

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 98 OF 104

Return to Me

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Hosea 9-14; Joel 1-3
Wisdom Literature	Ecclesiastes 3-4
Gospels	John 14
General New Testament	Revelation 8-9

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to help the class feel the difference between being sorry and returning. Hosea ends with a God who tells His people the very words to say. Joel asks for torn hearts instead of torn clothing. John records seven trumpets sounding over a world that will not turn. And in the middle of it Jesus, on the night He is betrayed, comforts frightened men by telling them the road home is a Person. Every one of these readings has a door being held open by God Himself.

Three doctrinal matters are in front of you. First and most important, Joel 2:28-32 was fulfilled at Pentecost, and Peter says so in Acts 2:16-21; this is not a promise of present-day miraculous gifts or new revelation. Second, and closely related, the Helper promises of John 14:16-17 and 14:26 were given to the apostles and produced the completed New Testament we hold. Third, Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 must be read as an under the sun observation, with 3:17 and 12:7 in the same hand.

The formational thread is the terrible human ability to hear a warning and change nothing. Israel heard Hosea for forty years. Judah watched the locusts eat everything and still had to be told to rend their hearts. The survivors in Revelation 9 lived through horrors and did not repent. Put this question to your class, and give them a minute of silence to answer it privately: name the one thing God has been asking you to turn from for more than a year, and say honestly what has kept you from it.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Hosea 9-14 with Joel 1-3 first. It carries the week's theme and the week's most important doctrinal question. Give the first half to Hosea 11 and 14, then move to Joel 2:12-13, and close by reading Acts 2:16-21 aloud beside Joel 2:28-32.

Second session: Take up John 14 second. After a session on returning to God, this chapter shows the road and the welcome at the end of it. Spend real time on verses 1 through 6 and on the Helper promises, and be careful to identify who is in the room.

The other two readings: Assign Ecclesiastes 3-4 and Revelation 8-9 with the extended questions. Before they read, say two things: that Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 describes what a graveside observer can see, and that the trumpets are warnings drawn from Exodus and Joel rather than a code for current events.

Rend Your Hearts and Return

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The last third of Hosea keeps the same two voices going at once. Chapter 9 announces that the harvest festivals will fall silent and the people will go into exile. Chapter 10 calls Israel an empty vine that grew more altars as it grew more prosperous. Then chapter 11 opens and the tone changes completely: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.” God speaks like a father remembering a toddler’s first steps, and then says, “How can I give you up, Ephraim?” Read that chapter slowly in class.

Chapter 14 is the altar call, and it is remarkably practical. God does not merely tell Israel to return; He tells them what to say, what to stop trusting (Assyria, horses, the work of their hands), and what He will do in response: heal their backsliding, love them freely, be like the dew to them. The book ends with a sentence aimed at the reader: the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous walk in them while transgressors stumble over them. Same road, two kinds of travelers.

Joel then takes a natural disaster and makes it a pulpit. Locusts have eaten the grain, the vine, and the fig, so there is nothing left even for the grain and drink offerings. Joel calls for a fast and a sacred assembly, then widens the lens: this swarm is a rehearsal for the day of the Lord. The heart of the book is 2:12–13, return to Me with all your heart, rend your heart and not your garments. What follows is restoration, the promise of the Spirit poured out, and judgment on the nations.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Hosea is still preaching to the northern kingdom in its last years before Assyria takes Samaria in 722 BC. Ephraim is his usual name for that kingdom.
- Joel son of Pethuel preaches to Judah and Jerusalem. He names no king, so his date is debated; nothing in the message depends on settling it.
- The locust plague of Joel 1 is a real agricultural catastrophe, described in four waves, and it becomes the prophet’s lens for something larger.
- “The day of the Lord” in the prophets means any decisive intervention of God in judgment or deliverance. It is not always the final judgment, and the context must decide.
- Peter quotes Joel 2:28–32 on the day of Pentecost and says, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). That apostolic statement, not our speculation, fixes the fulfillment.
- The valley of Jehoshaphat in Joel 3 means “the Lord judges.” It is a symbolic name for the place of God’s verdict on the nations, not a location on a map.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hosea 11 moves from courtroom to nursery, with God remembering how He taught Ephraim to walk. Read 11:1–9 aloud and talk about what those verses show you about God that a list of His attributes never could.*

Hosea 11 is God talking about His own memories. He taught Ephraim to walk and held him by the arms; He drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love; He was the one who stooped and fed him. Then comes verse 8, where the sentence breaks apart: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.” This is the God who is about to send them into exile, and He is grieving it before it happens.

