

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 97 OF 104

Redeeming Love

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Hosea 1-8
Wisdom Literature	Ecclesiastes 1-2
Gospels	John 13
General New Testament	Revelation 5-7

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to let your class see love that pays. Hosea pays silver and barley for a woman who left him. The Lamb pays His own blood for people out of every nation. Jesus pays in dignity, kneeling with a towel before men who had just argued about rank, including the one who had already taken money for Him. Against those three, Ecclesiastes shows a man who paid for everything else and came home empty. By the end of the week the class should be unable to hear the word love as mere sentiment.

Doctrinally, three things are at stake. First, Hosea's reversal promises (1:10-11; 3:5) are fulfilled in Christ and His church, and the apostles say so (Romans 9:25-26; 1 Peter 2:10), so no future political kingdom is waiting. Second, Ecclesiastes must be read by its own key, under the sun, and by its own conclusion (12:13-14); set that now and you will not be repairing it in week 101. Third, Revelation begins in earnest this week, and the method you establish here, first-century comfort and symbolic numbers, will govern the next seven weeks.

The formational thread is what love does when it is not returned. Gomer left, Israel forgot, Judas sold Him, Peter boasted and then denied, and not one of those undid the love aimed at them. That is the love Jesus makes the standard in John 13:34, and it is the badge He says the world will read. Put this question to your class before they leave: name one person who has given you every reason to quit on them, and say what loving them as Christ has loved you would actually require of you this week.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Hosea 1-8 first. It is the emotional and doctrinal weight of the week, and the marriage gives you the image everything else hangs on. Spend the first half on chapters 1 through 3, then let 4:6 and 6:6 carry the second half. Do not rush the ending of chapter 2.

Second session: Take up John 13 second. It puts Hosea's redeeming love in a room your class can picture, with a basin, a towel, and a traitor. Read 13:1-5 aloud twice, once for the events and once for everything Jesus knew before He knelt, and let the silence work.

The other two readings: Assign Ecclesiastes 1-2 and Revelation 5-7 with the extended questions. Take three minutes to teach the phrase under the sun before the class reads a word of Ecclesiastes, and three more to say that Revelation was written to comfort persecuted Christians and that its numbers are symbolic. Those six minutes will steady the next five weeks.

Love for an Unfaithful People

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Hosea preaches to the northern kingdom in its final decades, while the economy is good and the shrines are busy and the nation is roughly forty years from being carried off by Assyria. Prosperity has not made Israel grateful; it has made her confident. Hosea's charge is not that Israel has stopped being religious but that she has become an adulteress, taking Baal's gifts while wearing the Lord's name. The book is a covenant lawsuit written by a husband.

The marriage is the heart of it. Take chapters 1 and 3 as real history about a real woman, because that is how the text reads. Hosea marries Gomer, she leaves, and God sends him after her with fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley, the price of someone who had nothing left to sell. He does not lecture her. He buys her, takes her home, and tells her she will live with him. That is the sermon.

Chapters 4 through 8 spell out the indictment: no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land; priests who profit from the people's sin; a calf at Samaria; alliances with Assyria and Egypt; worship that God will not accept. Yet the tenderness keeps breaking through the anger. God says He will allure her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her, and that she will call Him My Husband again. Teach both voices, or you will not have taught Hosea.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Hosea son of Beeri prophesied to the northern kingdom (which he usually calls Ephraim or Samaria) during the reigns of Jeroboam II and the unstable kings after him, roughly 755 to 715 BC. Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 BC.
- He is a contemporary of Amos, who also preached to the north, and of Isaiah and Micah in the south. Your class will read Amos in two weeks; the two books make a matched pair.
- Israel's religion was a blend: the calf shrines Jeroboam I set up at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:28–33) mixed with Canaanite Baal worship, which promised grain, wine, and fertility.
- The genre is prophetic oracle, poetic and image-heavy, with abrupt shifts from courtroom language to a husband's grief. Hosea's own marriage is the controlling image of the whole book.
- In redemptive history, Hosea shows covenant love surviving covenant breaking. The apostles apply his reversal promises to the church made of Jews and Gentiles (Romans 9:25–26; 1 Peter 2:10).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hosea 1:2 records a command no man would volunteer for. Why did God have His prophet live this message instead of simply preaching it, and what does that show you about how God experiences unfaithfulness?*

God had prophets who only spoke. Hosea He asked to feel. For years this man woke up beside his own sermon, raised children whose names announced judgment, and then walked into a market and paid for his own wife. The command of 1:2 is not God being careless with a man's life. It is God letting one man stand where He has been standing with Israel since Sinai, and then sending him out to tell what it is like there.

