

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 80 OF 104

The Word Endures

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 33-37
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 107
Gospels	Luke 24:13-53
General New Testament	Hebrews 8-9

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to help the class see that God's word survives everything done to it and everything done with it. Jehoiakim burns it and it comes back longer. The exiles thought the promises had died with the city and Psalm 107 has them singing in the ruins. Two disciples decide the story is over and the risen Christ walks them through the very Scriptures they had given up on. The word endures because the God who spoke it endures.

Doctrinally, two matters are at stake, and they are connected. First, the promise of the Branch and the unfailing priesthood in Jeremiah 33 is answered in the enthroned, interceding Christ of Luke 24 and Hebrews 8, not in a future earthly kingdom. Second, Hebrews 8 and 9 establish that the first covenant is obsolete and that Christ's one sacrifice is final. Settle both carefully. Half the errors your members will meet this year come from missing one or the other.

Formationally, watch the theme of a word that goes unheeded. Zedekiah wanted the message in private and would not obey it. Jehoiakim cut it up. The disciples had read it and skipped the hard half. Only Baruch, who had nothing to gain, wrote it down and read it in public at his own risk. Ask your class this: name the last passage of Scripture that genuinely required something of you, and tell us what you did about it.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Hebrews 8-9 first. It is the doctrinal load-bearing wall of the week, it answers the Jeremiah 31 promise your class read seven days ago, and it gives you the clearest opportunity all year to teach why the Law of Moses is not binding on Christians.

Second session: Take up Luke 24:13-53. It pairs naturally with Hebrews because both put the risen Christ in heaven as our High Priest, and the Emmaus road lets you show the class how to read the Old Testament with Christ in view. End on the commission of 24:46-47.

The other two readings: Assign Jeremiah 33-37 and Psalm 107 for the week. Give two minutes to the burned scroll of Jeremiah 36, since it needs no explanation and will stay with people. Encourage members to write out their own answer to Psalm 107:2 and to say it to one person before Sunday.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT **Jeremiah 33-37**

A Branch and a Burned Scroll

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These five chapters are arranged so that promise and rebellion stand shoulder to shoulder. Chapters 33 and 34 come while Jerusalem is under siege and Jeremiah is under guard, and the Lord speaks of houses filled again with the voice of the bridegroom and the bride, of a Branch of righteousness for David, of a priesthood that will never lack a man. God makes His largest promises to His people at their smallest moment. That is worth saying out loud before your class hears anything else in this reading.

Then comes the underside. In chapter 34 Judah frees its Hebrew slaves in a burst of siege piety and reclaims them the moment the Babylonian army withdraws. In chapter 35 the Rechabites, a clan with nothing but a human ancestor's rule and a long memory, refuse a cup of wine in the house of the Lord, and God uses their obedience as an indictment. Judah could not keep a covenant with the living God that the Rechabites kept with a dead father.

Chapter 36 is the center of gravity. Jeremiah dictates twenty-three years of preaching to Baruch. Baruch reads it publicly. The princes tremble; the king does not. Jehoiakim cuts and burns, and God simply says, write it again, and adds a word of judgment on the king for burning it. Chapter 37 leaves Jeremiah in a dungeon and Zedekiah sneaking in to ask, privately, whether there is any word from the Lord. There is. The king just will not obey it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem from the thirteenth year of Josiah to the fall of the city in 586 B.C., roughly forty years of preaching to a nation that would not hear.
- The chapters are not in strict chronological order. Chapters 35 and 36 fall in the reign of Jehoiakim, earlier than chapters 33, 34, and 37, which belong to Zedekiah and the final siege.
- The Rechabites descended from Jonadab the son of Rechab, who appears in 2 Kings 10:15–23. Their vow concerned tents, fields, and wine, not the worship of God, which makes their faithfulness a pointed comparison rather than a command to imitate.
- Scrolls were dictated to a professional scribe. Baruch the son of Neriah is that scribe, and he pays for the association with his own danger (Jeremiah 36:19, 26; 45:1–5).
- Jeremiah 33:15–16 belongs to a chain of Branch prophecies (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12–13) fulfilled in Christ, who is both King and Priest (Hebrews 7:1–3, 14–17).
- Zedekiah is the last king of Judah, a man who believes Jeremiah in private and fears his own nobles in public.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Read Jeremiah 33:14–18 aloud, then read Acts 2:29–36 and Hebrews 7:23–25. How does the New Testament say the promise of a Branch and an unfailing priesthood was actually kept?*