A list of attributes tells the class that God is loving. Hosea 11 lets them watch it. Take the class to the difference between knowing a fact about a father and remembering his hands. Then ask the harder question: if God feels this way about people who abandoned Him, what does it mean that we sometimes speak about the fallen-away members of our own congregation with irritation rather than grief?

Question 2. *Joel 2:12–13 asks for torn hearts rather than torn clothes. What is the practical difference between the two, and how would a congregation honestly tell them apart in itself?*

Tearing the garment was the culturally proper display of repentance, and it was visible, quick, and cheap. A man could ruin a robe and change nothing. Joel demands the one thing nobody can see and nobody can fake: the heart torn open. Verse 13 then gives the reason it is safe to do that, and it is the oldest description of God in the Bible, quoted straight from Exodus 34:6: gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness.

How does a congregation tell the difference? By what changes on Tuesday. Torn garments produce moving assemblies and identical weeks. Torn hearts produce restitution, confession, a marriage worked on, an addiction confessed to someone who can help, a habit of giving that shows up in the checkbook. Ask the class for the last time their sorrow over sin cost them something besides an emotion.

Question 3. *In Acts 2:16–21 Peter stands up and says the outpouring promised in Joel 2:28–32 is happening in front of the crowd. Work through what Peter actually claims, and discuss what his claim settles about when Joel’s promise was fulfilled.*

Peter’s claim in Acts 2:16 is as plain as language gets: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” He then quotes the passage, including the last days, the sons and daughters prophesying, the wonders in heaven, and the promise that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. He is not saying Pentecost resembles Joel. He is saying Joel is being fulfilled in front of them, and he builds the rest of his sermon on it, ending at Acts 2:38 with what those who called on the Lord must do.

Draw the conclusion gently but without fog. The outpouring Joel promised began that morning. “All flesh” means without regard to age, gender, class, or nation, which is exactly what Acts goes on to show. The miraculous gifts served to confirm the word while it was being delivered (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4), and when the revelation was complete that confirming work was finished (1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Jude 3). We are not waiting on Joel 2. We are living downstream from it, holding the completed word it produced.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Hosea 14:1–3 and list exactly what Israel is told to bring when they return. Notice what is not on the list, and explain why its absence matters.*

They are told to take words with them, to ask God to take away iniquity and receive them graciously, to renounce Assyria, to stop riding on horses for security, and to quit calling the work of their own hands their gods. What is not on the list is a sacrifice, a payment, or a program of self-improvement. They bring nothing but words of repentance and an abandoned set of false securities, and God answers by healing their backsliding and loving them freely. Grace is not a New Testament invention.

2. *Hosea 11:1 is quoted in Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 15:55. Look up both and describe how each New Testament writer uses Hosea’s words.*

Matthew 2:15 applies “out of Egypt I called My son” to the child Jesus being brought back from Egypt. Hosea was speaking historically of the nation, and Matthew shows that the pattern of Israel’s story is completed in Christ, who succeeds where the nation failed. First Corinthians 15:55 takes Hosea’s taunt, “O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory?” and puts it in the mouth of the church at the resurrection. In both cases the New Testament writer is claiming that Hosea’s words reach their full meaning in Christ.

3. *Trace the four stages of ruin in Joel 1:4 and then the response Joel calls for in 1:13–14 and 2:15–17. Who is summoned to that assembly, and who is excused from it?*

Joel 1:4 names the chewing locust, the swarming locust, the crawling locust, and the consuming locust, wave after wave until nothing is left. The response is a national assembly: priests are to gird themselves and lament all night, elders and all the inhabitants are gathered, and 2:16 is emphatic that nobody is excused. Bring the children, bring the nursing infants, call the bridegroom out of his chamber and the bride out of her dressing room. When God calls a people back, no one is too young, too busy, or too newly married to come.

4. *Joel 2:32 says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Read Acts 2:21 with Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16, and explain what the Bible means by calling on His name.*

In Acts 2:21 Peter quotes Joel's promise, and the crowd asks in verse 37 what they should do. Peter does not tell them to say a prayer; he tells them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Ananias makes it explicit to Saul in Acts 22:16: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Calling on the name of the Lord is not a formula spoken; it is an appeal made in obedient submission to His authority (1 Peter 3:21).

