

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 90 OF 104

What Will Not Burn

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 25–30
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 126–131
Gospels	John 7:37–8:30
General New Testament	2 Peter 2–3

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is perspective. Ezekiel walks the class through the great powers of the ancient world, one at a time, and every one of them is gone. Peter then tells them that the earth itself and all its works will be burned up. The purpose is not to frighten anybody; it is to get the class to reckon honestly with what lasts, and then to live accordingly. Peter states the aim himself in 3:11, and you could not choose a better sentence to write on the board.

Doctrinally, three matters deserve your care. First, Ezekiel 28 is a lament over a human king. Do not teach it as the story of Satan; Scripture speaks about Satan's fall elsewhere and does not need a Phoenician funeral song. Second, 2 Peter 2:20–22 shows plainly that a person who has escaped the world through the knowledge of Christ can be entangled again and end worse than he began, which settles the question of unconditional security. Third, 2 Peter 3:10–13 describes one sudden coming that dissolves the present order, which leaves no room for an earthly thousand-year reign.

Formationally, the thread is what a person does with success and with delay. Tyre concluded from its wealth that it was divine. Pharaoh concluded from the Nile that he had made it. The scoffers concluded from God's patience that He was not coming. In every case the mistake was drawing the wrong conclusion from a real mercy. Ask your class this before they leave: what is the one thing you own, or run, or are good at, that you have quietly stopped praying about, and what will you do this week to put it back in God's hands?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 2 Peter 2–3 first. It carries the doctrinal weight and it supplies the week's organizing question in 3:11. Give real time to 2:20–22 and to 3:9–13, and be sure the class leaves understanding that the delay of the Lord's coming is mercy aimed at people they know.

Second session: Take up Ezekiel 25–30 second. Do not try to cover every oracle. Use chapter 25 on gloating, the ship of chapter 27, and the proud prince of 28:1–10, and settle the question of 28:11–19 before someone raises it in the hallway.

The other two readings: Assign Psalms 126–131 and John 7:37–8:30 for personal reading. Suggest they read Psalm 131 out loud every day this week; it takes thirty seconds and it works on a person. For John, ask them to note what the officers said in 7:46 and to write their own answer to the invitation in 7:37.

The Nations and the Proud King**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

The prophets regularly turn from God's people to the nations, and the reason is theological: the God of Israel is the God of everyone. Amos does it, Isaiah does it, Jeremiah does it, and Ezekiel gives six chapters to it here. Chapter 25 handles four neighbors quickly, and the charges are almost all about what they said when Jerusalem fell. Ammon clapped her hands and stamped her feet. Moab said Judah was like all the other nations. Edom took vengeance. Philistia acted with old hatred and contempt.

Chapters 26 through 28 belong to Tyre, the wealthiest trading city on the Mediterranean coast. Chapter 26 announces the siege. Chapter 27 is one of the most remarkable poems in the Old Testament, a funeral song in which the city is a magnificent ship: planks of fir from Senir, a mast of cedar from Lebanon, oars of oak from Bashan, sails of embroidered Egyptian linen, and a passenger list of every trading partner in the known world. Then verse 34 sinks her, and the merchants hiss along the coast.

Chapter 28 addresses the ruler himself. Because his heart is lifted up and he has said "I am a god," God will bring strangers against him, and he will die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas, saying nothing about deity to the men who kill him. Then comes a lament, using the imagery of Eden, precious stones, and a covering cherub, over a king who was the seal of perfection until iniquity was found in him. Chapters 29 and 30 turn to Egypt, the ally Judah kept trusting, whom God calls a staff of reed that splinters in the hand of anyone who leans on it.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Tyre was built partly on the mainland and partly on a rocky island offshore, which made it nearly impregnable. Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for thirteen years and took the mainland city; Alexander the Great finally took the island in 332 B.C. by scraping the ruins of the old city into the sea to build a causeway, which is remarkably close to Ezekiel 26:4 and 26:12.
- Ezekiel 29:17–20 honestly notes that Nebuchadnezzar's army got little plunder from Tyre for all its labor, and says God would give him Egypt as his wages. Prophecy here is specific enough to be checked.
- Egypt had repeatedly promised military help to Judah and repeatedly failed to deliver (2 Kings 18:21; Jeremiah 37:5–8), which is the background of the broken reed image.
- The oracles against the nations are not merely political commentary. They assert that the God of Israel holds every nation accountable, including nations that never had His law (Amos 1:3–2:3; Acts 17:26–31).
- The lament of 28:11–19 is addressed to "the king of Tyre," just as 28:1–10 is addressed to "the prince of Tyre." It uses the exalted imagery a royal funeral song would use, Eden and precious stones and a guardian cherub, about a human ruler.
- The dates scattered through these chapters (26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1) show Ezekiel kept careful records, and several oracles were delivered after Jerusalem had already fallen.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ezekiel 25 gives God's reasons for judging Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, and most of them concern how those nations reacted to Judah's fall. Identify the attitudes God names, and talk about why gloating over someone else's ruin is treated this seriously.*

