabbaths until seventy years were fulfilled. Read Leviticus 26:34–35 and Jeremiah 25:11–12, and explain what God was collecting.

God was collecting the sabbath years the land had never been given. Leviticus 25 commanded that the land rest every seventh year, and Leviticus 26:34–35 warned that if Israel would not obey, the land would enjoy its sabbaths while they were in their enemies' land. Jeremiah 25:11–12 set the term at seventy years. In other words, the exile was not an arbitrary sentence; it was God taking what Israel had withheld from Him for roughly four hundred and ninety years. God keeps accounts patiently and exactly.

4. The book closes with Cyrus issuing a decree. Read Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1–4 and note when those words were spoken relative to Cyrus. What does that tell you about God's control of history?

Isaiah names Cyrus, calls him God's shepherd and His anointed, and says he will say of Jerusalem that it shall be built, roughly a century and a half before Cyrus was born. God says explicitly in 45:4 that He called him by name though Cyrus did not know Him. History is not a runaway process that God reacts to. He names the man who will sign the release before the exile has even begun, which is exactly the kind of God worth trusting with a future you cannot see.

5. Josiah heard the word read and tore his clothes because he realized how far the nation had drifted (34:19). Name one command of Scripture you have known about for years and never obeyed, and obey it this week.

Answers will vary. The distinctive thing about Josiah is the gap between knowing and grieving; he did not merely take note, he tore his clothes. Listen for commands the class has domesticated by familiarity: confession, hospitality, forgiveness of a specific person, giving, visiting the widow, telling someone the gospel. Press for one, and for a day.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Manasseh's forgiveness can be misused as an argument for delaying repentance. Note that his sins had permanent consequences for the nation, that he lost most of his life to them, and that Scripture nowhere promises tomorrow (James 4:13–14; 2 Corinthians 6:2).
- Huldah is sometimes used to argue for women preaching or teaching over assemblies. The text shows the king's men going to her privately for a word from God, not a woman addressing the congregation. Teach the New Testament order plainly and kindly (1 Timothy 2:11–12), and give full honor to the enormous work women do (Titus 2:3–5; Acts 18:26).
- Hezekiah's prayer in 30:18–20 must not become a principle that sincerity replaces obedience. Pair it with Leviticus 10:1–3 so both truths stand.
- Do not apply the national judgment of Judah to modern countries. These are covenant terms given to Israel (Deuteronomy 28), and God has made no such covenant with any nation today.

Afraid and Trusting

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These are laments, and their headings tie them to two of the lowest moments in David's life. In Psalm 56 he is in Gath, a Philistine city, carrying, according to 1 Samuel 21, the sword of Goliath, and so frightened that he scribbles on the gate and lets spit run down his beard so the king will think he is mad. In Psalm 57 he is in a cave with a few hundred distressed and indebted men. These are not psalms written from a comfortable study.

The structure of Psalm 56 alternates between the threat and the trust: they twist my words, they lurk, they mark my steps, and then, in God I have put my trust, I will not fear what flesh can do to me. Verse 8 is one of the tenderest images in Scripture. God takes account of the wandering, collects the tears in a bottle, and writes them in a book. The suffering that no one else saw is not lost.

Psalm 57 turns from petition to praise at verse 7, and the turn is deliberate rather than emotional. My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise. Awake, my glory, awake, lute and harp, I will awaken the dawn. He is still in the cave. Nothing outside him has changed yet. He simply decides that God is worth singing to before the rescue arrives, and the refrain, be exalted above the heavens, lifts the whole psalm off the cave floor.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both headings say Michtam of David, a term of uncertain meaning, perhaps indicating a psalm meant to be engraved or preserved.
- Psalm 56 is tied to 1 Samuel 21:10–15, when the Philistines took David in Gath; Psalm 57 to 1 Samuel 22:1 or 24:3, when he fled from Saul into a cave.
- Genre: individual laments, moving from complaint to petition to confident praise, which is the standard shape of the form.
- Do Not Destroy in the heading of Psalm 57 is most likely the name of a tune.
- Psalm 57:7–11 appears again, nearly word for word, as the opening of Psalm 108, an example of psalm material reused in a new setting.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 56:3 says, whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. Notice that it does not say the fear went away. How do fear and faith live in the same person at the same time, and where is that happening in you right now?*

The Hebrew is candid: in the day that I am afraid, I will trust in You. David does not deny the fear or rebuke himself for it. He treats fear as the occasion for trust rather than as evidence against it. That should be an enormous relief to the person in your class who has concluded that his anxiety proves he has no faith. Faith is not the absence of fear; it is what you do with your fear.

