



Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

FALL 2022
GOD'S EXCEPTIONAL CHOICE

▶ International Sunday School Lessons

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

A quarterly publication of **STANDARD PUBLISHING**

FALL 2022 GOD'S EXCEPTIONAL CHOICE

CONTRIBUTORS

Lesson Development Rob O'Lynn (1), Mark Hahlen (2, 4),
Christopher Cotten (3), Mark W. Hamilton (5–7),
Mark S. Krause (8–9), Jon Weatherly (10–13)

Verbal Illustrations Noah Goodwin (1, 10–11, 13), Charles R. Boatman (2–5),
Laura McKillip Wood (6–8), Ronald L. Nickelson (7),
Petra L. Miller (9, 12)

Involvement Learning Connie Chandler (1–4), Mark A. Taylor (5–9),
Ann Diaz (10–13)

What Do You Think? Andrew Wood (1–13)

EDITORIAL TEAM

Jane Ann Kenney & Taylor Z. Stamps

For timely help EACH WEEK, check out www.standardlesson.com. Updated weekly!

KJV Bible Teacher is published quarterly by Standard Publishing, www.standardpub.com. Copyright © 2022 by Standard Publishing, part of the David C Cook family, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Lessons are based on the *Uniform Series International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching* Copyright © 2018 Committee on the Uniform Series. Used by permission. Scripture taken from the *King James Version*.

God's Exceptional Choice

Special Features

	Page
Quarterly Quiz	2
Quarter at a Glance..... Christopher Cotten	3
Get the Setting	Mark S. Krause 4
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)	5
Lesson Cycle Chart.....	7
The Power of Acrostics (Teacher Tips)	Mary T. Lederleitner 8
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)	449
Activity Pages (free download)	www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages
In the World (weekly online feature).....	www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world

Lessons

Unit 1: God Calls Abraham's Family

September 4	The Call of Abram.....	<i>Genesis 12:1-5, 7; 15:1-7</i>	9
September 11	God Chooses the Younger Twin	<i>Genesis 25:19b-34</i>	17
September 18	Jacob Called Israel	<i>Genesis 32:22-32</i>	25
September 25	The Scepter Given to Judah....	<i>Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12</i>	33

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

October 2	The Birth of Moses	<i>Exodus 2:1-10</i>	41
October 9	Song of Moses	<i>Deuteronomy 32:3-6, 10-14, 18</i>	49
October 16	The Call of Gideon	<i>Judges 6:1-2, 7-16a</i>	57
October 23	Who Is King?.....	<i>1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24</i>	65
October 30	David Anointed as King	<i>1 Samuel 16:1-13</i>	73

Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

November 6	God Picked You!	<i>Ephesians 1:1-14</i>	81
November 13	Christ Is Wisdom.....	<i>Ephesians 1:15-23</i>	89
November 20	We Are God's Handiwork.....	<i>Ephesians 2:1-10</i>	97
November 27	God Gives Tools for Our Protection	<i>Ephesians 6:10-18</i>	105

Quarterly Quiz

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of *This Quarter in the Word*.

Lesson 1

1. Lot was Abram's _____? (father, brother, nephew) *Genesis 12:5*
2. Who did Abram think might become his heir? (Ebed, Ehud, Eliezer)? *Genesis 15:2*

Lesson 2

1. Esau grabbed Jacob's heel at birth. T/F. *Genesis 25:26*
2. What did Esau sell to his brother for a meal? (birthright, servant, wild game) *Genesis 25:33*

Lesson 3

1. After wrestling a man, Jacob's name was changed to _____. *Genesis 32:28*
2. What name did Jacob give to the location where he wrestled? (Pithom, Peniel, Pirathon) *Genesis 32:30*

Lesson 4

1. Jacob's sons by Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. T/F. *Genesis 35:24*
2. Judah proclaimed that Tamar was "more _____ than I." *Genesis 38:26*

Lesson 5

1. Moses' father was from the tribe of _____. *Exodus 2:1*
2. Pharaoh's daughter named the child Moses because she "drew him out of the _____." *Exodus 2:10*

Lesson 6

1. The song describes God as what? (the Sea, the Rock, the Sky) *Deuteronomy 32:4*
2. The song likens God's care to an eagle caring for its young. T/F. *Deuteronomy 32:11-12*

Lesson 7

1. God handed Israel over to be ruled by whom? (Magog, Midian, Mesopotamia) *Judges 6:1-2*

2. Under what did the angel of the Lord sit while visiting Gideon? (an oak, a shelter, a winepress) *Judges 6:11*

Lesson 8

1. Samuel was pleased to hear that Israel desired a king. T/F. *1 Samuel 8:6*
2. According to Samuel, Israel had _____ God. *1 Samuel 10:19*

Lesson 9

1. From whose sons did the Lord choose Israel's next king? (Samuel, Saul, Jesse) *1 Samuel 16:1*
2. Upon further questioning it was found that David was working with _____. *1 Samuel 16:11*

Lesson 10

1. Redemption and forgiveness come in accordance to the riches of God's _____. *Ephesians 1:7*
2. All people, regardless of their belief, are marked with the Holy Spirit. T/F. *Ephesians 1:13*

Lesson 11

1. Paul gives thanks for the faith and love of the Ephesians. T/F. *Ephesians 1:15-16*
2. God placed Jesus to be the _____ over the church. *Ephesians 1:22*

Lesson 12

1. God is described as being "rich" in what? (grace, mercy, love) *Ephesians 2:4*
2. Believers are created in Christ Jesus to do good works. T/F. *Ephesians 2:10*

Lesson 13

1. The primary opponents of believers in spiritual struggle are flesh and blood. T/F. *Ephesians 6:12*
2. The sword of the Spirit is described as "the _____ of God." *Ephesians 6:17*

Quarter at a Glance

by Christopher Cotten

From a mountain in the wilderness of Sinai, God told Moses, “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people . . . and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6a). God’s words declare one of the central themes of Scripture: God’s freedom to choose a people to be His own.

Our limited understanding will not fully comprehend God’s choices. His selections may defy our standards for determining who is considered “choice.” Ultimately, He is in no way bound by our human standards. This quarter’s Scripture texts unpack the exceptional nature of God’s choice.

An Obscure Choice

The quarter begins by looking at the narratives in Genesis set amid the nomadic life of the ancient Near East. God demonstrated His choice by calling a descendant of Noah to experience blessing and a new land (Genesis 12:1-7). God’s choice was demonstrated through this family as He chose certain individuals for service to His name (25:19b-34).

God’s choice is not reserved for the notable or the powerful. These Scripture texts show that He may choose people not widely recognized. His choice is not based on any criteria other than His desire and freedom to choose.

Sometimes our expectations do not align with God’s choice. We should practice humility and show attentiveness to God’s purposes—He might work in ways that catch us unaware. Are you in a position to notice?

A Surprising Choice

Through the second unit of lessons, God’s choice is shown, even through the centuries. These lessons highlight the development of God’s choice of His people, from a child born of a slave (Exodus 2:1-10) to a shepherd turned king (1 Samuel 16:1-13). God’s call can be unexpected—He may

even choose people who are trying to avoid His call altogether (Judges 6:7-16a)!

God choice will often be in spite of human expectations. Moses’ path to fulfilling God’s choice was marked by uncertainty and risk (Exodus 2:3-4). Gideon had no reputation aligned with the tasks God called him to do (Judges 6:15). David’s fitness as king was overlooked by his own family (1 Samuel 16:7-12). Have you felt incompatible with God’s choice over your life? Remember that God is “the Rock, his work is perfect” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

A Life-Changing Choice

The final unit of lessons highlights how God continues to choose people for His will. These four lessons explore Paul’s teaching to Christians in the city of Ephesus regarding the life-changing nature of God’s choice over their lives—and ours.

*God's choice is not reserved
for the notable or the powerful.*

Paul explained the life-changing nature of God’s choice when he wrote that God’s people are blessed “according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4). For God’s people, being chosen comes with responsibility. Their actions and choices will be changed in light of God’s choice.

God’s people must live with obedience and good works in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10). Evil in the world desires to tear down God’s chosen people. Therefore, God’s people must prepare (see 6:10-18)!

We can encourage and support other believers through prayer, preaching, teaching, discipleship, and mentoring. God’s exceptional choice can never be doubted. He desires that His people live in a manner that reflects His choice. Let us turn our eyes toward that goal.

Get the Setting

by Mark S. Krause

Throughout Scripture, cities often served as the backdrop for God's work among His people. In some instances, God called people to leave a thriving city in order to follow Him. However, in other instances God called people to live in these cities in order to serve Him.

Ancient Wealth in Ur

During the era of Abraham (about 2167–1992 BC), one of the largest cities in Mesopotamia was Ur. Archaeologists have identified the city's ruins located on the Euphrates River, about 220 miles southeast of modern-day Baghdad. The ruins provide evidence of human occupation dating back to approximately the third millennium BC.