Read the charges out loud and let the class hear how much of it is talk. Ammon said "Aha!" against the sanctuary when it was profaned and against the land of Israel when it was desolate. Moab said, look, the house of Judah is like all the nations, meaning their God was nothing special after all. Edom took vengeance on Judah and was

greatly offensive in doing so. Philistia acted in revenge with a spiteful heart and ancient hatred. Not one of these nations pulled down the temple. They cheered while somebody else did.

Gloating is treated seriously because it reveals a heart that is glad about ruin, and God does not gloat, even over deserved judgment (Ezekiel 18:32; Proverbs 24:17–18). It is also revealing about ourselves: we usually rejoice at another's fall because it raises our own standing by comparison. Ask the class where they have caught themselves enjoying bad news about a person, a congregation, or a political opponent. Then ask what it would cost to pray for that person by name this week instead.

Question 2. *Chapter 27 reads like an inventory of the world's markets, and then the great ship goes down with everything in her. Why do you think God listed every commodity Tyre traded before describing the wreck, and what would be on that list if the ship were your life?*

The inventory in chapter 27 is glorious, and that is the point. Silver, iron, tin, lead, slaves, horses, ivory, ebony, turquoise, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral, rubies, wheat, honey, oil, balm, wine, wool, cassia, spices, precious cloths, cedar chests bound with cords. God lists it because He wants the reader to feel what the loss actually was. Judgment in Scripture is never described carelessly; the prophet writes a funeral song, not a taunt, and he insists you see what went down.

Turn it personally without turning it morbid. If someone were to inventory your life the way chapter 27 inventories Tyre, what would fill the hold? Most of us would be surprised by how much of the list is made of things that cannot survive a fire. Peter answers this in 3:11 of the reading later this week: seeing all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be? Ask the class to name one item they are carrying in the hold that is genuinely imperishable.

Question 3. *In 28:1–10 the prince of Tyre says, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods." Trace what the text says his wealth and his wisdom had done to him. Where does the same drift begin in ordinary people who would never say those words out loud?*

Follow the sequence in the text. Verse 4: by your wisdom and understanding you have gained riches. Verse 5: by your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches. Then the second half of verse 5: and your heart is lifted up because of your riches. The competence was real, the wealth was real, and the conclusion he drew from them was insane. Verse 2 is the summary: your heart is lifted up, and you say, I am a god. Verse 9 is the reply: will you still say before the one who slays you, I am a god?

Nobody in your class will make the speech in verse 2, but plenty of us make the drift. It starts when success stops feeling like a gift and starts feeling like an explanation, when we no longer ask anyone's counsel, when our schedule is the one thing no one may question, when we stop praying about the area where we are strongest because we do not feel we need to. Deuteronomy 8:17–18 names it exactly: you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth. Ask where each person has stopped praying because he has stopped needing to.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every nation addressed in chapters 25 through 30 and write beside each one the specific offense God names.*

Ammon, for rejoicing over the profaned sanctuary and the desolate land (25:3, 6). Moab, for saying Judah was like all the other nations (25:8). Edom, for taking vengeance on the house of Judah (25:12). Philistia, for acting in revenge with old hatred and a spiteful heart (25:15). Tyre, for saying "Aha!" over Jerusalem's fall and expecting to profit from it (26:2) and for a ruler whose heart was lifted up (28:2). Sidon, as a pricking brier to Israel (28:24). Egypt, for arrogance ("My River is my own") and for being a staff of reed that broke in Israel's hand (29:3, 6–7).

2. *Read the lamentation over the king of Tyre in 28:11–19, then read Isaiah 14:12–17 about the king of Babylon, noting Isaiah 14:4. In your own words, who are these two passages describing, and how do you know?*

Both passages are describing human kings, and both texts say so. Isaiah 14:4 introduces the poem as a proverb against the king of Babylon, and Ezekiel 28:12 addresses the king of Tyre. Both use soaring imagery, Eden, precious stones, a covering cherub, a fall from heaven, the way an ancient funeral song exalted a monarch before recording

his ruin. Scripture teaches elsewhere, plainly, that Satan fell and that angels sinned (Luke 10:18; 1 Timothy 3:6; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4), so we lose nothing by reading these two laments as what they say they are. Building a biography of Satan out of a funeral song over a Phoenician merchant king is not careful handling of the word.

