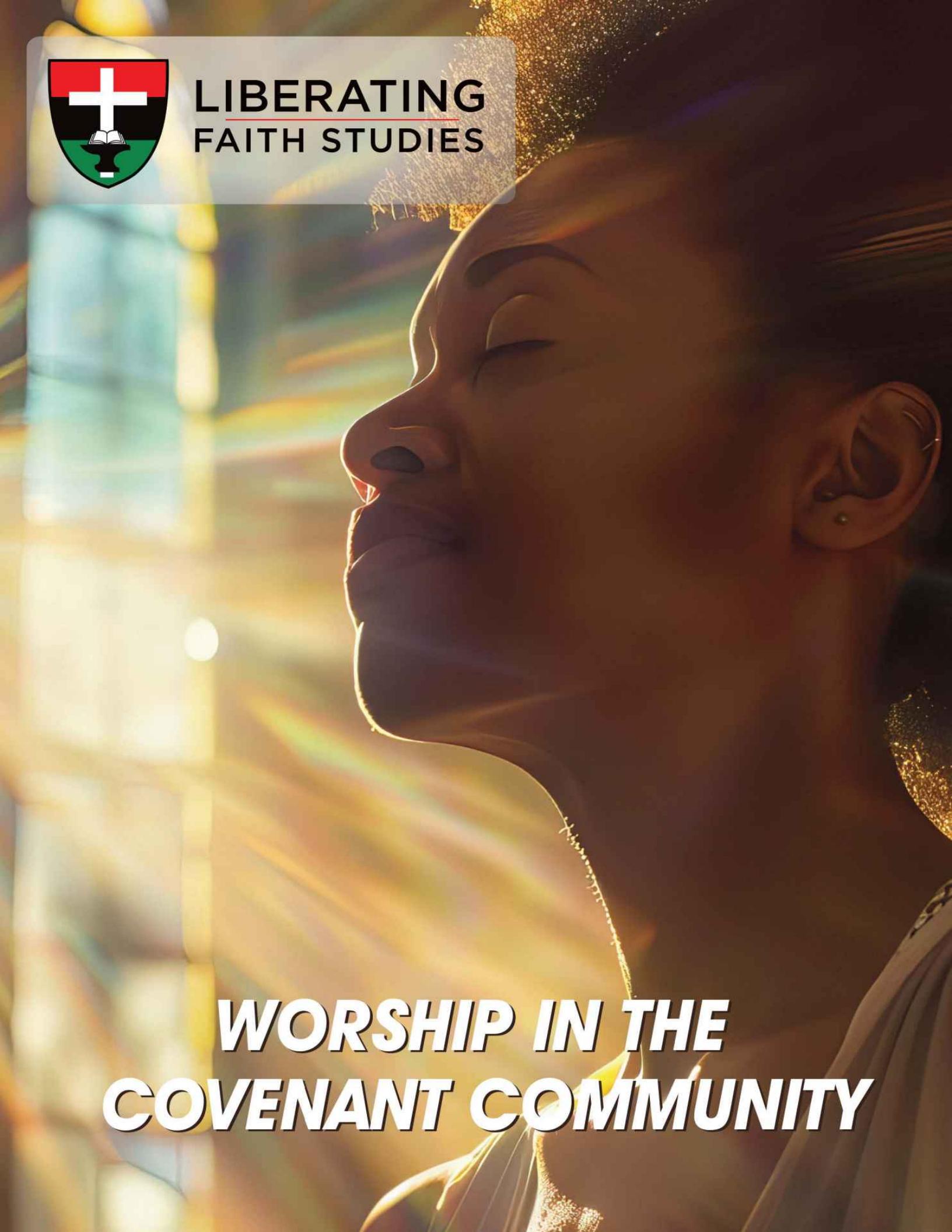




**LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES**



**WORSHIP IN THE
COVENANT COMMUNITY**

The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary as a signal for silence
- II. Singing
- III. The Apostles' Creed
- IV. Prayer, closing with the Lord's Prayer in concert
- V. Singing
- VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
- VII. Responsive reading of the lesson text by school
- VIII. The Decalogue

The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while the classes are being arranged
- II. Class study of the lesson
- III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
- IV. Closing bell — silence

The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

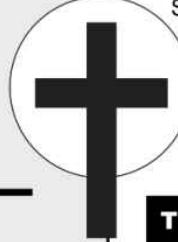
Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Lionel Merritt

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.



The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

The Home Daily Bible Readings will continue to appear at the end of each Sunday's lesson but they will be the readings for the following week. We made this change in response to your requests. The readings for the first week are below.

For over a year we have used Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

This virtual AME Connectional Church School was birthed due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blessings from the teachings have been immeasurable. We will continue this Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894.

Visit our website- www.iamame.org- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*: www.facebook.com/amecpublishing.

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Thank you for purchasing Liberating Faith Studies. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 26–September 1

Monday 2 Corinthians 1:16-24 (God's Promises Are Always "Yes")

Tuesday Genesis 12:1-9 (A New Life of Obedience)

Wednesday Genesis 12:10-20 (Fear Not Faith)

Thursday Philippians 4:10-19 (God Will Fully Satisfy Your Needs)

Friday Colossians 2:6-12 (Walk in Christ With Thanksgiving)

Saturday Psalm 16 (God Gives a Goodly Heritage)

Sunday Genesis 13:8-18 (Gratefulness for God's Promises)

LESSON 1: SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

ABRAM BUILDS AN ALTAR AT MAMRE

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 12–13

Focus Scripture: Genesis 13:8-18

Key Verse: So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord. Genesis 13:18

GENESIS 13:8-18 (NRSV UE)

- 8 Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me and between your herders and my herders, for we are kindred.
- 9 Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”
- 10 Lot looked about him and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.
- 11 So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.
- 12 Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom.
- 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.
- 14 The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,
- 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring

forever.

16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

17 Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

18 So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

GENESIS 13:8-18 (KJV)

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.

14 And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man

can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.

KEY TERMS

- **Sacred** – Dedicated to God; set aside for worship or service to God.
- **Avarice** – Great greed or covetousness.
- **Sacrament** – A religious ceremony or ritual regarded as imparting spiritual value/grace.
- **Equitable** – Fair and unbiased to the parties.
- **Rituals** – Religious (or solemn) ceremonies made up of a series or set of prescribed actions.

Introduction

Unit Overview

In this first set of lessons (lessons 1-4), we see four core pillars of religion (human recognition and interaction with God). First, we look at the importance of the altar for worship. Second, we see why it is necessary to have clearly defined sacred spaces. Third, Hezekiah highlighted for us why we should prioritize worship and our relations with God. And last, we look at the need for proper spiritual leadership in the worship of God. As you work through the first unit, keep the relationships between the four lessons before you. They build on one another and give a strong initial overview of worship and its importance in our relationship with God.

On Lesson 1

If we look at the structure of modern altars in churches and temples today, and how religious people regard them, we can easily miss the importance that people in Abraham's era attached to the altar. In principle, an altar is a structure on which worshippers lay offerings and perform rituals of worship. Both the Hebrew and Greek roots for the word *altar* make the altar a place of sacrifice. That is a place where we deny ourselves or submerge our desires and will under the desires and will of God. The altar is a sacred space where recognition, exaltation of, and obedience to God are paramount.

Note in the text how Abraham built an altar at each location where he dwelt. This underscored the importance Abraham attached to the altar. Wherever he was, he wanted, within easy reach, a sacred place to commune with God.

Start this study with one foot riveted to Romans 4:3 and the other firmly planted on Genesis 15:6. Please do not repeat the mistake that uninformed people made over the years. Nothing Abraham did earned him God's favor. God sovereignly called Abraham and Abraham recognized God and in faith responded to the Lord. Abraham's building of altars was not a vehicle to gain God's favor or to get God to answer his prayers for material things. Rather, the building and use of the altars were outward reflections of his inward (spiritual) recognition and commitment to the God who called him. Further, Abraham's altars showed his faith in the promises God made to him.

How Abraham dealt with the conflict between his staff and Lot's staff was exemplary and instructive. To grasp the importance of this event, appreciate that the welfare of Abraham, his staff, and his livestock was on the line. Given the scarcity of grazing land and water sources, access to these resources was a life-or-death matter. Keep this in mind when assessing how Abraham dealt with the conflict.

To make peace, Abraham gave Lot the first shot at choosing the land for his staff and herds. Abraham was prepared to take the resources that remained after Lot had taken the best. Note God did not instruct Abraham on how to settle the dispute. Abraham decided out of his character and desire for peace. He did not waste time trying to determine the best or equitable solution. Moreover, he showed an absence of avarice. Abraham at his discretion allowed Lot to choose the best of the available resources.

Then note that God's intervention and instructions to Abraham came AFTER Abraham had separated from Lot (verses 13:14-15). Often, we look to God for instructions and favors before we deal with

demanding situations. But if this text is any guide, at times God will wait until we have dealt with the situation, using good judgment, before intervening to guide us to the blessings ahead.

The irony of this situation with Abraham and Lot was profound. Lot chose the best of all available resources. Yet later, he found himself in a situation where he would lose it all. He barely escaped destruction by the skin of his teeth only because of Abraham's good standing with God. Abraham got the worst of the resources: what Lot had refused. But those leftovers formed the basis of a forever-blessing from God. Because of Abraham's relationship with God, the rejects became the platform for prosperity, materially, socially, and spiritually. There is a lesson here for believers today. The dregs which God blesses bring more prosperity than the bounty offered by people. So, we can say, that avarice is a sign of lack of faith in God. We do not have to start with the best. Our God still does miracles with less. No wonder Jesus taught us to avoid ALL forms of greed.

SANKOFA

When we think of altars today, a picture of a space or structure defined by rails or bars near or around the central platform (podium) in a church comes to mind. Members paint or varnish the rails or bars to give a pleasant, inviting look. And, at the places for kneeling, designers place cushions for the comfort of persons kneeling at the altar.

Worshipers consider the altar a sacred space; and, they use it as a special place of prayer and rituals like the administering of the Communion sacrament. But this is not the image we should see when thinking of the altars Abraham built. The first Hebrew altars were usually made of earth or unfinished stone (stone with no shaping or finishing). Traditionally, the Hebrews erected altars in

obvious (public) spaces with easy access for everyone.

In location and use, we see significant differences between the Hebrew altars and the Christian altars today. The main activities at the Christian altar are prayer, worship, and sacraments focused on Christ. This is in keeping with the traditional Hebrew view of the altar as a place of sacrifice and communion with God. Judaism had no such Christ focus at its altar.

CASE STUDY

Three articles dealing with the subject of reverence (in the church and wider society) inspired the comments in this section. One such article was “How Can We Cultivate a Spirit of Reverence in Today’s World?” by Lisa Loraine Baker, a contributing writer to *Bible Study Tools*, June 9, 2023. This article appealed to us because in both Judaism and Christian church history the central theme around the altar was reverence. The altar was the sacred place where people gathered to meet with and sacrifice to the Lord. Therefore, we display vital aspects of our attitudes to worship and God by how we regard and treat the altar and activities at the altar.

In Lisa Loraine Baker’s article, she made an apt comparison about reverence using respect for the national flag. The flag is nothing more than a decorated piece of cloth on a stick or pole. Yet it represents the history, values, and national consciousness of a people. Respect for the flag signals respect for the people and their values. The same we can safely say for our reverence surrounding altars.

As noted before, the structure of altars ranged from a heap of earth, or a piece of stone, to polished, expensive marble structures. Yet their values do not rest in the material, shape, or monetary value

of the item or structure. It is the value we assign to them in our hearts. To appreciate this point, consider how people approach a meeting with the English monarch at Buckingham Palace, or with the USA president in the Oval Office at the White House. We normally would not rush into those meetings dressed anyhow without the appropriate protocol. If indeed the altar is a sacred space where we meet and commune with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, how much more reverence should we show when approaching the altars in our churches?

It is unlikely we will ever return to the days when people were afraid to chat casually at the altar. Gone, too, are the days when people “dressed decently” for church and men showed reverence by removing headgear when entering churches. In those days stealing items from an altar was a disgrace. For all practical purposes, those days are over, never to return.

Yet we must consider how well we show reverence around our altars. People may advance the argument that how we behave is not as important as how we feel in our hearts. But that argument challenges all known research on human behavior. From both scripture and secular studies, we know that our outward behavior is a good reflection of our heart’s values. We cannot honor God in our hearts and dishonor him with our words and behaviors. So, it stands that our behavior toward the altar significantly reflects our understanding of the altar and our respect towards the things of God.

LIFE APPLICATION

People have always regarded the altar as a special place or symbol for offering worship or sacrifice to God. Considering this, a personal altar in the home may be a useful representation to help us

focus on God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the atonement of the world. Personal altars need not be elaborate or fancy. Any space we can designate and use as sacred space is acceptable. Personal altars in or around the home help people to develop stronger attitudes to prayer and meditation.

In the Hebrew culture, people develop altars to commemorate special encounters with God. You can use this historical framework to your advantage. Think about any time you had a special intervention from God. This could have been an event during worship, a solution to a problem, or a special revelation that deepened your understanding or relations with God. Find something, anything appropriate, that reminds you of that special event. This in no way suggests that you should worship the item. But let it be a constant reminder of God's goodness to you.

In the text, we see Abraham settling a conflict between his staff and flocks, and those of Lot. Abraham's attitude and decision were truly remarkable. Consider Abraham's offer to Lot. How does your attitude to settling conflicts align with Abraham's? Ask yourself what would have to happen for you to make such a selfless, generous offer to a person fighting you for scarce resources. Note that Abraham decided on his own without any prompting from God.

QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, how healthy are believers' attitudes to the sacredness of the altar?
2. What is the value (if any) of having a personal altar at home?
3. Did the way Abraham dealt with the conflict with Lot teach us

anything useful? Would it not have been a better solution to share the resources (land and water) equally?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Is Your All on the Altar?", AMECH #333

Closing Prayer: Dear God, help me to approach you and the symbols of your presence with the reverence that is due to you as the *Creator, Redeemer, Savior, and King of Kings*. Remind me that no person or thing should take the place of priority and worship that is exclusively yours. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 2-September 8

Monday Romans 8:18-28 (Sighs too Deep for Words)

Tuesday Psalm 34:11-22 (God Hears Our Cry for Help)

Wednesday Nehemiah 12:27-30, 44-47 (Celebrate With Rejoicing, Thanksgiving, Singing)

Thursday 2 Chronicles 7:12-22 (Bring Your Requests Before God)

Friday Luke 11:1-13 (Lord, Teach Us to Pray)

Saturday 1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-30, 37-43 (God the Promise Keeper)

Sunday 1 Kings 8:44-53 (Hear Our Plea and Grant Compassion)

LESSON 2: SEPTEMBER 8, 2024

SOLOMON DEDICATES THE TEMPLE

Lesson Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-53

Focus Scripture: 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a (end with “committed against you”)

Key Verses: “Whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the suffering of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; then hear in heaven your dwelling place.” 1 Kings 8:38-39a

1 KINGS 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50A (END WITH “COMMITTED AGAINST YOU”)

(NRSV UE)

1 Kings 8:22-24

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands to heaven.

23 He said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart,

24 the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand.”

37-39

37 “If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in any of their cities; whatever suffering, whatever sickness there is;

38 whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or

from all your people Israel, all knowing the suffering of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house;

39 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act, and render to all whose hearts you know – according to all their ways, for only you know the human heart –...”

46

46 “If they sin against you – for there is no one who does not sin – and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near,...”

48-50a (end with “committed against you”)

48 “...if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies who took them captive and pray to you toward their land that you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name,

49 then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, maintain their cause,

50 and forgive your people who have sinned against you and all their transgressions that they have committed against you,...”

