



ECHOES

Adult Student Book
Comprehensive Bible Study
June–August 2022



Partners in a
New Creation
Studies in Isaiah, John, Revelation

ECHOES

Adult Student Book Comprehensive Bible Study A Bible Study Quarterly for Adults

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T A B L E O F

Contents

Partners in a New Creation

June, July, August 2022
(Studies in Isaiah, John, Revelation)

Unit 1: God Delivers and Restores

June 5	Lesson 1	God Foretells Destruction	p. 5
June 12	Lesson 2	God Foretells of Redemption	p. 12
June 19	Lesson 3	God's Restored People Shall Prosper	p. 19
June 26	Lesson 4	God Offers Deliverance	p. 26

Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation

July 3	Lesson 5	The Creating Word Becomes Flesh	p. 33
July 10	Lesson 6	The Word Heals	p. 40
July 17	Lesson 7	The Word Saves	p. 47
July 24	Lesson 8	The Word Resurrects the Dead	p. 54
July 31	Lesson 9	The Word Gives Peace	p. 61

Unit 3: The Great Hope of the Saints

Aug. 7	Lesson 10	A New Home	p. 68
Aug. 14	Lesson 11	A New City	p. 75
Aug. 21	Lesson 12	The River of Life	p. 82
Aug. 28	Lesson 13	Come and Enjoy	p. 89

Special Features

What's Ahead	p. 4
Personal Pages	p. 96
Lesson Cycle	p. 97
Coming Up Next Quarter	p. 98

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What's Ahead

Quarterly Preview

This summer quarter considers ways in which believers are partners with God in creation. Unit 1 explores God's predictions through Isaiah of the future destruction of Babylon and deliverance for Israel. These events were evidence of God's power at work to grant mercy and redemption to the penitent and to restore God's people to a state of peace and prosperity.

Unit 2 lessons from John stress how the Creating Word, at work in and with humanity, became flesh, healed the sick, saved the lost, resurrected the dead, and granted—through the Holy Spirit—peace.

In Unit 3, lessons from Revelation help learners envision the new home and city God has prepared for the redeemed. In this new heavenly environment, the saints will enjoy the new water of eternal life.

In this quarter, here are some biblical principles you will study that can apply to your own life situations:

- Closely examine who or what you trust most deeply.
- Take heart! God sent His servant as a light for all people.
- Trust that God is working behind the scenes.
- Listen to the Lord! He is righteous and brings deliverance.
- Bear witness to the Light of life.
- Can you believe without seeing?
- Believe Jesus' words and follow Him to eternal life.
- God shows us His glory when we believe.
- Jesus has not left us alone—we have the Holy Spirit.
- Be encouraged! God will make all things new.
- Keep looking toward the city that shines with God's eternal glory.
- The night will end—look to the light that will last forever.
- Say with the Spirit and the Bride, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

God Foretells Destruction

“Won’t you join us, Yolanda?” asked Sherise.

Sherise, who had been at the company for only a few months, was circulating a petition in support of Kendrick Miller, a marketing manager, who was reportedly headed to the employment “guillotine.” He had been on administrative leave for one week.

Mr. Miller, after years of managerial abuse, performance mediocrity, and financial mismanagement, had arrived at an irrevocable dead end. Unbeknownst to Mr. Miller, he had been mistreating a staff member who had close ties with a top executive. The staff member’s complaint led to inquiries, which led to realizations that Yolanda and many other long-timers knew all along.

“They’re just trying to bring the poor man down,” said Sherise.

Yolanda found Mr. Miller to be charming at first. Upon closer inspection, she discovered him to be a bully, dishonest, and inept. He hid his flaws with false charm, and when that didn’t work, with mean aggression. He talked of God and goodness, but it seemed to serve only as a prop when interacting with certain audiences and to gain access as needed. Yolanda could not trust him; his professions rang hollow, especially the more she knew him.

“Do you wish him harm?” Sherise asked, visibly upset.

“I do not,” Yolanda replied. “I have my reasons for not signing the petition, and I cannot stop the repercussions that he will face.”

1. *Describe a time when your trust in someone or something has been broken or shattered. How did you react?*

2. *What factors or circumstances contribute to broken trust in relationships?*

3. *Why is it often difficult to rebuild trust once it has been broken?*

LESSON FOCUS: Closely examine who or what you trust most deeply.

Trusting in Wickedness

Isaiah 47:10-11

10 For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.

11 Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.

Isaiah 47:10-11

¹⁰“You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, ‘No one sees me.’

Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’

¹¹Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away.

A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom
a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.”

Most of the time, God’s words of warning to foreign nations fell on deaf ears. This was the case of Isaiah’s prophecies to Babylon. Like all superpowers throughout history, the Babylonians had long perceived themselves as invincible. Their military forces were intimidating and relentless. So when Isaiah accused the Babylonians of trusting in their wickedness, he was pointing out their ill-placed security in the ways they were abusing their power. As far as they were concerned, no one had more power than they did, so it didn’t matter who saw what they did—they had become a law unto themselves. The notion of divine accountability did not even show up on their radar. In their minds, the Babylonians believed that their gods fully approved of what they were doing.

In response to their haughtiness, Isaiah reminds them that disaster was just around the corner. At some point

down the road, the old tricks would no longer work for them. They had become quite dependent on the illusion that their sorcerers and conjurers could manipulate their enemies into positions of helplessness. Their success up to that point had only fed that delusion. But one day, the powers of darkness who energized their magical arts would no longer be given permission by God to keep on going. In 539 B.C., the Persians would end the Babylonian Empire, and when the Persians did conquer the Babylonians, they simply took what they wanted—which ended up being everything. The demise of the Babylonians was the one event their mediums would miss in their predictions—they could not see it coming and they could not “conjure it away” (vs. 11).

4. *In what were the Babylonians trusting?*

5. *What would be the consequence for putting their security in anything but God?*

The Stargazers

Isaiah 47:12-13

12 Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. 13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

Isaiah 47:12-13

¹²“Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. ¹³All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.”

The Babylonians were masters at magic and experts at reading the stars. This is because the powers of darkness energized these sorcerers and mediums. The law of Moses forbid the practice of dark arts among the Israelites; they are simply too seductive (see Deut. 18:9-13).

Of course, Isaiah, as God's spokesman, was not intimidated by the Babylonian astrologers. He knew that any success the magicians and astrologers had would end. The spells would become empty words with no power. The Babylonians had developed a dependence on their magicians and astrologers, but according to Isaiah, all their predictions would not "save" (vs. 13) the country.

While the Babylonians might have ignored Isaiah's words, his message would have given hope to God's people. Isaiah reminds us that God is sovereign over all nations. No dark art is more powerful than He.

6. *What were some of the occult practices that had been a part of their lives from childhood?*

7. *What would become of the predictions made by the Babylonian astrologers?*

Weak Fire

Isaiah 47:14-15

14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

15 Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee.

Isaiah 47:14-15

¹⁴Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up.

They cannot even save themselves

from the power of the flame.

These are not coals for warmth; this is not a fire to sit by.

¹⁵That is all they are to you— these you have dealt with and labored with since childhood.

All of them go on in their error; there is not one that can save you.

If the wind catches the smallest smoldering ember from a campfire and carries the spark into a dry forest, the resulting wildfire can consume hundreds of thousands of acres of trees, sometimes taking months before it can be stopped. Isaiah uses this type of analogy to describe the dangers of those who play with fire—namely the flames associated with the power of darkness, and the magic arts that the Babylonians had come to depend upon. There's never anything safe about being spiritually reckless.

The Persians, who eventually fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy of Babylon's demise, were known for their fire temples, and the central role that fire played in their pagan religion. One of the Persian gods was named Atar, who was nothing more than a consuming flame. Many Persians households kept their hearths on fire, 24 hours a day, every day of the year, as an expression of worship and dependence upon their fire god. This could be one reason Isaiah focused on the fire metaphor when warning the Babylonians of their coming end. What they had depended upon would now turn on them and consume them.

We see many similar manifestations of the occult today—in horoscopes, tarot card readings that purport to predict the future, seances that claim to make connections with the dead, and popular boards that claim to pass on messages from the dead.

Granted, many of these practitioners are simply con men who use sleight-of-hand and other magician's tricks to give the illusion of supernatural power. And then, there are some who really are energized by the same power of darkness that drove the Babylonians to their demise. Isaiah makes it clear: do not trust in anything or anyone besides God, no matter what empty promises are presented.

8. *To what type of fire did Isaiah liken the Babylonian sorcerers?*

9. *Why would trusting in the sorcerers prove to be futile?*

Misplaced Trust

There are so many people and places saying, “You can trust me; I have your best interests at heart.” The Babylonians trusted in their own knowledge and wisdom. Does this sound familiar? Often, we fall into the trap of placing our trust in someone or something other than God. When we do this, we don’t see the danger of straying from God’s way until it’s too late, and we must face and live with the consequences. Isaiah’s analogy of playing with fire vividly describes what can happen when people look to anything other than God alone for salvation.

The Babylonian magicians believed they could tap into a god’s power, and they became dependent on their worship of false gods for a sense of security. Today many seek power in fame, politics, controlling other people, or wealth. This leads to a false sense of security in which people do not see a need for God and independence is considered a virtue.

How easy it is for people to trust in their own knowledge and ability. From an early age, children claim, “I can do it myself.” This self-centered thinking follows us through life, resulting in a false sense of self-sufficiency. Not only will the world let us down, we are more than capable of letting ourselves down.

The Babylonians understood human frailty, so they looked to the sky for wisdom and guidance for the future. While we are in awe of the majesty of God’s creation, we’ll want to be careful to direct our worship to God alone, for only He knows the future.

10. *What things do people today commonly place their trust in other than God?*

11. *How does seeking power or security in the wrong things affect our relationship with God?*

12. *What does it mean to trust in God as the One who has our best interests at heart?*

Choosing to Trust Him

This lesson challenges us to closely examine who or what we trust most deeply. The Babylonians trusted in their wickedness and the false promises of the powers of darkness for their future. Only God is worthy of our trust for salvation and a future with Him.

► *Consider who or what you have been trusting other than Jesus, then write a prayer to Him, expressing your confidence in His ability to keep His promises.*

KEY VERSE

Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee. —Isaiah 47:15, KJV

That is all they are to you—these you have dealt with and labored with since childhood. All of them go on in their error; there is not one that can save you. —Isaiah 47:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of June 6 through June 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Corinthians 1:18-25—God's Redemption Defies Human Wisdom.
- Tue.** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31—Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.
- Wed.** Psalm 111—God Sent Redemption to His People.
- Thu.** Hebrews 9:11-14—Christ Brings Eternal Redemption.
- Fri.** Psalm 25:1-11—Pardon My Guilt, O Lord.
- Sat.** Psalm 25:12-22—Redeem Israel, O God.
- Sun.** Isaiah 49:1-17—The Lord Will Have Compassion.

God Foretells of Redemption

This is an elaborate undertaking, Sebastian," said Douglas, as the two men walked around scaffolding. "Couldn't you just hold a prayer meeting in a room somewhere?"

Sebastian gave his guest a patient smile. He was giving Douglas a tour of the facility in hopes of him taking over for one of the crew managers who had to leave the project suddenly because of illness in his family.

Sebastian was building the facility headquarters that would house "Boundless Love for All Humanity." It was a ministry to the homeless in the city of Philadelphia. Its mission was to bring God's light to a dark place through sharing the Gospel; offering education, job skills, and career opportunities; and assisting with financial independence.

Sebastian had prayed, planned, and prepared for this ministry for the past 15 years. Monies had come from grants and financial backers. The momentum and means had come from like-minded supporters, but the mission had come from God.

"I am excited to be part of this undertaking—which is the Lord's," Sebastian said to his guest. "He wants to show the light of His love and support to those who many seem to have forgotten or have forsaken."

"If you will excuse me," Sebastian said, looking at his cell phone, "It's almost time for our lunch and devotion."

"Could I stay?" Douglas asked.

"I'd be so happy if you did," Sebastian said, his smile growing wider. "Right this way."

1. What benefits does light provide?

2. What things can prevent light from serving its intended purpose?

3. How does God's light affect our lives?

LESSON FOCUS: Take heart! God sent His servant as a light for all people.

Called from the Womb

Isaiah 49:1-4, KJV

1 Listen, O isles, unto me;
and hearken, ye people,
from far; The LORD hath
called me from the womb;
from the bowels of my
mother hath he made men-
tion of my name.

2 And he hath made my
mouth like a sharp sword;
in the shadow of his hand
hath he hid me, and made
me a polished shaft; in his
quiver hath he hid me;

3 And said unto me, Thou
art my servant, O Israel, in
whom I will be glorified.

4 Then I said, I have
laboured in vain, I have
spent my strength for
nought, and in vain: yet
surely my judgment is
with the LORD, and my
work with my God.

Isaiah 49:1-4, NIV

¹Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the LORD called
me;

from my mother's womb he has
spoken my name.

²He made my mouth like a
sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid
me;

he made me into a polished arrow
and concealed me in his
quiver.

³He said to me, "You are my
servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my
splendor."

⁴But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for
nothing at all.

Yet what is due me is in the
LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."

Jews typically interpret Isaiah's Servant Songs (in Isa. 42, 49, 50, and 53) as the servant represents the nation of Israel. However, when the songs are quoted in the New Testament, the writers interpret the Servant as the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who calls to all nations.

