

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 86 OF 104

When Glory Departs

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 6-11
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 119:57-96
Gospels	John 5:18-47
General New Testament	1 Peter 1:1-2:12

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class off the assumption that nearness to God is secured by proximity to religious things. Ezekiel's contemporaries had the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the city of David, and God walked out the east gate. The men in John 5 had the Scriptures memorized and would not come to the One the Scriptures were about. Set those two pictures side by side early, and the week will preach itself.

Doctrinally, three things are at stake. First, the deity of Christ: John 5:18-23 is one of the plainest claims in the Gospels, and verse 23 makes honoring the Son the test of honoring the Father. Second, the nature of the new birth: 1 Peter 1:22-25 says it comes through the living word of God received in obedience, which rules out both a conversion by private feeling and a faith that never obeys. Third, the resurrection: John 5:28-29 puts all the dead, righteous and wicked, in one hour, which quietly closes the door on any millennial timetable.

The formational thread is the difference between handling holy things and belonging to God. The exiles who were marked in Ezekiel 9 were the ones who could still be grieved. The psalmist in trouble kept talking to God and asked only for strength to keep obeying. Peter's scattered readers were told what they already were before they were told what to do. Put this question to your class before they leave: what is one thing about your own life that God has been patiently pointing at, and what will you do about it this week, while the glory is still at the threshold?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Ezekiel 6-11 first. It is the longest and heaviest reading, and the vision of the departing glory is the image that will hold the whole week together. Budget most of your hour for chapters 8 through 11, and end on the promise of 11:16-20 so the class leaves with hope.

Second session: Take up 1 Peter 1:1-2:12 second. It answers Ezekiel directly: God now builds a house of living stones rather than dwelling in one of cut stone. It also gives you the clearest text of the week on how a person is born again, which is worth a full and careful hour.

The other two readings: Encourage Psalms 119:57-96 and John 5:18-47 for private reading. Tell the class to take Psalm 119 one stanza of eight verses at a time, out loud, noticing that the writer is in real trouble. For John 5, suggest they list the four witnesses and then sit for a minute with verse 40.

The Glory Leaves the Temple

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These six chapters are the hardest stretch of Ezekiel so far, and the reason is not the violence of the language but the address. God is not describing pagan Babylon. He is describing His own house. Chapter 6 preaches to the mountains where the high places stood, chapter 7 announces in short hammer blows that the end has come, and then chapter 8 opens the temple doors and shows the prophet exactly what has been going on inside while the sacrifices continued on schedule.

Chapter 8 is arranged as a tour, and the tour moves inward. An image of jealousy at the north gate, then a hole in the wall and a hidden chamber where seventy elders burn incense to carved beasts, then women at the gate weeping for a fertility god, then twenty-five men between the porch and the altar with their backs to the temple, bowing east. Each stop is deeper in and worse. The refrain God gives Ezekiel is “you will see greater abominations than these.”

Chapters 10 and 11 are the point of no return, and they are told with enormous restraint. The glory that had filled the house since Solomon’s day lifts from the cherubim, stands over the threshold, moves to the east gate, and at last goes up from the midst of the city and rests on the mountain east of it. God leaves His own temple. Yet in the same breath He promises the exiles a sanctuary in Babylon, a heart of flesh, and a way home.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Ezekiel is a priest, carried to Babylon in the deportation of 597 B.C., prophesying to fellow exiles roughly six years before Jerusalem finally falls in 586 B.C.
- The vision of chapter 8 is dated to the sixth year, sixth month, fifth day (8:1), with Ezekiel sitting in his own house in Babylon while the elders sit before him. He is transported in visions of God, not bodily.
- The temple abominations are historically credible: Manasseh had installed pagan worship in the house of God (2 Kings 21:1–7), and Josiah’s reform had not reached the heart of the nation.
- Tammuz was a Mesopotamian fertility deity whose annual death was mourned by women. Sun worship faced east, which required turning one’s back on the sanctuary itself.
- The departing glory is the answer to the exiles’ favorite argument. They believed Jerusalem could not fall because God lived there. Ezekiel shows them God moving out before the Babylonians move in.
- Ezekiel 11:19–20 anticipates the new covenant, fulfilled in Christ and His church (Hebrews 8:6–13), not in a future political Israel.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ezekiel 8 walks the prophet through four scenes of idolatry, each one further inside God’s house than the last. Describe what he is shown at each stop, and talk about how worship goes wrong so quietly that the worshipers themselves never notice.*

