

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE STUDENT

WINTER 2024–2025
A KING FOREVER AND EVER

▶ International Sunday School Lessons

A King Forever and Ever

Contents

| | | | |
|----------|----|-----------------------------|----|
| December | 1 | Jesus' Ancestry | 3 |
| | 8 | God's Promise | 7 |
| | 15 | A Father's Prophecy | 11 |
| | 22 | Savior's Birth | 15 |
| | 29 | David's Son | 20 |
| January | 5 | The Lord Is King | 24 |
| | 12 | The Lord Is Majestic | 28 |
| | 19 | The Lord Is Active | 35 |
| | 26 | The Lord Is Righteous | 39 |
| February | 2 | Praying Properly | 43 |
| | 9 | Heeding Wholly | 49 |
| | 16 | Living Lastly | 53 |
| | 23 | Ministering Mightily | 57 |

Features

| | |
|--|----|
| At Just the Right Time (Lloyd M. Pelfrey)..... | 19 |
| A King and His Kingdom (Jon Miller)..... | 32 |
| Praise the King! (Christian Wilder) | 34 |
| The Value of Context (Ronald L. Nickelson) | 47 |
| In the Word | 62 |
| Quarterly Quiz | 63 |

Contributors

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Lesson Development | Chad Summa (1, 3), Jon Miller (2), Doug Hoffer (4–5), Mark Hamilton (6, 8–9), Jon Weatherly (7), Mark S. Krause (10–11), Doug Redford (12–13) |
| Involvement Learning | Jon Miller (1–2), Andrew Wood (3–6), Connie Chandler (7–10), Mark Taylor (11–13) |
| Editorial Team | Jessica J. Schroeder, Taylor Z. Stamps |

KJV® Bible Student is published quarterly by Standard Publishing, www.standardlesson.com. Copyright © 2024 by Standard Publishing, part of the David C Cook family, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918. All rights reserved. Lessons are based on the *International Sunday School Lessons for Christian Teaching*; copyright © 2020 by the Committee on the Uniform Series. Scripture taken from the *King James Version*. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

Jesus'

Ancestry

Devotional Reading: Galatians 4:1-7

Background Scripture: Ruth 1-4; Luke 3:23-38

Today's Scripture: Ruth 4:9-17; Luke 3:23, 31b-32

I. Naomi's Family

Ruth 4:9-17

9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place. Ye are witnesses this day.

11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel, and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem.

12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife. And when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age. For thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

9. Boaz's desire was to redeem Naomi's land holdings and to marry Ruth. The laws regarding selling a family property are found in Leviticus 25:25-34. The gist of the regulation was that a sale of Israelite land was more of a lease since the land would return to the sellers' family when they could afford to redeem it or, at the latest, in the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 27:16-25). Because of the importance of land in Israel, the bias was to sell the property within a tribe to keep it in the extended family. For this reason, the family member who purchased the land was called a kinsman or kinsman-redeemer. And though property was generally inherited from father to son, there was precedent for a woman's holding land.

When a nearer kinsman abdicated his

right to buy the land (and marry Ruth), *Boaz* stepped in. In doing so, he took on the role of a kinsman for *Naomi* by buying the land that had belonged to her husband, Elimelech, and her sons, Mahlon and Chilion. At least ten *elders* were present, along with many *people*. *Witnesses* at this time served much like an oral form of a notary public for such transactions.

10. This is the first time we learn that *Ruth* had been *the wife of Mahlon* (not Chilion); this identification was likely due to the legal nature of the proceedings. Boaz repeated the phrase, “Ye are witnesses this day,” identically worded as in Ruth 4:9, creating bookends that open and close his formal, legal argument. There would be no doubt in the future that Boaz acted with integrity in redeeming the land or marrying Ruth.

The language around marrying Ruth is like that of levirate marriage. But a few details prevent its exact characterization as such. First, *Ruth* was a *Moabitess*, not an Israelite. The two people groups, though related, were often at odds with each other (examples: Numbers 22–25; Judges 3). God had even barred Moabites from being grafted into Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3)!

Second, Boaz was not a surviving brother of the deceased husband. He wasn’t even Naomi’s closest kinsman. Third, the kinsman who Boaz approached as first in line was not publicly shamed (as levirate law required) for declining to marry Ruth and redeem the land as a packaged deal.

11. This all took place at the city *gate*, the typical meeting place in Israel for legal proceedings. Going above and beyond their role as *witnesses*, the people pronounced a blessing on Boaz and the new household that was forming. The blessing clearly focuses on Ruth (*the woman*), as a blessing for Boaz would more likely call for the Lord to make Boaz like Jacob.

Rachel and *Leah* (and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah) bore the ancestors of the tribes of *Israel* (Genesis 29–30). To *do worthily* and *be famous* are blessings for wealth and a good name. The name probably assumed the couple would require children to experience these blessings.

Ephrath seems to be an old name for the area of Bethlehem, also spelled “Ephrath” (example: Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7), most famously mentioned in the messianic passage of Micah 5:2 (quoted in Matthew 2:6). Rachel especially was associated with the area, as she was buried near *Bethlehem* (Genesis 35:16–19).

Though Ruth was a Moabite, she was also known to be a woman of great character (Ruth 3:11). She left behind her own people because of her love for Naomi and the Lord without knowing what reception she could expect in Naomi’s home. The blessing from the people confirms their acceptance of her and hints at the Lord’s pleasure with her.

12. The account of Pharez’s birth is found in Genesis 38. *Tamar* was entitled to a levirate marriage when her husband, Er, died (Genesis 38:8). But several failures found Tamar back in her father’s house with no prospect of continuing her dead husband’s lineage. When she tricked *Judah* into sleeping with her, Tamar conceived *Pharez* and his twin brother, Zarah. Ruth’s situation was not identical, but it is notable that both Tamar and Ruth were foreign women who became ancestors to Jesus (Matthew 1:3, 5).

13. It is unclear why *Ruth* did not bear children in her first marriage, which lasted approximately ten years. In hindsight, however, we might sense God’s invisible hand preparing her for this moment. The Lord’s aid in her conceiving *a son* emphasizes His blessing of this union, even though historically, the Moabites were not to have any portion in Israel.

14. Verses 14-17 focus on *Naomi*, Ruth's mother-in-law. *The women* of the town had previously witnessed Naomi's heartbreaking return to Bethlehem. Naomi concluded that the Lord had left her bitter and empty at the death of her husband and sons; the reality was that God provided for Naomi even when all hope seemed lost. This was a great reversal for Naomi. *Blessed be the Lord* acknowledges His action, especially that this action reveals His loving character.

15. In Israel, grown children were expected to take care of their aging parents. This was especially true if their mother was widowed, as women had very few financial resources to fall back on if family could not help. Following the death of her husband and sons, Naomi's future was much in doubt. With the birth of *a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age*, Naomi need not be burdened about her future.

16-17. It was not uncommon for well-off families (as Boaz's seems to have been) to have nurses for their children. In Naomi's case, the role is not that of a wet nurse but as a guardian and caretaker. An informal adoption might be in view.

This is the only place in the Bible where *neighbours* are said to have named a baby. Ironically, there is no evidence to suggest that these same women honored Naomi's request to be called by a new name (Ruth 1:20). The name *Obed* means "worshipper" or "servant," the latter meaning lending itself to the idea that he would serve as a redeemer for Naomi one day. That "his name [became] famous in Israel" (4:14) came to pass through his son, *Jesse*, who became the father of the greatest earthly king to reign in Israel, *David*.

II. Jesus' Family

Luke 3:23, 31b-32

23 And Jesus himself began to be

about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli.

31b Which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,

32 Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson.

23. A Levite could begin serving in the tabernacle at *thirty years of age* (Numbers 4:3), although other texts reflect ages beginning at 20 or 25 years old (Numbers 8:24-25). These differences could reflect the variety of roles that were available at these ages, new age limits set in the temple rather than in the tabernacle, or changing supply and demand in demographics. In any case, Jesus' age certainly would have qualified Him to minister in the temple.

31b. *Nathan* was a *son of David* by "Bathshua" (Bathsheba; 1 Chronicles 3:5). The Gospel of Matthew traces Jesus' line through Solomon rather than Nathan. Undoubtedly, what was most important to both writers was showing that Jesus can trace His earthly lineage straight back to *David*. This relationship was the key to Jesus' being able to fulfill the promise that God made to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13.

32. This verse brings us back to the story of Ruth (see Ruth 4:17). *Jesse* was David's father, *Obed* his grandfather, and so on. Some names are probably omitted here, as *Booz* likely lived near the end of the time of the judges (about 1100 BC), whereas *Salmon* (see Matthew 1:5) lived during the initial days of conquest in the promised land (about 1400 BC). *Naasson* was the tribal leader of Judah during the wilderness period (see Numbers 1:4, 7).

Involvement Learning

Jesus' Ancestry

Into the Lesson

Set a timer for one minute and read the genealogy in Luke 3:23-38. After the time is up, set another timer for one minute and record as many names as you can remember in the space below.

Strike out any names that do not appear in Luke's genealogy (even if they are present in Matthew's). Then identify with stars which names in Luke 3:23-38 can also be found in Ruth without consulting Ruth 4.

As we dive into our lesson today, we will see the importance of lineage and legacy within the Bible, particularly in the books of Ruth and Luke.

Key Verse

The women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

—Ruth 4:17

Into the Word

Choose one of the following characters from the story: Boaz, Naomi, Ruth, and the witnesses. Answer the following questions based on the character you chose:

How did this person or group act righteously?

What conclusions did or might this person or group make about the Lord's action in this story?

Read Luke 3:23, 31b-32. Compare the purpose(s) of the brief genealogy in Ruth 4 to the purpose(s) of the genealogy in Luke 3.

Into Life

Compare what you know of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi's character with Christ. What family resemblances do we find?

Write down your own characteristics that speak to a family resemblance with these four people.

Thought to Remember

God's faithfulness resounds through generations.

God's Promise

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

Background Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-17

Today's Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:4-17

I. History Lessons

2 Samuel 7:4-9a

4 And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying,

5 Go and tell my servant David, thus saith the LORD, shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the shepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel.

9a And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight.

4. Unlike God's direct communication with King Solomon later, God chose to speak to David indirectly through *Nathan* the prophet. The reason for this difference is a matter of speculation.

But perhaps the prophet also needed the forthcoming corrective himself since he had encouraged David in his wrong thinking.

The prophet would later risk David's wrath by confronting the king regarding David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Nathan would also anoint Solomon as David's successor.

5. With this verse, God's corrective begins. The issue at hand seems to be not one of disobedience but rather one of presumption. Has *David*, God's *servant*, presumed that he would be doing God a favor?

6. For God to have the kind of house that David desired to build was never high on God's list of priorities. To this point, the tabernacle, as prescribed by God to Moses centuries earlier, had sufficed. At the future dedication of the temple, David's son Solomon will cite the words of this verse. He will note in the same verse that while God was not concerned about choosing a city in which to dwell, He was concerned about choosing a person. This is what the Lord addressed in the next part of His message.

7. God had never required a permanent structure for His dwelling place in *Israel*, let alone a grand one as *an house of cedar* would surely be.

God's faithfulness to His people had

always far exceeded their faithfulness to Him. Yet God had not called on anyone to respond by building *an house of cedar* (a temple) as a visual aid (or anything else) to influence their faithfulness. The term translated *tribes* probably refers to tribal leaders.

8-9a. The image of shepherd-leadership echoes throughout the passage as God reminded *David* of that man's own history. God had sent the prophet Samuel to Jesse's family in the small village of Bethlehem to anoint a new king over Israel. There, Samuel reviewed each of the sons of Jesse who were present. Jesse had not bothered to present to Samuel the youngest son, David. Instead, David was left caring for the sheep.

But God had chosen David to be the new king. Though David had once been a shepherd of sheep, he would now be a shepherd of *Israel*. And as God had been with the nation of Israel, so also would He be with David in victories over his *enemies*.

II. Future Plans

2 Samuel 7:9b-17

9b And have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more. Neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime.

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thy throne shall be established for ever.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

9b. Up to this point, God had given David greatness through military victories. It is in this light that God gave the reason for not allowing the man to build a temple. David would not have the chance to think of himself as a great builder.

10. The greatness God granted to David was not for David's benefit alone. The Lord was concerned for His *people Israel*. God desired not only to give David "rest," but also to give His people a *place of their own* and relief from those who had afflicted them in the past. God did indeed desire a place—not for himself but for His people. This promise would be the fulfillment of the promise God gave Moses. The agricultural metaphor emphasizes growth and longevity within the land. God would *plant* Israel.

11a. The period of the *judges* (from about 1380 to 1050 BC) followed Israel's conquest of the promised land. We might think of that period as the first era of Israel's life as a settled nation. That time was filled with conflict as one nation after another rose against *Israel*. God delivered Israel through the leadership of judges, but He also allowed threats to arise as Israel sank back into sin.

11b. Initially, David intended to construct a sanctuary for God. But God planned to turn the king's plan on its head and instead build a *house* for David. And though David's initial thought upon hearing this might have been of a new palace, God's further promises made clear that He would establish a kingdom and lineage for David.

12. God's promise would come to fruition through a descendant of David who would rise to power after David's death. David's *seed* is the focus of the promise. This word referring to one's descendant or descendants has a rich background in earlier texts of the Old Testament. God uses this word repeatedly in Genesis in promises of redemption; the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received promises regarding their "seed." Now David receives a promise that builds on theirs: God will firmly establish the kingdom of one of David's offspring, one physically descended from him. This wordplay also recalls how the Lord would plant Israel in the land.

13. Prophecies with dual fulfillments underscore the cohesion of God's plan of salvation found in the Scriptures. Such prophecies have a "nearer" fulfillment, and the one in this verse was realized through David's son Solomon. He did build *an house* for the Lord. But quickly it became clear that Solomon's *kingdom* would not last forever. He sinned against the Lord by worshipping other gods.

What, then, are we to make of the promise to *stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever*? We look to the fulfillment found in Christ. While the temple Solomon built was destroyed, Jesus builds believers into God's temple in the New Testament era. And Jesus' kingdom has no end.

14. As in the previous verse, this promise applies first to Solomon and ultimately

to Christ. The first statement in this verse is quoted in Hebrews 1:5, which clearly affirms its fulfillment in Jesus. But how can sinless Jesus be the fulfillment when He, as the ultimate son of David, did not *commit iniquity*?

We recall that Jesus was treated as though He had committed blasphemy—the ultimate iniquity. He took the stripes inflicted by *the rod of men* and was crucified. That suffering was not due to personal guilt; rather, He took upon himself the punishment that guilty sinners deserve.

15. We move to a second question: If the promise also applies to King Solomon, how can God say that *my mercy shall not depart away from him* when we recall that God judged Solomon for his foolish acceptance of the gods of his many wives who turned his heart away from the Lord?

