

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 99 OF 104

Fruit That Remains

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Amos 1-9
Wisdom Literature	Ecclesiastes 5-6
Gospels	John 15:1-16:4
General New Testament	Revelation 10-11

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to help the class tell the difference between activity and fruit. Israel had a full religious calendar and rigged scales. The man in Ecclesiastes 5 had a growing portfolio and could not sleep. Jesus stood in front of eleven men on the last night of His life and told them that the only thing a branch has to do is stay attached, and that He had chosen them to bear fruit that would still be there long after them. By Sunday evening the class should be asking not how busy they are but what they are connected to.

Doctrinally, two matters deserve your care. First, Amos 5:21-24 has to be taught with both hands: God refuses worship from people who oppress the poor, and God is also the one who specifies how He is to be worshiped. Neither half may be dropped. Second, John 15:2 and 15:6 settle the question of whether a Christian can be lost, and Amos 9:11-15 with Acts 15:13-18 and Revelation 11:15 with Colossians 1:13 settle the question of the kingdom. Christ reigns now, and His people must abide.

The formational thread is endurance in the place God put you. Amos kept preaching after he was ordered out of town. The witnesses in Revelation testified in sackcloth until their work was finished. The branch bears fruit by staying put through a pruning it did not ask for. Put this question to your class: name the assignment God has given you that you are tired of, the class, the marriage, the aging parent, the difficult coworker, and say what staying attached to Christ in that assignment will require of you this month.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Amos 1-9 first. The book is long but the structure carries it: the oracles, then 4:6-12, then 5:21-24, then the plumb line, then 9:11-15 with Acts 15 open. Guard the second half of the hour for what God says about worship and justice together.

Second session: Take up John 15:1-16:4 second. It gives the week its positive answer after Amos has done the demolition. Spend most of the hour on verses 1 through 11, define abiding in concrete terms, and handle 15:2 and 15:6 plainly rather than letting anyone sidestep them.

The other two readings: Assign Ecclesiastes 5-6 and Revelation 10-11 with the extended questions. Point out that Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 is the book's counsel on worship and pairs directly with Amos, and say in advance that the numbers in Revelation 11 are symbolic of a limited time under God's control.

Let Justice Roll Down

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Amos preaches during the most prosperous stretch the northern kingdom ever saw. Jeroboam the second had expanded the borders, trade was good, the shrines at Bethel and Gilgal were busy, and everyone assumed the good times were proof of God's approval. Into that confidence walks a man who raised sheep and tended sycamore figs in Judah, with no seminary behind him and no invitation in front of him. His message is that prosperity built on the backs of the poor is not blessing; it is evidence for the prosecution.

The opening is a masterpiece of preaching. He circles Israel with judgments on Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, each with the same refrain about three transgressions and four. Every oracle would have drawn applause in Bethel. Then he turns to Judah, which would have drawn even louder applause, and then, in 2:6, he lands on Israel and does not lift off again for seven chapters. The lesson on how to get a hearing before you tell the truth is worth noting.

The heart of the book is 5:21–24, where God says He hates their feasts, refuses their offerings, and will not listen to their songs, then demands that justice roll down like water and righteousness like a never-failing stream. The visions of chapter 7 press the same point with a plumb line held against a crooked wall. And the last word, 9:11–15, is restoration: the fallen shelter of David raised up, which James tells us is fulfilled in Gentiles coming into the church.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Amos of Tekoa was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit from Judah, sent north to Israel around 760 BC, two years before an earthquake people still remembered generations later (1:1; Zechariah 14:5).
- He is a contemporary of Hosea, whom your class read the past two weeks. Hosea preaches God's wounded love; Amos preaches God's justice. They are two halves of one message to the same nation.
- Bethel was a royal sanctuary with a golden calf, established by Jeroboam the first (1 Kings 12:28–33). The worship Amos attacks was enthusiastic, well attended, and unauthorized.
- The genre is prophetic oracle, arranged as a series of judgment speeches, five visions, and a closing promise, with poetry throughout.
- James quotes Amos 9:11–12 at the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:13–18) and applies it to Gentiles being brought into the people of God. That apostolic use governs how we read the promise.
- Israel fell to Assyria about forty years after Amos preached. The comfortable people in his audience lived to see it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Amos spends nearly two chapters announcing judgment on Israel's neighbors, and you can almost hear the crowd cheering, right up until 2:6. What is he doing with that structure, and when have you done the same thing while listening to preaching?*

Amos is working the crowd on purpose, and he is doing it honestly. The judgments on Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab are real judgments for real atrocities, but they are also a rhetorical net closing in. Each oracle moves closer to home geographically, and the audience is agreeing with every one. Then Judah, their old rival. Then, in 2:6, "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment." By the time he reaches them, they have already endorsed the principle.