Ur was one of the premier cities of its day. Its location near the Persian Gulf and the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers allowed the city to develop a thriving economy. Archaeological findings provide insight into the city's wealth. For example, the city's royal tombs have been found to have been filled with numerous riches, thus reflecting the wealth of the city and its inhabitants.

The city has been traditionally held as the ancestral home of Abraham's family (see Genesis 11:28, 31; compare Acts 7:2). However, the family did not stay in Ur—they traveled to Canaan. Scholars have tried to recreate their journey and estimate the exact route from Ur to Canaan. The most direct route would have taken the family directly up the Euphrates River valley. This route would have proven to be dangerous as the travelers would have forded tributaries, skirted marshlands, maneuvered through desert lands, and negotiated with hostile peoples.

The travels of Abraham's family were highly unusual during that time period. Many people stayed in the same geographic region for most of their lives. Cities, like Ur, were the home of much known wealth. That God promised blessing and greatness for Abraham (see Genesis 12:2-

3) outside Ur (15:7) would have been unparalleled. Abraham's contemporaries might have considered that he would find blessing in the thriving metropolis, not in unknown foreign lands.

Pagan Temples in Ephesus

During the first century AD, thriving cities were situated on critical trade routes, shipping corridors, or both. These cities served as ideal locations for the gospel message to take root and spread throughout the Roman Empire. Ephesus, a city on the western coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), was no exception.

A large harbor provided the city access to key shipping routes in the Mediterranean Sea. Highways connected the city to the rest of Asia Minor and, thereby, the far reaches of the empire. Therefore, the city was crucial for trade across the region.

Further, Ephesus was also important for pagan religious practices. During the era of the apostle Paul, the city was home to a large temple dedicated to the pagan goddess Diana (see Acts 19:35). The temple was more than a location for pagan rituals; it also provided a financial benefit for the city (see 19:24-27).

As a result, Ephesus was an ideal stop for the apostle Paul during his missionary journeys across the Mediterranean region (see Acts 18:19-21; 19:1-10). From this city, the message of Jesus Christ spread throughout the Roman Empire and, perhaps, through the known world.

Ambassadors to the World

In some instances, God called His people to leave large cities—like He called the family of Abraham to leave the city of Ur. However, in other instances, God called people to live and serve in large, influential cities—like Paul in Ephesus. Each context provided God's people with unique challenges as they were to be His ambassadors to the world.

Mon, Nov. 14
 Tue, Nov. 15
 Wed, Nov. 16
 Thu, Nov. 17
 Fri, Nov. 18
 Sat, Nov. 19
 Sun, Nov. 20
 Mon, Nov. 21
 Tue, Nov. 22
 Wed, Nov. 23
 Thu, Nov. 24
 Fri, Nov. 25
 Sat, Nov. 26
 Sun, Nov. 27

Grace Overflowed for Service 1 Timothy 1:1-4, 12-17
Live in Peace and Godliness 1 Timothy 2:1-8
Qualifications for God's Servants 1 Timothy 3:1-13
Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly Micah 6:1-8
Trust in God and Do Good Psalm 37:1-9, 37-40
A Prayer for Boldness Acts 4:23-31
Created for Good Works Ephesians 2:1-10

Remembrance and Repentance Revelation 2:1-7
The Mystery of Christ Ephesians 3:1-13
Build Up the Body of Christ Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16
Put On the New Self Ephesians 4:17-27
God Is Our Refuge Psalm 91
God Rebuilds the Afflicted Isaiah 54:6-17
Strength in the Lord Ephesians 6:10-24

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 2

- Lesson 1**—1. nephew. 2. Eliezer. **Lesson 2**—1. false. 2. birth-right. **Lesson 3**—1. Israel. 2. Peniel. **Lesson 4**—1. true. 2. righteous. **Lesson 5**—1. Levi. 2. water. **Lesson 6**—1. the Rock. 2. true. **Lesson 7**—1. Midian. 2. an oak. **Lesson 8**—1. false. 2. rejected. **Lesson 9**—1. Jesse. 2. sheep. **Lesson 10**—1. grace. 2. false. **Lesson 11**—1. true. 2. head. **Lesson 12**—1. mercy. 2. true. **Lesson 13**—1. false. 2. word.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Aug. 29
 Tue, Aug. 30
 Wed, Aug. 31
 Thu, Sep. 1
 Fri, Sep. 2
 Sat, Sep. 3
 Sun, Sep. 4
 Mon, Sep. 5
 Tue, Sep. 6
 Wed, Sep. 7
 Thu, Sep. 8
 Fri, Sep. 9
 Sat, Sep. 10
 Sun, Sep. 11
 Mon, Sep. 12
 Tue, Sep. 13
 Wed, Sep. 14
 Thu, Sep. 15
 Fri, Sep. 16
 Sat, Sep. 17
 Sun, Sep. 18

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

The First Will Be Last Luke 13:23-30
God Is Great and Gracious Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20
God Judges Rightly Psalm 75
God's Word Does Not Fail Romans 9:6-16
Who Can Argue with God? Romans 9:17-29
God Blesses Jacob Genesis 28:10-22
God Is Free to Choose Genesis 25:19-34

Partake in God's Holiness Hebrews 12:7-17
A Blessing Bestowed Genesis 27:18-29
A Blessing Forsaken Genesis 27:30-41
God Will Be Merciful to All Romans 11:25-32
Praise for God's Wonderful Works Psalm 105:1-11
Seeking Favor in God's Sight Genesis 32:3-12
Wrestling for a Blessing Genesis 32:22-32

Mon, Sep. 19 **Tamar Asserts Her Rights** Genesis 38:12-19, 24-26
 Tue, Sep. 20 **Ruth Gives Birth to Obed** Ruth 4:9-17
 Wed, Sep. 21 **God's Blessings for Israel** Numbers 23:18-26
 Thu, Sep. 22 **A Scepter Shall Rise from Israel** Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17
 Fri, Sep. 23 **The Heavenly Throne** Revelation 4
 Sat, Sep. 24 **The Conquering Lion of Judah** Revelation 5
 Sun, Sep. 25 **Judah Destined to Reign** Genesis 49:8-12

 Mon, Sep. 26 **God Preserves the People** Psalm 105:12-25
 Tue, Sep. 27 **From Lack to Abundance** Genesis 47:1-12
 Wed, Sep. 28 **Thriving in Spite of Adversity** Exodus 1:8-22
 Thu, Sep. 29 **God Prepares Moses** Acts 7:17-29
 Fri, Sep. 30 **Challenges of Heeding God's Call** Acts 7:30-41
 Sat, Oct. 1 **A Faithful Life** Hebrews 11:23-29
 Sun, Oct. 2 **God Raises Up a Deliverer** Exodus 2:1-15

 Mon, Oct. 3 **God Calls and Equips** Exodus 3:1-15
 Tue, Oct. 4 **God Brings Victory** Exodus 14:21-31
 Wed, Oct. 5 **God Remembers His Promises** Psalm 105:26-27, 37-45
 Thu, Oct. 6 **God Expects Obedience** Hebrews 3:7-19
 Fri, Oct. 7 **God Offers Eternal Rest** Hebrews 4:1-11
 Sat, Oct. 8 **God Promises a Homeland** Deuteronomy 1:1-8
 Sun, Oct. 9 **God Is Perfect and Just** Deuteronomy 32:3-14, 18

 Mon, Oct. 10 **God Is My Portion Forever** Psalm 73:1-5, 16-17, 21-28
 Tue, Oct. 11 **Israel Struggles to Remain Faithful** Judges 2:7-8, 11-19
 Wed, Oct. 12 **God's Power Is a Treasure** 2 Corinthians 4:1-7
 Thu, Oct. 13 **Afflicted but Renewed Daily** 2 Corinthians 4:8-18
 Fri, Oct. 14 **God's Grace Is Sufficient** 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
 Sat, Oct. 15 **Deliverance Comes from God's Hand** Judges 7:1-8, 16-22
 Sun, Oct. 16 **God Calls Gideon** Judges 6:1-2, 7-16a

Mon, Oct. 17 **Speak, for Your Servant Is Listening** 1 Samuel 3:1-10
 Tue, Oct. 18 **A Desire to Be Like Others** 1 Samuel 8:1-9
 Wed, Oct. 19 **God Is the King of Nations** Revelation 11:15-19, 15:2-4
 Thu, Oct. 20 **The Lord Is Clothed in Majesty** Psalm 93
 Fri, Oct. 21 **God Chooses Saul** 1 Samuel 9:3-17
 Sat, Oct. 22 **God's Spirit Will Possess You** 1 Samuel 9:27-10:8
 Sun, Oct. 23 **Behold Your King!** 1 Samuel 10:17-27

 Mon, Oct. 24 **God Rejects Saul** 1 Samuel 15:1-11
 Tue, Oct. 25 **God's Kindness and Severity** Romans 11:13-24
 Wed, Oct. 26 **God's Begotten Son** Psalm 2
 Thu, Oct. 27 **Jesus the Heir of David** Acts 13:21-31
 Fri, Oct. 28 **The Bright Morning Star** Revelation 22:12-17
 Sat, Oct. 29 **Making Melody to God** Psalm 89:20-29, 34-37
 Sun, Oct. 30 **A Higher Perspective** 1 Samuel 16:1-13

