

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 82 OF 104

Seeing the Unseen King

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 45-49
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 110-113
Gospels	John 1:35-2:25
General New Testament	Hebrews 11

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to train the class to see what is not yet visible. Jeremiah announces the fall of nations still standing at full strength. Psalm 110 describes a King and Priest a thousand years before anyone could point at Him. Nathanael is promised that he will see heaven opened. And Hebrews 11 gathers a crowd of people who staked their lives on a country they never entered. Faith is not optimism. It is taking God at His word about what is real.

Doctrinally, Psalm 110 is the load-bearing text of the week and should be handled with care and confidence. Christ sits at God's right hand now, reigning and interceding as our great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. That single verse answers premillennialism, answers the idea of a continuing human priesthood, and grounds the assurance of every Christian who prays. Hebrews 11 then guards the other flank by showing that the faith which saves is the faith that obeys.

Formationally, watch how often someone in these readings is simply brought. Andrew brings Peter. Philip brings Nathanael. The servants at Cana fill the jars and never get a word of credit. Baruch is told he will keep his life and nothing more, and that is enough. Ask your class this: name one person you will invite to come and see before this month ends, and tell us the day you intend to ask.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Psalm 110-113, and give most of the hour to Psalm 110. It is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament and the clearest statement anywhere that Christ reigns and serves as our High Priest right now. Bring Hebrews 7 and Acts 2 with you.

Second session: Take up Hebrews 11. It reads aloud beautifully and it lets you teach obedient faith without controversy, since every example in the chapter acted. End with verses 35 through 40 so nobody leaves thinking faith is a method for avoiding hardship.

The other two readings: Assign Jeremiah 45-49 and John 1:35-2:25 for the week. Tell the class to read the oracles quickly, watching for the word pride, and to read John slowly, watching for who brings whom. Ask everyone to come next week with the name of one person they could invite.

No Nation Beyond His Reach

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 45 is easy to skip and should not be. It is dated to the year Baruch wrote the first scroll, God's answer to a man who had said, "Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow." Baruch is tired, frightened, and probably disappointed that faithful service had not produced a better life. God does not scold him and does not promise him comfort. He says, behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them. But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.

Chapters 46 through 49 are the oracles against the nations, and the geography is the point. Egypt to the southwest, Philistia on the coast, Moab and Ammon across the Jordan, Edom to the south, Damascus to the north, the tent-dwelling Arab tribes to the east, and Elam far out beyond Babylon. Jeremiah has been called a prophet to the nations since 1:5, and here he does that work. The God of a small, defeated country announces the rise and fall of empires that had never heard His name.

Two threads run through the section. The first is pride. Moab gets the longest oracle, forty-seven verses, and God says plainly, we have heard of the pride of Moab, he is exceedingly proud. Edom is told that the pride of your heart has deceived you, you who say in your heart, who will bring me down to the ground? The second thread is mercy. Egypt will be inhabited again, Moab's captives will be brought back in the latter days, so will Ammon's, so will Elam's. Even in an avalanche of judgment God keeps opening doors.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- These chapters are arranged by nation rather than by date. Many of the oracles belong to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, around 605 B.C., the year of Nebuchadnezzar's victory over Egypt at Carchemish (46:2).
- Oracles against the nations appear in most of the prophets (Isaiah 13–23; Ezekiel 25–32; Amos 1–2). They assert that the God of Israel is the God of everyone, and that no people is exempt from His judgment.
- Moab and Ammon descended from Lot (Genesis 19:36–38) and Edom from Esau (Genesis 36:1), so these are family quarrels centuries old.
- Jeremiah 48 borrows heavily from Isaiah 15 and 16, the earlier oracle against Moab. Prophets frequently reuse and expand earlier prophetic language.
- Baruch is the scribe of chapter 36, who wrote, read publicly, and hid for his life. Chapter 45 is his personal postscript, placed here as the transition to the foreign oracles.
- The promises of restoration "in the latter days" (48:47; 49:6, 39) look ahead to God's mercy reaching beyond Israel, which finds its fulfillment in the gospel going to all nations (Acts 10:34–35; Galatians 3:28).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jeremiah 45 is a personal word to one exhausted scribe who was told to stop seeking great things for himself. What had Baruch been feeling, what does God promise him, and what does God plainly refuse him?*

Baruch is grieving. His words in 45:3 are those of a man worn out by faithfulness: grief added to sorrow, fainting in his sighing, finding no rest. Remember what he had been through in chapter 36, reading a scroll of judgment in public, then hiding because the king wanted him arrested. God's reply begins not with Baruch but with the big picture: I am about to break down what I built and pluck up what I planted, this whole land. That reframes everything. Baruch's disappointment was real, but it was set inside the collapse of a nation.

