

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 79 OF 104

A New Covenant

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 28-32
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 106
Gospels	Luke 23:44-24:12
General New Testament	Hebrews 6:13-7:28

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to let the class see the new covenant arrive. Jeremiah announces it from a prison yard in a doomed city: a covenant unlike the old one, written on hearts, with sins remembered no more. Psalm 106 explains why a new one was needed by telling the truth about the people who broke the first. Luke shows the moment it was ratified, when the veil tore from the top and a tomb came up empty. And Hebrews explains the mechanism: the priesthood changed, so the law changed with it. By the end of the week the class should understand what covenant they are living under and why it matters.

Doctrinally, this is one of the most important weeks in the two year plan. Jeremiah 31:31-34 must be taught with Hebrews 8 as fulfilled now, in Christ and His church, not as a promise waiting on a future earthly arrangement. Jeremiah 29:11 must be read in its own paragraph. Hebrews 7:12 establishes that the law of Moses has been set aside, which answers the Sabbath, the Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifice, and the worship practices attached to that system. And Hebrews 7:25 promises complete salvation to those who keep coming, which is stronger comfort than unconditional security and is also honest about the condition.

The formational thread is buying the field. Jeremiah handed over silver for land he would never farm, because God said houses would be bought here again. The women bought spices for a body they would not anoint. Joseph gave up a tomb he had cut for himself. Every one of them acted on a word from God while the evidence was still pointing the other way. So put this to your class before they leave: name the field God is asking you to buy, the thing that only makes sense if He is telling the truth, and name the day this week you will sign the deed.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Jeremiah 28-32 first and build the hour toward 31:31-34. Spend ten minutes on Hananiah and how to test a message, ten on Jeremiah 29:11 in its own paragraph, and the rest on the new covenant read alongside Hebrews 8:6-13 and Luke 22:20. Close with the field in chapter 32.

Second session: Take up Hebrews 6:13-7:28 second, since it completes what the first session started. Give fifteen minutes to the oath and the anchor, twenty to Melchizedek and the argument of chapter 7, and save the last twenty for 7:12 and its practical consequences, then end on 7:25.

The other two readings: Psalm 106 and Luke 23:44-24:12 carry the extended questions. Read Luke 23:44-46 aloud at the close of a session and pause on the torn veil with Hebrews 10:19-22. Ask each member to read Psalm 105 and Psalm 106 back to back at home this week; the pairing teaches more than either psalm can alone.

A New Covenant Promised**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Chapter 28 is a confrontation between two men in the temple court, and it should be read as drama. Hananiah announces that within two full years God will break Babylon's yoke and bring back the vessels and the king. Jeremiah says amen, may the Lord do so, and then says the test of a prophet of peace is whether his word comes to pass. Hananiah takes the wooden yoke off Jeremiah's neck and breaks it. Jeremiah walks away, comes back with a word about iron yokes, and tells Hananiah he will die that year. He does, two months later.

Chapters 30 and 31 are the brightest pages Jeremiah ever wrote, and they were written by a man in a doomed city. God says He has loved them with an everlasting love. Rachel weeping for her children is told to stop crying because there is hope for the future. And then verses 31 through 34: a new covenant, not according to the one made when He took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, which they broke. This one will be written on hearts. All will know Him. He will remember their sin no more.

Chapter 32 makes the promise concrete. Jeremiah is under arrest in the court of the guard, the Babylonians are besieging the city, and his cousin shows up asking him to exercise his right of redemption on a family field in Anathoth, land that will be enemy territory within months. God tells him to buy it. He weighs out seventeen shekels, signs the deed before witnesses, seals it in an earthen vessel, and says houses and fields and vineyards will be bought in this land again. Then he prays, and God answers with a question: is there anything too hard for Me?