The mouth of the Messiah would be like a sharpened sword, delivering teaching that could cut to the core of His listeners' hearts, and reveal their innermost secrets. He is using this sword to appeal to the nations to acknowledge God's sovereignty over them. There is also this hint of hiddenness to the Messiah, in that He represented a mystery to be revealed at a later time. Now, God hides

Him in the shadow of His hand, and conceals Him as an arrow in a quiver. The Servant wonders, out loud, about the refusal of someone to acknowledge that He has come from God. Centuries later, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem because the Messiah had remained hidden from them (Luke 19:41-44).

Even so, the Messiah was confident that the Lord would reward Him for His work, even if many rejected it.

4. *Who called and equipped the Servant to His ministry?*

5. *What did the Servant expect from God?*

A Light to the Gentiles

Isaiah 49:5-7, KJV

5 And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall

Isaiah 49:5-7, NIV

⁵And now the LORD says—
he who formed me in the womb
to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of
the LORD
and my God has been my
strength—

⁶he says:

“It is too small a thing for you
to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I
have kept.

I will also make you a light for
the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to
the ends of the earth.”

⁷This is what the LORD says—
the Redeemer and Holy One
of Israel—
to him who was despised and
abhorred by the nation,

see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

to the servant of rulers:
 “Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

The Messiah’s first order of business was to bring the people of Israel back to God. The return from exile would be a symbolic manifestation of God’s people turning their hearts to Him, and trusting in His Messiah.

Jesus’ outreach to the Gentiles is reflected in the instructions to the Servant. Not only would He restore the heart of Jacob’s tribes to God, but He would also extend His hand of compassion and salvation to non-Jews—all over the world—and the rulers of other nations would honor the One who His own people rejected.

6. *Why would the Servant’s realm extend beyond Israel to the nations?*

7. *Why would the Servant have credibility in the eyes of the world’s leaders?*

The Restoration

Isaiah 49:8-13, KJV

8 Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall

Isaiah 49:8-13, NIV

⁸This is what the LORD says:

“In a time of my favor I will answer you;
 in a day of salvation I will help you;

I will keep you and will make you

to be a covenant for the people,
 to restore the land,
 and to reassign its desolate inheritances,

⁹saying to the captives, ‘Come out,’
 to those who are in darkness,
 ‘Be free!’

feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

11 And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

12 Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

13 Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

“They shall feed beside the roads on find pasture on every barren hill.

¹⁰They will neither hunger nor thirst,
nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them.

He who has compassion on them will guide them
and lead them beside springs of water.

¹¹I will turn all my mountains into roads,
and my highways will be raised up.

¹² See, they will come from afar—
some from the north, some from the west,
some from the region of Aswan.”

¹³Shout for joy, you heavens;
rejoice, you earth;
burst into song, you mountains!
For the LORD comforts his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.”

In God’s perfect timing, the Lord would not only make a new covenant with His people, but the Messiah Himself would be that covenant. The Messiah’s driving force would be to guide those who are like sheep without a shepherd, who are “in [spiritual] darkness” (vs. 9). This section ends with a celebration for the ways people are returning to God. Drawn by His Spirit, they come from all points of the compass, Jew and non-Jew alike. They are all drawn by the love and compassion of the Messiah. Those who have been afflicted find comfort, hope, and healing in His hands.

8. *From what would the Lord rescue His people?*

9. *What would be the cause for great celebration?*

Shining the Light

God sent His Servant as the Light for Jews and Gentiles alike. These verses in Isaiah provide insight on Jesus and His ministry. This additional understanding of Jesus as Messiah encourages us to help spread His light today.

Called from the womb by name, God ordained Jesus to have a ministry of reconciliation and atonement. Messiah's words reveal the inner hearts of people, with the purpose of bringing the people of Israel back to God.

As the Jewish people embraced God and His Servant, they could then fulfill their God-given purpose of bringing light to the Gentiles. God's Servant came not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. He shows compassion and offers salvation to all people, shining the light of God's love into all the corners of the earth. In this way, Jesus is our example, that we also are called by God to show compassion and shine the light of the Gospel for others so they, too, may see the salvation and reconciliation God offers through His Messiah. God's goal has always been to redeem all people through the light of His Servant.

We rejoice and take heart in the gift of God's new covenant with us through Jesus. When we turn to Him, He delivers us from spiritual darkness, hunger, and thirst. Jesus' love and compassion shines forth in a dark world of empty promises, in part through His people. We experience healing and restoration to God through Jesus, and this hope is the light we need to help spread around the world as His followers. In these ways, we partner with God's Servant to serve as a light to all people.

10. *What is the significance of Jesus' role as Servant?*

11. *What was God's purpose in sending His Messiah into the world?*

12. *How would you describe the light of the Gospel?*

13. *How might we serve others with a gift of God's light?*

Take His Light to the World

This passage in Isaiah portrays a wonderful description of God's Servant sent to redeem His people. Just as Messiah's purpose was to bring light into the world, now God's intention for His followers is to serve as a light to the nations.

▶ *Reflect on what you have learned in this lesson to complete these sentences:*

▶ *I am encouraged by the truth that _____.*

▶ *Jesus brought light into the world when He _____.*

▶ *One way I can help spread the light of the Gospel to others is by _____.*

KEY VERSE

Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; —Isaiah 49:8, KJV

This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances." —Isaiah 49:8, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 13 through June 19

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

Mon. Psalm 75—God Puts Down and Lifts Up.

Tue. Leviticus 26:3-13—God Protects a Restored, Holy People.

Wed. Luke 6:20-26—Blessings upon God's People.

Thu. Psalm 30—God Has Turned Mourning into Dancing.

Fri. James 1:13-18—God Gives Good Gifts.

Sat. Deuteronomy 28:9-14—Blessings for Obedience.

Sun. Isaiah 49:18-23—Wait for the Lord.

God's Restored People Shall Prosper

"Got the house?" asked Erin, looking at her realtor in confusion.

"I'm totally stunned, too," said Barbara. "There were four offers on the house, and ours was the least. The highest bid was \$50,000 more than ours and the lowest offer was \$15,000 more. And the husband and wife were in agreement," Barbara added.

The house was valued at \$250,000, but the Millers were asking \$200,000. The house seemed like a mansion to Erin, who lived in a modest, medium-sized apartment with her two children. After finally completing her bachelor's degree in education, Erin had been working the last four years as a family engagement specialist with a Head Start program. She prayed and dreamed of owning a home.

When Erin began her house hunting venture, she told Barbara that she could afford a \$180,000 home. Her credit was good, and she had been saving on a down payment. When Barbara talked Erin into looking at "another lovely home," Erin fell in love with it, and the Millers seemed to genuinely like Erin.

"The Millers said God told them to sell the house to you. I've never had this happen to me before," Barbara said. "I couldn't have worked a better deal."

"Praise God," Erin said. "I know God loves me, and He is always working on my behalf."

1. *What are some examples of God bringing about something good from unexpected, disappointing, or difficult circumstances?*

2. *What is required as one waits for God to work? Why?*

3. *What can be a source of encouragement in the meantime?*

An Inconceivable Event

Isaiah 49:18-21, KJV

18 Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

19 For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away.

20 The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.

21 Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

Isaiah 49:18-21, NIV

¹⁸"Lift up your eyes and look around;
all your children gather and come to you.

As surely as I live," declares the LORD,

"you will wear them all as ornaments;
you will put them on, like a bride.

¹⁹"Though you were ruined and made desolate
and your land laid waste,
now you will be too small for your people,
and those who devoured you will be far away.

²⁰The children born during your bereavement
will yet say in your hearing,
'This place is too small for us;
give us more space to live in.'

²¹Then you will say in your heart,

'Who bore me these?
I was bereaved and barren;
I was exiled and rejected.
Who brought these up?
I was left all alone,
but these—where have they come from?' "

Today's passage describes something that was to happen that could be described as nothing short of a

miracle—the restoration of Israel from both its physical and spiritual ruin.

Isaiah's prophetic ministry began more than 150 years before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and continued until about 150 years before the beginning of the nation's restoration. What God said was going to happen from that time forward was humanly impossible. It was just as far-fetched as a widowed ("bereaved") and infertile ("barren") woman being found with child (vs. 21). Yet the land would be restored and have multitudes of people.

These promises would have both historical and symbolic fulfillment. The city and its temple were eventually rebuilt under the leadership of Ezra, Nehemiah, and others, beginning in 536 B.C., but the land was not filled afterward with so many that the land seemed "too small" to hold them (vs. 20). Since then, millions have returned to Israel, but it still isn't too small to hold all those who wish to dwell there. Therefore, the "too small" prophecy about the land may refer to a future time, perhaps when many millions have come into a saving relationship with Jesus.

These spiritual children of Israel will embellish the land like jewels adorning a bride. But the barren woman (Israel) will not understand where all these children have "come from" (vs. 21). She thought she was deserted and no longer of value to God. When the final events of this prophecy unfold, she realizes He never abandoned her. God was working behind the scenes to give her a countless number of spiritual offspring.

4. *What is the condition of Israel prior to the fulfillment of this prophecy?*

5. *What takes place in spite of this?*

6. *How does Israel (the "barren woman") respond to this?*

7. *What are some hints that this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled?*

A Worldwide Impact

Isaiah 49:22-23, KJV

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.

23 And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.

Isaiah 49:22-23, NIV

²²This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I will beckon to the nations,
I will lift up my banner to the peoples;
they will bring your sons in their arms
and carry your daughters on their hips.

²³Kings will be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.

They will bow down before you
with their faces to the ground;
they will lick the dust at your feet.

Then you will know that I am the LORD;
those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”

God promised Israel that she would one day be honored by others—that kings and queens would eventually bow down before her with “faces to the ground” (vs. 23). Like the promises in the previous verses, this one had both historical and spiritual implications.

When the first group of exiles migrated back to Jerusalem, Cyrus, the Persian king, gave back to them the implements taken by the Babylonians from the temple (Ezra 1:7-11). Then King Darius ordered the local governor to pay for some of the costs of rebuilding the temple (6:3-12), and Artaxerxes provided Nehemiah with protection and letters guaranteeing financial support for rebuilding

Jerusalem's walls (Neh. 2:7-9). During recent migrations to Israel, many nations have offered support to Jews desiring to return to the land. However, it's also possible that this prophecy is referring to a more distant time, one perhaps when kings will honor the role Israel played in the salvation of the world.

A "banner" (vs. 22) was a flag placed on a pole that signified the place where soldiers were to gather prior to a battle or people were to meet prior to a great event. Israel was to play an important role in God's future plans and others would flock to her when those plans were fulfilled.

This banner does not represent the literal land of Israel, however, but what God intended to accomplish through it. God promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through him and his descendants (Gen. 12:3). This promise was fulfilled when Jesus was crucified and then rose from the dead. Jews were the first believers and the first evangelists. Through the Jews, Jesus and the Gospel message became "a light for the Gentiles" (Isa. 49:6).

God promised the Jews their land would someday be restored. But more importantly, God promised that they would be blessed in a way they could not imagine. Through them, God was going to save the world from its sin. When the Israelites finally understood this, they would realize that God was indeed Lord of all and that He would not "disappoint" (vs. 23) them—their trust in Him had not been misplaced. God was going to work behind the scenes to bring something good out of a bad situation. This was a promise they could count on in the difficult days that lay ahead.

- 8.** *What part would other nations have in Israel's future?*
- 9.** *What part would Israel have in theirs?*
- 10.** *What would the Israelites learn when they saw this?*
- 11.** *How did God want them to respond in anticipation of their restoration?*

What I Thought Was a Problem

I remember a time when the conditions at my work place were so bad that I couldn't wait to move on to better surroundings. But no matter how hard I tried, it seemed I couldn't find another job that was a good fit.

What happened then revealed that God had a hand in blocking my path to what I thought were greener pastures. Many of the jobs I applied for that seemed perfect at the time eventually disappeared due to various economic forces. And the management of the company I worked with eventually changed for the better. Years later, I was able to retire with good memories and a substantial pension, something that would not have happened had I decided to move on.

Remembering incidents like that makes it easier to trust that God is at work even when I don't think He is. Yet I still sometimes wonder what He is up to when I don't know what I will find at the end of one of life's tunnels.

Early in the days of the pandemic, I was scrambling to find ways to safely connect with those I ministered to. We were unable to meet in person, and some feared that our group might not survive the restrictions imposed on it. But one year into the pandemic I realized that God was using the crisis to redefine what it meant to connect. Although we could not all be together in the same room, many found ways to meet with video or with distancing. I found that people were actually connecting more frequently than they had in pre-COVID days. They were just doing it differently. What I thought was a problem turned out to be a blessing.

12. *How have you seen God working behind the scenes to bring about something good in difficult or disappointing circumstances?*

13. *What did you learn from this?*

14. *How can this be of help as you respond to unexpected or challenging situations today?*

He Is Lord of All

God is often at work behind the scenes to bring about something good in even the most challenging of times even though the results may not be easily or quickly seen. He reassures us that He has our best interests in mind and that He is always at work even when we don't know what He's up to. What He asks us to do is to trust in Him. He is after all Lord of all. And He will do what He's promised.