5. *Hosea 10:12 tells Israel to break up their fallow ground. Name the hard, unplowed ground in your own life, the area you have quietly written off as hopeless, and name the first specific thing you will do to break it up this week.*

Answers will vary, and the image does the work. Fallow ground is not barren ground; it is good soil that has been left unworked so long that it has crusted over. Listen for the marriage that has gone quiet, the estranged child, the neglected Bible, the sin that everyone has stopped mentioning. Press for the first plow stroke rather than the whole field: one phone call, one appointment, one confession. Hosea adds the promise that God will rain righteousness on ground that is opened.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Joel 2:28–32 is the pressure point of the week. Peter settles its fulfillment at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21), and the last days he speaks of are the Christian age (Hebrews 1:1–2). Do not allow the passage to be used as a promise of present-day tongues, prophecy, or new revelation. The confirming signs accompanied the delivery of the word and ceased when the revelation was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Jude 3). Say it plainly, say it kindly, and do not let the hour become a debate.
- The wonders of Joel 2:30–31, blood, fire, smoke, a darkened sun and a bloodied moon, are the standard vocabulary the prophets use for God's judgment falling on a nation (Isaiah 13:9–10; Ezekiel 32:7–8). Do not build a calendar of end-time events from them.
- Joel 3 and Hosea 14 promise restoration, and both are fulfilled in Christ and His church, not in a future political kingdom centered in Palestine. The apostles read Hosea exactly this way (Romans 9:25–26).
- Hosea 11:1 as Matthew uses it is a matter of pattern and completion, not of Hosea predicting a flight into Egypt. Explain that briefly if it comes up, and do not let it become a lesson on prophecy mechanics.

Eternity in the Heart

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 3 begins with the poem everyone has heard and almost nobody reads in context. The fourteen pairs are not a comfort about timing; they are an argument. Life is full of opposites that arrive whether you approve of them or not, so the man who thinks he is in charge of his own seasons is mistaken. Then comes verse 11, and the fog thins for a moment: God has made everything beautiful in its time, and He has put eternity in their hearts, so that no one can find out the whole work of God from beginning to end.

That verse is the key to the entire book. We are creatures with a horizon set inside us. We cannot stop asking what it all means, and we cannot see far enough to answer. That is why the Preacher is restless, and it is why your class members lie awake. A cow does not wonder whether its life added up. We do, because God built us for something larger than seventy years, and nothing inside those seventy years will ever fill the space He made.

Chapter 4 turns from time to people, and it is bleak in a specific way: every misery in it is a misery of isolation. The oppressed have tears and no comforter. The hard worker is driven by competition with his neighbor. The man with no son and no brother works endlessly and never asks who he is doing it for. Then the Preacher lifts his head and says the truest practical thing in the book: two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Ecclesiastes continues its investigation of life measured from ground level, marked by the repeated phrase “under the sun.” Keep that key in front of the class every week.
- The poem of 3:1–8 is Hebrew merism, naming two extremes in order to include everything between them. It is a way of saying all of life, not a schedule.
- “Eternity” in 3:11 translates a word meaning the distant past and the far future; God has put a sense of the everlasting into creatures who live in time.
- Chapter 4 reflects a real ancient world of forced labor and powerless people. The Preacher does not excuse the oppression; he says plainly that he saw it and that the oppressors had power and the victims had no comforter.
- The threefold cord of 4:12 is a proverb about strength in numbers, not a wedding text about God being the third strand, though it makes a fine application as long as the class knows which is which.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God has set eternity in the human heart. How does that single line explain both the restlessness running through this book and the restlessness you feel on an ordinary Thursday?*

Eternity in the heart explains the itch. Every person in the room has had the experience of getting the thing he wanted and discovering that the satisfaction had a shelf life. Augustine said it plainly enough for anyone to remember, that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Ecclesiastes says it first: we are built with a capacity for forever and dropped into a world of seasons, and nothing in the seasons is large enough to fill the capacity.