Walk the tour with the class and let the geography do the teaching. The image of jealousy stands at the entry, in public. The seventy elders are in a private room in the dark, saying to themselves, “The Lord does not see us.” The women weeping for Tammuz are at the gate of the Lord’s own house. The twenty-five men are in the most sacred space available to them, between the porch and the altar, with their backs deliberately turned. Idolatry did not break the doors down; it was invited in, one compromise at a time, by the people responsible for guarding the place.

Then bring it home without scolding. Nobody in your class is burning incense to a carved beast. But every one of them has something that has moved from the parking lot to the foyer to the front pew of their affections. Ask

what they would have to give up this month if God were to lead them on that same tour through their calendar and their spending. Formation happens when the tour stops being about Jerusalem.

Question 2. *In Ezekiel 9:4 a mark is set on the foreheads of the people who sigh and cry over the abominations done in the city. What is God commending in those people, and what would that kind of grief look like in a Christian this year?*

The mark in 9:4 goes on people who are still capable of being grieved. That is the entire qualification. They are not described as heroes or reformers; they are described as sighing and crying over what everyone else had learned to live with. Scripture repeatedly honors that kind of sorrow: Lot's soul was vexed (2 Peter 2:7–8), David's eyes ran with rivers of water because men did not keep God's law (Psalm 119:136, which your class reads this same week), and Paul wept over enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18).

The danger for long-time church members is not open rebellion but calluses. We stop noticing what once would have bothered us. Press the class gently here, because there is a counterfeit nearby: outraged commentary about the culture is not the same thing as grief. Sighing and crying is what you do when you love what is being lost. Ask what they still grieve over, and what they used to grieve over and no longer do.

Question 3. *The glory of God moves out of the temple in stages across chapters 10 and 11, never all at once. Why do you think the departure is described so slowly, and where have you seen God show that same patience with you?*

God does not slam the door. He backs out of the room. The glory rises from the cherub to the threshold (9:3; 10:4), returns to the cherubim (10:18), moves to the east gate (10:19), and only then goes up from the midst of the city (11:23). Read those verses in order and let the class feel how long it takes. Even in the middle of that departure, chapter 11:16–20 contains one of the warmest promises in the book: a sanctuary for them in exile, a new heart, a return.

This is who God is. He is slow to anger and abundant in mercy (Exodus 34:6), not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). But the passage also insists that His patience is not the same thing as His indifference, and that it has an end. Ask the class to name the warnings God has already given them, quietly and more than once, about something in their lives. The glory moves slowly, which is mercy. It still moves.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the movement of the glory of the Lord through 8:4, 9:3, 10:4, 10:18–19, and 11:22–23. Write down where it rests at each point and how far it has gone by the end.*

In 8:4 the glory is already present in the plain of the vision. In 9:3 it goes up from the cherub to the threshold of the house. In 10:4 it fills the house and the court with brightness while standing over the threshold. In 10:18–19 it departs from the threshold, stands over the cherubim, and moves to the door of the east gate. In 11:22–23 it goes up from the midst of the city and stands on the mountain on the east side. By the end it has left the building, left the city, and is looking back.

2. *Ezekiel 11:16 says that God Himself became a little sanctuary to the exiles in the countries where they had gone. Set that beside what Jesus tells the woman in John 4:21–24 about where real worship happens.*

God tells the exiles that although He has scattered them, He has been a little sanctuary to them in the countries where they have gone. Presence was never finally about a building. Jesus makes the same point to a Samaritan woman arguing about the right mountain: the hour had come when true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth. Under the new covenant God dwells in His people (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19–22), which is a mercy and also a responsibility.