3. Ezekiel 29:3 puts a sentence in Pharaoh's mouth: "My River is my own; I have made it for myself." Compare Daniel 4:28–33 and Acts 12:21–23, and describe the pattern God keeps repeating.

Pharaoh says the Nile is his and he made it. Nebuchadnezzar, walking on his palace roof, says, is this not great Babylon that I have built by my mighty power for the honor of my majesty, and the sentence is not out of his mouth before he loses his mind for seven seasons. Herod accepts the shout that his voice is the voice of a god and not of a man, and is struck down immediately because he did not give glory to God. The pattern: God allows enormous success, a man credits himself, and God answers. Proverbs 16:18 states the rule, and James 4:6 states the principle underneath it.

4. In 28:24–26 God suddenly turns from the nations back to His own people. What does He promise them there, and on what basis does He promise it?

God promises that Israel will no longer have a pricking brier or a painful thorn among her neighbors, that He will gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, that they will dwell safely in their own land, build houses, plant vineyards, and know that He is the Lord their God. The basis is not their merit; it is stated in verses 22 and 25, that God will be hallowed and will show Himself holy in them in the sight of the nations. Just as in chapter 20, God acts for His name's sake. That is also why the promise does not expire when the people fail again; it rests on God's character.

5. Tyre's ruin began with what its success had told it about itself. Name the area where you are most competent, and name one specific step this week that would keep that competence under God's hand.

Answers will vary. Watch for the person who names something small and safe rather than the thing he is actually proud of. Useful steps look like this: asking a specific person for honest evaluation in that area, giving away some of what the competence produces, taking on a role where you are a beginner, or simply praying daily about the part of life you have been running alone. The goal is not to make people ashamed of being good at something. Tyre's skill was a gift; the ruin was in the conclusion it drew.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Ezekiel 28:11–19 is a lament over the human king of Tyre, as verse 12 states. Do not teach it as a biography of Satan. The Bible speaks plainly about Satan's fall elsewhere, and we do not need to borrow a Phoenician funeral song to do it. The same caution applies to Isaiah 14, which names the king of Babylon in verse 4.
- These oracles were fulfilled in history. Point to what actually happened to Tyre and Egypt rather than reading them as predictions of modern events. Avoid newspaper prophecy entirely.
- The gathering promises of 28:25–26 are covenant promises to a scattered people, realized in the return from exile and fulfilled ultimately in Christ. They are not a prediction about modern national politics.
- Chapter 25 is a warning to religious people about gloating. Do not let the class spend the hour enjoying the downfall of ancient enemies; that is precisely the sin the chapter condemns.

Sowing in Tears

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These six songs are worth teaching as a set because together they cover a life. Psalm 126 is memory and hope: when the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion we were like those who dream, our mouths filled with laughter. And then, in verse 4, the request: bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South. The same people who remember the miracle are still asking for one. That combination is honest, and most of your class lives in it.

Psalm 127 and 128 belong together. The first says that building, guarding, and long hours are vanity without the Lord, and then, almost abruptly, says children are a heritage and a reward. The second blesses the man who fears the Lord and walks in His ways, eating the labor of his hands, with his wife like a fruitful vine and his children around the table like olive plants. Read together, they say that a home is not constructed by effort but received as a gift, and that the daily work of a God-fearing man is not in vain.

Then the shadows. Psalm 129 remembers affliction from youth, plowers making long furrows on a back, and thanks God that the cords of the wicked were cut. Psalm 130 is one of the great penitential psalms: out of the depths I have cried to You; if You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. And Psalm 131, three verses long, is the quietest thing in the psalter: my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty; surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- All six are Songs of Ascents. Psalms 127 and 131 are attributed to Solomon and David respectively; the others are anonymous.
- Psalm 126 most likely looks back on the return from Babylonian exile under Cyrus (Ezra 1), which would place it in the generation that had actually experienced it.
- “Streams in the South” (126:4) refers to the Negev, where dry watercourses fill suddenly and violently after rain. The image is of barrenness reversed overnight.
- Sowing in tears may reflect the desperation of planting the last of the seed grain during famine, when a family had to bury food it could have eaten.
- Psalm 129:3, plowers plowing on a back, is the language of scourging and of prolonged national suffering. It is a memory of survival, not a boast.
- Psalm 130 is one of seven psalms the church has traditionally called penitential. Verse 8 ends with redemption from all iniquities, which the New Testament locates in Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 126 remembers a homecoming that felt like a dream and then, in the same psalm, asks God to do it again. Talk about the difference between remembering what God once did and expecting Him to act now, and why the second one is harder.*

Verse 1 is memory: when the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Verse 4 is petition: bring back our captivity, O Lord. It is the same psalm and the same people. Memory alone turns a congregation into a museum, where God is somebody who used to act. Petition without memory turns it into a panic. The psalm holds both, and it grounds the request in the record: He did it before, in a way none of us believed at the time.