Push it into ordinary time. The restlessness on a Thursday afternoon is not a defect and it is not necessarily discontent with your life; it is the part of you that was made for God reporting in. Ask the class what they normally do with that feeling. Most of us medicate it with a screen, a purchase, or a busier calendar. The Preacher would tell us to let it drive us to the One who set it there.

Question 2. Read 3:1–8 slowly. *The Preacher is not saying every season is pleasant; he is saying every season has its place under God. Which of these seasons are you actually in right now, and what would wisdom look like in it?*

Read the pairs aloud and let the class hear how much of life is not chosen: a time to be born, a time to die, a time to weep, a time to lose. The Preacher is not telling us to schedule these things. He is telling us that they come, that God has appointed seasons, and that wisdom is knowing which season you are in and acting accordingly. The man who keeps planting when it is time to pluck up, or keeps talking when it is time to keep silence, makes his own trouble.

Then get specific. Some in the room are in a season of building; some are in a season of losing, sitting with a diagnosis or an empty chair. Grief that is treated as a failure of faith becomes shame. Ask what it would look like to stop fighting the season they are in and to ask God what obedience looks like inside it. This is one of the most pastorally useful questions in the whole book.

Question 3. *Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 says man and beast appear to come to the same end. Read it together with 3:17 and 12:7, and discuss carefully what the Preacher can see from where he is standing and what he cannot.*

Handle this slowly and it will serve your class for the rest of Ecclesiastes. Verse 19 says that as one dies, so dies the other, that all have one breath, and that man has no advantage over the animal, for all is vapor. Verse 21 then asks a pointed question: who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth? That is an honest admission of the limits of observation. Standing at two graves, one for a man and one for an ox, your eyes report the same thing.

But the Preacher himself knows more than his eyes tell him. Two verses earlier he says God will judge the righteous and the wicked (3:17), and at the end of the book he says the dust returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7). Warn the class now that in three weeks they will read 9:5–6, which is often quoted to deny that the dead are conscious. Scripture answers plainly: Luke 16:19–31, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23, and the martyrs speaking under the altar in Revelation 6:9–11.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the fourteen pairs in 3:1–8. Which of them surprise you by being included among the things God has appointed a time for, and why?*

Born and die, plant and pluck up, kill and heal, break down and build up, weep and laugh, mourn and dance, cast away stones and gather stones, embrace and refrain, gain and lose, keep and throw away, tear and sew, keep silence and speak, love and hate, war and peace. Most classes are surprised by kill, hate, and war. The Preacher is describing what actually occupies human life under God's ordering of time, not issuing permission slips. Compare Romans 12:18, which tells the Christian to be at peace with all men as far as it depends on him.

2. *Compare Ecclesiastes 3:17 with 12:14 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. Even in the middle of his gloom, what has the Preacher already settled about judgment?*

He has already settled that judgment is coming. Ecclesiastes 3:17 says God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and every work. Ecclesiastes 12:14 closes the book with God bringing every work into judgment, including every secret thing. Second Corinthians 5:10 says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Preacher is gloomy about what life adds up to under the sun, but he never doubts that there is a court.

3. *Trace three miserable figures in chapter 4: the oppressed with no comforter (4:1), the man driven by envy (4:4), and the man with no second (4:8). Write down what all three are missing.*

All three are missing a person. The oppressed have tears and no comforter, and the text repeats the phrase twice for emphasis. The envious worker is measuring himself against a neighbor rather than working alongside one. The man of 4:8 has neither son nor brother, works without end, and never stops to ask for whom he is depriving himself. Chapter 4 diagnoses loneliness as one of the great miseries under the sun, which is precisely why 4:9–12 follows.

4. Read 4:9–12 and list the four advantages of two over one. Then read Galatians 6:1–2 and Hebrews 10:24–25 and describe what the church adds to Solomon's observation.

Two have a better return for their labor, one can lift the other who falls, two lying together keep warm, and two can withstand an attacker that would overpower one. Galatians 6:1–2 adds that Christians restore the one overtaken in a fault and bear one another's burdens, which is lifting a fallen man in the spiritual sense. Hebrews 10:24–25 adds the assembly itself, the regular gathering where stirring up to love and good works actually happens. Solomon observed that people need each other; the New Testament builds that need into the life of a congregation.

5. Name the person you know who is currently the man alone of 4:8–10, with nobody to lift him up. Put a day and a time on your calendar this week when you will be the second person, and keep it.