3. *List the slogans the leaders of Jerusalem are quoting in 8:12, 11:3, and 11:15. Underneath each one, write the thing it actually says about God.*

In 8:12 the elders say, “The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land,” which is practical atheism wearing priestly robes. In 11:3 the leaders say, “This city is the caldron, and we are the meat,” meaning they are safe,

protected, the choice cuts inside the pot. In 11:15 the ones left in Jerusalem tell the exiles, “Get far away from the Lord; this land has been given to us,” which is the arrogance of assuming that survival proves God’s approval.

4. *Read Ezekiel 11:19–20 alongside Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10. What is God promising to do that the people had proved they could not do for themselves?*

God promises to give them one heart, to put a new spirit within them, to take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they will walk in His statutes. Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10 name the same promise: a law written on the heart rather than on stone. The exiles could not manufacture that. Neither can we. It comes through the new covenant in Christ, and Hebrews quotes it precisely to show that the first covenant was never the final word.

5. *Ezekiel 9 singles out people who still grieved over sin instead of growing used to it. Name one sin you have quietly stopped grieving over, and decide before Sunday what you are going to do about it.*

Answers will vary, and this one should be answered privately rather than out loud. Listen for specifics rather than categories. A person who says “I need to be more careful about what I watch” has named a category; a person who says “I am cancelling that subscription tonight” has named an action. Ezekiel 9 does not reward people who disapprove of sin in general. It marks people whose hearts still break over particular things.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The mark in 9:4 has nothing to do with modern speculation about the mark of the beast or end-time sealing. Read it in its own setting: God distinguishes the faithful remnant before judgment falls, exactly as He does in Revelation 7:3 for persecuted Christians.
- Ezekiel 11:19–20 is covenant promise fulfilled in Christ and His church. Do not let it be read as a prediction of a future earthly Jewish kingdom. The new heart is given now, to people who obey the gospel (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 1:13).
- Ezekiel’s visions come from direct revelation to a prophet during the period when God was still speaking that way. Say plainly and kindly that revelation is now complete (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10), and that we are not looking for visions.
- The severity of chapters 6 through 9 can leave a class thinking God is chiefly angry. Balance it with 11:16–20 and with 18:23, which the class will read in two weeks. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

A Portion Better Than Gold

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 119 has a reputation for being long and repetitive, and a class will believe that reputation unless you show them otherwise in the first five minutes. The cure is simple: stop reading it as a hymn to Scripture written from a comfortable chair, and read it as the prayer journal of a man in serious trouble. Once you see the proud forging lies against him (69), the wicked waiting to destroy him (95), and his eyes failing for God’s word (82), the psalm becomes a lifeline rather than a lecture.

These five stanzas hold some of the highest ground in the psalm. Cheth opens with “You are my portion, O Lord,” the language of a Levite who got no land because he got God instead. Teth contains the astonishing verse 71, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” Yodh is a prayer of a man made by God’s own hands. Kaph is the low point, a soul fainting, a man like a wineskin shriveled in smoke. And then Lamedh lifts the whole thing.

Teach verse 89 as the hinge: “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.” He has spent forty verses looking at his own circumstances, and now he looks up and sees something that no proud man can touch. Verse 96 finishes the thought: he has seen the limit of every perfection he ever admired, and God’s commandment alone is exceedingly broad. That is not the conclusion of a man who enjoys religion. It is the conclusion of a man who has run out of other options.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 119 is an acrostic of twenty-two stanzas of eight verses, one stanza for each Hebrew letter, and every verse within a stanza begins with that letter. This reading covers Cheth (57–64), Teth (65–72), Yodh (73–80), Kaph (81–88), and Lamedh (89–96).
- Eight words for God’s revelation run through the psalm: law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, word, and saying. Nearly every verse contains at least one.
- The author is unnamed and the setting is undated, but the psalm assumes a written Scripture, opposition from powerful men, and a writer young enough to speak of his youth (9) yet experienced enough to have been afflicted more than once.
- The “law” the psalmist loves is the Law of Moses. Christians are not under that covenant (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13), but his posture toward God’s word transfers entirely to the completed Scriptures we now hold.
- Teach one stanza at a time. Forty verses at a gallop will bore a class; eight verses read slowly, with the trouble named, will hold them.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Verse 71 says it is good that the psalmist was afflicted. Nobody says that in the middle of the trouble. What had to happen inside this man before he could write that line, and where would you honestly place yourself in that process right now?*

Verse 67 is the confession that makes verse 71 possible: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.” He is not romanticizing suffering. He is reporting, after the fact, what it exposed and what it corrected. And verse 75 supplies the theology underneath it: “I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.” He has concluded that God was being faithful, not careless, and that conclusion took time.