 Mon, Oct. 31 **Receive the Holy Spirit** Acts 19:1-12
 Tue, Nov. 1 **Renounce Sinful Practices** Acts 19:13-20
 Wed, Nov. 2 **God Is My Light and Salvation** Psalm 27
 Thu, Nov. 3 **Chosen in God's Providence** Esther 4:5-17
 Fri, Nov. 4 **You Are God's Chosen People** Deuteronomy 7:1-11
 Sat, Nov. 5 **The Way, the Truth, the Life** John 14:1-14
 Sun, Nov. 6 **God's Eternal Plan of Salvation** Ephesians 1:1-14

 Mon, Nov. 7 **The Gospel Threatens Vested Interests** Acts 19:21-31
 Tue, Nov. 8 **Encouraging Disciples and Saying Farewell** Acts 19:32-20:1
 Wed, Nov. 9 **The Gospel Bestows an Inheritance** Acts 20:17-21, 26-35
 Thu, Nov. 10 **The Lord Is My Portion** Psalm 16
 Fri, Nov. 11 **Be Strong and Courageous** Joshua 1:1-9
 Sat, Nov. 12 **Rejoice in God's Salvation** Isaiah 25
 Sun, Nov. 13 **A Glorious Inheritance** Ephesians 1:15-23

Lesson Cycle Chart

International Sunday School Lesson Cycle, September 2022–August 2026

Year	Fall Quarter (Sep, Oct, Nov)	Winter Quarter (Dec, Jan, Feb)	Spring Quarter (Mar, Apr, May)	Summer Quarter (Jun, Jul, Aug)
2022– 2023	God's Exceptional Choice Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians	From Darkness to Light 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter	Jesus Calls Us Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts	The Righteous Reign of God Prophets, Matthew, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians
2023– 2024	God's Law Is Love Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians	Faith That Pleases God Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Prophets, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews	Examining Our Faith Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude	Hope in the Lord Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Epistles
2024– 2025	Worship in the Covenant Community Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, John	A King Forever and Ever Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke	Costly Sacrifices Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Matthew, Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation	Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings Genesis, Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter
2025– 2026	Judah, From Isaiah to Exile 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel	Enduring Beliefs of the Church Exodus, Psalms, Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation	Social Teachings of the Church Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Epistles	Faithful Witnesses Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos, Gospels, Acts, 2 Timothy, Philemon

The Power of Acrostics

Teacher Tips by Mary T. Lederleitner

Because adult learners live busy, distracted lives, you may find it challenging to make a memorable teaching point. Further, many adults are convinced that they are not good at memorization, so they don't make any attempt to improve in that regard.

The use of acrostics can be an effective way for teachers to make a lasting impression with students. An acrostic is a piece of writing in which the first letter of each word, line, or paragraph spells out another word or phrase. By remembering one specific word or phrase, students are able to then remember other words and phrases. Acrostics engage the mind in unique ways, thus making memorization more accessible.

Neural Pathways

Neuroscientists who study the human nervous system in regard to human learning have found a connection between learning and neural pathways. These pathways serve as connections between different parts of the human nervous system. The more utilized the connections, the stronger the pathways might become.

Through the repetitive use of these pathways, memory and learning are established and strengthened. Various memory devices, like acrostics, are helpful for teachers to use because these devices build on learners' existing neural pathways and serve to reinforce teaching points.

A Useful Example

Acrostics have been used to educate believers on ways to share their faith. Some believers feel ill-prepared to share their faith—perhaps due to a sense of intimidation or fear. To encourage and strengthen believers in this regard, the following model of evangelism was created.

The *BLESS* model utilizes an acrostic to highlight five steps to help believers share their faith. *B* stands for “begin with prayer.” The work of evan-

gelism all begins with God. *L* stands for “listen.” Active listening is an important aspect in building evangelistic relationships. *E* stands for “eat.” Finding space to share a meal with a person is a way by which the evangelistic relationship can grow. *S* stands for “serve.” Evangelism involves service: the willingness to serve others or let them serve you. The final *S* stands for “share.” Evangelism culminates when believers share the story of how their lives changed because of Jesus.

This acrostic helps believers learn and internalize the steps of evangelism. What could be an elaborate approach is streamlined as believers learn to bless others via the *BLESS* approach.

The Power of Linking

An acrostic's power lies in its ability to link one word with other words. *BLESS* links a single, easy-to-remember word to the activities of evangelism.

However, acrostics can be more potent for your class when the acrostic links Scripture texts to your teaching points. In this quarter, as you teach on God's choice of His people, what acrostics can you create based on the word *CHOICE*?

Playing with Words

To help spur your creativity in using acrostics, consider the following questions: What words do learners use in your context? What phrases might your learners consider to be commonplace, funny, or serious? Are there ways to employ frequently used key words or phrases? At the end of the day, what do you want learners to remember?

Pray and ask God for creativity and wisdom regarding the use of acrostics in your teaching. You will not want to use acrostics all the time, lest they start to feel recycled and stale. However, the timely use of acrostics will cause learners to perk up and pay attention. While developing acrostics may take some effort on your part, the long-term impact for your learners is worth the investment!

The Call of Abram

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 11:8-19
Background Scripture: Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-7

Genesis 12:1-5, 7

1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Genesis 15:1-7

1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

7 And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

Key Text

The LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. —Genesis 12:7

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 1: God Calls Abraham's Family

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List key features of Abraham's call and subsequent covenant vision.
2. Explain the relationship between that call and vision.
3. Identify one or more ways that Abraham's obedience will serve as a model to his or her obedience under the new covenant.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Answering the Call
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Call Announced (Genesis 12:1-5, 7)

- A. God's Declaration, Part 1 (vv. 1-3)
Grieving and Going
- B. Abram's Response (vv. 4-5)
- C. God's Declaration, Part 2 (v. 7)

II. The Call Affirmed (Genesis 15:1-7)

- A. Protection Pledged (v. 1)
"But Jesus Is with You!"
- B. Challenge Offered (vv. 2-3)
- C. Promise Confirmed (vv. 4-5)
- D. Righteousness Reckoned (vv. 6-7)

Conclusion

- A. Abram Answered. Will You?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Answering the Call

"When 'the Mouse' offers you a job, you say yes," an executive chef on a Disney cruise declared. Prior to his work with Disney, the chef had worked in an executive capacity at several successful restaurants. He enjoyed the line of work but had not considered doing so on the seas.

However, his name was suggested to the cruise line for a position. Eventually someone from the company called him, conducted an interview, and made an offer. The chef accepted, and for over a decade he has served in several upscale restaurants at sea. The chef answered the call, and the decision changed his life forever.

How much more so with God! When He calls, He expects a faith-filled response. His call may feel rather demanding, even overwhelming. In today's lesson, God called someone to a new context so that God's promises could be fulfilled.

B. Lesson Context

The first 11 chapters of Genesis look at humanity broadly—from their creation and fall (Genesis 1–3), to their acts of violence (4:2-12) and wickedness (6:5-6, 11-12), to their judgment and rescue (6:7–9:17). Despite all this, people still made vain attempts to focus attention on themselves (11:1-9).

As Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament, such a broad focus is understandable. This prepares readers of all eras to hear how God worked through humanity generally and specifically through one family.

After the flood narrative (Genesis 6–10), the text lists the descendants of Noah's son Shem (11:10-25). This genealogy culminated with Terah, the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran (11:26).

Terah outlived Haran, the father of Lot (Genesis 11:27-28). Terah's other sons, Abram and Nahor, were both married. However, Abram and his wife Sarai were unable to conceive (11:29-30).

The family lived in Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:31). This ancient Mesopotamian city was located on the banks of the Euphrates River. Modern archaeological discoveries have provided insight into the city's wealth, culture, and pagan religious

practices. The family's connections to the city likely ran deep, and at one time they took part in the city's pagan religious practices (see Joshua 24:2).

However, the family did not stay in Ur. Terah led Abram, Sarai, and Lot toward Canaan, a land bordering the western edges of the Mediterranean Sea (see Genesis 10:19). But Terah did not complete the journey. He settled and died in Haran (11:31b-32), an important city on a major trade route between Mesopotamia and Canaan.

Today's Scripture text continues narrowing the focus as it highlights the family of Abram. (Note that Abram is the same man who later had his name changed to Abraham; see Genesis 17:5.)

I. The Call Announced

(Genesis 12:1-5, 7)

A. God's Declaration, Part 1 (vv. 1-3)

1. Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

As *the Lord* addressed *Abram*, the focus of the text turns to the life of this man. The text gives no clues regarding the way through which God spoke. All that is noted is that God called to Abram.

That God told Abram to *get thee out* emphasized that God expected His imperative to be followed. Toward the end of Abram's narrative, God would show similar urgency by telling Abram to "get thee" to a certain place to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:2).