16. This verse summarizes God's promise to David and concludes God's word for the king. Even when Solomon's magnificent temple fell to ruins at the hands of the Babylonians, God's promise to David remained unshakable. That *house*, that *kingdom*, is established in Christ. He is David's true heir. And what Jesus said of His church remains true: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). God's promise was given not because David proved worthy where others did not. It is given to Israel despite the people's unworthiness.

17. In keeping with his role as a prophet, *Nathan* relayed what the Lord had revealed *unto David*. David's response reveals that the king knew this promise was not for David's family's glory but for God's. We too do well to remember that the fulfilled and yet-to-be-fulfilled promises we enjoy are opportunities to praise the Lord and bring glory to His name. Do we?

Involvement Learning

God's Promise

Into the Lesson

Consider promises you have made (whether honored, broken, or have yet to be fulfilled). What factors prevent people from keeping promises?

Do any of these factors apply to God? Why or why not?

Today, as we delve into the heart of 2 Samuel 7:4-17, we will concentrate on the importance of God's commitments, particularly His promise to King David.

Into the Word

Read 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Write down which promises named or alluded to in this passage were fulfilled *before* God spoke to Nathan.

Next, identify promises that were fulfilled *after* God spoke to Nathan.

Key Verse

Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thy throne shall be established for ever.

—2 Samuel 7:16

Write down evidence that David was obedient to the instructions God gave him through Nathan.

Into Life

What steps can you take to discern when the course you *want* is not *best*?

Write a prayer for obedience to God, even when His plans differ from yours.

Thought to Remember

God's promises are sure.

A Father's Prophecy

Devotional Reading: Luke 1:5-17

Background Scripture: Luke 1:5-23, 57-80

Today's Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

I. Prologue

Luke 1:67

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying.

67. The disbelief of *Zacharias* when he received the angel's message was replaced with being *filled with the Holy Ghost*. Luke, the author, seems to have a special interest in this person of the Trinity, who is mentioned in this Gospel about the same number of times as the other three Gospels combined. In the book of Acts, Luke's subsequent work, the Holy Ghost is mentioned more than 40 times. The presence of God's Spirit has been a necessary prerequisite for God's people to serve Him through prophetic ministry.

II. Celebrating God

Luke 1:68-75

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us,

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant,

73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

68. Zacharias begins a poetic expression of blessing and praise to God. Employing parallel expressions typical of biblical poetry, his song echoes key themes of prophetic promise from Israel's Scriptures. As God had fulfilled His surprising promise that Zacharias would become a father, so God would fulfill His greatest promises for all.

Zacharias praised the Lord because of the Lord's actions for His people. The Old Testament describes how the Lord had come and *visited* His people for blessing or because of their sin.

The reason for His coming at this particular time was so that *his people* might be *redeemed*. As we attempt to grasp this concept, we can simplify by realizing that when we are introduced to Jesus in the pages of the New Testament, two issues are of utmost importance: *who Jesus is in*

His essence and *what Jesus did* in terms of His mission. The shorthand way of saying this is that we are learning about the person and work of Christ.

69. The song's prophetic nature is on display as it announces the means by which the redemption arrives. In the Old Testament, animal horns were symbols of power. Through the power of the Lord God, the promised redemption—a *horn of salvation*—would come, vanquishing enemies and ruling as Messiah.

Zacharias recognized that the Messiah would come from one specific lineage: *the house of . . . David*. Centuries before Zacharias lived, the prophet Nathan had stated that the Lord would establish His kingdom in and through the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). This would bring righteousness, peace, and salvation. About six months after the birth of John, a descendant of the house of David was indeed born to fulfill the promises; His name was Jesus.

70. This verse reminds readers that God's plan was not a new thing; rather, it had been set forth through *his holy prophets* of centuries past. The person and work of Jesus the Messiah validated the predictions of the prophets. The message of the prophets comes to a focal point in the message of Zacharias's son, henceforth known as John the Baptist, who later proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" when seeing Jesus (John 1:29).

71. The theme of salvation by God's Messiah is repeated often in the Gospels. Indeed, that message of salvation is their primary message! But as events would unfold, God's idea of who their main *enemies* were didn't match who the Jewish leaders and people thought were their enemies. This misidentification distracted Jesus' own apostles right up to the time of Jesus' ascension.

72. God's promise to *perform . . . mercy* is witnessed in passages such as Micah 7:20. Considering the ancient use of the literary technique of parallelism, this is the same as remembering *his holy covenant*. The next verse offers an additional layer to this parallelism.

73. This *oath* is described in Genesis 22:16-18; it is the same as "his holy covenant" of Luke 1:72. Consider these two time frames: as we are now looking 2,000 years into the past to consider what Zacharias has written, Zacharias himself was looking 2,000 years into his own past to consider the covenant with *our father Abraham!* The centuries have proven God to be trustworthy and faithful; He keeps His promises to His people.

74. The oath granted to Abraham extended to the people of Zacharias's day (*unto us*). Nine months of being unable to speak had allowed Zacharias time to reflect on the fact that when the Lord speaks, people should listen rather than run off at the mouth!

75. As a devoted priest, Zacharias knew what it meant to serve the Lord. All his life, he had been "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). God desires the same for others. *Holiness* means to be set apart from sin; *righteousness* means that the people always do the right thing in the eyes of God. The only other place in the New Testament where the words translated "holiness" and "righteousness" occur together is Ephesians 4:24.

Zacharias's expectation was partially fulfilled when Christ established the church, whose members are a "holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). The ultimate fulfillment will come when we serve Christ in full holiness in Heaven.

III. Appointing John Luke 1:76-78a

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest. For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways,

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78a Through the tender mercy of our God.

76. Zacharias switches focus to his (only) *child*, John, and John's pending role in God's plan of salvation. That role will be to prepare hearts and minds for the coming of a greater one. John was to be like a herald, coming in advance of the king and announcing the king's arrival so that people might prepare. John was to be "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Luke 3:4). Some 30 years later, John's ministry fulfilled the words of his father.

77. The underlying Greek word for *remission* is translated elsewhere as "forgiveness," and that is the sense here. John's ministry included calling for repentance and "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of *sins*" (Luke 3:3).

The *salvation* mentioned here would prove to be more than just political salvation from oppression; *people* would be offered a spiritual, eternal *salvation*. The hope and mercy that God's people desired would come from God's redemption and salvation in Christ.

78a. The designation of the Lord as *our God* occurs more than 200 times in the Bible. God is not an abstract concept; He is intensely personal. The fictitious gods of paganism cannot be characterized by their *tender mercy*—those gods are seen as fickle. The word translated "tender" is

interesting. In a literal, physical sense, it refers to one's bowels. In a figurative or emotional sense, this area of a person was considered to be the center.

IV. Predicting Result Luke 1:78b-79

78b Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

78b-79. Today we speak of one's heart as his or her figurative center or origin. So, we can say that Zacharias's Song reminds us that God's motivation for sending the Messiah is the mercy of God's own heart. That mercy brings something like the dawning of a new day, to which *the dayspring from on high* refers.

Darkness is a common image for the state of those who oppose God. In this state, *death* is inevitable. But God promises *to give light* to those in this state. It is Jesus who brings light into darkness. A sad and continuing part of the problem, however, is that although "light is come into the world, . . . men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

V. Epilogue Luke 1:80

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

80. This verse takes us out of Zacharias's Song and summarizes John's formative years. Luke's Gospel provides parallel statements about Jesus. Becoming *strong in spirit* may refer either to John's determined willingness to conform to God's will, or it may describe the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Involvement Learning

A Father's Prophecy

Into the Lesson

Write down one prediction about the future. It can be silly or serious and does not have to be spiritual or Bible-related.

Rank your prediction on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being least likely to happen and 5 being most likely.

Today we are going to study a prophecy made by the father of John the Baptist that is related not only to his life but also to the coming of Jesus.

Key Verse

Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest. For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

—Luke 1:76-77

Into the Word

Read Luke 1:67-80. Outline God's previous words and actions as recounted by Zacharias, and the anticipated works that would be fulfilled in John and Jesus. Include Bible references.

Write down Bible references for the people, events, or promises that at the time were yet to be fulfilled by John or Jesus.

Into Life

How do these examples from Luke 1:67-80 of God's past provision give you confidence about His continued care in the future?

In the space below, update Zacharias's prophecy as a blessing for a new minister. This blessing needs to include two parts: (1) praise for God's past work and faithfulness, and (2) hopes for the minister's future. Take into account not only Israel's history as Zacharias knew it but also the history of the church.

Thought to Remember

Reject the darkness;
embrace the light.

Savior's Birth

Devotional Reading: Micah 5:1-6
Background Scripture: Luke 2:1-20
Today's Scripture: Luke 2:1-16

I. In Those Days Luke 2:1-7

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David).

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

1. Luke transitions the narrative of his Gospel account from the birth and childhood of John the Baptist and the subsequent worship from his father, Zacharias. The phrase *in those days* places the events of the text during the reign of the emperor *Caesar Augustus* (27 BC–AD 14).

2. Estimating the exact year of Jesus' birth proves challenging. The mention of "Herod" in Matthew 2:1 and Luke 1:5 gives us a time frame for Jesus' birth. That individual is Herod the Great, king of Judaea. He died in 4 BC, so Jesus' birth must have occurred before that time. However, historical sources outside the Bible state that *Cyrenius* became *governor of Syria* in 6 AD, about 10 years after the death of Herod the Great.

3. Roman taxes required that each person return to the *city* of his or her ancestors to be counted in a census. Ancestral records or land-ownership titles determined the citizenship of that town. However, as their housing situation in Bethlehem would soon reveal, it is unlikely that Joseph owned property or a home in Bethlehem (compare Luke 2:7).

4-5. Before receiving news of the census, *Mary* had been in *Nazareth in Galilee* (Luke 1:26-27). *Joseph* also lived in *Nazareth*, as the two were *espoused* to be married. Following the census requirements, Joseph traveled to his ancestral home *because he was of the house and lineage of David*. The town of *Bethlehem* had been the hometown of David before he became king (1 Samuel 17:12, 58). The name *Bethlehem* means "house of bread," a fitting meaning for the birthplace of the one who is "the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48).

The couple *went up* on the journey because Bethlehem is located in the mountains of Judea at an elevation of approximately 2,550 feet above sea level. The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem required a total elevation gain of about 1,250 feet.

6. After arriving in Bethlehem, Mary went into labor. Luke does not indicate the time between when they arrived and her labor.

7. Mary's pregnancy came to its fulfillment, and she gave birth to *her firstborn son*—an obvious point because she was a virgin. This detail also implies that she had other children in the following years.

The first order of business was to wrap the newborn *in swaddling clothes*, long cloth strips that bound the infant's limbs. This method ensured the baby stayed warm and felt secure. An ancient non-biblical work notes that the baby who would later become King Solomon "was nursed in swaddling clothes, and that with cares. For there is no king that had any other beginning of birth" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:4-5). The opposite is seen in Ezekiel 16:4.

II. In the Fields Luke 2:8-16

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not. For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you:

ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

8. Luke's Gospel brings readers' attention to the fields outside Bethlehem. *Shepherds* worked an important but lowly profession in the ancient world: caring for and tending to sheep. The hill country surrounding Bethlehem contained suitable pastureland for tending to sheep and goats. Shepherds and their flocks were typically *in the field* from early spring to early fall, but nothing in the Gospel accounts confirms the exact time of year of Jesus' birth.

9. Scripture sometimes depicts angels as heralds, messengers for God. Unlike the previous angelic appearances in Luke's Gospel, this particular *angel* is unnamed. Consider how the shepherds might have felt. They had been guarding their flocks, on alert for sounds from predators or thieves. Out of that silence came a sudden angelic appearance with the glory of the Lord. No wonder they were afraid!

10. Scripture sometimes depicts angels as agents of God's judgment. Therefore, upon seeing *the angel*, the shepherds may have feared pending divine judgment. The imperative, *fear not*, acknowledged their fears. The *good tidings of great joy*

brought by the angel were the beginning of the gospel message.

11. The statement *unto you* reveals the intended recipients of this message. Shepherds were among the first to receive the good news of the child *born* in Bethlehem. The proclamation signaled that God was overturning the world's expectations, casting down those considered mighty by the world's standards and raising up those considered lowly, like these shepherds.

This child would someday be a *Saviour* for people. Jesus' work, culminating in His death and resurrection, enacted God's plan of salvation for the world.

The title *Christ* comes from the ancient Greek translation of the ancient Hebrew title *Messiah*. Both titles mean "anointed one," referring to the anointed Redeemer and King of the people of God as proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets. The promised Messiah would save His people and establish a reign of peace. First-century Jewish belief held that the Messiah would come from the family of *David* and the town of Bethlehem.

12. The *swaddling clothes* were expected for a newborn. However, the *manger* was unexpected, not ordinarily used as a crib for a baby. This *sign* would confirm to the shepherds that everything the angel said about Christ had been accurate.

13. The sudden manifestation of a heavenly multitude emphasizes the angel's message. The Old Testament identifies *the heavenly host* as an army of angelic messengers who served the Lord of Hosts.

Luke, more than any other New Testament writer, includes the theme of praising God in his writings. A form of the phrase *praising God* appears nine times in the New Testament, seven of which are found in the writings of Luke.

The text does not say whether or not the heavenly host sang or spoke their praise, only that their voices joined to

praise God. What the prophets had prophesied, even without understanding the full import of their own words, was being fulfilled.

14. The host's message of praise is two-way, intended to be received by *God* and directed *toward* the good of humanity. The *glory* given to God acknowledges His power and His work of salvation. The phrase *in the highest* refers to the place where God resides. Though God is all-powerful, He revealed himself in and through humble circumstances: a baby born in a manger.

The second part of the statement refers to the genuine *peace now on earth*. The Roman Empire brought the *Pax Romana* through force, but only God can bring eternal peace. His peace is not just the cessation of hostility or the absence of conflict; it is the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. One of the most significant peace pronouncements of the New Testament is Romans 5:1: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

15-16. *The angels* delivered their message and praises and then departed *into heaven*. This raises some intriguing questions. Did they simply disappear? Was there a visible departure until they could no longer be seen? What is not in doubt, however, is the shepherds' response. Stunned, they collected their thoughts and took the only reasonable actions their experiences led them to do.

It was just as the angel had said: shepherds found the infant Jesus *lying in a manger*, with *Mary and Joseph* in attendance. Without a doubt, this was a privileged group of people who gathered that night, but people not typically regarded as privileged. God, in his generous kindness, makes himself known to the lowly.

Involvement Learning

Savior's Birth

Into the Lesson

Describe how you plan for an extended trip. What steps were involved in planning? How did you decide what to pack? What decisions were made regarding the number of stop? What did you learn about yourself as you planned?