Be careful and pastoral here. Somebody in your class is in the middle of something, and telling them to say verse 71 today would be cruel. What the psalm models is a man who kept talking to God, kept reading, and eventually

could look back and name the good. Ask where each person is on that line: in it, just out of it, or far enough past it to see. And let the ones who are far enough past speak, because the class needs to hear it from someone other than the teacher.

Question 2. *Read 119:81–88 out loud as a class. Describe the kind of week this man is having, and then notice how he prays. What is missing from his prayer that you might have expected to find?*

The Kaph stanza is a man at the end of his rope. His soul faints (81), his eyes fail (82), he is like a wineskin hung in the smoke, shriveled and useless (83), he wants to know how many days he has left (84), the proud have dug pits for him (85), and they persecute him wrongfully (86). By verse 87 they have almost consumed him on the earth. This is not a devotional mood. It is a man being hunted.

Now notice what is not in his prayer. There is no plan, no scheme, and no request to be allowed to strike back. What he asks for is to be revived according to God's lovingkindness so that he may keep the testimony of God's mouth (88). His entire request is for strength to keep obeying. Ask the class what they usually ask God for in a hard week, and put that honest answer beside verse 88. That comparison will do more work than any exhortation you could give.

Question 3. *Verse 89 says God's word is settled forever in heaven, and verse 96 says every other perfection has a limit. Talk about what changes on an ordinary Monday morning if you actually believe verse 89.*

Verse 89 changes altitude. Everything before it has been at eye level, down among the enemies and the failing eyesight. Then: "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You have established the earth, and it abides." The word is not one more fragile thing in a fragile world. It is the fixed point. Verse 90 anchors it in creation itself, and verse 91 says all things serve God, which means even the trouble is not out of bounds.

Then verse 96 lands: "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad." He has watched excellent things reach their limit, the strong man weaken, the wise man run out of answers, the fortune run out. God's word has no such edge. Ask for Monday specifics: the email that has to be answered, the diagnosis in the drawer, the child who will not talk. What does a settled word in heaven actually change about how a person walks into that? Keep pushing until the answers stop being abstract.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Work through verses 57 to 96 and list every different term the psalmist uses for God's revelation. Why do you think he keeps reaching for another word instead of repeating one?*

He uses law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, word, and God's saying or promise, and in this section he also speaks of God's ways, His name, His lovingkindness, and His faithfulness. The variety is not padding. Each term catches a different angle: instruction, witness, appointed charge, engraved decree, royal order, verdict, spoken revelation, given promise. Together they say that God's self-disclosure is too large for one word, and that a person can spend a lifetime turning it over and still find a new face on it.

2. *Verse 57 calls the Lord "my portion." Look up Numbers 18:20 and Lamentations 3:24, and explain what a Levite would have heard in that phrase.*

The Levites received no inheritance of land in Canaan; the Lord Himself was their portion and inheritance (Numbers 18:20). To say "You are my portion" is therefore to say, I hold no title deed, I own no acreage, and I have God.

Jeremiah says the same thing in Lamentations 3:24 standing in the smoking ruins of the city he loved: "The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him." It is the confession of a man with nothing left but the one thing he needed.

3. *Compare verse 67, verse 71, and verse 75. Trace the three different things this man says his affliction accomplished.*

Verse 67: before affliction he went astray, and afterward he kept God's word, so the affliction corrected a drift. Verse 71: it was good for him, in order that he might learn God's statutes, so the affliction taught him. Verse 75: it came in God's faithfulness, so the affliction was not abandonment but fatherly care. Correction, instruction, and assurance of God's faithfulness. Hebrews 12:5–11 makes the same three points about a Father who disciplines the sons He loves.

4. Verse 92 says he would have perished in his affliction if God's law had not been his delight. Read Romans 15:4 and describe what Scripture is designed to do for a suffering Christian.

