

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 81 OF 104

Hearing and Refusing

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 38–44
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 108–109
Gospels	John 1:1–34
General New Testament	Hebrews 10

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to put the question of reception in front of the class. Every reading contains people who heard God clearly and refused Him, and people who heard and obeyed at cost. The remnant in Egypt had the word of God delivered to them personally and called the prophet a liar. His own received Him not. Some in Hebrews had been publicly plundered for Christ and were now thinking about quietly slipping away. Against them stand Ebed-Melech, John the Baptist, and the Christians told to hold fast.

Doctrinally, two things need careful handling. The first is the deity of Christ in John 1, which is the foundation of everything else in that gospel and should be taught with confidence and without rancor. The second is Hebrews 10:26–31, which says as plainly as Scripture ever says it that a person who has been sanctified by the blood of the covenant can fall away. Teach it, and in the same breath protect the trembling Christian from thinking every stumble is that sin.

Formationally, watch the size of the roles. Ebed-Melech sends down rags. John the Baptist says he is only a voice. Hebrews asks Christians to consider one another and keep showing up. None of that is impressive, and all of it is what faithfulness actually looks like between Sundays. Ask your class this: name the last time you did something for a brother or sister that nobody else knew about, and if you cannot remember one, name what you will do this week.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Hebrews 10. It is the doctrinal center of the week, it completes the argument the class began in Hebrews 8 and 9, and verses 24 through 31 will generate more honest conversation than anything else you could put in front of them. Guard your time so the warning passage is not rushed.

Second session: Take up John 1:1–34. Spend the first half on the prologue and the identity of the Word, and the second half on John the Baptist as a witness who kept pointing away from himself. It pairs well with Hebrews because both books ask, who exactly is this Person we are trusting?

The other two readings: Assign Jeremiah 38–44 and Psalms 108–109 for the week. Warn the class that Jeremiah 42 and 43 will sting, and tell them to watch how long the promise of obedience lasts. Give sixty seconds of guidance on reading an imprecatory psalm so Psalm 109 does not throw them.

From the Cistern to Egypt

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These seven chapters are the hardest stretch of Jeremiah, and they should be taught as what they are: the collapse of a nation, told slowly, by the man who had warned them for forty years. Chapter 38 opens with the princes lowering Jeremiah into the mud of Malchiah's pit, and it is worth noticing who gets him out. Not the king, who is willing but afraid. Not a priest or a prophet. An Ethiopian palace servant named Ebed-Melech, who goes to Zedekiah, tells the truth about what has been done, and then thinks to send down old rags so the ropes will not tear the old man's arms.

Chapter 39 is the fall itself, reported almost without emotion. The wall is breached, Zedekiah runs and is caught on the plains of Jericho, his sons are killed in front of him, his eyes are put out, and he goes to Babylon in chains. Everything Jeremiah said would happen, happens. And then, in a detail easy to miss, the Babylonian captain of the guard treats Jeremiah better than Judah ever did and lets him choose where he will live. He chooses to stay with the poorest of the people.

Chapters 40 through 44 are the aftermath, sadder in some ways than the siege. Gedaliah, a decent man, ignores a warning and is assassinated over a meal. The survivors are terrified of reprisal and come to Jeremiah with a beautiful promise in 42:5–6. God makes them wait ten days, tells them to stay, and promises to build them up. They accuse Jeremiah of lying, go to Egypt, take him along, and in chapter 44 announce that they will keep burning incense to the queen of heaven because life was better that way. The book ends its narrative with a people who have lost everything and learned nothing.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The siege of Jerusalem ended in 586 B.C. with the burning of the temple, the palace, and the walls, and the deportation of most of the survivors to Babylon.
- Zedekiah was installed by Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled against him. His personal conversations with Jeremiah (38:14–28) show a man who believed the message and feared his own nobles more than he feared God.
- Gedaliah was appointed governor over the remnant left in the land. His murder by Ishmael, a man of royal blood backed by the king of Ammon, removed the last chance of an orderly life in Judah.
- The “queen of heaven” (44:17–19) was an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility whose worship involved cakes shaped in her image. Judah had been warned about it in Jeremiah 7:18.
- Egypt was the traditional place of refuge and the one place God expressly forbade them to go (42:19). The exiles who obeyed and went to Babylon had a future; those who fled to Egypt did not.
- Ebed-Melech and Baruch both receive personal promises from God in the middle of national ruin (39:15–18; 45:5), a reminder that God notices individuals in a collapse.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ebed-Melech is a foreigner and a servant in a hostile court, and he is the only man in Jerusalem who does anything about the prophet sinking in the mud (38:7–13). What did the rescue cost him, and what does God say to him afterward in 39:15–18?*