Ask the class what God has actually done in the life of your congregation and in their families, and then ask what they are currently asking Him for. The gap is usually instructive. Many mature Christians find it easy to thank God for the past and quietly difficult to expect anything now, which is a form of unbelief that looks like humility. Note that verse 4 does not tell God how. It asks for streams in the desert and leaves the method alone.

Question 2. *Psalm 127 says that unless the Lord builds the house the builders labor in vain, and then it describes early mornings, late nights, and the bread of sorrows. Where does honest work end and anxious striving begin, and how can you tell the two apart in your own week?*

The psalm does not condemn work. It condemns work that carries a weight only God can carry. Verse 2 is the diagnostic: it is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows. The tell is not the hours; it is the sorrow, the grinding sense that if I stop, everything collapses. Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 6:25–34 and adds that the Gentiles are the ones who chase these things, while your heavenly Father knows you need them.

Give the class practical tests. Can you stop? Is there a day, a time, a boundary you actually keep? When something goes wrong, is your first move prayer or a plan? Do the people in your house get the leftovers of your energy? And the sharpest one: what do you believe will happen if you rest? Then read verse 2 again, ending with “for so He gives His beloved sleep.” God gives what anxious striving is trying to seize.

Question 3. *Psalm 131 describes a soul calmed and quieted like a weaned child with its mother. Read the psalm aloud. What has to happen in a person before that picture is honest, and what is our restlessness usually after?*

Notice the verbs: surely I have calmed and quieted my soul. He did it; it did not happen to him. And notice the image. A nursing child is content only when it gets what it wants; a weaned child has learned to be content with its mother herself. That transition is the whole psalm. Before it, a person is at peace only when God grants the request. After it, a person is at peace with God, request or no request. Verse 1 tells you what had to go first: a haughty heart, lofty eyes, and the habit of concerning himself with matters too great for him.

Our restlessness is usually after control or after standing, and often both. We want the outcome managed and we want to be thought well of, and neither of those is ever finished. Ask the class what they have been turning over that is genuinely too great for them: another person’s choices, an outcome months away, the question of why something happened. Then ask what one practice would quiet them: a stated hour of prayer, a walk without a phone, the discipline of writing the worry down and handing it over (1 Peter 5:7). Psalm 131 ends by pointing outward: hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Psalm 126:5–6 promises that those who sow in tears will reap in joy. Read Galatians 6:9 and John 12:24, and write down what all three passages hold in common.*

Psalm 126:5–6 says those who sow in tears shall reap in joy, and that the one who goes out weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves. Galatians 6:9 says let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. John 12:24 says unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it produces much grain. All three assume a gap between the sowing and the reaping, all three assume that the sowing costs something, and all three insist that the harvest is certain but not immediate. That is the ordinary shape of faithfulness.

2. *Psalm 127:3–5 calls children a heritage from the Lord. List everything the psalm says about them, and note carefully who is said to be the giver.*

Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward, children of one’s youth are like arrows in the hand of a warrior, and happy is the man who has his quiver full of them, for they shall not be ashamed but shall speak with their enemies in the gate. The giver is the Lord, stated twice in verse 3. That matters in both directions: children are a gift rather than an achievement, and a family without children has not been denied a reward it earned. The psalm is celebrating God’s generosity, not grading households.

3. *Psalm 129 remembers long affliction with the image of plowers plowing on a back. Where does the psalmist turn at verse 4, and what does he ask concerning the wicked in verses 5 through 8?*

At verse 4 he turns to God: "The Lord is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked." The deliverance is credited to God, not to Israel's endurance. In verses 5 through 8 he asks that those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back, that they be like grass on the housetops which withers before it grows, too little for a reaper's hand, and that no passerby pronounce the customary blessing on them. It is a prayer for their plans to come to nothing. Read it as an appeal to God's justice, addressed to God rather than acted on personally (Romans 12:19).