Then the two halves of the answer. God refuses him great things: "Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them." And God promises him his life as a prize in every place he goes, which in a war is the only promise that matters. Ask the class what "great things" means for a Christian today. It is rarely a throne. It is more often a title, a reputation, a comfortable retirement, a church that grows large enough to prove something. God is not cruel to Baruch. He is telling him what season he is living in, and He is giving him exactly what He gave Ebed-Melech.

Question 2. Read Jeremiah 48:11 about Moab settled on his dregs, never poured from vessel to vessel. Describe the life that picture is drawing, and say why God treats comfort that has never been disturbed as a danger rather than a blessing.

The picture in 48:11 comes from winemaking. Wine left sitting on its sediment, never poured from one jar to another, keeps its taste and its scent unchanged. That is the compliment and the indictment in one line: Moab has been at ease from his youth, settled on his dregs, not emptied from vessel to vessel, and therefore his taste remained in him and his scent has not changed. Nothing ever disturbed Moab, so Moab never changed. He is proud, complacent, and confident in his own fortresses.

Handle this one pastorally, because prosperous, undisturbed people fill our pews and generally consider their comfort a sign of God's approval. God is not against rest, and hardship is not a virtue in itself. But a life that has never been poured out from one vessel to another tends to settle, and the sediment we settle on is usually self-satisfaction. Ask the class to name a time when being disturbed did them good, and then ask the harder question: what has changed in you in the last five years?

Question 3. These oracles are addressed to nations that never read them: Egypt, Moab, Edom, Damascus, Elam. If God governs peoples who do not acknowledge Him, how should that change the way we read the news and the way we pray about it?

It says that God is God of the whole earth and not a tribal deity attached to one people's fortunes. He raises Nebuchadnezzar up and He will pull him down. He sets the borders of Moab and He removes them. Amos makes the same point when he opens with judgments on Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab before ever mentioning Israel. Nations that never signed a covenant are still accountable for cruelty, arrogance, and violence (see Genesis 15:16; Romans 1:18–20).

Push this into how the class reads the news. Christians sometimes swing between panic, as though history has escaped God's hands, and partisanship, as though God's purposes were tied to one country's success. Neither fits Jeremiah. Ask what it would look like this week to pray for a nation you have only ever criticized, and read 1 Timothy 2:1–4 before the class leaves.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. List every nation addressed in Jeremiah 46 through 49, along with the specific charge God brings against it where a charge is given.

Egypt (46), defeated at Carchemish and later invaded, for her boast of covering the earth; Philistia (47), swept away by waters out of the north; Moab (48), for pride, arrogance, complacency, and trust in her works and treasures, and for magnifying herself against the Lord; Ammon (49:1–6), for seizing Gad's territory and trusting her treasures; Edom (49:7–22), for the pride of her heart and confidence in her rock fortresses; Damascus (49:23–27); Kedar and Hazor (49:28–33), settled desert tribes with no gates or bars; Elam (49:34–39). Note how often the charge is pride or misplaced trust.

2. Jeremiah 48:29–30 names Moab's besetting sin. Read Proverbs 16:18 and Isaiah 16:6 alongside it, then describe how that sin showed itself in Moab's national life.

Verses 29 and 30 speak of Moab's loftiness, arrogance, haughtiness, and the pride of his heart, and add that his boasts accomplish nothing. Proverbs 16:18 says pride goes before destruction, and Isaiah 16:6 had already said the same thing about Moab generations earlier. In national life it showed up as confidence in fortified cities, satisfaction with wealth, mockery of Israel's trouble (48:27), and contempt for the God of Israel.

3. Read Jeremiah 46:27–28, dropped into the middle of an oracle about Egypt. Why does God pause to speak to Jacob there, and what does He promise and refuse to promise?