It cost him everything he had to lose. He is a foreigner, a servant, and a eunuch in a court where the princes have just demonstrated they are willing to kill a prophet and are stronger than the king. To go to Zedekiah and say, in effect, these men have done evil, is to make permanent enemies of the most powerful people in the city on behalf of a prisoner with no future. And he does it with care, sending down cast-off clothing so the ropes will not cut. Mercy in Scripture usually shows up in details like that.

God's answer in 39:15–18 is worth reading aloud twice. In the middle of the destruction of a nation, God stops to send a personal word to one servant: I will deliver you, you shall not fall by the sword, your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me. Notice the reason given. Not because you rescued My prophet, but because you have put your trust in Me. The rescue was the evidence. Ask the class what that says about how God sees the small, risky kindness nobody applauds.

Question 2. *In Jeremiah 42 the people swear to obey before they hear the answer, and in Jeremiah 43 they call Jeremiah a liar. Why is it so much easier to promise obedience in advance than to give it once the answer actually arrives?*

Because a promise made in advance costs nothing yet. In 42:5–6 they call the Lord a true and faithful witness against them and say, whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey. It is a sincere sentence. But their real question was never “what does God want,” it was “how do we get to safety,” and when God's answer and their safety pointed in opposite directions, the promise evaporated. Ten days of waiting had also given fear time to work on them.

Push this into the room. Most of us have made that promise: Lord, whatever You show me. Then the answer turns out to involve a conversation we do not want to have, a habit we do not want to lose, a move we do not want to make, an apology we do not want to give. Ask the class what they suspect God has already answered and they are still calling unclear. Genuine obedience is decided before the content is known, or it is not obedience at all.

Question 3. *Jeremiah 44:15–19 records the people's own reasoning: things went better for us when we burned incense to the queen of heaven. Where do we still judge a way of life by whether it seems to be working, and how would you answer them from this chapter?*

Their argument is entirely pragmatic and, on its face, factual. When we burned incense to the queen of heaven we had plenty of food, we were well off, and we saw no trouble; since we stopped, we have lacked everything and been consumed by sword and famine. They have taken a real correlation and drawn a disastrous conclusion. Jeremiah answers in 44:20–23 by correcting the history: the trouble came precisely because of the incense, and God's patience had simply run longer than their memory.

We make the same argument constantly, just more quietly. The business that prospered after the corner was cut. The relationship that felt right. The years of neglecting the assembly during which nothing obviously bad happened. Results are not revelation. Ask the class how they would counsel a friend who says, I left the church and my life got easier, so how bad could it have been? Then ask whether anyone in the room is currently running that argument on himself.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace Zedekiah from 38:14–28 through 39:1–7. List every opportunity he was given and what he did with each one.*
Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah secretly, swears not to kill him, and is told plainly that if he will surrender to the king of Babylon he and his house will live and the city will not be burned. He admits he is afraid of the Jews who have already defected. He asks Jeremiah to hide the content of the conversation. He does nothing. The result in 39:1–7 is the death of his sons before his eyes, his own blinding, and chains. He had a real offer, a private prophet, and a clear path, and fear of men cost him all three.
2. *Read 40:13–41:3. Who warned Gedaliah, how did Gedaliah respond to the warning, and what came of it?*
Johanan the son of Kareah warned him that Ishmael had been sent by Baalis king of the Ammonites to kill him, and even offered to deal with Ishmael quietly. Gedaliah refused to believe it and called it a false report. Ishmael then ate bread with him and murdered him, along with the Jews and Chaldeans who were with him. Trusting people is a virtue; refusing to investigate a specific, credible warning is not.
3. *Set Jeremiah's treatment by the Babylonians (39:11–14; 40:1–6) beside his treatment by his own countrymen. Write down both, then say what that contrast reveals about forty years of faithful preaching.*
Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian captain of the guard, gave Jeremiah food and a reward, released him from the chains, and told him he could go anywhere he liked. His own people had put him in the stocks, thrown him in a dungeon,

and lowered him into a pit to die. A prophet is honored by the pagans who conquered his city and despised by the people he spent his life trying to save. It says that faithfulness is measured by obedience, not by reception.