1 KINGS 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50A (END WITH
“TRANSGRESSED AGAINST THEE”) (KJV)

1 Kings 8:22-24

22 And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:

23 And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:

24 Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.

37-39

37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpiller; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be;

38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:

39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men);...

46

46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near;...

48-50a (end with “transgressed against thee”)

48 And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name:

49 Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,

50 And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee,...

KEY TERMS

- **Covenant** – An agreement between parties with duties and benefits for each party.
- **Pestilences** – Epidemics (pandemic) outbreak of fatal disease.
- **Exiles** – People barred/prevented from returning to their own

country.

- **Petition** – A serious appeal to a higher authority for relief or favor in a matter.
- **Judaism** – The religion of the native Hebrews characterized by Old Testament laws.

Introduction

All of us love to celebrate the successful completion of tasks or projects. Celebrations stir in us a deep sense of success and spur us on to further accomplishments. When what we are celebrating relates to God's kingdom on the earth, that sense of achievement is even more exhilarating even as it is humbling. Such success we usually interpret as a sign of God's favor.

To feel what Solomon must have felt, consider that the building of the temple was a national project which his father King David wanted to undertake. God agreed that the nation needed such a sacred house of prayer. Yet the Lord blocked David from starting the project. Then God assigned it to Solomon. We are now at the point where Solomon has completed the assignment successfully. Oh, what a sense of relief and joy he must have experienced! He was sharing that joy and pride and putting the use of the temple in its proper perspective. The secular king was taking a leading role in the spiritual life of his nation.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In studying this text, note the central idea of the presence of God, the faithfulness of God, and the people's responses to that presence and faithfulness. Mark also references to the ark of the covenant, the Holy of Holies ("inner sanctuary," v. 6), and "A cloud filled the house of the Lord" (v. 10). These were all signs and symbols of God's presence (v. 11). Watch how Solomon prayed, praising God for God's covenant faithfulness through the Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomy 4:39; 7:9) and connecting it to the dynastic promise given to David (2 Samuel 7:11b-16).

Verse 30 speaks to an attitude that was common among the pre-

exile Jews. They held that God's presence rested and manifested only in the temple. Hence, they prayed, raised their hands towards or faced the direction of the temple when seeking God's favor. Later, the period of exile helped to break this view that God's presence and protection were only available in and around the temple. The Jews in exile, for their comfort, had to expand the presence and protection of God beyond the temple to the lands where they were in captivity. They would have been hopeless if God could only hear prayers from the temple. Understanding this puts the text from verses 34 to 48 in context.

Verses 33 to 37 give us great insight into the belief system of the Jews of that era. They associated tragedies (droughts, famines, pestilences, attacks, or defeats in wars) with a loss of God's favor. The remedy for such situations was repentance and appealing to God's mercy through prayer. Therefore, in the text, we see clear references to the pleading and repentance process. Check the repeated references of *to pray, prayer, pleas and pleading, crying to God, and asking God to hear their prayers and forgive their sins*. The temple was the ideal place for such pleadings.

In specific terms, Solomon's pleading includes seven petitions asking the Lord to hear his people when they pray toward the temple. These covered when the people sin against a neighbor (vs. 31-32), suffer defeat (vs. 33-34), are in a drought (vs. 35-36), in famines (vs. 37- 40), in war (vs. 44-45), praying for foreigners (vs. 41-43), and when in exile seeking compassion and comfort (vs. 46-53).

The position that Solomon took initially in verse 22 was the normal position for public prayer: stand and stretch out the hands (1 Kings 8:22). Psalm 134:2 and 1 Timothy 2:8 paint a similar picture.

However, note also in verses 54-55 that as a sign of reverence to the presence of God, he kneeled, facing the altar before standing to bless the people. We do not have to adopt these positions in prayer. However, when approaching God, whether in formal or informal prayers, a posture of reverence and respect should be evident. We cannot worship a God we do not respect.

SANKOFA

Solomon's prayer of dedication highlighted where the people were spiritually and culturally. His key points centered on God, how people reach out to God in worship, and the desired responses from God. In the New Testament church, those key planks remain. Yet because Jesus Christ is the star in the church age, our church dedication narrative is markedly different. Here is an example of what this difference looks like.

This is from a new church (building) dedication in Vere, Clarendon, Jamaica, on May 10, 2009, by Archbishop Dr. Rowan Williams. In the dedication sermon, he noted:

“So, the church is a place that tells the community that God is faithful. The church is a place that tells the whole community the Holy Spirit is always at work and always seeking new places to come fully alive. And then remember the words that Jesus speaks to his disciples: ‘This is the Spirit of Truth.’ This church, like every church, is a place where the truth is told. We as Christians, we must be people who tell the truth.

“And what does that mean? Of course, it means something very obvious and basic at first. It means we must be trustworthy people; people whose word is our bond. We must be honest, straightforward people; we must not dress up our failures; we must not deny our weaknesses; we must be able to be trusted by those around us. Yes, of course, but something even deeper than that. We are here to tell the world the truth about God and the truth about human beings.” (<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/884/sermon-of-dedication->)

Something to consider when we reflect on the role and function of the church.

CASE STUDY

It may be natural to consider the modern Christian church as an extension of the temple which Solomon dedicated. People may say, with good justification, that the temple and the church are both places of worship dedicated to God. However, we must not push the similarities too far. A central activity in the temple were animal sacrifices, with the related rituals and activities. Consider also that the Jews directed worship in the temple to God (the Father) and a yearly atoning ceremony was necessary. Further, the priests restricted access to certain areas in the temple. The temple was an imposing structure designed to accommodate large audiences at varying levels.

The church, as instituted by Christ, started small in private homes. Part of the reason for this was that in the first three hundred years of

its existence, the Judaism zealots and the Romans viewed the church with heavy suspicion. It took the Editct of Milan in 313 CE to give Christians the legitimacy to freely practice their religion. This opened the door for Christians to construct and dedicate churches without fear of persecution.

Understand also, that as for the temple, believers dedicated church buildings to prayer and worship of God. But there was a major difference. The central focus in the church was Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, and not the sacrifice of animals. The churches were open structures with access for all people. The restricted Holy of Holies became obsolete.

Over time, while prayer and fellowship of believers remain central activities, the church expanded its social outreach to the community. Expanded relief for the poor, education, health care, and even political influence gradually became hallmarks of the church. Today, several observers feel that the church's involvement in these ancillary activities may now be overshadowing the core activities of prayer and (traditional) worship to God. These zealots are afraid that in its effort to be earthly relevant, the church may have become spiritually ineffective. On such matters, each sect and each believer must find their own balance and level of comfort.

LIFE APPLICATION

We do not want to suggest that the physical position we take during prayer has magical powers to make God hear or answer our prayer. Nevertheless, we want to advance the proposition that our stance during prayer can reflect our reverence for the presence of God. Of course, we know that contentious people will hastily say that what matters is how we feel in the heart. Yet that is not a position we

take when in the presence of significant people like the president of the country, the CEO of a large company, our employer, or our bishops. We show them respect due to their office. How much more should we show respect to our Creator and Lord?

Therefore, consider if your position during prayer reflects the seriousness of your outreach to God. In your own heart, ask if you are satisfied that you are showing to God that you honestly believe he can hear and see you. Does your physical posture in prayer show that you respect God's presence? Consider this and let it guide you accordingly.

Likewise, consider your mental picture of God when you are praying. In times of trouble, do you see an angry God who is dragging you through torment and defeat because he is angry with you? Alternatively, in times of stress and failure, can you see a loving God taking you through events that draw you closer to him and mature you in your Christian faith? Traditional Jews held the outlook that hardship and failure signaled God's wrath. Success and prosperity showed his blessings. Consider your views and how they fashion your attitudes to life's twists and turns.

Notice in Solomon's petitions how he covered the foreigners. Now is a wonderful time for believers to examine their attitudes to people of different races and religions. Can we see these "foreigners" whose beliefs and lifestyles differ from ours as children of God? Do we appreciate that like us they need God's favor and protection? Do we see that under the second great commandment (love others) we owe "foreigners" a duty of love, God's love? Solomon's prayer in this regard can be a wake-up call for us to see one God with the same love for all people.

Solomon's prayer centered on congregational worship and

pleadings. We accept that there is joy and blessings in solitary personal worship. However, as a body of believers, God calls us to engage in congregational worship and fellowship. This is the vehicle God uses to encourage, mature, and strengthen us. Take time to reflect on the benefits of corporate worship. Actively consider what you can do to contribute to the appeal and effectiveness of corporate worship.

QUESTIONS

1. Are there any significant differences between temple worship of Solomon's day and church worship today?
2. How closely do you support the view that good times and success mean God's favor, while challenging times and failure signal God's wrath?
3. Why would Solomon cover the non-Jews in his prayer, and to what extent is this a model for us?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” AMECH #522

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, I thank you for the church, your vehicle on earth for encouraging, maturing, and preparing believers for holy living that pleases you. Help me, Lord, to do my part to contribute to your presence and power in the earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 9-September 15

Monday Romans 8:29-39 (We Are More Than Conquerors Through Christ)

Tuesday 2 Corinthians 4:8-18 (Do Not Lose Heart)

Wednesday Psalm 69:1-15 (God Protects Me)

Thursday Psalm 69:16-21, 29-36 (The Lord Hears the Needy)

Friday 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (God Will Strengthen and Guard You)

Saturday 2 Kings 19:14-19 (A Humble Prayer for Help)

Sunday 2 Kings 19:20-31 (God Is a Powerful Defender)

LESSON 3: SEPTEMBER 15, 2024

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER

Lesson Scripture: 2 Kings 19:1-34

Focus Scripture: 2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31

Key Verse: “So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.” 2 Kings 19:19

2 KINGS 19:14-20, 29-31 (NRSV UE)

2 Kings 19:14-20

14 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said, “O Lord the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.

16 Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God.

17 Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands

18 and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods but the work of human hands – wood and stone – and so they were destroyed.

19 So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.”

20 Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I have heard your prayer to me about King Sennacherib of Assyria.”

29-31

29 "And this shall be the sign for you: This year you shall eat what grows of itself and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit.

30 The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward,

31 for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

2 KINGS 19:14-20, 29-31 (KJV)

2 Kings 19:14-20

14 And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

15 And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth.

16 Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.

17 Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands,

18 And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

19 Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

29-31

29 And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.

30 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall yet again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.

31 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.

KEY TERMS

- **Worldview** – Mental image or concept of a person, thing, or event which influences how we see events involving that person or thing.
- **Intermediary** – A person or process which acts as a link (go-between) between two or more parties.
- **Profile** – Literally, a person's face especially from a side view. Figuratively, a mental image of a person, thing, or event that represents that person, thing, or event.

Introduction

In a crisis, it is natural, indeed expected, that believers will say, “Pray about it.” And with that advice comes an almost magical expectancy that the crisis will somehow just disappear or resolve itself. The assigned text shows it is usually not that simple. Facing and resolving a crisis often calls for strong leadership: a leadership grounded like an electrical earth-wire in faith in God. Hezekiah displayed such leadership. As you work through this lesson, examine Hezekiah’s worldview of God. Look at how seriously he took the threat and his resulting actions. Look closely at God’s responses and the hope they generated.

Further, use the **Sankofa** and the **Case Study** sections to see what godly hope in action looks like. Remember, God does not always work in the confines of the neat religious or political boxes we construct for resolutions. And, although it may be subtle, this lesson cautions us to be careful in how we try to reframe God’s solutions to fit the narrative (at times revisionary) we build to assess God’s intervention in the crises we encounter in life.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Verses 14 and 15 are pivotal in understanding Hezekiah’s profile of God. This can help us to assess why Hezekiah was confident God Jehovah would come through for him. He saw the Hebrews’ God as the ONLY true living almighty God, whose powers extended over all the world. Such a God was capable of handling Sennacherib and Assyria. People who receive from God have this general profile of God (Psalm 47:2-9).

In verse 16 note Hezekiah’s reference to “reproach of the living God.” Untrained Christians today may not understand the emotions

behind such a reference. In this age, we readily tolerate any insult people throw at our God. But zealots in other religions understand it. Insulting their sacred things can lead to unpleasant consequences. Note that it was such an insult from Goliath that enraged the young David who felt compelled to avenge God. The older King David still showed that disgust for people who insulted his God (see Psalm 69:9).

In this regard, note the supporting passages outside our set text. Isaiah 26:11 and 59:17 make clear that Yahweh will not allow others to profane his name or destroy his people. We see the same sentiments in Isaiah 9:7 with the promise to establish David's son on the throne forever.

Theologians and Bible commentators have always advocated that in serious appeals to God, we should pray God's words. They tell us to remind God of his promises. This advice in no way suggests that God is forgetful and needs our prompts to remember his promises.

However, praying God's promises gives us a sure footing on which to stand and plead before God. Check how Hezekiah did this in verse 19. And observe the use of the same approach at 1 Kings 8:42 and 1 Samuel 17:46. Perhaps the earliest use of it is in Exodus 32, where Moses used it to persuade Yahweh not to destroy a rebellious Israel.

Watch how in this situation God responded to Hezekiah's prayer through the prophet Isaiah, who announced the certain defeat of the Assyrian army and restoration of the land of Judah. This in no way should suggest that today God's answer must or will come through a third party. Unlike in the days of Hezekiah, we have full and free access to God's answers through the Holy Spirit. This is a distinguishing feature of the church age. Yes, God in his absolute

discretion can respond to us through designated leaders. However, know that God can also respond directly to us. We need no intermediary (apart from Christ).

Verse 29 hints at a principle of God's intervention that at times can baffle even mature believers. Often when we speak of God's intervention in a situation, we project a speedy microwave-like resolution. And several testimonies tell us dramatic resolutions do happen.

However, in most situations, God's solutions take time to manifest. In Hezekiah's situation, it took two years for life to return to normal after the invasion and siege. Why some injustices are resolved instantly, and others take a lifetime, is a question no religious leader, no theologian nor this writer can answer. That is just God's way of working.

SANKOFA

Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help in a time of war. Today the war-leaders faces come in all forms. In 2020 the war was in the form of a raging coronavirus pandemic. According to international news reports, Malawi's new president took the Hezekiah stance against the pandemic.

In his second week in office as president, Lazarus Chakwera called his people to three days of prayer and fasting as a pushback against the pandemic. We noted that before he became the political president, President Chakwera was the spiritual leader of the Assemblies of God, the country's largest Christian denomination. This may be a challenge for people who see a wall of separation between politics and religion. Whatever your views on this matter are, Chakwera's explanation is noteworthy. He said God's words to

him were, “I am not putting you out of ministry. Instead, I am extending your ministry. I want you to get into politics.” This is remarkably interesting when we know that in Bible days, the good kings of Israel gave both political and secular leadership. They led the nation using the principles that pleased God.

CASE STUDY

According to trusted presidential historians and observers, American President Ronald Reagan cherished a picture of another great American leader, General George Washington. The image showed General Washington kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge. At that time, the odds for his army’s success looked dauntingly low. Hope had fallen and was falling even further.

President Reagan explained why that image meant so much to him. He said that it “personified a people who knew it was not enough to depend on their own courage and goodness: they must also seek help from God their Father and their Preserver.” To appreciate this comment, we must review what happened at Valley Forge. Below is an extract from history.com which gives an overview.

“The six-month encampment of General George Washington’s Continental Army at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778 was a major turning point in the American Revolutionary War. While conditions were notoriously cold and harsh and provisions were in short supply, it was at the winter camp where George Washington proved his mettle and, with the help of former Prussian military officer Friedrich Wilhelm Baron von Steuben, transformed a battered Continental Army into a unified, world-class fighting force capable of beating the British.”

