

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 89 OF 104

Who Will Stand

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 22-24
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 121-125
Gospels	John 7:1-36
General New Testament	2 Peter 1

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to ask your class the question God asked in Ezekiel 22:30 and to keep asking it until somebody answers. Who will stand? The city fell for many reasons, and the one God names is that nobody would step into the breach. Set that beside 2 Peter 1, where a dying apostle tells ordinary Christians to give all diligence and add, and the week has a spine: God is not looking for impressive people, He is looking for willing ones.

Doctrinally, the center is 2 Peter 1:10. Be diligent to make your calling and election sure is an instruction that makes no sense if salvation cannot be lost, and it is one of the plainest answers in Scripture to unconditional security. Alongside it, John 7:17 guards against the opposite error, the idea that faith is a leap without evidence; Jesus promises that the willing person will come to know. Also watch Psalm 122 and 125 so the class locates the Zion language where the New Testament locates it, in the church rather than in modern national politics.

Formationally, the thread is the will. Ezekiel found no one willing to stand. The pilgrim in Psalm 123 keeps his eyes on his master's hand until mercy comes. Jesus says the willing man will know. Peter says give all diligence. Put this to your class before they leave: name one gap in your own congregation or family, a place where something is broken and nobody has stepped in, and say out loud what you are going to do about it this week.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 2 Peter 1 first. It is the most encouraging reading of the week and the one that most directly sets an agenda for the class: seven qualities to add, a promise attached, and a clear word about where Scripture came from. Verses 5 through 11 deserve at least half the hour.

Second session: Take up Ezekiel 22-24 second. Spend your time on the indictment of chapter 22 and on verse 30, summarize chapter 23 rather than reading its middle, and close with the dated siege and the death of the prophet's wife in chapter 24. End the hour by naming gaps in your own community that need someone standing in them.

The other two readings: Send them to Psalm 121-125 and John 7:1-36. Suggest they read the psalms as travel songs, aloud if possible, and that they write their own congregation's version of Psalm 124. For John 7, ask them to sit with verse 17 and to notice how many different opinions about Jesus one crowd can hold at once.

No One to Stand in the Gap

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 22 is an indictment, and it is organized like one. Verses 1 through 16 list the crimes of the city: bloodshed, idols, contempt for parents, oppression of the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, despising holy things, profaning sabbaths, slander, immorality, bribery, usury, extortion. Verses 17 through 22 change the image to a smelter. God says the house of Israel has become dross to Him, and He will gather them into the furnace of His wrath and melt them. Then verses 23 through 31 walk through the leadership tier by tier and find every tier guilty.

Verse 30 is the verse people remember, and it should be handled carefully. God says He sought for a man among them who would make a wall and stand in the gap before Him for the land, that He should not destroy it, but He found no one. This is not a claim that no righteous person was alive; Jeremiah was in Jerusalem, Daniel was in Babylon, Ezekiel himself was among the exiles. It is a statement about the leadership of a nation and about a generation in which no one would repair what was broken.

Chapter 23 tells the covenant history again in the form of two sisters, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem), whose political alliances with Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt are described as the betrayals of a wife. The language is deliberately coarse, meant to shock a comfortable people. Then chapter 24 lands. On the exact day the Babylonian army encircled Jerusalem, hundreds of miles away, God tells Ezekiel to write down the date. He gives the parable of the pot boiled until the scum is burned off. And that evening the prophet's wife dies, and he is forbidden to weep aloud, because the exiles are about to lose what they love most and will be too stunned to mourn.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The siege of Jerusalem began on the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year (24:1–2), a date confirmed in 2 Kings 25:1 and Jeremiah 52:4. Ezekiel recorded it in Babylon as it happened, which is itself a sign of a true prophet.
- Marriage imagery for covenant unfaithfulness runs through the prophets (Hosea 1–3; Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16). Chapter 23 is the harshest example and is aimed at shattering complacency, not at titillating readers.
- Standing in the gap pictures a breach in a city wall and a defender filling it with his own body. Moses (Exodus 32:11–14; Psalm 106:23) and Abraham (Genesis 18:22–33) both did this in prayer.
- Ezekiel had already been made a sign to the exiles repeatedly (the brick, the baggage, the shaved hair). The loss of his wife is the last and costliest of these sign-acts.
- Ezekiel's mouth is shut through most of this section and will be opened when a fugitive arrives from the fallen city (24:26–27; 33:21–22). The structure of the book turns on that moment.
- This is the end of the oracles against Judah. The next section, which the class reads next week, turns to the surrounding nations.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ezekiel 22:23–29 goes through the nation group by group: princes, prophets, priests, and the people of the land. Identify what each one did, and talk about what happens to a community when every layer fails at the same time.*