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Hananiah was from Gibeon, spoke in the temple before the priests and all the people, and was almost certainly sincere. Sincerity is not the test Scripture gives.
- The letter of chapter 29 was carried to Babylon by official envoys and addressed to the exiles taken in 597 B.C., who expected to be home shortly because prophets among them said so.
- Jeremiah 31:15, Rachel weeping for her children, is quoted in Matthew 2:18 concerning the slaughter at Bethlehem.
- Jeremiah 31:31–34 is the longest Old Testament passage quoted in the New Testament, appearing in full in Hebrews 8:8–12 and again in part in Hebrews 10:16–17.
- The right of redemption Jeremiah exercises in chapter 32 comes from Leviticus 25:25, where the nearest kinsman keeps land in the family.
- These chapters are sometimes called the Book of Consolation. They sit in the middle of the book precisely where hope seems least plausible, which is the point.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hananiah and Jeremiah both said they spoke for God, and they said opposite things (28:1–17). How was an ordinary person in Jerusalem supposed to tell them apart, and how do we test competing claims today?*

Give the class the tests Scripture actually provides. Deuteronomy 18:21–22 says a word that does not come to pass was not spoken by the Lord. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 says that even a sign that comes true does not validate a prophet who leads people to other gods. First John 4:1 says to test the spirits. Jeremiah himself adds one in 23:22: a true word turns people from their evil ways. Hananiah failed three of them: his prediction did not come true, his message required no repentance, and he flattered a nation that was under judgment.

Then note something important about Jeremiah's tone in 28:6. He says amen, may the Lord do so. He wanted Hananiah to be right. A man who loves his country and his people does not enjoy being the bearer of hard news.

Apply that to the class: we test messages today by measuring them against a completed Scripture (Acts 17:11; Galatians 1:8–9; Jude 3), and we do it without pleasure in being right. Ask where members get their teaching, and whether they check it against the text or against how it made them feel.

Question 2. *Jeremiah 29:11 is quoted on coffee mugs everywhere. Read it in its setting, verses 4 through 14, and discuss who it was written to, what it actually promised, and what it does and does not say to us.*

Read the whole paragraph aloud. God is writing to people already in exile, telling them to settle in for seventy years, and He says the thoughts He has toward them are of peace and not of evil, to give them a future and a hope. Then note verses 12 through 14: you will call on Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen; you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. The promise has a condition attached and a timeline of seventy years, which means most of the original readers died in Babylon.

So what does it say to us? It reveals the character of God, which does not change: He plans good for His people, He hears, He can be found by those who seek Him wholeheartedly, and His purposes outlast a lifetime. What it does not say is that any individual Christian is guaranteed a comfortable outcome on his own schedule. Teach both halves. A verse stripped of its paragraph becomes a promise God never made, and when that promise fails, people conclude that God failed. Ask the class how they would explain this verse to a friend going through a hard year.

Question 3. *Jeremiah 31:31–34 promises a covenant not like the one made with their fathers. List what is new about it, and then read Hebrews 8:6–13 and Luke 22:20 to see when it began.*

List what is new. It will be put in their inward parts and written on their hearts rather than on stone. Every member of it will know the Lord personally, from the least to the greatest. He will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. And it is expressly not like the covenant made at Sinai, which they broke. Hebrews 8:6–13 quotes the whole passage and concludes that in calling this covenant new, God has made the first obsolete, and that what is becoming obsolete is ready to vanish away.

Then settle the timing, since this is where many go wrong. Jesus said at the supper, this cup is the new covenant in My blood (Luke 22:20). Hebrews 9:15–17 says a covenant takes effect at the death of the one who made it. Hebrews 10:16–18 quotes the forgiveness promise and concludes that where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. The new covenant is not waiting on a future earthly kingdom; it is the arrangement Christians are living under right now, entered through the blood of Christ. Say that clearly, because the class will meet the other view in books and on the radio.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Compare Hananiah's message with Jeremiah's in chapter 28, and note Jeremiah's reaction in verse 6. How does the chapter end, and what does Deuteronomy 18:20–22 say about such a case?*

Hananiah promised that within two full years God would break the yoke of Babylon and return the temple vessels and King Jeconiah. Jeremiah answered amen, may the Lord perform your words, and then said that the prophets of old prophesied war and disaster, so a prophet of peace is proven only when his word comes to pass. Hananiah broke the wooden yoke; Jeremiah returned with a word about an iron yoke and told him he would die that year for teaching rebellion. He died in the seventh month. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 gives exactly that test: the word that does not come to pass was not from the Lord.

2. *Read Jeremiah 29:10–14 carefully and list the conditions God attaches to His promise to be found by them.*

God says that after seventy years are completed at Babylon He will visit them and perform His good word. Then the conditions: you will call on Me, you will come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you; you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. The promise is not automatic and it is not immediate. It belongs to people who turn to God wholeheartedly, and the same principle appears in the New Testament (Acts 17:27; James 4:8).