4. *Compare 42:5–6 with 43:2. Copy out exactly what the people promised and exactly what they said when the answer came. How long did the promise last?*

They promised, “Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God,” calling God a true and faithful witness against them if they did not. When the answer came they said, “You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you.” The promise lasted ten days, which is how long God made them wait for the answer (42:7).

5. *Ebed-Melech sent down worn-out rags so the ropes would not cut into Jeremiah’s arms (38:11–12). Name one person you know who is sinking right now, and name the specific, unglamorous kindness you will do for him before Sunday.*

Answers will vary. Watch for two failures. The first is naming someone without naming an action. The second is proposing something large and public rather than small and immediate. The rags are the point of the story: Ebed-Melech noticed a detail nobody else would have thought about, and God recorded it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- This material is bleak. Do not rush past it to find a lesson, and do not moralize it into a scolding. Let the class feel that God kept His word exactly, and then point to Ebed-Melech and Baruch as evidence that He sees individuals inside a national collapse.
- God’s promise to Ebed-Melech (39:18) is a specific word to a specific man, not a general guarantee that faithful people are spared hardship. Compare Hebrews 11:36–39.
- The queen of heaven passage invites a detour into arguments about Mary or about modern religious figures. Keep the class on the actual error in the text, which is measuring religion by results.
- Jeremiah 44 ends with a hard, unsoftened judgment. Teach it honestly, then take the class to 2 Peter 3:9 so they hear both God’s patience and His limits.

Steadfast Heart, Bitter Prayer

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 108 is a reminder that praying the same thing twice is not a failure of imagination. David takes the closing verses of Psalm 57, written when he was hiding in a cave from Saul, and the closing verses of Psalm 60, written in a hard campaign, and joins them into one prayer. The result opens with “O God, my heart is steadfast” and moves to a request for help, with the flat confession in verse 12 that human help is worthless. A man who has walked with God for decades has words to reach for when he has none of his own. Your class can build the same stock.

Psalm 109 is one of the most difficult prayers in Scripture, and it should not be softened. Verses 1 through 5 tell you the situation: lying mouths, words of hatred, fighting without cause, evil for good and hatred for love. Then verses 6 through 20 are a sustained imprecation, a request that the accuser be accused, his days cut short, his children left fatherless. Modern readers flinch. It helps to notice three things: this is prayer and not action, it is addressed to the Judge and not to a mob, and it asks God to do only what He has already said He will do with unrepentant wickedness.

Then the psalm turns. Verses 21 through 25 are as vulnerable as anything David wrote: he is poor and needy, his heart is wounded, he is gone like a shadow, his knees are weak from fasting. And it ends in verses 30 and 31 with public thanksgiving, because the Lord stands at the right hand of the poor man, which is exactly the place an accuser was supposed to stand in court. David has not been given his verdict yet. He has been given his Advocate, and that turns out to be enough.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both psalms are ascribed to David. Psalm 108 is a composite of Psalm 57:7–11 and Psalm 60:5–12, which shows that the psalms were used liturgically and recombined.
- Genre: Psalm 108 is a psalm of confidence moving into national petition; Psalm 109 is an individual lament with a long imprecatory section.
- Imprecatory psalms appeal to God’s justice under a covenant that promised God would repay the wicked. They are never presented as permission for personal revenge (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19).
- Peter quotes Psalm 109:8 in Acts 1:20 concerning Judas, which makes this psalm one the New Testament treats as pointing beyond David’s situation.
- Christians live under Jesus’ explicit instruction to love enemies and pray for persecutors (Matthew 5:43–48; Luke 23:34). That does not make Psalm 109 wrong; it shows where we stand in redemptive history.
- Note the courtroom imagery throughout Psalm 109: accusers, standing at the right hand, judgment, condemnation. The psalm is a legal appeal, not a curse ritual.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 108 is assembled from two earlier prayers of David (compare Psalm 57:7–11 and Psalm 60:5–12). Why might a man take words he had already prayed years before and pray them again, and when have you needed to do exactly that?*

Because faith is not always fresh. There are seasons when a believer has nothing new to say to God, and what he has instead is a memory of having said something true before. David reaches back to a cave and to a battlefield and prays those words again. That is not laziness; it is the reason God gave His people a songbook. It is also the reason a congregation sings the same hymns for fifty years.