The list is devastating in its completeness. The princes are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood for dishonest gain. The prophets plaster them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions and saying “Thus says the Lord God” when the Lord has not spoken. The priests violate God's law, profane holy things, make no distinction between holy and unholy or clean and unclean, and hide their eyes from God's sabbaths. The people of the land use oppression, commit robbery, and mistreat the poor and the stranger. Nobody is a bystander.

What happens to a community when every layer fails at once is that there is no longer anyone to appeal to. The prophets should have corrected the princes, the priests should have taught the difference between right and wrong, and the people should have refused to profit from it. Each group was supposed to be a check on the others. Ask your class where the checks are in a congregation and in a family, and what an ordinary member does when he sees something wrong. Silence is how a community reaches Ezekiel 22.

Question 2. *In 22:30 God says He sought for a man to make a wall and stand in the gap, and found no one. Describe what standing in the gap would have looked like in Ezekiel's day, and name the places where an ordinary Christian could stand in one now.*

In Ezekiel's day standing in the gap meant two things: interceding in prayer, as Moses did when God threatened to destroy Israel, and repairing what was broken by speaking the truth to people who did not want it. Both are dangerous. The man in the gap is exposed on both sides, and that is exactly why the position was empty. It is easier to write the city off and to be right about its condition than to stand in the breach and be wounded there.

Make the modern applications concrete, or this becomes a stirring sentiment and nothing more. Standing in the gap looks like praying by name and daily for a wandering brother; visiting the person everybody else has given up on; saying the hard, kind sentence to a friend who is drifting; being the one who tells the truth in a family that has agreed not to. Note also that Christ is the ultimate answer to 22:30. God looked for a man and found none, and eventually He sent His own Son to stand in the breach (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 5:6-8).

Question 3. *In 24:15-24 God takes the prophet's wife, the desire of his eyes, and tells him not to mourn publicly, so that his silence becomes a sign. This is one of the hardest passages in the book. How do you understand what God asked of Ezekiel, and what does it say about the cost of carrying God's message?*

Deal with this honestly, because a class will feel it. The text does not say God killed Ezekiel's wife to make a point; it says God told him in advance what was coming and how to respond. What God asked was that the prophet not perform the customary public mourning, because the exiles would soon lose the temple, the city, and their children, and would be too crushed to mourn in the ordinary way. His restraint was the sermon. Note verse 18: "So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And the next morning I did as I was commanded." That is all. No complaint is recorded.

The cost of carrying God's message runs all through Scripture: Hosea's marriage, Jeremiah's loneliness, Paul's beatings, and finally a cross. Ezekiel is not the only servant whose grief became a message. Say plainly to your class that faithfulness sometimes costs what we would least choose to give, and that this is neither a punishment nor a bargain. Then let the room sit with verse 18 for a moment before moving on. Some passages should not be resolved too quickly.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Work through 22:6-12 and list the specific sins named there. Then count how many of them concern the way powerful people treated the weak.*

The list includes shedding blood, treating father and mother with contempt, oppressing the stranger, wronging the fatherless and the widow, despising holy things, profaning sabbaths, slander, eating on the mountains at idol shrines, sexual sin including violation of family relationships, taking bribes to shed blood, usury and increase, extortion, and forgetting God. A striking proportion of them concern how the strong treated the weak. That is not an accident; when a nation loses God, the people with the least protection are the first to feel it, which is why God's law was so insistent about the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (Exodus 22:21-24; James 1:27).

2. *22:18-22 pictures Jerusalem as metal thrown into a furnace. Read Isaiah 1:25 and Malachi 3:2-3, and describe the two different things fire can accomplish.*

Fire either refines or destroys, and the difference is in what is being heated. Isaiah 1:25 says God will thoroughly purge away the dross and take away all the alloy, which is refining. Malachi 3:2-3 pictures a refiner sitting over the silver until He can see His own reflection, purifying the sons of Levi. But Ezekiel 22:20-22 has a furnace where the

metal is melted in God's fury and where the only result named is that they will know the Lord has poured out His wrath. The same heat that purifies a person willing to be purified simply consumes one who is not.