Even our best plans can sometimes go awry. We can trust that God will provide for us, regardless of the circumstances and our expectations. Today's lesson will show us how God provided and revealed His work in a way no one could have expected.

Into the Word

Read Luke 2:1-7. What was the significance of the decree from Caesar Augustus?

What was the significance of Joseph's (and Mary's) journey to Bethlehem?

What Scripture texts speak of Bethlehem's significance?

Why was it significant that Jesus was placed in a manger?

What are three ways that God provided for the needs of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus?

Key Verse

It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
—Luke 2:15

Read Luke 2:8-16. Describe when you felt fear after experiencing a work of God. How did you respond?

How would you articulate the "good tidings of great joy" to a modern-day audience?

Into Life

Write down in one minute or less a way that you will "go to Bethlehem" in a spiritual sense this Christmas season.

Thought to Remember

God loves and invites the lowly.

At Just the Right Time

by Lloyd M. Pelfrey

The Bible says that Jesus came at exactly the right time: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Galatians 4:4). An examination of history shows several key factors coming together to make this so. These factors are impressive individually, but their cumulative impact suggests that Jesus’ birth did come at the right moment in history.

On Earth, Peace

The heavenly multitude announced peace on earth to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). In a sense, that was not anything new, for significant proclamations had been made on previous occasions by Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor at the time (example: 2:1).

Augustus first proclaimed peace in 29 BC, after he defeated Marc Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC to end a civil

war. A special ceremony was held at the temple of Janus, the two-headed god from which we get the word *January*. This temple had two doors or gates, with the statue of Janus situated between them. When the doors were open, it meant that Rome was at war. When the doors were shut, Rome was at peace. The fact that Augustus closed the gates three times indicated the restoration of peace after war had erupted.

The more significant period of this Roman Peace (*Pax Romana* in Latin) lasted about 200 years, with minor uprisings quickly subdued. This period of peace meant that Joseph and Mary could safely travel to Bethlehem, Egypt, and back to Nazareth (see Matthew 2:13-14, 19-23; Luke 2:4-5). Several decades later, this peace meant the same thing for the apostles and others as they took the gospel throughout the Roman Empire (example: Acts 13-14).

We keep in mind, however, that the peace announced to the shepherds was of a better kind! Minister and author J. W. McGarvey (1895-1911) observes that this was “Peace between God and man, and ultimately peace between man and man . . . his peace comes upon those who have accepted his Son.”

Roman Roads

The roads of the Roman Empire were marvels of engineering, with portions still in use today. These highways were built primarily for commercial and military purposes, so trade and armies could



© Getty Images

Continued on page 48

David's Son

Devotional Reading: Luke 4:14-21

Background Scripture: Luke 18:31-43

Today's Scripture: Luke 18:35-43

I. Realization

Luke 18:35-38

35 And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging.

36 And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

37 And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

38 And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

35a. Located near the Jordan River, about 17 miles east of Jerusalem, the city of *Jericho* is infamous for having been destroyed by God some 14 centuries prior to the encounter described in Luke 18. Archeology reveals that there were actually two locations for Jericho in the first century: (1) the ancient location as described in the Old Testament and (2) the complex rebuilt by Herod, approximately one mile from the more ancient location. The modern city of Jericho includes both sites.

35b. The parallel account in the Gospel of Mark reveals more of the identity of this *certain blind man*: he is “Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus” (Mark 10:46). The fact that Luke doesn’t give the name is a bit surprising, given his tendency to give more actual names relative to how frequently the other three Gospels do so. The non-inclusion of the man’s name

here may be due to the fact that Luke was not an eyewitness, but is just speculation.

For a person living in the first century AD, any degree of visual impairment was untreatable. Corrective lenses, as we have them today, would not be available for centuries to come. The most serious visual impairment is, of course, blindness. People who were so afflicted had few, if any, viable treatment options and were unable to work in many occupations. *Begging* alongside heavily traveled roads or next to city gates was frequent. The Law of Moses pronounced a curse on those who took advantage of the blind.

36. The exact makeup and number of *the multitude* is not given. In Luke 12:1, we see the description of an “innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another.” This crowd—undoubtedly with drop-outs and add-ins along the way—was tagging along with Jesus on His final journey to Jerusalem.

It was not unusual for people to travel long distances in large groups. Bandits would frequently wait along roads to ambush solitary travelers. While the Roman road system and garrisons had made travel safer, banditry was still exceedingly common. Indeed, the parable of the Good Samaritan actually begins with this common scenario; its setting is the same road between Jericho and

Jerusalem on which Jesus and His companions traveled.

37. The designation of *Jesus* being of *Nazareth* or as a “Nazarene” occurs about two dozen times in the New Testament—all in the four Gospels and Acts. Although Jesus was not born in Nazareth, He grew up there. As a variant of the name *Joshua*, the name *Jesus* might have been common at that time. But there was no other person who had worked miraculously among the people—no other person who could be recognized by such a designation, as evidenced by the next verse.

38. The designation of *Jesus* as the *Son of David* reveals something that the blind man can “see” in contrast to the spiritually blind religious leaders. Since the Messiah was to come from the line of David, He was also referred to as the “Son of David.” Jesus was a descendant of David because He was Joseph’s adopted son, as Luke established earlier in his Gospel. By calling Jesus the “Son of David,” the blind man showed that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

II. Reactions

Luke 18:39-41

39 And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

40 And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,

41 Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

39. The crowd attempted to quiet the blind man. Luke does not explain their reasons, but it may have to do with the way that important people were treated in the ancient world. Most people be-

lieved that those individuals who were important and famous stood above common people’s concerns. The group may have thought they were paying Jesus due honor and respect by keeping someone they considered unimportant from bothering Him.

40. Based on ancient ideas of honor and the value of persons, the blind man had very little worth. Thus, it is likely that the crowd didn’t expect this reaction from Jesus. But Jesus was an expert at subverting expectations.

41. At the outset, we should realize that Jesus doesn’t ask this question to correct an information deficit—to learn something that He doesn’t know. He already knows what the man needs. One legitimate reason for the question is that Jesus wanted everyone present to hear the specifics of the man’s request. The recovery of sight would have been a very impressive miracle, and Jesus could have wanted His audience to recognize the full impact of what was taking place.

A second possible reason for Jesus’ question is that Jesus may have wanted the blind man to demonstrate faith. By stating the great problem that he had, the blind man risked embarrassment for even asking for something so bold.

III. Remedy

Luke 18:42-43

42 And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee.

43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

42a. Christians have been reading this story for nearly 2,000 years, and the radical nature of this healing is less clear to us than it would have been to the original readers. There were many people in

the first century who claimed to have the power to heal. Frequently, they depended on calling for the help of higher spiritual forces. Many in the ancient world believed that healing various ailments required connecting with spiritual beings. These beings held special positions in the cosmic hierarchy. To get help from these beings, one would have to know their names and perform elaborate rituals to lure them. In other words, many saw healing as a kind of magic that only beings higher up the celestial hierarchy could accomplish.

In contrast, Jesus did not summon such beings for help. He didn't ask for a heavenly creature to heal the blind man. He didn't perform any special rituals or even touch the person. Instead, Jesus simply commanded that the man *receive . . . sight*. Unlike ancient exorcists, Jesus had the power to heal others. He merely spoke, and the blind man was healed. In so doing, Jesus demonstrated power over human bodies that only the Creator of those bodies could possess.

42b. It may be tempting to understand the man's *faith* as saving faith—the admission of one's guilt for sins and request to be forgiven. But there is no mention of sin in this passage; Jesus does not claim that the man's sins have been forgiven.

Instead, *faith* in this context likely refers to two related aspects of the blind man's actions. First, he rightly identified Jesus as the expected Son of David. Second and most important, he persisted in his request when everyone around him pressured him to be silent. The man rejected the pressure of the crowd and focused only on who Jesus is and what Jesus can do. He continued to ask for healing even when everyone around him wanted him to stop. The man's persistence thus showed his faith in Jesus and his trust in the Messiah's love, compassion, and power.

43a. The power of Jesus is further shown by the speed with which the healing occurs. Jesus simply spoke the word, and *immediately*, the blind man received his sight. Unlike supposed healers among the Greeks and Romans, Jesus' commands have instantaneous results. The particular Greek word being translated "immediately" is a favorite of Luke's; 17 of the word's 19 occurrences in the New Testament occur in his Gospel and book of Acts.

43b. This result is interesting to contrast with a healing outcome in Luke 8:38-39. In that earlier passage, a healed man wanted to accompany Jesus but was refused. We see no such refusal in the passage at hand, however. The difference is attributable to the shifting context of Jesus' ministry. The episode in Luke 8 occurred outside the traditional boundaries of Israelite territory, and the timing wasn't right for Gentile outreach. The context in our lesson passage is different: Jesus is on His final trip to Jerusalem. There were likely no drawbacks for one more person to join the crowd.

43c. The shock wave of the healing sent ripples across *all the people*. And we can't help but wonder if those who *gave praise unto God* were the same ones who had tried to silence the blind man just a few minutes earlier.

This ending also sets up a surprise for the reader. One would expect that someone as powerful as Jesus would have continual victories wherever He goes. That impression is supported in the next chapter, as Jesus brings Zacchaeus the tax collector to repentance and as Jesus enters Jerusalem with a crowd of people who call Him "King." Yet Jesus had warned His disciples more than once that He would have to die and rise again. The reader is thus primed to experience the shock of Jesus' death and the joy of His resurrection that follows.

Involvement Learning

David's Son

Into the Lesson

Define the word *faith*. You can use dictionaries, biblical examples, or other pertinent resources.

Today we will see what Scripture has to teach us from a blind man who nonetheless could see that Jesus was the Son of David. The blind man's faith in the right person gave him his sight.

Into the Word

Read Luke 18:35-43. What motivations, knowledge, and insight seemed to be driving that individual or group to speak and act as they do?

Jesus _____

The blind man _____

The crowd _____

What is the significance of Jesus being called the "Son of David" (Luke 18:38-39). Be sure to consider where this phrase originated, what expectations were attached to it, and how Jesus fulfilled or upended those expectations.

Key Verse

They which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.
—Luke 18:39

Into Life

In what ways are you like the man who was healed? In what ways are you like the crowd who saw it unfold?

What challenges do you face in faithfully calling out to Jesus, whether because of a crowd or other concerns?

How can Jesus' identity as the Son of David bolster our confidence in Christ?

Thought to Remember

Persistent faith is vital.

The Lord Is King

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Background Scripture: Psalms 9, 10

Today's Scripture: Psalm 10:12-18

I. Humanity's Evil

Psalm 10:12-13

12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand. Forget not the humble.

13 Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require it.

12a. Psalms 9 and 10 were originally a single poem. It was split apart to serve separate purposes. The entire poem falls into four roughly equally sized sections. Each part contributes something to the overall picture as the poem moves toward a request for God's help in a world of suffering and struggle. They even form a partial acrostic as they use 17 letters of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet, successively, as the lines progress

We see here in verse 12 the first of three requested actions—requests that go from general to specific.

12b. The sense of this requested action is a desire for divine retribution. Such a desire implies a desire for God to assume the role of the divine warrior. It also can paint a picture of God's ability to save. But the two ideas are not mutually exclusive—the former can result in the latter.

An image of God's engaging in war is problematic to modern eyes. This is because the image can be misused to justify atrocities by some people against

others. Scripture often uses this imagery to depict God's commitment to ending wrongdoing and ensuring justice.

12c. We come to the third requested action—the most specific of the three. People *forget*, but God does not. Therefore, this request may seem strange, given that God always has complete mastery of all facts. Even so, the psalmist speaks similarly in several other passages. Suffering or a sense of isolation often results in a feeling of being forsaken, thus the cry of desperation.

13. This verse adds to the description of *the wicked* in Psalm 10:3b. The word *contemn* and the phrase *thou wilt not require it* may be hard to understand. The verb *contemn* is closely related to the familiar noun *contempt*; therefore, the idea is that of despising or disdainful God. What such a person claims *in his heart* is to be above accountability (*thou wilt not require it*). But that is never true.

Sinful conduct toward those in need can take two general forms: active oppression and benign neglect. The care of vulnerable people does not interest the wicked—only their exploitation. Either behavior shows contempt for God.

The righteous person, by contrast, fears God. He or she shows this by doing good for others, even at personal risk. The wicked have gotten away with

their behavior for so long that they think themselves to be immune from God's justice.

II. God's Awareness

Psalm 10:14

14 Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand. The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

14a. The appeal to God becomes more direct as the psalm calls God's attention to the attitudes and actions of the wicked. God is aware of such behaviors and responds to them. And, just as important, the psalmist is aware of God's awareness.

The word translated *mischief* is also translated as "trouble," "misery," and "labour." The word translated *spite* similarly has a somewhat wide range of possible meanings, including "anger," "grief," and "provocation." The focus is therefore not so much on the attitudes and actions of evildoers, but rather on the results of their evil actions. Some human suffering comes about because of the actions of others, and God takes up the cause of the vulnerable.

14b. This clause translates as "to give with your hand." The idea is that God raises His arm to defeat the evildoers in the earlier verses, so He also uses His strength to provide for the oppressed by His hand.

14c. In the Old Testament, the people most at risk or in need are often categorized as widows, *the poor*, and *the fatherless*. A fourth category used sometimes is "stranger," referring to a non-Israelite. Usually, however, only two are mentioned in the same verse, and that is the case here.

Helpless people realize that God is all they have. The psalmist takes God's care

for such people as a given, a theme often occurring in Scripture. The descriptor of God as the "helper" of those in need frequently appears in the Old Testament. We must embrace God's concern for how people treat one another. Condemnation of those who neglect or exploit the vulnerable is not a lesser concern in the New Testament. Those who sincerely cry out to God for help will find a listening ear. Trust in God's willingness to aid defines the very heart of faith.

III. God's Intervention

Psalm 10:15

15 Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man. Seek out his wickedness till thou find none.

15a. The text requests punishment for the evildoer. In seeing the phrase *break thou the arm* we might humorously think of "being disarmed" in a pun-like way. But that would be reading a modern concept into the text. Instead, we should be engaged in discerning the psalmist's original intent (a practice called *exegesis*).

We begin traveling down the road to correct exegesis when we realize that the word *arm* is not referring to a literal breaking of someone's physical arm. Instead, the word is a figure of speech for the concept of *power*. We see God's breaking of arms in just that sense in Ezekiel 30:21-24.

The image of breaking arms of the wicked also appears in Psalm 37:17. The breaking of enemies' "teeth" in Psalm 3:7 is similar. God, as a mighty warrior, is undoubtedly able to do this. But the image in the text at hand seems to be that of the evildoers as being like soon-to-be powerless warriors. Their arms are broken; they can no longer oppress the vulnerable.