3. Write out the four promises of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:33–34. Then find each of them quoted in Hebrews 8:8–12 and 10:16–18, and note what the writer of Hebrews concludes from the last one.

I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be My people; they shall all know Me, from the least to the greatest; I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more. Hebrews 8:8–12 quotes all four. Hebrews 10:16–18 quotes the first and last and draws the conclusion that where these sins are forgiven there is no longer an offering for sin, which means the whole sacrificial system is finished.

4. Trace the legal steps of the field purchase in Jeremiah 32:6–15. Why record the weighing of the silver, the witnesses, and the sealed deed in such detail?

Hanamel comes with the offer, Jeremiah knows it is God's word, he buys the field, weighs out seventeen shekels of silver, signs and seals the deed, calls witnesses, has the purchase weighed on scales, and gives both the sealed and open copies to Baruch to be put in an earthen vessel so they will last many days. The detail is the message. A man does not execute a legally binding land contract in front of witnesses as a symbolic gesture. God is putting a real deed in a real jar as a promise that ordinary life will return to this land.

5. God told exiles to build houses and plant gardens in a place they did not choose. Name the situation you are enduring rather than living in, and name one thing you will do this week to plant something there.

Answers will vary. Watch for the difference between enduring a season and inhabiting it: a temporary apartment nobody hangs pictures in, a job held while waiting for another, a city someone refuses to make friends in, a hard marriage year lived at arm's length. Planting something looks like hospitality offered, a ministry begun, roots put down where a person did not plan to stay.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jeremiah 29:11 was written to a community in exile with a seventy year timeline and conditions attached. Teach it as a revelation of God's character, not as a personal guarantee of comfortable outcomes.
- The new covenant of 31:31–34 is in force now, ratified by the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6–13; 9:15–17). Do not allow it to be postponed to a future earthly arrangement with national Israel.
- Jeremiah 31:34, that they shall all know Me, means that everyone inside the new covenant knows God personally, since a person must be taught before he can enter it (John 6:45; Romans 10:14–17). It does not make teachers unnecessary (Ephesians 4:11–12; 2 Timothy 2:2).
- Chapter 28 is a good place to state how we test teaching now. The faith was once for all delivered, and Scripture is the standard (Galatians 1:8–9; Acts 17:11; Jude 3).

We Have Sinned With Our Fathers

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 106 is the other half of Psalm 105, and the pairing is deliberate. The first tells the story from God's side and never mentions Israel's failures; the second tells it from Israel's side and never stops mentioning them. Put them together and you get the truth about every believer's life: a faithful God, an unfaithful people, and a mercy that keeps outlasting the record.

The confession is corporate and it is present tense. We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. The psalmist does not say they sinned; he includes himself in a history he did not personally live. That is worth pausing over in a congregation that likes to locate its problems in previous generations or in other congregations.

The catalogue is painful and honest: rebellion at the sea, forgetting within days, craving in the wilderness, envying Moses, a golden calf at the very mountain where God had spoken, refusal to enter the land, Baal of Peor, the waters of strife where even Moses spoke rashly, failure to drive out the nations, idolatry, and finally the sacrifice of their own sons and daughters. And still, verse 44 says He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry, and verse 45 says He remembered His covenant and relented according to the multitude of His mercies.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 105 and 106 close Book Four of the Psalter, and Psalm 106 ends with the doxology that closes that book (106:48).
- Verses 1 and 47 through 48 appear in 1 Chronicles 16:34–36, which means at least part of this psalm was used in public worship from David's time.
- The closing plea, save us and gather us from among the nations, suggests a setting during or after the exile, when the confession had become painfully current.
- The episodes referenced come from Exodus 14 through 17 and 32, Numbers 11, 14, 16, 20, and 25, and Judges 1 through 3. Each is named in a line or two and assumes the reader knows the story.
- Verses 37 and 38 refer to child sacrifice to the idols of Canaan, the same practice Jeremiah condemns at Topheth, and the psalm calls it the shedding of innocent blood.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *This psalm is a confession sung by the whole congregation. Why would God put a corporate confession in the hymnbook, and what would an honest one sound like for a congregation today?*

God puts confession in the hymnbook because sin is not only an individual matter. A congregation develops habits: how it treats visitors, what it tolerates, what it talks about, what it never talks about. Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 9 are long corporate confessions in which righteous men say we, not they. Naming sin together in the presence of God is one of the healthiest things a church can do, and most congregations never do it.