3. *Ezekiel 23 tells of two sisters. Identify who each one stands for, and note from 23:11 what Judah was supposed to have learned from watching her sister.*

Oholah is Samaria, the northern kingdom, and Oholibah is Jerusalem, the southern kingdom. Verse 11 is the point of the chapter: Oholibah saw what happened to her sister and became more corrupt than she was. Judah had a front-row seat at Samaria's destruction in 722 B.C. and learned nothing from it. That is the sharpest warning in the chapter and the most transferable. Watching someone else be ruined by a sin does not automatically protect a person from it; 1 Corinthians 10:11 says these things were written for our admonition, which means the watching only helps if we let it.

4. *Compare the boiling pot of 24:3–14 with the slogan the leaders had been quoting back in 11:3. How does God take their own proverb and turn it against them?*

In 11:3 the leaders said, "This city is the caldron, and we are the meat," meaning they were the choice cuts, safe inside, protected by the city walls. In 24:3–14 God takes the same image and finishes it: yes, you are the meat in the pot, and the pot is on the fire. The pieces are boiled, the bones burned, the flesh taken out, and then the empty pot is set on the coals until the scum in it is burned away. Their picture of security becomes the picture of their destruction. God has a way of taking the words we comfort ourselves with and asking whether we meant them.

5. *Standing in the gap begins with praying for people who are not praying for themselves. Write down three names before you close this page, and pray for each of them by name every day this week.*

Answers will vary, and this one should be checked the following week. Standing in the gap is not primarily heroic; it is mostly quiet and repeated. Listen for actual names rather than categories, and encourage members to choose someone they are not naturally drawn to. If the class will do this for a single week, some of them will keep doing it for a year.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Chapter 23 is even more graphic than chapter 16. In a mixed class, summarize the chapter rather than reading its middle section aloud, state plainly what the imagery means (covenant betrayal described as marital unfaithfulness), and spend your time on verse 11 and on the historical lesson.
- Do not use 22:30 to teach that God could not find a single righteous person. Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel were alive. The verse addresses a leadership and a generation with nobody willing to repair the breach.
- Intercession is real and powerful (James 5:16), but it does not cancel the personal accountability of Ezekiel 18. Praying for a man does not repent for him.
- The death of Ezekiel's wife should be handled with tenderness. The text reports God's command and the prophet's obedience; it does not invite speculation about God's motives, and no one in your class should leave thinking God takes loved ones to teach lessons.

The Keeper Who Never Sleeps

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These are traveling songs. Three times a year Israelite families walked up to Jerusalem for the feasts, and Psalms 120 through 134 are the collection they sang on the way. Read that way, the little details come alive: the hills full of bandits and shrines, the ache of a long road, the relief of the gates, the crowd. Psalm 120 last week put a man far from home among people who wanted war. Psalm 121 puts him on the road, looking up.

Psalm 121 is the song of a traveler, and the question in verse 1 is a real one. The hills were where the danger was and where the pagan shrines were. His answer is that his help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth, and then the psalm turns into a litany of keeping: He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber; the Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade; the Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your going out and your coming in. Six times in eight verses.

The rest of the set fills out the pilgrim's experience. Psalm 122 is arrival, and the joy of walking into God's house with everybody else. Psalm 123 is a servant with tired eyes, weary of the scorn of people who are at ease. Psalm 124 is a congregation testifying together that they escaped like a bird from a broken snare. Psalm 125 is the settled conclusion: those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, and as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 120 through 134 are titled Songs of Ascents and were most likely sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). Jerusalem sits high, so every approach is an ascent.
- Psalms 122 and 124 are attributed to David; the rest in this group are anonymous.
- The hills of Psalm 121:1 were both a physical danger to travelers and the location of pagan high places, which makes the question in verse 1 sharper than it sounds in English.
- The image of God as shade at your right hand (121:5) matters in a climate where a day's walk in the sun could kill.
- Zion and Jerusalem in these psalms are the actual city and the temple. Under the new covenant the language of Zion is applied to the church (Hebrews 12:22–23; Galatians 4:26), which is where Christians should locate the application.
- Psalm 125:5 ends with a warning: those who turn aside to their crooked ways the Lord will lead away with the workers of iniquity. Even the most reassuring of these songs assumes a person can turn aside.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 121 asks a question in verse 1 and answers it in verse 2. Read both lines slowly. Why does it matter that the answer is not the hills themselves, and what do people lift their eyes to today when they need help?*

The Hebrew of verse 1 is a question, and the answer is deliberately not the hills. Travelers looked up at those ridges and saw two things: the places where robbers waited, and the shrines where people went for help from gods that could not help. The psalmist looks past both. His help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth, which means his help comes from the One who made the hills he is worried about.