► *Think about an unexpected, difficult, or disappointing circumstance where you need to trust that God is at work behind the scenes to bring about something good. Then write out your response to the following:*

► *I need to respond to this situation by _____ instead of by _____.*

KEY VERSE

And thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. —Isaiah 49:23c, KJV

“Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.” —Isaiah 49:23c, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 20 through June 26

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 50:4-9—God Will Vindicate God's Servant.
- Tue.** Isaiah 51:9-16—Remember God's Mighty Deeds.
- Wed.** Isaiah 51:17-23—God Defends Israel's Cause.
- Thu.** 2 Corinthians 1:7-14—God Rescues Us from Peril.
- Fri.** 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10—Jesus Rescues Us from Wrath.
- Sat.** Psalm 3—Deliverance Belongs to the Lord.
- Sun.** Isaiah 51:1-8—God's Deliverance Is Coming.

God Offers Deliverance

There was the windup, the pitch—and then Cameron was hit right between the eyes!

When Pastor Mitchell began his sermon, Cameron felt like the Lord had custom-tailored a message for him. Cameron had been in a spiritual state of paralysis. He had been visiting Lighthouse Church off and on for the past two months. On his mother's side of the family were a few devout Jehovah's Witnesses. On his dad's side of the family were several members who staunchly held Muslim beliefs. It was after his experience with Simone, a Christian friend in college, that Cameron accepted Christ.

But without any routine Bible teaching, Cameron had begun to mix some Muslim and Jehovah's Witness beliefs with his Christianity.

"You're listening to too many voices," Simone had said.

Cameron did feel like he had found real truth, forgiveness, and salvation in the Lord. Only now, years later, he seemed to be in the wilderness.

"You have to take the first step that God is telling you to," Simone had said.

Coming to church this morning had been Cameron's first step. He looked over at his friend Simone and smiled timidly.

"Is there anyone this morning who would like to join Lighthouse Church?" asked Pastor Mitchell. "Please, listen to the voice of God, and get up and come."

And that is what Cameron did.

1. *What are some means through which the Lord speaks to us?*

2. *What are some ways we sometimes respond to what we hear from Him?*

3. *What would make us better listeners?*

Your Land Will Be Restored

Isaiah 51:1-3, KJV

1 Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

3 For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.

Isaiah 51:1-3, NIV

¹“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut

and to the quarry from which you were hewn;

²look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many.

³The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins;

he will make her deserts like Eden,

her wastelands like the garden of the LORD.

Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

“Listen to me” (vs. 1) indicates that what follows is an urgent call from God to pay attention to what He has to say. Those who need to listen are those committed to doing what is right in God’s eyes—those who want His righteousness to reign in their lives as well as in the world—but who harbor doubts that God is going to make that happen. It includes the Israelites scattered among the nations by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. as well as those exiled in Babylon in 586 B.C. who would long to return home.

God reassured both groups that He was going to give them the “comfort” they desired (vs. 3). Their land, though desolate, would once again become like the Garden of Eden; joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and singing would be found in it as well. If they doubted this, they needed to remember the “rock” (vs. 1) from which they were cut—Abraham. He was one man, yet God promised that out of him would come many who could trace their heritage to him. If God could work like this through one man, He would surely do the same for Abraham’s children.

4. *Who was God addressing in this passage?*

5. *What was He promising?*

6. *What did the Israelites need to remember if they had doubts about this?*

My Justice Will Reign

Isaiah 51:4-6, KJV

4 Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people.

5 My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish

Isaiah 51:4-6, NIV

⁴“Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation:

Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations.

⁵My righteousness draws near speedily,

my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations.

The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm.

⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath;

the heavens will vanish like smoke,

the earth will wear out like a garment

away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

and its inhabitants die like flies.
But my salvation will last forever,
my righteousness will never fail.

The exiles would not just long for their physical deliverance. They would also hunger for a day when God's righteousness would rule the world. God promised this would happen, beginning again with the call, "Listen to me!"

When God said, "The islands will look to me" (vs. 5), He was most likely referring to the Israelites that would end up living far away—especially the inhabitants of the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean. What they would be waiting for is for God's justice to reign.

God promised that this would happen speedily, at least in His time frame. But it would not happen completely in the lifetime of those exiled. It would occur in part through Jesus when He and the Gospel became a light to the world (John 8:12).

God said that the salvation He provided would "last forever" and that it would "never fail," unlike the heavens and earth below which would "wear out like a garment" (Isa. 51:6). The viability of His promises was more certain than the continuing existence of the world.

7. *What would the Israelites long for?*

8. *When will what they long for be realized?*

9. *How certain was this?*

Your Enemies Will Be Devoured

Isaiah 51:7-8, KJV

7 Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart

Isaiah 51:7-8, NIV

7 "Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken

is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.

8 For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

my instruction to heart:
Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals
or be terrified by their insults.
8For the moth will eat them up like a garment;
the worm will devour them like wool.
But my righteousness will last forever,
my salvation through all generations."

The final portion of today's passage begins with, "Hear me" (vs. 7), another urgent call by God. Those waiting for God's righteousness to be fully established would experience "reproach" (vs. 7); they would be insulted and terrified. But they were not to "fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults" knowing that God's righteousness, once established, would last "forever" (vs. 8). They were also to recognize the temporary nature of their afflictions. Those who opposed them would eventually be devoured, just like a garment eaten by moths or worms. Some of this would be fulfilled when the Israelites' real-life enemies were defeated by others, but its final fulfillment will not take place until the last days.

When the Israelites were living in exile, they would long to return home. They would also long for a world ruled by God's righteousness. God reassured them that these would take place but it would take time. As the Israelites waited for this to take place, they needed to listen to God and not give into their doubts and fears. He is righteous—and He will deliver.

10. *What would the Israelites experience as they waited to be delivered?*

11. *What was going to happen to their enemies?*

12. *How did God want His people to respond to this?*

Are You Talking to Me?

“He can’t be talking to me?” That’s how I often respond to what I hear from the Lord, whether from the mouth of a kind friend, from a pastor, from the words of an inspiring author, or from the Word of God itself. It seems that I’m often resistant to what God is telling me even if I know deep in my heart that He is talking to me.

Once I was going down a path I was convinced was right but I knew God did not think so. I initially resisted His instruction even though others counseled me that way too. However, I was convinced that what I was doing was best and didn’t listen to them or to God. It wasn’t until I experienced the pain that comes from failure that I realized I was following my own heart and not God’s way. It would have been better if I’d listened to Him in the first place.

I remember another time when I harbored doubts that God was going to deliver me from a difficult situation. I thought there was no way out except to grin and bear it. I was miserable and doubted that deliverance would ever come. My circumstances did eventually change for the better, however, and I did end up thanking God when they did. But looking back, I know I caused my family and myself a lot of heartache by failing to trust in God during those challenging days.

What I’ve learned from these and similar experiences is when what’s ahead seems uncertain or I’m encountering difficult times, it pays to listen to God and trust in His promise of deliverance.

13. *What are some ways God has spoken to you in the past? How did you respond?*

14. *Have there been times when you failed to listen to God or trust what He had to say? If so, what was the result?*

15. *What have you learned from this?*

Listen to God

Some are convinced that God is never silent and that He is always speaking to us in one way or another. If this is true, then God is saying something to you right now. And what He is trying to tell you is important.

It is crucial that we open our minds and hearts so that we can hear what God has to say to us. For who knows what blessing may come our way simply by listening to the Lord and trusting in His righteousness and His promise of deliverance.

► *What is something God may be saying to you right now? How will you respond?*

KEY VERSE

Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. —Isaiah 51:1, KJV

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.” —Isaiah 51:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 27 through July 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Proverbs 8:22-31—God Created the World through Wisdom.
- Tue.** Colossians 1:13-17—In Christ All Things Hold Together.
- Wed.** Colossians 1:18-22—Christ, the Head of All Things.
- Thu.** Psalm 104:1-15—God's Well-Ordered Creation.
- Fri.** Psalm 104:24-35—Praise God for Creation.
- Sat.** Hebrews 1:1-4—The Son Reflects God's Glory.
- Sun.** John 1:1-14—The Word Became Flesh.

The Creating Word Becomes Flesh

It was a bittersweet day for Kanita. It was her last day at the events and marketing firm. She was headed home to Oklahoma City to take care of her mom, whose health was failing.

Kanita had worked at the Chicago company for more than five years and was one of the few, if any, Christians on staff. The company had afforded her opportunities to be creative and grow professionally. The staff was also welcoming and friendly.

It had been a place where Kanita had shared her Christian principles and perspectives as a matter of response and clarification. She was never rude or overbearing, but she did engage her coworkers when appropriate. Several times she had been sought out by coworkers, who were in the midst of personal conflict and despair. While she was not widely popular or in demand for social hour, Kanita was respected among her coworkers for being “kind, honest and genuine.”

“I hate to see you leave, Kanita,” her executive director said, taking a seat in the empty chair across from her desk. “You have been a great worker, and you are a good person. When you leave, it’s like a light will be going out in this office.”

“It doesn’t have to,” Kanita said, turning around. “Christ is available for anyone. All you or anyone has to do is to reach out to Him.”

- 1.** *In what ways can a bright light be helpful?*
- 2.** *What feelings do people generally have when the dark of early morning fades and the sun begins to rise?*
- 3.** *What are the effects of knowing Christ for those who continually move toward the light that Christ is and provides?*

The Word, and the Witness

John 1:1-9, KJV

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

John 1:1-9, NIV

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

To begin his Gospel, John went all the way back, to the time of creation. And “in the beginning” (vss. 1-2; see also Gen. 1:1), Jesus, the Word, was already there. He “was with God, and . . . was God. . . . Through him all things were made” (vss. 1, 3). While John spent much of his Gospel detailing the fullness of Jesus’ humanity, he began with an even more important fact: Jesus was, and is, fully God, with authority over all things. And while John’s usage of “the Word” (*logos*) to describe Jesus was unique

to the Gospels, it was a term his readers would have easily recognized. The Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, which existed in Jesus' time, used *logos* to represent the divine word.

John spoke of Jesus' character and purpose: "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind" (vs. 4). As one both present at and intimately involved with creation, Jesus is the source of both physical and spiritual life. And this light/life is eternal and all-encompassing: it "shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

It is also interesting to note that the King James, among others, translates "overcome" as "comprehended." Jesus' ways are higher than man's ways (Isa. 55:9)—let alone Satan's. Those who do not know Jesus and remain in darkness "cannot understand [those ways] because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Verse 6 then introduced another man that God sent—Jesus' earthly cousin, John the Baptist. It is likely that he introduced the apostle John to Jesus. John the Baptist "came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe" (vs. 7). And yet, as great a figure as the Baptist was, he "was not the light" but rather was just "a witness to the light" (vs. 8). As he would later say about himself, "He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

The Baptist would have his own ministry of repentance and baptism, but even more important was his witness to the fact that "[Jesus] the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world" (vs. 9).

4. *How did John describe Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel?*

5. *How did John describe Jesus' character and purpose?*

6. *Who else did John introduce in this passage? What did he say about him?*

Rejected and Received

John 1:10-14, KJV

10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:10-14, NIV

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Continuing his introduction, John now presented a 30,000 foot view of Jesus' ministry on Earth. Even though He had come to Earth—and in fact made the world—"the world did not recognize him" (vs. 10). The darkness of verse 5 had so blinded the world that even when Jesus came to Earth, He still was not recognized as the promised Messiah, let alone as God—even by those who had been given the fullness of God's Word (i.e., the Old Testament) up to that time. Thus, John remarked sadly, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (vs. 11).

Yet there was, even in John's time, a small but rapidly growing remnant who did recognize and receive Jesus,

and “to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (vs. 12). John then clarified what constituted a child of God: he or she was “born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (vs. 13). Salvation came from God, not from human effort; it required a belief that only God Himself could produce. Later in his Gospel, John would detail a conversation where Jesus further explained what it meant to be born of God, or “born again” (John 3:1-21).

John then summarized Jesus’ earthly ministry, from the perspective of one who did, like John, receive Him: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (vs. 14). This was a critical statement at this time in the history of the early church, as there were already those who insisted that Jesus had *only appeared* to have come in the flesh. As one who walked alongside Jesus for roughly three years, communed with Him after His resurrection, and would once more encounter Him as risen King as described in the Book of Revelation, John was eminently qualified to proclaim, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

7. How did John describe the response to Jesus when He came to Earth?



A bedouin tent in the Syrian desert. John said that Jesus came and “made his dwelling [pitched his tent] among us” (John 1:14).

Photo: yeowatzup

8. How did John describe those who did believe in Jesus?

9. How did John summarize Jesus’ ministry, and his own experience of it?

Bearing Witness Here and Now

Courtroom dramas have attorneys, a judge, a jury, and witnesses. A witness has only one function: he or she simply tells what they have seen and heard. Such observations can change minds. They can determine the course of the defendant's life.

Just as John the Baptist gave a witness to the "light" (vs. 8), people telling their story about their experience with Christ is a powerful witness to the light of Christ. They say what they have read, seen, heard, and experienced in Christ. They don't try to coerce or convince or "win" in any way. In such simplicity and innocence, we are much like the once-blind man who unwittingly thwarted the religious leaders because his testimony was so uncomplicated: He insisted he didn't know anything about their politics or their theology. "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25).

Bearing witness of the light, then, is a version of storytelling, which can be very influential in listeners' lives. In a way, John was called to tell the story of Jesus.