Keep the class looking at God rather than at Gomer. We say easily that God is holy and just; Hosea says He is wounded. The prophet's marriage exists so that a nation that had reduced covenant to ritual would understand that they were not breaking a rule, they were breaking a heart. Ask the class where we have made our own unfaithfulness sound like a policy violation instead of a betrayal.

Question 2. Read Hosea 4:1–10 and then read 4:6 as a whole sentence rather than as a slogan. Whose failure produced that ignorance, and where does the same failure quietly show up in a congregation today?

Read the whole verse aloud: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.” The ignorance is not innocent. It is chosen, and the priests are named in the same breath (4:4–9) because they had stopped teaching and had learned to live off the people’s sin. The lack was not access to truth but appetite for it.

Bring it home without scolding. A congregation is one untaught generation away from the same ruin, and the failure rarely announces itself; it looks like busy buildings and thin Bible classes. Ask who in the room is responsible for teaching someone else: parents at the supper table, teachers with a quarterly they have not opened, elders who have not asked anyone a hard question in a year. Then ask what each will do about it before next Sunday.

Question 3. In Hosea 6:4 God compares Israel’s loyalty to a morning cloud that burns off before nine o’clock. Where does that kind of short-lived devotion show up in your own week, and what would actually steady it?

Hosea 6:1–3 sounds wonderful. “Come, and let us return to the Lord,” with talk of healing and of God coming like the rain. Then God answers in 6:4: “O Ephraim, what shall I do with you?” Their loyalty is a morning cloud, early dew that is gone by mid-morning. The trouble was not that Israel never repented. The trouble was that Israel repented the way we often do, warmly, sincerely, and briefly, and then went back to business by Tuesday.

The steadying answer is not more emotion but more structure under the emotion. Devotion lasts when it is carried by habit: the assembly on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Supper that refuses to let us forget the price, daily reading, and Christians close enough to ask direct questions. Ask the class to name the one practice they have let slide, and to name the day and hour they will restart it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. List the three children of Hosea 1:3–9 and what each name announces. Then read 1:10–11 and 2:23 and note what God does with those same three names.

Jezreel names the valley where Jehu’s bloodshed would be answered, Lo-Ruhamah means No Mercy, and Lo-Ammi means Not My People. In 1:10–11 and 2:23 God turns each one inside out: those called Not My People will be called sons of the living God, He will have mercy on No Mercy, and Jezreel (which itself means God sows) becomes a word about planting rather than slaughter. God keeps the names and changes the verdict.

2. Read Hosea 3:1–5 and write down exactly what Hosea pays and what he asks of her afterward. Compare the price with Exodus 21:32. What is God saying about His own dealings with Israel?

Hosea pays fifteen shekels of silver plus a homer and a half of barley. Exodus 21:32 sets thirty shekels as the compensation for a slave, so Gomer had come to be worth less than that. He then tells her she will stay with him many days and not belong to another, and he binds himself to her in the same sentence. God is saying that He redeems at cost, that redemption includes a claim on the one redeemed, and that He intends a real restored relationship, not merely a rescue.

3. Romans 9:25–26 and 1 Peter 2:10 both quote Hosea. To whom do the apostles apply “not My people” and “My people,” and what does that settle about who receives the promise?

Paul applies the words to Gentiles called into the people of God (Romans 9:25–26), and Peter applies them to the church, which “had not obtained mercy but now has obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:10). The promises land on the church of Christ, made up of Jew and Gentile together, not on a future political nation. Hosea 3:5 points the same direction: Israel will seek “David their king,” fulfilled in the reign of Christ begun at His resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:29–36).

4. Trace where Israel runs for help in Hosea 5:13, 7:11, and 8:9. Name the modern equivalents of running to Assyria, and be specific about the ones you have used.

Ephraim goes to Assyria and King Jareb for healing (5:13), flutters to Egypt and then to Assyria like a silly dove (7:11), and hires lovers among the nations (8:9). The modern equivalents are whatever we run to for the security only God gives: the second job that eats the family, the credit that hides the trouble a while longer, political power, a doctor's promise treated as a god, a new relationship begun before the old sin is repented of. Look for honest specifics.