The modern version of lifting our eyes to the hills is easy to name. We look to the portfolio, the insurance policy, the second opinion, the right politician, the network of friends who can get things done. None of those is wicked, and every one of them can quietly become the place we look first. Ask the class to finish the sentence honestly:

when something goes badly wrong, the first place I reach for help is this. Then read verse 2 again and ask whether the honest answer was God.

Question 2. *Six times in eight verses God is called a keeper or is said to keep. Since faithful people still get sick, lose jobs, and bury parents, what exactly is Psalm 121 promising, and what is it not promising?*

The psalm is not promising that nothing bad will happen. Verse 7 says the Lord shall preserve you from all evil and shall preserve your soul, and the second half interprets the first. Compare Romans 8:28 and 8:35–39, where nothing separates us from the love of God, and Paul lists tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword as the very things that do not separate us. The keeping is real, and it is not the same thing as exemption.

What the psalm actually promises is a Keeper who is awake, present, and attentive across every situation: by day and by night, coming in and going out, now and forevermore. Pagan gods slept; Baal's prophets had to shout to wake him (1 Kings 18:27). Our God does not doze. Ask the class where they have needed that in the last year, and let somebody who has suffered say out loud that God kept them even though He did not spare them. That testimony is worth more than any explanation the teacher can give.

Question 3. *Psalm 124 is a whole congregation remembering a near disaster out loud: if it had not been the Lord who was on our side. Why does that need to be said together rather than privately, and what would your congregation's version of Psalm 124 include?*

Psalm 124 is written in the first person plural from the first line. We would have been swallowed alive. The waters would have overwhelmed our soul. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers. Israel is told to say it, out loud, together. Memory is fragile and private memory is fragile in a particular way; we forget, we revise, and we start crediting ourselves. A congregation saying it together keeps the record straight, and it teaches the children who were not there.

Ask what your congregation's Psalm 124 would include. The building that nearly closed. The year half the members left. The family that came back. The Sunday after the funeral when the church filled the house with food. Most churches have three or four stories that nobody under thirty has ever heard. This question is worth ten unhurried minutes, and it may be the most valuable thing you do all quarter.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Go through Psalm 121 and write down every occurrence of the word keep or keeper, along with what is being kept in each line.*

Verse 3: He who keeps you will not slumber. Verse 4: He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. Verse 5: the Lord is your keeper. Verse 7: the Lord shall preserve (keep) you from all evil; He shall preserve (keep) your soul. Verse 8: the Lord shall preserve (keep) your going out and your coming in. The same Hebrew root appears six times. What is kept is the person himself, his life, his soul, and the whole pattern of his movements, from this time forth and even forevermore.

2. *Psalm 122 is the joy of going to God's house with other people. Read Hebrews 10:24–25 and describe what assembling with the saints is actually for.*

Hebrews 10:24–25 says to consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as we see the Day approaching. Assembling is for what it does to and through other people. Psalm 122 says the same thing from the inside: the psalmist is glad, the tribes go up together, thrones of judgment are there, and he prays for the peace of the whole community. Both passages assume that a Christian cannot do this alone and is not meant to try.

3. *Psalm 123 compares looking to God with a servant watching his master's hand. What does that image suggest about attentiveness, about waiting, and about who sets the pace?*

A household servant watched his master's hand because instructions came by gesture; he could not look away and still serve. The image suggests constant attentiveness, a readiness to move at a signal, and a complete surrender of the timing to somebody else. Verse 2 ends, "so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us." The

waiting is not passive and it is not open-ended in his mind; it lasts until. Compare Psalm 130:5–6, watchmen waiting for the morning.