Bearing witness can also occur when people demonstrate in their lives what they have seen and heard in Jesus. That may be by their winsome generosity or inexplicable peacefulness in the midst of chaos or their willingness to speak the truth with love and gentleness instead of disdain and harshness. In other words, they reflect the light of grace and truth. Any of this, of course, is led and empowered by Jesus who is the light of the world.

10. *Who have you heard talk about their experience with Jesus and you found it helpful? (Change the name of the person if you wish.)*

11. *When you hear such stories, what most impresses you about what is said or how it is said?*

12. *What is best to avoid in order to let Jesus shine as the true light, full of grace and truth?*

How the Light Has Shone on You

Jesus as the True Light eagerly comes alongside us to change us on the inside, resulting in outward behavior that is a step closer to being full of grace and truth. He helps us become more patient, more straightforward, more aware of others. The capacity to bear witness and to be a witness of Christ's light of grace and truth progresses slowly—that seems to be the reality. But with God's help, we move closer to being a person exemplifying His grace and truth!

► *How has God moved you closer to being a person who lives in and shows grace—God acting through you in ways you cannot act yourself? Ask God to help this overflow from you to bear witness to others of the light of Christ in a natural, yet supernatural way.*

KEY VERSE

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. —John 1:3, KJV

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. —John 1:3, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 4 through July 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** John 2:1-11—Jesus Reveals His Glory.
- Tue.** Psalm 6—O Lord, Heal Me!
- Wed.** Matthew 8:5-13—Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant.
- Thu.** John 5:1-9—Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man.
- Fri.** John 9:1-7—Jesus Heals a Blind Man.
- Sat.** Psalm 41—God Heals Their infirmities.
- Sun.** John 4:46-54—Jesus Heals a Royal Official's Son.

The Word Heals

Maurice turned around from the full-length mirror when he heard the low whistle. It was his younger sister, Karen.

“Hey handsome, where are you going?”

“I have the graphic arts designer job interview today,” smiled Maurice, turning back to finger the knot of his tie.

“Really?” said Karen, easing down in the oversized chair in his bedroom.

Maurice had learned of the position at the local community college from a job app. Maurice had recently completed his bachelor’s in marketing and had done graphic arts work in the athletic department of his alma mater as a student intern. His initial response was feelings of inadequacy. Maurice received encouragement from friends and the Word of God. People wouldn’t know it to look at the 6’ 2” tall man, but he had long wrestled with feelings of shortcomings. It was an issue he had been praying about and working through.

While Maurice questioned it, he had hoped that he could be made whole in his emotions. It was one of his mentors, Winston, who had helped him grab hold of his reality in Christ Jesus.

“You are whole,” Winston had said. “It’s part of the work that Christ finished on the Cross. Whether you feel it or not, the Lord has made you whole in Him. All you have to do is to walk in it ... by faith.”

1. *In what life circumstances is it important to believe that good things will occur in the future even when you don’t see that immediately?*

2. *How easy or difficult is to believe in a God you can’t see?*

3. *How easy or difficult is it to trust God when you ask Him to answer your prayer or forgive you of your sins?*

LESSON FOCUS: Can you believe without seeing?

The Savior's Response to a Royal Official

John 4:46-50, KJV

46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

John 4:46-50, NIV

⁴⁶Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. ⁴⁷When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

⁴⁸"Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

⁴⁹The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

⁵⁰"Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live."

The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

John 4:46 briefly mentions the episode recorded in 2:1-11, where Jesus miraculously changed water into wine at Cana in Galilee. Prior to Jesus returning to the town of Cana in Galilee, He spent several days in Samaria (John 4:1-42). Once He reentered Galilee, the residents welcomed Him. It did not take long for the news of His presence to reach Capernaum and an unnamed "nobleman" (KJV). He might have been a government administrator who served in the court of Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39 (Matt. 14:9; Mark 6:14, 22). It's

uncertain whether the official was a Jew or a Gentile and whether he was a soldier.

Nonetheless, it is clear that his young “son” (John 4:46) was bedridden with a life-threatening sickness in their home at Capernaum. The official, upon learning about Jesus’ presence, promptly went to Him and began repeatedly imploring Jesus to travel back to Capernaum and heal the father’s child, who was about to die (vs. 47).

Jesus responded that “you people” (vs. 48), all the residents in Galilee, demanded He do miracles for them, not just the official. Possibly, the official’s plea was similar to the demands other Galileans made on Jesus to perform “signs and wonders” (vs. 48). Sadly, Jesus perceived that, in general, the Galileans’ acceptance of Jesus was preconditioned on what spectacular deeds He carried out as a wonder-worker to improve their lot in life (see 2:23-25).

The administrator was neither put off nor deterred by Jesus’ blunt statement. Instead, he respectfully addressed Jesus as “Sir” (literally, “Lord,” 4:49). Then, in a genuine display of faith, the official once more pleaded with Jesus to travel to Capernaum before the boy succumbed to his illness. The underlying assumption is that Jesus needed to be in the child’s physical presence for him to be healed.

Perhaps after a momentary pause, Jesus told the official to leave at once. Then, before the distraught father had a chance to respond, Jesus declared that the young child would “live” (vs. 50, NIV). In turn, the official “believed” (KJV) the powerful declaration he heard and promptly returned with his entourage to his home in Capernaum.

4. *What situation did Jesus encounter upon His arrival in Cana?*

5. *How did the father respond when he learned about Jesus’ presence in Galilee?*

6. *What was Jesus’ initial response to the official’s request?*

7. *In what way did the official display persistence?*

The Royal Official's Belief in the Son

John 4:51-54, KJV

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

54 This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

John 4:51-54, NIV

⁵¹While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵²When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him."

⁵³Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed.

⁵⁴This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

"Going down" (vs. 51, KJV) reflects the fact that Capernaum was lower in elevation than the hilly plateau of Cana. Most likely, the approximately 20-mile trip would have taken longer than a day to make, traveling east through the hills of Galilee and then descending to the Sea of Galilee (which is nearly 700 feet below sea level).

Perhaps the official, having received Jesus' statement by faith, headed as quickly as possible with his subordinates to Capernaum. Yet, before the administrator could arrive at his home, some of his "servants" intercepted him and told the official that his son was going to live. The child's intense "fever" (vs. 52) had broken and he was now recovering. When the father asked when his little boy suddenly began to feel better, the servants reported that the "exact time" (vs. 53, NIV) was one o'clock in the "afternoon"

(literally, “at the seventh hour” from dawn) of the preceding day.

The servants’ response triggered the official’s memory—he quickly deduced that the moment when his child’s condition began to improve matched the time when Jesus asserted that the boy would “live.” There was not a second to waste as the administrator hurried back to his home in Capernaum to reunite with his son and the rest of his “household” (vs. 53).

Once everyone was assembled (perhaps in a spacious courtyard of the home), the relieved father would have told them about Jesus, the itinerant rabbi from Nazareth and the miraculous way in which the beloved little boy was healed with a word—not even a touch. All the members of the household (both family members and servants) were not only surprised and grateful, but they, like the official, then put their trust in the Messiah.

In verse 54, John noted that Jesus’ healing the official’s son was the “second sign” recorded in the fourth Gospel (with the first being the turning of water into wine; 2:11).

The miracle convincingly demonstrated Jesus’ supreme power as the Messiah. All those who put their faith in the Messiah became “God’s children” (John 1:12), as well as beloved members of His eternal, spiritual family.



A map of Galilee at the time of Jesus showing Cana and Capernaum.

8. *What impact did the news the official received have on him?*

9. *What resulted from the news about the miracle Jesus performed?*

God's Invitations

Everything seemed to change for the royal official when Jesus said, "Go, your son will live" (John 4:50). He stopped insisting that Jesus accompany him to his son's bedside. We can imagine the looks these two men exchanged before the official turned to go home with some certainty that what Jesus said was true.

Such exchanges can occur between God and ourselves in moments of praying, reading Scripture, listening to teaching, or even taking a walk. The words of Jesus come to us, and we go forward in certainty that we have been spoken to and these words are true. Like the royal official, we take Jesus at His word. These are God's invitations to us to trust Him more deeply, to nourish our relationship with Him.

In these moments, a further amount of trust in Jesus is then planted in us. Then when the assurance we read or heard or experienced from God comes to pass—although maybe not in exactly the manner we would have predicted it—even more trust develops. Our faith in God increases. A trusting relationship with God flourishes.

The apostle Peter wrote his first letter to new believers in what is now Turkey. They had not seen Jesus, but they had faith in Him, so Peter wrote to them, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

10. *What are some of the promises of God, or assurances of Jesus, that people most often recall?*

11. *What helps you remember His promises—learning verses by heart? Putting phrases to music?*

12. *What life experiences have helped you trust in God even more?*

God's Willingness

God loves us and works with us in moving toward a life that is immersed in God's goodness and advancement of His kingdom here on Earth. God reaches out to us as friends and partners, which is evident from the promises offered to us. We respond with loving gratitude to a God who has given us so much.

► *Write a short note to God, expressing your desire to Him to move forward with Him in whatever He asks you to do, trusting Him no matter what.*

KEY VERSE

So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. —John 4:53, KJV

Then the father realized that his was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed. —John 4:53, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 11 through July 17

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** John 3:1-8—You Must Be Born from Above.
- Tue.** John 3:9-17—Jesus Brings Eternal Life.
- Wed.** 2 Samuel 22:2-7—My Rock, Fortress, and Deliverer.
- Thu.** Psalm 62—Salvation Comes from God.
- Fri.** Hebrews 2:1-9—Don't Neglect God's Message of Salvation.
- Sat.** John 12:27-36—Father, Glorify Your Name!
- Sun.** John 12:44-50—Jesus, the Light of the World.

The Word Saves

I must admit to feeling a bit culpable that I still remember this commercial jingle from 1974: “Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce—special orders don’t upset us. All we ask is that you let us have it your way.” That was the basis of a fast-food franchise’s advertising campaign that lasted years and helped put that restaurant chain on the map. Analysts say the campaign worked partially because it tapped into a self-centered cultural trend to do your own thing, to be number one, to think only of yourself, to have it your way.

The problem is that we can too easily carry that catchy jingle beyond our bacon double-cheeseburgers and into the means by which we gain salvation. Rather than putting our trust in Jesus and committing to following Him, we try to earn salvation on our own. Or we decide to have Jesus solely on our own terms, to have Him our way, to have a special-order Jesus: “I’d like a super-size order of grace, and go heavy on the mercy, but please hold any demands on my lifestyle. Did you get that? No life-changes, please.”

Thus, you have for yourself your own idea of Jesus—not His way, but your way. It’s as though you pray the Lord’s Prayer, “My kingdom come, my will be done on earth—and, while you’re at it, up there in heaven, too!” It’s as though you sing the old hymn, “Have mine own way, Lord. Have mine own way. I am the potter, You are my clay.”

- 1.** *In what ways does having it your way conflict with being obedient to God’s will for your life?*
- 2.** *How does believing Jesus’ words help you be submissive to God’s will?*
- 3.** *What blessings do you receive when you are obedient to Jesus’ teachings?*

Looking to Jesus with the Eyes of Faith

John 12:44-46, KJV

44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.

45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

John 12:44-46, NIV

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.

⁴⁵The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

⁴⁶I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

For three years, Jesus conducted His public ministry among His fellow Jews. Amazingly, despite all that Jesus taught and the numerous miracles He performed, the nation as a whole did not welcome Him as their Messiah (John 1:11). Yet, even as the Passover festival drew near (12:1) and Jesus' ministry on Earth ended, He remained ever vigilant to invite as many people as possible to turn to Him in faith (12:44).

A consistent teaching in the fourth Gospel is that the Father "sent" the Son into the world. Indeed, He was the Father's chosen representative to herald the truth of the Gospel. For instance, John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the "Son of God" (1:34, KJV). Later, in 7:16, Jesus declared that what He taught did not originate with Him, but with the Father, who dispatched the Son to the world.

Moreover, the Son did not operate on His own "authority", (7:28, NIV) but the authority of the Father, who was characterized by truth. So close was the relationship between the Father and His approved emissary that knowing the Son equated to knowing the Father (8:19).

Jesus explained that one of the reasons He came to Earth was to be a "light" (John 12:46). He noted that His aim was twofold. First, He wanted the lost to put their trust in Him. Second, He knew that in doing so, the lost would

no longer “abide in darkness (KJV).” Throughout John’s Gospel, the apostle often used the metaphor of “light” and “darkness” to contrast the ways of God with the ways of the world. The concept of light and darkness had great significance in Hebrew culture. In Scripture, the words “lamp,” “light,” and “life” are often used as synonyms. In Jesus’ teachings, being cast into “outer darkness” was symbolic of the coming judgment of the unrighteous (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

4. *What sort of connection is there between trusting in the Son and the Father?*

5. *What reason did Jesus give for coming to Earth from heaven?*

Heeding Jesus’ Words with a Believing Heart

John 12:47-50, KJV

47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

John 12:47-50, NIV

⁴⁷“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. ⁴⁹For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. ⁵⁰I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

The fourth Gospel presents Jesus of Nazareth as the eternal Word of God (1:1). What He proclaimed was both divinely inspired and supremely important. On at least one occasion, when Jesus taught the crowds, they were “amazed” (Mark 1:27, NIV) at what He revealed about the Father and humankind. Unlike the experts in the law, Jesus taught with genuine “authority.”