5. Hosea 6:6 says God wants mercy and the knowledge of Him more than offerings. Name one person this week to whom you will show mercy that costs you time, money, or pride, and then go do it.

Answers will vary. Do not accept a category; ask for a name. Listen for mercy that actually costs something, a debt forgiven, a visit made, an apology offered first, a grudge released in a family where releasing it will be taken as weakness. Hosea 6:6 sets mercy and the knowledge of God above religious performance, and Jesus quotes it twice against religious men who had the performance down cold (Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Hosea and Gomer: the command was real and so was the marriage. Do not soften it into a vision or an allegory, and do not let the class linger over her sin with curiosity. Keep the point where the text keeps it, on God's grief over a people who wear His name. Say plainly that this was a prophetic sign act for Hosea and is not a pattern for a Christian choosing a spouse (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 7:39).
- Hosea 4:6 is one of the most quoted and least read verses in the book. Read the whole verse. It condemns a people who rejected knowledge and priests who forgot the law. It is not a slogan about education in general, and it does not teach that information by itself saves anyone.
- Hosea 6:6 uses a Hebrew comparison, not a cancellation. God Himself had commanded the sacrifices; He is saying He will not accept them from hard hearts. Do not let anyone stretch it into an argument that the manner of worship does not matter, since the same God specified the manner. The verse condemns worship without mercy, not worship according to God's instruction.
- Hosea 1:10–11 and 3:5 are fulfilled in Christ and His church, not in a future earthly kingdom for national Israel. Say it once, clearly, with Romans 9:25–26 and Acts 2:29–36 open, and move on.

Chasing the Wind

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Ecclesiastes is the hardest book in the wisdom section to teach, and the difficulty is not vocabulary but method. The Preacher is conducting an honest investigation of life as it can be measured from ground level, and he says so with a phrase he repeats nearly thirty times: “under the sun.” Take that phrase as your key. He is asking what life adds up to if you stand inside it with only your eyes, your reason, and a lifetime, and he answers with brutal honesty.

Chapter 1 sets the problem. Nothing new happens, nothing stays, nobody is remembered. Chapter 2 records the experiment. Solomon had the money, the authority, and the wisdom to try every avenue a human being can try, and he tried them methodically: pleasure, alcohol, architecture, agriculture, art, wealth, and music. The refrain after each is the same. It was vapor. He even discovers that wisdom is better than folly the way light is better than darkness, and then notices that the wise man and the fool end in the same grave.

But do not leave the class in the pit, because the Preacher does not. Twice in chapter 2 the fog lifts: good in your labor, bread on your table, and the ability to enjoy them are from the hand of God (2:24–26). That is the first appearance of a theme that will surface in every remaining reading from this book. The emptiness is what life looks like without God at the center. The bread and the work become gifts the moment He is.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The writer calls himself Qoheleth, the Preacher or Assembler, son of David, king in Jerusalem (1:1, 12), which points to Solomon, and the experiment of chapter 2 fits no one else in Israel’s history.
- Genre matters: this is wisdom literature working by observation and argument, not by command or prophecy. It is closer to a courtroom summation than to a sermon.
- “Under the sun” (about twenty-nine times) marks the vantage point: life measured without appeal to revelation. Everything the Preacher says is truly recorded; not every sentence in the book is the whole of what God has revealed on the subject.
- The book must be read from its conclusion backward (12:13–14). Fear God and keep His commandments, for God will bring every work into judgment. That verdict governs everything before it.
- Your class will read Ecclesiastes over the next five weeks. Ten minutes spent on the interpretive key now will save you an argument later, especially when you reach chapters 3 and 9.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The phrase “under the sun” runs through these two chapters like a drumbeat. Find several of them, then talk about what the Preacher is deliberately leaving out of the picture and why that changes how we read every verse in this book.*

Have someone read 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 20, 22 aloud in a row so the class hears the drumbeat. The Preacher is not denying that God exists; he mentions Him often. He is bracketing revelation on purpose in order to test what life is worth on its own terms. That is why his conclusions sound bleak. He is reporting an accurate reading of the instruments available from ground level.