4. *Psalm 125:1–2 uses two mountain pictures, Zion that cannot be moved and the hills that surround Jerusalem. Explain what each one claims, then read Romans 8:38–39 and note the overlap.*

Mount Zion cannot be moved but abides forever, which is a picture of stability: those who trust in the Lord are that kind of settled. The mountains surrounding Jerusalem are a picture of protection: as they encircle the city, the Lord surrounds His people. One says you will not be shaken; the other says you are enclosed. Romans 8:38–39 makes the same two claims in New Testament terms, listing death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, and any other created thing, and saying that none of them can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

5. *Psalm 122:6 tells pilgrims to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Write out a specific prayer for the peace of the congregation you belong to, naming real issues, and pray it every day this week.*

Answers will vary, and specificity is the assignment. A prayer for the peace of a congregation should name what actually threatens it: a disagreement that has hardened, a family carrying a grudge, a member no one has called in a year, a teacher who is exhausted. Praying that for seven days changes the person praying. Follow up the next week and ask whether anyone found himself doing something about what he had been praying for.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 121:7 does not promise immunity from suffering. Teach it alongside the second half of the verse and Romans 8:35–39, or someone in your class who has suffered will conclude God failed them.
- The Jerusalem of these psalms is the historic city and its temple. Do not apply Psalm 122:6 to modern Middle Eastern politics as though God's covenant purposes still run through a national state. The city of God now is the church (Hebrews 12:22–23; Galatians 4:26).
- Psalm 125:5 warns of those who turn aside to crooked ways. Do not let the comfort of verses 1 and 2 be read as a guarantee for someone who abandons the Lord.
- These are songs, not systematic theology. Let them do what songs do: settle the affections. Resist the urge to over-explain them.

The Argument at the Feast

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The chapter opens six months after the bread of life discourse, and the temperature has risen. Jesus walks in Galilee because the leaders in Judea are seeking to kill Him. The Feast of Tabernacles arrives, the one week of the year when Jerusalem was most crowded, and His brothers tell Him to go show Himself to the world. John adds the quiet, devastating line: “For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” These are men who grew up in the same house.

Jesus goes, but not with them and not publicly. The city is already buzzing. Some say He is good; others say He deceives the people; nobody says it out loud for fear of the leaders. Then, halfway through the feast, He walks into the temple and teaches, and the leaders marvel that an untrained man knows letters. His answer supplies the key to the whole chapter: “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.”

From there the debate spreads in every direction. They accuse Him of having a demon; He answers with a careful argument from their own practice of circumcising on the Sabbath. Some conclude that the rulers must secretly know He is the Christ. Others object that they know where He is from, and the Messiah is supposed to appear from nowhere. Many believe, on the evidence of His signs. The chief priests send officers to arrest Him, and He tells them plainly that He will be with them a little while longer and then return to the One who sent Him.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) came in the fall, lasted seven days plus a closing assembly, and commemorated the wilderness years when Israel lived in temporary shelters (Leviticus 23:33–43). Families built booths and lived in them for the week.
- The brothers of Jesus were the later children of Joseph and Mary (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). They did not believe during His ministry, but they were with the disciples after the resurrection (Acts 1:14), and James became a leader in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1:19; Acts 15:13).
- Rabbinic training was formal and credentialed. The astonishment in 7:15 is that Jesus had never studied in one of the recognized schools.
- The Law required circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:3), which regularly fell on a Sabbath, and the rabbis permitted it. Jesus uses their own exception to expose the inconsistency of condemning a healing.
- Popular opinion held that the Messiah’s origin would be unknown until He appeared (7:27), which is why knowing Jesus of Nazareth by name and family seemed to some a disqualification.
- John is writing years later for readers who know how the story ends, which is why he keeps noting that the hour had not yet come.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *John 7:5 says that even Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Him, and the advice they give in verses 3 and 4 sounds like sensible strategy. What is wrong with their counsel, and where are we tempted to offer God the same kind of advice?*

The advice is strategically excellent and spiritually blind. Go to Judea, they say, so that Your disciples can see Your works; no one does anything in secret while seeking to be known openly; if You do these things, show Yourself to the world. It is the logic of publicity. Build the platform, seize the moment, take advantage of the crowd. Jesus answers that His time has not yet come, and that the world cannot hate them but hates Him because He testifies

that its works are evil. They were free to move as they liked precisely because nothing about them threatened anybody.

We give God this advice constantly. We tell Him how His work should be promoted, which doors ought to open, and when. Most of it is well meant, and most of it quietly assumes that visibility equals fruitfulness. Ask the class where they have been impatient with God's timing lately, and whether their sense of urgency came from love for His will or from a desire to see results they could point to. Note that the brothers were eventually right that the world should see Him. They were wrong about when and how, which turned out to be the whole question.