Jesus’ statement recorded in John 12:47 reflects this perspective. He declared that, at His first coming, He would not “judge” those who heard His teaching but failed to heed it. This did not mean they would escape God’s condemnation. Instead, divine judgment would come at another time. After all, as Jesus explained, the purpose of His first advent was to make salvation freely available to the lost. Nonetheless, a future time of reckoning awaited those who spurned the Son (Heb. 9:27).

John 12:48 personifies Jesus’ “words” as the source of the unbelievers’ judgment. These are individuals who, because they categorically refused to “accept” what the Messiah taught, treated Him with contempt. Therefore, “at the last day,” the “very words” Jesus spoke, would “condemn” His detractors.

Jesus was referring to a future period of judgment that would take place during His second advent. He may be referring to what is known as the “sheep and goats” judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46, when He will judge the nations and put the “sheep” on His right and the “goats” on His left (vs. 33). The righteous sheep, who lived in agreement with Jesus’ teaching, would be rewarded for their hospitality and concern for others. In contrast, the goats, who opposed Jesus’ teaching, would be eternally punished for their indifference.

In keeping with what Jesus stated in John 12:44, He asserted in verse 49 that whenever He spoke, it was not on His own initiative and authority. Rather, as the Father’s faithful representative, the Son repeated what the Father “commanded” the Son to declare.

In 12:50, Jesus disclosed that He knew, with absolute

certainty, that what the Father commanded the Son to proclaim resulted in “eternal life.” It is no wonder that the Father and the Son were in perfect agreement as to what He would say and do throughout the course of His public ministry on Earth, including His willingness to offer Himself in sacrificial death on the Cross. Jesus spoke to those who welcomed His teaching, put their trust in Him, and experienced the Father’s forgiveness.

Jesus concluded His public ministry with one last appeal to the people to put their trust in Him. Believing in Him would be the same as believing in God, who had sent Him. Indeed, to see God the Son is to see God the Father (12:44, 45). Not only is Jesus one with God, He is also the light that dispels the darkness. Everyone is condemned to spiritual darkness except for those who receive Jesus as the spiritual light. Jesus called the people to enter into His light and be delivered from the world’s darkness (vs. 46).

Jesus’ purpose for coming into this world was not to judge those who refused to listen and obey His teachings. In fact, they condemn themselves by rejecting Jesus and His words. Jesus’ purpose for coming was to save the world—that is, those who turn to Him as their Lord and Savior (vss. 47, 48). Jesus did nothing apart from His heavenly Father, who had sent Him into the world to deliver the message of eternal life. Jesus conveyed this message exactly as God desired. Jesus delivered the message using the exact words and methods His Father instructed.

6. *What expectation did Jesus place on humankind concerning His teaching?*

7. *What consequence awaited those who rejected what Jesus’ taught?*

8. *On behalf of whom did Jesus “speak” (John 12:49)?*

9. *What was the outcome of God’s “commandment” (John 12:50, KJV)?*

Jesus' Startling Announcement

If Jesus' statement in this week's lesson is to be believed, then His words demand both that His divine authority be acknowledged and that His beckoning call be obeyed. Moreover, submission to Jesus cannot be halfhearted or now and then; it must be deliberate and without reservation.

It is certainly true that there will be times in which our faith will waver or entertain doubts, but our trust in His words will always be a bedrock to our faith in Jesus, who will surely light our way through the darkness. And the first step in this journey with Jesus is complete submission to His Lordship. It is then that Christ becomes our Redeemer and our Savior.

If one is hesitant, however, in taking that first step, examine what is holding you back: What fears distress your thoughts? What skepticisms question your resolve? And what desires lure you away from His righteousness? The answers to these questions are not insignificant, and it is because they are significant that Jesus' compassion for us becomes truly evident when we look to Him to be rescued from our tragic estrangement from God.

Yes, believe in Jesus and His startling words, but also place your life in His hands. For when you do, He will guide you along the path of eternal salvation.

"Come to me," Jesus beckons, "all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

10. *Why would Jesus' announcement regarding Himself be startling to His Jewish listeners?*

11. *Why is His announcement still startling today?*

12. *How did or do you respond to Jesus' announcement?*

Abide in Jesus

When Jesus told the Jews that God had sent Him and that He was conveying God's message to them, His listeners were astonished. Subsequently, some believed His words and followed Him—even unto death. Others dismissed His words and turned away. Jesus' words will always be relevant. Our decision to follow them—to follow Him—is crucial as to whether we have eternal life with Him or not.

► *Take a few minutes to write a prayer letter to God. If you already have a saving relationship in Christ Jesus, promise to abide in His Lordship and follow only Him. If you want to initially surrender yourself to Jesus and find eternal life with Him, commit your life to Him in this letter.*

KEY VERSE

I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. —John 12:46, KJV

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. —John 12:46, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 18 through July 24

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 26:12-19—Awake, O Dead, and Sing!
- Tue.** 1 Corinthians 15:12-19—The Dead Shall Be Raised.
- Wed.** 1 Corinthians 15:20-28—In Christ All Are Made Alive.
- Thu.** Daniel 12:1-4—Wake Up!
- Fri.** John 5:25-29—The Dead Will Hear Christ's Voice.
- Sat.** John 11:1, 3-16—Jesus Travels to Lazarus.
- Sun.** John 11:20-27, 38-44—The Raising of Lazarus.

The Word Resurrects the Dead

Makayla, do you want to take a break?" asked Traci, who had been watching her coworker closely. Makayla had begun to move a little slower.

The medical lab technicians were three hours away from the end of their shifts, and Traci was concerned for Makayla, who never complained, even in light of her illness.

Makayla shared that she had breast cancer, but only her doctors knew what stage and how much longer she would be able to work.

"I want to help get medical results to patients," was Makayla's response for her continuing to work.

Makayla's concern for patients was admirable, but her unflinching bravery in the face of her own diagnosis was a bit puzzling.

Traci would like to be confident about an afterlife, but how persuaded could one be?

"Yes, Traci," Makayla said. "Let's both take a break."

The women went to the hospital cafeteria for a snack. It was there at a table in the back that Makayla talked frankly. She mentioned her family and their love and concern, but Makayla spoke mostly about the Lord. While Makayla was anxious about the unknown and death, she was not scared. She said Traci could even see God's glory in what was happening to Makayla. Christ had taken away the sting of death for her. She knew without a doubt that she would be with the Lord forever and ever in heaven. Could Traci say the same thing?

1. *Why are people who do not believe in God unable to see His glory?*

2. *Why is it not enough to attend church and observe Christian holy days to be able to see God's glory?*

3. *How has God shown you His glory?*

Jesus Arrives in Bethany

John 11:17-19, KJV

17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:

19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

John 11:17-19, NIV

¹⁷On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

Somehow Lazarus became ill, and his condition worsened to the point that his sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus for help (John 11:3). The sisters undoubtedly had seen Jesus perform miracles and were convinced of Jesus' ability to help.

But when Jesus and His group arrived in Bethany, they learned that four days earlier the body of Lazarus had been placed in a tomb (vs. 17). Since a dead body decayed quickly in the hot middle eastern climate, the family would have had his body anointed, wrapped, and laid in the family tomb soon after he passed. Since Jerusalem was less than two miles from Bethany (John 11:18), a number of Jews from the city paid their respects to Martha and Mary.

4. *What event created the need for Mary and Martha to be consoled?*

Jesus Talks with Martha

John 11:20-27, KJV

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

John 11:20-27, NIV

²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have

22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

When the sisters of Lazarus heard that Jesus was approaching their village, Martha went out to greet Him, while Mary remained in the house. On the surface, Martha's first words to Jesus appear to be a veiled rebuke (vs. 21), but it was more likely an expression of regret that Jesus could not be present. Martha then expressed her faith in Jesus, for she was certain that God granted Jesus whatever request He asked.

Jesus declared to Martha that her brother would rise from the dead. Martha agreed since the Jews believed that would happen to all people at the last day (see Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:7-8).

But Jesus' response to Martha is incredible. He could have said that He would resurrect Lazarus. Instead, Jesus asserted, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Jesus, in fact, is the life of the age to come, and all who put their trust in Him will experience the resurrected life.

When Jesus asked Martha whether she believed what He was saying, Jesus was actually asking Martha whether she

believed in Him. He wanted Martha (and all other people) to begin experiencing right now the joys of eternal life.

Martha not only replied positively, but was also clear about what she believed—that Jesus is the Messiah, God’s only divine Son. Furthermore, she affirmed that Jesus left heaven and entered the world by becoming a human being.

5. *How did Martha and Mary’s responses to Jesus’ arrival contrast?*

6. *What did Martha say to Jesus when the two saw each other?*

7. *How did Martha respond to Jesus’ declaration to be the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)?*

Jesus Restores Lazarus to Life

John 11:38-44, KJV

38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?

41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of

John 11:38-44, NIV

³⁸Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people

the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

One can only imagine the emotions Jesus felt as He approached the tomb of Lazarus and ordered the stone to be removed. Martha did not understand why—after four days the stench from the decomposing corpse would be terrible. But Jesus stated once again that if Martha had faith, she would witness the glory of God (Jesus’ restoring Lazarus to life).

Jesus’ prayer is not so much a petition as it is an expression of thanksgiving to the Father. The Son knew in advance that the Father would grant the request, and so the Redeemer gave thanks for this. Jesus declared in the hearing of the onlookers that the Father always answered His Son’s requests. It was His desire that in seeing the miracle, the onlookers would believe His claim to be the Messiah. In restoring Lazarus to life, Jesus would prove that He is the master of death and preview His power that would be fully displayed in the final resurrection when all who have died hear His voice and live (5:25, 28-29).

After His prayer, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out of the tomb. He did, still wrapped in his grave clothes. To prove Lazarus was truly alive, Jesus told the people to “loose him, and let him go” (vs. 44, KJV).

8. *How did Martha respond when Jesus ordered the stone to be removed?*

9. *What happened when Jesus commanded that Lazarus come out of the tomb?*

Behold, the Glory of God!

Neil Armstrong was the first person to walk on the moon. More than being an astronaut, however, Armstrong was a devout Christian. In fact, while he walked on the ancient steps where Jesus went to and from the temple in Jerusalem, Armstrong stated to his friend Meir Ben-Dov, "I have to tell you, I am more excited stepping on these stones than when I was stepping on the moon."

When Armstrong stood on the surface of the moon and gazed at the heavenly bodies in space, he must have sensed the glory of God. Nevertheless, he would not have seen God's glory had he not believed so ardently in Jesus and had devoted his life to Him. Such faith in the Lord empowered Armstrong to truly see the glory of God.

We may not ever look at the stars from the moon, or gaze upon Victoria Falls in Zambia, or stare at the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, or observe the Aurora Borealis from northern Norway, or even see at all. But if we believe in Jesus, we will see God's glory in the precious moments of our experiences when we trust Him with our lives.

The privilege of seeing the glory of God is not only a blessing (like a gift or reward), but it is also a power source for enabling us to be more faithful in our devotion to Christ Jesus. Just as "believing" is meant to be active and not merely an acceptance of an idea, the glory of God not only reflects the Creator's divine attributes but also compels us to act according to His holy will.

Therefore, let us "declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Ps. 96:3).

10. *Would you be more excited to step on the surface of the moon or to walk where Jesus walked? Explain your answer.*

11. *What does it mean to you to believe in Jesus?*

12. *Why is it important to you to be able to see God's glory?*

Believe and See

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, He asked Martha whether she believed in Him enough to trust that He had power over life and death. He then raised her brother, Lazarus, from his tomb, thus demonstrating not only His divine qualities but also the glory of God. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and we see His glory as He shows us the mercy, grace, and love He showed to Mary and Martha.

► *Finish these two sentences:*

*I saw God's glory when He _____
_____.*

*I reflect God's glory when I _____
_____.*

KEY VERSE

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?
—John 11:25-26, KJV

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
—John 11:25-26. NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of July 25 through July 31

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 34:4-14—Seek Peace and Pursue It.
- Tue.** Matthew 11:25-30—Rest for the Weary.
- Wed.** John 16:23-27, 32-33—Jesus Has Conquered the World.
- Thu.** Psalm 119:161-176—Peace for the Upright.
- Fri.** Isaiah 54:6-10—God's Unmovable Covenant of Peace.
- Sat.** John 14:1-14—Don't Let Your Hearts Be Troubled.
- Sun.** John 14:15-29—Peace to the Disciples.

The Word Gives Peace

Wesley put aside his Bible reading and went to check on his meatloaf. In the kitchen, the older man went about preparing his dinner with the routine and ease that the past 13 years had brought.

He dished up mashed potatoes, corn, and green beans on his plate, along with the meatloaf, and took a seat at the table, neatly set for one. Then Wesley bowed his head for grace. When he took his first forkful of meatloaf, he realized how hungry he was. The meatloaf was good. Still, it wasn't as good as Flora's, he remembered.

Wesley thought of his wife every day since her death 13 years ago. Losing Flora had been the hardest thing that he had ever experienced. The Holy Spirit had always been Wesley's comforter, but he had felt a deeper communion since Flora's passing.

Wesley's daughter wanted him to move to Florida to be with her and her family. "We have room, Daddy," Kala said. "It's not good for you to live alone."

Wesley might consider moving to Florida at some point, but he had his church and some family and friends in Kansas City, Missouri. He would stay here for now.