The above passage underpins the reality that when we stand with God, he stands with us. Whatever our personal politics, whether

revisionary, conservative, or progressive, the faith expressed by George Washington, when coupled with appropriate action, helps to build hope in times of national crises. As grateful believers love to say, “One person and God is always a winning majority.” Hezekiah and George Washington proved that godly leaders do not look at surveys and public opinion polls in times of national crises. They look to God.

LIFE APPLICATION

Take a serious look at the current religious and political landscapes. What do you see? Does your assessment generate hope or despair? How does your worldview of God play in your assessment, and what happens if events do not play out as you predict or would prefer? Such an exercise will automatically measure your faith in God, so be as honest as you can.

Hezekiah faced his fears, asked God for help, and got a favorable outcome over time. We can use this approach as well. List your present fears on a sheet of paper or in your electronic device. Write a brief list beginning with “I fear and hope for” Then make these matters a point of prayer and meditation. Plot your progress over time. What you see may amaze you. As the saying goes, “When God does not change the situation, he changes his child to deal with the situation.”

This next application calls for a little boldness and faith. Recall a message or an action of a current or recent past leader that gave you hope and/or encouragement. Write a letter expressing thanks to the leader for their hopeful approach to leading. Be specific about how their approach impacted you. Now here is the brave part. Search out the address (even email) and send the letter to the leader. Even if you get no response, it is worth the effort.

Last, here is something you can apply immediately. Commit to memory (or use the song sheet or YouTube) the chorus, “Lord, of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise” (“For the Beauty of the Earth”). Sing or hum this chorus when you face a crisis, difficult decision, or relationship challenge. This is a superb tactic to keep your stress level low during life trials.

QUESTIONS

1. Hezekiah's profile of God was that of an almighty God with unlimited power over the entire world. Explain in your own words your personal profile of God.
2. What is your opinion on why solutions from God sometimes take a long time to manifest?
3. How do you appeal for God's help when facing threats of violence?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” AMECH #414

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, in times of threats, whether religious, social, political, or physical, help me to believe in your capacity to keep and protect me. Thanks for your presence; thanks for your power: thanks for your peace. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 16-September 22

Monday 1 Corinthians 5 (Abstain From Immorality)

Tuesday Revelation 5:6-14 (Worthy Is the Lamb!)

Wednesday 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14-27 (God Forgives Those Who Repent)

Thursday Psalm 85 (Restore Us Again, O God)

Friday Ephesians 5:3-14 (Living in the Light of Christ)

Saturday Exodus 12:3-17 (A Day of Celebration)

Sunday 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19 (Sanctify Yourselves)

LESSON 4: SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

JOSIAH CELEBRATES PASSEOVER

Lesson Scripture: 2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19

Focus Scripture: 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19

Key Verse: Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem; they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. 2 Chronicles 35:1

2 CHRONICLES 35:1-6, 16-19 (NRSV UE)

2 Chronicles 35:1-6

- 1 Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem; they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month.
- 2 He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the Lord.
- 3 He said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, “Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon son of David, king of Israel, built; you need no longer carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel.
- 4 Make preparations by your ancestral houses by your divisions, following the written directions of King David of Israel and the written directions of his son Solomon.
- 5 Take position in the holy place according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of your kindred the people, and let there be Levites for each division of an ancestral house.
- 6 Slaughter the Passover lamb, sanctify yourselves, and on behalf of your kindred make preparations, acting according to the word of the Lord by Moses.”

16-19

16 So all the service of the Lord was prepared that day, to keep the

Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of King Josiah.

- 17 The people of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time and the Festival of Unleavened Bread seven days.
- 18 No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
- 19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, this Passover was kept.

2 CHRONICLES 35:1-6, 16-19 (KJV)

2 Chronicles 35:1-6

- 1 Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.
- 2 And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord,
- 3 And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the Lord your God, and his people Israel,
- 4 And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.
- 5 And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites.
- 6 So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

16 So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the Lord, according to the commandment of king Josiah.

17 And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days.

18 And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.

KEY TERMS

- **Seder Meal** – The traditional meal the Jews eat at Passover.
- **Emulate** – To copy or imitate.
- **Ghana** – A country in West Africa
- **Atrocities** – Extremely wicked and cruel acts.

Introduction

All countries and cultures have national festivals where people remember various historical events. Public participation in such events is usually big. However, only a small fraction of the participants have good knowledge of the birth and significance of festivals. A sizable group of people simply join the celebration to have a 'good time' or to break from the dull rhythms of life.

The celebration of the Jewish Passover looks like an exception to this practice of casual participation in national festivals. The Jews seem to have mastered the art of passing the significance of Passover from generation to generation. One way they do this is through a tradition of active participation by adults and children in the Passover rituals. Adults engage in storytelling. They recount the story of the first Passover and the Exodus from Egypt. Adults encourage children to ask questions about the Passover traditions. The adults answer the questions with the stories passed down to them. This participation, especially around the Seder (traditional Passover meal), ensures the events and significance of the Passover celebrations are forever fresh in the minds of Jews.

This is a tradition we should emulate. If we make a deliberate effort to teach our children the significance of our festivals (religious and secular), we will increase the level of meaningful participation in the celebrations we hold dear.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Here are the historical anchors for the lesson. First, Josiah was a very young man when he began his reign, following the assassination of Amon (2 Chronicles 33:24). He reigned for 31 years, which historians put at 641/40 to 609 BCE. During this time,

Judah was entering a new period of freedom. Credible commentators believe this freedom played a role in the vast array of reforms that were enacted by Josiah.

The reforms did not all happen at once. They occurred in three periods over many years. The first set came in his 8th year (ca. 633 BCE; 34:3). Set two occurred in his 12th year (ca. 629 BCE; 34:3). The third batch happened in the 18th year (ca. 623 BCE; 34:8). We should note that the prophetic ministries of Zephaniah and Jeremiah support Josiah's reforms. So, the return to faithful worship did not occur in isolation.

From the assigned reading we saw that accounts of Josiah's reign are in both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The two accounts together (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19) give a good overview of the reign. Compare these defining aspects of the reign. The 2 Kings' text gives helpful details on the removal of foreign religions. Both accounts give equal treatment to the discovery of the Book of the Law and the covenant renewal that followed. In the 2 Chronicles account (2 Chronicles 35:1-19) the celebration of Passover has details. Kings covered this in two verses only (2 Kings 23:21-23).

The comments on Josiah's Passover seem conflicting unless we put them in the proper context. 2 Chronicles 35:18 says of the Passover, "No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel." This emphasized the importance of the prophets. The 2 Kings' text (2 Kings 23:22) related the celebration to the period of the judges. But since Samuel was both a prophet and judge, the dating covers the same period.

Another feature of the 2 Chronicles narrative was it reminded the Jews (especially the returning exiles) that God's people were characterized by faithful worship to the one true God. The

importance of this comes to life when we consider the state of the nation Josiah inherited from his father. The Israel Josiah took over reveled in widespread idolatry, immorality, bloodshed, violence, and a stark ignorance of the God who had provided for and protected the nation.

SANKOFA

The Jewish Passover apparently has inspired similar celebrations in other countries and cultures. In the African country of Ghana in the Greater Accra Region is a people group called the Ga people. They have a celebration, the Homowo Festival (or Harvest Custom), which folklore says the Jewish Passover festival inspired. This annual celebration starts at the end of April and runs into May. Subsidiary reports say that variations of Homowo can run for months.

The story behind Homowo is interesting. Passover marks the start of the Jewish liberation from Egyptian slavery and oppression. Likewise, Homowo marks liberation from a grueling famine and all the horrors of a large-scale national drought. As the Ga people tell the story, it all started when the seasonal rains did not come. These rains were vital for the growth and maturity of the food crops. So, because the rains failed, the crops failed, and the people had no food. The famine that followed was brutal with all the associated horrors. When normal rainfall patterns returned, crops grew rapidly, and food was abundant. So, people celebrated. These celebrations quickly became an annual national festival. The significance of the festival is in the name Homowo, which in the Ga people language means “to hoot (or jeer) at hunger.” When food became available, the people laughed at hunger.

Understanding the significance of a festival is the best way to

prepare for its celebration.

CASE STUDY

The Passover celebration is a feature of Jewish communities. Yet in all countries where Jews live, people outside those communities hear about, and in several ways, accommodate this major Jewish religious festival. The Jews take this cherished part of their history and tradition with them wherever they go. And they are not ashamed of it.

Historically and from the Bible narrative, the original Passover marked a time of both horror and jubilation. The horror reminded Jews of their bitter slavery in Egypt before the first Passover. Hebrew lives were lost. They had “to make bricks without straw,” and watched their family life crumble. Their captors tried to strip them of their customs, religion, and sense of hope. The enslavement in Egypt was a chilling type of horror. One they would gladly forget.

Yet, the Passover celebration still releases a sense of relief, joy, and hope for the Jews. It speaks of God’s enduring love towards them. Passover reminded Israel that God will rescue and preserve them in any situation, however daunting. Yes, whatever else it is, Passover is a yearly reminder of God’s heart of love for the Jews.

Based on our limited research, the general attitude of the Jews towards the Passover celebration is one of cherished tradition, reverence, and joy. And this is our main point of focus. The Jews must know a secret on how to turn national tragedies into bright silver linings to celebrate. And, in general, the world sympathizes with and accommodates Jews in their memorials and celebrations. When the Jews remember the horrors of their past, they get the understanding they rightly deserve. Other communities do not ask

Jews to get over their atrocities and move on. There is no widespread public pushback on the facts of the atrocities. There is sympathy and accommodation.

This observation prompts us to ask, "Why is similar sympathy and accommodation not offered to other communities that have suffered equally dehumanizing atrocities?" We must question for instance, why we see such vicious pushbacks against the facts of African slavery. Why are descendants of the African slave trade victims urged to forget their horrible past and move on to brighter days? Where is the sympathy and accommodation like that widely offered to the Jews?

Nothing in these questions suggests that the Jews have no right to the sympathies and accommodation they get for events like Passover. They deserve that human understanding. But understanding, accommodation, respect, and love must extend beyond them. It is equally due to people whose history contains similar, and more horrible, events of slavery and freedom.

LIFE APPLICATION

Josiah's reign focused on restoring worship to the true God Yahweh. The removal of idols was a necessary part of this restoration. This provokes us to assess the quality of our worship. We must ask whether any idols are diluting our worship of Yahweh. Consider the defining characteristic of an idol. It is people's attachment to and adoration of it. Modern-day idols come in such forms as religious leaders, political leaders, houses, cars, jobs, money, and social status. Take care to remove all idols from your life. Tearing down idols clears the way for us to have a closer relationship with God. So, make the effort to identify and eliminate them.

When we consider the significance of the Passover celebration, it is remarkable that Israel could have neglected that celebration for such a prolonged period. Against that background, consider your level of participation in the significant Christian and national celebrations. For instance, is your involvement in Easter, Independence Day, and Christmas celebrations more than token? During these festivals, do you see golden opportunities to celebrate God and his goodness to you and your nation? Soberly consider this and take the appropriate steps to enhance your sense of gratitude and honor to God.

Take a sober look at significant rituals in your church community. Consider how satisfied you are with the manner and frequency with which Christians perform these rituals. Are you happy and satisfied with the current rituals and practices? If you are not, consider what you can do to increase the quality (and frequency if appropriate) and level of participation in these rituals. Think about how you can get other members to assist you in the effort to excite greater and better participation in the rituals. On the other hand, if you are satisfied with the level and quality of participation, consider what you can do to ensure that congregations maintain a high quality of performance and participation, especially among the younger generation.

Young Christians and ministers are constantly in need of prayer. Remember, against people who recently committed their lives to Christ, the world, the flesh, and the devil have launched vicious attacks. They need prayer, encouragement, and fellowship to withstand the onslaughts. Recently-ordained ministers face similar (sometimes worse) attacks. Your mission, should you choose to accept, is to seek out such people and offer your prayers, encouragement, and support. This is a terrific way to contribute to

God's kingdom on earth.

QUESTIONS

1. The Passover celebration and Yom Kippur are central to Judaism. Take them out of the Jewish religious calendar and Judaism loses its significance. What celebrations do Christians have that evoke the awe and passion the Jewish celebrations generate among orthodox Jews?
2. Do you see the need for radical reforms in your church or your church's denomination? If yes, identify two areas that need significant reforms.
3. How do people make idols of other people and/or things?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," AMECH #84

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, so often in the daily hustle, I neglect to give you the praise and honor I owe to you. Help me, Oh Lord, to never neglect you for a prolonged time. And forgive me for those times when I do. This is my prayer for mercy, in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 23-September 29

Monday Isaiah 42:13-17 (God Goes Forth Like a Warrior)

Tuesday James 5:7-11 (Be Patient, the Lord Is Coming)

Wednesday 1 Peter 3:18-22 (Saved Through Water)

Thursday Exodus 14:21-31 (Victory at the Sea)

Friday Psalm 104:1-9 (God Protects Creation)

Saturday Psalm 147:1-12 (Our Worship Gives God Joy)

Sunday Exodus 15:1-13, 20-21 (Sing of God's Glorious Triumph)

LESSON 5: SEPTEMBER 29, 2024

MOSES AND MIRIAM LEAD THE PEOPLE IN PRAISE

Lesson Scripture: Exodus 14:21-31; 15:1-21

Focus Scripture: Exodus 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21

Key Verse: The prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. Exodus 15:20

EXODUS 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21 (NRSV UE)

Exodus 15:1-3

- 1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."
- 2 The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him; my father's God, and I will exalt him.
- 3 The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name."

11-13

- 11 "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?
- 12 You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.
- 13 In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode."

17-18

- 17 "You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established.
- 18 The Lord will reign forever and ever."

20-21

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.

21 And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

EXODUS 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21 (KJV)

Exodus 15:1-3

1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

2 The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.

3 The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name.

11-13

11 Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

12 Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.

13 Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.

17-18

17 Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

18 The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.

20-21

20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in

her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

KEY TERMS

- **Zealot** – A person who demands strict obeying of principles or teachings.
- **Bondage** – Enslavement of any kind (physical, economic, social).
- **Indomitable** – Cannot be controlled or defeated.
- **Stratification** – Putting people in social classes.
- **Transcends** – To rise above normal limits.

Introduction

In all eras, artists use music, songs, and poetry to pull people emotionally into events that the people did not witness. One of the criticisms of modern music is that too often people place excessive emphasis on the artificial effects of studio engineering. And so, songs that are poor on lyrics can still be “hits,” because the music is “great.”

In previous eras, it was the lyrics, the story, and the emotions the story stirred that captured our hearts. This certainly was the case with classics like “Unchained Melody” and “I Will Always Love You” (Whitney Houston), two classics. See the songs in the text in this light. Assess them in terms of how well they tell the story of God’s great deliverance of Israel and the people’s gratitude. Try to capture the emotions in the singing, music, and dancing, which expressed the people’s joy and gratitude to God. Incidentally, the text reminds us that singing and dancing as acts of worship are “as old as the hills” and perfectly acceptable.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The “Song at the Sea” (Exodus 15:1-18) celebrates Yahweh’s victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea and looks to the future establishment of God’s sanctuary on the earth. Please do not gloss over this song. Carefully note the effects the amazing deliverance will have on Israel’s Gentile enemies (Philistia, Edom, Moab, Canaan). Also, mark the confidence it stirred in Israel. At that point, the people were sure God would take them safely to the promised destination.

The song, although centered on the then-current events, was prophetic as well. Israel’s victory over the named enemies occurred

centuries later. God keeps the promises God makes and fulfills the hope awakened.