The promise has three strands: a righteous Branch from David, a city called “The Lord our righteousness,” and a Levitical priesthood that will never lack a man to offer. The New Testament answers all three in one person. Peter says at Pentecost that God swore to David that of the fruit of his body He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, and that God has done it in the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus (Acts 2:29–36). Hebrews says Jesus holds His priesthood unchangeably because He continues forever, which is exactly the unfailing priesthood Jeremiah was given.

This is the place to be plain with your class. The promise is not waiting on a future political Israel or a rebuilt earthly throne in Jerusalem. It has been kept. Christ reigns now at the right hand of the Father, and His people are the city that wears His righteousness as a name. Ask the class what difference it makes on a Monday morning to know the King is already seated.

Question 2. *In Jeremiah 34:8–17 the people release their slaves and then take them back again. What does that reversal show about the difference between a decision made under pressure and genuine repentance?*

Notice how good the decision in verses 8 through 10 looks. The covenant is made in the house of the Lord, it obeys the actual law of Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15, and it is made by the king and all the people together. And it lasts exactly as long as the Babylonian army is camped outside the wall. The moment the pressure lifts (verse 21 tells us the army had gone up from them), the freed slaves are hauled back. God calls this profaning His name.

Press the class toward the mechanics of it rather than the outrage of it. A vow made when you are frightened is not the same as repentance, because repentance is a change of mind about sin itself, not about consequences. Ask for the honest version: the promise made in a hospital hallway, the resolution made in January, the apology made when someone found out. What would it take for one of those to survive the pressure lifting?

Question 3. *Jehoiakim cut the scroll with a penknife and burned it while three of his men begged him not to (Jeremiah 36:22–25). Where are we tempted to do quietly what he did openly, editing out the parts of Scripture that indict us?*

Jehoiakim's method is almost polite. He does not shout. He sits by the hearth in his winter house, listens to three or four columns, cuts them off, and drops them in the fire, and Jeremiah notes that the king and his servants were not afraid and did not tear their garments. That last detail is a deliberate contrast with his father Josiah, who tore his clothes when the book was found (2 Kings 22:11). Jehoiakim heard the same kind of word and reached for a knife instead.

We rarely burn anything. We skim past a passage, we decide a command was cultural, we find a teacher who agrees with us, we quote the verses about love and leave the verses about holiness unread. Ask the class to name a passage they have been avoiding. Then ask a harder question: is there anyone in your life who could hold a page of Scripture in front of you and get a hearing? Jehoiakim had three such men and ignored them all.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the Rechabites through Jeremiah 35. List what Jonadab had commanded them and what they actually did, and then state what God holds up as the lesson for Judah.*

Jonadab had commanded them to drink no wine, build no houses, sow no seed, plant no vineyards, and dwell in tents, and they had obeyed for generations, breaking the tent rule only when the Babylonian army forced them into Jerusalem. God's point in 35:13–16 is comparative: these men kept the word of a human ancestor who could no longer enforce it, while Judah would not keep the word of the living God who spoke to them again and again, rising up early and sending prophets.

2. *Compare Jeremiah 33:6–9 with Jeremiah 31:31–34. Where do the two promises overlap, and where does each one reach further than the other?*

Both promise cleansing, forgiveness, restoration, and a renewed relationship that produces a people God can call His own. Jeremiah 33 emphasizes healing, abundance, and the security of the Davidic line and the priesthood; Jeremiah 31 emphasizes the interior work, the law written on the heart and a knowledge of the Lord that no one has to be taught secondhand. Together they describe what Hebrews 8 says arrived in Christ.