Everyone in your class has listened to a sermon on behalf of somebody else. We nod through the lesson on gossip while thinking of a woman two rows up, and through the lesson on materialism while thinking of a neighbor's

boat. Nathan did the same thing to David with a story about a lamb. Ask the class to name, privately, the sin they most enjoy hearing preached against, and whether their enjoyment is a warning sign.

Question 2. *Read Amos 5:21–24 aloud. God says He hates their feast days and will not listen to their songs. Work carefully through what He is rejecting there and what He is not rejecting, remembering that He is the one who appointed those assemblies.*

Be precise here, because this passage gets misused in both directions. God is not saying the assemblies were a bad idea; He is the one who commanded the feasts, the offerings, and the songs. He is saying He will not receive worship from hands that crush the poor in the courtroom on Monday. Isaiah says the same in 1:11–17, and Samuel says obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). Worship divorced from righteousness is offensive to God, and no amount of volume covers it.

What the passage does not say is that the manner of worship is indifferent. The same God who refuses these offerings had specified exactly how they were to be brought, and the same God has told the church how it worships Him: on the first day of the week, around the Lord's table, in singing, in prayer, in giving, in teaching (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Ephesians 5:19). Amos condemns worshipers whose lives contradict their songs. He does not authorize anyone to redesign worship. Say both halves plainly, or the class will leave with only the half they prefer.

Question 3. *In 6:1–6 wealthy men lie on ivory beds, invent instruments, drink from bowls, and are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph. What would being grieved actually look like in our town this month, and what keeps us comfortable instead?*

The picture in 6:1–6 is of people who are not doing anything obviously criminal. They are lying on comfortable furniture, eating good meat, listening to music, and drinking wine from bowls rather than cups. The indictment is in the last line: they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Their own nation is coming apart and they cannot feel it, because comfort has a numbing effect that nothing else in the catalog of sins quite matches.

Bring it to your town. Grief that means something has legs: knowing the name of a family in your congregation that is behind on rent, knowing which children in your neighborhood go home to an empty house, actually visiting the nursing home where three members have not had a visitor in a month. Ask what specific comfort is dulling the class. For most of us it is not ivory beds; it is a screen, a schedule, and a set of routes through town that never pass anything hard.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the eight peoples addressed from 1:3 through 2:16 in the order Amos names them. Which one comes last, and what would that order have done to the first audience?*

Damascus (Syria), Gaza (Philistia), Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and finally Israel. The order tightens like a noose, moving from distant enemies to relatives to the brother nation and finally to the audience itself. The first seven would have been heard as confirmation that God was on Israel's side. The eighth is more than twice as long as any of the others, and it demolishes the assumption they had just been enjoying.

2. *Five times in Amos 4:6–11 God says, “yet you have not returned to Me.” List the five disasters, and explain what each one was intended to accomplish.*

Famine (clean teeth and lack of bread), drought with rain on one city and not another, blight and mildew with the locust eating the gardens, plague and the sword taking the young men and the horses, and an overthrow like Sodom and Gomorrah leaving them as a brand plucked from the burning. Each was meant to bring them back. God says so after every one. Hardship in Scripture is often mercy aimed at repentance (Hebrews 12:5–11), and the tragedy is a people who absorb five rounds of it and remain unchanged.

3. *Read Amos 7:10–17, where Amaziah orders the preacher out of Bethel. Note how Amos answers regarding his own credentials, and say what that settles about who authorizes a man to preach.*

Amaziah tells Amos to go back to Judah and earn his bread there, and never to prophesy at Bethel again because it is the king's sanctuary. Amos answers that he was no prophet nor a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a tender of

sycamore fruit, and that the Lord took him from following the flock and said, “Go, prophesy to My people Israel.” His authority is not his training, his pedigree, or the approval of the establishment. It is his commission. God still calls ordinary men to speak His word, and the word does not need the king’s permission.