This one move protects your class for the next month. When they reach 3:19–21 and later 9:5–6 and hear statements that seem to contradict the rest of Scripture, they will already know that the Preacher is describing what observation can see, not delivering the final word on the dead. Say now that the full answer comes in Christ, who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

Question 2. *Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 is the most expensive experiment ever run, and it failed. Which of Solomon’s substitutes for God does our own time believe in most, and why is the emptiness so hard to see until afterward?*

Solomon ran the experiment with unlimited funding and an unusual amount of self-awareness: “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them” (2:10). He is not a bitter man who never got what he wanted. He is a man who got all of it. That is what makes the verdict of 2:11 so heavy. Every avenue our culture recommends had already been walked to the end by a man with better resources than any of us, and he came back and told us what is there.

Ask the class to name today’s versions: the house, the title, the portfolio, the body, the following, the retirement. The emptiness hides because each one delivers something real for a while, and because we always have another rung above us to blame for the dissatisfaction. Press toward honesty rather than cynicism. The point is not that houses and work are bad; the point is that they were never built to carry the weight of a soul.

Question 3. *In 2:24–26 the Preacher says there is nothing better than to eat, drink, and find good in your labor, and that this comes from God’s hand. How is that different from “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” and what would it change about your Monday?*

The difference is the hand the bread comes from. “Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (compare Isaiah 22:13 and 1 Corinthians 15:32) is despair dressed up as a party; it grabs at pleasure because nothing means anything. Ecclesiastes 2:24–26 is the opposite: the food, the work, and the very capacity to enjoy them are gifts from God, received with open hands rather than seized. One is a man drinking to forget; the other is a man giving thanks.

Bring it into Monday. The Christian does not need an extraordinary life to have a meaningful one. He needs to receive an ordinary one from God: the job, the sandwich at noon, the drive home, the people at his table. Ask what would change in the class member’s attitude toward his work this week if he genuinely believed it was a gift rather than a sentence.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Ecclesiastes 1:1–11 and list the four pictures of sameness the Preacher uses (generations, sun, wind, rivers). What is he seeing accurately, and what has he not yet said about God?*

Generations come and go while the earth stays, the sun rises and hurries back to rise again, the wind circles around to its circuits, and the rivers run to a sea that never fills. He is seeing accurately: nature is relentless, human life is short, and the world does not pause for any of us. What he has not yet said is that the God who set those cycles in motion also set eternity in the human heart (3:11) and will bring every work into judgment (12:14).

2. *The Hebrew word behind “vanity” is hebel, meaning vapor or breath. Read James 4:14 and then read Ecclesiastes 1:2 again. How does the picture of a breath change the tone of the verse?*

Vanity in older English suggested emptiness or futility, which is part of it, but hebel is the puff of breath you can see on a cold morning and then cannot find. James 4:14 says your life is a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away. The word carries less contempt and more grief: life is not worthless, it is fleeting, and you cannot hold it in your hand. That reading keeps the book from sounding like a sneer.

3. *Trace everything Solomon built, planted, bought, and collected in 2:4–10. Write his verdict from 2:11 beside your list, and note what he says he did not withhold from himself.*

He built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens and orchards with every kind of fruit tree, dug pools to water them, acquired male and female servants and a household of servants born to him, gathered herds and flocks greater than anyone before him in Jerusalem, collected silver and gold and the treasure of kings, and hired male and female singers. He withheld nothing his eyes desired. Then 2:11: he looked on all of it and found it vapor and grasping for the wind, with no profit under the sun.

4. *Compare Ecclesiastes 1:16–18 with 1 Kings 3:12 and 1 Kings 11:1–8. What appears to have happened between the gift of wisdom and the writing of this book, and what should that teach a gifted person?*

First Kings 3:12 records God giving Solomon a wise and understanding heart beyond anyone before or after him. First Kings 11:1–8 records that his many wives turned his heart after other gods when he was old. Ecclesiastes 1:16–18 is

the voice of a man who increased in wisdom and found that greater wisdom brought greater grief. The lesson for a gifted person is sobering: a gift from God does not protect you from drifting away from God, and intelligence is no substitute for obedience.

5. Name the one thing you are currently working hardest to get. Ask yourself honestly whether you expect it to satisfy you, then decide on one specific thing you will do this week to hold it loosely.