Romans 15:4 says that whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Scripture is not merely information for a suffering Christian; it is the supply line of endurance and hope. Note the order in Romans: patience first, then comfort, then hope. The psalmist does not say the law removed his affliction. He says it kept him from perishing in it.

5. Choose an actual time this week, before the week starts, when you will read one stanza of this psalm slowly and out loud. Write the time down now, and tell one person you are going to do it.

Answers will vary, and the value here is the specificity. A vague intention to read more will evaporate by Wednesday. A named time, a named stanza, and one person who knows about it will usually survive the week. If the class reports back the following Sunday, this single question can change the way a congregation reads the rest of Psalm 119 for the next month.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The psalmist delights in the Law of Moses, which is not binding on Christians (Colossians 2:14–17; Galatians 3:24–25). Teach his posture, not his covenant. His reverence for God's word is the permanent thing.
- Do not let verse 71 become a rule that all suffering is God's punishment for sin. Job settles that question, and John 9:1–3 settles it again. The psalm reports what affliction did in this man, not what every affliction means.
- Guard against turning love for Scripture into legalism or into mere information. The psalmist wants to be revived, taught, and kept, not to win an argument.
- A class can be intimidated by this psalm. Say out loud that you are taking eight verses at a time and that you expect it to be one of the most useful hours of the year.

Four Witnesses to the Son

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Verse 18 is the hinge of the chapter and one of the clearest statements of the deity of Christ in the Gospels, and it comes from His enemies. They sought to kill Him because He not only broke their Sabbath traditions but said that God was His own Father, making Himself equal with God. If they had misunderstood Him, this was the moment to say so. Instead He spends the next thirty verses explaining in what sense it is true.

What follows is not a claim of independence but of perfect unity. The Son does nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do (19). The Father loves the Son and shows Him all things (20). The Son gives life to whom He will (21). All judgment has been committed to the Son, so that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father (22–23). Then two resurrections are named: spiritually dead people who hear His voice now and live (24–25), and all who are in the graves, who will hear it at the last (28–29).

Verses 31 through 47 form a courtroom. Jewish law required more than one witness (Deuteronomy 19:15), so Jesus produces four: John the Baptist, the burning and shining lamp; the works the Father gave Him to finish; the Father Himself; and the Scriptures. The last is the most painful. These men handled the Scriptures professionally, counted its letters, and searched it for eternal life, and the Book they searched was pointing at the Man standing in front of them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The setting is Jerusalem at a feast (5:1), after the healing at the pool of Bethesda. The charge that starts the conflict is Sabbath breaking, though what Jesus actually broke was rabbinic tradition, not the Law itself.
- John writes so that readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name (20:30–31). Chapter 5 is the first extended courtroom scene in the book.
- The Jewish requirement of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) explains why Jesus lists witnesses rather than simply asserting His identity.
- “Searching the Scriptures” in verse 39 describes genuine, diligent, daily study. The failure was not laziness but unwillingness to come (5:40).
- This chapter belongs to the period when the Old Law was still in force. It was nailed to the cross later (Colossians 2:14), which is why Jesus can appeal to Moses as binding authority on His hearers.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In 5:18 the leaders understand exactly what Jesus has claimed, and He does not correct them. Read verses 19 through 23 and describe the relationship He lays out with the Father. According to verse 23, what is at stake in how a person honors the Son?*

Jesus describes total dependence and total equality at once, and a class needs both halves. The Son can do nothing of Himself (19) because He acts in perfect union with the Father, not because He is lesser in nature. Yet He raises the dead and gives life (21), receives all judgment (22), and is to be honored exactly as the Father is honored (23). No prophet ever spoke that way. No angel would dare.

Verse 23 is where this stops being theoretical: “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” There is no such thing as worshiping God while setting Jesus aside as a fine teacher. Every sincere religion that respects Jesus without bowing to Him has, by His own words, missed the Father too. Say that clearly and say it kindly, because most of your class knows people who believe exactly that, and they will need to be able to explain this verse without contempt.