Give the class the practical mechanics. David speaks to God in the fear, names the specific threat without exaggerating it, and then states aloud what he believes about God. Philippians 4:6–7 gives the same order. Ask the group where fear currently rules a decision, an avoided conversation, a health scare, a job, a child, and ask them to write verse 3 on a card and keep it where the fear shows up.

Question 2. *Psalm 56:8 pictures God counting David's wanderings and putting his tears in a bottle. What does that image say about how God regards suffering that nobody else noticed, and how would believing it change a hard week?*

The picture assumes a God who pays attention to details nobody else records. He numbers the wanderings, which were tedious and undignified, and He keeps the tears, which nobody saw. In a culture where mourners collected tears in small vessels, the image would have been immediate. Matthew 10:29–31 says the same in different terms: the sparrow does not fall without the Father, and the hairs of your head are numbered.

Press the second half hard, because this is where it becomes pastoral. Much of the hardest suffering in a congregation is invisible: a caregiver's exhaustion, a lonely widower, infertility, a marriage that is technically fine, a job endured for the family's sake. Ask what changes if all of that is recorded rather than wasted. Then ask a harder question: whose invisible suffering could you notice this week, since God clearly thinks noticing matters.

Question 3. *Psalm 57:7–8 has David saying his heart is steadfast and telling his own soul to awake and sing, while he is still hiding in a cave. What is the difference between pretending to feel better and deliberately choosing to praise before the trouble ends?*

Pretending says nothing is wrong. David has just described men whose teeth are spears and arrows and whose tongue is a sharp sword; he is not pretending. Deciding says something is very wrong and God is still worth praising. He commands his own soul, awake my glory, which means he is not waiting for the feeling to arrive first. Habakkuk 3:17–18 is the same move: though the fig tree does not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

This is worth practicing rather than merely discussing. Singing, giving thanks aloud, and naming specific mercies are all things a person can do while still in the cave, and doing them tends to change the one who does them. Ask whether anyone in the class has experienced that, and then ask what song, psalm, or list each person will use this week when the feeling is not there.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read 1 Samuel 21:10–15 for the setting of Psalm 56. What did David actually do to survive, and what does that add to your reading of a psalm about trusting God?*

David fled to Gath, the hometown of Goliath, carrying Goliath's sword, and when the servants of King Achish identified him, he was very much afraid and pretended to be insane, scratching on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. The psalm about trusting God comes from a man who was simultaneously terrified and improvising. That should keep us from romanticizing faith. David's handling of the situation was not admirable, and God preserved him anyway, and out of that mess came one of the great statements of trust in the Psalter.

2. *Twice in Psalm 56 David says, in God I will praise His word (56:4, 10). List everything the psalm says he will not fear and everything he says God will do. What is the relationship between the word he praises and the fear he refuses?*

He will not fear what flesh can do to him, will not fear what man can do to him, and refuses to fear even while they twist his words, plot evil, lurk, and mark his steps. He says God knows his wanderings, keeps his tears, will cause his enemies to turn back, is for him, and has delivered his soul from death and his feet from falling so he may walk before God in the light of the living. The relationship is direct: he praises God's word, meaning he rests on what God has promised, and because the promise is solid, the threat shrinks. Fear is always a question about which word is more reliable.

3. *Psalm 57 has a repeated refrain in verses 5 and 11. Write it out, and note where it falls in the psalm. What does it mean that the same sentence closes both the section about lions and the section about singing?*

The refrain is, be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be above all the earth. It closes the section about the lions and the section about singing. That placement is the point: the same request fits whether David is describing men whose teeth are spears or waking the dawn with a harp. What he wants most does not change with his circumstances, which is a good definition of a settled heart.

4. Psalm 56:7 asks God to cast the peoples down in anger. Read Romans 12:17–21 and 1 Peter 2:23, and explain how a Christian should pray about people who are genuinely trying to harm him.

A Christian may pray honestly about the harm being done and ask God to stop it and to do right, but he leaves the settling of accounts with God. Romans 12:17–21 forbids repaying evil for evil and says vengeance belongs to God, adding that we overcome evil with good. 1 Peter 2:23 says Christ, when reviled, did not revile in return but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. The imprecatory lines in the Psalms are appeals to the Judge, not permission to be the judge.