4. *Amos 9:11–15 promises that the fallen tabernacle of David will be raised. Read how James uses that promise in Acts 15:13–18, and write down what an inspired apostle says it means.*

James applies it to Gentiles being brought into the people of God through the gospel. He quotes the rebuilding of David’s fallen tabernacle and the rest of mankind seeking the Lord, and concludes that God is now taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name, which is exactly what was happening in Antioch. The promise is fulfilled in Christ and His church, not in a future political restoration of a nation in the Middle East.

5. *Amos 8:4–6 describes men who waited impatiently for the holy day to end so they could get back to cheating their customers. Name one place where your work and your worship are not telling the same story, and change it this week.*

Answers will vary, and this one usually produces silence before honesty. Listen for the specific: a billing practice, a resume, an expense report, how a customer is spoken to when the sale is lost, the way an employee is treated when nobody from the church is watching. Amos 8:5 is devastating precisely because the men in it were religiously observant. The Sabbath was kept; the scales were rigged. Ask what one adjustment gets made this week, not eventually.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Amos 5:21–24 must be taught with both hands. It condemns worship offered by people who oppress the poor; it does not teach that the form of worship is a matter of taste. The same God prescribed those assemblies, and the New Testament likewise specifies how the church worships (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Do not let the verse be used either to excuse unauthorized worship or to excuse unrighteous worshipers.
- Amos 9:11–15 is fulfilled in Christ and His church, as James says in Acts 15:13–18. It is not a prediction of a future earthly kingdom for national Israel. Settle it with the apostle’s own words and move on.
- The language of justice in this book has been borrowed by every cause under the sun. Teach it as God requires it: honest scales, honest courts, care for the poor and the widow, and no partiality. Do not reduce the gospel to a social program, and do not dismiss the plain demands of the text because someone else has misused them.
- Amos 8:11–12 warns of a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. We live where Bibles are everywhere, so the famine we risk is self-imposed. Apply it to homes with unopened Bibles rather than to nations without them.

Never Quite Enough

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The first seven verses of chapter 5 are the most direct instruction on worship in the book, and they are worth an unhurried ten minutes. Walk prudently when you go to the house of God. Be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools. Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart utter anything hastily before God, because God is in heaven and you are on earth. Then a warning about vows: better not to vow than to vow and not pay. The chapter ends the paragraph with two words, fear God.

Then the Preacher turns to money, and he is merciless. The one who loves silver is never satisfied with silver. When goods increase, so do the people who consume them, and the owner gets only the pleasure of watching. The laboring man sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but abundance will not let the rich man sleep. A man comes naked from his mother's womb and goes back exactly as he came, carrying nothing in his hand from all his labor. Every line is an observation anyone can verify.

Chapter 6 presses the knife in further. There is an evil the Preacher has seen often: God gives a man riches, wealth, and honor so that he lacks nothing he desires, and then does not give him the power to eat of it. A man may have a hundred children and live a long life, and if his soul is not satisfied, the Preacher says a stillborn child has more rest than he does. That is deliberate shock. It is meant to force the question of where satisfaction actually comes from, and 5:19 has already answered: it is the gift of God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Keep the interpretive key in front of the class: the Preacher is examining life “under the sun,” from ground level, by observation.
- The house of God in 5:1 is the temple in Jerusalem, and the sacrifice of fools refers to offerings brought thoughtlessly by people who did not know they were doing wrong.
- Vows under the Law were voluntary but binding once made (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21–23), which is why breaking one was serious. Jesus addresses the abuse of vows in Matthew 5:33–37.
- Ancient wealth was land, livestock, silver, and stored grain, and it required a household of servants to maintain, which is the point of 5:11: more goods, more mouths.
- Chapters 5 and 6 sit at the center of the book and prepare for the practical proverbs of chapters 7 through 12.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ecclesiastes 5:1–2 tells you to guard your steps when you go to the house of God and to let your words be few, because God is in heaven and you are on earth. How would our assemblies and our prayers look different if we took those two verses seriously?*

Solomon's counsel is about posture. Guard your steps means come deliberately, aware of whom you are approaching. Be more ready to hear than to speak means worship is first a matter of receiving from God rather than performing for Him. Let your words be few is not a rule against long prayers; it is a rule against careless ones, the promises we make in a moment of feeling and forget by Thursday. The reason given is simple and enormous: God is in heaven and you are on earth.