Answers will vary. Listen for candor. Many will name money or a promotion; some will name a relationship, a house, or a child's success. The healthy response is not to abandon the goal but to loosen the grip: give some of it away, refuse an hour of overtime in favor of the family, say out loud to God that the thing is His. Watch for anyone whose honest answer reveals something that has quietly taken first place.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Set the interpretive key this week, publicly and slowly. "Under the sun" means life measured by observation alone. The Preacher's reasoning is accurately recorded by inspiration, but individual statements inside his argument are not always the full revelation on the subject. Teach the book from its own conclusion (12:13–14) backward.
- Warn the class now about the coming verses. In two weeks they will read 3:19–21, where man and beast appear to share one end, and later 9:5–6, where the dead are said to know nothing. Both are under the sun observations. Scripture elsewhere is plain that the dead are conscious (Luke 16:19–31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23). Saying this in advance is far easier than correcting it afterward.
- Ecclesiastes 2:24–26 is not hedonism. The eating and drinking come from the hand of God and are set against the striving of the man who lives for accumulation. Do not let the verse be used to excuse indulgence, and do not let anyone dismiss it as worldly either.
- Do not leave the class believing the book is pessimistic or that Solomon is merely cynical. He is stripping away every false floor so the reader will stand on the only one that holds.

The Towel and the Basin

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

John devotes five chapters to one evening. Everything in the Gospel to this point has been public: signs, crowds, arguments in the temple courts. Now the door closes, and the Lord turns His attention entirely to the eleven men who will carry His word to the world. Chapter 13 opens this section, and the first sentence sets the tone for all of it: having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. What follows is what that love looked like with a basin in it.

The foot washing lands with full force only if the class understands the roads. Feet in sandals on dirt streets shared with animals were filthy, and washing them was the work of the lowest servant in the house. There was a basin in that room and no servant, and twelve men who had recently been arguing about which of them was greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things into His hands, used that authority to kneel. Authority that kneels is the center of this chapter.

Then the room darkens. Jesus is troubled in spirit, names a betrayer, hands Judas the morsel (an act of honor at a meal, not of accusation), and Judas goes out. John adds four words with the weight of a funeral: “And it was night.” Only after the traitor leaves does Jesus give the new commandment, and only after that does He tell Peter that the man most certain he will never fall will deny Him three times before morning.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John writes late in the first century, after the other three Gospels, selecting material they omitted and stating his purpose plainly in 20:30–31: that you may believe and have life.
- Chapters 13 through 17 are the upper room discourse, spoken on Thursday night of Passover week, to the apostles alone. Remember who is in the room; several of the promises in these chapters are given specifically to these men.
- John does not record the institution of the Lord’s Supper; he records the foot washing instead, along with the betrayal and the new commandment.
- Foot washing was ordinary household hospitality performed by a servant (Genesis 18:4; Luke 7:44). Its shock value here is entirely about who is doing it and for whom.
- Judas has already gone to the chief priests (Matthew 26:14–16). Jesus knows it and washes his feet anyway, which is the hardest verse in the chapter to preach and the one most worth preaching.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *John 13:1–5 stacks up everything Jesus knew before He picked up the towel, including who was about to betray Him. Why does John tell us all of that first, and what does the order of the sentences do to the meaning of the act?*

John piles up the knowledge before he reports the action: the hour had come, He loved His own to the end, the devil had already put betrayal in Judas’ heart, the Father had given all things into His hands, He had come from God and was going to God. Only then, “rose from supper and laid aside His garments.” The clauses are not decoration. They tell you that the foot washing is not the act of a humble man who did not know any better; it is the act of the Son of God who knew exactly who He was.

That order kills the most common misuse of this text, which is to treat humility as the virtue of people with nothing to lose. Real humility is secure. Jesus could stoop because His identity was not up for a vote. Ask the class where their own refusal to do the low job is really a fear of losing standing, and what it would take to be settled enough in Christ to not care.

Question 2. *Peter refuses, then swings to the opposite extreme in verses 6–10. Talk about what is really going on in him, and where you have seen both of those reactions in yourself when God moves to serve you.*

Peter's first reaction is not humility; it is control. "You shall never wash my feet" sounds reverent, but it is Peter deciding what Jesus may and may not do for him. When Jesus answers that refusing leaves Peter with no part in Him, Peter swings the other direction: then wash my hands and my head too. Both responses come from the same root, a man managing his own relationship with the Lord instead of receiving it.