The psalms also speak, conversely, of

the need of the righteous to be broken-hearted for God to sustain and redeem. Those who have been crushed by life have a sure advocate in God. Connecting the two ideas, we see the breaking of the arms of the wicked as God's response to the decision of the wicked not to break their hearts before God.

15b. This half-verse may seem puzzling at first. The ancient Greek version, the Septuagint is translated as "his sin shall be sought for, and shall not be found." The idea is that God's cleansing of sin is to be so complete that there is none (zero!) left to be found. The unerring ability to discern good and evil and to assess the proper response qualifies God to be, as Abraham put it, "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25).

IV. God's Character Psalm 10:16-18

16 The LORD is King for ever and ever. The heathen are perished out of his land.

17 LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.

18 To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.

16a. God's actions fall into three categories: He creates, rules, and redeems. The confession of the Lord's kingship acknowledges the second of those three and is a significant idea in the Psalter as a whole. *The Lord is king* over the nations and peoples, whether they like it or not. God's rule should be a subject of confession and worship. The psalmist calls upon all reading or singing this text to recall that God—neither the idols nor the rulers of empires—is the ultimate ruler. No other sovereign reigns *for ever and ever*.

16b. The second half of the verse says

something about the future of the Israelites. Centuries after David's reign (1010–970 BC), the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah came to be dominated by a succession of massive pagan empires. First, it was Assyria, then Babylonia, then Persia. This order of invasion was predicted in Deuteronomy 8:20. For *the heathen* to be *perished out of his land* reflects confidence that domination by foreign empires will end.

The psalm does not blame the Israelites' coming travails solely on those great empires. Instead, 20/20 hindsight allows us to detect a hint of repentance-to-come since that is a prerequisite for the removal of God's judgment that comes via those empires

17. The meaning of being *humble* is explained in the commentary on Psalm 10:12 above. Verse 17 gives us the opposite of Psalm 10:3, which speaks of the desires of wicked people. Other psalms witness the double-edged nature of human *desire*. Some desires are evil, and some are holy. The latter is the case in this verse.

The difference between the *heart* of the humble and that of the wicked is key. The heart of the wicked is one of disloyalty. God listens to our prayers when we offer them from a pure, undivided heart.

18a. *To judge* means to "defend in court" or "argue on behalf of." For God to do so on behalf of *the fatherless and the oppressed* is a model for humans to do likewise. Orphans as a vulnerable group are discussed in the commentary on Psalm 10:14c above. The word translated *oppressed* is somewhat rare in the Old Testament, occurring only here and in Psalms 9:9; 74:21; and Proverbs 26:28.

18b. As God protects those lacking families, support systems, etc., we should see this as a model to emulate. We are commanded to be God's hands and feet in relieving oppression.

The Lord Is Majestic

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 52:1-12
Background Scripture: Psalms 47, 93
Today's Scripture: Psalm 93

I. God's Reign Psalm 93:1-2

1 The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself. The world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.

2 Thy throne is established of old. Thou art from everlasting.

1a. *The LORD* (with small caps) translates God's proper name, often transliterated as "Yahweh" for English speakers. This name is first recorded in Exodus 3:14, when Moses asked how to refer to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Tetragrammaton (which refers to the name *Yahweh*, only four letters in Hebrew) means "I am who I am" or "I will be what I will be." The name conveys God's reliability to be himself, not fickle or changing as people or pagan gods can be.

To speak of God's clothing is to personify Him—that is, to describe Him with human characteristics even though He is not human. The descriptions here are appropriate for a king. But whereas a human king might be clothed in "fine linen" (1 Chronicles 15:27) and royal colors (Esther 8:15), God is *clothed with majesty* and *strength*. God's character alone is so wonderful to perceive that no

further adornment could heighten the experience. His authority in all things rests on himself, not any other trappings of power.

A belt would be *girded* around one's waist. This accessory could hold the robe close to the body or help to gather the bottom part of the robe around and between the top of the legs, allowing free, quick movement. This special preparation for action, especially battle, is what girding oneself signified. In God's case, the action is taken on behalf of His people, to do battle for them. God needs no sword or other weapon to be armed for battle.

1b. *The world* does not exist on its own but was created by God. It can only be spoken of as *stablished* and immovable because of God's intention for it and His power to accomplish what He wills. Should the Lord wish it, all of creation would tremble and fall to pieces. Paul touched on this while preaching in Athens. God expressed His contentment after He finished creating the world, and it is His continuing broad concern for *all* His creation that the psalmist celebrates.

2. Ancient kings were fond of exaggerating the extent of their power and influence. Many rulers, like the pharaohs, believed themselves to be direct

descendants of the gods, worthy of all the honor and glory associated with that status. Maps from various ancient kingdoms show their own territory as the center of the world. Stories of kingly exploits suggest the king was a larger-than-life mythical hero. For instance, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* recounts the semi-mythical King Gilgamesh's exploits and his quest for immortality.

God has no need for exaggeration. In keeping with the royal description in Psalm 93:1a, the *throne* is a symbol of a king's authority. God's throne is generally understood as being in Heaven, while the earth is considered His footstool. One exception to this is the ark of the covenant. As the place where God would meet the high priest, it represented God's throne on earth. Another possible exception is Zion. Revelation 4 offers an awe-inspiring description of the worship around God's throne in Heaven.

This psalm does not concern itself with where the throne is or any description of it. The most important characteristic of this throne is its ancient—indeed timeless—existence. There was never a time when our *everlasting* God was not King. This stands in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern gods who were enthroned by the people each year. God had no need of any human intervention to affirm His kingship.

II. God's Words

Psalm 93:3-5

3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.

4 The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

5 Thy testimonies are very sure. Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

3. The people of Israel lived in an arid region. Some of their homeland was true desert, but all of it depended on seasonal rains. Most rain fell between November and March, with very little from June to September. This climate lent itself to *wadis*, a term that can refer to seasonal creeks that are sometimes dry or to small year-round brooks. In Hebrew, the word translated *floods* can refer to either variety of river. These wadis were prone to flash flooding and could suddenly become violent, rushing torrents, sweeping away anything in their banks. The image here is likely of a swollen, violent river in the midst of flooding. Jesus used this image in His parable of the wise and foolish builders: the sand is a foolish place to build because it marks the bed of a seasonal river.

The heaping up of flood imagery (*lifted up, lifted up their voice, lift up their waves*) emphasizes the ferocity of the water. We might hear in this frightening, rising tide echoes of Noah's flood. Far from the peaceful sound of an afternoon shower, these floods raised a cacophony.

4. The imagery seems to shift from floods to *the sea*, though the concepts are used in parallel to one another, building on the same idea. For the people of Israel and others in the ancient Near East, the Mediterranean Sea was familiar, as it formed the western boundary of the promised land. Familiarity did not breed comfort, however. Water, especially the sea in the ancient Near East, often represented chaos. The sea was powerful and unpredictable. It was home to giant creatures. Its waves and storms posed a mortal danger to those who dared to sail upon it.

Though a river might not typically evoke the same sense of danger, a *flooded* river surely would. The danger of water, whether by flooding or violent *waves of*

the sea, is not *the noise* of it, though this can be greatly alarming. But compared to God's might, the *many waters* could be described with Shakespearean language: "[They are] full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (*Macbeth*). The Lord separated the waters at the beginning, creating order where there had been only chaos. He commands the waves to be still and stay within the boundaries He sets. Indeed, He commands the waters to sustain the creatures He has made and He rules over the mighty creatures of the deep oceans. Little wonder that Jesus demonstrated His divine nature and power by stilling storms to protect His vulnerable disciples, or that they exclaimed in wonder that the one who stills the storm must be the Son of God.

5a. We might think the final verse decisively moves away from nature to civilization. But this is a distinction the psalmist would not make. The same laws and *testimonies* that ordered the waters also created order for God's people. God's word went forth and created an ordered world; God's laws taught the Israelites how to coexist both with one another and with the land that God granted them.

Two laws regarding rest illustrate how God's care for people could also overlap significantly with His care for animals and the wider creation. Every seven years, the land was to be allowed to grow wild without cultivation. Doing so allowed the land to replenish itself through natural processes while also providing food for the poor *and* for wild animals. And on every seventh day, the people were to observe the Sabbath and rest along with any foreigners, slaves, and animals in their midst.

The Lord's testimonies are not like those of unreliable humans, who often either do not know the truth or alter it to fit their own interests. God's word is not like that of human kings, who twist the

truth with words to magnify their power. God's word is *sure*, firm like a huge stone, unmovable even in the greatest flood.

5b. Like the robe and the throne, the ancient king's *house* was intended to demonstrate the extent of his wealth and power. In Israel, Solomon's palace became legendary for its grandeur. And the physical temple that Solomon built to be the Lord's *house* was a beautiful structure. The temple was not truly God's house until He filled it with His glory to such a degree that the priests could not minister there because of it. A *house* could also refer to the family within the home.

As Solomon acknowledged at the temple's dedication, God's primary residence is not the temple. For that reason, it is appropriate that the psalmist did not describe God's house by its literal building materials, such as cedar or gold. Instead, it is defined by *holiness*, one of God's core attributes. One aspect of holiness is uniqueness. When we speak of the holiness of God's people, we often talk about being "set apart" in the sense of being dedicated to following the Lord. This includes seeking to live by His laws and grow into His likeness.

Given the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 BC, *for ever* cannot refer to the longevity of the temple in Jerusalem. God's throne is in Heaven, so we can appropriately consider that His home. And some psalms celebrate all of creation as God's habitation, emphasizing that no place (and no people) are outside of His concern. Those of us who follow Christ are also now God's house in a spiritual sense, as the Holy Spirit forms us into His people in the likeness of Jesus. Knowing that collectively and individually, we are His temple, we commit ourselves to reflect His glory wherever we are, whatever we do. Wherever God chooses to reside, that place is holy.

Involvement Learning

The Lord Is Majestic

Into the Lesson

Write a short poem. Three suggested forms are a couplet (two rhyming lines), a haiku (three lines with 5-7-5 syllables), or a free verse (four lines with no rhyme or rhythm but with repetition or personification).

Poetry can help us see things in a new way. When we creatively play with words, we can spark other people's imagination and draw attention to, or emphasize, valuable truths they may not have considered before. Today's passage of Scripture is a poem; as you read it, pay attention to what images it brings to your mind and what truths it reminds you of.

Key Verse

The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself. The world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.

—Psalm 93:1

Into the Word

Read Psalm 93. Which images or phrases fit with the theme of majesty?

Which images or phrases fit with the theme of strength?

In the blank space, draw a Venn diagram (two circles with some overlap), labeling one circle "Majesty" and the other "Strength." Write down phrases you identified with each theme. Write any shared answers between the circles.

Into Life

Consider Psalm 93 and find the verse from this short psalm that most resonates with you today. Write a short plan to keep this verse in mind in the week ahead.

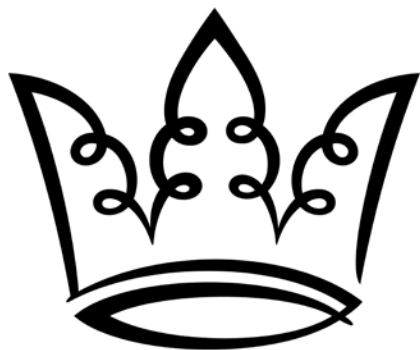
Thought to Remember

The Lord reigns!

A King and His Kingdom

by Jon Miller

This quarter explores the broad sweep of Scripture’s teaching regarding God’s reign—teaching that culminates in the proclamation of Jesus as the earthly exhibition of that kingdom. Beginning with key moments in the history of Jesus’ ancestors, this quarter highlights Jesus’ birth as the Son of David. The quarter then moves to a four-week study of psalms that extol the reign of God. The conclusion of the quarter provides a look at Jesus’ teachings on life in God’s kingdom. At the conclusion of this quarter, we will be able to proclaim, “God’s kingdom will last forever.”



© Getty Images

Jesus, the Heir of David

The first unit of lessons prepares us for the Christmas season by introducing us to members of Jesus’ lineage. Each individual in that lineage is a testament to God’s faithfulness and His glorious plan for His kingdom. This royal lineage would culminate with the rule and reign of Jesus Christ.

The example of Ruth demonstrates

the ways that God’s plan for His kingdom defies human expectations. Even though Ruth was a Gentile (non-Jewish person), she was welcomed and loved (Ruth 4:9-17, lesson 1). Through this Gentile woman, God continued His plan for an eternal kingdom and eternal King. Her descendants were included in the genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:31-32).

Other members of Jesus’ lineage demonstrate the surprising ways that God works. King David’s behavior was a mixed bag, but his “house and . . . kingdom” (2 Samuel 7:16, lesson 2) would be forever. His royal line would eventually lead to the promised Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Zacharias, a relative of Jesus who lived at the time of Jesus’ birth, considered how his own son would prepare the way for Jesus. Zacharias’s son, John, would become “the prophet of the Highest” and one who would “give knowledge of salvation” (Luke 1:76-77, lesson 3).

The Scripture text of lesson 4 reveals the culmination of the long-awaited hope. Luke’s Gospel highlights how Jesus’ birth, as the heir of David, brings good news to the world—even to lowly shepherds (Luke 2:1-16). The first unit of lessons concludes with a glimpse of Jesus, the “Son of David” (Luke 18:38, lesson 5), who bestows mercy on those in need.

Our God Reigns

The songbook of the ancient people of God, the Psalms, praises the reign of God. Through these songs, God’s

people find comfort in the assurance of God's reign (Psalm 10:12-18, lesson 6). God's people proclaim that "The Lord is King for ever and ever" (10:16). He is the eternal and all-powerful King (Psalms 47, 93, lesson 7), who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (103:8, lesson 8). As such, God's people praise His righteous name for His powerful acts as ruler of an everlasting kingdom: "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations" (145:13, lesson 9).

Life in the Kingdom

The quarter concludes with four lessons from the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus explains the nature and obligations of life in His kingdom. This manner of living consists of prayer marked with praise, petitions, and forgiveness (Matthew 6:5-15, lesson 10).

Life in this kingdom will not be marked with ease. In fact, citizens of this heavenly kingdom will inevitably face resistance in this world, for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence" (Matthew 11:12, lesson 11).

Life in the kingdom will often involve reorienting expectations. When a rich young ruler sought eternal life through his good deeds, Jesus pointed him toward a more profound understanding of kingdom living (Matthew 19:16-30, lesson 12). More than anything, citizens of this heavenly kingdom are called to faithful obedience to the King, even in unexpected contexts (Matthew 25:31-46, lesson 13). The King has called His people to life in His kingdom. Are you ready?

What steps will you take in the upcoming weeks to orient your life to life in Jesus' kingdom? Who is an accountability partner who can help you in this regard?