Answers will vary, and the assignment is deliberately concrete. Watch for the class member who names someone nobody else has thought about: the widower who stopped coming on Wednesday nights, the single mother, the man who lost his job and is embarrassed, the college student two states away. Push past a plan to pray for them, which costs nothing anyone can see, to a calendar entry with a time on it. Follow up the next week.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 is the most misused passage in the reading. It is an under the sun observation about what the eye can see at a graveside, and the same book says the spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7) and that God will judge (3:17). Teach the method now, because 9:5–6 is coming in three weeks and is commonly used to deny conscious existence after death. Answer it with Luke 16:19–31, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23, and Revelation 6:9–11.
- The poem of 3:1–8 describes what fills human life; it does not authorize whatever it names. A time to kill and a time to hate are not permissions handed to individuals, and the New Testament governs the Christian's conduct (Romans 12:17–21).
- Eternity in the heart (3:11) is an awareness that we were made for more than time. It is not innate knowledge of the gospel, which comes only by hearing the word (Romans 10:17).
- The threefold cord of 4:12 is frequently used at weddings as though the third strand were God. The application is lovely and the context is companionship in general. Say which is which so nobody thinks the wedding use is what Solomon wrote.

The Way to the Father

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Context is everything here. Chapter 13 ended with a betrayal announced and a denial predicted, and the men in that room are frightened. Chapter 14 opens with Jesus comforting the people who are about to abandon Him. He tells them not to let their hearts be troubled, points them to the Father's house, and promises to come again and receive them to Himself. Notice that His comfort is not a mood. It is a set of facts about where He is going, why, and what He intends to do about them.

The chapter moves by interruption. Thomas says they do not know the way, and gets John 14:6 for an answer: I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. Philip asks to be shown the Father, and gets the staggering reply that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father. Judas, not Iscariot, asks why Jesus will show Himself to them and not to the world, and the answer turns on obedience: if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

Then come the Helper promises. Jesus tells these apostles that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in His name, that He will teach them all things and bring to their remembrance everything Jesus said to them. Look at the verbs: remembrance requires having been there. This promise is the reason there is a New Testament at all, and it is why we are not waiting on further revelation. The chapter ends with peace given, the ruler of this world dismissed, and a quiet, "Arise, let us go from here."

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is still Thursday night in the upper room, spoken to the eleven after Judas has gone out. Several promises in chapters 14 through 16 are given to these men in their role as apostles and eyewitnesses.
- "Mansions" in older translations renders a word for dwelling places or rooms. The picture is of room in the Father's house, that is, heaven, not of real estate in a future earthly kingdom.
- "Another Helper" (Paraclete) means another of the same kind: one called alongside to help, as Jesus had been alongside them.
- John 14:28, "My Father is greater than I," speaks of position and role during the Son's earthly mission, which John has already framed by declaring the Word to be God (John 1:1; compare 10:30; Philippians 2:6-8; Colossians 2:9).
- The chapter is the source of some of the most quoted verses in the Bible, which means your class will arrive with familiar phrases already loaded. Slow them down and read whole sentences.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus tells troubled men to believe rather than to calm down (14:1-3). What exactly does He give them to hold onto, and how is that different from the reassurance people usually offer each other?*

He does not tell them to relax; He gives them something to believe. Notice what He hands them: the reliability of the Father, His own trustworthiness, the fact that there is room in the Father's house, that He is going there on purpose to prepare a place, and that He is coming back to receive them to Himself. Every one of those is a fact about God rather than a feeling about themselves. Their hearts are to be steadied by what is true outside of them.

That is different from what we usually do for one another. We say it will be all right, which we do not know, or we say to cheer up, which nobody can do on command. Jesus grounds comfort in the character and the plans of God. Ask your class how they would rewrite the last encouraging thing they said to a hurting friend if they had to anchor it in something God has actually promised.

Question 2. *In 14:16–17 and 14:26 Jesus promises a Helper who will teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all He said to them. Look carefully at who is in that room. To whom is the promise made, and what did it produce that we hold in our hands today?*

Count the men in the room: eleven apostles. The Helper is promised here to those specific men, and the promise itself proves it. The Spirit will bring to their remembrance all things that Jesus said to them, which is a promise nobody else in history is capable of receiving, because nobody else was there to remember. The same is true in 16:13, where the Spirit will guide them into all truth and tell them things to come.