5. David says, in God I have put my trust, I will not be afraid, what can flesh do to me (56:4). Identify the person or situation whose opinion or power you are most afraid of this week, write that sentence out with the person's name in it, and act accordingly the next time it comes up.

Answers will vary. The exercise of putting a name into the verse is what makes it useful, because fear is almost always attached to something particular. Watch for the person whose fear is of a family member's disapproval; that is one of the most common and least discussed. Galatians 1:10 and Proverbs 29:25 are good follow up verses.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not hold up David's feigned madness in Gath as an example of faith. The psalm is honest about fear, and the narrative is honest about a poor decision. God's faithfulness is the constant, not David's conduct.
- Psalm 56:9, this I know, because God is for me, is not a guarantee of favorable earthly outcomes. Read Romans 8:31–39, where the same confidence is stated alongside tribulation, persecution, famine, and sword.
- Psalm 56:7 is imprecatory. Handle it as an appeal to divine justice and set the Christian standard beside it (Luke 23:34; Romans 12:19).
- A class member fighting real anxiety may hear these psalms as a rebuke. Make clear that Scripture treats fear as an occasion for trust, not as proof of unbelief, and be available afterward.

Tempted, Then Rejected

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The temptation account is not a story about how Jesus proved He could resist. It is a story about how He resisted, and the answer is the same three times: the written word of God, quoted accurately and applied precisely. He was hungry after forty days, and the first offer was reasonable on its face, since the Son of God certainly could make bread out of stone. The refusal is not about the bread; it is about taking orders from the wrong voice. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God.

The second offer is the shortcut: all the authority and glory of the kingdoms of the world, for one act of worship. The devil offers Jesus what the Father had already promised Him, on terms that bypass the cross, and every temptation since has had something of that shape. The third moves the scene to the temple and turns Scripture itself into the bait, with a psalm quoted and a key phrase left out. Jesus answers not by disputing the psalm but by refusing to make God prove Himself on demand.

Then Nazareth, where Luke shows you the pattern of the whole gospel in one afternoon. Jesus reads Isaiah, hands back the scroll, sits down, and says this is fulfilled today. They are delighted and sentimental, this is Joseph's son. Then He reminds them that in Elijah's day God fed a Sidonian widow and in Elisha's day cleansed a Syrian, and the mood turns murderous in a single verse. Grace they could applaud. Grace to outsiders, while insiders stood by empty handed, was intolerable.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The wilderness of Judea is a harsh, rocky region west of the Dead Sea; forty days recalls Israel's forty years and Moses' and Elijah's forty day fasts.
- All three of Jesus' answers come from Deuteronomy 6 through 8, the very chapters about Israel's testing in the wilderness. Where Israel failed, He stood.
- The devil is presented as a real being with real offers, not as a personification of inner conflict.
- Synagogue reading involved standing to read and sitting to teach; a visiting teacher could be invited to speak, which is why Jesus was handed the scroll.
- Isaiah 61 was understood as a messianic passage; Jesus' claim in 4:21 is unmistakable and is why the reaction is so strong.
- Nazareth was a small town where everyone had known Him since childhood, which is the point of the proverb He quotes in 4:23–24.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Every answer Jesus gives the devil begins with, it is written, and every one comes from Deuteronomy (4:4, 8, 12). What would it take for Scripture to be that available to you in a moment of pressure, and what is your current plan for getting there?*

Notice that Jesus does not argue, negotiate, or explain. He quotes. And He quotes from a section of Deuteronomy He clearly knew well enough to use without a scroll in front of Him after forty days without food. That is the standard the question is aiming at. Psalm 119:11 says the same thing from the other direction: Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Then get practical, because most adults have given up on memorizing anything. Suggest something modest and specific: one verse a week, written on a card, reviewed in the car. Better yet, ask each person to choose the verse that answers his own most frequent temptation, because Jesus did not quote randomly; each answer fit the offer. Ask the class to name the temptation and then find the verse together. That exercise is worth the rest of the hour.

Question 2. *The devil quotes Psalm 91 in 4:10–11 and leaves out part of it. Since Scripture can be quoted accurately and used falsely, how does an ordinary Christian protect himself from a persuasive misuse of a Bible verse?*

Psalm 91:11–12 says God will give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. The devil drops in all your ways, which is precisely the phrase that limits the promise to God's paths rather than to reckless stunts. It is a clean example of how error works: not by denying Scripture but by trimming it.