Question 2. *In 7:17 Jesus makes a promise: if anyone wills to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God. Talk carefully about the order of that sentence. What changes when willingness comes before certainty rather than after it?*

Jesus reverses the order we prefer. We want to be persuaded first and to commit afterward; He says the willingness to do God's will is what brings the knowing. This is not anti-intellectual, and it does not mean evidence is unimportant; this same Gospel records signs written so that we may believe (20:30–31). It means that the obstacle to faith is usually moral rather than informational. A man who has already decided how he intends to live will find reasons, and a man genuinely willing to do God's will finds the teaching authenticates itself.

Two cautions to keep this from going wrong. First, it is not subjectivism; Jesus is not saying that whatever feels right to a sincere person is from God. The test is the objective teaching, which the willing person comes to recognize. Second, unwillingness is rarely conscious. Nobody says out loud, I refuse to know. They say, I have questions. Ask your class, gently, whether there is any point at which they would rather not have a clear answer, and then ask what they would have to change if the answer came tomorrow.

Question 3. *Read 7:12, 7:25–27, and 7:31 together. The city has settled on several different opinions about Jesus. Walk through the options they considered, and discuss why the same evidence did not persuade everyone.*

Lay the options out. Some say He is good (7:12). Others say He deceives the people (7:12). Some say He has a demon (7:20). Some say, is this not He whom they seek to kill, and behold He speaks boldly, do the rulers know indeed that this is the Christ (7:26)? Others object that they know where He is from (7:27). Many of the people believe, saying, when the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these (7:31)? The same man, the same week, the same miracles, and at least five verdicts.

Evidence did not settle it because evidence never settles anything by itself. It has to be weighed by someone willing to follow it. Notice that the objection in verse 27 is not evidence at all; it is a piece of popular expectation that Jesus failed to match, and it was enough for some people to dismiss Him. We do the same thing whenever we measure God's word against an assumption we have never examined. Ask what assumptions in your class might be functioning that way, and where the honest response is to test the assumption rather than the Lord.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace every reference to time in this passage: "My time has not yet come," "about the middle of the feast," "a little while longer I am with you." What is John drawing your attention to?*

In 7:6 and 7:8 Jesus says His time has not yet come while His brothers' time is always ready. In 7:14 He begins teaching about the middle of the feast. In 7:30 no one lays a hand on Him because His hour had not yet come. In 7:33 He says He will be with them a little while longer and then go to Him who sent Him. John wants you to see that Jesus is not reacting to events; He is moving on a schedule set by the Father, straight toward a cross. Compare 2:4, 8:20, 12:23, and 17:1, where the hour finally arrives.

2. *In 7:21–24 Jesus argues from the practice of circumcision on the Sabbath. Read Leviticus 12:3 and lay out His reasoning step by step.*

Leviticus 12:3 requires circumcision on the eighth day, which falls on a Sabbath one week in seven, and the rabbis allowed it. Jesus reasons: you break the law of the Sabbath, as you understand breaking, in order to keep the law of circumcision, because circumcision concerns one part of a man. I made an entire man well on the Sabbath, and you

are angry with Me. Then He gives the rule in 7:24: do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. He is not setting aside God's law; He is exposing a tradition that had grown inconsistent with it.

3. *Look up the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:33-43. What were the Israelites remembering during that week, and why is it fitting that Jesus taught there?*

Tabernacles recalled the forty years when Israel lived in temporary shelters and God dwelt among them, and it was also a harvest festival of thanksgiving. Families lived in booths for a week to remember that their ancestors had no permanent homes and that God provided anyway. It is fitting that Jesus teaches there because John has already said that the Word became flesh and dwelt, literally tabernacled, among us (John 1:14). The feast that remembered God camping with His people became the setting where God in the flesh stood in the temple courts and taught.

4. *7:16 says His doctrine is not His own but belongs to Him who sent Him. Compare John 12:49-50 and John 14:10, and write out what Jesus claims about the source of everything He taught.*

John 7:16 says the doctrine is not His own but His who sent Him. John 12:49-50 says He did not speak on His own authority, but the Father who sent Him gave Him a command, what He should say and what He should speak. John 14:10 says the words He speaks He does not speak on His own authority, but the Father who dwells in Him does the works. Together, Jesus claims that every word He taught originated with the Father. That is why rejecting His teaching is rejecting God, and why 7:17 works: a person genuinely willing to do God's will will recognize God's voice in it.