Bring this down to practice. Ask who in the room has a passage they return to when they cannot pray, and let two or three name it. Then suggest that everyone leave with one: a psalm marked in the front of the Bible for the night the diagnosis comes, or the marriage cracks, or the child will not come home. The time to choose that passage is not the night you need it.

Question 2. *Read Psalm 109:1–5 before you read verses 6 through 20. What has been done to this man, and what precisely is he asking God to do about it?*

Verses 1 through 5 establish that David is the injured party, not the aggressor. He has been surrounded by lying and deceitful mouths, attacked without cause, and, worst of all, repaid evil for good and hatred for his love. That last phrase is the sting of the whole psalm. This is not a stranger; this is someone he was kind to. Then verses 6 through 20 ask God to set a wicked man over him, to let his prayer become sin, to shorten his days, to leave his family destitute, to let his sin be remembered.

Some teachers handle the difficulty by suggesting that verses 6 through 19 are David quoting what his enemies are saying about him. That reading is possible and worth mentioning, but the plain reading is that David prays it himself. Do not rescue the text by explaining it away. Say instead what is actually true: a man who has been betrayed takes the whole ugly weight of what he feels and puts it in God's hands rather than his own, and God saw fit to preserve the prayer. Then read Romans 12:19 and Matthew 5:44 and let the class feel the difference Christ makes.

Question 3. *Psalm 109:4 says, "In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer." Set that beside Romans 12:19–21. How does handing your anger to God protect you from taking the matter into your own hands?*

The sentence in verse 4 is the hinge of the psalm: "but I give myself to prayer," or literally, "but I am prayer." Betrayal drives a man somewhere. It drove David to God. Anger that is never spoken to God tends to be acted out on people, and anger that is handed over tends to be released. Romans 12:19 makes the logic explicit: do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. The reason we can stop settling the score is that Someone else has promised to.

Be pastorally careful here. In almost every adult class there is someone carrying a real, unresolved injury: a betrayal by a business partner, a spouse who left, a relative who did something unspeakable. Do not tell them to feel differently. Tell them where to take it, and tell them what Romans 12:20–21 asks next, which is bread and water for the enemy and a refusal to be overcome by evil. That is a tall order, and it is only possible because the account is already in better hands than theirs.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Psalm 108:12 says the help of man is useless. Walk back through the last month and list where you went first for help. Be honest about the order.*

Answers will vary. The point is not that human help is sinful; God gives us doctors, elders, friends, and counselors.

The point is order. Psalm 108:12 is written by a man who commanded armies and knew exactly how far armies could carry him. Listen for students who realize that God got the call only after the other options were exhausted.

2. *Compare Psalm 108:1–5 with Psalm 57:7–11, and read the title of Psalm 57. What was David's situation when he first prayed those words?*

Psalm 108:1–5 reproduces Psalm 57:7–11 almost word for word. The title of Psalm 57 places it when David fled from Saul into the cave. So the line "my heart is steadfast, O God" was first sung by a hunted man hiding in the dark, which makes it far more valuable than if it had been composed in a season of comfort.

3. *Read Acts 1:15–20 and find which verse of Psalm 109 Peter quotes and how he applies it. What does that show about the way the apostles read the Psalms?*

Peter quotes Psalm 109:8, "Let another take his office," and applies it to the replacement of Judas. It shows that the apostles read the Psalms as Scripture with a reach beyond the original circumstance, and that they saw David's experience of betrayal as anticipating the betrayal of David's greater Son. Compare Psalm 41:9 with John 13:18.

4. Trace the words David uses to describe himself in Psalm 109:22–25. What is his physical and emotional condition while he prays this?