The protection is not cleverness; it is familiarity and context. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to rightly divide the word of truth. Practically: read whole chapters and whole books rather than living on isolated verses, check the context of any verse used to justify something new, and notice when a teaching requires ignoring other plain passages. Ask the class to name a verse they have heard used in a way they suspect was wrong, and work through it together.

Question 3. *Nazareth marveled at His gracious words until He brought up a widow in Sidon and a leper in Syria, and then they wanted to kill Him (4:22–29). Why does God's kindness to outsiders offend insiders so much, and where does that instinct still show up in us?*

The offense was not that Jesus claimed to fulfill Isaiah; verse 22 says they marveled at His gracious words. The offense came when He said that God had bypassed many widows in Israel to feed one in Sidon, and many lepers in Israel to cleanse one Syrian. That is a direct statement that God is free to show mercy where He pleases and that proximity to the covenant guarantees nothing. It is exactly what John the Baptist said about children of Abraham, and it produced the same fury.

The instinct survives. It looks like resentment when a new convert with a checkered past is given attention, quiet disapproval when a congregation spends money on people outside it, a preference for members who are like us, and the elder brother in Luke 15 standing outside the party. Ask the class where they feel that pull, and ask whether their congregation is a place a Sidonian widow could walk into.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the three temptations in order, and beside each one write the passage Jesus quotes. Look up Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13, and 6:16 and note what Israel had done in each of those settings.*

First, turn this stone into bread, answered with Deuteronomy 8:3, man shall not live by bread alone, spoken about the manna, when God humbled Israel and let them hunger to teach them dependence. Second, worship me and receive the kingdoms, answered with Deuteronomy 6:13, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve, spoken as Israel entered a land full of other gods. Third, throw Yourself down, answered with Deuteronomy 6:16, you shall not tempt the Lord your God, which refers to Massah, where Israel demanded that God prove Himself. In each case Israel had failed the very test Jesus now passes.

2. *Read Psalm 91:11–12 in full and compare it with the devil's quotation in Luke 4:10–11. What did he leave out, and how does the omission change the meaning?*

The devil omits the phrase to keep you in all your ways. The psalm promises angelic protection for a person walking in God's ways, not for a person deliberately creating a crisis to see whether God will act. With the phrase restored, the passage no longer supports the suggestion at all. The lesson is that a quotation can be word for word accurate and still be a lie in the way it is used.

3. *Jesus read Isaiah 61:1–2 and stopped in the middle of a sentence, before the day of vengeance of our God. Read the whole passage in Isaiah and explain why He stopped where He did.*

Isaiah 61:2 reads, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God. Jesus stopped after the first half because the first half described what He had come to do at that time. His first coming brought good tidings, liberty, and the acceptable year; the day of vengeance belongs to His return (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; Acts 17:31). The comma in Isaiah sits between two comings, and He read up to it and stopped.

4. Trace the Holy Spirit through 4:1, 4:14, and 4:18. What is Luke establishing about the ministry Jesus is beginning?

In 4:1 He is full of the Holy Spirit and led by the Spirit into the wilderness; in 4:14 He returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; in 4:18 He reads that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him because He has anointed Him to preach. Luke is establishing that the entire ministry is carried out in the power of the Spirit from the beginning, which is the same writer who will later show the church working in that power in Acts. It also confirms the anointing announced at His baptism in 3:22.

5. Hebrews 4:15 says He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin, and 1 Corinthians 10:13 promises a way of escape. Name the temptation you most reliably lose to, identify the specific way of escape God has already provided, and take it the next time.

Answers will vary, and this one belongs on paper rather than in open discussion. The second half is where people usually fail: the way of escape almost always exists earlier than we want it to, in the decision not to be in that room, on that site, in that conversation, or that tired and that alone. Press for the escape that is available before the temptation is at full strength.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The temptation of Jesus was genuine (Hebrews 4:15), and He was sinless throughout (1 Peter 2:22). Do not suggest that He could not really be tempted, and do not suggest that He had any inclination toward sin. James 1:13–14 describes temptation drawing on our own desire; His came entirely from outside.
- Do not use Luke 4:18 to argue for present day miraculous ministries. The signs confirmed His identity and the word (John 20:30–31; Hebrews 2:3–4).
- The acceptable year of the Lord is not a program of social or economic reform, and it is not a prediction of an earthly reign. It describes the gospel age opened by Christ's coming.
- Take the devil seriously as a real adversary (1 Peter 5:8) without letting the class drift into speculation about demons or into blaming Satan for every difficulty.