Question 2. *Jesus names four witnesses in verses 31 through 47. Identify them as a class, and then talk about why God stacks up evidence this way instead of simply demanding that people believe.*

The four are John the Baptist (33–35), the works the Father has given Him to finish (36), the Father Himself (37–38), and the Scriptures (39–47), with Moses named specifically at the end. Jesus says the witness of His works is greater than John's. He also makes clear that He does not need human testimony (34); He names John for their sake, because they had once been willing to rejoice for a season in John's light.

Why stack the evidence? Because God has never asked for blind belief. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), and the signs were written that we might believe (John 20:30–31). God gives more than enough reason. Verse 40 then names the real problem: "You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." Evidence answers the honest question. It does not overcome an unwilling heart, which is why verse 44 matters so much.

Question 3. *Verse 39 describes people who searched the Scriptures diligently and still would not come to Christ. Where does Bible study go wrong like that, and what keeps yours from ending in the same place?*

These men were not casual readers. The word behind "search" carries the sense of tracking something down. They knew where every phrase was. And Jesus tells them the Scriptures they searched were testifying of Him, and they would not come. Bible study goes wrong the moment it becomes a way of handling the text rather than being handled by it: studying to win arguments, to feel informed, to be the one with the answer in class, or to confirm what we already intended to do.

Guard against letting this become a complaint about other people's churches. Ask the class what they are looking for when they open the Bible. Ask whether there is a passage they can explain beautifully and have never once obeyed. Then give them John 5:40 as the diagnostic: the question is not whether we know the Book, but whether the Book has brought us to Him. Verse 44, the love of honor from one another, names the most common reason church people stall out.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the four witnesses Jesus calls in 5:32–47, with the verse where each one appears, and note which of them He says is greater than John.*

John the Baptist in verses 33 through 35; the works the Father gave Jesus to finish in verse 36; the Father Himself in verses 37 and 38; and the Scriptures, with Moses specified, in verses 39 through 47. Jesus says in verse 36 that He has a greater witness than John's, namely the works. Notice that He accepts human testimony for their benefit, not for His own need (34).

2. *Compare 5:24 with 5:28–29. One speaks of the dead hearing His voice now and one of all in the graves hearing it later. Explain the difference in your own words.*

Verse 24 speaks of a present resurrection: the one who hears His word and believes God has already passed from death into life, and the hour "now is" when the spiritually dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live. Verses 28 and 29 speak of a future, bodily, universal resurrection: all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come out, some to the resurrection of life and some to the resurrection of condemnation. One is happening as He speaks. The other is one hour, at the end, for everyone.

3. *Verse 44 says they could not believe because they received honor from one another. Read John 12:42–43 and name what that trade actually cost those men.*

They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, and John 12:42–43 says many of the rulers actually believed but would not confess Him for fear of being put out of the synagogue. It cost them their standing with God to keep their standing with men. Jesus warns in Matthew 10:32–33 that confessing Him before men is not optional. The tragedy of John 12:42 is not unbelief; it is belief that never became confession.

4. *Jesus says in 5:46 that Moses wrote of Him. Find at least two places in the first five books where that is so, beginning with Genesis 3:15 and Deuteronomy 18:15–19.*

Genesis 3:15 promises the Seed who will crush the serpent. Deuteronomy 18:15–19 promises a Prophet like Moses whom the people must hear, quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22–23. Beyond those, Genesis 22:18 promises blessing to all nations in Abraham's Seed (Galatians 3:16), Genesis 49:10 points to Shiloh from Judah, Numbers 21:8–9 gives the bronze serpent that Jesus applies to Himself in John 3:14, and Numbers 24:17 speaks of a Star out of Jacob. The Passover lamb itself is a picture (1 Corinthians 5:7).

5. *Answer this one on paper and keep it: is there something God's word has told you about your own life that you have now read past more than once? Name it, and do something about it before this week is out.*

Answers will vary, and this question is meant to be uncomfortable. Encourage people to write it down rather than say it aloud. Listen afterward for the shape of the answer: a person who names a passage and a date to act on it has understood John 5:40. The point of the question is to keep Bible study from becoming what it became for the men in this chapter.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Hold the deity of Christ firmly. Verse 19 describes the Son's submission in role, not inferiority in nature; verses 21 through 23 make Him the giver of life and the receiver of equal honor. Do not let a class resolve the tension by lowering Him.
- Verses 28 and 29 describe one hour in which all the dead, righteous and wicked together, come out of the graves. That single general resurrection rules out any scheme of resurrections separated by a thousand years.
- Verse 24 says the believer has passed from death to life. Read it with John 8:31, Hebrews 3:12–14, and 2 Peter 2:20–22, which the class reads shortly. The one who hears and believes is the one who keeps hearing and believing; this is not a guarantee of unconditional perseverance.
- Belief in John is never bare mental assent. Compare 5:24 with 3:36, where the contrast to believing is refusing to obey.