He calls himself poor and needy, says his heart is wounded within him, that he is gone like a shadow when it lengthens, shaken off like a locust, his knees weak through fasting, his flesh failing from lack of fatness, and a reproach to those who look at him. He is not praying from a position of strength. He is emptied, hungry, and publicly humiliated, which is worth remembering before judging the harshness of verses 6 through 20.

5. Psalm 109 ends in public praise (verses 30–31) before anything has changed. Name one wrong done to you that you have never actually handed over to God, then set a date this week and hand it over in prayer by name.

Answers will vary. Look for specificity: a name, a date, and an actual prayer rather than a general willingness to forgive someday. Where the injury is severe, do not rush the student; point him to the elders and to Romans 12:17–21, and make clear that handing a matter to God is not the same as pretending it did not happen.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Teach Psalm 109 as an appeal to God's justice, never as a model for personal vengeance or for praying harm on a specific person today. Christians are under Matthew 5:43–48 and Romans 12:19–21.
- Do not try to soften the psalm by pretending David is only quoting his enemies. Mention that some hold the view, then teach the plain sense honestly and let the New Testament supply the balance.
- Psalm 109:8 is applied by inspiration to Judas (Acts 1:20). That is apostolic application, not a pattern for us to assign psalms to people we dislike.
- Psalm 108:13 says "through God we will do valiantly." Keep it as confidence in God's help, not as a promise of victory in whatever project a Christian chooses.

The Word Made Flesh

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

John does not open with a genealogy or a birth account, because his subject is older than genealogies. “In the beginning was the Word” deliberately echoes Genesis 1:1 and then goes behind it: when the beginning began, He already was. Three claims follow in one verse. The Word was in the beginning, so He is eternal. The Word was with God, so He is personally distinct from the Father. The Word was God, so He is fully divine. Everything else in the gospel rests on those eighteen verses, and a class that grasps them will read the rest of John differently.

Then the prologue turns tragic. Verse 5 says the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it, but verses 10 and 11 tell you what that cost: the world was made through Him and did not know Him, and He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. John is writing his whole plot in advance. Rejection is not a surprise ending in this book; it is announced on the first page. And against it stands verse 12, the door left open to anyone at all: as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.

Verses 19 through 34 bring in the last and greatest of the prophets, and what is striking is how relentlessly he refuses attention. Not the Christ. Not Elijah. Not the Prophet. Only a voice. He says the One coming after him was before him, that he is unworthy to untie His sandal, and then, on two consecutive days, he points at a man walking by and gives Him the title that shapes the rest of the New Testament: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. A Jewish crowd knew exactly how lambs were used, and exactly what happened to them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John, the son of Zebedee, writes late in the first century with a stated purpose in John 20:30–31: that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.
- “The Word” (Logos) would speak to both audiences: to Jews it recalled the God who created and revealed by speaking, and to Greeks it named the rational principle behind the universe. John fills the term with a person.
- The prologue (1:1–18) is structured around light and darkness, receiving and rejecting, law and grace, themes that recur through the entire gospel.
- John the Baptist is presented here not mainly as a preacher of repentance but as a witness. The word “witness” or “testify” appears repeatedly in this passage and throughout the book.
- The delegation from Jerusalem in 1:19–28 is official: priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees to determine John’s claim, since baptizing was an unusual act requiring authority.
- “Lamb of God” draws on the Passover lamb (Exodus 12), the daily offering (Exodus 29:38–42), and the lamb led to slaughter of Isaiah 53:7. See 1 Corinthians 5:7 and 1 Peter 1:18–19.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *John opens his gospel before Bethlehem, before Abraham, before Genesis 1:1. Why does he start there, and what would be missing if he had begun with the manger?*

John starts there because he intends to settle the identity question before he tells a single story. If Jesus is a good man, a teacher, a prophet, or even a uniquely anointed creature, then the miracles are curiosities and the cross is a tragedy. If the man teaching in Galilee is the One through whom all things were made, then every page that follows carries a different weight. Verse 18 closes the loop: no one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son has declared Him. Jesus is not a messenger about God; He is God making Himself visible.

If John had begun at Bethlehem, a reader could conclude that Jesus began at Bethlehem. That is precisely the error John forecloses. Be ready for the argument that verse 1 should read “a god.” The answer is the whole

prologue: verse 3 says all things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made, which leaves Him on the Creator's side of the line, not the creature's. Add John 8:58, John 20:28, and Titus 2:13, and teach it confidently without turning the hour into a debate about one translation.