God interrupts a judgment on Egypt to tell His own frightened people not to be afraid, because He will save them from far away and their descendants from the land of captivity. What He promises is preservation, return, and a full end of the nations where He scattered them. What He refuses to promise is exemption from discipline: "I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished." Comfort and correction arrive in the same sentence.

4. Trace the promises of a restored future in 46:26, 48:47, and 49:6 and 39. What is surprising about God's last word to these old enemies of Israel?

God promises that Egypt will be inhabited again, that He will bring back the captives of Moab, of Ammon, and of Elam in the latter days. The surprise is that the last word to these enemies is not extermination but restoration. It is a small window opening toward the day when the gospel would be preached to every nation, and it should soften any reader tempted to enjoy the judgment passages too much.

5. Baruch wanted great things for himself while his world was coming apart (45:5). Name the "great thing" you have been quietly seeking, and say what one week would look like if you stopped seeking it.

Answers will vary. Listen for honesty about ambition rather than false modesty. The point is not that ambition is always sin; it is that Baruch was pursuing advancement in a world about to be dismantled. Ask what the student is building that will not survive, and what he would do with the time and energy he now spends on it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not turn the oracles against the nations into political commentary about modern countries. They are historical judgments on specific ancient peoples, and their abiding lesson is that God rules all nations.
- "The latter days" in 48:47 and 49:39 is prophetic language for a later time of God's choosing. Do not read it as a timetable for end-time events or for a restored political Israel.
- The judgment language is graphic. Teach it as God's justice against real cruelty and arrogance, and resist letting the class savor it (Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9).
- Jeremiah 45 can be misused to teach that ambition itself is sin. The word is specific to Baruch in a collapsing nation. Teach the principle of holding our plans loosely (James 4:13–16) rather than binding a rule.

A Priest Upon His Throne

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 110 is the hinge of the week and possibly of the Psalter. David writes, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Two persons are in that sentence, and the second one is David’s superior. Jesus used the verse to silence the Pharisees, Peter used it at Pentecost to prove the enthronement of the risen Christ, and Hebrews returns to it again and again. If your class learns one Old Testament verse this year by heart, make it this one.

Verse 4 adds the second office. God swears, and will not change His mind, that this King is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek appears for three verses in Genesis 14, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, with no genealogy given. That is exactly the point Hebrews 7 makes: a priesthood that does not depend on descent from Levi, and therefore can belong to a man from the tribe of Judah. King and priest in one person, which no son of David had ever been and no son of Aaron had ever been.

The three psalms that follow show the shape of a life lived under that King. Psalm 111 is an acrostic celebrating what God has done: great works, righteousness that endures forever, redemption sent to His people, grace and compassion. Psalm 112 is a matching acrostic about the man who fears Him, and the echo is deliberate; God’s character begins to show up in His people. Psalm 113 closes with the picture that ought to stay with the class: a God so high He must stoop to see heaven and earth, and what He stoops to do is lift a poor man from an ash heap and seat him with princes.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 110 is a royal and messianic psalm of David. The New Testament quotes or alludes to it more than any other Old Testament passage (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Acts 2:34–35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 5:6; 7:17, 21; 10:12–13).
- Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14:18–20 and Psalm 110:4 only, and then is expounded at length in Hebrews 5 through 7.
- Psalms 111 and 112 are acrostics: each successive line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a device for memory and for signaling completeness.
- Psalm 113 begins the Hallel (Psalms 113 through 118), sung at Passover and the other great feasts. Jesus and the apostles very likely sang these psalms at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30).
- Jesus’ argument in Matthew 22:41–46 depends on David calling his own descendant “Lord,” which only makes sense if the Messiah is more than a man.
- Christ’s present reign and priesthood are the plain teaching of this psalm as the New Testament uses it. He sits now; He is not waiting to begin.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 110:1 is quoted in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament verse. Read it, then read Matthew 22:41–46 and Acts 2:34–36. What is Jesus proving with it, and what is Peter proving with it?*

Jesus uses the verse to force a question the Pharisees could not answer: if the Christ is David’s son, why does David call Him Lord? The point is the Messiah’s identity. He is David’s descendant and also David’s superior, which no merely human king could be. Peter uses the same verse for a different purpose: to prove that the ascension actually happened and that Jesus has been enthroned. David did not ascend into the heavens, Peter says, but he himself said, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand. Therefore let all Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ.