4. *Psalm 130:3-4 asks who could stand if God kept a record of iniquities, and answers that there is forgiveness with Him, "that You may be feared." Explain why forgiveness produces reverence rather than carelessness, and compare Romans 6:1-2.*

If God kept a record with the intent to prosecute, no one could stand; the psalmist includes himself. Forgiveness is therefore not God overlooking sin casually but God choosing to redeem. The result is fear, meaning reverent awe, because a person who has been forgiven at that cost cannot treat the Forgiver lightly. Romans 6:1-2 answers the opposite instinct directly: shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not. How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Grace received produces reverence; grace presumed upon produces the very question Paul refuses.

5. *Psalm 131 says the writer calmed and quieted his own soul, which is something he did on purpose. Name what agitates you most, and name one practice this week that would actually quiet you before God.*

Answers will vary. Press for a practice rather than a resolution, and for something that can be done in a normal week: a set time of prayer, a written list handed to God, a Sabbath from the phone, an honest conversation that ends a low-grade conflict. Some will name an agitation they cannot fix, and that is exactly the point of the psalm; the weaned child is not one who got what he wanted but one who learned to rest against the person who holds him.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 127 and 128 describe how life usually goes under God's order, not a formula for prosperity. Faithful people have lost businesses and buried children. Teach these as the wisdom literature teaches, as general truth about God's design.
- Children are called a blessing, and childlessness is not a punishment. Be careful here; in most classes someone is carrying that grief.
- Psalm 129:5-8 asks God to frustrate the enemies of His people. Handle it as an appeal to divine justice and contrast it with Romans 12:17-21 and Matthew 5:44.
- Psalm 130's hope of redemption from all iniquities is answered in Christ (Ephesians 1:7). Point forward where it is natural, without reading New Testament specifics back into the psalmist's understanding.

Come and Drink

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The invitation in 7:37–38 lands on the last and greatest day of Tabernacles, and the setting makes it electric. Each morning of the feast a priest had carried water from the pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher and poured it out at the altar while the crowd recited Isaiah 12:3, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” Into that scene, in that week, Jesus stands and cries out: if anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. John then adds the interpretation in verse 39: He was speaking of the Spirit, not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The reaction breaks in every direction. Some say He is the Prophet, some the Christ, some object that the Christ cannot come from Galilee. The officers sent to arrest Him return without Him and offer the best excuse in the Gospels: no man ever spoke like this Man. The Pharisees sneer that none of the rulers has believed, and Nicodemus, who had come by night in chapter 3, asks whether their own law condemns a man before hearing him. They answer him with contempt.

Then chapter 8 gives two scenes. First, a woman taken in adultery, dragged in as bait for a trap, and a question designed so that either answer would ruin Him. He stoops, writes on the ground, and says whoever is without sin among you, let him throw a stone first. They leave from the oldest to the youngest. Then, in the treasury, He declares Himself the light of the world, and the argument turns to witness, origin, and destination, ending with the sober warning of 8:24 and the promise of 8:28, that when they have lifted up the Son of Man they will know who He is.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The water-pouring ceremony at Tabernacles, drawn from Siloam and poured at the altar each day of the feast, is well attested and is the immediate background to the invitation of 7:37.
- Tabernacles also involved the nightly lighting of great lamps in the Court of the Women, which makes “I am the light of the world,” spoken in the treasury (8:20), pointed and timely.
- Nicodemus appears three times in this Gospel: at night in chapter 3, here defending due process, and finally at the burial of Jesus in 19:39. His development is worth tracing.
- The section from 7:53 through 8:11 is absent from the earliest and best manuscripts of John and is placed differently in others. Be honest about this with your class while noting that nothing in the account contradicts Scripture and that no doctrine rests on it alone.
- The Law required both parties in adultery to be brought (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22), and the witnesses were to cast the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:7). The man is conspicuously missing, which exposes the accusers’ real purpose.
- “I am He” in 8:24 and 8:28 renders the same Greek words used in the Greek Old Testament for the divine name, and John uses them deliberately throughout the Gospel.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *On the last day of the feast Jesus stands and cries out an invitation (7:37–39), and John adds an explanatory note in verse 39. Read both together. What was He promising, when did it arrive, and who was it for?*

He was promising the Holy Spirit, and John says so plainly in verse 39. The rivers of living water flow out of the believer, which means the promise is not merely relief for the thirsty person but overflow toward others. The timing is stated too: the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified, that is, not yet crucified, risen,

and ascended. Acts 2:33 closes the loop; Peter says that being exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Who is it for? Acts 2:38–39 answers: repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. The indwelling gift given to every Christian (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19) is not the same as the miraculous gifts that confirmed the word and ceased when revelation was complete (Mark 16:20; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10). Make that distinction clearly and without heat; several people in your class have been taught to expect something the text does not promise.