Question 2. *Verses 10 through 13 say He came to His own and His own did not receive Him, but that as many as received Him were given the right to become children of God. What does receiving Him involve, and what three human factors does verse 13 rule out?*

Verse 12 defines receiving Him with the next phrase: "to those who believe in His name." In John's vocabulary, believing is never bare mental agreement; it is trust that acts, which is why the same book says in 3:36 that the one who does not obey the Son shall not see life. Verse 13 then rules out three things: born not of blood (ancestry, which was the Jewish assumption), nor of the will of the flesh (human desire or effort), nor of the will of man (someone else's decision for you). Sonship is God's gift, given on God's terms.

Be careful and be clear. Verse 13 is not teaching that God regenerates a person unconditionally before he can believe. The verse is addressed to "as many as received Him," so receiving comes first in John's own sentence. What is excluded is the notion that anyone is born into God's family by bloodline, by self-improvement, or by another person's choice. How the new birth actually occurs, John will tell us plainly in chapter 3: born of water and the Spirit. Save the details for that week, but do not let the class leave thinking sonship is automatic or hereditary.

Question 3. *John the Baptist answers nearly every question by saying who he is not (1:19–27). What would it look like this week for you to be that content with a smaller part?*

Count how many times he says no. Not the Christ. Not Elijah. Not the Prophet. What he claims is to be a voice, and a voice is nothing but a carrier for someone else's words. He describes himself as unworthy to do the job of the lowest household slave for the One coming after him. Later, when his own disciples start leaving him for Jesus, he says the sentence that ought to be carved over every pulpit and every classroom door: He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30).

Make the application specific rather than sentimental. A smaller part looks like teaching a class nobody notices, letting a younger man lead the singing, giving without telling, declining to correct the record when you were right, serving under an elder you did not vote for. Ask the class where they are currently fighting for a larger role, and whether the fight is about the kingdom or about being seen.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything John 1:1–18 says the Word is and does. Mark the statements that could only be true of God Himself.*

He was in the beginning, was with God, was God, made all things, is life, is the light of men, is not overcome by darkness, gives the right to become children of God, became flesh, tabernacled among us, displayed glory as of the only begotten of the Father, is full of grace and truth, existed before John the Baptist though born later, gives grace upon grace, and has declared the unseen God. Eternal existence, creatorship, the possession of life in Himself, and the outright statement "the Word was God" could only be true of God.

2. *Set John 1:3 beside Colossians 1:16–17 and Hebrews 1:1–3. Write down what all three passages agree on concerning the Son and creation.*

All three say the Son is the agent of creation, not part of it. John says all things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made. Colossians says all things were created through Him and for Him, and that He is before all things and in Him all things consist. Hebrews says God made the worlds through Him, that He is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person, and that He upholds all things by the word of His power. The Son creates, sustains, and precedes creation.

3. *John 1:14 says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, a picture drawn from the tabernacle in the wilderness. Read Exodus 40:34–35 beside it and say what John is claiming.*

The verb translated "dwelt" means to pitch a tent or tabernacle. In Exodus 40 the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle so completely that Moses could not enter. John is claiming that the glory which once filled a tent in the

wilderness now walks around in a human body, and that “we beheld His glory.” The God who came down to camp with Israel has come down again, and this time you can have supper with Him.

4. *Trace what John the Baptist says about Jesus in 1:15, 1:23, 1:27, 1:29, 1:33, and 1:34. Which of those statements would have been the most startling to a first-century Jewish crowd?*

He says Jesus ranks before him because He existed before him; that he himself is only a voice crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3); that he is unworthy to loose His sandal strap; that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; that He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit; and that He is the Son of God. “Lamb of God” would have been the most startling, because it announces that the Messiah has come to be sacrificed, which is the one thing the crowd was not expecting.