What that promise produced is the New Testament. What the apostles were given by direct revelation they wrote down, and Paul says a reader can understand his knowledge of the mystery by reading it (Ephesians 3:3–5). Peter says we have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and Jude says the faith was once for all delivered (Jude 3). Teach this warmly. The Holy Spirit does dwell in Christians (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9–11); what He does not do today is hand out new revelation alongside the completed word He gave.

Question 3. *Three times in this chapter Jesus ties loving Him to keeping His word (14:15, 21, 23). Where does our culture pull those two apart, and where do you find yourself doing it?*

Verse 15 is the hinge: if you love Me, keep My commandments. Verse 21 repeats it from the other direction: he who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. Verse 23 adds the promise that the Father and the Son will make Their home with such a person. Love and obedience are not two separate departments in Scripture; obedience is what love looks like when it has hands. John says the same thing in 1 John 5:3.

Our culture pulls them apart in both directions. It treats love as a feeling that excuses disobedience, and it treats obedience as a cold legalism with no affection in it. Both are wrong here. Press the class on the personal half of the question. Most of us have one commandment we treat as optional, usually about money, speech, forgiveness, or the way we spend a Sunday. Ask each person to name his to himself, silently, and then to name it to God.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every promise Jesus makes in 14:1–4 and write beside each one whether it concerns His work, His return, or their future with Him.*

He promises that there are many dwelling places in His Father's house, that He would have told them if it were otherwise, that He goes to prepare a place for them, that He will come again, that He will receive them to Himself, that where He is they may be also, and that they know where He is going and the way. The promises are about His work (going, preparing), His return (I will come again), and their future (that you may be where I am). Comfort here is entirely tied to His activity, not their performance.

2. *John 14:6 makes a claim no other religious teacher has ever made good on. Read it with Acts 4:12 and 1 Timothy 2:5, then state the claim in one sentence of your own words.*

Jesus says He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. Acts 4:12 says there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. First Timothy 2:5 says there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. Stated in one sentence: Jesus is not one road among several to God; He is the only road, and He is a Person rather than a philosophy.

3. *Read 14:12 about greater works, then read Acts 2:41 and Acts 4:4 alongside John 20:30–31. Explain what kind of greater the Lord has in mind.*

Greater in scope and result rather than in raw power. No apostle did anything more astonishing than raising Lazarus. But on one day in Acts 2 about three thousand were baptized, and in Acts 4:4 the number of the men came to about five thousand, because the apostles preached a finished gospel, a completed cross and an accomplished resurrection, which Jesus during His earthly ministry could not yet preach. John says his own book was written so that you may believe (20:30–31). The greater works are the gospel going out and people being saved.

4. Trace the three interruptions in 14:5, 14:8, and 14:22. What do Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Iscariot) reveal about how much the apostles still misunderstood on the last night?

Thomas admits they do not know where He is going or how to get there. Philip asks to be shown the Father, after three years of watching the Father's work done in front of him. Judas, not Iscariot, cannot imagine a Messiah who reveals Himself to disciples rather than to the world, which is the old political expectation still breathing. Their questions show that being close to Jesus is not the same as understanding Him, and that He was patient with slow men on the worst night of their lives.

5. John 14:27 offers a peace the world cannot give. Name the worry you carried into this week, then name the act of obedience you have been postponing because of it, and go do that act before Sunday.

Answers will vary. Listen for the connection the question is making: anxiety usually has an obedience attached to it that we are avoiding, a conversation, a confession, a check written, a doctor called, a sin admitted. The peace of 14:27 is not the absence of trouble; three verses later Jesus mentions the ruler of this world coming. It is the settled confidence of a person who knows where he stands with God and has stopped negotiating.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The promises of the Helper in 14:16–17 and 14:26 are given to the apostles in that room; the Spirit would bring to their remembrance what Jesus said to them. Those promises are the basis of the completed New Testament (John 16:13; Ephesians 3:3–5; 2 Peter 1:3; Jude 3), not a guarantee of ongoing revelation to every Christian. Affirm gladly that the Spirit dwells in Christians and works through the word He gave, and be gracious with those taught otherwise.
- John 14:13–14 is not a blank check. To ask in His name is to ask by His authority and in keeping with His will (1 John 5:14–15), which rules out the health and wealth use of these verses.
- John 14:28 does not deny the deity of Christ. It speaks of the Son's submitted role in His earthly mission (John 1:1; 10:30; Philippians 2:6–8).
- John 14:2 speaks of the Father's house, which is heaven. Do not let it be turned into a promise of an earthly kingdom or a millennial reign; Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).

