

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 77 OF 104

Hearts Under Pressure

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 16-22
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 104
Gospels	Luke 22:31-71
General New Testament	Hebrews 1-3

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to get past what people say about their own hearts and down to what is actually there. Jeremiah names the problem, that the heart is crooked and no one can fully audit himself. Psalm 104 shows what a heart looks like when it is working right, blessing God over wild goats and evening light. Luke shows a confident man discovering at a fire what he really was. And Hebrews says, with great affection, take heed, brothers, lest any of you have an unbelieving heart, and then tells us how to keep that from happening.

Doctrinally, four matters deserve careful handling. Jeremiah 17:9 teaches the deceitfulness of the heart, not inherited guilt or total depravity. Jeremiah 18:7-10 shows that God's dealings with nations are genuinely conditioned on their response, which guards the class against determinism when Romans 9 comes up. Hebrews 1 establishes the full deity of the Son, including the Father calling Him God. And Hebrews 2:3-4 with Hebrews 3:12-14 gives you two of the most important teaching opportunities of the year, the purpose of confirming miracles and the plain fact that a Christian can fall away.

The formational thread is that hearts are kept soft in community, not in isolation. Jeremiah hardened under pressure until God called him back. Peter fell at a fire full of strangers and was restored by a Lord who had already planned his return. Hebrews prescribes the remedy in one line: exhort one another daily, while it is called today. So ask your class this before they go: name the person who has permission to tell you the truth about yourself, and if you cannot name one, say who you are going to ask this week.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Hebrews 1-3 first. It carries the week's doctrinal weight and repays a full hour. Give twenty minutes to the deity of the Son in chapter 1, fifteen to why He took flesh in chapter 2, and reserve the last twenty for Hebrews 2:3-4 and 3:12-14 together.

Second session: Take up Luke 22:31-71 second, and teach it as one unbroken night. Give real time to Gethsemane and then walk Peter's fall backward from the courtyard to the boast. Close with 22:61 and with the assignment Jesus gave Peter before he ever failed.

The other two readings: Jeremiah 16-22 and Psalm 104 carry the extended questions. Ask everyone to read Jeremiah 17:5-10 aloud at home this week and to settle in his own mind what verse 9 does and does not teach. Give the Psalm 104 walking assignment from the front; classes that actually do it come back changed.

Fire Shut Up in the Bones**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

These chapters put Jeremiah's private life and his public message on the same page. God forbids him to marry, to mourn, or to feast, and explains why: children born here will die of disease, and there will be no one left to bury the dead or comfort the living. The prophet's loneliness becomes the sermon. It is one of the hardest assignments given to any man in Scripture, and your class should sit with it for a minute before rushing to the famous verses.

Chapter 17 gives the diagnosis. Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his arm; blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, planted by the water, unafraid when heat comes, still bearing fruit in the year of drought. Between the two stands verse 9: the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can know it? The answer comes immediately in verse 10, I the Lord search the heart.

Then come the acted parables. At the potter's house a spoiled vessel is reworked, and God says He can do the same with a nation, which is a word of hope as much as of warning. In the valley of Hinnom Jeremiah smashes a flask and says a nation can also be broken past mending. For that he is beaten and put in the stocks, and out of that humiliation comes the most naked prayer in the Old Testament, followed by chapter 22 and God's verdict on four kings who had every advantage and used none of them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Jeremiah's enforced singleness (16:2) is unique among the prophets. Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea all married; Jeremiah's empty house was itself a sign.
- The potter's house was a working shop, probably in the valley south of the city, where the process Jeremiah watched was ordinary craftsmanship, not a miracle.
- Pashhur, who beat Jeremiah and put him in the stocks (20:1–2), was the chief officer of the temple, which means the prophet was punished by the religious establishment, not by pagans.
- Chapter 22 addresses Shallum (Jehoahaz), Jehoiakim, and Coniah (Jehoiachin or Jeconiah), the last kings before the exile. Jehoiakim is the king who later cut Jeremiah's scroll with a penknife and burned it (chapter 36).
- The Sabbath gate sermon of 17:19–27 belongs to the Old Covenant given at Sinai. It is not binding on Christians (Colossians 2:16–17), though the underlying principle of not treating God's commands as optional certainly is.
- The word behind deceitful in 17:9 carries the sense of crooked or twisted, and the word behind desperately wicked means incurably sick. The verse is a medical diagnosis, not a legal verdict on newborns.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jeremiah 17:5–8 sets a desert shrub beside a tree planted by the water. Describe what each one looks like in a real life today, and what makes the difference between them so hard to see in good weather.*