3. *Jeremiah 34:18–20 speaks of men who passed between the parts of a calf they had cut in two. Read Genesis 15:9–18 and explain what those men were calling down on themselves.*

In Genesis 15 God alone passes between the divided pieces, taking the covenant obligation on Himself. The ceremony meant, in effect, may I be cut in pieces like this animal if I break my word. Judah performed that ceremony and then broke the covenant, so God says in 34:20 that He will hand them over as He handed over the calf. They invoked the penalty and then earned it.

4. Read Jeremiah 36:27–32 and note what was added to the second scroll. What does that addition say about the price of resisting the word of God?

The second scroll contained all the words of the first, and God added many similar words besides, along with a specific judgment on Jehoiakim and his line. Resisting God's word never reduces it. The word came back longer, and the man who burned it lost what he had been protecting. Compare Isaiah 40:8 and Matthew 24:35.

5. Baruch wrote, read publicly, hid, and risked his life (Jeremiah 36:4–8, 19, 26). Name one place this week where your part is not to preach but simply to put God's word within someone's reach, and set the day you will do it.

Answers will vary. Watch for concrete, low-glamour service: leaving a Bible with a neighbor, reading Scripture aloud at a hospital bed, sending a passage to a grandchild, offering to study with a coworker. Baruch was not the prophet. He was the man with the pen and the courage to read in public, and God preserved his name for it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The Branch promise (33:14–18): do not let this become a premillennial text. The throne of David and the enduring priesthood are fulfilled in Christ now (Acts 2:29–36; Hebrews 7:23–28), not in a future earthly reign from Jerusalem.
- The Rechabites: God praises their faithfulness, not their rule. Their tent-dwelling vow was never binding on anyone else, and it is not a model for abstinence-by-vow today.
- Slavery in Jeremiah 34: the text addresses Israel's own law limiting Hebrew servitude to six years. The point is covenant faithlessness, not divine approval of slavery. Say so plainly and move on rather than letting the hour go there.
- Zedekiah in chapter 37 shows that private interest in the word of God is not obedience. Handle that gently; there are people in the room who love the sermon and have never acted on it.

Let the Redeemed Say So

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 107 begins Book Five of the Psalms and reads like a homecoming service. Verses 2 and 3 tell us who is speaking: the redeemed, gathered out of the lands, from the east and the west, from the north and the south. Most likely these are people who have come back from exile, standing in the wreckage of Jerusalem and choosing to give thanks anyway. That setting matters for your class. This is not a psalm written by people whose lives went well. It is written by people who were rescued.

The four scenes are carefully built, each with the same four beats: distress, a cry, a deliverance, and a call to thank God. Lost travelers are led by a straight way to a city. Prisoners in irons have their chains snapped. Sick fools are healed by His word being sent out. Terrified sailors find the storm hushed and are brought to their desired haven. The variety is the point. God rescues from geography, from politics, from our own folly, and from the raw force of nature, and the cry that reaches Him is the same cry every time.

The last section, verses 33 through 43, pulls back to show the same God reversing whole landscapes and whole reputations, drying up rivers and turning deserts into springs, pouring contempt on princes and setting the poor family on high like a flock. Verse 43 is the hinge for the teacher: whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. Thanksgiving here is not a mood. It is what intelligence looks like when it has been paying attention.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 107 opens Book Five of the Psalter (Psalms 107 through 150). The author is unnamed.
- Genre: a community thanksgiving psalm, with four narrative vignettes built on a repeated refrain.
- Verse 3 (“gathered out of the lands”) points to the return from exile, which places this psalm in the same world as Ezra, Nehemiah, and the end of Jeremiah.
- The refrain structure (verses 6, 13, 19, 28 and then 8, 15, 21, 31) is a deliberate teaching device; Hebrew poetry drives a point home by repetition rather than by argument.
- Verses 23–30, the storm at sea, are the words Christians most often hear behind the stilling of the storm in Mark 4:39–41. Point that out; do not force it.
- The psalm describes how life usually goes with God, not a guarantee that every believer is rescued from every trouble in this life (see Hebrews 11:36–39).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 107 repeats one refrain in verses 6, 13, 19, and 28. Read the four scenes and describe what all four groups have in common in the moment before God rescues them.*

All four groups are past self-rescue. The travelers have no city and their soul faints in them; the prisoners are bound with iron and there is none to help; the fools have no appetite left and are at the gates of death; the sailors are at their wits' end, which is one of the great phrases of the English Bible. The psalm is not describing four inconveniences. It is describing four dead ends. And in every case the turn comes at the same place: “Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble.”