Verses 8-10 reflect an ancient myth we see in various parts of the Hebrew scriptures. The Hebrews regarded water, especially the sea, as a hostile power. The victory in the water therefore revealed Israel's God's superior power. Related references on this matter are Psalms 77:16-19, 107:25-27, and 114:3-6, and Habakkuk 3:8.

This text and a related reference at Micah 6:4 create a huge challenge for persons who proffer that God has a problem with female leadership. We see Miriam as the first woman in the Old Testament called a prophet. She is a spiritual and political leader for the children of Israel. This observation clearly shows God will not sit comfortably in the social and religious boxes zealots construct to protect their biases.

Historical reports suggest that the refrain, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously" was sung in some form during Israel's years of bondage in Egypt. This may or may not be true. And frankly speaking, it does not matter. Liberation theology teaches that songs of faith sung during slavery reach new heights of purpose and praise to God when sung by free people. The singing during bondages expresses hope. Singing during freedom expresses gratitude. Either way, they glorified God.

The use of the tambourines, singing, and dancing highlighted a gigantic truth we must not miss. Despite the horrible decades of bondage and oppression, the people of Israel never lost their creativity, culture, or religious anchor. Physical bondage cannot strip people of the liberation they see and live spiritually through the hope they draw from God. Oppressors can break the bodies of people they hold in bondage. But even in those broken bodies, the spirit of

freedom remains intact.

SANKOFA

For Caribbean people, when thinking of songs that reflect freedom from oppression, and the indomitable spirit to survive, “Redemption Song” by Bob Marley springs to mind. In the **Introduction**, we talked about the strong emotions that songs evoke. For people who understand the horrors of slavery, and what it took to survive, “Redemption Song” hit reverberating soul chords.

In the usual catalogs of music, “Redemption Song” is not Gospel or religious. Yet it notes that, “My hand was made strong, by the hand of the Almighty.” The author invited us to sing with him the songs of freedom, because that was “all I ever have.” When oppressors strip us down to nothing, we can still hold on to a song of freedom.

In the second stanza, Bob raises a truth that is so profound, it transcends political affiliations, religious denominations, and social stratifications.

“Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.” Anytime a people embrace that truth, they stop looking for political saviors, and ‘White Knights’ to lift them out of their social and economic mire. It is worth repeating: “None but ourselves can free our minds.” Moses had his “Song at the Sea.” We have our “Redemption Song.”

CASE STUDY

The Battle Hymn of the Republic

Today in the USA it has become commonplace to question the results of elections and be suspicious of the motives of leaders. In

this age of free speech and social media platforms, we do such things without great thought. Yet the history behind “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” screams at us to be mindful of what such suspicion can lead to: a split nation with bloody consequences.

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln became the elected president of the USA. Despite his declared objection to slavery, President Lincoln gave an understanding that he would leave alone the slavery system in the southern states. But apparently, this promise was not good enough for the leaders in those states. They could not accept Lincoln’s election. Further, and more importantly, they suspected the president would take steps to end slavery and control the southern states.

So, these states broke away from the Republic to form the Confederate States of America. President Lincoln could not allow such a secession. He saw a duty to keep the “United States” together. His resolve to hold the “Union” intact met with an equally fierce resolve for southern states’ independence. As a result, in April 1861 the Civil War broke out. For the next four years, Americans killed one another for the right to rule the USA.

“The Battle Hymn of the Republic” was the victory song for the Union (the North). They hailed it as a vindication of the noble dreams of Lincoln and his generals. Not surprisingly, for the Confederates, the hymn became “a musical slap at their honor and pride” as one writer put it. We are, therefore, not surprised that a song of liberation for one people can also be a song of oppression for other people groups.

LIFE APPLICATION

The declarations of Moses and Miriam were songs of joy and

celebration. Bring this home to your experiences. Think of a time when you came out of a great challenge or distressing situation. Recall your emotions and reactions. How did you celebrate the relief, the triumph over the adversity? Now here is your challenge. Jot down short notes about your feelings of relief. Then arrange the notes in order and use them as the basis to draft a poem or song. Depending on your level of confidence about the work, share it with trusted friends. Even if you do not make it to national fame, you will have a strong reminder of a triumph in your life. This will do for you what the songs in the text did for the people of Israel. The lyrics reminded them of God's great delivering power and spurred them on to more victories later.

Make a list of the good fortunes you have experienced in life. The list can include special people you met who contributed to your life. Put on the list exceptional favors you received at home, church, or work, and special places you traveled to on holiday or business. For each of these blessings note the points where you saw the hands of God intervene. These would be the emotional bridges you knew you could not have crossed without the special favor of God. End this reflection by thanking God for God's favor on your life.

Now let us get crazy. Think of a song you love, whether modern pop, hymn, or contemporary Gospel. Play this song and claim it as your song of praise. Keep copies (recordings) of this song where you have easy access to them: on your phone, car system, YouTube playlist, or home entertainment devices. Whenever you are feeling down for any reason, play this song which you have consecrated to the Lord. Let it be your reminder of God's love and goodness in the past. This should rekindle your hope for brighter things in the future.

QUESTIONS

1. How does music contribute to corporate praise and worship?
2. What should we listen for when we sing hymns of praise?
3. What are the benefits of reminding ourselves of God's goodness in past years?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "To God Be the Glory (Praise the Lord)," AMECH #21

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, thanks for the crucial times you rose to save me. I recognize that without you I would have drowned in the sea of life. Thank you, Savior, thank you, Lord. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 30–October 6

Monday Hebrews 10:26-35 (Do Not Persist in Sin)

Tuesday 2 Corinthians 7:5-11 (Godly Grief Leads to Repentance)

Wednesday Proverbs 28:4-18 (The Righteous and the Wicked)

Thursday 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-24 (Sin's Deadly Spiral)

Friday Lamentations 5:1-3, 15-22 (God, Restore Us)

Saturday John 21:15-19 (Follow Christ)

Sunday Psalm 51:1-13, 16-17 (Create in Me a Clean Heart)

LESSON 6: OCTOBER 6, 2024

PRAYERS OF REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 11

Focus Scripture: Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17

Key Verse: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

PSALM 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17 (NRSV UE)

Psalm 51:1-4

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

10-12

- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

15-17

- 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and

contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

PSALM 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17 (KJV)

Psalm 51:1-4

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

10-12

- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

15-17

- 15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
- 16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

KEY TERMS

- **Extrapolate** – Extend to a conclusion; extend to apply.
- **Propensity** – A natural tendency to behave in a certain way.

- **Predisposes** – Inclined to a particular attitude (or disposition).
- **Restitution** – Returning to its rightful owner a thing taken/stolen.

Introduction

Some years ago, a minister gave a eulogy for a person he knew well. The deceased was well-known in the community. The church shared the funeral service nationally via a radio network. The minister had a reputation for speaking frankly on issues. And he spoke of the deceased in a frank, matter-of-fact manner.

The minister stated that it was not his job to talk anyone into heaven or hell. People, by their lifestyles, decide their soul's destiny while they are alive. About the deceased, he noted that while alive, the person had loved people and people had loved them. Also, they had hurt people and people had hurt them. They had done a lot of good, and as expected, had done bad as well. The eulogist capped these remarks by noting that such was the human condition. In all of us, there is good and evil. In the same heart, we love, and we hate.

That eulogy remains wedged in my memory. And at various events over the years, I have referred to it. "Such is the human condition. We are all capable of good and evil." As you work through this lesson, try to reconcile David's evil, his repentance, and his acceptance of God's judgment. This brings us to a point where even as mature, sincere believers we often fall. We pick a positive event in a person's life. And based on that one event, we extrapolate that the person was good in all other facets of life. The reverse is hauntingly true as well. From one terrible event or sin, we label people as corrupt and demonic for the rest of their lives. Happily, for all of us, God is not like that.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The story in this lesson is easy to follow in the assigned texts. David coveted a man's wife (2 Samuel 11:2-3), committed adultery

with her (11:4-5), attempted to cover up the affair through deceit (11:6-13), and finally organized the murder of the woman's husband Uriah (11:14-17).

But that was just *act 1 scenes 1 to 4*. In *act 2* God's messenger confronted David. The king's heart convicted him, he admitted his guilt and repented (12:13, 16-17). Flowing from his conviction David made a declaration that should stop all of us in our tracks. In pangs of conscience, King David recognized that every sin is essentially an offense against God ALONE (Psalm 51:4, 2 Samuel 12:13). We can hurt people, defraud people, and offend people, but sin is an offense against God alone. This is true because God alone declares what is sin, judges sin, and punishes sin. To appreciate this, ponder the practice of fornication. In the USA and most countries, secular laws freely permit fornication. No one goes to jail or pays legal penalties for fornicating. New Testament standards forbid fornication, and Christians do suffer penalties for it. Here is a great point to note: secular law does not always reflect moral or spiritual laws.

This text raises a question we sometimes grapple with but are often afraid to discuss publicly. The matter arises when people catch prominent spiritual or religious leaders in "heavy sins" like adultery or misappropriation of church funds. The question is, "How can people, who know or should know about God so well, do such obvious wickedness?" The King David in this story is the same person who felt offended when Goliath insulted the Hebrew's God. This is the same David for whom God had broken all the traditional rules of coronation to select as a king. How could a man so close to God, who had benefited from God's intervention in his life, be so sinful? If you cannot find your own answer, re-read the **Introduction**.

Still, the text helps us to understand why after all his horrendous

deeds David still thought he had a chance at God's mercy. The Hebrews attributed to God the trait of *Chesed*, or *loving-kindness*. Respected scholars hold that the implications of *Chesed* are so wide and high that the English translation of *loving-kindness* barely hints at the meaning of the word. *Chesed* conveys a love so relentless and profound that God's propensity to forgive our offenses overshadows multiple times the Lord's inclination to judge and punish our offenses. It is an extravagant love that predisposes God to show mercy rather than judgment. This is the God David, with blood on his hands and shame in his heart, addresses in Psalm 51.

The mention of the plant hyssop has great significance for the Hebrews. Hyssop, also known as marjoram, is a plant with leaves that can hold liquids. The Israelites used it to cleanse those who were ceremonially unclean. The ritual was to dip the hyssop leaves in water and sprinkle the water over persons who were (ceremonially) unclean (Leviticus 14:4; Numbers 19:18). This is the function of the blood of Christ in the New Testament age.

To appreciate the plea in Psalm 51:11, we must understand the Hebrews' view of the work of the spirit of God. The Hebrews were convinced that the Holy Spirit fills the lives of believers. This thought runs through the scriptures: Numbers 27:18; Isaiah 63:10-11, 14; Micah 3:8; Haggai 2:5; Zechariah 7:12. Therefore, David anticipated the wretched state he would be in if God's Spirit were to leave him. Bear in mind he would have felt enabled and protected by this divine Spirit in his battles with lions as a shepherd, and with Goliath. He could not afford to be stripped naked of God's Spirit, as Saul was after Saul's disobedience and sin (1 Samuel 16:14).

Verse 51:18 presents a challenge in interpretation. To what rebuilding was David referring? Our view is, David as the king saw

himself as the protector of the nation. If his relationship with God was in ruin, that shattered the nation's protection. The nakedness that came from his sin exposed the entire nation. Thus, King David was asking God to restore him and by extension restore the protection of the nation. In the interest of full disclosure, note that other teachers relate the verse to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonians had razed the city and exiled the people hundreds of years after David. That seems an unwarranted stretch.

The text underscores a base principle in the doctrine of repentance. John the Baptist alluded to it in Matthew 3:6-12. A repentant heart results in repenting actions. The offering of sacrifices was the outward sign of inward repentance (51:17). God delights in proper sacrifices, those offered with a broken and contrite heart (51:19). But please understand that the two (the acts of repentance and the sincere heart of repentance) must go together. Step outside the text to places like Isaiah chapter 1, where the people were offering sacrifices but no heart sorrow. God screamed at them to stop it since he was not accepting the show.

SANKOFA

This lesson compels us to examine our attitude toward people caught in sin or who publicly confesses wrongdoing or sin. As noted before, not all wrongdoing is sin, and numerous sins are not legal evils. Still, we must note, as David seemed to, that the sin of a leader can have national implications. At times, the public calls for the resignation or imprisonment of the sinning leader, not because they expect perfection, but because to allow the wrongdoing to go unpunished would set a bad precedent for future leaders.

Such was the case in June 2021 with Matt Hancock, a former

health secretary in the British government. During the pandemic, when the government prescribed and demanded social distancing, a photograph emerged showing Mr. Hancock embracing and kissing a female colleague (*BBC News* online, 26 June 2021). In his letter of resignation, as published in the BBC story, Mr. Hancock noted that the government “owe it to the people who have sacrificed so much in this pandemic to be honest when we have let them down.”

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, while regretting the situation that led to the resignation, accepted the resignation. The point is that when a leader is exposed for doing wrong or sinning, the matter goes beyond a straight case of offering forgiveness. It strikes at the heart of integrity in public life. The person’s standing with God, the Lord of loving-kindness, is another matter. As Alexander Pope noted, “To err is human, to forgive divine.”

CASE STUDY

The text provokes consideration of an issue that theologians and commentators have wrestled with for centuries: to what extent does repentance demand restitution? We can look at the matter using the encounter of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Following the law, Zacchaeus’ reaction to Jesus was to offer to give to the poor half of his wealth. Further, he would pay in restitution four times the amount he had stolen from people. In this encounter, we see a collision between the law and grace.

Going strictly on the recorded text, Jesus ignored Zacchaeus’ offer and focused on the salvation of Zacchaeus’ soul. It is as if Jesus said, “Zacchaeus, as good as your offer sounds, that is not the heart of the matter. The real issue is the condition of your heart and how it lines up with God’s requirements for eternal life.”

Before you express outrage at this approach, look at another portion of scripture in Luke 12:13-15. Assume the person who asked Jesus to intervene in the inheritance dispute was genuine and desired justice. Look at how Jesus side-stepped the man's appeal for Jesus to ask the offending party to act justly. Again, Jesus went to the underlying greed in the heart.

What conclusions can we draw from these situations? Restitution out of obligation does not impress God. The physical act of restitution must come from a heart that acknowledges that the offending deeds were sinful. This requires a commitment to abandon the attitudes that led to the crookedness in the first place. In legal cases, a judge can order a thief to restore property or pay its value in money. But that act alone will not get the thief God's forgiveness and favor. The restitution that excites God is a repayment that flows directly out of repentance, not a sideshow.

Now back to our text. How could David have restored to Bathsheba any mental anguish or shame she might have felt? She was married and we assume loved her husband and would not be eager to have sex with another man while her husband was risking his life to save his country. How could the king have restored what he took from her that fateful day?

We ask the same regarding her husband. Look at his attitude when David ordered him home. He felt no joy to be home when his brothers were out on the battlefield fighting to save the nation. What would have been appropriate restitution: a new life; could David give that?

In our money-crazy society, we try to value everything in dollars. The two Luke references are instructive as Jesus seemed to ignore the money solution approach. Most likely, the Lord was showing that

there are some things no amount of money can restore. The best that a person can do is to recognize errors, turn away from them, and carve a path through life that pleases God. As you may have already concluded, restitution is a beast with sharp horns which is never easy to ride. Against this background we ask, can black people ever get just compensation for the horrors and indignity of slavery?

LIFE APPLICATION

Cynics maintain that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. In other words, before they forgive a person, they must be convinced that the person is truly sorry for the hurt they inflicted. To justify this, they lay hold on John the Baptist's call to the "vipers" to show fruit worthy of repentance. How do you feel about this? Is such a view consistent with Jesus' teaching on forgiveness? Can we tell when a person is truly repentant?