Ask the class what would visibly change. Some will mention arriving on time or arriving awake. Some will mention what we do in the five minutes before the assembly begins. Others will mention prayer language that has become automatic. Press toward the internal change too: coming ready to hear means coming with the text read, the week confessed, and the mind willing to be corrected. Jesus warned against vain repetition for the same reason (Matthew 6:7).

Question 2. *Ecclesiastes 5:10 says whoever loves silver will never be satisfied with silver. Why does money keep its promises so badly, and how can a person honestly tell whether he has come to love it?*

Money makes a specific promise, which is that a certain number will finally make you feel secure. The promise fails because the number moves. The Preacher observes it with three pictures: the appetite that grows with feeding, the household that expands to consume whatever comes in, and the sleepless owner lying awake over what he now has to protect. Nothing here says money is evil. It says money cannot do the one thing we hire it to do.

How does a person tell whether he loves it? Ask what he thinks about when he cannot sleep, what he would refuse God if God asked for it, whether his giving changes when his income changes, and whether he can be generous without calculating. Jesus put it as a question of masters (Matthew 6:24), and Paul warned that the love of money has pierced some believers through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10). The test is not the size of the account; it is the grip.

Question 3. *In 6:1–2 a man has wealth, honor, and everything he could want, and God does not give him the power to enjoy any of it. Where does the Preacher say the ability to enjoy life comes from, and what does that do to our assumptions about getting ahead?*

The Preacher makes a distinction most of us never think to make: having and enjoying are two different gifts, and the second one comes from God. A man can accumulate everything and be handed nothing. He says in 5:19 that when God gives a man riches and also the power to eat of them and rejoice in his labor, that is the gift of God. Chapter 6 shows the same man without the second half, and calls it an evil and a severe affliction.

This reorders our ambitions. We spend a working life pursuing the having, on the assumption that the enjoying comes attached. It does not. Ask your class who they know who has more than they do and enjoys it less. Then ask the harder question: what would it change about the next ten years if they pursued contentment from God's hand with the same energy they currently spend pursuing the raise?

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Ecclesiastes 5:1–7 and list everything the Preacher says about the words we bring to God. Compare his counsel with Matthew 6:7 and Matthew 5:33–37.*

Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; do not be rash with your mouth; do not let your heart be hasty to utter anything before God; let your words be few; a dream comes through much activity and a fool's voice through many words; when you vow, pay it without delay; better not to vow than to vow and not pay; do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin or tell the messenger it was a mistake. Jesus forbids the vain repetition of those who think they are heard for many words (Matthew 6:7) and tells His disciples to let their yes be yes (Matthew 5:33–37). Both agree that God is not impressed by volume.

2. *Trace what happens to the lover of money through 5:10–17, writing each loss in order. What does the Preacher say the man carries away in 5:15?*

He is never satisfied; those who consume his goods increase with them; he gets only the sight of his wealth with his eyes; his abundance keeps him awake; his riches are kept to his own hurt; the riches perish through misfortune; and the son he saved them for has nothing in his hand. Verse 15 is the summary: as he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand. Paul says the same in 1 Timothy 6:7.

3. *Compare 5:18–20 with 2:24–26 from two weeks ago. State the Preacher's repeated answer to emptiness, and note carefully who he says is the source of it.*

The answer is the same both times: eat, drink, and enjoy the good of your labor, because this is from the hand of God. Ecclesiastes 5:19 says plainly that riches and the power to enjoy them are the gift of God, and 5:20 adds that such a man will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart. The Preacher is not recommending escape or indulgence. He is recommending that ordinary life be received as a gift rather than seized as a wage.

4. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10 and 6:17–19 beside Ecclesiastes 5. Where does Paul agree with Solomon, and what is Paul able to add that Solomon could not yet say?

Paul agrees that we brought nothing into the world and can carry nothing out, that godliness with contentment is great gain, and that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare. He agrees that riches are uncertain. What Paul can add is the part the Preacher could not yet see from under the sun: that God gives us richly all things to enjoy, and that generosity now stores up a good foundation for the time to come, laying hold on eternal life. Solomon can tell you money will not last. Paul can tell you what does.

5. Look honestly at your last month of spending. Name one expense that exists to feed the appetite described in 5:10, and redirect that exact amount this month to someone who genuinely needs it.