Ask what an honest one would sound like here. Perhaps: we have been more concerned with our comfort than with the lost; we have let members drift away without going after them; we have talked about people rather than to them; we have been more loyal to our preferences than to the text. Keep the conversation off individuals and off other congregations. If the room can name two or three things without defensiveness, something real has happened.

Question 2. *Psalm 106:13 says they soon forgot His works and did not wait for His counsel. Talk about what impatience does to a person's obedience, and where you see that pattern in your own decisions.*

The word soon in verse 13 is the sting. They had walked through a sea on dry ground, and within three days they were complaining about water. Verse 13 gives the mechanism in two clauses: they forgot His works, and they did not wait for His counsel. Forgetting and impatience always travel together, because a person who remembers what God has done can afford to wait, and a person who cannot wait will act on the loudest voice in the room, which is usually his own.

Draw it into ordinary decisions. Impatience is the engine behind most debt, many bad hires, half the arguments in a marriage, the text sent at eleven at night, and the decision made without prayer because a deadline was manufactured. Ask the class to name a decision currently in front of them that they are tempted to force. Then ask what waiting for God's counsel would actually involve this week: the passage read, the counsel sought from someone wiser, the seventy two hours allowed to pass.

Question 3. *Psalm 106:15 says God gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul. Describe a time when getting exactly what you wanted turned out to cost you something you did not see coming.*

Numbers 11 is the background. They craved meat, complained about manna, and God sent quail in quantities that sickened them. The psalm says He gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul. That is one of the most sobering sentences in the Old Testament, because it means God sometimes answers a demanding prayer by letting us have exactly what we insisted on.

Handle this carefully so nobody concludes that God is stingy or that answered prayer is dangerous. The psalm is not warning against asking; Scripture commands asking. It warns against demanding, against making our will the fixed point and God the delivery service. Ask the class for real examples: a house bought at the edge of affordability, a promotion that ate the family, a relationship pursued past every warning. Then turn it around and ask what they are asking God for right now, and whether they could honestly pray Gethsemane's nevertheless over it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the sins the psalm names in order, from the Red Sea to Canaan. How many separate episodes are recorded, and what do they have in common?*

Rebellion at the Red Sea, forgetting His works and not waiting, lusting in the wilderness and tempting God, envying Moses and Aaron, making the calf at Horeb, despising the pleasant land and not believing His word, murmuring in their tents, joining themselves to Baal of Peor, angering Him at the waters of strife so that Moses spoke rashly, failing to destroy the nations, mingling with the heathen and learning their works, serving idols, and sacrificing their sons and daughters to demons. That is roughly a dozen episodes. What they share is forgetfulness: each begins with a people who had seen God act and then behaved as though He had not.

2. *Psalm 106:23 says Moses stood before God in the breach to turn away His wrath. Read Exodus 32:11–14 and Ezekiel 22:30, and then read 1 Timothy 2:1–4. Who stands in the breach now?*

Moses stood in the breach, which is a military image of a man standing in a gap in a wall. Exodus 32 records him pleading with God on the basis of His own name and His promises. Ezekiel 22:30 has God looking for a man to stand in the gap and finding none. First Timothy 2:1–4 says supplications, prayers, and intercessions are to be made for all men, because God desires all men to be saved. The intercessor now is Christ Himself (Hebrews 7:25), and Christians stand in the gap for others in prayer.

3. *Psalm 106:30–31 says the act of Phinehas was counted to him for righteousness. Compare Genesis 15:6 and James 2:21–24. What is being counted, and what does that say about faith and action?*

Genesis 15:6 says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. James 2:21–24 says that faith was made complete by what he did, and that a man is justified by works and not by faith only. Psalm 106:31 applies the same phrase to an act of Phinehas. What is counted is the faith that acts. Scripture never separates the two: trust

in God that stops short of doing what He says is not the faith that justifies, and doing without trust is mere performance.

4. *Count the cycles in verses 40 through 46: provocation, judgment, crying out, deliverance. What finally moves God each time, according to verse 45?*

Many times He delivered them, but they rebelled in their counsel and were brought low for their iniquity. Then verse 44 says He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry, verse 45 says He remembered His covenant for their sake and relented according to the multitude of His mercies, and verse 46 says He made them objects of compassion to their captors. What moves God, according to verse 45, is His own covenant and His own mercy. Their record supplied Him with no other reason, and neither does ours.