The two pictures are agricultural and precise. The shrub in the desert is not dead; it exists, it just never thrives. It lives in a salt land, it does not see when good comes, and it has no root system to survive a dry summer. The tree is planted deliberately by a stream, spreads its roots toward the water, and is not anxious in the year of drought. Both look green in April. The difference only shows in August.

Press the class on that last point, because it is the pastoral heart of the passage. In a good year the man trusting his salary and the man trusting the Lord look identical, attend the same assembly, and sing the same songs. The diagnosis waits for the layoff, the scan, the phone call at two in the morning. Ask each person what he reached for first the last time something frightened him. That reflex is the root system, and roots grow slowly, which means this week is when they are grown.

Question 2. *Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things. Talk about the ways we actually deceive ourselves, and be careful to say what this verse is claiming and what it is not.*

State clearly what the verse does say. Left to itself, the human heart is twisted and self flattering, and it is so good at it that a person cannot fully audit himself. Verse 10 supplies the remedy: God searches the heart and tests the mind. That is why Psalm 139:23–24 asks God to do the searching, and why Hebrews 4:12–13 says the word discerns the thoughts. We need an outside instrument because the measuring device is bent.

Now state what it does not say, because someone in the room has been taught otherwise. It does not teach that people are born guilty, that infants are depraved, or that a person is incapable of responding to God. Jeremiah spends his whole book pleading for repentance, which would be nonsense if repentance were impossible. Ezekiel 18:20 says the soul that sins shall die and that the son does not bear the guilt of the father. Jesus set a child in the midst as the picture of the kingdom (Matthew 18:3; 19:14). Teach the deceitfulness of the heart honestly, and teach personal accountability just as honestly. Then ask the class the practical question: who is allowed to tell you the truth about yourself?

Question 3. *At the potter's house God says He will relent from planned judgment if a nation repents, and relent from promised good if it turns to evil (18:7–10). How should that shape the way we pray and the way we think about a situation that looks settled?*

Read 18:7–10 out loud twice, because most people have never noticed it. God says that when He announces judgment on a nation and that nation turns from its evil, He will relent; and when He promises to build a nation and it does evil, He will relent from the good He intended. God is not fickle; He is consistent. His response is shaped by the response of the people, and He says so in advance.

That is the opposite of fatalism, and it is also the opposite of Calvinistic determinism. The potter image in Romans 9 has the same structure: God has the right to deal with peoples according to His purpose, and that purpose has always been conditioned on faith and obedience (Romans 9:30–33). Draw the practical conclusion for the class. It means prayer matters, repentance matters, and no situation is settled while people still breathe. Ask who they have stopped praying for because the outcome seemed fixed, and tell them to start again this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Jeremiah 16:1–9 and list what God forbids the prophet to do. What is God trying to say to Judah through a man's empty house?*

He is forbidden to take a wife or have children in that place, to enter a house of mourning or to lament or console, and to enter a house of feasting to eat and drink. God says He has taken away His peace, lovingkindness, and mercies from that people. The empty house preaches what the sermons could not: normal life is ending, and the ordinary comforts of marriage, mourning, and celebration will not be there when the siege comes.

2. *Trace the swings in Jeremiah 20:7–18, verse by verse. How many times does he move between praise and despair, and where does the passage leave him?*

He accuses God of overpowering and persuading him, says he is a laughingstock, complains that the word brings him reproach, resolves to quit, admits he cannot because the word burns in him, hears the whispering of those waiting for him to stumble, then suddenly declares that the Lord is with him like a mighty terrible one, calls on God to see His vengeance, bursts into a full doxology in verse 13, and in verse 14 curses the day he was born. The passage does not end resolved. That is part of its honesty, and it is why suffering believers find a friend here.