Praise the King!

by Christian Wilder

Several lessons of this quarter celebrate the reign of God through worship and praise of the psalms. Praise is not a modern invention, nor is it limited to the Christian tradition. Since the beginning of civilization, humans have offered praise and worship to fictitious gods.

Praise in the Ancient World

One such account in Ancient Near Eastern literature comes from the coronation of Sulgi, written over five thousand years ago. Sulgi praises his god in response to his own coronation as king.

Praise is also used to motivate a god to act on behalf of the person praising. One such example is the Babylonian “Prayer of Lamentation to Ishtar.” This prayer is an attempt to sway the god through flattery.

On the surface, these accounts may look similar to the biblical idea of praise. But the Christian should never resort to deceit or mere flattery. Instead, the Old and New Testaments present a different approach to praise and worship. Whereas these examples highlight a human-centered approach to praise, biblical praise is done in response to who God is and what He has done as King.

Biblical Praise: Direct

The biblical authors incorporated praise in two ways: direct praise and praise in narrative form. Direct praise includes the author’s recorded words praising God. This method, found in poetry or direct speech, usually describes the proclamation of praise from the point of view of the person offering that praise. Often, these expressions of praise include particular

words indicative of worship—words such as *praise*, *thanksgiving*, and *bless*.

Examples of direct praise are found in the song of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15:11-21), the book of Psalms (example: Psalms 9:1-12), and even from the book of Revelation (example: Revelation 7:9-17). These passages highlight the focused nature of direct praise, expressions of worship to an active and caring God.

Biblical Praise: Narrative

A second way biblical authors demonstrate praise is through the use of narrative. These are biblical passages in which an author depicts a picture of people praising God, often in response to God’s work or intervention among His people. Examples of narrative praise can be found in the story of the healing of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), the events of Pentecost (Acts 2), and the conversion of Cornelius (10:34-37).

Sometimes, the biblical author describes people praising God after events that do not clearly indicate His direct intervention. In these cases, the praise may be for God’s protection or His goodness (example: 2 Samuel 6:1-19). Narrative praise shows that praising God can serve as an example to others.

Conclusion

Just as the Bible contains accounts of direct praise to God and narratives of people praising God, so it should be with the pages of our lives. We can and should praise God directly. And the narrative that it creates for others can inspire them to praise God as well.

The Lord Is Active

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 66:1-14

Background Scripture: Psalm 103

Today's Scripture: Psalm 103:1-14

I. Call to Worship

Psalm 103:1-5

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

1a. The word *bless* translates a Hebrew word that overlaps in meaning with other Hebrew words. Psalm 104:35 is particularly interesting in this regard. Its translation, “Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord,” reveals that the different words translated “bless” and “praise” overlap in meaning, following the practice of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Reflecting that fact seems to be the intent of the psalmist.

Other words in this same grouping that reflect the imperative to *bless the Lord* include those translated “glorify,” “magnify,” “exalt,” and “extol.” All speak of lifting worship to the only one who is worthy of it.

1b. The second half of verse 1 stands

parallel to the first half. The parallel elements are arranged in a pattern such that the first and last parts correspond, and the middle parts correspond. “Bless the Lord” corresponds to “bless his holy name” as “O my soul” corresponds to “all that is within me.”

Unlike the verse before us, the phrase “bless the Lord” repeated in the last three verses of Psalm 103 (not in today's text) is decisively plural. What the psalmist finds appropriate for himself applies equally to his fellow Israelites. But he begins with self. A life of regular, sincere worship draws us closer to God. The fact that God's *name* is *holy* hints that we are to be so as well.

2a. The first half of this verse is identical to the first half of verse 1, just considered in both Hebrew and English.

2b. The second half of verse 2 adds a negative imperative alongside the positive one of Psalm 103:1b. Worship of God includes, even requires, an accurate recall of who God is and what He has done. Forgetfulness in this regard—whether intentional or otherwise—invites God's wrath. The history of ancient Israel testifies relentlessly to the fact that forgetfulness is a precursor to sin and apostasy.

3. The next several verses feature a series of action verbs that describe how God relates to humanity. The psalmist begins by speaking of the completeness of God's

works toward humanity as He deals with both issues of the spirit (*iniquities*) and the body (*diseases*). This combination does not necessarily argue that sin causes disease (or vice versa). God-as-healer is a major theme in the Psalter.

4. In a general, abstract sense, we want two things for our lives: (1) we want to avoid negative things that take us down, and (2) we want to embrace positive things that move us forward. The verse before us specifies that God is the key in both areas. He's not a one-dimensional god, as are the fictitious deities of paganism. The word *crowneth* also appears in the past tense in Psalm 8:5, and its cross-connection with Hebrews 2:7 is interesting and insightful.

5. God provides abundantly. Two extraordinary features of food are its sheer variety and the forms of enjoyment it gives when not consumed to excess. This bounty is an important symbol of God's goodness, particularly in provision.

Various comparisons with eagles occur about two dozen times in the Old Testament. The image projected is almost always one of strength or capability.

II. Acknowledge Divine Grace **Psalm 103:6-14**

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

6. The series of action verbs continues, extending the ideas of the two previous verses. The characteristic actions or concepts of *righteousness* and *judgment* are closely related, coupled as we see here about 50 times in the Old Testament.

7a. We come now to the conclusion of the series of action verbs begun in Psalm 103:3. What is different here is that the verbs shift from what God was doing in the psalmist's present to what God did in Israel's beginnings via *Moses*. The fact that humans lived hundreds of years before the psalmist (David) reveals God's consistency. He *made known his* unchanging *ways* in giving His law at Sinai. Those laws were to guide the path of redeemed lives.

7b. As the second half of the verse points out, the words of the Torah are not merely words to live by. They also use *acts* by God as a model for *the children of Israel* for those requirements. We have heard of people who don't "practice what they preach." That may be true of humans, but it is never true of God!

8. This verse deepens the psalm's connection to the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt. The verse at hand quotes Exodus 34:6, probably the verse of the Old Testament most quoted within the Old Testament itself.

9. The thoughts of this verse are also reflected in numerous other passages. God's judgment of sin does not cancel out His mercy, and even times of punishment cannot be the last word (the notable exception is Jude 13).

Regarding a connection with Isaiah 57:16, that verse is part of a more extensive discussion of sin and redemption in which the prophet both notes how oppressed people can be, as well as the need for God to intervene on their behalf. God indeed does punish the guilty. However, He wants mercy to triumph as people repent. All this is reflected in the prophets' relentless message, which can be summed up in one word: *Repent!*

10. Once again, the parallelism that characterizes so much of Hebrew poetry is observed: the phrase *hath not dealt with us* expresses the same thought as *rewarded us*. The phrase *after our sins* expresses the same idea as *according to our iniquities*. Good news bears repeating! This verse does just that as it summarizes the previous observations about God's mercy. The clearest evidence of that mercy is how He deals with sin: the punishment is less than the sin deserves. Were He to treat sinners immediately as we deserve, our situation would be hopeless. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm 130:3-4).

11-12. These two verses allow us to explore the concept of parallelism a bit deeper since there is more than one kind. Many instances of parallelism are easily recognizable as *synonymous parallels*, where the two lines under consideration say about the same thing using different words. That's the kind of parallelism we see in verse 10.

But now, we encounter what is called *alternate parallelism*. Rather than featuring the two lines of synonymous parallelism, an alternate parallel has four lines. Those four lines alternate as the third line repeats the first line in some way, and the fourth line repeats the second line. To the ancient mind, the

distance between *heaven* and *earth* (the first line) is as incalculable as the distance between *east* and *west* (the third line). These two lines begin two analogies completed by the second and fourth lines as the psalmist marvels that *so great is his mercy* and that *so far hath he removed our transgressions*, respectively. These features help us understand the text as the original writer intended.

13. The Hebrew verb translated *pitieth* is also translated "have mercy" in Psalm 102:13 and "had compassion" in 2 Kings 13:23, and that is the sense here. God shows the sort of compassionate mercy to us that a good parent does to a child. Parents gently educate, correct, guide, and encourage. The image of God as a *father* also appears in the Torah, wisdom literature, the prophets, and the New Testament. Those texts mention God's fatherhood as a way of calling the people to reconsider the direction of their lives. In Psalm 103, however, the emphasis is slightly different. Remembering that God works as a parent should comfort the reader in times of distress.

14. The Hebrew word translated *frame* occurs nine times in the Old Testament. In six of its other occurrences, the word speaks of a person's frame of mind; in two occurrences, the idea is that of someone's physical being.

The latter would also seem to be the case here if the word *dust* is taken to be a synonymous parallel with *frame*. This conclusion is entirely consistent with the fact of the creation of humans in Genesis 2:7. There, in the word *formed*, we find the verb form of the noun *frame*. The Creator knows His creation.

Moreover, God's mercy reflects His awareness of our limits. The fact that our bodies decay into dirt results from our limited life spans. God works with due regard for our limitations.

Involvement Learning

The Lord Is Active

Into the Lesson

Who is someone you admire but you do not know personally, and who is not a public figure?

What is it about that person's life that you find admirable and worth emulating?

It is pretty easy for us to praise those people who actively do right. But how often do we do that to the exclusion of praising the Lord for His actions? Today's text may convict us in that regard.

Key Verse

The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.
—Psalm 103:6

Into the Word

Read Psalm 103:1-5. Focusing on the word *benefits* in verse 2, (1) identify benefits mentioned in these five verses and (2) identify benefits that you have experienced over and above those in the text.

Read Psalm 103:6-10. What does this range of verses tell us about the character of God?

In no more than three words, complete the following heading (example: "The Lord is compassionate!"): *The Lord is . . .*

The Lord is . . .

Read Psalm 103:11-14. What additional word pictures or analogies to explain these truths to a small child.

Into Life

Write a prayer in the week ahead that celebrates God as the source of blessings.

Thought to Remember

Expect signs of God's mercy.
Be one yourself.

The Lord Is Righteous

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29

Background Scripture: Psalm 145

Today's Scripture: Psalm 145:1, 10-21

I. Praiseworthy God, Part 1 Psalm 145:1, 10-13

**1 I will extol thee, my God, O king,
and I will bless thy name for ever and
ever.**

**10 All thy works shall praise thee, O
LORD, and thy saints shall bless thee.**

**11 They shall speak of the glory of
thy kingdom, and talk of thy power,**

**12 To make known to the sons of
men his mighty acts, and the glorious
majesty of his kingdom.**

**13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting
kingdom, and thy dominion endureth
throughout all generations.**

1. Other lessons from the Psalms this quarter have introduced us to *parallelism* as a feature of Hebrew poetry. We saw last week in Psalm 103:1 that there are various synonyms or near-synonyms that express the concept of *bless*. That fact continues to hold true here in Psalm 145:1, as we see the words *extol* and *bless* alongside the words *bless* and *praise* in the verse that follows.

The psalm's opening phrase *I will extol thee* is repeated exactly in the original language, in Psalm 30:1. A slight divergence between the two texts is seen in the next phrase: the text we are studying is directed toward *my God, O king*, while

30:1 has "O Lord." They are clearly one and the same!

God's actions can be categorized in three ways: He creates, rules, and redeems. In proclaiming God as his king, the psalmist acknowledges the second of those three. The psalmist invites the reader to consider God's character as good and powerful in that regard.

10. The phrase *all thy works* expands the scope beyond merely Israel and the entirety of humankind to encompass the inanimate elements of creation. The praise of God concerns all aspects of the universe. The *saints* are those who live in solidarity with both God and other people. They see themselves as carrying a responsibility for others, owing others respect, care, and concern shown in tangible actions. Those who live in such a way find room for praising God, even during difficult times, and those sincerely praising God have no problem being loyal to other people.

11-12. We group these two verses because they illustrate an X-shaped parallel construction similar to what we saw in last week's lesson. In verse 11, kingdom glory corresponds to the *glorious majesty* of the *kingdom* in verse 12. *Thy power* in verse 11 corresponds to *his mighty acts* in verse 12.

Glory is an attribute belonging to God.

By extension, it also belongs to His *kingdom*. But we may ask ourselves, *Who can be in this glorious kingdom besides God?* In one sense, only those included in “the saints” of the previous verse are or will be kingdom-citizens. In a broader sense, however, we see this declaration in Psalm 103:19: “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.” There is only one ultimate king, and the rule of His kingdom is not limited. Satan has his own kingdom, but in the end, it is temporary. People, both ancient and modern, also set themselves on the thrones of their hearts to be self-kingdoms or kingdoms-of-one; this is folly.

13. The psalmist understood that God’s rule extends beyond any given moment or era. The New Testament writers understood this as well. While all earthly things pass away, God’s merciful concern for His creation does not.

II. Compassionate God Psalm 145:14-20

14 The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

15 The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season.

16 Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

18 The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

19 He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him. He also will hear their cry, and will save them.

20 The LORD preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will he destroy.

14. Parallelism in thoughts continues.

Even so, this verse shows extra poetic creativity. The original words translated *upholdeth* and *fall* are quite common in the Old Testament in general and the Psalms in particular. By contrast, the word translated *raiseth up* is rare, occurring only here and in Psalm 146:8 in the entire Old Testament.

But the primary challenge concerns the word translated *bowed down*, which is found only here and in Psalm 148:6; Isaiah 57:6; 58:5; and Micah 6:6. Reading all the texts that have “bowed down” reveals that the word doesn’t have the same meaning in all contexts. There seem to be two possibilities: it refers to great distress or a posture of worship. Which of these does the writer of Psalm 145 intend? Is the one “bowed down” humbled by negative life experiences, or does the person seek to worship God?

A third possibility is that the ambiguity is deliberate, with the psalm pointing us to both meanings being intended. In that case, the message would be that whatever experiences bring us humbly to God will result in our ultimate benefit.

15-16. The parallelism continues as these two verses make essentially the same point but in different ways. The psalmist describes worshippers almost as children waiting for a parent to give them something they need. They recognize that all people, indeed *every living thing*, depend on God similarly. That is true even if not everyone recognizes it as truth. God graciously feeds all. This idea underlies Jesus’ statement that it rains on the just and unjust alike, with both benefiting from the life-giving things God bestows on them.

Meat refers to food in general, which God provides in due time. The text does not promise wealth, and a spiritually mature person would not expect God to be a purveyor of such. But God does give us

what we need. To open the *hand* implies giving a gift. God's gifts may go beyond the bare essentials to things that bring appropriate forms of pleasure.

17. The phrase *all his ways*, which parallels *all his works*, includes the generosity of the previous verse. The word translated *holy* occurs about 50 times in the Old Testament, but almost always, it refers to godly people. It refers to a characteristic of God in no more than a half dozen places, and this is one of them. Throughout history, those who have questioned God's righteousness or justice have discovered that this is an area where humanity lacks, not God.