5. *Name one sin pattern that has repeated in your life or in your family across more than one generation. Write down the first specific thing you will do to break the cycle, and tell someone who will ask you about it.*

Answers will vary, and this question should be asked gently, since some of what people name will be painful.

Patterns pass down: anger, addiction, financial chaos, a habit of leaving when things get hard, a family tradition of Sunday absence. Look for one concrete first step and one person who will ask about it. Cycles break when someone finally names the thing out loud and refuses to hand it on.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 106 is confession, not despair. It opens and closes with praise, and it ends in a plea for God to save and gather. Do not leave a class in the catalogue of sins without taking them to verses 44 through 48.
- The act of Phinehas (106:30) took place under a specific divine judgment in the Old Covenant and is not a model for vigilante action today. Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19).
- Read Psalm 106 with Psalm 105. Either one alone gives a distorted picture, and the two together are the honest one.
- Verse 33 says Moses spoke rashly with his lips. Even the greatest servants of God failed under pressure, and Scripture records it without excusing it. Use it to encourage humility, not cynicism about leaders.

The Veil and the Empty Tomb

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke gives three signs at the death of Jesus. Darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth, which is the middle of the day. The veil of the temple torn in two, which Matthew says happened from top to bottom. And the loud cry of a dying man quoting a psalm: Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Then Luke adds the centurion, a professional executioner who had watched many men die and had never seen one die like that.

The burial is told with unusual care, and the care is the point. Joseph of Arimathaea is named, his council membership noted, his dissent recorded. The linen, the tomb hewn in rock, the fact that no one had ever lain there, the day, the approaching Sabbath. The women from Galilee followed, saw the tomb, and saw how His body was laid. Luke is establishing a chain of custody. There was a real corpse, a known tomb, and named witnesses who could find it again.

Then the morning. They come with spices, find the stone rolled away, and are standing there perplexed when two men in dazzling clothes ask the question that reframes everything: why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee. And they remembered His words. They tell the eleven, who dismiss it as nonsense, and Peter runs to the tomb and goes home wondering.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The veil separated the holy place from the most holy place, where only the high priest entered, once a year, with blood (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:6–8).
- Joseph of Arimathaea was a member of the Sanhedrin, wealthy according to Matthew, and Luke notes he had not consented to their decision. John adds that Nicodemus helped him.
- Jewish burial custom required immediate attention to the body, and the Sabbath began at sunset, which is why the women prepared spices and then waited.
- Luke notes that the women rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. They were faithful Jews in the days of transition; the Old Covenant was fulfilled at the cross and the new was proclaimed and entered at Pentecost.
- In first century courts the testimony of women was widely discounted. No one inventing a resurrection story would have made women the first witnesses, which is one reason the account carries the marks of honest reporting.
- Luke 23:46 quotes Psalm 31:5, a prayer Jewish parents taught children to say at bedtime. Jesus dies with a child's evening prayer on His lips, with the word Father added.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The veil of the temple was torn in two at the moment Jesus died (23:45). Discuss what that curtain had kept people out of, and then read Hebrews 10:19–22 to see what the tearing accomplished.*

The veil was the most eloquent piece of cloth in the world. It said that the way into the presence of God was not open, that only one man could go in, only on one day, only with blood, and only for a moment (Hebrews 9:6–8). Ordinary Israelites never saw behind it. When Jesus died, God tore it from the top, which is a detail Matthew supplies and which says who did the tearing.

Hebrews 10:19–22 draws the conclusion: we have 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. So let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Note that last phrase for your class; the writer connects entering God's presence to a washing. Ask the class what they would say to someone who feels he cannot approach God. The answer is not that his sin does not matter. The answer is that the curtain is already torn.

Question 2. *Joseph of Arimathea was a council member who had not agreed with the verdict, and the women from Galilee stayed through the burial. Why do you think the courage at the end came from people nobody expected, and what does that suggest about who is ready when the moment comes?*

Joseph had been a secret disciple, afraid, sitting in a council that had just condemned Jesus. The women had followed from Galilee and had no standing to do anything except watch and remember. Yet when the apostles had scattered, these are the people who claimed the body, bought the linen, noted the tomb, and came back at dawn. Courage does not always come from the people we would have picked.