3. *Jeremiah 20:9 says God's word was like a fire shut up in his bones so that he could not hold it in. Compare Acts 4:19–20 and 1 Corinthians 9:16. What do these three men have in common?*

All three are men who could not stop speaking even when speaking cost them. Peter and John tell the council they cannot help speaking the things they have seen and heard. Paul says woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. Jeremiah tried to quit and found he could not. The common thread is that a word genuinely received from God builds pressure. A faith that can be set down quietly for a year was probably never carrying much.

4. Read Jeremiah 22:1–5 and 22:13–17. List what God required of a king, and pay close attention to the question at the end of verse 16.

He required them to execute judgment and righteousness, to deliver the plundered from the oppressor, to do no wrong or violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, and to shed no innocent blood. Against Jehoiakim He charges building a fine house with unpaid labor while his father Josiah judged the cause of the poor and needy. Then verse 16 asks, was not this to know Me? Knowing God, in the mouth of God, means doing justice for people who cannot repay.

5. Name one place where you have been leaning on an arm of flesh: a person, a paycheck, an insurance policy, a reputation. What is one specific step this week that would move you from the shrub to the tree?

Answers will vary. Watch for the difference between using a resource and trusting it; Scripture nowhere condemns savings or planning (Proverbs 6:6–8; 21:5). The question is which one a person turns to first and which one he could not bear to lose. Press for one action: a gift that shrinks the cushion, a decision made on principle rather than on security, a conversation with God about a number.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jeremiah 17:9 describes the self-deceiving human heart, not inherited guilt or total depravity. Say so directly; the verse is a favorite proof text for a doctrine it does not teach.
- The potter and the clay in chapter 18 is explicitly conditional (18:7–10). Do not let it, or Romans 9, be read as unconditional individual election. God shapes peoples according to their response to Him.
- Jeremiah 20:7 is rendered deceived, persuaded, or enticed in different versions, and the Hebrew allows the sense of being overpowered or talked into it. Jeremiah is speaking as a crushed man, and Scripture records his words without endorsing the accusation. God never deceives (Titus 1:2).
- The Sabbath sermon of 17:19–27 belonged to Israel under the law of Moses. The Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath (Colossians 2:16–17; Acts 20:7).
- Jeremiah 22:30, that Coniah should be written childless with no descendant prospering on David's throne, is fulfilled exactly. Matthew traces Joseph's legal line through Jeconiah, while Luke traces a different line, and Jesus reigns not from Jerusalem but from heaven (Acts 2:33–36). Do not turn this into a debate about a future earthly throne.

The Creator Keeps House

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 104 is the finest piece of nature writing in the Bible, and it is not sentimental. It begins with God clothed in light and riding on the wings of the wind, and then descends to springs in the valleys and birds singing among the branches. The poetry is concrete throughout: oil to make his face shine, bread that strengthens the heart, goats on the high hills, badgers in the rocks, the moon marking the seasons, the sun knowing its going down.

The organizing idea is not that God made the world once but that He runs it continuously. Verse 27 says these all wait on You to give them their food in due season. Verse 28 says You open Your hand, they are filled with good. Verse 29 says You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. There is no clockmaker here who wound the world and walked away. Every meal on earth is being served by God.

Notice where humanity appears. One verse, verse 23, man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening, sandwiched between the young lions returning to their dens and the great wide sea. That placement is a gift to a tired class. We matter to God, and we are not the center of the poem. And the whole thing closes as it opened, with a man telling his own soul to bless the Lord.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 104 begins and ends with the same words as Psalm 103, bless the Lord, O my soul, which links the two: the God who forgives is the God who feeds the ravens.
- The psalm follows the general sequence of Genesis 1 (light, the waters and the firmament, dry land and vegetation, the heavenly lights, the creatures of sea and air, land animals and man), then closes with a note on death and renewal.
- This is Hebrew poetry describing a world as it is experienced from the ground. It is not a scientific treatise, and reading it that way misses both its intent and its beauty.
- Leviathan in verse 26 appears as a creature God made to play in the sea, not as a rival deity. The psalm reduces what the surrounding nations feared to one of God's creatures at recreation.
- Acts 17:24–28 gives the New Testament's version of this psalm's theology: God gives to all life, breath, and all things, and in Him we live and move and have our being.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 104 is not only about God making the world but about God keeping it running (104:27–30). How would believing that change an ordinary Monday at work?*

Providence means God's continuing government of what He made. Verses 27 through 30 are as direct as Scripture gets: they wait on You, You give, You open Your hand, You hide Your face, You take away their breath. Jesus says the same thing more briefly when He notes that the Father feeds the birds and clothes the grass (Matthew 6:26–30), and Paul says in Him we live and move and have our being.