Answers will vary, and the exercise is uncomfortable on purpose. Look for honesty about the recurring subscriptions, the upgrade nobody needed, the eating out that has quietly doubled. The assignment is not asceticism; Ecclesiastes 5:19 will not let us call enjoyment sinful. The assignment is to prove to ourselves that the appetite can be interrupted, and the best proof is a specific amount going to a specific person or work this month.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- These chapters are not a condemnation of wealth. Ecclesiastes 5:19 says riches and the power to enjoy them are the gift of God. The target is the love of money and the illusion of security, not prosperity itself, and a class of working people needs to hear that distinction clearly.
- Vows in 5:4–6 belong to the Old Covenant system, which is not binding on Christians (Colossians 2:14–17). The enduring principle is that God expects our word to be good, which Jesus states in Matthew 5:33–37.
- Ecclesiastes 6:3–5 says a stillborn child is better off than an unsatisfied man. That is deliberate rhetorical shock in an argument, not a doctrine about infants. Handle it gently if anyone in the class has lost a child, and do not build anything on it.
- Remember the key. Ecclesiastes 6:12 asks who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun. That question is honest within the Preacher's method and is answered fully only in Christ, who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

The Vine and the Branches

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The vine was the national symbol of Israel, stamped on coins and carved over the temple gate, and the prophets used it against her repeatedly: a vineyard that produced wild grapes (Isaiah 5), an empty vine (Hosea 10:1). When Jesus says “I am the true vine,” He is claiming to be everything Israel was meant to be and failed to be, and He is telling eleven Jewish men that their connection to God now runs through Him rather than through their nation. That claim is the foundation of the whole passage.

The teaching is simple and the implications are enormous. The branch has one job, which is to stay attached. It does not manufacture fruit; it bears fruit, which is what happens naturally when sap flows. “Without Me you can do nothing” is not exaggeration. But two warnings sit inside the comfort: branches in Him that bear no fruit are taken away, and branches that do bear fruit get pruned, cut back by a Father who is after more fruit rather than less. Neither warning should be softened.

Then the passage turns outward. Abiding produces love, and love among disciples is the mark Jesus keeps returning to on this night. He calls these men friends, tells them He chose them and appointed them to go and bear lasting fruit, and then prepares them for what that will cost. The world hated Him first. Some who kill them will believe they are offering God a service, which Saul of Tarsus would prove within a few years. He tells them in advance so that when it comes they will not stumble.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Still the night of the betrayal. Chapter 14 ended with “Arise, let us go from here,” so these words were likely spoken on the walk toward Gethsemane, possibly within sight of vineyards or the golden vine on the temple.
- Israel as God’s vine or vineyard is a standing Old Testament image (Psalm 80:8–16; Isaiah 5:1–7; Jeremiah 2:21; Hosea 10:1), and it is nearly always used in a context of failure to produce.
- Vinedressers did two things in the season: they removed dead wood and they cut healthy canes back hard, because an unpruned vine puts its strength into wood rather than grapes.
- “Friend” in 15:15 is not a casual word. It describes one admitted to the master’s counsel, told what the master is doing, which is exactly what Jesus says He has done with them.
- Being put out of the synagogue (16:2) meant losing family, business, and community. John has already shown the threat at work in 9:22 and 12:42.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus says that every branch in Me which bears no fruit is taken away (15:2), and that a branch which does not abide is cast out, withers, and is burned (15:6). Talk honestly about what those verses teach concerning a Christian’s security, and about what they do not teach.*

Read the words as they stand. The branch in 15:2 is “in Me,” and it is taken away. The branch in 15:6 does not abide, and it is cast out, withers, is gathered, and is burned. Whatever else those verses do, they make it impossible to teach that a person once in Christ cannot be lost. The rest of the New Testament says the same thing without blinking: fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4), an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:12), the dog returning to its vomit (2 Peter 2:20–22).

Now say what the verses do not teach, because a class can walk out of this lesson frightened rather than steadied. They do not teach that a Christian is one bad day from being lost, and they do not describe a God looking for a reason to prune someone off. The whole passage is an invitation to remain, spoken by a Lord who says His joy is in them and their joy will be full. Security in the New Testament is real, and it is located in abiding rather than in a

past decision. Ask the class which error they are more prone to, false confidence or fear, and answer both from the text.