If Abram had stayed in Haran, the livelihood of his *kindred* could have been jeopardized. In a culture of polytheism (meaning "many gods"), the act of worshipping the one true God could have required Abram to detach from the larger community. This may be part of the reason that God ordered Abram to leave everything behind and proceed to a new *land*.

In the ancient world, a person's identity and social standing were attached to family and ancestry. For this reason, genealogies and ancestral records were of great importance (examples: Genesis 5; 11:10-32; Nehemiah 7:6-64). Additionally, inheritance claims and family responsibilities were tied to a person's family lineage.

By calling Abram to leave his *father's house*, God called him to a new identity. As he followed God's imperative, Abram would demonstrate trust, even if uncertainties remained (see Hebrews 11:8).

Grieving and Going

As the child of a military service member, I learned to relocate every few years. This constant churn is one reason why moving to a new country sounded appealing. I didn't have a strong attachment to any particular "home"—or so I thought.

Recently, I found myself weeping at my parents' house. My wife and I were staying with my parents before leaving to become missionaries abroad. I was emotional because I realized that my nuclear family—regardless of their location—had always been my "home." They were a stabilizing force during every move. As I prepared to move abroad, I felt the significance of not living near my family.

Perhaps Abram experienced similar grief as he left his family to follow God's call. He might have never seen them again. When God calls you to follow Him, will you go no matter the cost? —N. G.

2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.

Blessing would result if Abram obeyed God: the childless Abram would become *a great nation*. Nothing from this promise indicated human power. Abram's descendants would become great only because of the Lord's steadfast love and promises (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

His descendants were not to be like other nations. Instead, they were to be a "holy people . . . above all the nations" (Deuteronomy 14:2; see Leviticus 20:26). Their unique establishment

How to Say It

Chaldees	<i>Kal-deez.</i>
Eliezer	<i>El-ih-ee-zer.</i>
Haran	<i>Hair-un.</i>
Moreh	<i>Moe-reh.</i>
Nahor	<i>Nay-hor.</i>
Sichem	<i>Sigh-kem.</i>
Terah	<i>Tair-uh.</i>

would cause God's name to be glorified and made great among the peoples of the earth (see Isaiah 29:23; 60:21-22; Ezekiel 36:23).

Abram and his descendants were tasked with living among other nations in a manner that would result in the *blessing* of both groups. In a way, Abram's descendants were to serve as a "kingdom of priests" for the whole world (Exodus 19:5-6).

3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Abram would not have to face trials alone—God would give protection as He would *curse* all people *that curseth* Abram. As a result, blessing would continue for generations (compare Exodus 23:22).

God's choice was not to the exclusion and rejection of other people. The apostle Paul interpreted God's promise of blessing to apply also to people who expressed faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 4; Galatians 3:7-9, 14). Further, this blessing included making salvation available to all people, regardless of ancestry, through Abram's seed (see 3:26-29).

As Abram followed God, he would be a witness of God's grace and mercy to the peoples of the world. As *all families of the earth* saw how Abram's descendants obeyed God and saw the blessings that resulted, they would want to follow the same God and *be blessed* themselves (Acts 3:25).

What Do You Think?

In what ways has God provided blessings for you?

Digging Deeper

How might believers live in a way that blesses their unbelieving family and friends?

B. Abram's Response (vv. 4-5)

4. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

One might expect *Abram* to have discussed the issue with God or provided pushback. (Compare Abraham's discussion with God regarding Sodom's pending judgment, Genesis 18:16-33.)

But there is no record that Abram did so. He obeyed and *departed out of Haran*. Abram showed faith trusted that God would not renounce His promises.

By allowing *Lot* to go *with him*, Abram acted honorably (see Genesis 11:27-28). Given this act, combined with Abram's advanced age (*seventy and five years old*) and his childless reality (11:30), one might expect the promised blessing to come through Lot. However, that was not the case (see 17:19). Lot would cause great difficulty and heartache for Abram (see 13:2-13; 14:1-16).

What Do You Think?

How can believers ensure their obedience to God's commands?

Digging Deeper

What is the connection, if any, between obedience to God and resulting blessing from Him?

5. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

While God called *Abram* specifically, the call apparently included more than him alone. Thus we see him taking his wealth (Genesis 13:2) and extended household on the trip.

Abram's journey *into the land of Canaan* brought the travelers to Moreh of Shechem (Genesis 12:6, not in our printed text). This region would become a significant place for Abram's descendants (see 35:4; Joshua 24:25). Its importance among Abram's descendants resulted from his obedience.

C. God's Declaration, Part 2 (v. 7)

7a. And the LORD appeared unto Abram.

Abram's obedience brought him to a new land and to a new interaction with *the Lord*. Several other times he experienced God's self-disclosure (see Genesis 17:1; 18:1). Other patriarchs had similar experiences (see 26:2; 35:1; 46:2; 48:3). The means by which God appeared is not the most

important aspect. Instead, most important is His desire to reveal and the content of His words.

7b. And said, Unto thy seed will I give this land.

The content of God's declaration reveals a new aspect of the previously given promises. The manner through which Abram would become "a great nation" (Genesis 12:2, above) would be through his descendants (his *seed*) and *this land* of Canaan. These two are often mentioned in discussion of God's promises to His Old Testament people (see Genesis 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 48:4; Exodus 32:13; 33:1; etc.).

7c. And there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Abram's act of building *an altar* in response to God's words was of significance. Other cultures built altars to their pagan gods (see Deuteronomy 12:2-3). But Abram did not reuse a pagan altar.

Instead, Abram built a new altar to *the Lord*. By doing so, Abram announced the focus of his worship to the one true God. This altar served as a tangible reminder of God's faithfulness and presence (compare Genesis 8:18-20; 13:14-18; 35:7; Exodus 17:15; 24:3-4; etc.).

What Do You Think?

How can believers tangibly remember and celebrate God's work?

Digging Deeper

How might Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-18; Joshua 4; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 provide believers with examples of tangible remembrance?

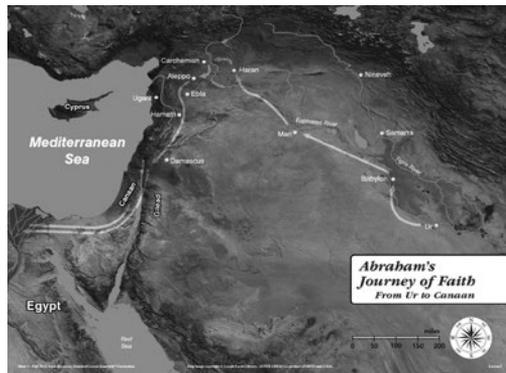
II. The Call Affirmed

(Genesis 15:1-7)

A. Protection Pledged (v. 1)

1. After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Abram's first interactions in the land were challenging. For a time, Abram and Lot lived separately (Genesis 13:10-18). Eventually, the two were reunited when Abram saved Lot from captivity



Visual for Lesson 1. Show this map as you teach on the locations, events, and people of the first unit of lessons.

(14:11-16). Additionally, Abram met with a mysterious king and offered him a tithe (14:18-20; Hebrews 7:1-10). It was *after these things* that God appeared again to Abram.

The underlying Hebrew translated here as *vision* occurs only three other times in the Old Testament. The word's stress is not necessarily on the revelation's visual component, but that a specific utterance from God had arrived (see Numbers 24:4, 16).

It was the vision's content that was most important for Abram. That God promised to be Abram's *shield* is indicative of His care and protection for His people (see Deuteronomy 33:29; 2 Samuel 22:3, 31; Psalms 3:3; 28:7; 84:11; 115:9-11). In a dangerous new land, Abram could take comfort in God's protection.

During an encounter with the king of Sodom, Abram refused riches and financial gain from the king (Genesis 14:22-24). Abram did not want to depend on the wealth of others. Instead, he trusted that the Lord himself would be an *exceeding great reward*.

"But Jesus Is with You!"

"Come see this really cool thing!" I heard my 8-year-old implore his 4-year-old brother. The older son is frequently afraid to go upstairs by himself. He often comes up with creative ruses to entice his younger brother to accompany him up the stairs. Most of the time the ruses work, and the younger brother happily complies.

However, if my older son revealed his fear, the younger son would answer, “But Jesus is with you!” The 4-year-old is unwavering on this point. He explains he isn’t afraid because “Jesus is with me!”

Our youngest seems to grasp the truth of God’s exhortation to Abram: “Fear not” (Genesis 15:1). What are you most afraid of right now? Can you say with confidence “Jesus is with me”—and let Him be your shield? —N. G.

B. Challenge Offered (vv. 2-3)

2. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

For the first time, we have a record of *Abram* responding directly to the *Lord God*. The response was filled with concern. God’s promises would not come to fruition unless Abram had a child of his own. His words reflected an awareness of the Lord’s promise to make of him “a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). Yet at this point Abram remained *childless*, and his wife was past the age of child-bearing (see 12:4; 17:17). How could God truly be Abram’s “exceeding great reward” (15:1) under these circumstances?

The steward . . . Eliezer may have joined the journey during travel from Haran to Canaan (Genesis 12:4-5) since *Damascus* is situated between the two locations.