Bring it to Monday. If God is running the world at that level of detail, then the commute, the inbox, the difficult coworker, and the paycheck are all inside His government, which makes gratitude reasonable and panic unreasonable. It also dignifies ordinary work; verse 23 has man going out to labor in the same breath as the lions and the sea. Ask the class what one habit would make them notice God during a workday. Many find that a two minute pause before the first task, or thanks before a meal eaten alone at a desk, changes the tone of an entire week.

Question 2. *In this psalm human beings get a single verse, tucked between lions and the sea (104:23). Why is it healthy for us to see ourselves that way, and what does it protect us from?*

The psalm is refreshingly free of the idea that the universe exists to serve human beings. God waters trees no one will ever climb, feeds lions at night when nobody is watching, and made a sea creature to play in. Job 38 through 41 does the same thing at greater length. The effect is not to shrink us into insignificance, since the same Bible says we are made in His image, but to put us back into proportion.

What it protects us from is the exhausting belief that everything depends on us. A man who thinks the world runs on his effort cannot rest, cannot delegate, cannot stop checking his phone, and cannot enjoy a Saturday. Ask the class where they feel indispensable. Then read verse 23 again and note that the man goes home when evening comes, because God is still awake.

Question 3. *The psalm ends with the writer saying his meditation of God will be sweet and that he will sing as long as he has any being (104:33–34). Describe honestly what actually fills your thoughts in an unoccupied ten minutes.*

The psalmist says his meditation of God will be sweet, which means he has been in the habit of thinking about God for pleasure rather than for duty. That is a different thing from Bible study, and most of us have almost no practice at it. Meditation in Scripture is not emptying the mind; it is turning something over the way Psalm 1 describes, chewing on a truth until it releases flavor.

Give the class permission to be honest about the ten minute question. Most of us fill every gap with a screen, and the result is that we have almost no unoccupied thought left for God. Ask what would happen if the first ten minutes of a commute were silent, or the last ten minutes before sleep. Then let the class hear verse 34 again: may my meditation be sweet to Him. The aim is not more religious duty but actual enjoyment of God.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Psalm 104 next to Genesis 1 and note how closely the psalm follows the order of the creation days. Where does it match, and where does it move freely?*

Verses 1 through 2 correspond to light on day one, verses 2 through 4 to the heavens, verses 5 through 9 to the separation of waters and dry land, verses 14 through 17 to vegetation, verse 19 to the sun and moon, verses 11 through 12 and 25 through 26 to birds and sea creatures, and verses 20 through 23 to land animals and man. The psalm follows the order loosely and then moves freely, because it is a hymn built on Genesis rather than a commentary on it.

2. *List every creature named in this psalm and what God is said to provide for each. What does the list say about how detailed God's care is?*

Wild donkeys and every beast of the field drink from the springs, birds sing among the branches, cattle eat grass, man gets bread, wine, and oil, storks nest in the fir trees, wild goats live in the high hills, badgers hide in the rocks, young lions seek their meat from God, and innumerable creatures great and small fill the sea, with Leviathan playing there. God provides habitat as well as food: a hill for the goat, a rock for the badger, a tree for the stork. His care is not general; it is specific to each creature He made.

3. *Psalm 104:29–30 says that when God takes away their breath they die, and when He sends His Spirit they are created. Compare Job 34:14–15 and Acts 17:25–28. What claim are these passages making about every breath you take?*

All three passages say that life is on loan. Job 34:14–15 says that if God gathered to Himself His spirit and breath, all flesh would perish together. Acts 17:25 says He gives to all life, breath, and all things, and verse 28 says in Him we live and move and have our being. Every breath is a gift being handed to you at that moment, not a resource you possess. That truth will not leave a person the same, and it makes the last verse of Psalm 103 and the last of Psalm 104 make sense.