Question 2. *Abiding is the central command of this passage, and it is easier to admire than to define. In concrete terms, what does a person actually do on an ordinary Tuesday to abide in Christ?*

Push past the devotional fog. Jesus defines it Himself in the passage: His words abiding in us (15:7), keeping His commandments (15:10), and remaining in His love. That gives you three concrete answers for a Tuesday. First, Scripture in the mind, which means actually reading it rather than intending to. Second, obedience in the ordinary decisions of the day, since obedience is not a byproduct of abiding but part of it. Third, prayer, since 15:7 puts asking right in the middle of it.

Add the corporate half, which Americans tend to miss. The command that follows immediately is to love one another, and a branch is not a solitary object. Abiding shows up in being with God's people, bearing with them, forgiving them, and showing up when it is inconvenient. Ask each class member to name the one of these he has let go slack, and what time of day he will put it back.

Question 3. *Jesus moves straight from "love one another" to "the world will hate you" (15:17–19). Why do those two belong back to back, and where have you personally felt the second one?*

They belong together because both come from the same source. The love in verse 17 and the hatred in verse 18 are both responses to Jesus. A community that genuinely loves the way He loved becomes a standing rebuke to a world organized around self-interest, and the world does not stay neutral about that. Jesus says it plainly: if you were of the world, the world would love its own. The friction is not evidence of failure; it is evidence of difference.

Be careful how you apply this. Some Christians are disliked for rudeness rather than righteousness and then congratulate themselves on persecution. But many in your class have felt the real thing: a family that went cold when they were baptized, a promotion that quietly went elsewhere, a friendship that ended over a conviction they would not trade. Let them say it out loud. Jesus told these men in advance precisely so they would not conclude that something had gone wrong.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything the vinedresser does in 15:1–8 and everything the branch does. Notice what the branch is never asked to do, and say why that matters.*

The vinedresser takes away fruitless branches, prunes the fruitful ones, and is glorified by much fruit. The branch abides, lets His words abide in it, asks, keeps His commandments, remains in His love, and bears fruit. The branch is never asked to produce the fruit by its own effort or to attach itself by its own strength; it bears what the vine supplies. That matters because most of our spiritual exhaustion comes from trying to manufacture what only connection can produce (compare Galatians 5:22–23, where the fruit is the Spirit's).

2. *Compare John 15:6 with Hebrews 3:12–14, Hebrews 10:26–31, and 2 Peter 2:20–22. State in your own words what these passages agree on.*

They agree that a person genuinely joined to Christ can afterward be lost. John speaks of a branch that does not abide being burned. Hebrews 3 warns brethren about departing from the living God and says we are partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 10 warns of willful sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth. Peter says that those who escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and are again entangled are worse off than at the beginning. The warnings are addressed to believers, which is the whole point.

3. *Trace the word abide through 15:1–11. Count how many times it appears, and list the different things we are told to abide in.*

The word appears about ten or eleven times in those eleven verses, depending on the translation, which is itself the sermon. We are told to abide in Him, to let His words abide in us, to abide in His love, and He speaks of abiding in us. Notice also that abiding in His love is defined in 15:10 as keeping His commandments, just as He kept His Father's and abides in His love. Abiding is not a mood; it is a sustained relationship with obedience in it.

4. *Jesus calls the apostles friends instead of servants in 15:14–15. On what condition does He base that word, and how does what is said about Abraham in James 2:23 fit the same pattern?*

He bases it on obedience: “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Then He explains the difference between a servant and a friend, which is disclosure; a servant does not know what his master is doing, but He has made known to them everything He heard from the Father. James 2:23 says Abraham believed God, it was accounted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God, and James says that in the middle of an argument that faith is completed by works. In both cases friendship with God and obedience to God are not in tension.

5. *John 15:16 says He appointed them to bear fruit that should remain. Name one thing you are pouring your life into that will not remain and one that will, then move an hour from the first to the second this week.*

Answers will vary, and the contrast is the point. Most will name work, hobbies, house projects, or screens on one side, and family discipleship, teaching a class, hospitality, visiting the sick, or personal evangelism on the other. Do not let anyone conclude that ordinary work is worthless; Ecclesiastes will not allow that, and neither will Colossians 3:23. The question is proportion. Ask for one hour, named and scheduled, moved this week.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- John 15:2 and 15:6 state plainly that a branch in Christ can be taken away. Teach it without flinching, since the doctrine that a saved person cannot be lost cannot survive this passage (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 3:12–14; 2 Peter 2:20–22). Teach it also without terrorizing the class; the passage is an invitation to abide.
- John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you,” is about the appointment of these men as apostles to go and bear fruit. It is not unconditional individual election to salvation, which the same Gospel rules out by inviting whoever will (John 3:16; compare 1 Timothy 2:4; Revelation 22:17).
- John 15:7, “ask what you desire, and it shall be done,” is conditioned by the first half of the verse: abiding in Him with His words abiding in us. Do not let it be quoted as an unconditional guarantee.
- John 15:26–27 again ties the Spirit’s testimony to men who had been with Jesus from the beginning. Keep the apostolic setting in view, as in chapter 14.