Draw two lessons. First, the moment tends to find people who have been quietly faithful in small things; the women had been supporting Him out of their own means since Luke 8:1-3. Second, some people's faith stays hidden longer than it should, and then a crisis pulls it out. Ask the class who in the congregation does the unnoticed work, and whether anyone has ever told them it matters. Then ask the harder question: what would it take for a quiet believer in this room to be publicly identified with Jesus at work this month?

Question 3. *When the women reported the empty tomb, the apostles considered their words idle tales and did not believe them (24:11). Rather than embarrassing the gospel, why does that detail actually strengthen the case for the resurrection?*

Nobody constructing a legend includes their own leaders dismissing the central claim as nonsense. The Greek word Luke uses for idle tales was used for the delirious talk of a fevered patient. The eleven are not presented as visionaries eager to believe; they are presented as men who had to be convinced against their expectations, and Luke says so bluntly.

Add the other embarrassing details and let the case build. The first witnesses were women, whose testimony carried little weight in that culture. The male disciples are portrayed as cowards, doubters, and deniers throughout. A member of the council, not the apostles, buries Him. These are not the details of propaganda. Ask the class what evidence they personally find most convincing: the empty tomb with a known location, the transformation of the apostles, the willingness to die for a claim they could have checked, the conversion of Paul and of James, the existence of the church itself within weeks in the same city. Then ask them to be ready to say it in their own words to somebody.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every detail Luke records about the burial in 23:50-56. How many of those details would matter later if someone claimed the tomb had been mistaken or the body had never been buried?*

Joseph is named, his town is named, his membership on the council and his dissent are noted, he went to Pilate and asked for the body, took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb hewn from stone where no one had ever lain. The day was the Preparation and the Sabbath drew near. The women who had come from Galilee followed, observed the tomb, and saw how His body was laid, then returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. Every one of those details answers a later objection: wrong tomb, wrong body, no burial, no witnesses, a swoon rather than a death.

2. *Compare Jesus' last words in Luke 23:46 with Psalm 31:5. What is He doing with a psalm at the moment of death, and what does that suggest about how Scripture serves us in extremity?*

Psalm 31:5 says into Your hand I commit my spirit. Jesus adds one word, Father, and prays it with a loud voice. He is dying with Scripture in His mouth, using words He had known since childhood. It suggests that what we put in early is what surfaces under extremity, and that memorized Scripture is not a schoolroom exercise but a provision for the worst hour of a life. Ask what a person will have available if he has never put anything in.

3. *The centurion in 23:47 says this was a righteous man, and Mark 15:39 records more. Trace what this Roman soldier had just watched that brought him to say it.*

He had watched Jesus refuse to curse His executioners and instead pray for them, watched Him promise paradise to a criminal, watched three hours of darkness at midday, watched the manner of His death, and according to Mark saw how He cried out and gave up His spirit. Luke says he glorified God and said, certainly this was a righteous man; Mark records, truly this man was the Son of God. A man whose profession was killing people concluded that this execution was different.

4. *In 24:6–8 the angels tell the women to remember what Jesus said in Galilee. Find three places earlier in Luke where He said it, and note how plainly He had spoken.*

Luke 9:22, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, and be raised the third day. Luke 9:44, let these words sink into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed. Luke 18:31–33, where He names the Gentiles, the mocking, the scourging, the killing, and the third day. He had told them at least three times in plain language. The failure was not in the clarity of the teaching but in hearts that could not hold what they did not want.

5. *The women went to the tomb to care for a body and walked into the greatest news in history. Tell one person this week, in your own words, why you believe Jesus rose, and be specific about the evidence you find convincing.*

Answers will vary. The value of the exercise is that most Christians have never once said out loud why they believe, and the first attempt is always the hardest. Encourage members to write three sentences and practice them. Teachers can model it by giving their own three sentences at the start of the class.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The torn veil signifies access to God through Christ and the end of the Old Covenant system (Hebrews 9:6–8; 10:19–22). Keep the emphasis there rather than on speculation about the physics of the tearing.
- Luke notes that the women kept the Sabbath according to the commandment. They were faithful Jews at the hinge of the covenants; do not read it as binding Sabbath observance on Christians (Colossians 2:16–17).
- Teach the resurrection as bodily and historical. Luke is building a case with names, places, and witnesses, and the class should feel the weight of the evidence.
- Say what Scripture says about the three hours of darkness and stop. Speculation about natural causes distracts from what Luke is actually reporting.