"I'm not alone, baby girl," Wesley had told his daughter. "The Holy Spirit is always with me, and He will never leave me alone."

1. *When do you not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit? Explain why.*

2. *How does God assure you that His Spirit abides in you when you feel otherwise?*

3. *In what ways is God's Spirit more than your babysitter?*

The Promise of the Spirit

John 14:15-17, KJV

15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

John 14:15-17, NIV

¹⁵“If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

During the Last Supper (John 13–14), Jesus said that if His disciples truly loved Him, they would obey His teachings (John 14:15). He did not demand their obedience to prove their love for Him. Rather, obedience would be a natural result of loving Him.

Jesus promised that His disciples would have the indwelling of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit would come and make His home in believers so their love could be clearly defined and their obedience could be carefully directed.

The Spirit would come to the believers’ aid to help them meet every challenge to their faith. As the “Spirit of truth” (vs. 17), He reveals the truth about God, shows what is true, and leads believers into all truth. In these ways, the Spirit remains ever present to help believers understand, accept, and apply what Jesus commands.

4. What did Jesus promise He would give to His disciples?

The Abiding Presence of the Son

John 14:18-24, KJV

18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

19 Yet a little while, and the

John 14:18-24, NIV

¹⁸“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

¹⁹Before long, the world will

world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

²²Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

Jesus assured His disciples that He would not abandon them as "orphans" (vs. 18). In fact, after His death and resurrection, He appeared to them several times before His ascension. These appearances were only for believers, to strengthen their faith and persuade them that Jesus would never leave them alone in this world.

Once again, Jesus emphasized that it is not enough for believers simply to have affection for Him in their hearts. True love for Him is demonstrated when they keep His

teachings in their daily lives. When believers show this kind of love for Jesus, they enjoy three specific blessings: the love of the Father, the love of the Son, and a deeper knowledge of Jesus.

The Messiah's statements puzzled one of His disciples. His first name was "Judas" (vs. 22), though he was not "Iscaiot," the betraying disciple who had left earlier (13:30). The faithful disciple Judas asked Jesus why He would show Himself to them but not to everyone else in the world.

Jesus did not answer Judas's question directly, for the disciples would learn soon enough the ultimate purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry. He was more concerned about their relationship with Him. So, once again, He stated that if they loved Him, they would obey His teachings.

In addition, both the Father and the Son would come to believers and make their home with them. In contrast, those who did not obey Jesus' teaching showed that they really did not love Him and had rejected the Father. To accept the Son is to accept the Father, and to reject the Son is to reject the Father.

5. *In what sense would Jesus come back to His followers?*

6. *What connection did Jesus make between love and obedience?*

7. *What pledge did Jesus make concerning the Father?*

The Son's Return to the Father

John 14:25-29, KJV

25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

John 14:25-29, NIV

²⁵“All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of every-thing I have said to you.

²⁷Peace I leave with you;

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”

Jesus covered a wide range of issues, which verse 25 refers to as “all this.” Just as the Father had sent His Son into the world, He would also send the Spirit to dwell permanently within Jesus’ followers. This “Advocate” (vs. 26) would instruct believers by helping them recall all that Jesus taught. The Spirit, having been sent in Jesus’ name, would officially represent Him on His behalf.

As Jesus was about to depart from His disciples, He bestowed on them His “peace” (vs. 27)—not the absence of conflict and adversity, but the assurance of God’s grace, regardless of the situations His followers experienced. His presence through the Spirit would strengthen their hearts.

Jesus reminded the Eleven that while He was “going away” (vs. 28) from them, He also promised to return. Because His disciples genuinely “loved” (vs. 28) the Son, they would come to rejoice that He was going to the Father in heaven. The Son would voluntarily submit Himself to the Father’s redemptive plan through His death at Calvary.

8. *What would enable Jesus’ followers to continue to grow in their faith?*

9. *What did Jesus want His “peace” (John 14:27) to do for His disciples?*

Filled with the Holy Spirit!

How absolutely astounding is the image of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters while the almighty Creator brought the universe into existence (see Gen. 1:2)! What is equally amazing is that this same Spirit resides in us at this very moment! To truly comprehend this reality is breathtaking to behold!

Nevertheless, how often do we neglect or forget the fact that God's Spirit dwells in us? How often do we neglect the Holy Spirit when we encounter worldly temptations? How often do we forget the Holy Spirit when we endure grievous hardships? How often do we neglect the Holy Spirit when we study Scripture? How often do we forget the Holy Spirit when we seek God's guidance?

Moreover, as Christians, most of us tend to exalt heroes such as Moses, Elijah, and Peter, who parted the Red Sea (see Exodus 13:17-22), caused fire to burn the sacrifices on Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:16-46), and raised Tabitha from the dead (see Acts 9:32-43)? As righteous as Moses, Elijah, and Peter were, they were still the servants of God, whose Spirit brought these miracles to pass. Without the Holy Spirit, none of these events would have occurred.

So, too, in our own lives, without the Holy Spirit, we would be spiritually lost and powerless. Praise God! The Holy Spirit is with us to comfort us, to guide us, and to help us overcome any ordeal or challenge. Therefore, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

10. *What one word describes how you feel about the Holy Spirit abiding in you? Explain why you chose this word.*

11. *What does it mean to "be filled with the Spirit"?*

12. *How can the Holy Spirit deliver Christians from feelings of despair?*

Following the Spirit

During the Last Supper, Jesus promised the apostles that He would ask His heavenly Father to send the Spirit of truth to be with them after His departure from this world. God's Spirit would not only be an Advocate on their behalf but also a Comforter during times of hardship. And so, too, the Holy Spirit is with us as He was with them.

► *Pray today and the rest of this week for the Holy Spirit to comfort and protect you. Also, look for where He is guiding you to new opportunities of service and people who need to find Jesus.*

KEY VERSE

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. —John 14:16, KJV

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” —John 14:16, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 1 through August 7

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 90:1-12—The Lord, Our Dwelling Place.
- Tue.** 1 John 2:12-17—To Love God Is to Know God.
- Wed.** 1 John 5:1-5—Faith Is the Victory.
- Thu.** Isaiah 43:14-21—God Will Do a New Thing.
- Fri.** Isaiah 55:1-5—Come, You Who Thirst.
- Sat.** Romans 8:31-39—More Than Conquerors.
- Sun.** Revelation 21:1-9—God Will Dwell with His People.

A New Home

Brianna's forlorn thoughts were interrupted with someone's irritated, "Hey, aren't you next?"

She focused on the open door in front of her, then turned to nod at the other three women standing in line with towels. "Sorry," Brianna murmured, as she shuffled into the open door of the tiny bathroom that had just been vacated.

She had been in a Christian-run safe house and shelter for almost a week, and it was the last place she wanted to be. She hadn't foreseen the events that had brought her to this point, though now she should have predicted it. She should have been smarter. Done more. Tried to get away from her husband Raynard sooner when he refused to get help for his problems.

Later that day, she sat in the large living room as other women assembled for the evening Bible study and prayer time. Joanne was the group leader for the night. The woman had experienced drug use and homelessness, among other things. So, when she began talking about real hope that was in Christ, Brianna didn't tune her out immediately.

"How can we have hope in our situation?" scoffed one woman.

"If you are in Christ, you can indeed have hope," Joanne gently offered. "Life can be extremely unfair, hurtful, and hard. But believers have a promise that outshines anything this world can offer. One day, we will know no sorrow. We will be with the Lord, where all things will be new."

- 1.** *What are some things that discourage us in this life?*
- 2.** *When you're discouraged, how does faith in God's gift of eternal life change your perspective?*
- 3.** *How does God's promise to one day make all things new encourage you to keep moving forward?*

A Blessed Home

Revelation 21:1-3, KJV

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Revelation 21:1-3, NIV

¹Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Having just described God's righteous judgment on the Earth, culminating in the "great white throne" judgment at the end of the ages (Rev. 20:11-15), John turned his attention to our great hope, our new home with Christ. John saw a new heaven and new earth because the first heaven and first earth had passed away in the judgment of God.

Included in John's vision of the new heaven and earth was an interesting observation, namely, there was no sea upon the face of the new earth. Whereas the oceans and seas of the current earth cover some three-fourths of the surface, such will not be the case on the new earth. From the beginning, massive amounts of water were associated with death and God's judgment. From that time until the final judgment when John saw that the "sea gave up the dead that were in it" (Rev. 20:13), the vast waters of the deep have and will claim an untold number of lives. This will not be so on the new earth.

After these observations of the new heaven and earth,

John saw God's holy city, the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven. He specifically noted that it was beautifully adorned as a bride for her husband. The imagery of a bride and her husband reminds us that the Lord's people are referred to as His bride (see Eph. 5:25-27). And one day, His bride will rejoice during her marriage to the Lamb (see Rev. 19:7-8).

Because the description of a bride and her husband is used for the new Jerusalem, many commentators see it as the home of the resurrected, glorified Church after the heavenly wedding. This is right in line with what the voice from heaven said as the New Jerusalem descended from heaven. God's dwelling place has come down, and His people will reside with Him there. Such is the great hope of the saints of God.

4. *What new things did the apostle John see?*

5. *Then what did John see descending from God in heaven?*

6. *Who will reside there?*

A Blessed Hope

Revelation 21:4-6, KJV

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I

Revelation 21:4-6, NIV

⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death¹ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

⁵He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.”

Because God’s people will be with Him in our new home, it will be a place of great joy. All those tears we experienced in this sin-ravaged world will be wiped away forever. There will be no more death and mourning, no more pain, no hunger or diseases, and no more oppression of one person or people over another. Crime, warfare, and other forms of violence will be gone. All of this will pass away with the onset of the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem.

Of course, the promise of a glorious eternity bereft of death, suffering, and sorrow is only as good as the word of the one making the promise. For a promise to be kept, two conditions must be met: the promiser must have the intent to keep it, and he or she must have the ability to keep it.

Our Lord, however, does not suffer from any of these limitations. He who made heaven, Earth, and everything therein is more than able to keep every promise He ever made. Therefore, we can trust that every word spoken by Him who sits upon His eternal throne is faithful and true. For He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End of all things. Our Lord is the first cause and our ultimate destination. He gives meaning to what would otherwise be a futile existence. Furthermore, He gives living water to all who thirst and desire to be with Him. What a blessed hope God’s people have of a new home with Him!

7. *What will God wipe away in His holy city?*

8. *How can we trust this will be so?*

9. *What will the Lord give us freely from His fountain?*

A Blessed Heritage

Revelation 21:7-9, KJV

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Revelation 21:7-9, NIV

7“Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

will be my children. ⁸But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

⁹One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

The blessed heritage of the victorious overcomers in Christ is that they will inherit all the good things that God has in store for His children. However, those who reject the Lord and choose to continue their sinful ways have quite a different future. Cowardly unbelievers who continue in their abominable practices, from murder to all manner of immorality, face the final judgment and will be sentenced to the lake of fire, which is the second death. Death is not annihilation, but rather separation. Physical death is separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is separation of the spirit from God. The first death is physical; the second death is spiritual. So those who reject God's forgiveness and continue in their sin will face spiritual separation from Him for eternity in the fiery lake of brimstone and sulfur.

Then, one of the angels who was involved in releasing the last seven plagues upon the earth came to John with a message of hope. John saw the glorious bride, the Lamb's wife, descend out of heaven. God's saints truly have a great hope and home to look forward to. May that hope keep us faithful to Him.

10. *Who shall inherit all things?*

11. *Who shall not dwell in God's holy city?*

12. *What did the angel summon John to come and see?*

A New Perspective

Starting in 2019, the COVID pandemic consumed the world. People's hearts filled with discouragement. No one understood the virus or knew how to respond. The only certainty was its rapid growth and danger to the world. Life as "normal" ceased—no more traveling, large gatherings, or even dining in restaurants with loved ones.

Cynthia's mother died before the pandemic hit; six months later, COVID took her father's life. Jason had many problems in his life—the pandemic was the final straw. He ended his life. Debbie and Jerry woke in the middle of the night to the sound of their six-year-old daughter gasping as she took her last breath.

Throughout the world, people's perspective on life changed. Life no longer was about hustling and bustling to climb the ladder to success. It became about survival. Families struggled to eat and keep a roof over their heads.

Over time, people began to process and heal. Cynthia's loss of both parents in six months continued to hurt. But she experienced peace in knowing her parents were together for eternity. Jason's family wondered if they could have prevented his suicide, and they learned the importance of being open with one another. As Debbie and Jerry walked by their daughter's bedroom, their hearts cried out to hold her once again. Yet, their faith told them Jesus now held her forever.

Christians turned again to God's Word about life after physical death—life with no more pain, sorrow, or tears in eternity with Christ. God's promise of eternal life in His presence took on a new meaning as people realized once more that this life is not the end but just the beginning.

13. *What do you do when chaos fills your daily life?*

14. *How do God's promises of a new heaven and earth encourage you in the midst of chaos?*

15. *Do you take time to meditate on His promises when discouraged?*

In His Time

A chorus from several years ago proclaims that God “makes all things beautiful in His time.” We would like that time to be now, but God’s timing is not our timing. He doesn’t tell us the exact time when Jesus will return and all things will become new, but we can depend on God fulfilling His promises.