The act of transferring the heir’s rights to the steward of Abram’s *house* would have been a last resort to ensure Abram’s legacy. The transference of an heir’s blessing from a firstborn to another person was not unusual in the narrative of Abram’s descendants (see Genesis 25:31-33; 48:13-14; 49:3-4).

3. And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

Ancient adoption practices allowed for a childless couple to adopt another man as household servant or steward. This person would then care for the couple in their old age and provide a proper burial when they died. As a result, this person would then inherit the family property. This allowed for an *heir* and continuation of the family line.

Familial love and care, while possible, were not

the primary reason for many ancient adoptions. Instead, this relationship was more like a business contract between adults. Considering the likelihood of this result, Abram vented his frustrations to God. How could the God who promised so much also provide *no seed* to Abram?

What Do You Think?

What circumstances have left you feeling angry or frustrated with God?

Digging Deeper

How can you comfort another believer who may experience these feelings?

C. Promise Confirmed (vv. 4-5)

4. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

In response to Abram’s frustration, *the Lord* spoke to him with assurance. God’s promises would not be diverted—*this* man, Eliezer, would *not* become Abram’s *heir*. God declared that a child from Abram’s *own bowels* would instead be his heir. When God makes a promise, He will keep it, although its fulfillment may not align with earthly expectations. This heir would be the first of many “children of promise” (see Galatians 4:28).

5. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

God had previously compared the number of Abram’s descendants to “the dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:16). The numerous *stars* in the sky also served to illustrate God’s promise. The assertion that Abram’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars is one of the most prevalent promises in Scripture (see Genesis 22:17; 26:4; Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chronicles 27:23; Nehemiah 9:23; Hebrews 11:12).

God did not dismiss Abram’s frustration, nor did He give an explanation. Instead, God merely reaffirmed His promises. If God had kept His promises thus far, Abram could trust that God would keep His promises in full.

D. Righteousness Reckoned (vv. 6-7)

6a. And he believed in the LORD.

That Abram *believed* did not simply mean he felt good about his relationship with God. Rather Abram demonstrated faith when he trusted that these promises would come to pass; he trusted in the guarantor of those promises. Abram knew what his descendants would someday find out: *the Lord* is faithful and keeps His promises (Deuteronomy 7:9).

6b. And he counted it to him for righteousness.

Abram's belief did not go unnoticed—it would become the model for all others (see Hebrews 11:8-10, 12). His belief led to his being *counted . . . for righteousness*—being viewed in right standing with God.

Because God's own nature is righteous and perfect (see Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 103:6, 17; Zephaniah 3:5; Zechariah 8:8; etc.), He desires that His people be righteous as well. They could live righteously and justly, with God and with others, as they did “that which is lawful and right” (Ezekiel 18:5).

The text utilizes an accounting metaphor: God counted Abram's faith as the foundation for righteousness. The underlying Hebrew verb gets at the idea of regarding something or someone as having a certain characteristic, although that thing or person may not actually have that characteristic (compare Genesis 31:15; Numbers 18:27; Job 18:3; Proverbs 17:28; etc.). Abram's faith was enough for God to consider Abram in right standing with Him.

For the apostle Paul, this verse provided background on the nature of salvation. As righteousness came to Abraham (Abram's later name) through his faith, all people who follow his example and demonstrate faith will be counted as righteous (Romans 4:1-8, 13-15, 22). People who demonstrate faith in God are considered “children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7) regardless of their ancestry (3:8-9).

The apostle James further the narrative regarding the faith of Abram. Not only was he counted righteous, but he was also called “the Friend of God” (James 2:23). His words and deeds exhibited the presence of his faith.

What Do You Think?

What is the relationship between belief and right action (see James 2:14-24)?

Digging Deeper

How would you explain righteousness to a person unfamiliar with Scripture?

7. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

The Lord brought Abram from his homeland in *Ur* to the *land* that He promised. Abram could be encouraged because the one who would declare himself “*I am*” (Exodus 3:14) was guiding him.

Conclusion

A. Abram Answered. Will You?

Abram had to answer a difficult call with boldness, courage, and faith. God had placed the call, and Abram answered by way of relocating his family. This decision would radically change his life and the lives of others for centuries.

There will be times in the life of a believer when the challenge is not to *find* God's will but to *follow* God's call. This call may lead to a different job, a new neighborhood, or even to an unknown land. Yet if we remain faithful to God and trust in His steadfast promises, He will bless us deeply.

B. Prayer

God, throughout history You have shown yourself to be faithful. Give us faith to follow Your call and patience to trust You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God calls us—we only need to follow His directions!

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 13) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. Order No. 1629122 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Begin class by saying, “You have been faced with a call and offered a prestigious job. How will you answer?” Instruct participants to give a thumbs-up sign if they would accept or a thumbs-down sign if they would decline.

Continue adding conditions to the job offer: “You will have to move away from family and friends.” “You can expect to work an average of 65 hours a week.” “You will be 100 percent vested in company stock options at the beginning of the job.” After stating each condition, allow time for students to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down sign.

After the activity ask for volunteers to discuss why they accepted or declined the call and what conditions affected their decision in this regard. Transition to Bible study by saying, “In today’s lesson we will see how God placed a call on the life of Abram. The conditions of God’s call required life-changing decisions from Abram.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups, giving each group a handout (you prepare) according to the following: **Nation Group:** Genesis 12:1-2; 15:1 / **Blessing Group:** Genesis 12:3-4; 15:2-4 / **Provision Group:** Genesis 12:5, 7; 15:5-7.

Ask the group to read their assigned Scripture passages and answer the following questions: 1—Identify the promise(s) that God made to Abram. 2—How did God fulfill the promise(s) during Abram’s life? 3—How would the fulfilled promise(s) affect Abram’s descendants? 4—How would the fulfilled promise(s) affect the world?

After 10 minutes, reconvene the class and have a volunteer from each group read their responses.

Transition to the second part of the activity by saying, “God’s promises and Abram’s responses were seen as important by the New Testament writers. Let’s see how the apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews refer to the events of today’s lesson.”

Have students remain in the same groups as before, and assign one of the following New Testament passages to each group: Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:8-12.

Have each group answer the following questions on a handout that you prepare beforehand: 1—What promise does the New Testament passage highlight? 2—How does the New Testament writer interpret God’s promise(s)? 3—How does the New Testament writer interpret Abram’s (Abraham’s) response(s)?

After 10 minutes have a volunteer from each group read the group’s responses for each question.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “God’s Promises Fulfilled” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated. After 10 minutes, ask volunteers to share their conclusions.

After either activity, make the transition to Into Life by saying, “The narrative of Abram can inform us greatly regarding obedience and emboldened faith. The next practice will demonstrate how today’s Scripture passage is more than a good story for us to read.”

Into Life

Write two headers on the board: “Abram” and “Us.” Through whole-class discussion, have students work together to make a list under the “Abram” header regarding how Abram lived in obedience, faith, trust, and right action regarding the commands of God. Through the same discussion model, have students work together to make a list under the “Us” header of how believers might live in obedience, faith, trust, and right action regarding the commands of God. These answers should be based on Scripture and personal testimony.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Emboldened and Obedient” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity individually in a minute.

God Chooses the Younger Twin

Devotional Reading: Psalm 75
Background Scripture: Genesis 25:19-34

Genesis 25:19b-34

19b Abraham begat Isaac:

20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

21 And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his

name was called Jacob: and Isaac was three-score years old when she bare them.

27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

Key Text

The LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

—Genesis 25:23

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 1: God Calls Abraham's Family

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the account and result of Rebekah's pregnancy.
2. Contrast the motives of Jacob and Esau.
3. Identify a character quality to demonstrate this week in handling a conflict.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Unhappy in Its Own Way
- B. Lesson Context

I. Unexpected Declaration (Genesis 25:19b-23)

- A. Two Generations (vv. 19b-22)
All That's Humanly Possible
- B. Two Nations (v. 23)

II. Undeniable Differences (Genesis 25:24-28)

- A. Physically (vv. 24-26)
- B. Personality (vv. 27-28)
Family Feud?

III. Unruly Disregard (Genesis 25:29-34)

- A. Desperate (vv. 29-32)
- B. Despised (vv. 33-34)

Conclusion

- A. Unworthy but Chosen
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Unhappy in Its Own Way

A popular English translation of Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* begins with the following observation: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The statement highlights an important concept for the novel: numerous factors might affect a family's relationship and well-being. Any of these factors might go awry and lead to a family's dysfunction.

From my experience ministering to families, I have seen Tolstoy's generalization lived out. I have seen that a family's happiness correlates to its levels of commitment, love, and respect for one another.

Conversely, I have seen that unhappy families experience turmoil in a variety of ways: bad attitudes, unfaithfulness, favoritism, anger, and addiction. Regardless of what may have caused the families to experience these things, the negative effects were noticeable.

God is at work, even in unhappy families. This week's lesson introduces us to a family that experienced strife and conflict. As a result, the direction of whole nations would forever be affected.