Question 2. *In 8:2–11 a woman is dragged in and her accusers drift away one at a time, beginning with the oldest. Work through what Jesus says and does not say to her, and talk about how verse 11 manages to hold mercy and truth in a single sentence.*

Notice first what Jesus does not do. He does not deny the sin, dispute the law, or minimize what she did. He also does not accept the terms of the trap. His sentence, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,” is aimed exactly at the witnesses, who under Deuteronomy 17:7 were to cast the first stones. They leave from the oldest to the youngest, which is a detail worth pausing over: the ones who had lived longest had the least trouble finding their own sins.

Verse 11 is a model sentence for the Christian life: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” Mercy first, then a command. Remove either half and you get something that is not the gospel: condemnation without mercy crushes, and mercy without the command flatters. Ask your class which half they personally find harder to say to someone, and which half they find harder to hear. Then ask how a congregation practices both toward a member who has fallen (Galatians 6:1–2; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8).

Question 3. *Three times in this passage Jesus says “I am” (8:12, 8:24, 8:28). Read each in its setting and talk about what He is claiming. Why does 8:24 make believing a matter of life and death rather than preference?*

In 8:12 He says, “I am the light of the world,” spoken in the temple treasury during the feast when the great lamps burned in that very court. In 8:24 He says, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” In 8:28 He says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He.” The last one is a prediction of the cross and of the conviction that followed it; some in that crowd were pierced to the heart in Acts 2.

Verse 24 is life and death because of what the claim is. If Jesus is who He says, then rejecting Him is not a preference about religion; it is a refusal of the only one who can take sin away. Note that He says they will die “in your sins,” plural, and He says it twice. Then note what believing means in this Gospel, because verse 30 says many believed, and by verse 31 Jesus is telling those very believers that if they abide in His word they are truly His disciples. Belief that stops short of abiding is not yet the belief of 8:24.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *John 7:39 says the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Read Acts 2:32–33 and Acts 2:38–39, and describe exactly when and how that promise was kept and who may receive it.*

The promise was kept on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:32–33 says God raised up Jesus, that all the apostles were witnesses, and that having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out what the crowd could see and hear. Acts 2:38–39 then extends it: repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is to you, to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. The condition is obedience to the gospel, and the promise reaches every generation.

2. *The officers returned without Jesus and said, “No man ever spoke like this Man” (7:46). Trace the reactions in 7:40–52, including Nicodemus, and note who in the scene is afraid of whom.*

Some in the crowd said He was the Prophet, others the Christ, others objected that the Christ comes from Bethlehem and David’s line rather than from Galilee, which is ironic since He was born in Bethlehem of David’s line. The officers returned amazed and said no man ever spoke like this Man. The Pharisees answered that the officers

had been deceived, that no ruler or Pharisee had believed, and that the crowd was accursed for not knowing the law. Nicodemus asked whether their law judged a man before hearing him, and they mocked him. Notice the fear moving in every direction: the crowd is afraid of the leaders (7:13), the leaders are afraid of the crowd (7:32), the officers are afraid to touch Him, and Nicodemus is afraid to say more than one careful sentence.

3. *Read 8:12–20 and list the objections the Pharisees raise against Jesus, along with His answer to each one.*

First they object that He bears witness of Himself, so His witness is not true (8:13). He answers that His witness is true because He knows where He came from and where He is going, while they do not, and that He is not alone in it: the Father who sent Him bears witness with Him, satisfying the law's requirement of two witnesses (8:14–18). Then they ask where His Father is (8:19), and He answers that they know neither Him nor His Father, and that if they had known Him they would have known the Father also. John adds that no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.

4. *8:29 says Jesus always did the things that pleased the Father. Compare Hebrews 4:15 and 1 Peter 2:22, and write out what those passages claim about the whole course of His life.*

Hebrews 4:15 says we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. First Peter 2:22 says He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth. Together with John 8:29 these passages claim a life without a single failure, tested fully and never once yielding. That is what qualifies Him to be the sacrifice (Hebrews 9:14) and what makes His call to follow Him something more than advice.