► *If you believe God’s promise to make all things new, how should this affect your actions when discouragement or trials come in your life?*

KEY VERSE

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

—Revelation 21:4, KJV

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

—Revelation 21:4, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of August 8 through August 14

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 66:6-14—You Shall Be Comforted in Jerusalem.
- Tue.** Isaiah 66:18-22—God’s Glory Revealed in Jerusalem.
- Wed.** Hebrews 12:18-29—City of the Living God.
- Thu.** Psalm 48—Jerusalem, Joy of All the Earth.
- Fri.** Zechariah 8:1-8—The Faithful City, the Holy Mountain.
- Sat.** 1 Timothy 6:11-16—God, Who Dwells in Unapproachable Light.
- Sun.** Revelation 21:10-21—The Holy City.

A New City

I wouldn't have guessed you for one of those 'pie-in-the-sky' folk," said Danny. "Christianity wants to keep you focused on some future heaven, which isn't real. Instead, you should be fixated on the here and now, and all the injustice we have to fight."

Terrence was talking to Danny, the new barber. Terrence was in his barber Cecil's chair, getting his fade touched up. Terrence had been talking to Cecil about heaven being an actual place. While Terrence knew it wasn't the typical conversation for most barbershops, what he liked about Cecil's Barber Shop was that a wide range of black men—old, young, and varying economic and educational backgrounds—were clientele. Thus, the topics of conversation were equally wide ranging.

Danny was a 30-something-year-old man with a background of surviving the streets. He engaged young black men to do the same and to become responsible sons, fathers, and community leaders. Terrence respected that and knew Danny to be a good man, but Terrence also tried to sow seeds of the Gospel whenever possible.

"The Bible encourages us to do both and a lot more," Terrence replied, after Cecil had turned his chair enough to where he could look directly at Danny. "I'm concerned about social issues. Still, this world will not last forever. Only those who know the Lord will live forever in heaven, and it's that glorious and real place that I never lose sight of."

1. *Are you a person who looks more ahead in life or lingers more in the past? Explain your answer.*

2. *How would you feel if this world is all you have to live for?*

3. *Describe how you feel when you think about having eternity ahead of you with God.*

<p>LESSON FOCUS: Keep looking toward the city that shines with God's eternal glory.</p>
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The City from God

Revelation 21:10-14, KJV

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

13 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:10-14, NIV

¹⁰And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

¹¹It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

¹³There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Our last lesson ended with the angel telling John to “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9b, KJV). And with that summons, the angel took him “in the Spirit” (NIV) to the mountain top, where John saw the New Jerusalem descending from our God in heaven. John described its brilliance like an exceedingly precious jewel, specifically jasper, with the clarity of pure crystal. A jasper stone is usually a mottled, opaque stone of the quartz family, so it would be a very rare, valuable stone. It is possible that John’s focus was more on the dazzling splendor of the city than the specific gem in this

case, but there was something about it that reminded him of the beauty of a jasper stone. That it was clear speaks of the perfection and purity of the holy God who made it.

As John continued to observe the glorious city descend out of heaven, he noted that it had very high walls with 12 gates guarded by angels, three gates per each of the four walls. Each of the 12 gates had the name of one of the tribes of Israel written upon it. Israel represents the Old Testament law, and though keeping the laws that God gave Moses could not save a person from sin, they did point to the need of salvation. Now, it is through salvation in Christ that we will enter the gates of the city.

Whereas the 12 gates are named after the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 foundations are named after the 12 apostles of Christ. We can know with great certainty that the magnificent city is built on the firm foundations of the apostles and their doctrine—that is to say, it is built upon Christ Himself. As sure as the Lord Jesus and His Word are, so too will be the foundations of the New Jerusalem.

4. *What did the angel show John descending from heaven?*
5. *What gates did John see?*
6. *What foundations did John see?*

The City of Gold

Revelation 21:15-18, KJV

15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

Revelation 21:15-18, NIV

¹⁵The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.

¹⁶The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷The angel measured

17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick.¹⁸The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

The angel next took a rod of gold and measured the city. Whether a cube, some other geometric shape such as a pyramid, the width, length, and height were the same. And depending upon which unit one uses to translate a furlong or stadia, the city measured from 1,400 to 1,500 miles in all three directions. Furthermore, the thickness of the walls is 144 cubits. With a cubit typically defined as 18 inches (1.5 feet), the walls' width would span 72 yards across.

John's description of the New Jerusalem details a truly awe-inspiring structure, not only in its incredible size, but also in its incomparable beauty. These massive walls were made of jasper, and the city within the walls is pure gold with the clarity of glass.

What John described coming down from God in heaven staggers the imagination! If the new Jerusalem were to come to rest in the current United States, it would roughly cover the distance from New York City to Dallas. And most of the city would reach above the major portion of the Earth's atmosphere into outer space.

7. *What did the angel find with the rod of gold?*
8. *What were the dimensions of the New Jerusalem?*
9. *How did John describe the city's wall?*

The City of Gems

Revelation 21:19-21, KJV

19 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious

Revelation 21:19-21, NIV

¹⁹The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious

stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

20 The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

John next described how the foundations and the gates were decorated with precious gems. We would expect the foundations to be garnished with stones, since each foundation would be strong, solid rock to support such a massive city. So, garnishing solid rock with like materials—stones of great value and beauty—makes perfect sense.

On the other hand, the gates were each a single, giant pearl. Unlike stones, which have their origin within the earth, the pearl has as its source a living organism, namely the mollusk. This is also appropriate, since these gates of pearl allow passage to the very source of life within, specifically God Almighty and the Lamb (Rev. 21:22). When it comes to the New Jerusalem, there is nothing more valuable than the gates, which provide entry to the very presence of God. And, of course, as with the rest of the city structure, the great city street is made of the purest gold.

10. *How are the foundations decorated?*

11. *Of what did God make the gates?*

12. *How can this glimpse of the new Jerusalem give God's people hope today?*

Greener Pastures or Golden Streets

Jeremy spent his life searching for one greener pasture after another. First, he earned as many degrees as possible, believing more knowledge meant more happiness. Then, Jeremy found the most beautiful woman and began a family. He believed a lovely family would lead to love and peace. He started his own business, because he thought being his own boss would be better than working for someone. Year after year, he looked for greener pastures, but often discovered the pasture wasn't greener on the other side—it was just different.

Dan lived his life in the present. He knew this life wasn't his final destiny. As a youth, he saw the importance of seeking God's direction in every step he took. When it was time to further his education, he sought God for which school to attend. Dan didn't rush to marry soon after graduation. He waited on God to bring him the person to be his wife.

One day, as Dan spent time with God reading His Word, the Holy Spirit led him to take a step of faith and begin his own business. Dan, his wife, and children prayed daily for the right timing for him to become an entrepreneur. His decision-making was grounded in his eternal destiny—not accumulating earthly possessions. Dan knew that loving and serving God on Earth determined whether or not he would hear God say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Both Jeremy and Dan furthered their education, married, and started their own businesses. But their motivations differed. Jeremy was driven by his desire to find greener pastures. Daniel was motivated by his desire to walk the "golden streets" with his Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity.

13. *Why is it important to have the right motivation as we make decisions for the future?*

14. *How do God's Word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit help us move forward in life?*

15. *What does having an eternal perspective mean to you personally?*

Citizenship in Heaven

When thinking of our future home, it's good to remember Paul's words to the Philippians: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that we will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21). Therefore, we should have a grateful heart to God, who will one day transform our bodies to become like His glorious body as we live eternally with Him.

► Write a "Thank You" card to Jesus. Thank Him for coming to saving us from sin and preparing a place for us after death. Express your gratitude to God our Father, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit. After writing this "thank You" card, keep it in your Bible as an encouragement whenever you are struggling. This world is not our home.

KEY VERSE

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. —Revelation 21:14, KJV

The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. —Revelation 21:14, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 15 through August 21

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cook* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 63—My Soul Thirsts for You.
- Tue.** Zechariah 14:6-11—Living Waters Shall Flow from Jerusalem.
- Wed.** John 4:4-14—Jesus Promises Living Water.
- Thu.** John 4:15-26—Worship God in Spirit and Truth.
- Fri.** John 7:37-40—Rivers of Living Water.
- Sat.** Isaiah 44:1-8—Water on the Thirsty Land.
- Sun.** Revelation 22:1-9—For the Healing of the Nations.

The River of Life

Natalie sat down on the side of her bed and closed her eyes. Her eight-year-old daughter, Jalicia's, temperature was down. The concern of taking her to urgent care or the emergency room was receding, thankfully. It was a cost that Natalie could ill afford.

Natalie was mentally exhausted from the recent events and circumstances that were present in her life. There was her upended relationship with her husband, who had moved out more than a year ago and was showing no signs of reconciliation. There was her job, which held an enormous workload that according to the last staff meeting was going to increase. Then there was what she felt was the unfair and biased nature of her working conditions that prevented her from thriving.

One of her best friends had been pulling away for years, and constant inquiries from Natalie were met with little or no communication. Recently, Natalie lost one of her closest cousins, when a drunk driver slammed into her car and killed her.

It had been a dark period of her life, and Natalie was hurting. She was grateful, however, for the prayers and support of her pastor's wife, Sister Scott.

"God will get you through this season of hardship," Sister Scott had said. "There are better days ahead. One day, all of our suffering will end. Grab hold of the hope and light that we have in Christ."

- 1.** *Why do we associate the words darkness and night with the problems of life?*
- 2.** *What would you say is the darkest night in your life you have lived through?*
- 3.** *Did that dark night end happily or not? Explain your answer.*

The Water and Tree of Life

Revelation 22:1-3, KJV

1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

Revelation 22:1-3, NIV

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

After showing John the New Jerusalem, the angel now showed him “the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal” (vs. 1). This hearkened back not only to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10), but to the beginning of John’s revelation of heaven (Rev. 4:6)—as well as Jesus’ ministry on Earth. These last two were echoed in verse 1, as this river flowed “from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” These waters were not only physically pure but spiritually pure as well.

The vision then extended further—all the way back to the creation of man. As the river continued “down the middle of the great street of the city on each side . . . stood the tree of life”—the same Tree of Life Adam and Eve had been prevented from eating (Gen. 3:22-24). In addition, this tree was no longer in a separate location but planted throughout the city, on both the river’s banks. Its fruit would be readily available for all who desired it.

Furthermore, the Tree(s) of Life would bear “twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month” (vs. 2). There would be no more seasonal harvest, followed by seasons of barrenness; there would always be an abundance of fruit all year round. Furthermore, “the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (vs. 2). Thus, “No longer will there be any curse” (vs. 3). Both physical and spiritual death will have been banished.

Above all these human benefits, “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (vs. 3). No longer will the Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit seem elusive to us; we will live in their midst—and we will serve Him together, along with the angels and all His other servants. And because the curse will be removed and we will have been given eternal life that does not diminish, this service will not be difficult and/or drudgery; it will be joyous, worshipful, and God-focused.

4. *What did the angel show John, in verse 1? How did this vision connect to previous sections of the Bible?*

5. *What stood on the banks of the river? What was significant about this?*

6. *What else was in this city, and how would God’s people respond to it?*

The Eternal Light

Revelation 22:4-7, KJV

4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever

Revelation 22:4-7, NIV

⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for

and ever.

6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

ever and ever.

⁶The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

⁷"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

Not only will all God's people live with Him in their midst, but as John declared, "They will see his face" (vs. 4). Even one as great as Moses could not see God's face and live (Ex. 33:20); but in the New Jerusalem all sin and death will be vanquished. God's people will once again be able to look upon Him in wonder and live. They will see Him fully, and fully be known as His—so much so, John added, that God's "name will be on their foreheads." It is not entirely clear whether this mark is literal or poetic; what is clear is that God's people will be clearly identified.

Furthermore, night will be a thing of the past: "They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light" (vs. 5). Thus, this light will be both physical and spiritual. And as opposed to the millennium, where the reign of God's people still had a temporal aspect (Rev. 20:4), in the New Jerusalem "they will reign for ever and ever" (vs. 5) with Christ. At this point the description of the New Jerusalem ended, but there still would be some final words for John (and us).

The angel declared to John the veracity of the words he had heard and recorded in Revelation: "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord . . . sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place" (vs. 6)—again, bringing the message full circle as it echoed the opening words of Revelation (1:1).

Note the closed quotes at the end of verse 6. It is generally believed that the speaker changed in verse 7—to Jesus Himself: “Look, I am coming soon!” The exact meaning and date of “soon” is not known, but it is certain that Jesus wanted His people to remain ready for His return (Matt. 24:35—25:11). He affirmed the words of His angel, and added a word of exhortation: “Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” Those who honored and obeyed God’s words would be honored by God at the time of Jesus’ return.



7. What will God’s people see, according to verse 4? How will it be clear that they are God’s people?

8. What else will God’s people enjoy (vs. 5)?

9. Who spoke in verses 6-7, and what did each declare?

This drawing from what is called the Apocalypse of Andrew of Caesarea, dating to the 10th century A.D., shows the River of Life flowing from the throne of God, Christ on the throne, the apostles around Him, the Tree of Life by the river, and John (lower right corner) viewing the heavenly scene.

Music Is a Light

Larry began to slip down the dark slope of depression after his oldest son died from asthma at the age of 12. Larry stayed in his bedroom and slept most of the time. He had little to no contact with his family, which included his wife Tracy and other son, 7-year-old Teddy. The depression caused him to lose his job of 23 years and jeopardize his marriage of 18 years to the love of his life. It was a dark time for everyone. Thankfully they are a family of believers. When Larry could not pray, Tracy covered him in prayer.