B. Lesson Context

The second half of Genesis introduces audiences to Abraham (originally known as Abram) and his family line. God promised that this family would be the way by which He would bless the world (Genesis 12:1-3; see lesson 1). Despite Abraham and Sarah's fertility issues and their advanced age (11:30; 12:4), God provided them with a son, Isaac (21:1-7).

However, Abraham would have other sons by other women. Hagar, a servant of wife Sarah, gave birth to Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-4, 15-16). After Sarah died, Abraham took another wife, Keturah, who bore him other sons (25:1-2). However, Abraham held Isaac in the highest regard (25:5-6). Isaac eventually married Rebekah (24:67). Together they settled in the southern part of Canaan, near the Sinai Peninsula (25:11; see 16:14).

Throughout Genesis, family lines and the concept of generations serve as transition points in the text. For original audiences, these served as mark-

ers for moments of great significance, and each marked a new focus in the narrative (see Genesis 5; 6:9-10; 11:10-27; 25:12-18).

The underlying Hebrew word translated as “generations” (Genesis 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10; etc.) reminds audiences to focus their attention on the upcoming narrative and the individuals depicted. This lesson focuses on “the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son” (25:19a).

I. Unexpected Declaration

(Genesis 25:19b-23)

A. Two Generations (vv. 19b-22)

19b. Abraham begat Isaac.

God had promised *Abraham* that he would become “a great nation” (Genesis 12:2) with numerous descendants (15:5). The fulfillment of this promise seemed impossible. However, God was gracious to the couple, and He fulfilled His promise: Sarah gave birth to *Isaac* (21:2-3).

20. And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

Abraham sent a servant to his ancestral homeland, Mesopotamia, to find a *wife* for *Isaac* (Genesis 24:1-10). At *forty years old*, Isaac might be considered an elderly bachelor. However, considering the marriage practices of the era (compare 26:34) and his eventual length of life (35:28), his seemingly advanced marital age was likely not uncommon.

Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham’s nephew *Bethuel* (Genesis 22:20-23; 24:15), was chosen to marry Isaac. Her family—especially her brother *Laban*—would be important for Abraham’s descendants (see 29:10-12; 30:25–31:55).

The region of *Padanaram* was in northwest Mesopotamia. One of the principal cities of the region was Haran, the place where Abraham (as Abram) began his journey (Genesis 12:4; see lesson 1). As this was the patriarch’s ancestral homeland, *Padanaram* serves as a critical location in the family’s narrative (see 28:1-7; 31:18; 35:9).

The repetition of the title *Syrian* differentiated Rebekah’s family from neighboring Canaanite families (see also Genesis 31:20, 24; compare Deu-

teronomy 26:5). Abraham considered Canaanite women inappropriate for Isaac to marry (Genesis 24:1-4; compare 27:46–28:2).

21a. And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren.

Although a suitable *wife* for *Isaac* was found, that was no guarantee regarding the continuation of the family line. Infertility had also affected Isaac’s mother, Sarah (Genesis 11:30). Both generations had to depend on God’s power in order to conceive.

Just as his father had done years before (see Genesis 15:1-4), Isaac *intreated the Lord* through prayer. Unlike other women in the Old Testament, there is no record of Rebekah’s approaching the Lord in prayer regarding her infertility (compare 30:22; 1 Samuel 1:10-11).

All That’s Humanly Possible

My heart broke as a I heard my friends describe their trials. They desired children of their own, but they were unable to conceive. They conferred with doctors and specialists, costing the couple time and money. After many failed attempts to conceive, the couple determined that they had done all that was humanly possible. They placed their struggle in God’s hands and would await His answer.

This couple is not alone in their struggles to conceive. You probably know several couples who are facing struggles regarding fertility and conception, whether you realize their struggles or not!

When Rebekah faced fertility challenges, Isaac approached God in prayer. Do you pray for the couples in your life who face fertility struggles? More broadly, how do you pray for the invisible struggles that others experience? —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

How can churches support families who may be dealing with infertility?

Digging Deeper

How can your church be sensitive to the experiences of childless adults among your congregation?

21b. And the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

However, Isaac’s prayers were answered as *the*

Lord was intreated of him (compare Judges 13:8-9). That *Rebekah . . . conceived* highlighted God's work in doing what people might consider impossible.

22. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

The underlying Hebrew word translated *struggled* is fairly common in the Old Testament, but its rare construction in this verse alludes to conflict that is more intense than ordinarily expected. Rebekah's physical distress was more than would be anticipated by a pregnant woman; something deeper and more serious was at hand.

Hagar experienced a divine interaction during her pregnancy (see Genesis 16:7-14). That interaction provided her with hope and encouragement. Perhaps Rebekah was trying *to enquire of the Lord* and experience the same kind of comfort that Hagar received.

B. Two Nations (v. 23)

23a. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people.

The Lord's response set up future conflict between Rebekah's children (see Genesis 27). The internal conflict she experienced would someday continue outside her *womb* as her children would become *two nations*. God was not necessarily addressing the conflict that would immediately occur, but conflict between the *people* of their descendants (see commentary on 25:30, below).

The text does not immediately describe how the two people groups would come from her two unborn children. *The Lord* was not directing Rebekah regarding her future parenting practices. Further, the text is not describing a form of divine predeterminism by which people have no role and responsibility. Instead, God was describing the future realities of generations and thereby reinforcing the promise that Abraham would "be a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4).

23b. And the elder shall serve the younger.

Primogeniture—the right or inheritance of the firstborn—was a crucial element of the ancient Near East's social and legal systems (see Gen-

esis 27:19; Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Rebekah, along with the text's original audience, would have anticipated that her first child would receive greater status and acclaim than the second child.

However, the Lord overturned those expectations. Rebekah's *elder* child would not receive the expected firstborn blessing. Instead, the blessing would be given to (actually, taken by) *the younger* child (compare Genesis 17:18-21; 49:3-4).

God did not provide details regarding the younger child's acquisition of power. God's intentions will come to pass, regardless of human structures (see 1 Corinthians 1:27-31). He transforms broken situations because His ways are superior to ours (see Isaiah 55:8-9). As a result, humans are to respond to Him in love and faith (see Deuteronomy 7:7-9; John 3:16-18; Ephesians 1:3-14).

The apostle Paul elaborates on today's text in Romans 9:10-12. The significance of this text for Paul was that God chose the younger child (Jacob) before he was even born. God's purpose for the world resulted in His call of Jacob as the individual through whom God's promises would be fulfilled.

What Do You Think?

What prayers are appropriate for a parent to say for their quarreling children?

Digging Deeper

What prayers are appropriate for a believer to say for parents who may be dealing with quarrelsome children?

II. Undeniable Differences

(Genesis 25:24-28)

A. Physically (vv. 24-26)

24-25. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

Scripture describes instances when a child's name indicated something about the parents' relationship with God (see 1 Samuel 1:20; 4:21) or the circumstances surrounding the child's birth (see Genesis 35:18). The naming of Rebekah's *twins* reflected similar practice.

The *name Esau* reflected a physical attribute of the *first* child: his skin, hair, or both appeared *red*. The pronunciation of this underlying Hebrew word sounds similar to another name given to Esau (see commentary on Genesis 25:30, below). This Hebrew word was also used to describe David’s “ruddy” health (1 Samuel 16:12; see lesson 9). Esau’s *hairy* physique would become key in how he would lose his firstborn blessing (see Genesis 27:11).

26a. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau’s heel; and his name was called Jacob.

The name of Esau’s *brother* also demonstrates wordplay and foreshadowing. The underlying Hebrew word for *Jacob* has multiple connections. It is related to a verb concerning the act of grasping—either for protection or restraining movement, like using a *hand* to take *hold* of something (see Hosea 12:3). Another similar sounding Hebrew verb describes fraud or trickery (see Jeremiah 9:4). Later texts would describe how Jacob demonstrated the latter sense (see Genesis 27:35-36).

Further, Jacob’s name has similarities to the Hebrew word for “heel,” thus relating his name to his actions during his birth. Jacob’s act of grabbing *Esau’s heel* during birth foreshadows future dealings between the brothers and Jacob’s interactions with others—Jacob would be shrewd and cunning as he took what he desired.

26b. And Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

That *Isaac* was *threescore years old* (that is, age 60) highlights the 20 year period that the couple had to wait before having children (see Genesis 25:20). This time was reminiscent of the long wait Isaac’s parents endured before his own birth (see 21:5). God was faithful to this family, even if His timing was not what they desired or expected.

B. Personality (vv. 27-28)

27a. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field.

The brothers’ differences became apparent as *the boys grew* up. In a nomadic culture, having a family member serve as a *hunter* was important for the family’s livelihood (compare Genesis 10:8-

9). That he was *cunning* alluded to his knowledge of the land: the surrounding *field* and its resources (see 27:3, 5). Considering his perception, pulling a fast one on Esau would be difficult—or so one might think.

27b. And Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

One meaning of the Hebrew word translated here as *plain* describes a guiltless and upright person who was not liable for wrongdoing (see references to Job in Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Its usage regarding Jacob was an ironic descriptor, considering that his future actions were anything but guiltless.