5. *The invitation of 7:37 is open to anyone who thirsts. Name the thirst you have been trying to satisfy some other way, and name one thing you will stop doing this week in order to come to Him and drink.*

Answers will vary, and the second half of the question is where the work is. Thirst is not the problem; everyone is thirsty, and Jesus assumes it. The problem is the cistern we keep going back to (Jeremiah 2:13). Listen for something specific and current: the scrolling, the shopping, the second drink, the constant noise, the need to be needed. Then listen for a named thing to stop, because coming to Him usually requires leaving something else.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Be honest about the manuscript question at 7:53–8:11. Tell the class the earliest copies of John do not contain it, that it appears in different places in other manuscripts, and that it is consistent with everything else we know of Christ. Teach it, and do not rest a doctrine on it alone.
- Do not let 8:11 be used to suggest sin does not matter. “Go and sin no more” is half the sentence, and Jesus said it.
- The promise of the Spirit in 7:38–39 was fulfilled at Pentecost. The gift given to every Christian who obeys the gospel (Acts 2:38) is not the same as the miraculous gifts that confirmed the word and have ceased. Teach this plainly and without hostility.
- 8:24 makes believing that Jesus is who He claimed essential to salvation. Keep John's own definition of believing in view: 8:31 shows that real faith continues in His word, and 3:36 sets disobedience as the opposite of belief.

Scoffers and the Day of the Lord

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 is a hard chapter, and Peter means it to be. There were false prophets among the people, he says, and there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them. Notice the word “secretly.” These men do not announce themselves. They are inside, they are persuasive, many follow their destructive ways, and the way of truth is blasphemed because of them. Then Peter reaches for history: angels who sinned, the world of Noah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the middle of it, Noah preserved and Lot delivered.

The description that follows is unsparing: presumptuous, self-willed, speaking evil of things they do not understand, carousing in the daytime, eyes full of adultery, hearts trained in covetous practices, following the way of Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness. They are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest. They speak great swelling words of emptiness and promise liberty while they themselves are slaves of corruption. And then verses 20 through 22, one of the most sobering paragraphs in the New Testament, about people who escaped and were entangled again, for whom the latter end is worse than the beginning.

Chapter 3 answers the scoffers. Where is the promise of His coming, they ask, since everything continues as it was from the beginning of creation? Peter says they willfully forget two things: that God made the world by His word, and that He once destroyed it by water. The delay is not slowness; it is patience, because He is not willing that any should perish. Then the day itself: coming as a thief, the heavens passing away with a great noise, the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth and the works in it burned up. And Peter’s application is not a timetable but a question: what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Peter is writing shortly before his death (1:13–15) to warn churches about teachers already at work or about to arrive. Jude covers much of the same ground in similar language.
- “Denying the Lord who bought them” (2:1) says plainly that Christ purchased even those who later deny Him, which is fatal to any doctrine of a limited atonement.
- The three examples of chapter 2 (angels who sinned, the flood, Sodom) are treated as literal history, as they are elsewhere in Scripture (Genesis 6–8; Genesis 19; Jude 6–7; Luke 17:26–32).
- Balaam (Numbers 22–24; 31:16) is the pattern of a religious man who sells his influence, which is exactly the charge Peter brings.
- “One day is as a thousand years” (3:8) addresses God’s relationship to time and His patience. It is not a code for calculating dates, and no calculation of the Lord’s return is possible (Matthew 24:36).
- The “new heavens and a new earth” (3:13) is where righteousness dwells, the eternal home of the redeemed (Revelation 21:1–4), not a renovated political kingdom on this present earth.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Read 2:20–22 slowly as a class. Peter describes people who escaped the pollutions of the world through knowing Christ, became entangled again, and ended worse than they began. What does this passage settle, and how should it shape the way we treat a brother who is drifting right now?

Take the verses phrase by phrase. They had escaped the pollutions of the world, which means they had genuinely come out. They escaped through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so this is not a description of an outsider. They are again entangled and overcome, and the latter end is worse than the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to turn from the holy

commandment delivered to them. Then the two proverbs: the dog returning to his own vomit and the washed sow returning to the mire.

What it settles is that a person who has been saved can be lost. Peter is not describing someone who merely reformed his outward habits; he is describing someone who knew the Lord and turned back. Put it with Galatians 5:4, Hebrews 3:12–14, Hebrews 10:26–31, and 2 Peter 1:10, which the class studied last week. Then take the second half of the question seriously, because doctrine without love is useless here. If falling away is possible, then a drifting brother is an emergency and not a topic. Ask who has actually called someone recently. Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19–20 give the assignment: restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, and know that turning a sinner from the error of his way saves a soul from death.

Question 2. *Peter says the false teachers promise liberty while they themselves are slaves of corruption (2:19). Describe the kinds of freedom being offered to your family this year, and talk about how a person can tell a real freedom from a counterfeit.*

Verse 19 is Peter's sharpest sentence: while they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption, for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. The counterfeit always sells itself as freedom, and it always delivers a master. That is the oldest sales pitch there is; the serpent used it in a garden. And notice that the men selling it are themselves owned by what they are advertising.