This is your best chance in weeks to settle the kingdom question clearly. Christ sat down at the right hand of God at His ascension and reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–23; Colossians 1:13). He is not waiting for a future earthly throne in Jerusalem. He rules in the midst of His enemies, as verse 2 says, and He will reign until the last enemy, death, is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25–26). Say it plainly, show it from the text, and give the class the references to take home.

Question 2. *Psalm 110:4 swears that this King will also be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Using Hebrews 7:11–17, explain why Jesus could not have served as a priest under the Law of Moses, and what His priesthood does for you on an ordinary day.*

Hebrews 7:14 gives the reason: our Lord arose from Judah, a tribe from which Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. Under the Law, priests had to descend from Aaron, and the roles of king and priest were deliberately kept apart. When King Uzziah tried to combine them he was struck with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16–21). So if the Messiah is to be both King and Priest, it requires a priesthood older than Aaron and independent of genealogy, and Psalm 110:4 says by divine oath that He has exactly that.

Bring it to the ordinary day. Because Christ is a priest forever, He always lives to make intercession, and therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:24–25). That means there is no moment this week when your approach to God is unattended, no confession that has to be routed through a human priest, no sin so recent that there is nobody at the altar. Ask the class how their praying would change if they truly believed someone was already speaking for them when they started.

Question 3. *Psalm 113:5–9 says that God is enthroned on high and yet stoops to lift the poor from the dust and set the barren woman in a home as a joyful mother. Where have you watched Him do that, and who in your life needs that kind of lifting from you?*

The logic of Psalm 113 is the whole gospel in miniature. Verses 4 and 5 put God above the nations and above the heavens, so high that verse 6 says He humbles Himself to behold the things in heaven, not only on earth. Then verses 7 through 9 show what that highness does: raises the poor out of the dust, lifts the needy out of the ash heap, seats him with princes, and gives the barren woman a household of children. Greatness in this psalm is measured by how low it will stoop. Philippians 2:5–8 is the same movement in a Man.

Then turn the question on the class. If God's highness expresses itself in stooping, the imitation of God is not upward mobility but downward attention. Ask for names: the widow nobody sits with, the single mother, the man who lost his job, the teenager whose family does not come. And ask for a specific action this week. A class that answers this question honestly will change more than a class that answers the first two correctly.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Go through Psalm 110 verse by verse and label what each one says about the Messiah: His throne, His people, His priesthood, His judgment.*

Verse 1, His enthronement at God's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool. Verse 2, the rule of His scepter extending out of Zion, in the midst of His enemies. Verse 3, a willing people in the day of His power. Verse 4, His eternal priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, established by an oath God will not revoke. Verses 5 through 7, His judgment of kings and nations. Throne, people, priesthood, and judgment, in twenty-two lines.

2. *Set Psalm 110:1 beside Hebrews 1:13, Hebrews 10:12–13, and 1 Corinthians 15:24–26. When did Christ sit down, and what is He doing while He waits?*

Hebrews 1:13 asks which angel God ever invited to sit at His right hand, and the answer is none. Hebrews 10:12–13 says that after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, He sat down, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 1 Corinthians 15:24–26 says He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, the last enemy being death. So He sat down at the ascension, He reigns now, and He is waiting for the final subjection of every enemy, which will be complete at His return.

3. *Psalms 111 and 112 are deliberate twins, both acrostics of the same length. Read them side by side and list the phrases used of God in 111 that are used of the God-fearing man in 112.*

Both say His or his righteousness endures forever (111:3; 112:3). God is gracious and full of compassion (111:4); so is the righteous man (112:4). God's works are honorable and glorious (111:3); wealth and riches are in the righteous man's house (112:3). God is remembered forever (111:4); the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance (112:6). The likeness is the point: people who fear God begin to resemble Him.

4. *Psalm 111:10 repeats the great line of the wisdom books. Find it in Proverbs 9:10 and Job 28:28, and explain in your own words what "the beginning of wisdom" means.*

The line is, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," with Proverbs 9:10 adding that the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding, and Job 28:28 adding that to depart from evil is understanding. "Beginning" means both the starting point and the controlling principle. A person who has not settled that God is God cannot reason rightly about anything else, no matter how intelligent he is.