We saw earlier that to err is human. That means that if we are in relationships with other people conflicts, misunderstandings, and abuses will occur. We can be sure about this. Therefore, since we know these things, should we not have a mental framework for dealing with situations when we feel offended?

But be aware the door swings both ways. With all the best intentions in the world, at times we will offend people. Yes, situations will arise where we strongly yearn for other people to forgive us. So, consider your personal approach to asking for or granting forgiveness. What guiding principles do you apply when someone has hurt you and needs your forgiveness?

Likewise, how do you recognize when you have hurt someone and need their forgiveness? Consider if your principles are fair and godly

in both directions. If you have great difficulty in dealing with this matter, at your leisure, read Shakespeare's work on *Sherlock the Jew*.

In the **Introduction**, we noted that every person is capable of good and evil. You can keep this before you by memorizing and repeating Bryan Stevenson's words, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." To see the principle explained, read *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson.

Bitter people make it a pastime to nurture and hold grudges. Once we met a person who, years after the person's partner had died, was still nursing a grudge about a wrong suffered at the hands of the deceased partner. We know that is an extreme case (or so we want to believe), but let it spur you to examine your attitude to holding grudges. Set aside time, and in your private devotions, consider how long you hold onto the hurts you suffered from others. Do you ever let go of the pain? Do you always forgive? As you struggle with such a question, note this quote: "Unforgiveness is a poison that shrivels the heart. It means a person cannot truly live in the present as they are always thinking about the past."

QUESTIONS

1. Why is forgiveness a teaching of Christ that is hard for Christians to embrace?
2. Consider the case of repeat offenders. How often should we forgive them?
3. Can we abuse God's loving-kindness disposition to forgive us our sins?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy," AMECH #78

Closing Prayer: Dear God, help me to form a character that reflects your disposition to forgive offenses. Sharpen in me the willingness to seek reconciliation with offenders. This I want to do not because it is easy, but because I want to please you. My prayer in Jesus' name! Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 7-October 13

Monday Luke 13:10-17 (Set Free From Bondage)

Tuesday Daniel 3:8-18 (Our God Is Able to Deliver)

Wednesday Daniel 3:19-27 (Our God Is Unstoppable)

Thursday Matthew 8:5-17 (A Cry for Help in Distress)

Friday Mark 10:46-52 (Have Mercy on Me!)

Saturday Psalm 107:23-32 (God Delivers Us From Our Distress)

Sunday Psalm 22:1-11, 19-22 (Deliver My Soul, O God)

LESSON 7: OCTOBER 13, 2024

A PLEA FOR DELIVERANCE

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 22; Daniel 3

Focus Scripture: Psalm 22:1-11

Key Verse: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Psalm 22:1

PSALM 22:1-11 (NRSV UE)

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night but find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm and not human, scorned by others and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock me; they sneer at me; they shake their heads;
- 8 “Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”
- 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
- 10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help.

PSALM 22:1-11 (KJV)

- 1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?
- 2 O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.
- 3 But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.
- 4 Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.
- 5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.
- 6 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.
- 7 All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
- 8 He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.
- 9 But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.
- 10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.
- 11 Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

KEY TERMS

- **Propensity** – An often intense inclination or preference.
- **Intrigue** – Something that stirs curiosity or mystery.
- **Skeptics** – People who doubt; disbelievers.
- **Assimilate** – To merge in or blend into a situation.
- **Harassment** – Applying pressure or fear to force compliance/acceptance.

Introduction

Hardships, trials, disappointments, and rejections all appear as potholes on the normal road of life. No one, saint or sinner, avoids them. In these times when life turns sour, Christians look to God for relief and rescue. It is a solid strategy that, over the centuries, helped millions of believers to weather the storms of life.

But what happens when we appeal to God for relief and rescue and our appeals seem to fall on deaf ears, as if God is on vacation? How can we maintain hope when the source of our hope appears to ignore us? Even more importantly, how do we maintain an attitude of praise and worship to a God who abandons us when we need him the most? This lesson seeks to provide answers to those questions. The way the three Hebrew boys in Daniel 3, and David in Psalm 22, faced those situations is instructive to us. Maybe it is from such texts that we say, “God may not come when you want him, but he is always right on time.”

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The faith of the three friends was tested when Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image and demanded that his officials worship it or die. The list of officials (Daniel 3:2-3, 27) and musical instruments (vs. 5, 7, 10, 15) adds pomposity and heightens the tension. However, despite the pomp and ceremony, this is nothing more than state-sponsored religious harassment. Reflect on countries with state-approved religions, which terrorize people sympathetic to other religions.

The appearance of the “fourth man” has always been a subject of intrigue among both believers and skeptics. How and from where he appeared, no person explains. Equally baffling is how he

disappeared. He did not come out of the furnace when the three youths came out. Such are the mysteries of our God.

In their rush to hail the deliverance of the three defiant youths who stood firmly for God, commentators can gloss over verse 18. In verse 17 the three young men were confident that God would deliver them from the king. Verse 18 underwrites that commitment to remain faithful to God no matter what. Still, in this verse, they recognized that God, for whatever reason, may decide not to save them. If that happens to be the case, they still will not bow to the idol. Translation! They were willing to die rather than compromise their worship. In assessing this position, revisit the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts.

The name change that Nebuchadnezzar ordered for the Hebrew captives was significant. This was a deliberate ploy to force them to merge into the Babylonian society, and by extension, wipe out their Hebrew heritage and religion. This is the same tactic slave masters practiced in the slavery years in the USA and the Caribbean. They changed the slaves' names to force the slaves to identify with their new masters and to adopt an identity that was fitting with slavery.

The prayers, praise, and pleadings we find in the Psalms have several unique features. In the Psalms, we hear the voice of the people offering up prayers to God. All other scripture assumes an audience listening to the voice of God. In the Psalms, we hear echoes of our own lived experience flowing out of the range of human emotions, from rage to ecstasy, from lament to thanksgiving. For more on the human dimension of the Psalms see Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2001).

Psalm 22 expresses the ultimate anxiety of every Christian – feeling rejected or abandoned by God (vs. 1-2, 11). Yet as we deal

with the Psalmist's anxiety, we see a glaring paradox. The psalmist, while accusing God of abandoning him despite his faithfulness to God, appeals to that same God for relief and commits further to worship and praise God.

SANKOFA

In a modern context, the story of Daniel 3 is a story of state-sponsored religious harassment. The persecutors designed the harassment to break the Hebrew men and make them fall in line with the state-approved religion. The penalty for refusal was death. In modern times the harassment may not be that obvious, as tyrants often hide it under cloaks of noble national aims. A case of this is in the online report of Share America on September 23, 2023:

“Evangelical Christian pastor Andrew Brunson was detained for two years in Turkey on charges of ‘membership in an armed terrorist organization.’ Brunson, an American citizen, had resided in Turkey for more than 23 years before his arrest. After intense international pressure and high-level engagement by the United States, Brunson was allowed to return to the United States.”

This case shows the complexities of modern cases of harassment, as well as an effective approach for dealing with them. In Daniel's time, the people could not protest openly the king's actions, but today we can show our displeasure with the government's decisions. We can protest in the streets and on social media. Further, we can ask our officials in government to take a stance against any actions we deem religious harassment. See in the case cited, that the pastor's release came because of pressure from the international community of nations.

CASE STUDY

In Psalm 22 David expressed profound feelings of abandonment. He experienced the worst kind of abandonment: an emotion of spiritual detachment from God. In a public posting on *Psychology Today* (online edition) on June 4, 2010, Claudia Black, M.S.W, Ph.D., addressed this matter in "Understanding the Pain of Abandonment." The article focused on children, their interaction with parents and caregivers, and the sense of abandonment they can feel. Nevertheless, the preview comments on the articles are worthy of consideration. Claudia Black addresses the psychological and physical aspects of abandonment. Yet the considerations addressed apply to spiritual realities also. She noted:

"Not receiving the necessary psychological or physical protection equals abandonment, and living with repeated abandonment experiences creates toxic shame. Shame arises from the painful message implied in abandonment: 'You are not important. You are not of value.' This is the pain from which people need to heal."

Underline the last statement. People need healing from the pain of abandonment. This applies to all forms of abandonment: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Maybe this pain from abandonment is part of the reasons health professionals are recording dramatic increases in mental health cases. In our modern lifestyles, people place less emphasis on the traditional family unit. People are feeling less attached to one another. This is true even among close relatives. So, in times of stress and distress, people can feel alone with no support systems. In these circumstances, feelings of abandonment easily set in.

The healing that the article alludes to often needs a jumpstart, like a stalled car with ignition problems. If the person experiencing feelings of neglect or rejection is part of the church family, and the

level of fellowship is high, the healing can start there. Members can share the burden of reassuring and encouraging the dejected person. This is where Christians give life to the call in Galatians 6:3 to share one another's burdens. Great fellowship among the body of Christ, not a therapist chair, is often the place where healing for feelings of abandonment starts.

LIFE APPLICATION

Consider a time when you felt dejected, rejected, or abandoned by people or God. Try as best you can to remember what triggered the deep feelings of abandonment. It could have been a case where you were praying for something, and you saw no signs that God was taking note of your request. Moreover, the situation you were praying about became worse rather than better. It may be painful but try to identify the thoughts and emotions you had during that period of gloom. Then appreciate that your experience of abandonment qualifies you to help people battling feelings of rejection, dejection, or abandonment. Think of ways you can use your experience to help others.

There exists a school of thought that sees illness as a sign that the sick person has lost or is losing God's favor. On that basis, people in good standing with God should not get sick. Check your thoughts on this. Your opinions on this matter are important. Those views will govern how you pray for sick people. James 5:14-16 suggests that believers will deal with sickness.

Psalm 22 starts with a piercing plea and deep groanings of a person missing the presence of God. Yet in the Psalm, David maintained a strong praise for the majesty of God and the Lord's great works toward Israel. Consider the struggle it takes to sing

praise to God when the Lord seems distant and deaf to your pleas for deliverance. What does it take to worship a God who looks like he is ignoring you?

What does Jesus' use of parts of Psalm 22 (see Matthew 27:46ff) say to you? One school of thought interprets Christ's quoting of the Psalm as a symbol that believers will come to similar blind spots in their relationship with God. Alternatively, others teach that because Jesus bore the abandonment (distance from God) for us, we should never feel similar abandonment. How you feel about Jesus' use of Psalm 22 will frame your response in times when you feel frustrated in your prayer life. Therefore, think carefully about this.

QUESTIONS

1. Does a feeling of abandonment mean we have offended God, and he does not want to hear us? If not, what does it mean?
2. Do you see any similarity between David's mindset in Psalm 22 and Job's mindset in Job 13:15 (though he slays me, yet will I trust him)?
3. How long should we wait for God to answer a prayer request? (Is 25 years too long)?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Never Alone," AMECH #441

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, in times of trial when I feel alone, isolated, or abandoned, help me to remember your everlasting promise to be with me always even to the end of the age. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 14-October 20

Monday Ephesians 1:3-14 (Redemption Through Christ's Blood)

Tuesday 1 Peter 1:3-12 (Praise God for New Birth)

Wednesday Daniel 6:10-17 (May Your God Deliver You)

Thursday Daniel 6:18-28 (God Shut the Lions' Mouths)

Friday Judges 5:1-5, 12-22 (Deborah's Song of Deliverance)

Saturday Luke 17:11-18 (Praising God With a Loud Voice)

Sunday Isaiah 25:1-10a (God's Victory Feast)

LESSON 8: OCTOBER 20, 2024

PRAISE FOR DELIVERANCE

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 25; Daniel 6:10-28

Focus Scripture: Isaiah 25:1-10a

Key Verse: On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. Isaiah 25:6.

ISAIAH 25:1-10A (NRSV UE)

- 1 O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
- 2 For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of foreigners is a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.
- 3 Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.
- 4 For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,
- 5 the noise of foreigners like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.
- 6 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
- 7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the covering that is spread over all nations;
- 8 he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.
- 9 It will be said on that day, “See, this is our God; we have waited for

him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

10 For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

ISAIAH 25:1-10A (KJV)

1 O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

2 For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built.

3 Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.

4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

5 Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

6 And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.

9 And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest,...

KEY TERMS

- **Sway** – Gentle or subtle influence.

- **Breach** – Breaking or failure to observe standards or laws.
- **Personified** – Represented by human characteristics.

Introduction

2 Timothy 3:12 tells us that the faithful in Christ will suffer persecution. Hebrews 10:38 reminds us that the just shall live by faith. When we put these two together, they tell us that in times of persecution we must draw on our faith in the Almighty God. Daniel in the text showed us what this looks like.

Naturally, in times of stress, distress, and threats of destruction, we want relief and deliverance immediately. But as believers, we must accept that God works by his own schedule and according to his greater purpose. Usually, when threatened, our only focus is eliminating the threat as quickly as possible. However, God will often work the threatening situation for his glory. Such were the cases in Daniel 3 and Daniel 6. In both situations, the faithful got their deliverance and God got his glory. One key lesson we can take from these stories is in all situations we must factor in God's glory. At times we may have to suffer a while for the glory of the kingdom of God.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Approach Isaiah 25 as a continuation of Isaiah 24, a prophecy of God's judgment of the earth destroying all that people hold dear. In the scenario, only a remnant of people remains. These are the people who recognized and honored God as Lord. For that joyous group, God provides a great feast on Mount Zion – representing the City of God (verse 25:6) – and a great, wonderful era starts.

There is a historical underpinning to such festivals. In Isaiah's time, the royals and the affluent sponsored those banquets to honor victories and special occasions. These feasts were also associated with the enthronement of gods which people celebrated annually.

Yet do not miss the implication (vs. 25:2-3) that God's judgments are righteous. Yes, to the carnal mind what chapter 24 outlined is harsh and catastrophic. But it is righteous. God is nature-bound to judge rebellion and iniquity.

Isaiah 25:8 strikes one of the great underpinnings of the Christian faith. Ultimately, Yahweh "will swallow up death forever" (see also Revelation 7:17; 21:4). Recall that death entered the world because of sin. God's conquering of death, the last great stronghold of sin, will signal the ushering of God's glorious reign. The term "All peoples" (mentioned in vs. 6-7) we must keep in context. It refers to only those people – Jews and Gentiles – who honored God as Lord and hence secured their invitation to the Great Feast. The sad fate of the unrepentant sinners, prideful, scoffers, and doubters is covered in verse 11.

Daniel 6:19-23 describes innocence by ordeal. This is a legal situation in which the accused is placed in the hands of a god, using a mechanism that puts the accused in jeopardy. If the deity intervenes to protect the accused from harm, the verdict is innocent. Most trials by ordeal in the ancient Near East involve dangers such as water, fire, or poison. When the accused faces these threats, people assume their guilt until the gods save them. This is the reverse of our usual presumption of innocence of accused persons.

The story of Daniel in the lions' den shares important similarities with the account of Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue (Daniel 3). In both chapters, the king forces his subjects to demonstrate their loyalty to him in a way that is contrary to the faith of Daniel and his countrymen. The Hebrews' allegiance to Jehovah forced them to defy the king's orders.

In both stories, God stepped forward to rescue Daniel and the

other Hebrew youths. The plotters suffered punishment, and the heathen kings praised the true God. The stories teach two great lessons. First, wicked people often suffer the horrible fate they plan for the innocent (Proverbs 1:18-19; Psalms 9:15; 35:7-8). Second, God works on his own schedule and the faithful must stay the course until God intervenes.

Like Nebuchadnezzar before him (2:47; 3:28-29; 4:2-3), Darius responded to the display of God's power by praising God. In both cases, this objective – glorifying God's name – appears to be the principal factor behind how God allowed those situations to play out. The entire world had to see that Jehovah was God, the only true God.