Get concrete about the versions your class is actually offered: freedom from restraint in what we watch and how we spend, freedom from commitment in relationships, freedom to define ourselves however we choose, freedom from the obligations of a congregation. Then give them the test from the verse: what does it make you a servant of? Real freedom in the New Testament is never freedom from a master; it is a change of masters (Romans 6:16–18), and the marks of it are that you are more able to do right, not less, and that you can stop.

Question 3. *3:10–13 describes the heavens passing away with a great noise, the elements melting, and the earth and its works burned up. Peter's own response is the question in verse 11. Answer his question as a class, and make the answers concrete.*

Peter's question is the point of the chapter: "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" He does not give a chart. He gives an ethic. If everything visible is temporary, then the only sane investments are the ones that survive the fire, and the only sane posture is readiness. Verse 14 adds the specifics: be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Push the class past pious generalities. What would change on Monday? Naming a relationship to repair, a debt to pay, a purchase to cancel, a habit to end, a conversation about Christ to have with a neighbor while there is time. Tie in verse 9: the reason the day has not come yet is that God is giving people, including some people your class knows by name, more time to repent. Delay is mercy, and mercy has a purpose. Ask each person who in his life is the reason he ought to be grateful the Lord has waited.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *In 2:4–9 Peter gives three historical examples and draws two conclusions from them. List the examples, then write out both conclusions in verse 9.*

The examples are the angels who sinned and were cast down and reserved for judgment; the ancient world, which God did not spare but flooded, saving Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others; and Sodom and Gomorrah, turned to ashes as an example, with righteous Lot delivered, whose soul was tormented day after day by what he saw and heard. The two conclusions are stated together in verse 9: the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment. Both halves are meant to comfort a pressured church: God rescues, and God settles accounts.

2. *Trace the marks of the false teachers through chapter 2: how they teach, how they live, what they promise, and what actually motivates them.*

How they teach: secretly, bringing in destructive heresies, with deceptive and great swelling words of emptiness, exploiting people with false words. How they live: in the lusts of the flesh, presumptuous and self-willed, carousing in

the daytime, eyes full of adultery, unable to cease from sin, speaking evil of what they do not understand. What they promise: liberty. What motivates them: covetousness and the wages of unrighteousness, the way of Balaam. Peter's summary images are devastating: wells without water and clouds carried by a tempest. They arrive looking like relief and deliver nothing.

3. 3:3–7 says scoffers willfully forget two things. Identify both, and explain why forgetting them is what makes the scoffing possible.

They willfully forget that by the word of God the heavens existed of old and the earth was formed out of water and in the water, and that by those same means the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. In other words, they forget creation and the flood. Forgetting those two makes the scoffing possible because both are cases of God intervening decisively in a world that assumed nothing would ever change. If God has never acted, then the argument from uniformity works. Once creation and the flood are on the table, “all things continue as they were” is simply false, and the only question left is when.

4. 3:9 says the Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Compare 1 Timothy 2:3–4 and Ezekiel 18:23, and write out what these passages say about God's desire and about our responsibility.

Second Peter 3:9 says God is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. First Timothy 2:3–4 says God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Ezekiel 18:23 says God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but would rather he turn and live. Together they say God genuinely wants every person saved, which means no one is lost because God chose against him. They also say the door is repentance, which is something a person must do. God's desire is universal; the response is ours.

5. 3:18 says to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Name the place where your growth has flattened out, and name one practice you will begin this week to start moving again.

Answers will vary. Watch for the assumption that growth is automatic; Peter says grow, which makes it a command. Plateaus usually show up in one of four places: Bible reading that has become sporadic, prayer that has become a formula, service that has become someone else's job, or a besetting sin that has been quietly accepted. Ask for a practice with a time attached to it. The last verse of the letter is where Peter chose to stop, and it is a good place to leave a class.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- 2:20–22 is decisive against the doctrine of once saved, always saved. Teach it plainly, with 2:1 and 1:10, and teach it pastorally: the doctrine matters because drifting brothers matter.
- 2:1 says these false teachers denied the Lord who bought them, which means Christ died for people who are finally lost. That closes the door on limited atonement.
- 3:10–13 rules out an earthly millennium. The Lord's coming is sudden, unannounced, and universal, and it ends the present order rather than inaugurating a thousand-year reign on this earth. There is one coming, one resurrection (John 5:28–29), one judgment, and then eternity.
- 3:8 is about God's patience and His relationship to time, not a key for date-setting or for calculating prophetic periods. Matthew 24:36 settles the question of the date.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Ezekiel 31–35 · Psalm 132–135 · John 8:31–59 · 1 John 1:1–2:27

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