4. *The psalm's last verse asks that sinners be consumed from the earth. Why would a hymn about hummingbirds and mountain goats end that way, and how should a Christian pray about evil (Romans 12:19; Revelation 6:10)?*

The line is honest rather than harsh. A person who loves what God has made will hate what ruins it, and sin is what ruins it. The psalmist is not planning vengeance; he is asking God to act. Christians pray this way too: the martyrs

under the altar cry how long (Revelation 6:10), and Paul says vengeance belongs to God so that we do not take it (Romans 12:19). We long for evil to end, we leave the judgment to God, and we pray for our enemies in the meantime (Matthew 5:44).

5. Take a twenty minute walk this week with no phone and name ten things God made and sustains. Write them down afterward, and tell someone in your household what you saw.

Answers will vary, and this one is worth actually assigning. The walk works because Psalm 104 is a psalm of noticing, and noticing is a skill that atrophies. Ask for the written list at the next meeting, and let two or three read theirs aloud. Families with children should do it together; a child will find things the adults walk past.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- This is poetry. Expressions like the earth being founded so that it should not be moved (104:5) are the language of a settled, reliable creation, not a statement of astronomy.
- Affirm God as Creator and as the ongoing sustainer of all things. The psalm leaves no room for a God who started the world and withdrew.
- Leviathan in verse 26 is one of God's creatures, not a rival power. Do not let a class spend the hour speculating about its identity.
- Verse 35 is a plea for God to end evil, not a license for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19).

Sifted Like Wheat

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke's account of this night is built around hearts being tested. Peter's confidence is tested at a fire. The disciples' vigilance is tested in a garden and fails through sorrow rather than indifference; Luke says they were sleeping from grief. The Lord's own submission is tested to the point that an angel comes to strengthen Him and His sweat falls like great drops of blood. Everything true about each man comes to the surface within a few hours.

Gethsemane deserves unhurried attention. Jesus does not pretend to want the cross. He asks, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Then comes the sentence on which our salvation hangs: nevertheless not My will but Yours be done. The cup is the wrath against sin that He will drink in our place. He prays about it in agony, alone, with His friends asleep, and He gets up and goes to meet the torches.

Then Peter. He follows at a distance, which is Luke's quiet commentary, and sits down among the servants at the fire. A servant girl, a man, and then another accuse him, and each denial is more emphatic. The rooster crows. And Luke records what no other gospel does: the Lord turned and looked at Peter. He went out and wept bitterly. That is not the end of Peter's story, which is exactly why this passage is good news for people who have failed.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is late Thursday night into Friday morning, in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives and then in the high priest's house.
- Luke uses a medical man's eye throughout. He alone reports the sweat like drops of blood and the healing of the servant's ear.
- Some ancient manuscripts omit Luke 22:43–44, and many modern versions footnote or bracket it. The passage is well attested and reflects what the rest of Scripture says about Christ's suffering (Hebrews 5:7). If a class member notices a bracket in his Bible, explain the footnote calmly rather than letting it become a crisis.
- The Sanhedrin's night proceedings were irregular by their own standards, which is part of Luke's point: the trial was a foregone conclusion looking for a charge.
- The claim in 22:69 comes from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, and the council understood it exactly as a claim to divine status, which is why they said they needed no further witnesses.
- The cup in Scripture regularly pictures the portion God gives a person to drink, often His wrath against sin (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus tells Peter that Satan asked for him, that He has prayed for him, and that when he has returned he should strengthen his brothers (22:31–32). What does this passage teach about failure, restoration, and what a restored person owes the church?*

Take the verse apart. Satan asked for all of them; the you in verse 31 is plural, while the you in verse 32 is singular. Jesus prayed specifically that Peter's faith would not fail utterly. Note carefully that Jesus does not say Peter will not fall; He says when you have returned, which assumes the fall. Peter does deny Him, three times, with cursing according to Matthew, and he is restored by repentance and by the Lord's own patience (John 21:15–19).

Two doctrinal points and one pastoral one. First, this is not a proof of unconditional perseverance; Judas was at the same table and did not return. Second, it shows that a Christian who falls can be restored, which is the whole argument of Galatians 6:1 and Acts 8:22. Third, notice what Jesus tells Peter to do afterward: strengthen your

brothers. The person best able to help someone in the pit is usually the one who has been in it. Ask the class who in the room could tell a story of returning, and whether anyone has ever asked them to.