18. Psalms of lament often express regret that God seems so far away, and they request God's tangible presence. On the other hand, there are biblical cases where people do *not* desire God's nearness. But here, it would be helpful to see a distinction between the two senses of the near/far issue. We might call one sense "literal nearness" and the other "spiritual nearness." The fact of God's presence and activity within the world is summed up in the word *immanence*; we are in the presence of the immanent God at all times—and note that this is not the word *imminent*. That's the literal nearness.

19. The second part of this verse clarifies the first part since God does not fulfill each and every imaginable *desire* that people have. The most striking example of God's hearing a *cry* and effecting deliverance is the exodus from Egypt.

The promise *will save them* can be understood in two senses in the various places it is used: it can mean rescue from a physical threat or from a spiritual threat of unholiness. Sometimes, the two senses are both present if rescue from a physical threat accompanies rescue from a spiritual threat.

We know from modern experience

and Bible history that God does not always deliver godly people from the loss of their physical life; sometimes, His larger plans include even death—but this is temporary, given the promise of our resurrection. But He is always ready, willing, and able to deliver us from spiritual threats.

20a. Psalms 31:23; 91:14; and 97:10 also reflect the reality of this praise thought. *Preserveth* carries the idea of "protection." The wording in the original Hebrew of the phrase *them that love him* is also translated "his friends" in Esther 5:10, 14; 6:13. Those who love God rejoice because of repeated acts of goodness toward them.

20b. Psalm 94:23 is similar. In contrast to the experience of those who love God, *the wicked* can expect a terrible fate. This statement confesses a general truth, though the psalms also know a great deal about forgiveness of sins. The wicked are those who refuse to repent while deliberately pursuing the harm of others.

III. Praiseworthy God, Part 2 Psalm 145:21

21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

21. The psalm concludes, as many do, with a promise to praise God. This personal commitment by the one praying this psalm also extends to others (*all flesh*). The psalmist hopes that all beings capable of praise, especially humans but not necessarily limited to them, will acknowledge the rightness of God's good reputation for saving works and do so in perpetuity (*for ever and ever*). This phrasing serves as an appropriate "bookend" to the psalm, with the first of the two bookends occurring in the opening verse of our lesson today.

Praying Properly

Devotional Reading: Psalm 4

Background Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15

Today's Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15

I. Directives for Prayer

Matthew 6:5-8

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

5. Before the time of Jesus, the word *hypocrite* was used to describe actors on the stage, people who pretended to be what they were not. That is Jesus' point: some people are respected for their devotion to God, but they are not devoted to God at all. Instead, they want other people's attention and approval.

Matthew records the use of the word *hypocrite(s)* 15 times, Mark once, and Luke four times—all 20 on the lips of Jesus. In Matthew 6, Jesus gives three

contexts for such wrong-hearted behavior: giving for the relief of the poor, praying in public, and fasting. Jesus did not condemn the practices of giving, public prayer, or fasting as such; instead, He was condemning self-seeking motives behind them.

6. Rather than make a public performance of prayer, Jesus stressed the need to retreat to a private place. Note again that the issue is not "private prayer" versus "public prayer" as such. Instead, it's an issue of "private prayer" versus "public performance." Jesus wasn't stressing *where* a person prayed, but *why*. A valid prayer is directed to God alone and is not concerned with whether others notice.

7. Jesus' mention of the excesses of hypocritical, performative praying suggests its practice in His day. Prayers of this nature are no better than prayers of *the heathen*. In the cultures surrounding Israel in Jesus' time, the "gods" were often considered unpredictable and selfish, like powerful human rulers. Praying to such gods was a matter of begging them not to harm or nagging them for a gift. Further, many pagans thought of their gods less as personal beings and more like unseen forces that could be manipulated.

8. Next, Jesus informed His hearers of an important "given" that should undergird all prayers: our heavenly *Father*

knows our needs before we even pray to Him. We are not telling Him anything He doesn't already know. This does not mean we should not ask or that we should assume prayer is unnecessary. Prayer reflects the measure of the faith we have in the fact that God does indeed listen.

II. The Prototypical Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

9a. A cup of coffee consists of two things: the cup that holds the coffee (the “form”) and the coffee itself (the “content”). Prayer also has a form and content. We have discussed the *form*; we now move to prayer's *content*.

9b. This establishes the prayer's recipient. Unless you know to whom you are praying, your prayers may be pointless at best and a violation of Exodus 20:3 at worst. By definition, *prayer* is a conversation with the God of all creation. As Christians, we do not launch our prayers into the void, hoping that someone will be listening. Instead, we pray in faith, addressing the one true God who creates, rules, and redeems.

9c. Continuing from above, we come to the second part of properly addressing God. We might ask, Where is *heaven*? Heaven is where God is, and we are barely able to scratch the surface in understanding that. Yet there is an important truth

for us in Jesus' words: God is the “God of heaven,” a phrase used about two dozen times in the Bible, all but two of which occur in the Old Testament. He is not part of the physical, created universe. God is separate. We are on earth; God is in Heaven. Even so, we mortals are privileged to speak with the God of Heaven.

9d. Following the issue of how to address God, Jesus instructs on the proper way of thinking about God. The word *hallowed* speaks to the issue of God's holiness. When we pray *hallowed be thy name*, we are saying, in effect, “May your name be holy.” This is a commitment to honor the third commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus 20:7). But it's more than just being correct at *not* doing something; there's a positive element as well. When we pray “hallowed by thy name,” we reaffirm our resolve to uphold His holy nature.

10a. This petition may be challenging to understand because the underlying Greek verb is a third-person imperative, and the English language doesn't have this grammatical option, strictly speaking. The closest we can come is by using the word *let*. We see this in our translations of third-person imperatives in John 7:37 and Revelation 22:17. But the idea is more forceful than taking the word *let* to mean “allow.” The sense is one of expressing an urgent need for God's *kingdom* to *come* in its fullness. In this kingdom, there will be no temptation, sin, pain, sadness, or death. God will rule over everything, and His followers will worship Him forever.

10b. This partial verse contains another third-person imperative in the underlying Greek. As mentioned above, the idea is an implied use of the word *let* in a stronger sense than merely “allow.” For examples of the word *let* equating to the

word *allow*, see Acts 5:38; 17:9; for more examples of the word *let* in the stronger sense, see Matthew 11:15; Galatians 1:8.

10c. These twin petitions are all-encompassing. To pray for the establishment of God's kingdom *is* to pray for the carrying out of God's will in every place as God reigns over His realms. Or perhaps we should use the singular word *realm* instead. The two locations of *earth* and *heaven* should not be unduly separated since the qualifier unites them *as it is in*. In using that phrase, Jesus depicts Heaven as a place without opposition to God's will.

When we pray these petitions, we pray that God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, will come to earth. To pray this is to pray that God's sovereign will, as realized in Heaven, will prevail in the present world where we live.

11. There are two important points to note about this request. First, the word *give* has a broad sense of "provide" when associated with God. Second, the idea of *bread* in the Bible is more than a reference to baked loaves. The word may indeed refer to that, but context determines if the concept of "food in general" is meant. The word may have the even larger sense of "things necessary for life" (John 6:33). When we say this prayer, we acknowledge that we rely on God. It is not about informing Him of things we think He might not be aware of. We are affirming our belief that God will meet every need.

12. This petition is unique in being conditional. As we ask for God's forgiveness, we promise to be forgiving of others. This is the only petition in the prayer that receives an additional comment from Jesus at the end.

13a. These final petitions of the prayer are two sides of the same coin: to *lead us not into* is to *deliver us from*. The first

part of this request has troubled those who think it raises the possibility that God himself can be responsible for tempting us to sin. Jesus did not intend this understanding, and James 1:13 is definitive on this point: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." God may allow temptation, but He does not initiate or cause it. Still, there are moments when God saves us from difficult situations or "trials." Taking the two petitions of this half-verse together gives the sense of "give us power over"—and He does.

13b. This half-verse is not found in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel. But with echoes of 1 Chronicles 29:11-13, it nevertheless expresses a biblical idea. It is very fitting for the themes of this prayer as it doubles down in emphasizing God's sovereignty, with which the prayer begins.

III. Addendum on Forgiveness Matthew 6:14-15

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

14-15. After describing how to pray, Jesus gives more information on the need to *forgive*. This conditional petition is so important that Jesus later clarified it with a lengthy parable in Matthew 18:21-35.

In the addendum on forgiveness before us, we note that Jesus has switched from the words *debts* and *debtors* in Matthew 6:12 to the word *trespasses*. The word translated "trespasses" often refers to sins, while the word translated "debts" might include other kinds of obligations.

Involvement Learning

Praying Properly

Into the Lesson

Write down an experience from childhood of having to memorize certain prayers. Think about how those prayers shaped your understanding of prayer.

For some people, prayer may be such a common habit that they give it very little thought; for others, prayer may not be as familiar and, therefore, more difficult to remember to practice. In today's lesson, consider what new prayer habit you could learn from Jesus' instruction.

Into the Word

Read Matthew 6:5-8. How can we pray unseen by others per Matthew 6:6 when we're supposed to let our lights shine before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father per Matthew 5:16?

Read Matthew 6:9-13. Considering Jesus' directive, "After this manner therefore pray ye," does that mean we should at least occasionally use the exact words of this prayer? Why, or why not?

Read Matthew 6:14-15. Considering God's track record and Luke 17:4, should forgiveness be extended to someone who does not repent? Why, or why not?

Key Verse

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done
in earth, as it is in heaven.
—Matthew 6:10

Into Life

Is it proper to call the various aspects of prayer in general and the Lord's Prayer in particular "ingredients of a recipe"? Why, or why not?

Thought to Remember

Pray as if God is listening—because
He is.

The Value of Context

by Ronald L. Nickelson

Why bother reading this page? Of what practical importance is it to “get the setting”? Why “waste time” studying a setting or context that won’t change a statement’s meaning?

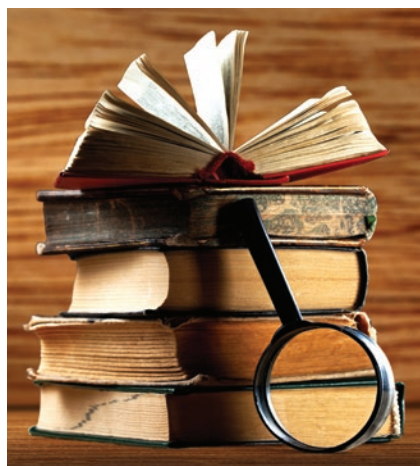
To answer these questions, we first need to understand that the words *context* and *setting* mean the same thing in terms of our discussion here. Another thing to realize is that *context* can be addressed in terms of two subcategories: *historical context* and *literary context*.

The Historical Context

This kind of context considers what else was going on at the time that the event or thought of the text occurred. Words are not spoken, nor do events occur, in a vacuum! The first lesson of this quarter invites special attention in this regard. Taken in isolation, the book of Ruth may seem to be little more than a quaint love story that revolves around curious cultural practices. But the text takes on a certain sharpness when considering its historical context is the dreary period of the judges.

Spanning roughly the years 1380–1050 BC, the era of the judges was a time when “there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). The book of Ruth, then, is a countercultural story in that the characters in the story go to appropriate lengths to make sure to do the right thing in *everyone’s* eyes. The book self-testifies to its place in history, being an account of the great-grandparents of David, whose descendant Jesus would reign as King forever.

The historical settings in the lesson texts of this quarter are both continuous and discontinuous with that of the book of Ruth. Elements of continuity are the facts of sin, foreign oppression, and a persistent emphasis on King David. Elements of discontinuity across our 13 lessons include a shift in perspective from the old covenant to the new covenant, a change from an expected Messiah to the advent of the Messiah, and the presence of clearly delineated power structures within Israel.



© Getty Images

The Literary Context

This subcategory of context investigates the kind of literature in which the text appears. Is it parable? sarcasm? apocalyptic? history? poetry? There are other categories, but you get the picture.

Each type of literature has its own distinctive recurring characteristics and, therefore, distinctive guidelines

for interpretation as the original author intended for the text. Parables use fictional elements to stress important real-life points (examples: Jesus' parables). In sarcasm, the writer means the opposite of what he or she is saying (example: Isaiah 47:12). Apocalyptic literature includes content on ultimate realities (example: Mark 13).

History is the type of literature for lessons of units 1 and 3 for this quarter. The authors intended these texts to be understood as having really happened to real people at a real time in history. (Note: this use of the word *history* is an issue of "what happened," while the issue of historical context, previously discussed, is an issue of "when it happened.")

Poetry is the type of literature in the four lessons of unit 2. This literature

draws out emotion from its audience, but that doesn't mean the poetry is fictional. An example is Psalm 93:2 from lesson 7: "Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting." The poetry elicits the emotion of wonder from the reader. One way that poetry achieves this is through the use of synonymous parallelism, the practice of stating a singular thought—not two thoughts—expressed by two synonymous lines.

Bible Reality

Without any awareness of historical or literary context, even children can pick up a Bible and learn eternal truths. We can do so as well. But if we are ignorant of historical and literary contexts, we won't reach the level of spiritual maturity that we should.

At Just the Right Time

continued from page 19

move quickly throughout the empire. These roads were essential in helping fulfill the divine mandate to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). Christ came on the scene when the transportation network of the ancient world was at its best!

Common Language

Over 500 years before Christ, Daniel prophesied that a goat from the west would conquer; that goat represented Greece (Daniel 8:5, 21). Most interpreters believe that Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) fulfilled that prophecy. He and his successors spread the Greek language far and wide.

By the time of Christ's birth, the Old Testament had been translated into Greek for the benefit of Greek-speaking

Jews. The Day of Pentecost saw many languages being spoken, but the fact that the people could converse with one another about this miracle indicated the presence of a common language (Acts 2:6-12; compare John 19:20; Acts 21:37). Greek was that language, the universal language in which the New Testament was written.

Looking for the Next "Right Time"

God worked through pagan kings, ordinary people, and the rise and fall of empires to prepare for the first coming of the Lord at just the right time. We may, therefore, be assured that Christ's return will also be at just the right time.

Spend time this upcoming week in prayer, praising God for His perfect timing.

Heeding Wholly

Devotional Reading: Matthew 10:31-42

Background Scripture: Matthew 11

Today's Scripture: Matthew 11:7-15, 20-24

I. John, the Messenger

Matthew 11:7-15

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

11 Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

7. Having just received Jesus' answer to their query, John's disciples *departed* to relay that response to John the Baptist, who was in prison. As they left, Jesus turned the tables to inquire about John's identity. Why did so many people leave their comfortable homes to make an uncomfortable, inconvenient trip *out into the wilderness* to be baptized by John? Did they make such a trip because they wanted to see *a reed shaken with the wind*—a description of a wishy-washy, indecisive person whose message shifts with the winds of popularity? These questions were designed to make Jesus' audience consider the kind of individual John the Baptist was.