Draw out the second thing they share, which is easy to miss. Not one of the four is described as especially righteous. One group is explicitly there by its own fault. God's help in this psalm is not payment for good behavior. It is mercy answering a cry. Ask the class why we so often wait until the wits' end before we pray, and what would change if the cry came earlier.

Question 2. Verse 2 says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” Why would God want deliverance spoken out loud, and what usually keeps us quiet about ours?

Redemption that is never spoken slowly becomes redemption that is not remembered. Israel’s whole life of worship was built on rehearsal: tell your children, keep the feast, set up the stones, say so. When the redeemed speak, three things happen at once. God is honored, the speaker is strengthened by hearing his own story again, and someone in earshot learns that rescue is possible.

What keeps us quiet is usually one of three things: we are embarrassed by the part of the story where we were the fool, we assume our account is too ordinary to matter, or we have quietly begun to credit ourselves. Name those honestly. Then do something specific in class: ask two people who came prepared to take ninety seconds each and say so. A class that has heard its own members testify reads this psalm very differently.

Question 3. The third group in verses 17–22 is in trouble because of their own iniquity, not because of circumstance. How does the psalm treat them, and how should that shape the way a congregation receives someone whose trouble is self-inflicted?

The psalm does not soften the diagnosis. Verse 17 says plainly that fools, because of their transgression and their iniquities, were afflicted. It does not blame circumstance, and it does not pretend the suffering was undeserved. And then, with no scolding at all, verses 19 and 20 report that they cried out and He saved them, He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions. Honest about the cause, generous with the rescue.

That is a working model for a congregation. We are often the opposite: vague about the cause and stingy with the welcome. Ask the class to picture the specific person, the one whose marriage collapsed because of what he did, the one who lost the job because of the drinking, the one whose debts are his own doing. What would it look like for this class to be the people who tell the truth about sin and still run toward the sinner? Galatians 6:1 and 2 Corinthians 2:6–8 are worth reading aloud here.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. List the four groups in Psalm 107 and the specific danger each one faced. Which of the four most resembles a season you have lived through?

The wanderers lost in a desert with no city and no food or water (verses 4–9); the prisoners in darkness and iron chains, there because they rebelled against the words of God (verses 10–16); the sick fools afflicted because of their own iniquity, unable to eat and near death (verses 17–22); and the sailors caught in a storm at sea, staggering like drunken men (verses 23–32). Answers will vary on the second half; listen for honesty rather than drama.

2. Count how many times the psalm says, “Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness.” What is being insisted on by that much repetition?

Four times, in verses 8, 15, 21, and 31, each time paired with “and for His wonderful works to the children of men.” The repetition insists that thanksgiving is not an optional flourish after rescue but the proper end of it. God delivers in order to be known, and a rescue nobody thanks Him for has only gone halfway.

3. Psalm 107:1 opens with a line Israel used constantly. Compare 1 Chronicles 16:34 and Psalm 118:1, 29. Why would a nation keep returning to that one sentence?

The line is “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” Israel returned to it because it says the two things they most needed to hold together: that God is good in His character and that His covenant love does not expire. In seasons when almost nothing else could be said with confidence, that sentence could be.

4. Verses 33–42 turn from rescue stories to God’s larger dealings, rivers made into wilderness and wilderness into springs. Trace the reversals, and say what verse 43 asks you to do with them.