5. *Psalm 112:7 says the righteous man will not be afraid of evil tidings because his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Name the bad news you most dread, and write down what trusting God with it would actually look like.*

Answers will vary. Watch for the difference between a wish that the bad news never come and a settled trust that God will be there if it does. Psalm 112:7 does not promise that the tidings will be good; it promises a heart that is fixed. Practical answers might include naming the fear out loud in prayer, memorizing a passage now for that day, or telling one trusted Christian what you are dreading.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 110 establishes that Christ reigns now. Guard carefully against any premillennial reading that postpones His throne to a future earthly kingdom (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:24–26).
- The Melchizedek priesthood belongs to Christ alone. There is no continuing human priesthood in the church; every Christian has direct access through Him (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Hebrews 4:14–16).
- Psalm 112 describes how life generally goes for the God-fearing man. It is wisdom-style promise, not a guarantee of wealth or immunity, and it must not be preached as a prosperity formula.
- Psalm 110:5–6 uses the language of battlefield judgment. Handle it as God's certain justice against His enemies, not as encouragement for human violence.

Come and See

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The calling of the first disciples is told as a chain reaction. John the Baptist points, two disciples follow, one of them is Andrew, Andrew finds Simon, Jesus finds Philip, Philip finds Nathanael. Nobody in this passage is recruited by a program. Each one is brought by somebody who already knew him. Notice also the first words Jesus speaks in this gospel, a question: “What do you seek?” And the second thing He says is an invitation: “Come and see.” That is the whole method of John’s gospel in four words.

Nathanael deserves a few minutes of class time. His objection, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” is honest prejudice, and Philip does not argue with it. He says come and see. Then Jesus disarms him by telling him who he is (“an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit”) and where he was (“when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”), and Nathanael confesses on the spot. Jesus answers the confession with a promise drawn from Jacob’s ladder: you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Jacob’s ladder turns out to be a person.

Then two scenes that belong together. At Cana the first sign is worked quietly, in six stone waterpots meant for ceremonial washing, and John says that Jesus manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him. In Jerusalem, at Passover, He makes a whip of cords and clears the temple courts, and answers the demand for a sign with a sentence nobody could decode until Sunday morning three years later: destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The chapter closes soberly. Many believed when they saw the signs, but He did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew what was in man.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John’s gospel is organized around seven signs, of which Cana is the first (2:11), each chosen to support the purpose stated in 20:30–31.
- The six stone waterpots held water for Jewish purification rites. That detail is not incidental; the old ceremonial water becomes the best wine of the feast.
- A first-century wedding feast could run a week, and the host’s supply of food and drink was a matter of family honor. Running out was a lasting public humiliation.
- John places a temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry; Matthew, Mark, and Luke record one in the final week. The simplest explanation is that He did it twice, at the start and at the end.
- The temple money changers exchanged common currency for the coin accepted for the temple tax, and animal sellers supplied sacrifices. The abuse was the markup and the location, in the court of the Gentiles, the only place a non-Jew could pray.
- “Forty-six years” (2:20) refers to Herod’s reconstruction of the temple, begun about 20 B.C., which places this Passover around A.D. 27.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The first thing Andrew did after meeting Jesus was to go find his own brother (1:40–42). Who is the person closest to you that you have never actually invited, and what has kept you from it?*

Andrew appears three times in this gospel, and all three times he is bringing somebody to Jesus: his brother here, the boy with the loaves in chapter 6, and the inquiring Greeks in chapter 12. He is not the preacher of the family. Peter will do the preaching, and Peter would not have been there without Andrew. The text says he first found his own brother Simon and said, “We have found the Messiah,” and then he brought him to Jesus. Told, then brought. Both verbs matter.

The hardest evangelism is usually at the closest range, and the class knows it. Nearness makes us cautious. We do not want the holidays to be awkward, we know how they would answer, we have watched our own inconsistency in front of them for twenty years. Ask for names, not categories, and ask what the next actual step would be: a meal, a question, an invitation to this class. Then ask who will report back next week.