No Other Gospel

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Every other letter of Paul begins with thanks. This one begins with, I marvel that you are turning away so soon. Teachers had come into the Galatian churches insisting that Gentile converts be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be right with God. Paul does not treat this as a secondary issue or a matter of preference. He calls it a different gospel, which is not another gospel at all, and he pronounces an anathema twice in two verses.

The first two chapters are largely autobiography, and it is not self promotion. His opponents were saying that Paul's message was a watered down version he had picked up secondhand in Jerusalem and then softened for Gentile audiences. So he lays out the record: he was a persecutor, he was called by revelation of Jesus Christ, he did not immediately consult with anyone, he was in Jerusalem only briefly and saw only Peter and James, and he was personally unknown by face to the churches of Judea. His gospel had one source.

The account of the confrontation at Antioch is one of the most remarkable passages in the New Testament. Peter, the apostle to whom Christ first gave the keys, ate freely with Gentile believers until men came from James, and then he drew back out of fear. His example pulled in the other Jews and even Barnabas. Paul says he withstood him to his face before them all, because the truth of the gospel itself was at stake. Then, out of that conflict, comes the central sentence of the book: knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Galatians was written to churches in the Roman province of Galatia, most likely those founded on the first missionary tour (Acts 13–14), around AD 48 to 55.
- The trouble came from Judaizing teachers who accepted Jesus as Messiah but insisted that Gentiles must also be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.
- Works of the law in this letter means the whole system of the Law of Moses as a means of being justified, with circumcision, the calendar, and the food rules as its markers.
- Justified is a legal term meaning declared righteous; the question of the letter is what basis God uses for that verdict.
- The Antioch incident concerned table fellowship, which for Jews carried heavy ritual weight; Peter's withdrawal implied that Gentile Christians were second class.
- This is the letter to have open when discussing the Old Law's relationship to the church. The Law was fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:14–16; Hebrews 8:13).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul says that if he himself, or an angel from heaven, preached a different gospel, let him be accursed (1:8–9). How do we tell the difference between another gospel and a difference of judgment or opinion, and why does that distinction matter so much?*

Start with what made this another gospel. The Judaizers did not deny the resurrection or the deity of Christ. They added a requirement for being right with God, and in doing so they changed the basis of salvation. Paul says in 5:2 that if they receive circumcision for that purpose, Christ profits them nothing. Anything that changes how a person is saved, who Christ is, or what God has actually commanded is in this category. A different judgment about a work method, an expedient, or an opinion is not.

Then teach the class how to sort the two, because both errors are costly. On one side, treating every preference as a test of fellowship shatters churches over things God never spoke about. On the other, treating plain commands as optional empties the word of authority. Romans 14 governs matters of opinion; Galatians 1 governs the gospel itself. The practical test is whether Scripture speaks to it, and how. Ask the class to name a current dispute they have seen and to decide honestly which category it belongs in.

Question 2. *Peter ate with Gentile Christians until certain men arrived, and then withdrew out of fear, and even Barnabas was carried away (2:11–13). Where does the fear of what other people will think still bend a Christian's behavior, and what did Paul do about it?*

Notice that Peter's doctrine was correct; his practice was not. He had already been given the vision in Acts 10 and had defended Gentile inclusion in Acts 11 and 15. This was not confusion; it was fear, and fear made him act out a lie, that Gentile Christians were not fully brothers. The damage spread instantly, which is what happens when respected people bend. Even Barnabas, the man who had vouched for Paul when nobody else would, was carried away.

Ask where the same fear operates now. The Christian who is devout at church and silent at work. The parent who will not confront an adult child's sin because of how the family will react. The member who changes his tone about a doctrine depending on which relative is in the room. As for what Paul did, note the care in it: the sin was public, the damage was public, and the truth of the gospel was at stake, so the correction was public. That is a narrow set of conditions, not a license for airing complaints. Matthew 18:15 governs a private offense; 1 Timothy 5:20 governs the public one.