The Church That Cannot Be Silenced

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Revelation keeps interrupting itself, and the interruptions are where the comfort lives. Between the sixth and seventh seals, God stopped to seal His servants. Now, between the sixth and seventh trumpets, He stops again. A mighty angel stands astride sea and land and swears that there will be no more delay, that the mystery of God will be finished as He declared to His servants the prophets. Seven thunders speak and John is forbidden to write them, which is a quiet rebuke to every reader who wants more information than God has chosen to give.

Then John is made to eat the message. The little scroll is sweet as honey in his mouth and turns his stomach bitter, and Ezekiel had the same experience (Ezekiel 2:8 through 3:3). Anyone who has preached a funeral for a faithful member knows both tastes in one afternoon. God's word is good news and it contains judgment; a messenger who has not felt both has not digested it. And the commission follows: you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.

Chapter 11 then gives the boldest picture of the church in the book. Two witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, testify for a limited time under God's protection, and when their testimony is finished the beast kills them. Their bodies lie in the street of the great city while the world throws a party and sends each other gifts. Then, after three and a half days, the breath of life from God enters them and they stand on their feet. The testimony of God's people can be killed and will not stay dead.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The interlude structure matters: Revelation repeatedly pauses its judgment cycles to show the safety and the mission of God's people. Read chapters 10 and 11 as the companion to chapter 7.
- Forty-two months, 1,260 days, and three and a half years are the same span, and the image comes from Daniel (7:25; 12:7). Half of seven signals a period of trouble that is real, severe, and definitely limited by God.
- The temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the time John wrote. The measuring of 11:1–2 is a picture of God marking out what belongs to Him and is under His protection, not a blueprint for a rebuilt building.
- Two witnesses reflects the Old Testament requirement of two witnesses for valid testimony (Deuteronomy 19:15) and the two olive trees of Zechariah 4. Their powers recall Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets.
- "The great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (11:8) is a symbolic description of the world in its hostility to God, marked by the place it put Jesus to death.
- The seventh trumpet (11:15–19) is not a beginning of Christ's reign but the announcement and celebration of a reign already established (compare 1:5–6; 5:9–10).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *John is told to eat the little scroll, and it is honey in his mouth and acid in his stomach (10:9–10). Why would God's own message taste both ways to the man who carries it, and which of the two flavors do we tend to leave out when we speak it?*

The sweetness is the message itself: God reigns, the Lamb has conquered, the martyrs are vindicated, the mystery of God is being completed. That is honey to a man on a prison island. The bitterness is what the message costs and what it contains: judgment on people who will not repent, and suffering for the churches who carry it. The same scroll holds both, and John has to take the whole thing into himself before he can preach a word of it.

Ask which flavor we leave out. Some congregations serve only honey, and their preaching cannot account for a hard providence or call anyone to repentance. Others serve only bitterness, and their people are dutiful and

joyless. The remedy is not balance as a technique but digestion: a preacher and a class who have taken the whole word in and let it work on them. Ask each member which half of God's message he personally avoids reading.

Question 2. *The two witnesses prophesy, are killed, lie in the street while the world exchanges gifts, and then stand up. How would that sequence have sounded to Christians who had watched friends die for refusing to say that Caesar is Lord?*

It would have sounded like their own funerals, and then like the answer to them. Every element was familiar: a hostile city, a beast with power to kill, bodies left unburied as a final humiliation, and neighbors celebrating the removal of people whose lives had been a standing rebuke. Revelation does not promise these Christians that the persecution will stop. It promises that the story does not end where the world thinks it ends.

Then comes the sentence that makes the chapter: the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet. The pattern of Jesus is stamped on His people. Ask your class where they have watched a faithful life end in apparent defeat, a member who died estranged from his children, a mission work that closed, a congregation that dwindled. The chapter does not tell us to pretend those were victories. It tells us to wait three and a half days.