Question 2. *Nathanael starts with a sneer about Nazareth and ends by calling Jesus the Son of God and King of Israel (1:46–49). What changed his mind, and what does that suggest about arguing people into faith compared with bringing them to see?*

What changed his mind was not an argument about Nazareth. It was being known. Jesus described his character before they met and told him where he had been sitting. Philip had refused to debate and simply said, come and see, and the encounter did what the debate could not. That is not a rule that arguments never matter; John's whole gospel is evidence presented for a verdict. It is an observation about order. People are usually brought near enough to look before their objections collapse.

Apply it to the way your members talk about faith. Many Christians think they must win the argument about origins, or suffering, or hypocrites in the church, before anyone can come. Often the better move is an invitation: come and see, sit with us, read this gospel with me, watch how these people treat each other. Ask the class what someone would actually encounter if he came and looked at this congregation for a month.

Question 3. *At Cana the miracle happens in the servants' hands, out of sight, and the guests never know (2:6–11). Why would Jesus begin His public work that way, and what does John say the sign accomplished?*

Nearly everything about the first sign is understated. There is no crowd, no announcement, no healing of a public figure. The servants who drew the water know; the master of the feast does not. Jesus does not even touch the water. What John records is the result: this beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. The sign was given to reveal who He is, and the ones who knew what happened were the ones who had obeyed the instruction to fill the jars.

There is a pattern here worth naming. God very often does His work through people doing unremarkable tasks exactly as they were told, and the credit goes elsewhere. Ask where the class is serving without recognition, and encourage them that the servants at Cana were the only ones in the room who saw the glory. Also note the setting: Jesus begins His ministry at a wedding, blessing an ordinary family celebration. He is not a sour Savior.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace how each of the first five disciples came to Jesus in 1:35–51. Note who brought whom and what was said in each case.*

Two of John's disciples, one of them Andrew, hear John say "Behold the Lamb of God" and follow Jesus; He asks what they seek and invites them to come and see, and they stay the day. Andrew finds his brother Simon, tells him they have found the Messiah, and brings him to Jesus, who renames him Cephas. The next day Jesus Himself finds Philip and says, "Follow Me." Philip finds Nathanael, meets his objection with "Come and see," and Nathanael confesses Him. Four of the five came through another person.

2. *Jesus gives Simon a new name in 1:42. Read Matthew 16:16–18 and John 21:15–17, and describe what that name came to mean over time.*

Cephas in Aramaic and Peter in Greek both mean a rock or stone. At the time it must have sounded ironic for an impulsive fisherman. Matthew 16 shows him making the great confession, and John 21 shows the risen Christ restoring him after his denials and charging him three times to feed the sheep. The name was a promise about what grace would make of him, not a description of what he was that afternoon.

3. *Read John 2:13–17 beside Malachi 3:1–3. What were the money changers and animal sellers doing, and why did it provoke Him as it did?*

They were selling oxen, sheep, and doves and exchanging currency for the temple tax, doing it inside the temple courts. Whatever service it originally provided, it had become commerce in the house of God, conducted in the court of the Gentiles where the nations were supposed to be able to pray. Malachi 3:1–3 had said the Lord would suddenly

come to His temple and purify the sons of Levi. Jesus' own words, "Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise," show the offense: they had made worship a market and crowded out the outsider.

4. *John 2:19–22 records a saying the disciples understood only after the resurrection. Write down what Jesus said, what His hearers thought He meant, and what He actually meant.*

He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." His hearers thought He meant Herod's building, which had been under construction for forty-six years. He was speaking, John says, of the temple of His body, and when He had risen from the dead the disciples remembered this and believed the Scripture and the word Jesus had said. It is His first veiled prediction of the resurrection, given at the very start of His ministry.

5. *John 2:23–25 says many believed when they saw the signs, but Jesus did not commit Himself to them. Examine your own faith honestly: is it fastened to what God does for you, or to who He is?*

Answers will vary. The distinction John draws is sharp: they believed "when they saw the signs," and Jesus knew that kind of belief would not hold. Listen for students who can identify where their own faith has been transactional, and steer them toward the test Jesus gives elsewhere, which is obedience (John 14:15; Luke 6:46). Faith that survives is fastened to His person and His word, not to the last answered prayer.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The wine at Cana: the text says wine, and Jesus did nothing sinful. Scripture condemns drunkenness plainly (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29–35; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3). State both truths, urge the abstinence that wisdom commends, and do not let the class spend the hour arguing about the beverage.
- Two temple cleansings: if someone raises the difference between John and the other gospels, the simple answer is that He cleansed the temple twice. Do not let it become a challenge to the reliability of the record.
- Nathanael's confession (1:49) and Jesus' reply about the Son of Man point to His deity and to Genesis 28:12. Keep the focus on Christ rather than speculating about what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree.
- John 2:23–25 is a warning against faith built only on what Jesus can do for a person. Teach it gently; there are people in the room whose faith began exactly there and needs to grow up, not be dismissed.