Born Again by a Living Word

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Peter is writing to Christians who are out of place. He calls them pilgrims of the dispersion, scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, and the letter assumes that being a Christian is costing them something socially and will soon cost more. What Peter gives them first is not a strategy for surviving persecution. It is an avalanche of what God has already done.

Read 1:3–9 out loud at pace and the effect is cumulative: begotten again, a living hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade, reserved in heaven, kept by the power of God through faith. Then the trials appear in verse 6, and they land on a foundation already poured. The testing is not evidence that God has lost track of them; it is fire refining gold that will be found to praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

From there Peter turns to consequence. Gird up the loins of your mind (1:13). Be holy, because He is holy (1:15–16). Remember what your redemption cost, not silver and gold but the blood of a lamb without blemish (1:18–19). Love one another fervently, because you have been born again through the word of God that lives and abides forever (1:22–23). Then the great image of 2:4–10: living stones built into a spiritual house, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people who once were not a people and now are the people of God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Peter, the apostle, writes from “Babylon” (5:13), most likely Rome, probably in the early to middle 60s, as pressure on Christians was intensifying under Nero.
- The five regions named in 1:1 are provinces in what is now Turkey. The recipients are largely Gentile converts (1:14, 18; 2:10; 4:3) living as a minority among neighbors who find their new lives strange (4:4).
- “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1:2) describes God’s eternal plan to save a people through Christ, a plan announced beforehand and entered by obedience to the truth (1:22), not the unconditional selection of particular individuals.
- The Old Testament runs all through this letter. Peter applies Exodus 19:5–6, Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 40:6–8, Psalm 118:22, and Hosea 1:9–10 and 2:23 directly to the church.
- Holiness language in 1:15–16 quotes Leviticus 11:44. Peter is not putting Christians back under the Law but drawing on the character of the God who gave it.
- This is the same Peter who preached Acts 2:38. His language of obedience, new birth, and being saved through water (3:21) is consistent from Pentecost forward.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Peter is writing to people under pressure, and his first move is to tell them who they already are (1:1–5). List what he says is true of them before he asks anything of them. Why begin there instead of with instructions?*

Verses 1 through 5 pile up identity: elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, begotten again to a living hope by the resurrection, heirs of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, reserved in heaven, kept by the power of God through faith. Not one of those is a command. All of them are reports.

Peter starts there because people under pressure do not need to be told to try harder; they need to be told who they are. That is the pattern all over the New Testament (Ephesians 1 before Ephesians 4; Romans 1 through 11 before Romans 12). Ask your class what they would say if a stranger asked them to describe themselves in one

sentence, and then ask how many of Peter's descriptions would have made the sentence. Behavior follows identity far more reliably than identity follows behavior.

Question 2. *According to 1:22–25, how does a person come to be born again? Work carefully through what Peter says the word of God does, and talk about what that means for the place of Scripture in anyone's conversion.*

Peter is precise. They have purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit (1:22). They have been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1:23). And that word, he says, is the word which by the gospel was preached to you (1:25). The seed of the new birth is the preached word of God. James 1:18 says the same thing, and so does the sequence in Acts: they heard, they believed, they were cut to the heart, they were told to repent and be baptized, and about three thousand received his word gladly and were baptized (Acts 2:37–41).

Two things follow, and the class needs both. First, there is no new birth apart from the word of God. Not a feeling, not an impression, not a private experience that bypasses Scripture. Second, the word calls for obedience (1:22), and Peter will name what that obedience includes in 3:21. Set John 3:3–5 and Romans 6:3–4 alongside this text and let the class see that the new birth of water and the Spirit is exactly what Peter is describing.