The reversals run both directions: rivers into wilderness and dry ground into watersprings, fruitful land into barrenness because of wickedness, the hungry settled in cities with harvests and herds, princes brought to wander in trackless waste, and the poor set on high with families like a flock. Verse 43 asks you to be wise enough to watch for these things and to read them as the lovingkindness of the Lord rather than as luck.

5. Write out in four or five sentences what God has redeemed you from, in plain words a child could follow, and then say it to one person before Sunday.

Answers will vary. Press for plainness. The temptation is either to tell a dramatic story that flatters the teller or to keep it so general that nothing was actually said. Look for a student who can name what he was saved from, who did the saving, and what changed.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not let the four rescue stories become a promise that God removes every hardship from every faithful person. This is a thanksgiving psalm celebrating real deliverances, not a prosperity formula. Hebrews 11:36–39 is the necessary balance.
- “Let the redeemed say so” is a call to speak, not a call to institute an emotional testimony service or a mandated public sharing time. Teach the principle and let each Christian obey it in his own setting.
- Verse 20, “He sent His word and healed them,” is about God’s delivering command, and it is not a proof text for modern faith healing or for treating Scripture as a formula to be recited over illness.

The Road to Emmaus

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke ends his gospel with one of the most beautifully told stories in the Bible, and the storytelling itself is doing theological work. Two ordinary disciples, one named Cleopas and one never named, are walking away from Jerusalem discussing a weekend that had ruined them. Their sentence in verse 21 is the saddest in the chapter: “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.” They are not wrong about the facts. They have the empty tomb, the women’s report, the angels. They simply cannot read what has happened.

So Jesus teaches them. He does not begin with proof of life; He begins with Moses and all the Prophets, and He expounds in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. That is Luke’s claim about the whole Old Testament, and it is the reason your class is reading Jeremiah alongside the Gospels this week. The cross was not a failure that God recovered from. It was written down centuries in advance, and the disciples were slow of heart precisely because they had read the glory and skipped the suffering.

The chapter closes with three things settled. The resurrection is bodily, which is why Jesus insists on being handled and eats broiled fish in front of them. The mission is defined: repentance and remission of sins preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And the King ascends, with His hands lifted in blessing, to take His seat. Luke will pick up exactly there in Acts 1. Notice that the disciples respond to the departure of Jesus with great joy, which only makes sense if they understood He was going somewhere to do something for them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke, the physician and traveling companion of Paul, writes to Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4) with careful attention to eyewitnesses and orderly sequence.
- Emmaus lay about sixty stadia, roughly seven miles, from Jerusalem, a walk of two to three hours each way. These men made the round trip twice in one day, the second time at night.
- This all occurs on the first day of the week (24:1, 13), the day that would become the day of the Lord’s Supper and Christian assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- Luke compresses events. The ascension in 24:50–53 occurred forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3), not on the same evening; Luke gives the fuller account in his second volume.
- “The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (24:44) is the standard Jewish way of naming the entire Old Testament, in its three divisions.
- The promise of the Father in 24:49 is the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 1:4–8; 2:1–4).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus could have begun with His hands and His feet. Instead He began at Moses and all the Prophets (Luke 24:25–27). Why would He treat the Old Testament as the first evidence for His own resurrection?*

Jesus is establishing something more durable than an experience. Had He begun by displaying His wounds, these men would have had an astonishing memory and nothing to preach from. By starting with Moses and the Prophets, He gives them a permanent standard by which the resurrection can be tested, understood, and proclaimed to people who were not on that road. This is why the apostolic sermons in Acts are so heavily woven with Old Testament quotation. Peter at Pentecost argues from Joel and from two psalms before he ever appeals to what he saw.

There is a warning in this for a class. The disciples had all the right data and drew the wrong conclusion because they had read Scripture selectively. Slow of heart to believe “all that the prophets have spoken” is a diagnosis of partial reading, not of unbelief in general. Ask which parts of the Bible your class habitually skips, and what conclusions they may be drawing too soon as a result.