SANKOFA

Calling for national days of prayer and worship is a practice that has traveled from Old Testament days to current times. The rationale and objectives for such national days vary by country. However, at the heart of the call is an acknowledgment that God (a supernational deity) has had and still holds significant sway over the affairs of a nation.

In October 18, 2022, *the Lusaka Times* online edition (lusakatimes.com) reported on the president of Zambia's remarks on the National Day of Prayer. Here is a quote from the article.

“President Hichilema in a speech on his behalf by Vice President Mutale Nalumango during the observation of the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, Repentance and Reconciliation at Lusaka’s Showground noted that the day provides all with an opportunity to reconcile with God and with one another, and say no to all forms of bad vices such as corruption, gender-based violence, alcohol, and

substance abuse."

We were particularly impressed by the recognition that "the day provides all with an opportunity to reconcile with God and with one another." These are noble ideals for a National Day of Prayer and Worship. Such days should not be days to glorify leaders or idols.

CASE STUDY

In discussing the ordeal that Daniel faced, it is natural to lay disdain on the wicked people who plotted to make him dinner for the lions. Yet it is highly likely that this was not the mindset of Daniel. We know not what he prayed in the days leading up to the lions' one-night accommodation, but based on chapter 9 we get an interesting glimpse of his mindset.

Daniel was not bitter with his captors, the king, or his detractors. He did not blame them for what had happened to him and his fellow Hebrews. Their plight was a result of the Hebrews' disrespect to and disobedience of their God. Based on the prayer in chapter 9, Daniel knew that God showed mercy to people who kept his commandments, and his people had offended God. They had sinned and committed iniquity; "done wickedly and rebelled," and had not heeded the prophets. Because of this disloyalty to God, the Lord had scattered all Israel "near and far."

Note that the rebellion against God stretched from "our kings, princes, and ancestors." It was deep and wide. But despite the nation's widespread wickedness against God, Daniel stood on a praying plank which he stated in Daniel 9:8. He knew, "But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving." This is the solid basis all intercessors stand on. Yes, we acknowledge the bad players around us, who participate in the plots to destroy us. But we must also look

beyond them and check our standing with God. When we are standing on a righteous base, we can be confident that God will send deliverance. If by our assessment, we are not in good standing with God, our first pleas should not be for deliverance. It should be for mercy, forgiveness, and repairing of the breach.

LIFE APPLICATION

In Isaiah 25:4 we see God personified as strength in times of trials, as well as a refuge, and a shade (a deliverer and protector). Consider to what extent you can say “Amen” to that description. Make short journal notes of the times God acted for you as described in the text. Be clear on the perils you faced and the extent of the deliverance/relief you received. These notes can give great hope when you feel you are swimming against the tides of life with shackles on your ankles.

Isaiah 25:8 contains that great promise (often referenced from Revelation 21:4) that ultimately “the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces.” Often ministers remind us of this at funeral services. However, it holds terrific value for us in everyday life. Try to burn it in your memory and draw strength from it when life’s fastballs come at you. A great memory device is to repeat the verse every time you turn on a light or lamp. This trains your mind to accept that however dark the situation looks, the future is bright.

Isaiah’s declaration that “we have waited for God” reminds us that God’s interventions are not always prompt and dramatic. Sometimes we must wait for the relief or escape we desire. Practice patience when you can. For impatient people, everything is an emergency. Take steps to get your mind away from the ambulance driver mentality. We do not need a siren at every roadblock or divergence

along the road of life.

QUESTIONS

1. We often must wait for God's intervention in our affairs. What can you do to remind yourself that God does not always work in microwave oven timing?
2. When people plot against our interests, how can we assess if the ugly situation arose because God lifted the veil of protection around us?
3. How do you assure yourself that in the end, with God, believers win?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Higher Ground," AMECH #347

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, before I focus on people who seek to harm my interest in any way, remind me to check my standing with you. Give me the insight to know when I have rebelled against you, and the strength to walk back to your favor and protection. In Jesus' name. Amen!

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 21-October 27

Monday Mark 9:14-27 (I Believe, Help My Unbelief!)

Tuesday Psalm 28 (God Is My Strength and Shield)

Wednesday Proverbs 3:1-8, 13-14 (Trust God With All Your Heart)

Thursday 1 John 4:4-13 (God in You Is Greater)

Friday 1 John 4:14-21 (Boldness on the Day of Judgment)

Saturday Jeremiah 17:5-11 (Blessed Are Those Who Trust God)

Sunday Psalm 62 (Wait Upon God's Salvation)

LESSON 9: OCTOBER 27, 2024

TRUST IN GOD ALONE

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 62

Focus Scripture: Psalm 62

Key Verse: For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. Psalm 62:5

PSALM 62 (NRSV UE)

- 1 For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.
- 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.
- 3 How long will you assail a person, will you batter your victim, all of you, as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence?
- 4 Their only plan is to bring down a person of prominence. They take pleasure in falsehood; they bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. Selah
- 5 For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.
- 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
- 7 On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
- 8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah
- 9 Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.
- 10 Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

11 Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God,

12 and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

PSALM 62 (KJV)

1 Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation.

2 He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.

3 How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.

4 They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved.

7 In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

8 Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah.

9 Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.

10 Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

11 God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

12 Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

KEY TERMS

- **Paradoxically** – Referring to a statement or situation which links two competing ideas.
- **Purists** – People who insist on absolute obedience or application to a law or standard.
- **Neuroscientific** – Science or studies relating to the brain and nervous system.
- **Neurobiology** – The biology (make-up and function) of the nervous system.

Introduction

Today we live in a fast do-it-now and get-results-now world. Workaholics see taking time to relax and meditate silently as wasteful inactivity. This attitude penetrates all aspects of our lives, including our spiritual activities. Congregations are demanding shorter worship services, quicker prayer sessions, and less frequent corporate church attendance.

In our personal prayer lives, the same seems to apply. We rush through “our prayers” so we can get back to the demands of modern living. Slowly, it looks like Christians are losing the art of spending meaningful time before the throne of grace. And this shows negatively in the society in which we live. People are more intolerant, short-tempered, depressed, and easily agitated. Even without the results of formal research, we know there must be a connection between agitated minds and social ills like abuse, crime, depression, and suicide.

In this lesson we look at the value of waiting, especially waiting on the Lord. Research data suggests there is indeed a strong correlation between the time we spend in stillness and quietness and our overall health. Spiritually, the same applies. The time we spend looking to and waiting on the Lord determines the pace of our maturity and the results we see from God. Paradoxically, the way to get faster results from God is to slow down before God.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The identity of David’s enemy in Psalm 62 is not clear. Conservative commentators date the Psalm at the time Saul’s family threatened David. Others see the enemy as David’s own son Absalom. The first line in verse 4 suggests that David is already king.

However, whichever situation the sentiments refer to, in David's mind the threat is terrifying. The terror sends him hurriedly to God looking for cover and relief.

In the first part of the Psalm (vs. 1-2), note the use of the terms "rock" and "fortress" (NLT). These suggest an elevated level of confidence in God's protection. Although the enemy outnumbered him and they acted deceitfully (vs. 3-4), David was confident of deliverance through his God. He reinforced this idea of God being his rock and fortress in verse 6.

The phrase "waits in silence" (v. 1) translates a Hebrew word for motionless waiting, stillness. This is a stillness of the whole being: body, mind, and spirit. Here David shows his total confidence and trust in God as his protector. David adopts a similar attitude in Psalm 46:10.

The Hebrew word we translate *alone* occurs seven times in Psalm 62. The psalmist made it clear that his trust is in God alone. He is not looking at his own fighting skills, his weapons, or his allies. He is placing all his bets for deliverance exclusively on God alone.

In verses 8-10, the psalmist calls on all godly people to place similar trust in God. He supports his call by explaining why putting trust anywhere else is useless. People, dishonesty, and wealth are not worthy substitutes for trust in God.

The psalmist capped his declaration of trust in God by sharing the foundation of his confidence: all power belongs to God. Further, God is just and rewards people according to their works. These are convincing reasons to trust God.

SANKOFA

The trust David expressed in God was all-encompassing. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the fearless South African bishop, social rights activist, non-violence crusader, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, demonstrated similar trust in God during his fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa. Here is one of his sterling quotes about faith in God.

“My trust in God flows out of the experience of his loving me, day in and day out, whether the day is stormy or fair, whether I’m sick or in good health, whether I’m in a state of grace or disgrace. He comes to me where I live and loves me as I am.”

That is a healthy view of God. It contrasts harshly with the view purists have of a God who only loves us when we are doing good. Bishop Tutu’s God is always worthy of our trust and worship. As David did, we encourage you to trust him in all your situations, whether pleasing or challenging.

CASE STUDY

“Recent neuroscientific research shows that in many ways our brains are hardwired to **trust** others. This aspect of our human nature is one reason that having your trust betrayed can short-circuit your neurobiology and make it difficult to trust again.”

The above quote is from an article “The Neuroscience of Trust” posted August 12, 2015, in *Psychology Today* by Christopher Bergland. That synopsis of how trust works is insightful. Naturally, we are inclined to trust the God of our parents and the society in which

we grew up. In the normal course of life, our learning and religious institutions reinforce knowledge of the deity society worships. This is the linchpin on which religions preserve faith traditions from generation to generation. So naturally we trust God.

So why do certain people distrust or lose faith in God? The reasons vary but here are a couple of key ones. Because of erroneous teachings, people can develop the wrong expectations about how God works in the affairs of people. When faced with a situation where God does not respond as expected, people are upset and lose trust in the God they created in their minds. For this reason, religious teachers must create the right image of God and how he works.

Second, people may become exposed to a “better” god. Cults and other groups with a vested interest in discrediting the Christian God, deliberately set about to offer “better” gods. Usually, these deities are from Eastern religions or the fantasies of cult personalities. These are deities that supposedly respond more readily or give people what they desire faster. People who buy into these “better” gods will lose faith in the Christian God. Note that one of these alternative gods is the notion that there is no god.

And as the quote noted, once a person loses trust in God, it is difficult to rebuild that trust. This knowledge arms us with useful tools for teaching people about God. First, we must let our teaching about God be rooted in the scriptures, rather than intellectual opinions. There is no need to over-sell God and set unrealistic expectations. We must teach that God has his own timetable and at times it is necessary to wait on him. Second, we must be honest when answering queries about the nature of God and how he intervenes in our affairs.

Further, recognize that no one person can answer every query about God. At times it will be necessary to do research and to consult with reputable colleagues before we give answers. Be conscious that the theology we share with others helps them to form their image of God. When the image is accurate and conforms to scripture, people are likely to trust God and maintain that trust. On the other hand, when the images we paint are defective, we can destroy people's trust in God.

LIFE APPLICATION

The text focuses on David's trust and his waiting on God. But what does it mean to wait? Consciously test it yourself. Think of a matter in which you need God's intervention. Pray about the issue and stay in your praying position for at least 30 minutes after your prayer. Repeat this exercise for at least three consecutive days. Note your thoughts and actions during the waiting periods. Let this remind you that trusting God often involves long waits.

One of the great benefits of waiting on God is the ensuing peace that comes during the wait. This is not a mystery. Paul noted it in Philippians 4:6-7. Recall an experience when turning to God in stillness and silence brought you such peace. Compare this experience with occasions where in your anxiety you sought alternative secular remedies.

Survey your community to identify places of peace and quiet. Consider organizing a community project to develop other sanctuaries of silence. As part of the project, take steps to encourage people to experience the peace of waiting in quiet and stillness.

Reading about and speaking of peace and waiting on God is great

in classroom and private conversations. However, we live in a world where the tempo of events is fast, and people demand swift action. Consider how you can apply to the events of real life, the points you noted about the benefits of stillness and waiting.

QUESTIONS

1. Does waiting on the Lord mean ignoring opportunities to do something towards a solution?
2. How would you describe to a skeptic the peace that passes understanding?
3. How can we help others to develop or strengthen their trust in Jehovah God?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Closing Hymn: “They That Wait Upon the Lord”

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, grant me the strength I need to wait upon you for your perfect solutions to life’s challenges. You are my only hope for success and deliverance. I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 28–November 3

Monday Ezekiel 34:1-6 (Sheep Without a Shepherd)

Tuesday Ezekiel 34:7-16 (God Opposes Unfit Leaders)

Wednesday Ezekiel 34:17-31 (God Will Appoint a Shepherd)

Thursday John 10:1-10 (The Good Shepherd Defends the Flock)

Friday John 10:11-18 (The Good Shepherd Gives His Life)

Saturday Revelation 7:1-4, 9-17 (The Lamb Will Be Their Shepherd)

Sunday Psalm 23 (The Lord Is My Shepherd)

LESSON 10: NOVEMBER 3, 2024

CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S SHEPHERDING

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 23; John 10:11-14

Focus Scripture: Psalm 23

Key Verse: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. Psalm 23:6

PSALM 23 (NRSV UE)

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
- 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
- 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

PSALM 23 (KJV)

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
- 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

KEY TERMS

- **Metaphor** – A figure of speech where a thing or action represents another thing.
- **Depiction** – A graphic representation of something; to paint a verbal picture.
- **Hermeneutics** – The study of the principles of interpretation (of Bible text).
- **Existential** – Matters about (human) existence.

Introduction

As adults, we like to chart our course through life. This gives us the satisfaction of being masters of our fate, captain of our ship. However, we must accept that we come to corners in life where we need help outside ourselves. This is where the metaphor depicted in Psalm 23 becomes useful.

In Psalm 23 David depicted himself as a helpless sheep depending on God's help. The lesson challenges us to assess the source of our help in situations we cannot manage by ourselves. Please do not restrict God's provision to physical needs only. As a believer, try to see God's provisions in the areas of healthy relationships with others, emotional well-being, and spiritual insight and maturity.

Although the Psalms preserved the idea of God as the shepherd throughout, we must acknowledge that at times God calls us to be shepherds to others. So, in looking at the role of the shepherd, try to see the role in both directions: as a sheep under God's care, and as a responsibility to help others needing care.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

It is obvious that Psalm 23 speaks to a metaphor where David is the sheep and God is the shepherd. The brilliance in the depiction is how splendidly it highlights the natural characteristics of sheep when compared with other animals.

Green grass, which becomes available in the spring, is like five-star dining for the sheep. In the other seasons, the sheep's food is weeds and stubbles (leftovers). Hence the excitement in verse 2. God gives great food to our physical bodies as well as to our souls.

Like camels, sheep can go for extended periods without water. But

when they need water, they must have water and gallons of it. A sheep can drink as much as 2.5 gallons when thirsty.

But the greatest depiction is the dependence of the sheep on the shepherd. Unlike their cousins, the goats, sheep are fully dependent on the shepherd to find pastures and water for them. The shepherds also provided shelter from adverse weather, health care, and protection from wild animals and thieves. The picture the Psalm paints is one of critical dependence. If the shepherd does not perform well, the sheep falter and will die.

Phrases such as “prepare a table,” and “anoint my head with oil” indicate hospitality practices. Offering food to an enemy was a gesture of friendship: putting away hostilities. However, there is an even greater implication. The *Shepherd-King* (God) is waiting on (serving) the helpless sheep. To catch this, appreciate that in that culture, the lesser person serves the greater; not the reverse. It underscores the servant status that ministers of God must take with God’s people. Isaiah spoke to this in the prophesies on the *Suffering Servant*. Jesus underlined it in Matthew 20:25-28.