8. Jesus continued to probe His audience's motivation for making inconvenient trips to see John in the wilderness. Did they travel to a wilderness area to see a fashion show featuring *a man clothed in soft raiment*? This question paints a word picture of someone who lived in stark contrast to John the Baptist. John led a minimalistic life in the wilderness, far removed from the lavish comforts of a king's palace.

9. Jesus posed another rhetorical question. And then He voiced the answer that was on everyone's mind. John's message was of such a nature, his preaching so powerful that even hostile religious leaders

and Roman soldiers came to investigate if not outright repent. They came because they thought John was at least *a prophet* and possibly even the Messiah.

10. As the Messiah's immediate forerunner, John was not only a prophetic voice of the Lord. He was also a fulfillment of a prophecy himself. This prophecy is found in Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1. It is so significant that all four Gospels mention this role.

11. In this verse, Jesus seemed to speak in a paradox. On the one hand, no person *born of women* up to that point was *greater than John the Baptist*. On the other hand, *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*. How can these both be true?

The key is understanding that in various contexts, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God (Matthew prefers the designation "kingdom of heaven") in terms of three time frames: near, present, and yet to come. Jesus spoke of God's reign as being "nigh at hand" (Luke 21:30-31). But as Jesus healed and drove out demons, He also spoke of God's kingdom as being present. And when He spoke of His own return, Jesus pictured the kingdom as a future reality. The ultimate nature of that future kingdom will be so marvelous that the person who is least in it is to be thought of as greater than John the Baptist—whom no one (other than Jesus himself) surpassed in terms of the kingdom of heaven being near.

12-13. Combining the time elements recorded in Matthew 4:12, 17 with those in Luke 3:1-3, 23, we realize that the interval between *the days of John the Baptist* and *now* (as Jesus was speaking) was relatively short—only a few months. This points to an overlap of the ministries of John and Jesus, confirmed by John 3:22-36. Thus, there is no clear line of demarcation between John's role as the last of

the Old Testament prophets and Jesus' inauguration of the *kingdom of heaven*. John's job was to proclaim *the prophets and the law* (the old system) to ready the people for encountering the Messiah. Jesus, as that Messiah, came to open the doors to the kingdom via His death and resurrection (the new system).

Jesus' mention of *violence* foreshadows John's pending death by beheading. It may also apply to Jesus' own death by brutal crucifixion. The church's beginning was not calm and readily accepted; the history of the church is littered with violence and persecution.

14-15. Jesus concluded His teaching on John the Baptist by noting the fulfillment of a prophecy from Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." *Elias* is another name for the prophet Elijah. Elijah's ministry is documented in 1 Kings 17:1-19:21; 21:17-28; and 2 Kings 1:1-2:11. First-century Jews expected the prophecy of Elijah's return to be fulfilled by the arrival of Elijah reincarnated. Jesus affirmed the expectation of Elijah's return but not that of reincarnation. Rather, someone with the attitude and spirit of the original Elijah would come. That person was John the Baptist.

II. Jesus, the Wonder Worker Matthew 11:20-24

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

20. Following criticisms of “this generation” in Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus rebuked the residents of specific villages. The locations at issue were in Galilee, where most of Jesus’ *mighty works* had been displayed. Jesus’ popularity did not result in people heeding His message to “repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17); this message was identical to that of John the Baptist.

The Greek word translated into English as *repentance* means “to change one’s thought process.” When someone repents, they alter their thinking about sin and embrace new thoughts and actions. But Jesus’ message and method were not what the Jews of His day expected. To see God’s work in the healing of lepers, the casting out of demons, etc., should have prompted repentance.

21-22. The villages of *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida* are located near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, less than 10 miles from each other. *Chorazin*, a prosperous agricultural town in the hills above the Sea, is mentioned in the Bible only here and in Luke 10:13. *Bethsaida*, whose name means “house of fishing,” was on the east side of the Jordan River where it feeds into the Sea of Galilee in the north. It was the hometown of Philip, Peter, and Andrew.

Tyre and Sidon, on the other hand, were famous Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast north of Galilee. For these cities to *have repented long ago*

in sackcloth and ashes brings to mind the city of Nineveh, whose citizenry repented when hearing the message of the prophet Jonah. This also foreshadowed Jesus’ travel to the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, where he encountered the extraordinary faith of a Canaanite woman. Repentance and faith will be honored on *the day of judgment*, even among Gentile cities such as Tyre, Sidon, and Nineveh.

23-24. The importance of *Capernaum* is reflected in the fact that it is mentioned 16 times by name in the four Gospels. This fishing village was on the Sea of Galilee, several miles southwest of Bethsaida. Capernaum was strategically located between villages along the Sea of Galilee and those in the Galilean highlands to the west—villages such as Nazareth. This may have been the reason that Jesus used Capernaum as a type of home base for His ministry (Matthew 4:13). Jesus performed several miracles (*mighty works*) in and around this location during His earthly ministry.

The comparison of Capernaum to *Sodom* is quite stark! The latter was one of the cities God destroyed with “brimstone and fire . . . out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24) because of sin so “grievous” (18:20) that not even 10 righteous people were to be found there. In the later books of the Old Testament, Sodom becomes a byword for a place harshly judged for its unrepentant sinfulness. Even Jerusalem did not escape this comparison.

Jesus’ calls to repentance, like those of John the Baptist, appeared threatening and were unappreciated in places like Capernaum. As such, they were rejected. It bears remembering that repentance precedes forgiveness. Calls to repentance must be heeded. Proudful hard-heartedness, on the other hand, will result in a mighty fall, even to the eternal destiny of being *brought down to hell*.

Involvement Learning

Heeding Wholly

Into the Lesson

When were you surprised by something that was contrary to what you expected? something about which you had no expectations at all?

Today we'll look at two individuals to see how they did not match the expectations of those they encountered. In the process, we may find our own expectations challenged as well.

Key Verse

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.
—Matthew 11:20

Into the Word

Summarize the people's (apparent) expectations regarding John the Baptist in Matthew 11:7-15.

Compare and contrast their expectations with those in Matthew 20:9-12; Luke 3:15; 9:7-9.

Summarize the people's (apparent) expectations regarding Jesus in Matthew 11:20-24.

Compare and contrast their expectations with those in Matthew 13:53-57; Luke 2:25-35; John 4:25; 7:25-31.

Into Life

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

—James 1:22

Let's explore some ways for us to be accountable to one another in the Christian life for making sure that *hearing* leads to *heeding*.

Consider the following passages: Proverbs 27:17; Ezekiel 3:16-27; 3:8; John 12:6; 2 Corinthians 2:6; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 5:21; Hebrews 4:13; 10:24-25; 13:17; James 5:16. What are possible differences between accountability to the church and accountability to an individual?

Thought to Remember

Choose repentance.
Choose eternal life.

Living Lastly

Devotional Reading: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Background Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30

Today's Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30

I. A Seeker's Inquiry

Matthew 19:16-22

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother, and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

16. Each of the three Gospel accounts of this encounter offers interesting details that the other two do not. Whereas Mat-

thew's account begins simply by saying *one came*, Mark 10:17 adds that the man came by running and kneeling before Jesus. The account that begins in Luke 18:18 states at the outset that the man was "a certain ruler."

17. Rather than answer the man's question, Jesus first challenged him with a question. He wanted the man to consider whether he knew what he was asking. The man had used the word *good* twice in his question to Jesus, but did he grasp its significance? What did he mean by calling Jesus *good*? No one is truly good except *God*, Jesus told the man. Was he aware of the deity of the one he spoke to? Using "religious language" without depth of understanding can be very easy.

18a. Only Matthew records this response by the man. It seems to indicate his understanding that the various individual statutes within the Law of Moses can be rank-ordered from "necessary for salvation" downward. If this is the man's viewpoint, he is not alone. This is understandable given that the Law of Moses consists of over 600 statutes!

18b-19. In response, Jesus quoted portions of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:2-17. He also quoted Leviticus 19:18.

20. *The young man*, who had asked what good thing he could do to receive

eternal life, appeared to take heart from considering the commandments Jesus had listed. The man's claim to have *kept* these commandments from his *youth* sounds somewhat arrogant, though Jesus offered no reaction to the claim. The man does appear to have lived a morally upright life, perhaps similar to how Paul described himself as being "blameless" regarding a legalistic form of righteousness in his pre-Christian life (Philippians 3:6). *The young man* knew something was missing. It was likely with great anticipation that he asked, "*What lack I yet?*"

21. Jesus knows every person's heart. Everyone has one or more weak areas that prevent being *perfect*. And Jesus knew what that was in this man's case.

22. The young man's reaction to Jesus' challenge reveals that he had broken the First Commandment. That's the one that says to have no other gods before the one true God. Think about it! By disobeying Jesus, was the man not honoring his *great possessions* above God? Luke's account includes this stark contrast: "And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich" (Luke 18:23). What Jesus told the man to do was not what he expected to hear.

II. The Savior's Instruction Matthew 19:23-30

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said

unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee. What shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

23. Sometimes Jesus' public teaching or encounter with an individual was followed by instructions directed toward His *disciples*. Here Jesus provided further teaching concerning the threat that riches can pose to one's progress toward *the kingdom of heaven*.

24. To illustrate His point, Jesus used hyperbole—a statement exaggerated for effect. Some have suggested that an ancient wall in Jerusalem had a small gate called "The Needle's Eye" through which a camel might pass with some difficulty, but only without any baggage or cargo. But that gate was not built until the Middle Ages. Jesus was talking about something impossible for a human being. He emphasized that impossibility with the mental picture of a large *camel* trying to pass *through the eye of a needle*.

25. The shocked response of the *disciples* shows that the hyperbole Jesus used did, in fact, grab their attention. In the

first century, many believed wealth was a sign of God's favor. So, if the wealthy could not be saved, nobody could. Jesus was teaching the disciples that only God can grant salvation, not a person's actions or status. Not long before the rich young ruler approached Jesus, the disciples tried to shoo away children whom they considered a nuisance to Jesus, only to learn that "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). And now, a man whom the disciples considered a "shoo-in" for the kingdom was being declared unworthy to enter it. These would have been difficult, not to mention surprising, words to receive.

26. Whenever people create their own categories of who is worthy or unworthy to be saved, the result can be blindness to the truth that it is *impossible* for humans to purchase their salvation. Only God can address this dilemma, which is why Jesus came to our fallen, broken world to save us.

Jesus' statement does not imply that rich people cannot be saved or enter into a right relationship with God. Poverty is not a key to Heaven, nor are riches an automatic pathway to Hell. The issue comes down to what controls a person's life: wealth or God. One may have great wealth and love God supremely, or one may have very little and love it more than God.

27. If any of Jesus' disciples had a comment or question in response to something Jesus said or did, it was usually *Peter*. Jesus had just challenged a rich man to relinquish control of his possessions for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. As Peter pointed out, the disciples had *forsaken all* to follow Jesus, giving up their livelihoods. What rewards awaited them for their choice to leave all to follow Jesus?

28. Jesus did not respond in terms of

an earthly reward. Instead, He spoke of what will happen *in the regeneration*. At a time when Jesus will reign in *glory*, these twelve disciples will occupy *twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. Perhaps at this point, the disciples were still thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom and an earthly throne that Jesus would establish in Jerusalem.

Most likely, this regeneration refers to the establishment of the new heavens and new earth that will characterize Jesus' return. The word translated as "regeneration" is quite rare in the New Testament. It occurs only twice: here and in Titus 3:5: "he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Christians anticipate the regeneration to come because of their current status of having been renewed.

29. A magnificent reward awaits not only those disciples standing before Jesus as He spoke but also anyone who gives up earthly possessions and relationships for His *name's sake*. The return on investment (so to speak) will be eternal. It will be a wealth that differs from anything the world can offer.

The blessing of *everlasting life* is what the rich young ruler had inquired about. That life begins with the personal knowledge of Jesus as Lord; that life is brought to fullness by eternity with Him in Heaven. That is the life that awaited the rich young ruler had he been willing to follow Jesus on His terms.

30. Nothing illustrates this statement better than the incident recorded in Matthew 19:13-15, just before today's text. Children (whom the disciples considered an inconvenience to Jesus) are the prime examples of what His kingdom residents should look like. On the flip side, it is the rich (whom the disciples viewed as having a guaranteed place in the kingdom) who are the least likely to dwell there.

Involvement Learning

Living Lastly

Into the Lesson

Consider these phrases:

The first will be last; the last will be first.

Give examples of how these two phrases should apply (or how you've seen them actually apply) in secular, nonreligious contexts. Include, as far as possible, information regarding *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how*.

We may or may not find it easier to see how the phrases apply in a religious sense. Let's find out.

Into the Word

Read today's text. Work down through the following list and give your impression of what the question says about the one(s) asking it.

1. The man's first question (v. 16)

2. Jesus' question (v. 17)

3. The man's second question (v. 18)

4. The man's third question (v. 20)

5. The disciples' question (v. 25)

6. Peter's question (v. 27)

Key Verse

Again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

—Matthew 19:24

Compare and contrast what is revealed about the man in his first question here with that of a different man who asks the same question in Luke 10:25.

Into Life

What are some ways that people today use to try to "get right with God"?

What common themes can you detect among elements in the list?

Thought to Remember

The life that lasts puts God first.

Ministering Mightily

Devotional Reading: Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30

Background Scripture: Matthew 25

Today's Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

I. The Judge

Matthew 25:31-33

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

31. With this declaration, Jesus was still answering the disciples' question in Matthew 24:3: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" The word *when* reinforces the certainty of Jesus' return. That word also anticipates a time factor as part of the declaration. But during Jesus' earthly ministry, no one except God the Father knew the specific day of Jesus' return. The phrase *Son of man*, for its part, confirms Jesus will be the one returning since that phrase is His frequent self-designation.

32. At Jesus' first coming, the angels spoke of good news to "all people" (Luke 2:10); at His return, it will be good news to some but bad news to others as everyone is *gathered* before Him. While other passages in the Bible emphasize that every person must give a personal, individ-

ual account before Jesus, the focus in the verse before us is on *all nations* appearing before Him.

In the first century, many Jewish people believed that when the Messiah arrived, He would take control over powerful nations like the Roman Empire, as this verse describes. The purpose of Jesus' first coming, however, was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus' intent was and is for all nations to receive the message of this good news. His second coming will bring all nations (both ancient and modern) under the power of His mighty hand and the authority of His flawless judgment.

33. To be at a ruler's *right hand* was to be in the place of approval and acceptance. It is in this prominent position that the *sheep* are placed. Note that Jesus describes only two groups. When He carries out His judgment at this gathering, there will be no middle ground, no "provisional sheep." Although we tend to view others in shades of gray, Jesus will be able to pronounce judgment clearly and decisively.