Question 2. *Read Luke 24:44–49 slowly. What exactly are the apostles commissioned to preach, where are they told to begin, and how does Acts 2:36–38 show them doing it?*

The content is precise: that the Christ would suffer and rise the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. That is a summary of the gospel and its intended response in a single sentence. When you turn to Acts 2, you find the apostles doing exactly this. Peter preaches the suffering and the resurrection, presses it to “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,” and when the crowd asks what to do, he answers with repentance and baptism for the remission of sins.

Let the class connect those two passages themselves rather than doing it for them. Luke 24:47 names repentance and remission of sins; Acts 2:38 tells the first audience how to receive them. Nothing here supports the idea that a person is saved at the moment of faith apart from obedience, and nothing here supports a prayer offered in place of baptism. Keep it textual, keep it calm, and let the two verses stand side by side.

Question 3. *The two men said their hearts burned within them while He talked with them on the road (24:32). When did Scripture last do that to you, and what has changed in your reading since then?*

This question will either produce silence or produce the best ten minutes of your hour, so give it room. The burning heart in verse 32 came while Jesus opened the Scriptures on an ordinary road, not in a spectacular moment at the tomb. That is the encouraging part. God has ordinarily set His people on fire through the plain exposition of His word.

If someone says it has been a long time, receive that honestly and ask the follow-up: what is your reading actually like now? Very often the answer is that reading has become a duty performed at high speed, or a search for material to teach others, or nothing at all. Suggest something concrete for the week: one chapter, read slowly, out loud, with the question these two men were finally given, namely, where is Christ in this?

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything the two disciples say about Jesus in 24:19–24. Mark what they got exactly right, and mark where they had drawn a conclusion too soon.*

They say He was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, that the chief priests and rulers delivered Him to be condemned and crucified, that this is the third day, that the women found the tomb empty and saw a vision of angels saying He was alive, and that some of the men confirmed the empty tomb but did not see Him. Every fact is right. The error is in verse 21, the past tense of “we were hoping,” a conclusion reached three days early.

2. *Jesus says in 24:26 that the Christ had to suffer and then enter His glory. Read Isaiah 53:10–12 and Psalm 16:8–11, and explain how each one supports what He said.*

Isaiah 53 says the Lord was pleased to bruise Him, that He made His soul an offering for sin, and then that He would see His seed, prolong His days, divide a portion with the great, and be satisfied. The suffering and the glory are in the same paragraph. Psalm 16 says God would not leave His soul in Sheol nor allow His Holy One to see corruption, and then speaks of fullness of joy in God’s presence, which Peter applies directly to the resurrection in Acts 2:25–31.

3. *Three things are opened in this chapter (24:31, 24:32, and 24:45). Trace all three, and say what each had been closed to.*

Their eyes were opened (24:31), so that recognition of the risen Christ came only when He gave it. The Scriptures were opened (24:32), which is what set their hearts burning on the road. And their understanding was opened (24:45), so that they could comprehend the Scriptures. Closed eyes, a closed book, and a closed mind, all opened by Jesus in one afternoon.

4. Compare the ascension in 24:50–53 with Acts 1:9–11 and Hebrews 9:24. Where did Jesus go, and what does Scripture say He is doing there right now?

Luke says He was parted from them and carried up into heaven; Acts adds the cloud, the forty days, and the promise that He will come again in like manner. Hebrews 9:24 says Christ entered heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. He is not idle and not merely waiting. He reigns (Acts 2:33–36), He intercedes (Hebrews 7:25), and He serves as our High Priest in the true tabernacle (Hebrews 8:1–2).

5. The disciples went back to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple praising God (24:52–53). Choose one habit of praise you will begin this week, name the time of day you will do it, and tell someone so you will keep it.