This is more familiar than we admit. Some of us cannot let the church bring a meal, cannot confess a sin out loud, cannot let anyone see the need, because being served feels like losing. Others overcorrect into showy extremes. Ask the class, gently, who in the room has a hard time being on the receiving end, and what that costs the people who love them.

Question 3. *Love for neighbor was already in the Law of Moses, yet Jesus calls this a new commandment in 13:34–35. What is new about it, and what would have to be true of this congregation for an outsider to identify us by it this month?*

What is new is the standard. Leviticus 19:18 said to love your neighbor as yourself, which uses your own self-interest as the measure. Jesus says "as I have loved you," and He says it in a room where He has just washed the feet of the man who sold Him and is hours from the cross. The measure is no longer my regard for myself; it is His regard for me. That is a new commandment in the only sense that matters.

Verse 35 makes it the badge: by this all will know you are My disciples. Not by the sign out front, not by the correctness of our arguments, though truth matters greatly. Push the class to specifics: who in this congregation has been sick, out of work, newly widowed, or simply overlooked, and what would have to happen this month for a visitor to see that love rather than hear about it?

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every action of Jesus in 13:4–5, one verb at a time. What does the deliberateness of that list suggest about whether this was an impulse or a decision?*

He rose from supper, laid aside His garments, took a towel, girded Himself, poured water into the basin, began to wash the disciples' feet, and wiped them with the towel He was wearing. Seven deliberate actions. Nothing here is impulsive. He chose it the way you choose to get up early, and John slows the sentence down so the reader will watch each step.

2. *Read 13:10–11, where Jesus distinguishes the one who has been bathed from the one who needs his feet washed. Read 1 John 1:7–9 alongside it and describe the ongoing cleansing a Christian still needs.*

Jesus says the one who is bathed needs only to wash his feet and is completely clean, though not all of them were clean, because He knew His betrayer. The picture is of a man who has already been washed and then picks up the dust of the road on the way home. First John 1:7–9 says the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing those who walk in the light, and that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive. The Christian is not rebaptized daily; he is kept clean by walking in the light, confessing, and repenting (Acts 8:22).

3. *Trace Judas through the chapter, from verse 2 to verse 30. Mark every point at which he was still being offered a way back, and note what that says about God's foreknowledge and a man's choice.*

The devil had already put it into his heart (13:2); Jesus washed his feet along with the rest; Jesus said one of them would betray Him without naming him to the room; Jesus handed him the morsel, the gesture a host used for an honored guest; and only then did Satan enter him and Jesus tell him to do quickly what he was doing. Every step gave Judas room to turn. God knew what Judas would do, and knowing is not causing. Compare Acts 1:16–25, where Peter says Judas "by transgression fell," language of a man's own choice.

4. *Compare John 13:3–5 and 13:16 with Philippians 2:5–8. Lay the two passages side by side and write down the pattern they share, in order.*

Philippians 2 says Jesus, being in the form of God, did not cling to equality with God, emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, and humbled Himself to death on a cross. John 13 says Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things

into His hands, laid aside His garments, took a towel, served, and then took His garments and sat down again. Both move the same direction: secure identity, voluntary descent, servant's work, and finally exaltation. John 13:16 then applies it to us: a servant is not greater than his master.

5. Name the one person whose feet you would least like to wash, meaning the one you would least like to serve in a way nobody will notice. Decide what that service is and do it before next Sunday.

Answers will vary, and the discomfort is the point. Listen for a real name and a real act: the relative who has been cold, the member who is difficult, the coworker who took credit. Guard against public announcements; the best answers to this question are the ones nobody ever hears about. Follow up next week by asking, without naming names, how many actually did it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Foot washing: what the Lord binds here is the humility it pictures, not a ceremony to be added to the worship of the church. The New Testament mentions it once more, in 1 Timothy 5:10, listed among ordinary works of hospitality and help rather than as an act of assembly worship. Teach that plainly, and be gracious toward sincere people who have been taught to practice it as a rite.
- Judas: do not let the chapter be used to argue that God predestined a man to be lost. Jesus foreknew the betrayal and gave Judas every opportunity to the last moment. Foreknowledge is not compulsion (Acts 1:16–25; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).
- John 13:10 is an illustration, not a formal statement about baptism. Do not build a doctrine of ongoing sinlessness or of repeated baptisms on it. Handle sin after baptism with Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:7–9.
- Peter's boast and fall (13:36–38) show that a genuine disciple can fail badly. Use it both ways: as a warning against self-confidence (1 Corinthians 10:12) and as evidence that repentance and restoration are real (John 21:15–17).