Question 2. *In Gethsemane Jesus prays that the cup be removed if the Father is willing, and then says nevertheless not My will but Yours (22:42). What has it cost you to pray that second sentence, and what makes it so hard?*

Notice the order. Jesus first asks honestly for the cup to pass. Prayer that pretends we do not want what we want is not honest prayer. Only then does He add the nevertheless. Both halves belong. He prays it while kneeling, alone, in agony, and Luke says He prayed more earnestly rather than less as the pressure rose.

Let the class answer the personal question with real examples, and expect the room to go quiet. Praying not my will means releasing an outcome: a diagnosis, a prodigal child, a job, a relationship, a prayer that has now gone unanswered for eleven years. It is hard because we do not merely want the outcome, we believe we know which outcome is good. Point out that Jesus prayed this knowing exactly what the Father's will would cost Him. Then ask what each person needs to place in that sentence this week.

Question 3. *Luke alone records that the Lord turned and looked at Peter (22:61). What do you think was in that look, and why did it break him when the rooster alone had not?*

Answers will vary, and that is fine, but guide the class away from a look of disgust. Everything Luke tells us about Jesus argues otherwise, and the result was repentance rather than despair. Judas felt remorse and hanged himself; Peter wept bitterly and was restored. The difference is not the depth of the failure but what each man believed about the one he had failed.

The rooster was information. The look was personal. That is the difference between knowing a fact about your sin and meeting the face of the one you sinned against, and it is why the cross does what a rulebook never could. Ask the class to consider how differently they would handle their own failures if they pictured that face rather than a ledger. Then remind them that the same Lord told Peter, before the denial, what his assignment would be after it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace Peter's fall backward from the third denial to his boast in 22:33. List every step, including where he was standing and who he was standing with.*

The third denial comes about an hour after the second, when a man insists that Peter is a Galilean. The second comes from another who sees him. The first comes from a servant girl who studies his face in the firelight. Before that, Luke says Peter followed at a distance and then sat down among them at the fire. Before that, Jesus warned him. Before that, Peter boasted that he was ready for prison and death. The chain is boast, distance, bad company, warmth and comfort, and then three denials, each louder than the last. Very few people fall at the first step.

2. *Read 22:36–38 about the two swords beside 22:49–51, John 18:36, and Matthew 26:52. What was Jesus teaching, and what was He clearly not authorizing?*

Jesus tells them to take a purse and a bag and to buy a sword, then says of two swords, it is enough, which is plainly not a war plan for eleven men. He is telling them that the sheltered conditions of their earlier mission are over and that hostility is coming, and He quotes Isaiah 53:12 about being numbered with transgressors. When a disciple actually uses a sword, Jesus stops him and heals the injured man. John 18:36 says His kingdom is not of this world, or His servants would fight. Matthew 26:52 says those who take the sword will perish by it. The passage does not authorize advancing His cause by force.

3. *Compare Luke 22:41–44 with Hebrews 5:7–9. What does the writer of Hebrews say Jesus learned, and how could a sinless Son learn anything?*

Hebrews 5:7–9 says that in the days of His flesh He offered up prayers with strong crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, was heard because of His godly fear, and though He was a Son, learned obedience by the things He suffered. A sinless Son had nothing to unlearn; what He learned was obedience by experience, actually walking the path of submission at its full cost. That is why Hebrews 4:15 can say He sympathizes with our weaknesses.

4. In 22:69 Jesus tells the council that from now on the Son of Man will sit at the right hand of the power of God. Read Psalm 110:1 and Acts 7:55–56. What was He claiming, and did it come true?

He was claiming the place described in Psalm 110:1, where the Lord tells David's Lord to sit at His right hand. The council heard it as a claim to be the Son of God and asked no further witnesses. It came true: Peter says so at Pentecost (Acts 2:33–36), and Stephen, dying, saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55–56). Jesus was telling the men condemning Him where He would be standing when it was over.

5. Peter denied Jesus where it was warm and crowded and nobody expected a confession. Name the specific room or conversation this week where you are most likely to go quiet, and decide now what you will say.