Trumpets That Call for Repentance

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The half hour of silence in 8:1 is one of the most effective moments in the book. Heaven has been full of thunderous worship for four chapters, and suddenly nothing. Then the scene explains itself: an angel at the golden altar mingles incense with the prayers of all the saints, and those prayers go up before God. Remember who has been praying. In 6:10 the martyrs asked how long, and here their prayers are the incense. When the censer is filled with altar fire and hurled to the earth, the answer to their question has begun.

Then the trumpets. Trumpets in Israel sounded alarms and summoned assemblies, and these are alarms. Hail and fire strike the land, a burning mountain falls into the sea, a star named Wormwood poisons the rivers, and the lights of heaven are dimmed. Every one of them strikes a third. The restraint is deliberate. These are not the end; they are God allowing enough disaster to get attention, in the same way the plagues of Egypt escalated while Pharaoh still had opportunity to relent.

Chapters 9 and its two woes are grotesque on purpose. Locusts with scorpion tails and human faces come out of a pit and torment people for five months without killing them, and they are explicitly forbidden to touch those sealed by God. Then two hundred million cavalry cross the Euphrates, the direction from which invasion always came. Yet John ends the section with the saddest verse in the chapter: the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The trumpets do not simply follow the seals in time. Revelation circles the same ground repeatedly from different angles, each cycle showing God's judgment on a world that persecutes His people.
- John's imagery comes from the Old Testament, not from current events: the plagues of Exodus, the locust army of Joel, the wormwood of Jeremiah 9:15, and the Euphrates as the road invaders travel.
- A trumpet in Israel gave warning and called an assembly (Numbers 10:1–10; Joel 2:1). These blasts are warnings, which is why the judgments are partial.
- Abaddon and Apollyon (9:11) both mean Destroyer. The point is the character of what comes out of the pit, not the identification of a historical figure.
- The first readers were Christians in Asia Minor under Roman pressure. This section tells them that the disasters loose in their world are not out of God's control and that the people harming them are not beyond His reach.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Revelation 8:1 answers the seventh seal with half an hour of silence, and then 8:3–5 shows the prayers of the saints rising with incense and fire coming back down. What is that picture saying to a church that has been praying under pressure and hearing nothing?*

The silence is not an anticlimax; it is the hush before an answer. Ancient readers knew that silence in the presence of God signals that He is about to act (Habakkuk 2:20; Zephaniah 1:7). Then John shows us exactly what filled that silence: the prayers of the saints, carried up with incense from the golden altar. The praying church is not shouting into an empty sky. Her prayers are collected, kept, and presented in heaven itself.

For a congregation that has been praying about something for years, that image is worth the whole hour. God is not hard of hearing and He is not indifferent; He is the God who takes a censer full of His people's prayers, fills it with fire from the altar, and casts it to the earth. Ask the class what they have quit praying about because nothing seemed to happen, and whether this chapter changes how they will pray this week.

Question 2. *The trumpet judgments strike a third, never the whole. Why would God send partial judgments rather than final ones, and what do 9:20–21 report about the way people responded?*

A third is a measured amount. God is not emptying the quiver; He is knocking on a door. The pattern is as old as Exodus, where each plague gave Pharaoh another opportunity, and as old as Amos, where God says five times, “yet you have not returned to Me.” Partial judgment is mercy in a severe form, because a final judgment leaves nobody time to change. Every trumpet in this section is a summons to repent while there is still a world to repent in.

And 9:20–21 records the result. The survivors did not repent of the works of their hands, their idols, their murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, or thefts. That verse, not the horsemen, is the tragedy of the chapter. Ask the class about the human capacity to absorb a warning and change nothing: the diagnosis that did not change the habit, the near miss that did not change the driving, the crisis in a marriage that produced two weeks of effort.