5. *John 1:29 calls Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Name one sin you have been managing instead of confessing, and deal with it this week rather than next.*

Answers will vary. The distinction to press is between managing a sin (hiding it, budgeting for it, keeping it inside a tolerable size) and confessing it (naming it to God, and where appropriate to the person wronged, and forsaking it). Point to 1 John 1:8–10 and Proverbs 28:13. Where the student is not a Christian, be ready to teach him what to do with Acts 2:38 rather than leaving him with a resolution.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The deity of Christ is the point of the prologue. Be ready for the “a god” rendering of verse 1 and answer it from the passage itself, kindly and without contempt for the person asking.
- Verse 13 is not Calvinistic regeneration preceding faith. John’s own sentence begins with those who received Him and believed on His name. Teach what the verse excludes: ancestry, human effort, and another person’s decision.
- Verse 9, “the true Light which gives light to every man,” speaks of the universal availability of the light, not universal salvation. Verses 10 through 12 immediately show that many refuse it.
- Do not import all of John 3 into verse 13. Note that the new birth is coming in chapter 3 and let the class wait two weeks for it.

Draw Near and Hold Fast

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 10 completes the argument begun in chapter 7. Verse 1 says the law had only a shadow of the good things to come, and verses 3 and 4 give the blunt reason the old system could never be final: in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year, and it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins. Then Psalm 40 is put in the mouth of Christ: sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. The whole sacrificial system was pointing at a will to be done, not at an animal to be killed.

Verse 12 is the sentence to write on the board: this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. Priests did not sit. There were no chairs in the tabernacle because the work was never done. The seated Christ is the visual proof that it is finished. Verse 14 adds that by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified, a phrase that holds together a finished sacrifice and an ongoing work in us.

Then doctrine turns into duty. Three exhortations in verses 22 through 25: let us draw near with a true heart, let us hold fast the confession of our hope, let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. And immediately the reason for the urgency: verses 26 through 31 warn about willful, ongoing sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and describe a man who has trampled the Son of God underfoot. The chapter closes tenderly, reminding them of the days when they joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods, and urging them not to cast away their confidence now.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Hebrews is addressed to Jewish Christians tempted to drift back to the temple system under social and probably legal pressure (10:32–34 describes a season of public reproach and confiscated property).
- The five warning passages of Hebrews run through the whole letter (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:8; 10:26–31; 12:25–29). Read them together and their meaning is unmistakable.
- Psalm 40:6–8, quoted in 10:5–7, is applied to Christ's incarnation and obedience. The Old Testament itself said God wanted obedience more than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6).
- "Forsaking the assembling" (10:25) uses a word meaning to abandon or desert. The assembly in view is the gathering of the saints, which the New Testament shows meeting on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- The warning in 10:28–29 argues from the lesser to the greater: if despising Moses' law brought death without mercy, how much worse for one who tramples the Son of God.
- Habakkuk 2:3–4 is quoted in 10:37–38, including the line "if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him," which is the point the writer is making.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hebrews 10:19–22 says we have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. Picture what that sentence meant to someone raised knowing that one man entered that room one day a year. How should that boldness change the way you pray?*

Let the class sit inside the old arrangement first. One man, one day, one room, and never without blood, with the rest of the nation waiting outside. Access to God was rationed. Now read verse 19 again: 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. Not tolerated. Not permitted on a technicality. Bold. And verse 22 adds the qualifiers: a true heart, full assurance of faith, hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, bodies washed with pure water.

Ask how this should change praying, and press past generalities. Many Christians pray as if they are filing an appeal with a busy official: apologizing for taking up time, rushing, hedging, keeping it formal, never saying the actual thing. Boldness means going in with the real matter, in plain words, expecting a hearing, because the blood that opened the door has not lost any of its power since the day it was shed. Hebrews 4:16 says the same thing: come boldly to the throne of grace.

Question 2. *Hebrews 10:24–25 ties assembling together to stirring up love and good works. Why does the writer connect those two, and what is actually lost, both to the Christian and to the congregation, when someone stops coming?*

The writer connects them because love and good works are not produced in isolation. The word translated “stir up” is a strong one, close to provoke; we are to needle one another toward good. That cannot be done at a distance. You cannot notice that a brother has gone quiet, or learn that a widow’s car will not start, or see that a young father is discouraged, if you are not in the room with them. Assembling is not the sum of Christian duty, but it is the setting in which most of the rest of it gets arranged.