Faith That Obeys

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The chapter is usually called the roll call of faith, and the label is fine as long as nobody misses what is being argued. The recipients of this letter were thinking about quitting. Chapter 10 ended with Habakkuk's warning about drawing back, and chapter 12 will open with running the race set before us. Chapter 11 sits in between as the evidence that people have done this before, under worse conditions, with less information, and that God was not ashamed to be called their God.

Notice the grammar of the chapter. Faith is never a feeling here and never mere agreement. By faith Abel offered. By faith Noah prepared an ark. By faith Abraham obeyed and went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith Moses refused, and chose, and forsook. Faith in Hebrews 11 is always attached to an action taken on the strength of what God said, usually at cost, usually before the outcome could be seen. A class that grasps that will read James 2 correctly when they get there.

The last movement of the chapter is the one we skip. Verses 35 through 38 leave the victories behind: torture, mockings, scourgings, chains, stoning, being sawn in two, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves. The same faith that shut the mouths of lions also went quietly to the sword. And verses 39 and 40 tell us that all of them, the delivered and the destroyed alike, died without receiving the promise, because God had provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Their story and ours are one story.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Hebrews 11 answers the crisis of the whole letter: Jewish Christians under pressure, tempted to go back to a safer religion (10:32–39; 12:3–4).
- The examples run in Old Testament order, from Genesis through the judges, kings, and prophets, which assumes readers who knew those stories well.
- “Substance” in 11:1 translates a word used for a title deed or a firm foundation; “evidence” is a word for proof or conviction. Faith is not wishful thinking but confident reliance on what God has said.
- Verse 6 gives the two things anyone approaching God must believe: that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.
- The city and country in 11:10 and 11:16 are heavenly, not a parcel of real estate in the Middle East. Hebrews 12:22–24 identifies it as the heavenly Jerusalem.
- Verse 40, “God having provided something better for us,” means the Old Testament faithful waited for the redemption accomplished in Christ, which we have received (Hebrews 9:15).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Then verse after verse follows faith with a verb: offered, built, obeyed, went out, refused, endured. How does this chapter define what faith actually is in practice?*

Read the verbs out loud and let the class hear them: offered, pleased, prepared, obeyed, dwelt, waited, judged Him faithful, was gathered, blessed, gave instructions, was hidden, refused, chose, forsook, kept, passed through, encircled, received, subdued, worked, stopped, quenched, escaped, became valiant, turned to flight. Not one of them is a state of mind. Faith in this chapter is confidence in God's word that produces action, and usually action before the evidence arrives. Noah built for a flood nobody had seen. Abraham left without an address.

This is the place to say clearly what the New Testament teaches about faith and salvation. Nobody in Hebrews 11 was commended for believing and doing nothing. Verse 8 says by faith Abraham obeyed, which is the whole issue.

So when Scripture says we are saved by faith, it means this kind of faith, the kind that obeys, which is exactly why James 2:24 says a man is justified by works and not by faith only. Salvation is not earned; it is received by trusting God enough to do what He says (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:16).

Question 2. *Read Hebrews 11:13-16 with 11:39-40. These people died without receiving what was promised. What were they really looking for, and how should that reshape what we expect out of this life?*

Verse 13 says they died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were assured of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Verses 14 through 16 explain what that confession meant: they were seeking a homeland, and not the one they had left, because they could have gone back. They desired a better, that is, a heavenly country. Abraham lived in tents in the land he was promised because he was waiting for a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Two applications, and give both. First, this settles a question about the land promise: Hebrews says the patriarchs themselves were not finally looking for real estate. The promises to Abraham reach their fulfillment in Christ and in the heavenly city, not in a future political Israel. Second, and more personally, it means that a faithful Christian may go to his grave with prayers unanswered and hopes unrealized and still have missed nothing. Ask what your class expects God to deliver in this life, and whether the expectation came from Scripture or from somewhere else.