In contrast to his outdoorsman brother, Jacob preferred to live a life *dwelling in* the *tents* of the home camp. As a result, he may have had a propensity for administration, an aptitude later demonstrated by his son Joseph (see Genesis 39:4, 22-23; 41:33-40, 46-49).

28. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

The favoritism demonstrated in that each parent *loved* a particular son would be repeated years later by *Jacob* (renamed Israel; Genesis 37:3-4). Isaac’s love for *Esau* and his hunting would be a factor in how Jacob and *Rebekah* plotted against Esau and *Isaac* regarding the father’s blessing (see 27:2-13).

What Do You Think?

How can parents avoid showing favoritism toward one of their children?

Digging Deeper

What practices ensure that believers do not show favoritism in their congregations?

Family Feud?

When you think of the title above, the first image that may come to mind is that of the long-running TV game show of the same name. And while that show is all in good fun, some bitter rivalries between families, such as that of the Hatfields and the McCoys in the nineteenth century, exist. Those two families spent decades in violent conflict.

But that was an *interfamily* feud, while the text

JACOB VS ESAU:

A POWER STRUGGLE FROM THE WOMB



Visual for Lesson 2. Show this visual as you ask the class what part of God's words in Genesis 25:23 is most surprising.

at hand presents us with an *intrafamily* rivalry. The distinction is important because causes, effects, and dynamics are often quite different. As an example, feuds *between* families are usually overt—highly visible. Feuds *within* families, on the other hand, are often hidden from public view as individuals maneuver against one another in subtle ways to form or destroy alliances. Parental favoritism magnifies the problem.

Do you see yourself in any of this? If your answer is no, would you be willing to check for blind spots by asking others if they agree with your self-assessment? —C. R. B.

III. Unruly Disregard

(Genesis 25:29-34)

A. Desperate (vv. 29-32)

29. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint.

That *Jacob sod pottage* implied that he was preparing a stew. The stew might have consisted of herbs, vegetables, and lentils (see Genesis 25:34, below; compare 2 Kings 4:38-40).

This encounter might have occurred at a shepherding camp where the brothers tended livestock. That *Esau* was an outdoorsman made it natural for him to go out into *the field*. This left Jacob to manage the chores around camp, including meal preparation. As a result of Esau's hard work, he felt *faint* with exhaustion (compare Judges 8:5).

30. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Esau's pleading made him appear impulsive as he focused on immediate physical concerns. His request to *feed me, I pray* could be read as exasperated begging. Instead of making a level-headed request, Esau sounded like a beggar.

The Hebrew word translated here as *red* was used to describe Esau at his birth (see commentary on Genesis 25:25, above). An alternative *name* for Esau sounded similar: *Edom* (see 36:1, 8, 19).

Esau's descendants were the Edomites (Genesis 36:9, 43). They would eventually settle in the region of Seir (Deuteronomy 2:22), south-east of the Dead Sea. During the era when kings ruled Israel, a constant state of tension and frequent warfare existed between the Edomites and the Israelites (see 1 Samuel 14:47; 1 Kings 11:14). As a result, God's promise to Rebekah regarding her sons (Genesis 25:23b, above) came to pass. The descendants of her older son would serve the descendants of her younger son (see 2 Samuel 8:14; 2 Kings 14:1, 7).

31. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

In contrast to Esau's desperate pleading, *Jacob* is portrayed as opportunistic and manipulative. It is unknown whether Rebekah revealed to him the nature of God's promises. But what is certain is that Jacob drove a hard bargain. This was an expensive bowl of soup—it would cost Esau the rights that only a firstborn would enjoy.

The firstborn's *birthright* would include a double portion of the father's estate (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Isaac was a wealthy man (Genesis 26:12-14), therefore the birthright would have been sizable.

What Do You Think?

What things might believers consider to be their "birthright" that may instead hinder their relationship with God?

Digging Deeper

How might these things affect relationships among believers?

32. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point

to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

Esau was driven by his physical urges. It is doubtful that he was *at the point to die*. Surely someone known as “a cunning hunter” (Genesis 25:27) would have been better prepared for hunger! His desire for immediate gratification led him to disregard the most important earthly thing that was his to lose: his *birthright*.

The writer of Hebrews depicts *Esau's* attitude and action here as “profane” (Hebrews 12:16-17). *Esau* was so focused on immediate *profit* and pleasure that he gave up lifelong blessing.

B. Despised (vv. 33-34)

33. And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

Jacob made the deal permanent by having *Esau* swear an oath. *Esau* risked divine judgment, should he later try to deny or break the agreement.

The act of swearing an oath or vow was not uncommon. Abraham swore that he would deal truthfully and kindly with Abimelech and his descendants (Genesis 21:22-24). Additionally, Abraham's servant swore that he would not procure a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites (24:3-9). These vows were irrevocable and would result in a curse if broken (see Nehemiah 10:29). While God allowed for His people to take oaths and vows, He had certain stipulations (see Numbers 30).

What Do You Think?

How should believers consider the practice of swearing an oath?

Digging Deeper

How might Leviticus 19:12; Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12; and Revelation 10:5-6 inform your answer?

34. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

Following the oath, the exasperated *Esau* received his temporary relief—*bread and pottage of lentiles*. However, the shrewd *Jacob* received per-

manent blessing—the transferred *birthright*. The older brother would continue to be at the mercy of his younger brother (see Genesis 27).

Conclusion

A. Unworthy but Chosen

Readers should be unimpressed with the attitudes and actions of the individuals described in this lesson. Isaac and Rebekah each favored one of their sons over the other. *Esau* desired immediate relief over long-term benefits. *Jacob* schemed and manipulated his brother for personal gain. A story that began with God's love and power transitions into a story of people pursuing selfish interests.

However, we need not idealize any one human character, because the Lord is the protagonist of this story. He alone can make good out of less than ideal circumstances and less than ideal people (see Romans 8:28; compare Genesis 50:20).

God worked through this deeply flawed family, and He will work in the lives of all people whom He has called. People of God should not strive to force His hand. Instead, we should trust that His plans and purposes will be fulfilled, regardless of any attempts to circumvent or force those plans.

B. Prayer

Father, we celebrate that You have chosen to work through us. Thank You for Your faithfulness to us, even when we fail to live holy lives. Prepare us so that we can live out Your purposes. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's plans will be fulfilled, either through or despite your efforts.

How to Say It

Abimelech	Uh-bim-eh-lek.
Bethuel	Beh-thew-el.
Keturah	Keh-too-ruh.
Laban	Lay-bun.
Padanaram	Pay-dan-a-ram.
Seir	See-ir.
Syrian	Sear-ee-un.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

On the board write, “I would _____ for _____.” Explain that the first blank will be filled in with an extreme action, while the second blank will be filled in with a favorite food. (For example: “I would swim an icy river for my mother’s apple pie.”)

Instruct all students to complete their own version of this phrase on a slip of paper that you will provide. After one minute, have students pass their slips to you. Randomly select one slip and read it aloud. Invite the class to guess the author. Have the author indicate when the group guesses correctly.

After this activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “In today’s story, notice what each character desires and what they do to fulfill that desire.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 25:19b-23. Divide the class into two groups: **Isaac Group** and **Rebekah Group**. Instruct each group to create a character sketch of their namesake. The sketches could be written out or drawn (with supplies you provide). After no more than 10 minutes, have a representative from each group present their sketch to the class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Get What You Want” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete rows 1 and 2.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 25:24-28. Divide the class into two new groups: **Esau Group** and **Jacob Group**. Instruct each group to create a character sketch of their namesake. Just as before, the sketches could be drawn or written out. After no more than 10 minutes, have a representative from each group present their sketch to the class. Update the Isaac and Rebekah character sketches with any new characteristics or insights.

Ask the class, “How does God’s reply to Rebekah in verse 23 seem to be playing out?” Allow for no more than three minutes of whole-class discussion.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 25:29-34. Set up a debate about which brother was “right” regarding his actions. In the same groups as previously, have each group represent and defend their namesake. Encourage each group to develop two arguments and one example to reinforce their argument. Allow no more than 10 minutes for each group to prepare.

Give each group two minutes to make their case. Allow time for each group to give a rebuttal and response. Encourage friendly discussion, but step in if discussion becomes heated.

Afterward, have the class respond to these questions in whole-class discussion: 1—Were either of the brothers truly in the right? 2—Why or why not? 3—How did their selfish desires affect their actions?

Alternative. If groups completed rows 1 and 2 of the “Get What You Want” activity, have the same groups complete rows 3 and 4 now.

Into Life

Write on the board three headers: *Desires / Consequences / James 3:17-18*. Lead the class in brainstorming selfish desires and resulting negative consequences that may lead to conflict with others. Jot down responses in the appropriate column. If necessary, encourage students not to be too specific.

Have a volunteer read James 3:17-18 aloud. Have students use the qualities named in these verses to address the selfish desires and negative consequences listed on the board. Jot down responses in the final column.

Alternative. Distribute copies of “The Situation” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it with a partner.