Worthy Is the Lamb

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapters 4 and 5 are one scene, and your class read chapter 4 last week. God is on the throne, and now a scroll appears in His right hand, sealed with seven seals, containing the working out of His purpose in history. The question is not who is strong enough to take it but who is worthy to open it, and the silence that follows is total. John weeps because if nobody opens the scroll, then history has no key, suffering has no meaning, and the martyrs died for nothing.

Then comes the hinge of the entire book. John is told to look at a Lion and turns to see a Lamb standing as though slain. Both images are true at once, and the second interprets the first: the Lion of Judah conquers by being slaughtered. Every song that follows says so, from the four living creatures to the myriads of angels to every creature in heaven and earth. The worship of chapter 5 is the theological center of Revelation, and it is worth reading aloud in class rather than summarizing.

The seals follow, and they are grim: a conqueror, war that takes peace from the earth, scales and scarcity, and Death with Hades following. The fifth seal shows martyrs under the altar asking the question every persecuted saint asks, and being told to rest a little longer. The sixth shows the sky splitting and the powerful hiding in caves. Then chapter 7 pauses the terror to show that before any wind blows, God marks His own, and that the numberless multitude in white is standing before the throne already.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John writes from exile on Patmos to seven real congregations in Asia Minor, most likely in the mid-nineties under Roman pressure, where refusing to honor Caesar could cost a Christian his business or his life.
- The book announces itself as things which must shortly take place (1:1; 22:6) and calls itself a revelation, an unveiling, not a puzzle. It was written to be understood by people who were suffering when it arrived.
- The genre is apocalyptic, built on Old Testament imagery. John alludes to Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, and Exodus constantly without quoting them directly.
- Numbers carry meaning: seven is completeness, twelve is the people of God, four is the earth, a thousand is fullness. Multiplied numbers intensify rather than count.
- The altar under which the martyrs wait (6:9) recalls the blood poured at the base of the altar in the Law (Leviticus 4:7). Their lives were an offering.
- This begins seven weeks of Revelation in your class. Establish the method now: read it as comfort to persecuted first-century Christians, assuring them that the Lamb wins.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *John breaks down and weeps in 5:4 because no one can open the scroll. Why is that worth crying over, and what does the answer of 5:5–6 say about the way God actually wins?*

Put yourself in John's place. He has just seen the throne of God, and now the scroll that holds God's purpose lies unopened because no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth is worthy. John does not weep because he is curious. He weeps because a sealed scroll means history is a runaway wagon and the churches he loves are being crushed for nothing. The tears are the honest response of a man who has seen what happens when God's purpose seems stalled.

The answer transforms the picture. He hears Lion and sees Lamb, and the Lamb still carries the wound. God's victory does not come by out-muscling Rome; it comes through a slaughtered sacrifice who is now standing. That shapes how a church under pressure lives: we overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our

testimony (12:11), not by seizing the levers of power. Ask the class where we still expect God to win the way Caesar wins.

Question 2. *The four horsemen bring conquest, war, scarcity, and death, and under the fifth seal the martyrs ask how long. How would this section have sounded to a Christian in Smyrna who had already buried friends, and what does it say to a believer under pressure now?*

The horsemen would not have felt like predictions to the seven churches; they would have felt like the news. Conquest, war, grain prices that put bread out of reach, and death following behind were the ordinary furniture of the Roman world. Revelation does not deny any of it. It says the scroll is in the Lamb's hand while all of it happens. The fifth seal then gives the martyrs a voice, and God does not scold them for asking how long. He gives them white robes and tells them to rest.

For a believer under pressure today, the comfort is the same in three parts: God knows the number, God has not forgotten the blood, and the waiting is measured, not endless. Be careful not to trivialize this by comparing a hard week at work to martyrdom. Ask instead who in the class is quietly enduring something long, and let the passage do for them what it did for Smyrna.