Question 3. *In 2:9 Peter hands the church every title God once gave Israel at Sinai. Read Exodus 19:5–6 beside it. What practical difference should it make on an ordinary Tuesday that you belong to a royal priesthood?*

Exodus 19:5–6 was spoken to Israel at Sinai: a special treasure above all people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Peter hands every one of those titles to a scattered group of mostly Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, and then adds Hosea: "who once were not a people but are now the people of God." The promises did not evaporate and they were not postponed. They landed on the church.

Now make it Tuesday. A priest does two things: he has access to God, and he offers sacrifices. Christians have both (Hebrews 4:16; Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15–16). That means there is no sacred class in the Lord's church standing between a member and God, and it means the ordinary work of a Tuesday, done honestly and offered to Him, is priestly work. Note also 2:9's purpose clause: that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness. Priests are not kept for themselves. Ask who is watching their Tuesday.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything in 1:3–5 that God has already done, and mark which of those things depends on your performance.*

God has begotten us again, given a living hope, raised Jesus from the dead, provided an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, reserved that inheritance in heaven, and kept us by His power through faith. Every verb is God's. The one thing on our side of the sentence is "through faith," and Peter immediately shows in verses 6 through 9 that this faith is tested, proven, and held onto under fire. God's keeping and our faith are not alternatives; the keeping comes through the faith.

2. *1:18–19 sets silver and gold against the precious blood of Christ. Read Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, then write out what redemption cost and what it purchased.*

Redemption cost the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish and without spot, foreordained before the foundation of the world. Isaiah 53:7 pictures Him silent before His shearers. What it purchased, according to 1:18, is release from the aimless way of life handed down from the fathers, and 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 adds that we are not our own, but bought with a price, so we glorify God in our bodies. Redemption is not merely forgiveness. It is a change of ownership.

3. *Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6–8 in 1:24–25. Trace his argument: why does the permanence of God's word matter so much to people whose own lives feel temporary?*

Isaiah wrote that all flesh is grass and its glory like the flower of the field; the grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Peter's readers were watching their own security wither: their standing in the community, perhaps their livelihood, eventually for some their lives. Peter tells them the seed they were born from is the one thing in the world that will not wither. A temporary person born from an eternal word has a future that outlasts his circumstances.

4. In 2:4–8 Christ is a living stone, precious to some and a stumbling stone to others. Look up Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16, and explain how one stone can be both.

Psalm 118:22 says the stone the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone, and Isaiah 28:16 says the one who believes will not act hastily or be put to shame. The stone does not change; the builders do. To those who believe He is precious, the foundation of everything. To those who are disobedient He is exactly what a cornerstone is to a man who refuses to build on it: something to trip over. Jesus made the same point in Matthew 21:42–44. Neutrality toward Christ is not one of the options.

5. 1:22 calls for fervent love from a pure heart. Pick the member of your congregation you find hardest to love, and do one specific, inconvenient thing for that person before next Sunday.

Answers will vary, and the inconvenience is the point. Fervent love in 1:22 translates a word suggesting a muscle stretched to its limit. Listen for a specific person and a specific act with a date on it. If someone objects that they cannot manufacture the feeling, point them back to the verse: the command is to love from a pure heart, and Peter grounds it in the new birth, not in natural compatibility.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1:2) is covenant language about God’s plan and His people, not unconditional individual election. Peter’s own readers purified their souls “in obeying the truth” (1:22), and 2 Peter 1:10 tells them to make their calling and election sure. Handle this gently but do not leave it vague.
- Teach 1:22–25 plainly: the new birth comes through the word of God, received and obeyed. That excludes any conversion by private experience apart from Scripture, and it excludes a faith that never obeys.
- The royal priesthood of 2:9 belongs to every Christian and abolishes any human priestly class. It does not, however, erase the New Testament pattern for elders, deacons, and those who teach (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5:1–4).
- The inheritance is “reserved in heaven for you” (1:4). Keep the hope where Peter puts it, and do not let the class relocate it to a future earthly kingdom.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Ezekiel 12–16 · Psalm 119:97–136 · John 6:1–21 · 1 Peter 2:13–3:22

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