Question 3. *Hebrews 11:24-26 says Moses chose affliction with God's people over the treasures of Egypt because he was looking to the reward. What is the nearest equivalent choice in front of you right now, and what makes it hard?*

Notice that Moses' choice is described as reasoning, not impulse: he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward. He weighed two futures and picked the one with God in it. And what he chose was suffering affliction with the people of God, which means he chose a group of slaves over a royal household. Verse 27 adds that he endured as seeing Him who is invisible, which is as good a definition of faith as the chapter gives.

Make the parallel concrete rather than heroic. For most of your class the equivalent is not renouncing a throne. It is a promotion that will cost their family and their Sundays, a friendship group that has to be let go, a business practice everyone else uses, a relationship that cannot continue, a cost in reputation for standing where Scripture stands. Ask each person to write one down. Then ask what makes it hard, because naming the fear honestly is usually the beginning of the obedience.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every person named in Hebrews 11 and the one act of faith credited to each. What pattern do you see in what faith actually did?*

Abel offered a better sacrifice; Enoch walked with God and was taken; Noah built an ark; Abraham left home, lived in tents, and offered Isaac; Sarah received strength to conceive; Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come; Jacob blessed Joseph's sons and worshiped; Joseph gave instructions about his bones; Moses' parents hid him, and Moses refused Pharaoh's house, kept the Passover, and left Egypt; Israel passed through the sea and encircled Jericho; Rahab received the spies. The pattern is unmistakable: in every case faith did something, and usually something costly and in advance.

2. *Hebrews 11:4 says Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice by faith. Read Romans 10:17 with Genesis 4:3-7 and explain where Abel's faith came from and what made his offering better.*

Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, so Abel must have had a word from God about how to approach Him. Genesis 4 shows Abel bringing of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat, while Cain brought of the fruit of the ground. The difference was not preference or personality. Abel offered what God had said; Cain offered what Cain chose. God's question to Cain in Genesis 4:7, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" assumes Cain knew what doing well required.

3. Compare Hebrews 11:7 with Genesis 6:22, and Hebrews 11:8 with Genesis 12:4. Note in each case how quickly obedience followed the command, and how much information the man was given.

Genesis 6:22 says, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did," for a flood no one had ever seen and a boat with no sea in sight. Genesis 12:4 says, "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him," with no destination given, only a direction and a promise. Hebrews 11:8 makes the point explicit: he went out, not knowing where he was going. In both cases the information was minimal and the obedience was immediate.

4. Read Hebrews 11:35–38 aloud. Trace what happened to the faithful in the second half of that list, and say how it fits with the deliverances in the first half.

Some were tortured, refusing deliverance so they might obtain a better resurrection; others endured mockings, scourgings, chains, and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawn in two, tempted, slain with the sword, and wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented. It fits with the first half because faith is not a technique for getting good outcomes. The same trust that delivered some sustained others through the worst the world could do, and the verdict on all of them is identical: of whom the world was not worthy.

5. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. Name one decision this week you would make differently if you genuinely believed that second half.

Answers will vary. Watch for the word "diligently." The promise in verse 6 is not to the casual inquirer but to the one who seeks God earnestly. Practical answers might include giving where it will be felt, telling the truth where it will cost, taking a Sunday off the calendar that had been sold to work, or beginning a habit of prayer that no one will ever see.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not let this chapter be used to teach salvation by faith alone. Every example acted on what God said, and Hebrews 11:8 says by faith Abraham obeyed. Compare James 2:21–24.
- The city and country of 11:10, 16 are heavenly. This is the New Testament's own interpretation of the promises to Abraham and rules out a future earthly fulfillment for national Israel (Galatians 3:16, 26–29; Hebrews 12:22–24).
- Rahab is commended for receiving the spies in peace, not for her past or for her deception. Keep the commendation where Scripture puts it (James 2:25).
- Verses 35 through 38 must be read aloud in any class that has heard faith presented as a way to avoid suffering. Faith does not guarantee rescue; it guarantees that God is not ashamed to be called our God.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Jeremiah 50–52 · Psalm 114–117 · John 3 · Hebrews 12–13

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