Question 3. *Revelation 7 gives two pictures of one people, 144,000 sealed and a crowd nobody could number. How do the two fit together, and what does the sealing actually promise a Christian and what does it not promise?*

The two pictures are one people seen from two angles. John hears a number, 144,000, twelve times twelve times a thousand, sealed out of the tribes of Israel; then he looks and sees a multitude no one could number, from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. The same thing happened in chapter 5 when he heard Lion and saw Lamb. The heard number tells you God has counted His people exactly and lost none. The seen crowd tells you how vast that complete number is.

Be clear about what the seal promises. It is God's mark of ownership and protection (compare 2 Timothy 2:19; Ephesians 1:13), and it does not promise a Christian that he will avoid suffering; chapter 7 says these very people came out of great tribulation. It promises that nothing which happens to him can take him out of God's hand against his will. Ask the class what difference that makes to fear.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every title and description given to Christ in 5:5–6 and 5:9–12. Note what the Lion contributes to the picture and what the Lamb contributes.*

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the One who has prevailed, a Lamb as though it had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which John explains as the seven Spirits of God sent into all the earth. In the songs He is worthy, He was slain, He redeemed people to God by His blood, He made them kings and priests, and He receives power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing. The Lion supplies royal authority and the fulfillment of promise (Genesis 49:9–10; Isaiah 11:1); the Lamb supplies the means, a sacrificial death.

2. *Read the new song of 5:9–10, then compare Exodus 19:5–6 and 1 Peter 2:9. Write down what the Lamb has made His people and where those people come from.*

The song says He was slain and redeemed us to God by His blood out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and made us kings and priests to our God. Exodus 19:5–6 made that promise to Israel at Sinai, and 1 Peter 2:9 applies the same language to the church: a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. The Lamb has made a priesthood out of people from everywhere, which is exactly what the Gentile Christians in Asia needed to hear.

3. *Work out the arithmetic behind 144,000 (twelve times twelve times a thousand), then read 7:9 immediately afterward. Why is a symbolic number a comfort here rather than a limit?*

Twelve times twelve is the people of God under the old covenant and the new, and a thousand is fullness, so 144,000 is the complete people of God with nobody missing. It is a comfort rather than a limit precisely because 7:9 follows: the moment John looks, the counted number turns out to be a crowd beyond counting. If the number were a literal

quota, the passage would be terrifying arithmetic. As a symbol of completeness it means God knows His own by name and will not misplace one of them.

4. *In 6:9–11 the souls of the martyrs are alive, aware, and speaking. Compare Luke 16:22–25, 2 Corinthians 5:8, and Philippians 1:23, and state what Scripture teaches about the dead in Christ.*

They are conscious, they speak, they are aware of injustice on earth, and they are given white robes and told to rest. Luke 16:22–25 shows both the rich man and Lazarus aware, speaking, and separated after death. Second Corinthians 5:8 says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and Philippians 1:23 says departing to be with Christ is far better. Scripture consistently teaches conscious existence between death and the resurrection. Keep this answer; you will need it when the class reaches Ecclesiastes 9:5.

5. *Revelation 7:14 describes people who came out of great tribulation with robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. Name the cost your faith is asking of you right now, and write down one specific way you will not flinch from it this week.*

Answers will vary, and most of the costs named will be small compared to Smyrna: an awkward conversation with a coworker, a friendship that cooled when you took a stand, a relative who mocks the church, a business practice you will not use. Honor those honestly rather than inflating them. Look for a written, specific commitment, and remind the class that the robes in 7:14 are white because of the Lamb's blood, not because of the wearer's courage.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Set the ground rules for the next seven weeks in the first five minutes: Revelation was written to real congregations under real pressure about things which must shortly take place. Refuse date setting and refuse to match its images to current headlines. The book is comfort, not code.
- The 144,000 is a symbolic number for the complete people of God, not a literal quota and not the membership roll of any modern group. Say so plainly, kindly, and once.
- The seals are not a calendar of world history. They portray what God permits to run its course in a rebellious world while the Lamb holds the scroll. Resist any attempt to assign them to particular wars or rulers.
- Do not allow a millennial scheme to be built on chapters 5 through 7. Christ already reigns and has already made His people kings and priests (5:9–10; 1:5–6; Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:33–36). The victory here is present tense.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Hosea 9–14; Joel 1–3 • Ecclesiastes 3–4 • John 14 • Revelation 8–9

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