II. The Sheep

Matthew 25:34-40

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the king-

dom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger, and ye took me in.

36 Naked, and ye clothed me, I was sick, and ye visited me, I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

34. Speaking as *the King*, Jesus' first pronouncement is to those *on his right hand*, the sheep of the analogy. Their invitation to *inherit the kingdom prepared for them* is an invitation to enter Heaven. The fact that this kingdom has been ready for them since *the foundation of the world* alludes to the truth of Genesis 1:1.

35-36. The favorable verdict resulted from six ways the favored helped the king and met His needs. Their conduct is reminiscent of that in the parable about the Samaritan who met the needs of someone after others had merely passed by.

Such a heavy emphasis on doing good to others may indicate that Judgment Day will be a time for counting up such deeds and calculating our "final score." So how does Jesus' commendation of good works here square with the biblical teaching on salvation by grace? In truth, salvation encompasses both divine initia-

tive and human response. Salvation by God's grace results in appropriate good works. We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* works—a point James makes especially clear.

37-38. Those designated as "sheep" are also *the righteous*. They will express their confusion at being told they were serving Jesus the King during their acts of mercy. They had seen themselves as meeting the needs of ordinary people, not Jesus. When had they ever encountered Jesus during such times?

39. The last act of mercy mentioned is the most fascinating of all. Prisons in the ancient world were not places of long-term incarceration as they are today. Prisons back then were places of short-term custody where perpetrators awaited either (1) corporal punishment such as flogging and then release or (2) execution. At what point would the righteous sheep ever have encountered King Jesus in such a place, especially after His ascension? The answer comes next.

40. Here is the answer to the sheep's bewilderment. Whatever the sheep have done to help even *the least of these my brethren*, they have done it to the greatest of all, King Jesus. The word *brethren* indicates Christians—those who have accepted the kingship of Jesus. This does not mean, however, that we have the freedom to ignore the needs of those who are not followers of Jesus. Throughout Jesus' life, the least and lowliest of the people in His surroundings received special attention.

Perhaps the element of surprise will be present for each of us as we individually come before Jesus to be judged. There, we will see the true impact of our service to others. We likely will be astonished to discover numerous occasions when we were actually serving Jesus and did not realize it.

III. The Goats

Matthew 25:41-46

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

41. Next, Jesus will address the goats, those on His *left*. Note how the command to this group is exactly the opposite of that given to the group on Jesus' right. The sheep will be invited to "come"; the goats will be ordered to *depart*. The sheep will be called "blessed"; the goats will be called *cursed*. One group will inherit a kingdom; the other will be sent *into everlasting fire*.

Unlike the sheep, the goats will be sent to a place that has been prepared just for them. Instead, the goats are to be sent to the place *prepared for the devil and his angels*.

42-43. King Jesus will confront the goats with the fact of having faced the same groups in need that the sheep faced. But whereas the sheep are pictured as having helped people in need, the goats

chose to ignore those people. It is rather sobering to consider that the goats are not accused of doing anything evil—like murder, adultery, or theft. Rather, they are condemned for doing nothing. They had opportunities to meet needs, just as the sheep had. But the goats chose to look the other way. Sins of commission and sins of omission are both still sins!

44. The goats will react with the same surprise that the sheep exhibited. The sheep will be astonished to be considered as having helped Jesus when they helped those in need; the goats no doubt will reason that had they realized the danger of their lack of action, they would have been more than eager to help. However, such logic is flawed, as it is circular. The goats will have no excuse.

45. The failure of the goats to address the needs of others is a failure to serve Jesus (compare James 4:17). This is an image reversed from that of the sheep.

46. It is virtually impossible to imagine a greater contrast between the *everlasting punishment* that awaits the goats and the *life eternal* that awaits the sheep. The words *everlasting* and *eternal* have the same meaning here, since they are translations of the same Greek word. The goats' endless punishment will be where "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48, quoting Isaiah 66:24). Hell is a place of unspokeable torment.

In contrast, eternal life awaits those numbered among the sheep. Nothing is said in today's passage about this life other than it is eternal. But other portions of Scripture provide insights concerning it. The book of Revelation describes a heavenly city, eternally bright, inhabited by only the redeemed. It is a place where "the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4)—everything associated with a broken world. God will be with His people, and they will be with Him—forever.

Involvement Learning

Ministering Mightily

Into the Lesson

Determine agreement (A) or disagreement (D) with the following statements:

- ___ When meeting needs, Christians should first explore the availability of government programs.
- ___ Giving cash to meet a need is often a good idea.
- ___ Meeting a need of a poverty-stricken person is best done by church committee.
- ___ The needs of an unbeliever should be treated differently than those of a fellow Christian.
- ___ When it comes to deciding *when, who,* and *how* to help others, Jesus should be my boss.

Into the Word

Read today's text and fill out the following columns.

Identity of Sufferers

What Some Did

What Others Failed to Do

Key Verse

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger, and ye took me in.

—Matthew 25:34-35

Into Life

How would you recognize when someone is having problems in each of the following areas?

Lacking Sustenance: _____

Lacking Emotional Support: _____

Lacking Clothing: _____

Lacking Good Health: _____

Lacking Freedom: _____

What would be a good plan for meeting each type of need?

Thought to Remember

Jesus is closer than we realize.

December 2-8

- ☐ Mon, Dec. 2
- ☐ Tue, Dec. 3
- ☐ Wed, Dec. 4
- ☐ Thu, Dec. 5
- ☐ Fri, Dec. 6
- ☐ Sat, Dec. 7
- ☐ Sun, Dec. 8

December 9-15

- ☐ Mon, Dec. 9
- ☐ Tue, Dec. 10
- ☐ Wed, Dec. 11
- ☐ Thu, Dec. 12
- ☐ Fri, Dec. 13
- ☐ Sat, Dec. 14
- ☐ Sun, Dec. 15

December 16-22

- ☐ Mon, Dec. 16
- ☐ Tue, Dec. 17
- ☐ Wed, Dec. 18
- ☐ Thu, Dec. 19
- ☐ Fri, Dec. 20
- ☐ Sat, Dec. 21
- ☐ Sun, Dec. 22

December 23-29

- ☐ Mon, Dec. 23
- ☐ Tue, Dec. 24
- ☐ Wed, Dec. 25
- ☐ Thu, Dec. 26
- ☐ Fri, Dec. 27
- ☐ Sat, Dec. 28
- ☐ Sun, Dec. 29

- 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- 2 Samuel 5:1-10
- Luke 1:26-38
- Psalm 2
- Isaiah 9:1-7
- Romans 1:1-7
- 2 Samuel 7:4-17

- Psalm 89:1-4, 27-37
- Luke 1:5-17
- Luke 1:18-23
- Psalm 84
- Malachi 4
- Luke 1:57-66
- Luke 1:67-80

- Isaiah 11:1-9
- Isaiah 43:14-21
- Isaiah 64
- Micah 5:1-6
- John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18
- Hebrews 1
- Luke 2:1-16

- Luke 4:14-21
- Luke 6:27-36
- Micah 7:14-20
- Psalm 25:1-10
- Psalm 25:11-22
- Luke 18:9-14
- Luke 18:35-43

December 30-January 5

- ☐ Mon, Dec. 30
- ☐ Tue, Dec. 31
- ☐ Wed, Jan. 1
- ☐ Thu, Jan. 2
- ☐ Fri, Jan. 3
- ☐ Sat, Jan. 4
- ☐ Sun, Jan. 5

January 6-12

- ☐ Mon, Jan. 6
- ☐ Tue, Jan. 7
- ☐ Wed, Jan. 8
- ☐ Thu, Jan. 9
- ☐ Fri, Jan. 10
- ☐ Sat, Jan. 11
- ☐ Sun, Jan. 12

January 13-19

- ☐ Mon, Jan. 13
- ☐ Tue, Jan. 14
- ☐ Wed, Jan. 15
- ☐ Thu, Jan. 16
- ☐ Fri, Jan. 17
- ☐ Sat, Jan. 18
- ☐ Sun, Jan. 19

January 20-26

- ☐ Mon, Jan. 20
- ☐ Tue, Jan. 21
- ☐ Wed, Jan. 22
- ☐ Thu, Jan. 23
- ☐ Fri, Jan. 24
- ☐ Sat, Jan. 25
- ☐ Sun, Jan. 26

- Revelation 11:14-19
- Psalm 9:1-9
- Psalm 9:10-20
- 1 Timothy 1:12-17
- 1 Timothy 6:11-16
- Psalm 10:1-11
- Psalm 10:12-18

- Revelation 19:11-21
- 1 Chronicles 29:10-20
- Isaiah 52:1-12
- Psalm 47
- Philippians 2:1-13
- Mark 4:35-41
- Psalm 93

- Revelation 4
- Revelation 22:1-14
- Isaiah 6:1-8
- James 4:1-10
- Hebrews 4:11-16
- Isaiah 66:1-14
- Psalm 103:1-11, 19-22

- Daniel 2:31-45
- Colossians 1:9-20
- Colossians 1:21-29
- Zechariah 14:8-11, 16-21
- Hebrews 12:18-29
- Matthew 6:25-34
- Psalm 145:1-10, 17-21

January 27–February 2

- Mon, Jan. 27
 - Tue, Jan. 28
 - Wed, Jan. 29
 - Thu, Jan. 30
 - Fri, Jan. 31
 - Sat, Feb. 1
 - Sun, Feb. 2
- Marthwe 11:25-30
Psalm 4
Luke 18:1-8
James 5:13-20
Psalm 91
Psalm 92
Marthwe 6:5-15

February 3–9

- Mon, Feb. 3
 - Tue, Feb. 4
 - Wed, Feb. 5
 - Thu, Feb. 6
 - Fri, Feb. 7
 - Sat, Feb. 8
 - Sun, Feb. 9
- Joshua 1:1-9
Marthwe 10:16-31
Marthwe 10:32-42
Psalm 35:1-14
Psalm 35:15-28
Proverbs 24:8-22
Marthwe 11:7-15, 20-24

February 10–16

- Mon, Feb. 10
 - Tue, Feb. 11
 - Wed, Feb. 12
 - Thu, Feb. 13
 - Fri, Feb. 14
 - Sat, Feb. 15
 - Sun, Feb. 16
- Marthwe 20:1-16
Proverbs 22:1-9
Luke 6:20-26
1 Timothy 6:17-21
1 Samuel 2:1-10
Psalm 113
Marthwe 19:16-30

February 17–23

- Mon, Feb. 17
 - Tue, Feb. 18
 - Wed, Feb. 19
 - Thu, Feb. 20
 - Fri, Feb. 21
 - Sat, Feb. 22
 - Sun, Feb. 23
- 2 Timothy 3:10-17
Psalm 119:17-24
Marthwe 25:1-13
Marthwe 25:14-15, 19-30
Psalm 119:41-48
Isaiah 58
Marthwe 25:31-46

In the Word

Your weekly Sunday school time will be enriched when you come to class each week prepared. One aspect of good preparation is continual contact with the Word of God. Of course, Bible reading is more than preparation. It is a vital link with the Father. Coupled with prayer, it is the most important item on your daily agenda.

There are a variety of Bible reading plans available. We offer this one because it is designed to enhance your weekly Bible study of these lessons with an adult class.

Your devotional time can be enriched if you add to these Bible readings a time of prayer and meditation. The quarterly booklet *Devotions*® combines these same readings with a meditation, daily Scripture verse, a hymn, and prayer thoughts. *Devotions*® is available from your local Christian bookstore or from David C Cook (order no. 2629325; order no. 2629525 for large print).

REMOVE THIS PAGE, FOLD, AND KEEP IN YOUR BIBLE
FOR REFERENCE.

November 25–December 1

- Mon, Nov. 25
 - Tue, Nov. 26
 - Wed, Nov. 27
 - Thu, Nov. 28
 - Fri, Nov. 29
 - Sat, Nov. 30
 - Sun, Dec. 1
- Luke 3:23-38
Psalm 128
Ruth 1:1, 3, 6-18
Ruth 2:1-3, 17-23
Marthwe 12:46-50
Ruth 3:1-13
Ruth 4:9-17

Quarterly Quiz

Lesson 1

1. The women praised the Lord because Naomi was not without a _____ . *Ruth 4:14*

2. Luke states that Jesus was about 30 years old when He began His public ministry. T/F. *Luke 3:23*

Lesson 2

1. The word of the Lord came to whom? (David, Nathan, Samuel) *2 Samuel 7:4*

2. The Lord declared that David's house, kingdom, and _____ would be forever. *2 Samuel 7:16*

Lesson 3

1. "Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and _____ ." (prayed, prophesied, worshipped) *Luke 1:67*

2. The child would be called "the prophet of the Highest." T/F. *Luke 1:76*

Lesson 4

1. Where did Joseph begin the journey to Bethlehem? (Capernaum, Jerusalem, Nazareth) *Luke 2:4*

2. The heavenly host proclaimed "_____ to God." (Honor, Praise, Glory) *Luke 2:14*

Lesson 5

1. The blind man said, "Jesus, thou Son of David, heal me." T/F. *Luke 18:38*

2. Jesus restored the man's sight by placing mud on the man's eyes. T/F. *Luke 18:42-43*

Lesson 6

1. The psalmist asked God, "lift up thine _____ ." *Psalm 10:12*

2. The psalmist describes God as being a "helper of the _____ ." *Psalm 10:14*

Lesson 7

1. "The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with _____ ." *Psalm 93:1*

2. What body of water lifts its "voice" to the Lord? (rivers, lakes, floods) *Psalm 93:3*

Lesson 8

1. The Lord will renew youth like doves. T/F. *Psalm 103:5*

2. The Lord remembers that "we are _____ ." *Psalm 103:14*

Lesson 9

1. The Lord's dominion endures through all _____ . *Psalm 145:13*

2. The psalmist states that the Lord is righteous in all what? (thoughts, actions, ways) *Psalm 145:17*

Lesson 10

1. Jesus taught that people should pray in a way that others will notice. T/F. *Matthew 6:5*

2. Jesus taught that people should pray for what kind of bread? (daily bread, bread of life, bread of heaven) *Matthew 6:11*

Lesson 11

1. Jesus described John the Baptist as "Elias," who was to come. T/F. *Matthew 11:14*

2. Jesus pronounced "woe" to what two cities? (choose two: Bethsaida, Capernaum, Chorazin, Tyre) *Matthew 11:21*

Lesson 12

1. Jesus told the young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor to have _____ in heaven. *Matthew 19:21*

2. The young man obeyed Jesus' directives regarding wealth. T/F. *Matthew 19:22*

Lesson 13

1. The Son of man will gather all _____ before His throne. *Matthew 25:32*

2. The Son of man will put sheep at His left hand and goats at His right hand. T/F. *Matthew 25:33*