Answers will vary. The value of the question is in naming the room in advance: the break room, the group chat, the holiday table, the job site, the conversation with a certain relative. A person who decides the sentence beforehand rarely goes silent. Ask for the sentence itself, not merely the intention.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Luke 22:32 does not teach that a Christian cannot fall. Jesus assumes Peter's fall in the same sentence, and Judas is the counterexample in the same chapter (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4).
- Do not use 22:36–38 to justify violence in the Lord's service. Jesus heals the wounded man two paragraphs later and says His kingdom is not of this world.
- If someone raises the bracketed verses at 22:43–44, treat it as an ordinary question about manuscripts and answer it calmly. The doctrine of Scripture is not endangered by a footnote.
- Gethsemane shows the true humanity of Jesus without the least compromise of His deity. Do not let the class conclude either that He was merely a brave man or that His agony was play acting.

God Has Spoken by His Son

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Hebrews begins like a sermon rather than a letter, with no greeting and no sender, and the first sentence carries the whole argument: God, who spoke through prophets in many portions and in many ways, has now spoken in His Son. Everything that follows contrasts something good from the old arrangement with something better in Christ. The Son is described as the brightness of God's glory, the exact expression of His nature, the sustainer of all things by the word of His power, and the one who by Himself purged our sins and sat down.

Chapter 1 then stacks up seven Old Testament passages to prove the Son is not an angel. He is called Son, is worshiped by angels, is addressed as God with an eternal throne, is the Creator who remains while the heavens wear out, and is seated at God's right hand, while angels are ministering spirits sent to serve. Then chapter 2 turns that argument into a warning: if the word spoken through angels carried penalties, how shall we escape if we neglect this?

Chapter 2 explains the incarnation. He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, so that He might taste death for everyone, bring many sons to glory, destroy the one who had the power of death, release those held by fear of dying, and become a merciful and faithful high priest who can help those who are tempted because He was tempted. Chapter 3 then places Him above Moses, a Son over the house rather than a servant in it, and issues the first of the great warnings, built on Psalm 95.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The audience is Jewish Christians under pressure to return to the synagogue and the old system, probably before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, since the writer speaks of the sacrifices as still being offered.
- The author is not named. Content and authority are what the book rests on, and the church received it as Scripture without settling the question of authorship.
- The book is structured as alternating exposition and warning. Every doctrinal section is followed by a call to act on it, which is a good pattern for teaching it.
- The quotations in chapter 1 are from Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:14, Deuteronomy 32:43 or Psalm 97:7, Psalm 104:4, Psalm 45:6–7, Psalm 102:25–27, and Psalm 110:1.
- The last days in 1:2 is the Christian age, which began with Christ and Pentecost (Acts 2:16–17), not a period just before the end of the world.
- Psalm 95, quoted in Hebrews 3:7–11, was part of your class's reading three weeks ago in week 74. Remind them; the connection lands hard when they remember singing it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hebrews 1:1–3 and 1:8 make extraordinary claims about the Son. Work through them phrase by phrase and state what the writer is saying about who Jesus is.*

Go phrase by phrase, because each one is a claim. Appointed heir of all things. Through whom He made the worlds. The brightness of His glory, which is the radiance that belongs to the light itself rather than a reflection. The express image of His person, the exact stamp, as a seal in wax. Upholding all things by the word of His power, which means the universe is held together by Him right now. He purged our sins by Himself, and He sat down, which no priest under the old system ever did because the work was never finished.

Then read 1:8 slowly: to the Son He says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The Father addresses the Son as God. Add 1:10 through 1:12, where words spoken to the Lord in Psalm 102 are applied to Jesus as Creator. The

class should leave with no ambiguity: Jesus is not a great teacher, a created being, or an exalted angel. He is God the Son, and He reigns now. This is the foundation for everything the rest of Hebrews argues.

Question 2. *Hebrews 2:3–4 says the salvation first spoken by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, with God bearing witness through signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Discuss what those miracles were for, and what follows once the confirming work is finished.*

The passage assigns a purpose to the miracles, and the purpose is confirmation. The message was spoken first by the Lord, confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness with signs, wonders, various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Mark 16:20 says the same thing from the other side: they went out and preached, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs. Miracles authenticated the messengers while the message was still being delivered.