Name both losses honestly. The absent Christian loses the Lord’s Supper, the teaching, the singing, the encouragement, and the accountability, and the drift almost always continues. The congregation loses his gift, his example, his money, his welcome to visitors, and the chance to serve him. Then ask the practical question: who has been missing lately, and which person in this room will make contact this week? Note also that the verse ties assembling to seeing the Day approaching, so the nearer the end, the more we need one another, not less.

Question 3. *Read Hebrews 10:26–31 slowly. Who is being described, what have they done, and how does this paragraph answer the teaching that a saved person can never be lost?*

Read the description precisely. These are people who received the knowledge of the truth, were sanctified by the blood of the covenant, and then sinned willfully, a present tense describing deliberate, continuing sin, not a moment of weakness. Verse 29 uses three terrible verbs: trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace. You cannot trample something you never stood on. A person who was never saved cannot be said to have been sanctified by the blood of the covenant.

So the passage plainly teaches that a Christian can be lost, which the rest of the letter says three other times (3:12–14; 6:4–6; 12:25) and which Paul and Peter say as well (Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 2:20–22). Teach it plainly and then immediately guard the other ditch. This is not describing the Christian who sins and is grieved about it; for him there is 1 John 1:7–9 and Acts 8:22. It describes a settled, defiant return to sin by someone who has decided the blood of Christ is not worth much. The tender Christian who fears he has committed it almost certainly has not, precisely because he fears it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Set Hebrews 10:11–12 beside 10:14 and list every contrast between the standing priest and the seated Christ.*

The priest stands; Christ sat down. The priest ministers daily; Christ offered once. The priest offers the same sacrifices repeatedly; Christ offered one sacrifice. Those sacrifices can never take away sins; His offering is for sins forever. The priest stands in an earthly sanctuary; Christ is at the right hand of God. Verse 14 completes it: by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified, so the sacrifice is finished while the sanctifying continues in us.

2. *Hebrews 10:16–17 quotes Jeremiah 31 again, and verse 18 draws a conclusion. Write that conclusion in your own words, and say what it means for anyone still offering sacrifices for sin.*

The conclusion is that where there is remission of sins, there is no longer an offering for sin. Once God has said He will remember sins and lawless deeds no more, the sacrificial system has nothing left to do. For anyone still offering sacrifices for sin, whether animal sacrifices or any repeated offering claimed to atone, the answer is that the work is done and adding to it denies its sufficiency.

3. Verses 22, 23, and 24 each begin with “let us.” List all three, and note what each one asks of you specifically.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. The three are worship, perseverance, and active care for the body, and the third is where the other two usually get tested.

4. Read 10:32–34 and list what these Christians had already endured. Then read 10:35–39 and say what the writer is afraid they are about to do.

They had endured a great struggle with sufferings, been made a public spectacle by reproaches and tribulations, stood with others who were treated that way, shown compassion to the writer in his chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods, knowing they had a better and enduring possession. The writer fears they are about to cast away their confidence and draw back, which Habakkuk 2:4 says God takes no pleasure in. He is not worried about a sudden denial but about a slow quitting.

5. Verse 24 says to consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. Pick one member of the congregation you have not thought about in months, and do something concrete for him before next Sunday.

Answers will vary. Push for a name and an action with a deadline: a visit, a meal, a phone call, a ride to services, a note in the mail. The verb in verse 24 is “consider,” which means to fix your attention on someone deliberately. Most congregational neglect is not hostility; it is simply never having thought about a particular person.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Hebrews 10:26–31 must be taught as written: a Christian can fall away. At the same time, protect the tender conscience. This describes deliberate, continuing, defiant sin, not the struggling believer (1 John 1:7–9; Acts 8:22).
- Do not let 10:14 (“perfected forever”) be turned into once saved, always saved. The same chapter warns against drawing back, and the phrase “those who are being sanctified” is present and ongoing.
- Hebrews 10:25 is about the assembly of the saints, and it is a serious command. Teach it as a command without turning it into a club, and be ready to deal kindly with the homebound and the genuinely ill.
- “No longer an offering for sin” (10:18) concerns sacrificial systems, not the forgiveness available to a penitent child of God, who confesses and is cleansed (1 John 1:9).

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Jeremiah 45–49 • Psalm 110–113 • John 1:35–2:25 • Hebrews 11

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