Answers will vary. Look for something small enough to survive a hard week: a psalm read aloud at breakfast, a spoken thanksgiving in the car before work, singing one hymn at bedtime with the family. Luke's detail is that their praise was continual and public, in the temple. Praise that never leaves the inside of a person's head is not yet what Luke is describing.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The resurrection is bodily and physical. Jesus insists on it in 24:39–43. Do not allow a class to drift toward the idea that He rose only spiritually or only in the disciples' memory.
- The breaking of bread in 24:30 is an ordinary meal in a home, not the Lord's Supper. Do not build a doctrine of communion on it; the New Testament pattern for the Supper is found in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11.
- The ascension: Christ went to be enthroned and to serve as High Priest, and He reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13). Guard against any suggestion that His kingdom is postponed to a future earthly reign.
- Luke 24:49 promises power to the apostles for their work as witnesses. Do not generalize it into a promise of miraculous empowerment for Christians today; the confirming signs accompanied the word while revelation was being given (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).

A Better Covenant

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Hebrews 8:1 gives you the sentence to build the class around: “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” Every earthly high priest stood, because his work was never finished. This one sits. The writer is not arguing that Christianity is a better version of Judaism. He is arguing that the entire Mosaic system was a copy and a shadow of something real, and the real thing has now arrived.

Chapter 8 then does something that ought to settle a great many arguments in the church: it quotes the longest Old Testament passage in the New Testament, Jeremiah 31:31–34, and draws one conclusion from it in verse 13. God said “new,” and the word “new” made the other one old. The first covenant was not abolished because it was bad; Romans 7:12 calls it holy, just, and good. It was replaced because it was never intended to be final, and because it could not do what only blood better than an animal’s could do.

Chapter 9 makes the contrast visible. There was a room behind a veil that almost nobody ever entered, one man, one day a year, never without blood, and even then the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest. Then Christ entered, not a sanctuary made with hands but heaven itself, not with the blood of goats and calves but with His own, not annually but once. The difference in the two systems is not degree. It is finality. Bring your class to verse 14 and let it sit: blood that purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians under pressure who were tempted to drift back into the familiar safety of the temple system (Hebrews 2:1; 3:12–14; 10:32–39). The author is unnamed.
- The book’s argument runs on the word “better”: a better hope, a better covenant, better promises, better sacrifices, a better and enduring possession.
- The tabernacle described in chapter 9 is the wilderness tent of Exodus 25 through 40, not Herod’s temple, though the same pattern of holy place and holiest of all governed both.
- The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) stands behind the whole of Hebrews 9: one high priest, one day, blood for himself and for the people’s sins of ignorance.
- Jeremiah 31:31–34, quoted here in full, was written to a people about to lose the temple, which is exactly where your Jeremiah reading has them this week.
- This is the New Testament’s clearest statement that the Law of Moses is not the covenant Christians live under (see also Colossians 2:14–17; Galatians 3:24–25; Romans 7:4–6; Ephesians 2:14–16).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hebrews 8:13 says that in calling this covenant new, God has made the first one obsolete. What practical difference should that make in how a Christian reads, quotes, and uses the Law of Moses?*

Begin with what does not change. The Old Testament is still Scripture, still inspired, still profitable, still written for our learning (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). We read it, preach it, and love it. What changed is its status as law over us. Christians are not under the Sabbath, the feast days, the sacrificial system, the Levitical priesthood, the dietary code, the tithe as a legal requirement, or the temple worship with its instruments. Colossians 2:14–17 says those things were a shadow, and the body is Christ.

The practical fallout is larger than it first appears, so give it examples. If someone defends instrumental music in worship by pointing to David and the temple, this is the answer. If someone argues for a Christian Sabbath on Saturday or Sunday, this is the answer. If someone binds the tithe as law, this is the answer. Teach the class to ask

a single question of any practice: is there authority for it in the New Testament of Christ? Then ask what they personally still carry as religious obligation that Christ never laid on them.

Question 2. *Hebrews 9:9 says the old offerings could not make the worshiper perfect in conscience. What could they do, then, and what is it about the blood of Christ that finally reaches a guilty conscience?*

Verses 9 and 10 tell you what the old system could do. It dealt with foods, drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances, and it was imposed until the time of reformation. It could make a person ceremonially clean, restore him to the camp, and keep the covenant community in order. What it could never do is quiet the accusing memory of a man who knew what he had done. Hebrews 10:3 puts it starkly: in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. The blood went on, and the guilt stayed.