5. *Jesus ties knowing to willing. Is there a question you have kept conveniently open because settling it would require you to change something? Name it, settle it from Scripture, and act on it this week.*

Answers will vary, and honesty is the whole value. Most people keep one or two questions permanently open because closing them would cost something: a relationship that Scripture calls a person out of, a use of money, a Sunday habit, a grudge. Listen for the person who can name the question and then name what would have to change. If someone is genuinely uncertain and studying, encourage that; 7:17 is a promise to such a person, not a rebuke.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The brothers of Jesus were the sons of Joseph and Mary born after Him (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Teach this plainly and graciously; some in your community have been taught otherwise. Note the hopeful ending: they believed after the resurrection (Acts 1:14).
- 7:17 is not a license for subjective religion. Jesus promises that a willing person will recognize the truth of a definite body of teaching, not that sincerity makes any belief acceptable.
- 7:24, "judge with righteous judgment," should be taught alongside Matthew 7:1-5. Scripture forbids hypocritical and superficial judging, not the discernment it repeatedly commands.
- Jesus' going up privately in 7:8-10 is not deception. He declined to go with His brothers, on their terms and their timing, and went later, quietly, on His own.

Making It Sure

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Peter opens with an extraordinary claim. God's divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. Whatever a Christian needs in order to live a godly life, he already has access to. Peter adds that we have been given exceedingly great and precious promises, so that through them we may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. That last phrase is about moral likeness to God, not about becoming divine.

Then comes the ladder. Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. Peter's logic is stated in verses 8 through 11. If these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful. The one who lacks them is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. And if you do these things, you will never stumble, and an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom.

The last half of the chapter is Peter's defense of the message itself. We did not follow cunningly devised fables, he says; we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. He was on the holy mountain and heard the voice from the Excellent Glory. Then the remarkable turn: we have the prophetic word made more sure, and you do well to heed it as a light shining in a dark place. A man who heard God's own voice points his readers away from his experience and toward the written word, because prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Peter writes near the end of his life (1:13–15), knowing his death is near, to the same general readership as the first letter. Much of the letter is aimed at false teachers, whom chapter 2 will describe at length.
- “Partakers of the divine nature” (1:4) refers to sharing God's moral character, His holiness and love, as the following list of qualities makes clear. It has nothing to do with becoming a god.
- The list in 1:5–7 is a common ancient literary form in which each item is linked to the next. Faith is the foundation, love is the capstone, and the whole thing is something the Christian is told to supply.
- “Make your call and election sure” (1:10) places the certainty on the Christian's side of the relationship. God's call is genuine; our part is to confirm it by the way we live.
- The mountain of 1:16–18 is the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8), where Peter, James, and John heard the Father's voice.
- “Private interpretation” (1:20) concerns the origin of prophecy, not the right of a Christian to read and understand Scripture. Verse 21 explains it: prophecy did not come by the will of man.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *2 Peter 1:3 says God's divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. If that is actually true, what excuse does it remove, and how does it change the way you approach the habit you cannot seem to break?*

Verse 3 removes the excuse of inadequacy. Christians frequently talk as though God has asked for a life He has not equipped them to live, and Peter says otherwise: all things that pertain to life and godliness have already been given, through the knowledge of Him. The resources are the word, the promises, prayer, the blood of Christ, the fellowship of the church, and the providence of God. None of that is theoretical.

Applied to a stubborn habit, this changes the question from “Can I?” to “Will I use what I have been given?” Ask the class what they have actually tried: have they told anyone, removed the occasion, changed the schedule, memorized a passage, asked for prayer by name? First Corinthians 10:13 belongs here too. The point is not to shame anyone who is struggling; some struggles are long. The point is that the Christian never fights with empty hands.

Question 2. *Work through the seven qualities of 1:5–7 one at a time, in the order Peter gives them. Why do you think he arranged them this way, and which one is the current bottleneck in your own growth?*

Take them in order and let the class hear the progression. Faith is the foundation, the settled conviction about Christ. Virtue is moral courage and excellence, faith that has grown a spine. Knowledge is understanding of God’s will, so that courage is not blind. Self-control puts knowledge in charge of appetite. Perseverance is self-control stretched over time and trouble. Godliness is a life oriented toward God rather than merely disciplined. Brotherly kindness turns that Godward life toward the brethren, and love extends it to everyone, including those who give nothing back.

The arrangement is instructive because each one without the next becomes a defect: faith without courage is sentiment, knowledge without self-control is arrogance, perseverance without godliness is mere grit, and godliness without kindness produces the sourest people in any congregation. Ask each person to identify the step where his own progress stalls. Most people will find they have stacked several and skipped one, and the skipped one is where the trouble in their life actually is.