Question 3. *Revelation 9:4 says the locusts could not harm anyone who had the seal of God on his forehead. How should a Christian read that promise honestly, given that believers in Asia were losing their businesses and their lives?*

Be honest about this or the class will not trust the book. The seal is not a hedge against suffering. The same letters that promise the seal also tell Smyrna that some of them will be thrown into prison and must be faithful unto death (2:10), and chapter 7 said the great multitude came out of great tribulation. What the seal marks is ownership. The plagues that fall on a rebellious world for its idolatry are not aimed at God’s people; the wrath described here is not for them.

So the promise is real but precise. A Christian can lose a business, a reputation, even his life, and still be untouched by the thing he ought to fear. Jesus said the same: do not fear those who kill the body (Matthew 10:28). Ask the class to name the worst thing that could realistically happen to them this year, and then to ask whether it is the thing Revelation says they are sealed against.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the first four trumpets and what each one strikes. Compare them with the plagues of Exodus 7 through 10, and explain what the echo is meant to tell a reader who knows his Old Testament.*

The first strikes the earth with hail and fire mixed with blood, burning a third of the trees and all the green grass; the second hurls a burning mountain into the sea, turning a third to blood and destroying a third of the ships; the third drops a star called Wormwood into the rivers and springs, making the waters bitter; the fourth darkens a third of the sun, moon, and stars. The Exodus plagues included hail and fire, water turned to blood, and darkness. The echo tells the reader that the God who broke the greatest empire of the ancient world to free His people is still doing exactly that kind of work.

2. *Compare the locusts of Joel 1:4 and 2:4–9 with the locusts of Revelation 9:1–11. Note what John borrows from Joel and what he deliberately changes.*

John borrows the swarm itself, the sound like chariots, the military formation, and the terror of an army no one can stop. What he changes is the nature of the swarm: these come out of the bottomless pit, they have a king, they do not eat vegetation at all, and they are restrained from killing. Joel described locusts that were a picture of judgment; John describes demonic torment loosed on a world that has chosen its own gods, with God still setting the limits, including the five months and the protection of the sealed.

3. *Read 9:20–21 and write down the sins the survivors refused to leave. Which of those same practices still function as idols in a society that owns no carved images?*

Worshiping demons and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood which cannot see or hear or walk, and then murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, and thefts. Sorcery translates a word connected with drugs and potions. A society without carved images still has idols: money, career, pleasure, the body, entertainment, political power, anything we serve, trust, and sacrifice for. The list also shows how idolatry and the treatment of people belong together; false worship and murder appear in the same sentence.

4. Trace the call to repent through Revelation 2:5, 2:16, 2:21–22, 3:3, 3:19, and 9:20–21. What is the book asking of the people reading it?

The word runs through the letters to the seven churches and then out into the visions. Ephesus is told to repent and do the first works; Pergamos to repent or He will come quickly; Thyatira is given time to repent and refuses; Sardis is told to remember and repent; Laodicea is told that God rebukes and chastens those He loves, so be zealous and repent. Then 9:20–21 shows a world refusing the same call. Revelation is not primarily asking its readers to decode the future. It is asking them to repent and to hold on.

5. Warnings are mercy. Name one warning God has already given you, through Scripture, through a friend who loves you, or through consequences you brought on yourself, that you have not yet acted on. Act on it this week.

Answers will vary, and the honest ones will be uncomfortable. Listen for warnings already delivered: a passage that keeps surfacing, an elder or a spouse who said something true, a friend who asked about the drinking, a financial consequence that has not yet changed the spending. Point out that the whole logic of Revelation 8 and 9 is that God warns before He finishes, and that the tragedy of 9:20–21 belongs to people who had every warning and used none of them.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Refuse the identification of these images with modern events and technology. Wormwood is not a nuclear accident and the locusts are not aircraft. John's readers had the Old Testament, not a newspaper, and every image here comes from Exodus, Joel, and Jeremiah.
- The point of the section is 9:20–21, not the arithmetic of a third or the count of the cavalry. Keep the class from spending the hour on the numbers and away from the summons to repent.
- The trumpets are not a chronological calendar and do not simply follow the seals in sequence. Revelation returns to the same ground from new angles. Say this once so nobody tries to build a timeline.
- The seal of God (9:4) marks ownership and protection from God's judgment, not immunity from suffering or death. Revelation 2:10 and 7:14 keep that straight, and so should we.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Amos 1–9 · Ecclesiastes 5–6 · John 15:1–16:4 · Revelation 10–11

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