Question 3. *Revelation 11:15 announces that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Read it beside Colossians 1:13 and Acts 2:33–36, and discuss when the reign of Christ actually began.*

The elders in 11:17 are explicit: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and reigned." The verb is past tense. This is the announcement of an accomplished reign, not the inauguration of a future earthly one. Colossians 1:13 says we have already been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Acts 2:33–36 says Christ was exalted to God's right hand at His ascension and made both Lord and Christ.

This is the place to say clearly what your congregation believes, and then to make it useful. If Christ reigns now, then no headline, election, or empire changes who is on the throne, which is exactly the comfort the seven churches needed while Rome looked invincible. Ask the class what they would do differently this month if they truly believed the announcement of 11:15 was already true rather than pending.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Note the repeated time periods in 11:2, 11:3, and 11:9 (forty-two months, 1,260 days, three and a half days). Work out how they relate to each other, and explain why half of seven is a fitting symbol here.*

Forty-two months equals 1,260 days on a thirty-day month, and both equal three and a half years. Seven in Revelation is completeness, so half of seven is a broken or truncated period: real trouble, but cut off before it can run its full course. Notice also that the witnesses lie dead three and a half days, a miniature of the same symbol. The message to a persecuted church is that the time of suffering is measured by God and has an end He has already set.

2. *The two witnesses are described with imagery from Moses and Elijah and are called two olive trees and two lampstands. Read Zechariah 4:1–14 and Deuteronomy 19:15, and say what the number two contributes to the picture.*

Zechariah 4 shows two olive trees supplying oil to a lampstand, standing for the two anointed leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, through whom God rebuilt the temple, and the promise there is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit." Deuteronomy 19:15 requires two witnesses for a matter to be established. Together they say that God's testimony in the world is valid, sufficient, and supplied by Him rather than by human strength. The two witnesses picture the faithful, Spirit-supplied witness of God's people, not two individuals to be identified.

3. *List everything that happens to the witnesses in 11:7–12, in order. Where does that sequence match the death and resurrection of Jesus, and what is the point of the match?*

They finish their testimony; the beast from the bottomless pit makes war on them, overcomes them, and kills them; their bodies lie in the street of the great city for three and a half days; people from many nations look at them and refuse burial; the earth rejoices and sends gifts; then the breath of life from God enters them, they stand on their feet, great fear falls, and a voice calls them up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watch. The pattern is the

death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, stamped on His witnesses. What happened to the Head happens to the body.

4. *Read 11:15–18 and list everything the twenty-four elders give thanks for. Which items on your list are already true of Christ right now?*

That God has taken His great power and reigned; that the nations were angry and His wrath has come; that the time has come to judge the dead; that He will reward His servants the prophets, the saints, and those who fear His name, small and great; and that He will destroy those who destroy the earth. The reign is already true right now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25), and so is the reward being kept for the faithful (1 Peter 1:4). The judging of the dead is still ahead of us (Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

5. *Revelation 11:3 keeps the witnesses in sackcloth the entire time they testify. Name one place where you have stayed quiet about Christ because speaking would cost you comfort, and speak there this week.*

Answers will vary. Listen for real settings rather than general resolutions: the break room, the family reunion, the group text, the neighbor who has asked twice about what we believe. Sackcloth in 11:3 is not a costume; it is the posture of someone who knows the message is serious and speaks anyway. Ask for a name and a week. Follow up without embarrassing anyone.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The numbers are symbolic. Forty-two months and 1,260 days come from Daniel and mark a limited time of persecution under God's control. They are not a countdown, and no date can be built from them. Refuse every attempt to line these chapters up with current events.
- The two witnesses are not two individuals to be named, and this is not a prediction that Moses and Elijah will return. The imagery describes the sufficient, God-supplied testimony of His people, which the world can silence only temporarily.
- The measuring of the temple in 11:1–2 is not a prophecy of a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. The temple was already gone when John wrote, and the New Testament identifies God's temple as His people (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19–22).
- The seven thunders that John was forbidden to write (10:4) are a standing rebuke to speculation. God has told us what we need. When someone in class wants to know more than the text says, this verse is your friendly answer.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Obadiah, Jonah · Ecclesiastes 7–8 · John 16:5–33 · Revelation 12–13

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