Question 3. *1:10 tells Christians to be diligent to make their call and election sure. Discuss what that instruction assumes about assurance, and what it does to the idea that a saved person cannot possibly fall away.*

The command itself answers the question. You do not tell a man to make sure of something that cannot possibly be otherwise. Peter tells Christians to be diligent, which means effort, and to make their call and election sure, which means the certainty is something they establish by the way they live, not something handed to them regardless of it. Verse 10 ends with the promise: if you do these things you will never stumble. The if is not decorative.

Put it beside the rest of Scripture and the pattern holds: Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brethren about departing from the living God; Galatians 5:4 says some had fallen from grace; 2 Peter 2:20–22, which the class reads next week, describes people who escaped the pollutions of the world and became entangled again. Assurance is genuine and is meant to be enjoyed (1 John 5:13), but it is the assurance of a person walking in the light, not a guarantee attached to a moment in the past. Teach this gently. Some in your class have been taught that any conditionality destroys grace, and Peter’s own sentence is the kindest answer.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the seven qualities in 1:5–7 and write a one-sentence definition of each one in your own words.*

Faith is confident trust in God and in His Son. Virtue is moral excellence and courage, the backbone that acts on what faith believes. Knowledge is understanding of God’s will as He has revealed it. Self-control is the mastery of appetite and impulse, saying no to yourself. Perseverance is endurance that stays under a load without quitting. Godliness is reverence toward God that shapes ordinary life. Brotherly kindness is genuine affection for fellow Christians. Love is the deliberate seeking of another’s good, extended even to those who cannot or will not return it.

2. *1:9 describes the Christian who lacks these qualities as shortsighted and forgetful. What exactly has he forgotten, and what happens to a person who forgets it?*

He has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. That is the memory Peter says is fading, and losing it explains almost everything about a stalled Christian. A person who remembers the weight that was lifted, the water, the moment the guilt was gone, has a motive that never runs out. A person who forgets becomes shortsighted, able to see only what is close: this week, this comfort, this grievance. Growth stops because the reason for growing has slipped out of view. Compare Revelation 2:4–5, where the remedy for a lost first love is to remember, repent, and do the first works.

3. Peter recalls the mountain in 1:16–18. Read Matthew 17:1–8 and note precisely what Peter says he heard and saw, and why he brings it up here.

Peter says they were eyewitnesses of His majesty, that Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father, and that the voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” and that Peter himself heard this voice when he was with Him on the holy mountain. Matthew 17 adds the shining face and garments, Moses and Elijah, Peter’s ill-timed offer to build three shelters, and the Father’s added command, “Hear Him.” Peter brings it up to establish that the apostolic message rests on things actually seen and heard, not on invented stories.

4. 1:19–21 says no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, and that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Compare 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and describe what these passages claim about where the Bible came from.

Second Peter 1:21 says prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; the verb pictures a ship carried along by the wind. Second Timothy 3:16 says all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, literally God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Together they claim that the Bible originated with God and came through men who were carried by the Spirit, which is why it carries His authority and why it is sufficient to make the man of God complete.

5. Choose one of the seven qualities in 1:5–7 and name a specific practice that would actually add it this month. Write down the practice, not the quality, and start it this week.

Answers will vary, and the instruction to write the practice rather than the quality is the point. “I need more self-control” changes nothing; “I am not eating after eight and I am putting my phone in the kitchen at nine” is a practice. “I need more knowledge” changes nothing; “I am reading a chapter before work and writing one sentence about it” is a practice. Peter says to give all diligence and to add, which are the verbs of someone doing something on purpose.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- “Partakers of the divine nature” (1:4) means sharing God’s moral character, not becoming divine. The context of escaping corruption and the list of qualities that follows settles it.
- 1:10 is a direct answer to unconditional eternal security. Make the calling and election sure, and you will never stumble; the promise is attached to doing these things. Teach it with kindness and with the text open.
- 1:20 is about the origin of prophecy, not about whether ordinary Christians may interpret Scripture. Verse 21 gives the explanation, and Ephesians 3:3–4 and Acts 17:11 show that we are expected to read and understand.
- Peter appeals to the written prophetic word as more sure than even his own experience on the mountain. Use this to settle the question of revelation today: we test every claim by the completed word, and we do not look for new ones (Jude 3; Galatians 1:8–9).

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Ezekiel 25–30 · Psalm 126–131 · John 7:37–8:30 · 2 Peter 2–3

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