Then follow the logic gently. First Corinthians 13:8–10 says that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge would cease when that which is perfect, the complete revelation, had come. Jude 3 speaks of the faith once for all delivered. If the word is confirmed and complete, the confirming sign has done its work, the way scaffolding comes down when the building stands. Say this plainly, and say it kindly. Many sincere people have been taught otherwise, and this passage is best taught with a calm voice and an open Bible, not with ridicule.

Question 3. *Hebrews 3:12–14 warns against an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God and says to exhort one another daily. Who is doing that for you right now, and who have you taken responsibility for?*

Notice three things in order. The danger is described as an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, which means it is addressed to brethren, people who are currently with God, and that they can depart. The mechanism is named: hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, which is gradual, not sudden. And the remedy is communal: exhort one another daily, while it is called today.

Teach against once saved, always saved here, plainly and pastorally. Verse 14 says we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, and verse 19 says they could not enter because of unbelief. Then press the remedy, because it is the part we skip. God's stated plan for keeping Christians from hardening is other Christians talking to them every day. Ask each person for a name in each direction: who has permission to say hard things to you, and whose spiritual condition have you taken responsibility for? A congregation that answers those two questions honestly will lose fewer people.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Find the seven Old Testament quotations in Hebrews 1:5–13. Write down what each one proves about the Son over against angels.*

Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 prove that the Son holds a relationship to God no angel was ever given. The call for angels to worship Him proves He receives worship rather than offering it. Psalm 104:4 shows angels are made servants, winds and flames. Psalm 45:6–7 addresses the Son as God with an everlasting throne and a righteous scepter. Psalm 102:25–27 calls Him the Creator who remains when the heavens perish. Psalm 110:1 seats Him at God's right hand, which was never said to an angel. Taken together they prove full deity, eternal reign, and the right to be worshiped.

2. *List the reasons Hebrews 2:9–18 gives for why the Son had to share in flesh and blood. How many of them concern us directly?*

So that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone, to bring many sons to glory, so that the one who sanctifies and those being sanctified are all of one, to destroy through death the one who had the power of death, to release those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage, to become a merciful and faithful high priest to make propitiation for the sins of the people, and to be able to help those who are tempted because He Himself suffered when tempted. Every one of them concerns us directly; not one of them was for His own benefit.

3. Read Hebrews 2:3–4 with Mark 16:20 and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. What purpose is assigned to miraculous signs, and what does that imply about their duration?

The stated purpose is confirmation of the spoken word: God bearing witness alongside those who preached, the Lord confirming the word with signs following. First Corinthians 13:8–10 says such gifts would be done away when the complete came. A confirming sign is needed while a claim is being made and is unnecessary once the claim has been established and written down. The word we hold is confirmed and complete (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16–17), so we look to the Scriptures rather than to new signs.

4. Hebrews 3:1–6 compares Moses and Christ using the picture of a house. Trace the comparison, and note carefully the difference between a servant in a house and a son over it.

Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, for a testimony of things that would be spoken later. Christ is faithful as a Son over His own house, and He built the house, so He has more glory than the house itself. A servant works within an arrangement he did not create; a son owns it. The passage then says we are His house if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firmly to the end, which is the same condition repeated in 3:14.

5. Hebrews 3:13 says to exhort one another daily, while it is called today. Name one brother or sister you will contact each week for the next month, and decide today what day of the week you will do it.

Answers will vary, and the assignment is worth taking literally. Suggest a specific mechanism: a Sunday afternoon call, a Wednesday text, a Thursday visit. Encourage members to pick someone outside their usual circle, especially a member who has been missing. Teachers should ask about it in four weeks.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Hebrews 1 teaches the full deity of Christ, including the Father addressing the Son as God in 1:8. Affirm it clearly; it is the anchor of the book.
- Hebrews 2:3–4 explains why miracles were given. Teach plainly and graciously that the confirming signs completed their purpose when revelation was complete (Mark 16:20; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Jude 3). Do not mock those who believe otherwise.
- Hebrews 3:12–14 teaches that Christians can depart from the living God. Handle it as the writer does, as a warning given to brethren by someone who loves them, with the remedy of daily encouragement attached.
- Angels are ministering spirits (1:14). Resist speculation about their ranks, names, and assignments; the passage mentions them only to make the Son's superiority plain.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Jeremiah 23–27 · Psalm 105 · Luke 23:1–43 · Hebrews 4:1–6:12

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com