During that period of depression, Larry's routine included waking up to eat breakfast and going back to sleep for most of the day. This sometimes included days of not bathing or having communication with anyone for no longer than 20 minutes. He did not want any sunlight in the rooms he occupied. He did not want to leave the house. His words were few and far between.

Before the bout with depression, Larry was heavily involved with his church's music department. He is a saxophone player and he loved it. Everyone loved to hear Larry. He knew he was anointed and blessed God's people.

One day, Larry's wife came into the room and suggested for Larry to play his saxophone. Surprisingly, he agreed. When he played, 1 Samuel 16:23 came to life: "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him" (KJV). The depressive spirit on Larry lifted and he was well. Larry wrote a song in memory of his son Linden.

10. *How easy is it to fall into a depression when things go wrong?*

11. *How can knowing about heaven help someone who is in a dark place?*

12. *Finish this sentence "Music is one light out of a dark place because _____."*

Water and Light Are Life

Water represents life. Although colorless and odorless, it is one of the most important substances on the earth. It's symbolic of life because every living thing needs it to survive. The River of Life in heaven is like the everlasting light that is there as well. Both show that life there is the fullest it can be. But the water of life can also flow here and now into the dark places of people's lives when we share Jesus with them.

► *Think of where the world needs the River of Life to flow and how you can contribute. Where are the dry bones that need watering? Is there an issue with homelessness, crime, or lack of youth and elderly programs? Once you identify a need, try to fulfill it in your own special way.*

KEY VERSE

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

—Revelation 22:1, KJV

Then the angels showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

—Revelation 22:1, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 22 through August 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 14:16-24—Invited to the Heavenly Banquet.
- Tue.** Exodus 19:9-15—Preparing for God to Appear.
- Wed.** Revelation 1:3-8—The Alpha and Omega.
- Thu.** Isaiah 46:8-13—The Ending Declared from the Beginning.
- Fri.** Isaiah 54:1-5—God Is Your Husband.
- Sat.** Lamentations 3:21-31—God's Steadfast Love Never Ceases.
- Sun.** Revelation 22:10-21—Come, Lord Jesus!

Come and Enjoy

Yehonatan and Shira were married in a traditional Jewish ceremony overlooking the ancient city of Jericho. Shira knew her husband-to-be would be coming for her soon; so she waited for that moment by sitting outside the hall in a wooden swing surrounded by numerous women attendants. Inside the hall, Yehonatan and the rabbi sat at a makeshift table signing marriage documents as numerous men joyfully sang and danced around them, making final preparations for the moment when he would arise to go get his bride. Smiles and laughter abounded as Yehonatan arrived at Shira's swing. After singing, "You Had Me from Hello," he took Shira by the hand and led her to the wedding canopy. There she walked around him seven times to symbolically bring down any walls between them. And thus, their marriage had begun.

For years, Jim had fought off congestive heart failure and kidney disease. For years, his wife took care of him and drove him to doctor's appointments. Jim's once beloved mobility began diminishing every day. But he kept trying. He did what he could to keep up his strength. And he kept his faith. He still read his Bible and prayed every day. But that Sunday morning, he felt he had reached the end of his rope. He was ready to go. And so he prayed aloud in his wife's hearing, "Jesus, come get me." Early that afternoon, Jesus answered Jim's prayer.

A wedding and a death—but both a new beginning of a resplendent relationship.

- 1.** *Why is marriage a good picture of how our relationship should be with Jesus?*
- 2.** *Has there been a time when you felt Jesus should have already returned? Explain your answer.*
- 3.** *How often do you think about your readiness for Jesus' return?*

LESSON FOCUS: Say with the Spirit and the Bride, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

The Final Warnings

Revelation 22:10-16, KJV

10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Revelation 22:10-16, NIV

¹⁰Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. ¹¹Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy."

¹²"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

¹⁴"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

¹⁵Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

In his final words, the angel instructed John not to “seal up the words of the prophecy”—not to hide them away—“because the time is near” (vs. 10). Although everything recorded in Revelation has not been completed, it has begun. Therefore, “Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy” (vs. 11). There is some debate about the meaning, and timeframe, of these words, but it is clear that once judgment has arrived, there will be no time left to repent. John’s readers still had a choice.

Jesus once more warned in verse 12: “Look, I am coming soon!” To those who believe, “I will give to each person according to what they have done” (vs. 12). This does not refer to salvation but to the future rewards believers will receive for faithfully serving God. Jesus could deliver on this promise because He was “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (vs. 13). Those who remain faithful, “who wash their robes” and will “have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city” (vs. 14)—the New Jerusalem.

However, those who “continue to be vile”—“the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (vs. 15)—will be cast outside, into eternal separation from God (Rev. 20:15).

Jesus’ final words to John again affirmed His message: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches”—not just the churches cited at the beginning of Revelation (chapters 1—3) but His Church throughout all time, for whom His words remain imminent (Rev. 22:10). And once more Jesus affirmed His identity: “the Root and the Offspring of David,” the Messiah promised to the Jews; “and the bright Morning Star,” another messianic title dating back to the days of Moses (Num. 24:17; see also 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28). Jesus, the Morning Star, will soon overcome the darkness permanently.

4. *What were the angel's final instructions?*
5. *What did Jesus declare to John in verses 12-15?*
6. *What did Jesus affirm in His final words to John (vs. 16)?*

The Final Call

Revelation 22:17-21, KJV

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Revelation 22:17-21, NIV

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.

¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

The Book of Revelation ends not on a note of condemnation but of invitation. The Holy Spirit, the bride, and all who

heard this invitation proclaimed, “Come!” (vs. 17). Whether this invitation was to the reader or to Jesus Himself, every believer would enjoy Jesus’ presence upon His return.

The next invitation certainly was for the reader: “Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (vs. 17). This echoed Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me . . . rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37-38).

John made one final warning to his readers: “If anyone adds anything to [this prophecy], God will add to that person the plagues described. . . . And if anyone takes words away . . . God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City” (vss. 18-19). Just as Jesus and His angel affirmed His words, John’s readers were to do the same, rather than twist them to make them fit their own viewpoints or desires. Those who chose to try to add or take away from the many judgments in Revelation would, instead, run straight into them.

Jesus’ promise is then reiterated one final time: “Yes, I am coming soon” (vs. 20). Through John, the angel, and His own words, Jesus had testified to everything depicted through the Book of Revelation. His words were true, and would be fulfilled in their time. In response, John proclaimed, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (vs. 20). Here John used the familiar Aramaic word *maranatha*—declaring “come, Lord” in the common language of the people. Jesus’ return will be for all believers, not just an elite few.

John concluded the book, and the Bible as a whole, with the benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen” (vs. 21). True to John’s words, Jesus’ grace has remained with His people to this day—and will remain forever.

7. *What invitation was made in verse 17, and by whom?*

8. *What warnings did John give his readers?*

9. *How did John end the Book of Revelation—and therefore, the Bible itself?*

Come to Jesus

The great gospel singer Mahalia Jackson wrote a song titled, "Come to Jesus," which many churches sang during the altar call portion of the church program:

"Come to Jesus just now, Just now come to Jesus."

Greg accepted Jesus as His Lord and Savior after dating a church girl named Cathy. He had desired a relationship with her, and she had desired for him to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. He went to church with her not expecting to give his life to Christ but to please the woman he wanted to date.

Greg remembers that day like it was yesterday. After the pastor had preached his sermon, he conducted an altar call, and the choir sang, "Come to Jesus:"

"He will save you, He will save you just now."

Before he knew it, this drug dealer and gang member, who knew little about Jesus, was weeping and coming to the altar to give his life to Christ. When he reached the altar, Pastor John prayed with him, and Greg felt set free from all the weight that sin brings. The young man who trusted no one was now trusting the unseen God of deliverance. Tears ran down his cheeks, and his hands were raised high—the same hands that distributed drugs, the hands that beat up young men as an initiation into his gang.

"He will cleanse you, He will cleanse you just now."

It was a glorious day. Greg went on to conduct soul-winning meetings in the neighborhood where he sold drugs. He eventually married Cathy, and they are ministers of the Gospel. Greg had come to Jesus, and Jesus had come to him.

10. *Why is it important to come to Jesus as soon as possible?*

11. *Why do we need to emphasize that Jesus is coming for everyone?*

12. *What do you need to do to prepare for Jesus' arrival, whenever it is?*

Jesus Is Coming

Truth cannot be changed because it is the truth. The truth is that Jesus will return, and that one day every life will be held accountable. Those of us who are Christians look forward to that day, whether He comes for all of us at once or individually, so we echo the words of the early Christians: “Maranatha! Come quickly, Lord Jesus!”

► *Prepare for Jesus’ coming as you would if you were to see Him this week. What things do you need to get in order in your life? What people do you need to forgive? What bad habits need to go? What people need to hear your testimony before you go?*

KEY VERSE

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

—Revelation 22:18-19, KJV

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

—Revelation 22:18-19, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of August 29 through September 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Hebrews 11:18-19—The Faith of Abraham.
- Tue.** Psalm 84—Blessed Are They Who Dwell in Your House!
- Wed.** Romans 4:1-12—God Reckons Righteousness.
- Thu.** Romans 4:13-25—A Promised Inheritance.
- Fri.** John 8:51-59—Abraham Rejoiced in the Day.
- Sat.** Genesis 11:27-32—First Steps of Faith.
- Sun.** Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7—Called to Be a Blessing.

COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY

Lesson Cycle

FOR 2020-2023

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2020/21	<p>Love One Another (Studies in Genesis, 1 Samuel, Luke, John, Acts, the Epistles)</p>	<p>Call in the New Testament (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews)</p>	<p>Prophets Faithful to God's Covenant (Studies in Deuteronomy, Lamentations, Joshua, 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Prophets)</p>	<p>Confident Hope (Studies in Leviticus, Matthew, Luke, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 John)</p>
2021/22	<p>Celebrating God (Studies in Exodus, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Mark, Acts, Revelation)</p>	<p>Justice, Law, History (Studies in the Pentateuch, 2 Samuel, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Nahum)</p>	<p>God Frees and Redeems (Studies in Deuteronomy, Ezra, Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians)</p>	<p>Partners in a New Creation (Studies in Isaiah, John, Revelation)</p>
2022/23	<p>*Chosen, Not Choice (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p>Chosen, Not Choice: Darkness to Light (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p>Chosen, Not Choice: Jesus Calls Us (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p>God's Kingdom Come (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>

 Next quarter's study



Coming Up Next Quarter

June, July, August 2022

Chosen, Not Choice: God's Exceptional Choice

This quarter traces the arc of salvation history from Abraham to Jesus and on to the early church.

Unit 1, "God Calls Abraham's Family," is drawn from Genesis and chronicles the origin of the chosen people, Israel, from Abraham to Judah.

Unit 2 journeys through Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, and 1 Samuel showing the move to nationhood.

Finally, Unit 3 explores the theme of chosenness through the perspective of the Book of Ephesians.

Comprehensive Bible Study lessons are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible following the International Sunday School Lessons series. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both the Old and New Testaments.

John: The Power of the Word

John began his Gospel account by pointing his audience back to the ultimate starting point of the universe—"In the beginning. . ." (John 1:1). John described the God who created everything in the beginning through His Word and that this Word—Jesus—was both "with God" and ought to be identified as God!

John supported his divine description of Jesus with eye-witness accounts of His miraculous power such as the healing of a royal official's son and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus said all who listened

to His words and believed them would leave darkness and enter life, whereas those who reject them will be judged at the last day because they refused the only source of life. He is the "resurrection and the life" (11:25). Thankfully, the Father and the Son sent the Advocate—the Spirit of truth to both help believers hear and obey God as well as comfort them eternally with God's indwelling presence. Therefore, we can have peace no matter what is happening in the world around us.



John said that Jesus "made his dwelling" or tabernacled (John 1:14) among us. This is a photo of the tabernacle reconstruction in the Israeli desert.
© Ruk7



This first-century oil lamp illustrates how Jesus is light that shines in the darkness (John 1:5).
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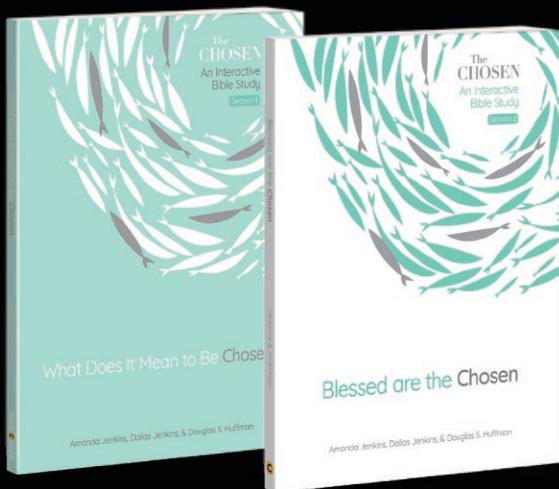


This is the traditional site of Lazarus's tomb in modern-day Bethany (John 11).
© Abraham



In this painting by El Greco, the Holy Spirit descends on the disciples at Pentecost. Jesus said He would send "the Advocate; the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, [who] will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:46).
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