Question 3. *Galatians 2:20 says, I have been crucified with Christ. Read Romans 6:3–6 and describe when that crucifixion happened and what it means for how you live on an ordinary Thursday.*

Paul says I have been crucified with Christ, a completed action with continuing effect. Romans 6:3–6 tells us when it happened: as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death, buried with Him through baptism into death, our old man crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away. The crucifixion Paul is describing is not a mystical feeling; it happened when he was united with Christ in baptism, and its meaning is that the old self no longer runs the life.

The Thursday version is the rest of the verse: the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Practically, it means the question is no longer what do I want but what does the One who bought me want, and it shows up in small, unobserved decisions. Ask the class for one recurring decision where they would answer differently if they genuinely believed the old self had been put to death.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every statement in chapter 1 about where Paul's gospel came from and where it did not come from. Why does he spend so much space on this before arguing a single point of doctrine?*

He says the gospel he preached is not according to man, that he neither received it from man nor was taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ; that he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood; that he did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him; that after three years he saw only Peter and James, and briefly; that he was unknown by face to the churches of Judea; and that when he did present his gospel at Jerusalem, those of reputation added nothing to it. He spends this much space because if his gospel is secondhand, it can be corrected by whoever gave it to him. If it came directly from Christ, then the Judaizers are not correcting Paul; they are correcting the Lord.

2. *Trace Paul's movements in 1:15–2:1: Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem after three years, Syria and Cilicia, Jerusalem again after fourteen years. What is he proving by the chronology?*

He went to Arabia and returned to Damascus, went to Jerusalem three years later for fifteen days, went into Syria and Cilicia, and returned to Jerusalem fourteen years after that with Barnabas and Titus. The chronology proves there was no period of apostolic tutoring. He was preaching for years before any extended contact with the

Jerusalem apostles, and when the contact came, they recognized his gospel rather than supplying it, giving him the right hand of fellowship.

3. *Galatians 2:16 says a man is not justified by the works of the law. Read Romans 3:20–28 and Ephesians 2:8–10, and write out what Paul is denying. Then read Galatians 3:26–27, James 2:24, and Hebrews 5:9, and write out what he is not denying.*

He is denying that anyone is justified by keeping the Law of Moses or by any system of law keeping that earns a verdict of righteous; Romans 3:20 says by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified, and Ephesians 2:8–9 says salvation is by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. He is not denying that God requires obedience. Galatians 3:26–27 says we are sons of God through faith, for as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. James 2:24 says a man is justified by works and not by faith only. Hebrews 5:9 says Christ became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. The contrast is between earning and trusting, not between obeying and not obeying.

4. *Compare Galatians 2:1–10 with Acts 15. What was the issue, who was present, and what was decided? Note especially what they did not require of Titus.*

The issue was whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Present were Paul, Barnabas, Titus, Peter, James, John, and the elders. The decision was that no such burden should be laid on Gentile believers, with a request regarding things offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and sexual immorality. The detail Paul highlights is that Titus, a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised, which settled the question by a living example standing in the room.

5. *Paul says he does not set aside the grace of God, because if righteousness came through the law, then Christ died in vain (2:21). Name one place where you have been trying to earn what God has already given, and write out what it would look like to stop.*

Answers will vary. This usually surfaces as a person trying to feel acceptable rather than trying to be faithful: attendance kept as a ledger, service done to quiet a sense of guilt, a private sin repented of dozens of times without ever accepting forgiveness. Ephesians 2:8–10 holds it together: saved by grace, not of works, and created in Christ Jesus for good works. Listen for the difference between working because you are accepted and working to become accepted.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Galatians 2:16 is the standard proof text for salvation by faith only. Paul is denying justification by the Law of Moses and by human merit, not denying the obedience of faith. Read the letter's own conclusion, faith working through love (5:6), and pair it with Galatians 3:26–27, James 2:24, and Mark 16:16. Teach this positively; most people have never seen the two halves side by side.
- Baptism is not a work of human merit. It is a burial into the death of Christ in which God does the saving (Colossians 2:12; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). Make that distinction explicit whenever works are discussed in Galatians.
- Paul's independence from Jerusalem does not license a spirit of independence from the local church. He submitted his gospel for examination, took Barnabas and Titus with him, and received the right hand of fellowship.
- The anathema of 1:8–9 concerns a false gospel, not people who differ with us about judgments and opinions. Guard the class against turning apostolic seriousness into a party spirit (Romans 14:1–4; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13).

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Ezra 1–10 · Psalm 58–59 · Luke 4:31–5:26 · Galatians 3:1–4:20

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