In John 10, Jesus breathes more life into the metaphors of the shepherd and the sheep. The Lord takes it further by highlighting the contrast between the good shepherd with a real interest in the welfare of the sheep, and the hireling (employee) who is just doing a job and has no real interest in the welfare of the sheep. David’s imagery in Psalm 23 is of the good shepherd. Ultimately, the good shepherd gives his life to protect and give life (eternal life) to the sheep.

Jesus’ analogy in John 10:27 again strikes at a feature of caring for sheep. The sheep, as dumb as they are, learn the voice and looks of their shepherd. They respond to the instructions of their shepherd

and follow behind him. People who are genuinely interested in God learn his Word and submit to leadership by the Spirit of the good shepherd; hirelings cannot mislead them.

SANKOFA

Psalm 23 is without doubt one of the most popular psalms – if not the most popular – in sacred literature. This being so, there is a temptation to look for a standard or common interpretation of it. But serious Bible commentators know there cannot be such a universal interpretation, as interpretations take on the flavor of the culture to which they relate.

In a 2018 publication (*Verbum Eccles.* (online) vol. 39 n.1 Pretoria 2018), David T. Adamo (Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa, South Africa) guides us on how to interpret Psalm 23 in the African context. “Reading Psalm 23 in African context: It has been stated that one of the basic characteristics of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) is that it is highly existential in its interpretation (Adamo 2015b:31-52). African biblical interpreters bring real-life interest into the text and it plays a major role in such interpretation.

“Such life interest may be healing, provision, success, and protection, which are the major concerns of Africans. When African biblical interpreters approach the text, the main question is what the text has to offer and not what is the historical, social, and literary dimension of the text (Adamo 2015b:31-52). In this case, in African context Psalm 23 is classified as a Psalm of protection, provision, healing, and success and will be interpreted in that context.”

Such a real-life approach to Psalm 23 gives it immediate relevance and application across generations. We may be outside of Africa

physically, but such an approach can help us in our evangelization efforts.

CASE STUDY

Psalm 23 is immensely popular among people around the world. Even people who claim no attraction to Christianity recite the Psalm at secular functions. We hear Psalm 23 at church services, outside the church as a ready-to-use prayer, as a short meditation at official ceremonies, at weddings, and most definitely at funerals. Priests, politicians, and public speakers use the Psalm liberally. What makes it so popular and useful? Below is a comment that caught our attention on Ministry Voice (ministryvoice.com):

“Psalm 23 captures David’s intense and deeply personal relationship with God perfectly, from shepherding sheep through to becoming king – undoubtedly contributing to an unshaken faith in him and providing solace and inspiration for generations after him. David used powerful imagery such as using *shepherd* as a metaphor to explain this journey of faith which resonated deeply with readers worldwide – giving comfort when needed and offering solace during tough times.”

People love and refer to Psalm 23 because of its powerful imagery. It is easy to follow yet gripping. Even people who are not familiar with the details of shepherding sheep can easily grasp the concepts of divine provisions, protection, love, and care. As they struggle with the demands of life, people desire to be under the superior care of a deity who loves them with the love depicted in Psalm 23.

LIFE APPLICATION

Because of all the provisions and protection God gave David, he

ended Psalm 23 with an expression of gratitude and commitment of faithfulness to God. This is in stark contrast to people who have an attitude of entitlement to God's favors. Consider your attitudes to what God provides for you daily. Are you grateful? If you are, what gestures can you adopt to show your gratitude? How can you remind yourself to be grateful for such basic things as the ability to breathe God's oxygen on your own?

David saw himself as a sheep under God's care. But at times God also calls believers to be shepherds to others like young (or immature) Christians. Do a self-assessment of your role in both positions. As a sheep, do you recognize God's voice and make the effort to follow his instructions? As a shepherd, do you recognize the opportunities to serve others: to care for and nurture them in the things of the kingdom?

The idea of the abundant life in John 10:10 attracts varying interpretations. For worldly- focused believers, it signals an entitlement to the luxuries of life. Others see it as an offer of eternal life with minimal reference to material things. The third group favors a mixture of material and spiritual blessings. Consider your position on this matter. Note that your reading of this verse will decide in large measure how you pray, and where you place the emphasis of your life.

In the hustle of modern life, it is easy to forget or overlook people

who shepherded us through feeble stages of life. Spend time looking back over your life to identify people who helped to nurture you. Consider people from home, schools, clubs, and churches. Say a prayer for such people, and where appropriate, send them a card or small gift of appreciation. If you have children or grandchildren, encourage them to do likewise. This is a small way to share immense joy with people who contributed to your life.

QUESTIONS

1. Psalm 23 speaks of God's good provisions for life. Yet ministers use it often at funerals. What is the justification for this use?
2. Jesus said his sheep know his voice. What kind of responsibility does this place on believers to learn the voice and ways of the *Good Shepherd*?
3. Why was it necessary to make the sheep lie down in green pastures, and what is the implication for us today?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Psalm 23"(Metropolitan Tabernacle)

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, thanks for your provisions, protection, and general care. Guide me back to your fold when I stray and keep me in your house all the remaining days of my life. Accept my gratitude through Jesus Christ. Amen.

OME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 4-November 10

Monday Revelation 19:1-10 (The Lord God Almighty Reigns)

Tuesday Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20 (How Good to Sing God's Praises)

Wednesday Psalm 148 (Praise God From Heaven and Earth)

Thursday Luke 1:46-55 (My Soul Magnifies the Lord)

Friday Luke 1:68-79 (Blessed Be the God of Israel)

Saturday Psalm 146 (Praise the Lord, O My Soul!)

Sunday Psalms 149–150 (Let Everything That Breathes Praise God!)

LESSON 11: NOVEMBER 10, 2024

SONGS OF PRAISE

Lesson Scripture: Psalms 146–150

Focus Scripture: Psalms 146, 150

Key Verse: I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Psalm 146:2

PSALMS 146, 150 (NRSV UE)

Psalm 146

- 1 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
- 2 I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.
- 4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.
- 5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,
- 6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
- 7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free;
- 8 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.
- 9 The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
- 10 The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150

- 1 Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his

mighty firmament!

- 2 Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
- 3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!
- 4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!
- 5 Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
- 6 Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

PSALMS 146, 150 (KJV)

Psalm 146

- 1 Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul.
- 2 While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.
- 3 Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.
- 4 His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.
- 5 Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God:
- 6 Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever:
- 7 Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The Lord looseth the prisoners:
- 8 The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous:
- 9 The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.
- 10 The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 150

- 1 Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.
- 2 Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.
- 3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.
- 4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
- 5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
- 6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

KEY TERMS

- **Spontaneous** – From a sudden inner or natural impulse or urging.
- **Indiscriminately** – Not showing regard for people's (status) or circumstances.
- **Intrigue** – Secretive (deceptive) plans and actions.
- **Frequency** – How often something occurs.

Introduction

As they reached the fifth item on the morning worship church service program, the worship team leader walked proudly to the podium and announced, “Let us start our praise and worship.” The visiting bishop, in a fatherly tone, asked, “So, sister, what were we doing the whole morning?” The worship leader did not get it. Therefore, as she waited for the musicians to set the tune, the bishop told her that everything done during the service was about praising and worshiping God.

The story demonstrated how modern congregations have classified and redefined terms relating to church activities. In most churches, praise is where they sing songs, clap hands, and dance. These outward actions are just a brief session in the service.

This was not King David’s idea of praise and worship. In his concept, music was indeed a feature, and we see this in the Psalms. However, the real praise came from within the hearts of the people. Praise was an outward expression of an inward thanksgiving. It was gratitude to God focused on God. The people would do whatever was necessary to show God their gratitude for his marvelous works. The leading singers and the music, while appreciated, were never a focus of attention. Keep this concept before you as you try to understand the expression of praise in the Psalms.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Scholars call this last set of Psalms (146-150) the “Hallelujah Psalms” because they offer a crescendo of praise to Yahweh. Hence

each starts and ends with Praise the Lord (from the root words *hallelu*, to praise and *yah*, Yahweh, the personal name for God.)

In crucial respects, the first Psalm (Psalm 146) sets the tone for the other Psalms. The psalmist starts with a personal vow of praise. He vows to himself (and God) to offer praises (adoration to God) for the remainder of his life. What is significant about this vow is that it is not dependent on anything. It is not conditional on God doing anything for him.

From that personal commitment, David urged those around him (indeed the whole nation) to do the same and trust God. In the remainder of the song, the psalmist explains why trusting God, rather than people, is the better option. Watch the comparison between God's care and the care from people.

The sentiments about God and his unfailing good works, which David expressed in this Psalm, are things David noted before in other Psalms. Thus "gives food to the hungry" links to Psalm 145:16; "sets the prisoners free" links to Psalm 107:3, 10; and "lifts up those who are bowed down" finds parallels in Psalms 113:7 and 145:14. These cross-references give hints that these Psalms were written late in David's life when he was reflecting on his experiences with God.

In verse 8 we find a reference to "[open] the eyes of the blind." We can link this to references in Isaiah (Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 29:18; 35:5)

and the earthly ministry of Christ. Without a doubt, God has the power to open any physically blind eyes as Jesus demonstrated in various healings. However, as two commentators (Clark and Maclaren) noted, we should explain this statement widely to include the curing of spiritual blindness.

Psalm 150 completes the book with a resounding call to praise God. It takes us out of the book on an emotional and spiritual high. Check the frequency of the word *praise*. We see it thirteen times in just six verses. This Psalm announces that all is now said and done in the book of Psalms. There is nothing more to add about God, his love, or his works. We need no new arguments to convince us to praise him. The only call now is a strong appeal to just praise the Lord. Hallelujah!

Also note from above, what Psalm 150 calls us to do transcends our usual concept of “praise and worship.” In the modern church culture, we reserve the term “praise and worship” for formal sessions of congregational singing in church services. This is not the call in Psalm 150. That call is to praise God anytime, anywhere, with whatever instrument of praise we have available. This type of praise is spontaneous, self-sustaining, and personal. It springs from a heart understanding of who God is, his love, care, and good works towards us. It is a praise that screams indiscriminately, “God, you are Lord, and I thank you for all you are doing for me.” Praise the Lord.

SANKOFA

We are familiar with how King David praised and thanked the Lord for his goodness. But what does a modern expression of praise from the heart of a grateful teenager sound like? Here is an example a listener of *Thru the Bible*'s Tigrinya language broadcast in Eritrea, Africa. The listener wrote:

“I will bless the Lord with my entire soul. I will bless the Lord and his holy name forever! For he has saved my family and brought us out of sadness and ruin! I am only 16 years old, but I carried such a burden because my father rejected my mother and my four brothers and sisters.

“Father never made much money but would drink and gamble with friends after work. He often would not come home for days. My mother was left with the job of stretching the little bit of money he gave us to make sure we had enough to eat and a home to live in. But more importantly, every night mother made us sit down around the table to listen to your programs. At the end of each program, we prayed for our dad to come and join us around the table and listen to God’s Word. We prayed for him with great enthusiasm.

“Although it took a few years, God answered our prayers! Now I want to yell to everyone I know that God is WITH us! How can we not praise his name? Today my dad listens with us and a remarkable change has occurred in our home – there is love and partnership

between my mom and dad, and God provides for our every basic need. We are not rich, but we are very happy. Please continue to broadcast God's Word. There are so many others who need his hope and love."

It does not have the poetic rhythm of David's Psalms, but it flows with the same intensity and gratefulness of his heart (see the full article on [A Modern-Day Psalm from Africa \(ttb.org\)](https://www.ttb.org/resources/articles-news/world-prayer-today/2019/03/12/a-modern-day-psalm-from-africa)).

(<https://www.ttb.org/resources/articles-news/world-prayer-today/2019/03/12/a-modern-day-psalm-from-africa>)

CASE STUDY

King David urged us to praise the Lord. But how does praising God work for us? Do believers get any physical or emotional benefits from praising God? Psalm 28:7 helps us to address this question, especially when we are facing trials.

"The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart.

He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy.

I burst out in songs of thanksgiving."

The Lord is my strength and shield.

Focusing on God and praising him tells us we are not alone in the struggle. Traditionally, when children faced situations that were too big or complex for them, they took them to parents or teachers. Two things fueled this behavior. First, the child felt the adult could handle the problem. Second, the child believed that the adult loved them enough to want to solve the problem for them. The same applies to us when we praise God during a tough time. Praising God reassures us we are not alone. We have a parent who is bigger and wiser than

us. It stirs our confidence in getting a solution or deliverance.

I trust him with all my heart.

We can only praise God sincerely if we believe firmly in our hearts that God exists and cares about us. Praising God reinforces this belief in our hearts. The more we praise, the deeper the belief grows in our hearts. When this growth is mature, we find God in everyday life, Jeremiah 29:13-15.

He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy.

When we find God's hands in our daily lives, we see his help in our affairs. The praise that led us to closer relations with God, also becomes the vehicle through which we detect his help. Physically and emotionally, this moves us. We feel the excitement of getting God's assistance. Consequently, our heart's emotion changes from one of fear and despair to hope and joy. The more we look to God, praise, and obey him, the deeper the joy becomes.

I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.

This is the fruit of our prolonged praise. The joy we feel inwardly bursts out in songs and other expressions of thanksgiving. This is where we want to be in a storm of life. We want to be able to sing and dance in the rain knowing that God is in control and his love for us will give the outcome that is right for us. Yes, praising God gives feedback to the whole person: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And it is free.

LIFE APPLICATION

Talking about praising God in safe spaces like churches and the privacy of our homes sounds easy and inspiring. However, we live in a world that at times is anything but a safe space. Daily we face

conflicts of various kinds. We hear constant reports of religious wars, gang wars, family breakdowns, the slaughter of the innocent, migration problems, and political intrigue. How do we praise God faithfully in such a world? Consider if you have a workable approach for maintaining your praise in challenging situations. If you do not have a strategy, spend time developing one.

Psalm 150 makes references to God's "mighty deeds" and "greatness." These should become more than sweet expressions when referring to God. If they are true, we should still see them from the same God David praised. Set aside quiet time to consider where you saw or are seeing instances of God's "mighty works." Consider what makes the works mighty, and God's signature on these events. Once you identify "mighty works," give God praise for them. Make this a regular practice and watch how your faith and praise to God grows.

Ephesians 2:10 teaches that God does much of his great works through us, his handiwork. Ask your pastor or other leaders in your faith communities about opportunities to serve God by serving other people. When you undertake such ministry work, remind yourself you are acting as God's ambassador. At the end of your assignment, onlookers should see from you what the character of God looks like.

QUESTIONS

1. What determines the frequency and intensity of our praises to God?
2. Why is praising God during a storm of life effective?
3. Can we teach people to praise God, or is praising spontaneous?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "To God be the Glory," AMECH #21

Closing Prayer: Dear God, I am grateful for the blessings you released in my life. Thanks for helping me in those tough situations when I could not help myself. I praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 11-November 17

Monday Psalm 28 (Give Thanks Through Song)

Tuesday Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-20 (Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs)

Wednesday Psalm 69:1-6, 30-36 (Magnify God With Thanksgiving)

Thursday Psalm 7:1-2, 6-17 (Give Thanks to the Righteous Judge)

Friday 1 Thessalonians 1 (Thanks for Faithful Brothers and Sisters)

Saturday Philippians 4:4-9 (Prayer and Supplication With Thanksgiving)

Sunday Psalm 100 (Worship the Lord With Gladness)

LESSON 12: NOVEMBER 17, 2024

A SONG OF THANKSGIVING

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 100

Focus Scripture: Psalm 100

Key Verse: Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him; bless his name. Psalm 100:4

PSALM 100 (NRSV UE)

- 1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.
- 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
- 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him; bless his name.
- 5 For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations.

PSALM 100 (KJV)

- 1 Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
- 2 Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.
- 3 Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
- 4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.
- 5 For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

KEY TERMS

- **Zambia** – A country in southern Africa with a population of

around 19 million people.