A Priest Like Melchizedek

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The passage begins with an argument about oaths. People swear by someone greater to end disputes; God, having no one greater, swore by Himself. So the heirs of the promise have two unchangeable things, His promise and His oath, in which it is impossible for God to lie. The result is an anchor, and the image is striking: an anchor that does not go down into the sea floor but up and inward, behind the veil, where Jesus has entered as forerunner. The word forerunner implies others are coming after.

Chapter 7 makes the argument the writer postponed in chapter 5. Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14 without genealogy, priest of the Most High God and king of Salem, who blesses Abraham and receives a tenth of the spoils. Since the record gives no father, mother, beginning of days, or end of life, he stands in Scripture as a permanent priest, made like the Son of God. Then the argument: the lesser is blessed by the greater, and Levi, still in Abraham's body, paid tithes through him. The new priesthood outranks the old.

The conclusion is the most consequential sentence in the book for how we live. If perfection had come through the Levitical priesthood, why would another priest be needed? And since the priesthood is changed, there must be a change of the law as well. Christ came from Judah, a tribe with no priestly claim under Moses, and He is priest by the power of an endless life. The former commandment is set aside because it made nothing perfect, and a better hope is brought in by which we draw near to God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Melchizedek appears in only two Old Testament passages: Genesis 14:17–20 and Psalm 110:4. Hebrews builds its argument from both.
- Without father, without mother, without genealogy (7:3) describes the silence of the Genesis record, not a claim about his biology. The writer says he was made like the Son of God, which distinguishes him from the Son.
- Levitical priests had to prove descent from Aaron; a man without a genealogy could not serve (Ezra 2:61–62). That is exactly the point being made about a priesthood that does not depend on ancestry.
- Salem is generally understood as Jerusalem, and the name means peace, which the writer notes alongside the meaning of Melchizedek, king of righteousness.
- Christ came from the tribe of Judah (7:14), which had no priestly role under the law of Moses. His priesthood therefore requires a different arrangement entirely.
- Hebrews 7:12 is the verse to which everything in chapters 8 through 10 is attached. Once the class sees it, the rest of the book opens up.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hebrews 6:13–20 says God confirmed His promise with an oath so that we might have strong consolation, and calls our hope an anchor that enters behind the veil. How does that help a believer who is struggling to feel sure of anything?*

Two unchangeable things: God promised, and God swore. He did not need the oath; we needed it. That is a remarkable act of condescension, God accommodating human weakness by doing something for our sake that adds nothing to His truthfulness. The purpose stated in verse 18 is that we might have strong consolation, and the picture in verse 19 is an anchor that holds inside the veil where Jesus has already gone.

For a struggling believer, the pastoral point is where assurance comes from. It does not come from the strength of our feelings, which fluctuate weekly, but from the character of God and the location of our High Priest. Be careful not to slide from this into once saved, always saved. The anchor is hope, held by people who, as 6:11–12 says,

show diligence to the full assurance of hope and imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The anchor holds; we are told to hold the anchor. Ask the class where they have been looking for assurance, and read verses 18 through 20 to them again slowly.

Question 2. *Hebrews 7:12 says that when the priesthood is changed, there must be a change of the law as well. Work out carefully what that means for the law of Moses today, and name three specific practices it settles.*

Work the logic out on a board if you can. The law of Moses and the Levitical priesthood were a package; the law regulated the priests, the sacrifices, the feasts, the tabernacle, and everything else. If God replaces the priesthood, He cannot leave the law that governed it standing. Verse 12 says so explicitly, and verse 18 adds that the former commandment is annulled because of its weakness and unprofitableness.

Then name specifics, since this is where it becomes practical. First, the Sabbath and the feast days are not binding on Christians (Colossians 2:16–17); we assemble on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Second, there is no earthly priesthood among Christians standing between a believer and God; every Christian is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9) and there is one mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Third, the Levitical system of tithes, animal sacrifices, incense, and temple worship, including the instruments that belonged to it, has been set aside; Christians give as they have prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7) and offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips (Hebrews 13:15; Ephesians 5:19). Teach it firmly and without scorn toward anyone.