Hebrews 9:14 answers with a different kind of blood: Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanses the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Note the purpose clause. The conscience is cleansed in order to free a person for service, not to make him comfortable. Ask your class where a bad conscience is currently stealing somebody's usefulness, and read 1 John 1:7–9 beside it.

Question 3. *Hebrews 9:27–28 sets one death and one judgment beside one sacrifice and one return. How should a sentence like that change the way you spend an ordinary Tuesday?*

The writer sets four “once” events in a row: it is appointed for men to die once, after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many, and He will appear a second time apart from sin for those who eagerly wait for Him. There are no repeats in that sentence anywhere. No second chance after death, no repeated sacrifice, no series of returns.

The application is deliberately ordinary. A person who genuinely believes he will die once and be judged once does not spend his one life the way most of us spend a Tuesday. Push the class past vague solemnity toward a schedule: what is one thing on this week's calendar that would not survive that sentence, and what is one thing that is not on the calendar and should be? Also point out that the second appearing is for those who eagerly wait. Waiting eagerly is a describable behavior, not a feeling.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Hebrews 8:8–12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31–34 at length. Read both passages side by side and list the distinct promises God makes about the new covenant.*

The promises are that God will put His laws in their minds and write them on their hearts, that He will be their God and they will be His people, that they will not need to teach one another to know the Lord because all will know Him from the least to the greatest, and that He will be merciful to their unrighteousness and remember their sins no more. Note the last one especially: not merely forgiven but no longer brought up.

2. *Walk through the tabernacle furniture in Hebrews 9:1–5 and note which room each item stood in. Then read Exodus 25–26 quickly to see how much detail the writer is compressing.*

In the first room, the holy place, stood the lampstand and the table with the showbread. Behind the second veil, in the Holiest of All, stood the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, containing the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant, with the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. The writer stops at verse 5 with a sentence every teacher should memorize: “of these things we cannot now speak in detail.” He refuses to get lost in the furniture, and so should you.

3. *Hebrews 9:8 says the Holy Spirit was signifying something by the fact that the veil still stood. Explain what was being signified, then read Matthew 27:50–51 and say what happened to that veil.*

The standing veil signified that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet opened while the first tabernacle still had standing. Access to God was restricted, mediated, annual, and incomplete by design. When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom, torn from God's side, and Hebrews 10:19–20 says we now have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way He consecrated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh.

4. Count every use of “once” or “once for all” in Hebrews 9, then compare Hebrews 10:11–12. What is the writer driving at by that much repetition?

The word cluster appears in verses 7 (once a year), 12, 26, 27, and 28. Hebrews 10:11–12 adds the contrast that makes the point unmistakable: every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. The writer is hammering finality. Nothing needs to be added to Calvary, and nothing can be.

5. If Christ has dealt with your sin once for all, name one specific guilt you keep picking back up, and take it to God in prayer tonight with Hebrews 9:14 open in front of you.

Answers will vary. Two errors to watch for. Some will refuse to name anything, which usually means the lesson has stayed theoretical. Others will name a sin they have never actually repented of and confused guilt with conviction; there the answer is not reassurance but obedience (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). For the Christian who has repented and confessed and still cannot put it down, Hebrews 9:14 and 10:17 are the medicine.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- This is the central passage for teaching that the Law of Moses is not binding today. Teach it plainly and kindly, and give concrete examples (Sabbath keeping, instrumental music borrowed from temple worship, the tithe as law, animal sacrifice, a separate priesthood).
- Do not let “the old is obsolete” slide into disrespect for the Old Testament as Scripture. It is inspired, profitable, and written for our learning (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- “Once for all” concerns the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice, not the impossibility of falling away. The same book warns repeatedly that a Christian can depart (Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 10:26–31). Next week’s reading makes that explicit, so do not create a problem here that Hebrews 10 will have to undo.
- Resist speculation about the heavenly sanctuary’s geography. The writer himself declines to go into detail (9:5), and the point is the priest, not the architecture.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Jeremiah 38–44 · Psalm 108–109 · John 1:1–34 · Hebrews 10

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