- **Inauguration** – The official start of the authority of an official or administration.
- **Linguistic** – Relating to language (the features of a language).

Introduction

It is natural for us to be grateful to people who give us good things or pleasing experiences. Whether it be a gift of chocolates at Easter or a bottle of perfume at Christmas, we appreciate gifts and are happy to show the givers that we do. Sometimes we show this gratitude by offering our gifts to people who give to us.

Yet when giving becomes routine, sometimes dullness covers its value. We can take the presenting of gifts for granted. We hear stories of people who did not open their Christmas gifts until January or even later. This is especially true when the receivers felt they knew what was inside the gift package. When giving becomes routine, we no longer attach a high level of appreciation to it. In such cases, we make no special effort to thank the giver.

When the giver is God, we may have a problem. You may ask how we can do this to God. It is an attitude that develops when we move from appreciating God's blessings as gifts and start seeing them as entitlements. Most people do not have a high level of gratitude for things they think they are entitled to. They just take them and even abuse them.

During this lesson, consider your attitude to the blessings of God. Do you appreciate them as gifts for which you should show appreciation? Alternatively, do you see God's provisions as entitlements, and therefore praising him for them is optional? The psalmist in the text took the first outlook. He saw all of God's provisions as worthy of special praise.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In Psalm 100, the psalmist praises the Lord for his (God's)

faithfulness to his people. Mark that the call is to all “lands” or earth (ESV). This extends the call outside Israel to include us (Christian believers). The call has two sections (vs. 1-3; 4-5), with each section giving a clear reason why the people should praise God. In section one the Psalm celebrates the Lord’s creation of his people (v. 3). In the second, the praise is for God’s care of the people he created.

The opening of this Psalm is interesting in that unlike several other Psalms, it does not start hailing God’s lordship. Instead, it is a bold jump-start calling us to praise the Lord joyfully. The joyful shout the psalmist has in mind is the type that loyal subjects give when their king comes among them. Yet the shout has an air of deep reverence. A faithful God deserves such a joyful shout from the people he created.

In verses 4-5 we see a note of intimacy. The worshippers are invited close to their king (God); into the courts and gates. The king does not keep them outside (as with the temple’s outer walls). Beyond that, they must know God’s name, as they are urged to bless that name. (People cannot bless a name they do not know.) And why should we praise and bless God’s name? Verse 5 answers: because he is good, reliable, the ultimate in love, and forever faithful.

The Psalm, as noted above, urges (demands) that all of God’s creatures offer praise. However, the “us” in verse 3 gives special reference to Israel, God’s special people at that time. Again, we see

the cross reference of this Psalm to other Psalms (Psalms 95:6; 149:2).

The start of verse 3 lays the foundation for all the praises we should give to the Lord. He is God, plain and simple. Consider all the implications of this declaration. As God, he made us and thus we are fully accountable to him. As God, he is the only true living God. Further, as the only true living God, he is the only deity capable of caring for us.

His people translates a Hebrew word that structurally is at the very center of the Psalm. Everything preceding this leads up to this fundamental affirmation of God's relationship with his people, and everything following it springs from it. Locating a poem's main point at its structural center – whether it be a word, a phrase, or an entire verse – occurs many times in Psalms (6:6; 8:4; 20:6; 21:7; 23:4; 25:11; 42:8; 54:4; 71:14; 73:15; 74:12; 82:5; 92:8; 97:7; and 142:4).

SANKOFA

Let us borrow a statement from the **Introduction** section. “The joyful shout the psalmist has in mind is the type that loyal subjects give when their king comes among them.” Zambia no longer has kings. They have presidents, and such were the shouts that engulfed the nation when President Hakainde Hichilema was inaugurated in August 2021. According to a CNN online report about the inauguration, a tweet from the new president read:

“As I sit here in our vehicle being driven to Heroes Stadium, I see the

love, the joy, and the jubilation as people line the streets on our way. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. I love you all so much."

Another online report noted that "masses of people," dressed in the official red shirts of the new president's party, lined the streets, and cheered as the new president's motorcade made its way to Heroes Stadium for the inauguration. In addition, the people filled the 60,000-seat Heroes Stadium to witness and celebrate the inauguration.

All the reports suggested that the cheering and praising were loud, spontaneous, and full of expectations. The people were looking forward to a new era of hope, prosperity, and freedom. Those are the same elements that should anchor our praises to a faithful God.

CASE STUDY

As believers in the New Testament era, we cherish the word "Hallelujah," noting that it is the "highest praise." In the context of the different forms of Hebrew praises, that claim has merit. Still, what we find remarkable is that the word "Hallelujah" appears only four times in the New Testament and only in one chapter, Revelation chapter 19. This seems to suggest that Hallelujah is not only the highest praise, but it will also be the final praise when God brings about the final deliverance for the saints.

Still, we wonder why scholars and artists preserved Hallelujah in its (almost) original form all these centuries from the Old Testament worship to the final praise in Revelation (Only Amen appears to have received similar preservation). Our research took us to a December 20, 2021, *Los Angeles Times* article by staff writer Deborah Netburn. Here is the relevant extract from that article.

“Scholars can’t say for sure why ‘hallelujah’ was preserved intact when nearly every other Hebrew word in the Bible was translated first into Greek and then into Latin (‘amen’ is another notable exception). Markus Rathey, a professor of early Christian music at Yale University, said it suggests the word was already charged with an emotion that transcended its linguistic meaning.

“I must say, personally, hallelujah sounds so much more beautiful than simply just ‘Praise the Lord,’” Rathey said. “Hallelujah’ is almost music already, even without a musical setting.”

We must agree. ‘Hallelujah’ has a special, majestic ring to it. It evokes emotions that tell us we are offering special praise, reserved praise, and glorious praise to the one true, faithful God in whom all our hope rests. Hallelujah!

LIFE APPLICATION

From casual observation, people (including Christian believers) have a general tendency to praise and celebrate happy or “good” experiences and events. They lament sad or distressing experiences. Consider how that behavior reflects our faith in a faithful, loving, caring God. Reflect on this. How would we respond to events both good and bad if we were sure our God was firmly in control and would lead us to the outcomes that were right for us? We would break the normal tendency and rejoice in all situations. So let us practice this. Try to praise God “at all times,” whether pleasing or disturbing.

One reason for much of the distress and depression in our lives is

the feeling of lack we sense when we compare ourselves with others. There may be nothing wrong with a healthy desire to get more of the “good things” of life, but heed the desiderata that there will always be greater and lesser persons. In material goods, we will have more than millions of other people. Likewise, millions of people will have more than us. Live that reality by thanking God for what you do have. This creates a better attitude than complaining about what you lack. After you practice this for a while, you will experience a healthy change in your outlook on life.

Consider why you worship God. To be effective our praise and worship must sit on a firm base. Normally we have three such bases for praising God: God’s goodness, his enduring, steadfast love, and his faithfulness to all generations. Take time to assess which of these bases are at the root of your praises to God. And make a conscious effort to consider all three when you praise God. When you do, you will see that your praise will become more spontaneous and enduring. Praising God will be more inspiring. You will draw more strength to face the trials of life.

Psalm 100, a song directed to the Lord who made us and whose faithfulness is for all generations, is a perfect hymn to read and sing for Thanksgiving. Consider how you can make Psalm 100 a part of your Thanksgiving holiday celebration. Discuss this idea in advance with the friends and family you share Thanksgiving celebrations with.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between the praises we offer to people for doing an excellent job of leadership and the praises we offer to God?
2. What must happen in our hearts for us to praise God in grim times?
3. If you had the authority to change corporate praise in your church, how would you improve it?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Praise Him! Praise Him! " AMECH #92

Closing Prayer: Dear Father God, help me to appreciate the world you made for me, and all the physical, emotional, and spiritual provisions you made to sustain my life. Also, remind me of the joys that await me in glory. Show me how to make my hallelujahs stronger and more self-sustaining. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 18-November 24

Monday Matthew 1:18-23 (God Is With Us Through Christ)

Tuesday Exodus 33:12-23 (My Presence Will Go With You)

Wednesday Exodus 34:1-9 (A Glimpse of the Merciful God)

Thursday Psalm 16 (Complete Joy in God's Presence)

Friday Matthew 18:15-20 (Where Two or Three Are Gathered)

Saturday Matthew 28:16-20 (I Am With You Always)

Sunday Psalm 139:1-12 (God Searches and Knows Us)

LESSON 13: NOVEMBER 24, 2024

GOD'S PROMISED PRESENCE

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 139

Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:1-12

Key Verse: O Lord, you have searched me and known me. Psalm 139:1

PSALM 139:1-12 (NRSV UE)

- 1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.
- 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
- 7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
- 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
- 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,"
- 12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

PSALM 139:1-12 (KJV)

- 1 O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
- 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.
- 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.
- 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.
- 7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
- 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
- 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
- 11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
- 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

KEY TERMS

- **Omniscience** – The divine trait of knowing all things; perfect (complete) always.
- **Attested** – Serves as clear evidence.
- **Consecutive** – Following one after the other.

Introduction

As adults, we cherish a certain degree of privacy. We find it difficult to disclose intimate heart secrets to even our closest relatives and friends. The idea that God knows us through and through is both comforting and intimidating. Such knowledge demands that we always be honest with God. It also demands that we have confidence in God's love for us, and how the Lord balances judgment with mercy and grace.

In the text, see how the psalmist acknowledges God's omniscience and its implications. Consider the psalmist's conclusions and the extent to which you agree with them. If indeed you agree with them, think about how you can align your life with those implications. Also, consider how you express in your prayers this delightful insight about the all-knowing God.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The entire Psalm revolves around God's complete (perfect) knowledge of David (humanity). The Hebrew root for *know* as used in Psalm 139 is *yada*. This indicates intimate knowledge, an acquaintance that is above casual observation. It suggests a close familiarity with all the finer details about the subject. That is the familiarity Adam and his wife had which produced children.

David's declaration that God knew everything about him may not refer to special revelation. It was common in the ancient world to claim that gods and kings knew everything, without limits. But note that in Psalm 139, Yahweh's infinite knowledge has a judicial

context. It makes God the perfect judge who has all the information for judging the psalmist's case wisely and fairly.

The Hebrew root for *wonderfully* in verse 14 is *pala* which means *to be different*, or *remarkable*. We must see this word in the context of the whole Psalm. It goes beyond physical features. This wonderfulness strikes at all the details of life: the design of the body, the way it works, personal desires, and attitudes toward God. The Hebrews also used *pala* to describe the benevolent acts of God (cf. Psalms 9:1-2; 40:5; 78:4; 105:5).

Psalm 139 is something of an exception in the Old Testament. Rather than focusing on God's majesty and praises to the Lord, it focuses strongly and positively on the individual, King David. But note that the Psalm shows that the individual (David representing humanity) has no privacy from God. Yahweh is aware of everything about the individual: his whereabouts, thoughts, attitudes, and disposition towards God. This is both comforting and frightening.

It is comforting because we know that God is aware of every aspect of our lives and therefore is qualified to deal with our every need. God can take care of us. The frightening aspect stems from the understanding that we can hide nothing from God. Therefore, when we know we have offended God, we must go clean before God, repent, and seek his mercy/grace.

SANKOFA

In the **Introduction**, we noted that it was common in the ancient

world to claim that gods and kings knew everything, without limits. That was a statement excited citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines made jokingly about a former prime minister, Sir James Mitchell KCMG PC. Sir James led the nation for over 17 years and was loved by his people as his consecutive election victories showed. He had a reputation for knowing the details of whatever was happening in the small island state. And if you took a walk with him through the city, you were easily convinced the assertion was true.

The prime minister greeted most people on a first-name basis and started conversations which showed he knew what was happening in their lives. He knew what stages new government projects had reached and what problems they were having. He understood the challenges individual businesspeople faced. He asked people about their families by names and occupations. It was a remarkable experience to walk about St. Vincent with him and watch and listen as he talked about people's concerns with alarming detail.

The people of St. Vincent did not believe that their "king" (prime minister) knew every detail about them without limit. However, there was no doubt they were aware that Sir James knew about them and cared for them. Apparently, this belief was the reason the people returned him to the seat of power in consecutive elections.

CASE STUDY

Psalm 139 goes to the heart of the doctrine of divine omniscience – the all-knowing God. This means that God always has full (perfect) knowledge of everyone and everything and what is happening around them. The all-knowing God, because he has perfect knowledge, can see all aspects of any situation. Accordingly, he can likewise devise perfect solutions. Thus, we can have total trust in the

solutions that God provides.

We must note that this doctrine is common among most major religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. It is a key, base doctrine and Christianity (among others) will unravel if this doctrine collapses. The omniscience doctrine governs how we relate to God. For instance, by this doctrine, we always accept that God sees us and all the situations we face. He knows our problems from the past, the ones we presently face, and the situations we will face in the future. God is therefore not waiting for us to tell him our problems. God knows them before we pray. But what is more important and inspiring, is the Lord knows the perfect solutions.

Further, note that several New Testament scriptures speak to the omniscience of God. Among them are Matthew 10:30, Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 3:20, and Matthew 6:8. So here is the question that naturally arises whenever we teach this doctrine. "If God knows everything, why do we have to pray to him, tell him our problems, and ask for solutions?" It is a reasonable question, and the answer is simple.

First, when we pray, we are not informing God: we are not telling the Lord something God does not know. But our prayers demonstrate our confidence in God's almighty ability to give us perfect solutions. Our prayers are a demonstration of confidence in God's love for us and God's ability to take care of us. Last, we must let our requests be known unto God so we can get the peace that comes when we cast our burdens on him, knowing that God cares for us. Simply put, we pray to an all-knowing God because God told us that is the way to stay connected with him.

On the other side of the coin, we give God praise because we accept that the all-knowing God is giving us all we need for godly

living: living that pleases God and brings us into God's blessings.

LIFE APPLICATION

In your private devotions, reflect on Psalm 139 and the doctrine of God's omniscience. What does the thought that God is seeing you when you do wrong say to you? Consider what you can do to modify your approach to life to reflect this knowledge.

How do you see your gifts and talents? One view is that our gifts and talents are clues to God's calling in our lives. Under this view, consider how well you are fulfilling your calling, and what changes you may need to make.

Listen to Harry Chapin's song, "Someone Keeps Calling My Name." Compare the longing of the song with the promise of Psalm 139:1-12. What do you feel?

Verse 14 speaks of how fearfully, wonderfully, and marvelously God made us. Consider this as you think of yourself. Apply the adverbs not only to physical characteristics but to the way your body functions, your emotional makeup, and your spiritual tendencies. Do you see yourself as God's handiwork? Consider the basis you use to assess yourself. Is it the models in the magazine or movies, or the scriptures' view?

QUESTIONS

1. In what respects is the doctrine of God's omniscience comforting?
2. How does understanding that God knows everything affect the way we pray?
3. Since God knows about injustice before it happens, why does he not prevent it?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise," AMECH #71

Closing Prayer: Dear all-knowing Creator, I accept that you know me better than I know myself. I know your eyes are on me every second. Remind me of this in those times when I feel threatened and scared by the storm winds of life. My prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 25–December 1

Monday Luke 3:23-38 (We Belong to Christ's Family)

Tuesday Psalm 128 (A Household Built by God)

Wednesday Ruth 1:1, 3, 6-18 (Determined Loyalty)

Thursday Ruth 2:1-3, 17-23 (An Act of Kindness)

Friday Matthew 12:46-50 (Bound Together by More Than DNA)

Saturday Ruth 3:1-13 (Daring Faith)

Sunday Ruth 4:9-17 (God Has Not Abandoned You)