Question 3. *Hebrews 7:25 says He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. Talk about who this promises to save, and what the word come tells you about the condition.*

Two words carry the verse. Uttermost, which means completely or forever, so that nothing about His salvation is partial or temporary. And come, which is a present participle in the Greek, describing those who keep coming to God through Him. The promise is not made to everyone indiscriminately; it is made to those drawing near through Christ, and it rests on the fact that He always lives and never has to hand the work to a successor.

Handle the doctrinal edge plainly. This verse does not teach that a person once saved is saved regardless of what he does afterward; the same book says take heed lest there be an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (3:12), warns about falling away (6:4–6), and speaks of sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth (10:26). It teaches something better than unconditional security: that no one who keeps coming to God through Christ will ever find the door shut or the Priest unavailable. Ask the class what difference it makes to know that someone is praying for them right now, by name, who will never stop.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Genesis 14:17–20, the only narrative about Melchizedek. List every detail it gives, and then note how Hebrews 7:1–3 uses each one.*

Genesis 14 says Melchizedek was king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, was priest of God Most High, blessed Abram, and received a tenth of everything. Hebrews 7:1–3 takes the name to mean king of righteousness, the title king of Salem to mean king of peace, and the absence of any genealogy, birth, or death in the record to present a priesthood without ancestral qualification and without end, made like the Son of God. The argument rests on what the text says and on what it pointedly does not say.

2. *Trace the argument of Hebrews 7:4–10 that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and therefore greater than Levi. What two pieces of evidence does the writer use?*

First, Abraham paid a tenth to Melchizedek, and the lesser pays tithes to the greater. Second, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the greater. The writer then adds that Levi, who receives tithes under the law, may be said to have paid tithes through Abraham, since he was still in the body of his ancestor. The conclusion is that the Melchizedek priesthood outranks the Aaronic one, and Psalm 110:4 says Messiah belongs to it.

3. Compare Hebrews 7:12 with Colossians 2:14, Ephesians 2:14–16, and Romans 7:4–6. What happened to the law of Moses, and when?

Colossians 2:14 says the handwriting of requirements against us was wiped out and nailed to the cross. Ephesians 2:14–16 says He abolished in His flesh the law of commandments contained in ordinances, making peace and reconciling both Jew and Gentile in one body. Romans 7:4–6 says we were made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that we might be married to another, to Him who was raised. All three place the end of the law of Moses at the death of Christ, which is exactly what Hebrews 7:12 requires.

4. List the contrasts in Hebrews 7:23–28 between the old high priests and Christ. How many of them turn on the fact that He does not die?

There were many priests because death prevented them from continuing, but He continues forever and has an unchangeable priesthood. They needed to offer sacrifices daily, first for their own sins and then for the people; He did this once for all when He offered up Himself. They were men with weakness; the Son has been perfected forever. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and higher than the heavens. At least three of the contrasts turn directly on the fact that He does not die, which is why He can save completely and intercede without interruption.

5. You have a High Priest who is alive right now and interceding for you. Write down three things you have never actually asked God for because you assumed they were too small or too shameful, and pray about all three this week.

Answers will vary, and this one often opens a quiet door in a class. People withhold whole categories from prayer: the humiliating habit, the resentment toward a family member, the financial mess they made themselves, the doubt they are ashamed of, the small daily thing they think is beneath God's notice. Hebrews 4:15–16 and 7:25 remove both excuses at once, since the Priest knows what temptation feels like and is always available.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Melchizedek was a historical man. The phrase without father, without mother refers to the silence of the genealogical record. He is said to be made like the Son of God, which means he was not the preincarnate Christ. Say so before someone speculates.
- Hebrews 7:12 settles that the law of Moses is not binding on Christians. Teach the specific consequences plainly (the Sabbath, the Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifice, temple worship and its instruments, tithing as law) and teach them without contempt for those who believe otherwise.
- Hebrews 7:25 promises complete salvation to those who keep coming to God through Christ. It is not a proof of once saved, always saved; read it with 3:12, 6:4–6, and 10:26–31.
- The anchor of 6:19 is hope, and 6:11–12 attaches diligence, faith, and patience to it. Assurance in Hebrews belongs to people who hold fast, not to people who have stopped caring.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Jeremiah 33–37 · Psalm 107 · Luke 24:13–53 · Hebrews 8–9

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