Close class with a prayer based on Psalm 75, a psalm composed to provide reassurance of God’s victory. Begin the prayer by reading verse 1 aloud. Allow students to pray silently regarding the conflicts they may face, asking God for His wisdom. End the prayer by reading verse 9 aloud.

Jacob Called Israel

Devotional Reading: Romans 11:25-32
Background Scripture: Genesis 32:22-32

Genesis 32:22-32

22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

23 And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his

thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

31 And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.



Key Text

He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. —Genesis 32:28

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 1: God Calls Abraham's Family

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the reason for Jacob's trip.
2. Explain the text's focus on names.
3. List attitudes and actions of Jacob to emulate and to avoid.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Defining Struggle
- B. Lesson Context
- I. The Struggle (Genesis 32:22-25)**
 - A. Jacob's Situation (vv. 22-23)
 - B. Jacob's Injury (vv. 24-25)
A Nocturnal Struggle
- II. The Debate (Genesis 32:26-29)**
 - A. Dual Demands (v. 26)
 - B. Different Designation (vv. 27-28)
What's in a Name?
 - C. Divine Delight (v. 29)
- III. The Results (Genesis 32:30-32)**
 - A. Protected at Peniel (v. 30)
 - B. Remembered by Relatives (vv. 31-32)

Conclusion

- A. The Clenched Hand of Prayer
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Defining Struggle

The image of Jacob wrestling under the night sky with a mysterious individual has captivated thinkers, artists, and writers through the centuries. The sheer number of artistic endeavors that depict this event speaks to the text's influence. Renaissance painters and modern alternative musicians have all used this event from Scripture to inform their art.

However, Jacob's struggle is more than a provocative backdrop for creating art. Nor is Jacob's struggle merely a stand-in for the battle between good and evil. Instead, the struggle would define Jacob and his descendants.

B. Lesson Context

Today's text comes from the larger set of narratives regarding Isaac's son Jacob and his conflicts with others. Jacob's struggle with his brother Esau began at their birth (Genesis 25:26, lesson 2). Their conflict became more intense by Jacob's scheming (and meal preparation) when he acquired his brother's birthright (25:29-34). Later Jacob tricked his father into giving him the blessing set aside for firstborn Esau (27:6-36). Jacob's scheming destroyed his relationship with Esau; Jacob was "hated" and threatened by his brother (27:41). In response, Jacob fled to the household of his uncle Laban (28:5).

Jacob worked seven years for his uncle to gain the hand of Laban's daughter Rachel in marriage (Genesis 29:18). However, Laban required that Jacob first marry Leah, leading Jacob to another seven years in service to marry Rachel (29:26-27).

Jacob flourished during his time in Laban's land, but the relationship between the two men soured (Genesis 31:2). This was due to Jacob's perception of unfair treatment regarding his payment from Laban (31:6-7). In response, Jacob and his wives took all that they owned and left Laban's household in secret (31:17-21). Ultimately, Laban confronted Jacob and the two agreed to a covenant (31:44). Jacob's struggle with his uncle had subsided.

Today's text comes as a part of Jacob's preparation to meet his brother. If Jacob returned to the land promised by God, then he would have to be

on good terms with Esau. Jacob initiated contact by sending messengers to request grace from Esau (Genesis 32:5). Esau responded with a promise to appear—along with 400 of his men (32:6).

This response brought fear and distress to Jacob. It would appear that the time had come for Esau's threats to be fulfilled. Jacob responded with alarm: he divided his camp (Genesis 32:7-8), prepared gifts for Esau (32:13-20), and approached God in prayer (32:9-12). Jacob's fear was understandable; God had promised him descendants (28:14). An enraged Esau would likely not only kill Jacob but also Jacob's household. Jacob, known for his scheming ways, openly admitted fear of someone else's scheme.

Throughout his life, Jacob's clever planning had generally paid off in his favor, often to the detriment of others. A mysterious struggle would now define Jacob in unimaginable ways.

I. The Struggle

(Genesis 32:22-25)

A. Jacob's Situation (vv. 22-23)

22. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

That Jacob *rose up* to travel during the *night* could indicate that he desired secrecy regarding his movements. Esau might have been made aware of Jacob's presence (see Genesis 32:20). As a result, Jacob may not have wanted his exact movements to be noticed. Nomadic travelers in the desert, similar to Jacob and his household, may have preferred to travel during the cool of the night.

While unnamed here, Jacob's *two wives* were Leah (Genesis 29:21-23) and Rachel (29:28). Jacob also had *two womenservants* turned surrogate wives: Bilhah (30:4) and Zilpah (30:9). At this point in his life, the four women had given him a total of *eleven sons*. Another son (Benjamin) would later be born to Rachel (35:16-18), giving Jacob a total of 12 sons (35:22b-26, see lesson 4).

The text does not mention Jacob's daughter, Dinah (Genesis 30:21). While she was likely present with the family at this time (34:1), her exclusion from the narrative could be because she did

not participate in the night expedition *over the ford Jabbok*.

The Jabbok is identified as an eastern tributary of the Jordan River. The river served as a boundary for non-Israelite kingdoms (see Numbers 21:24; Deuteronomy 2:37; Joshua 12:2) and Jacob's descendants (see Deuteronomy 3:16).

23. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

By sending his wives, servants, and children *over the brook*, Jacob planned for their protection. He was concerned that his upcoming interaction with his brother would prove to be dangerous for his family (see Lesson Context).

B. Jacob's Injury (vv. 24-25)

24. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

As the night progressed, *Jacob* prepared to meet his brother. Scripture describes instances when God spoke to His people in their solitary moments (see Exodus 24:2; Daniel 10:8). Though Jacob's family had left, he was anything but *alone* in the night.

Out of the night's stillness, a figure who appeared as *a man* approached Jacob. This occurrence is an example of a theophany, a specific appearance or manifestation of God to humanity. Some theophanies consisted of what appeared to be God in human form (see Genesis 18; Exodus 24:10; 33:11, 18-23; etc.). However, other theophanies demonstrated God's self-disclosure through non-human manifestations (see Exodus 3:2; 19:18; Numbers 22:28; etc.). These events confirmed a person's relationship with God and provided confidence of His work (see Genesis 16:13; Exodus 4:10-12; Numbers 22:22; Joshua 5:15; Judges 6:16-17).

This appearance consisted of more than

How to Say It

Bilhah	<i>Bill</i> -ha.
Elohim (<i>Hebrew</i>)	El- <i>o-heem</i> .
Jabbok	<i>Jab</i> -uck.
Peniel	Peh- <i>nye-el</i> .
theophany	the- <i>ah-fuh-nee</i> .
Zilpah	<i>Zil</i> -pa.

dialogue. Instead, a skirmish between Jacob and the so-called man resulted. The pronunciation of the Hebrew word translated as *wrestled* sounds similar to the pronunciations of the Hebrew words for Jabbok and Jacob. The repetition of sounds would have been evident to original audiences and would have reminded them that Jacob jostled at the Jabbok!

What Do You Think?

How should believers respond when they feel left alone by God or others?

Digging Deeper

How can believers apply Psalm 102:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28; and 2 Timothy 4:16-17 to these situations?

A Nocturnal Struggle

At my family's encouragement, I scheduled an appointment with my doctor regarding a possible case of sleep apnea. The doctor questioned my sleeping and breathing habits and put me through a variety of tests. The results proved my family's concern—I suffered from sleep apnea. The doctor suggested that I begin using a breathing device known as a CPAP machine when I slept.

The device delivers pressurized air through a mask fitted over the nose or mouth. The first night I used the device, the mask triggered a sense of claustrophobia in me. The second night was worse. While dreaming that I was using the mask incorrectly and that my doctor was trying to communicate with me, I struggled with the actual mask and ripped it off.

Jacob struggled throughout his life—with his brother and with God. These struggles came to a head as Jacob jostled at the Jabbok. What life struggles are affecting your relationships? Have you made plans to resolve those issues? —C. R. B.

25. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

Jacob had reason to be confident in his physical strength. He had spent 20 years in hard service

to his uncle (Genesis 31:38-41; compare 29:2, 10). The mysterious man *saw* Jacob's strength firsthand and *prevailed not against* him. This was no ordinary wrestling match; each wrestler was unable to gain an edge over the other!

However, Jacob suffered an injury when his assailant *touched* him. Win or lose, this experience affected Jacob's body. That the injury occurred after the assailant could not gain an upper hand might emphasize a level of equal physical ability between the two, or that the man was holding back for Jacob's sake.

The exact nature of Jacob's injury is unclear because the underlying Hebrew words are difficult to translate. The word translated *thigh* could refer to a person's side (Exodus 32:27) or upper leg (28:42; Judges 3:16, 21). It could also refer to procreation or descendants (see Genesis 46:26; Exodus 1:5). The *hollow* region would describe the part that joins with another part of the body.

The severity of Jacob's injury is unclear. This is one of only four times in three passages where the Hebrew verb translated as *out of joint* is used in this particular manner. The other uses speak to God's Spirit departing (Jeremiah 6:8) and to the alienation experienced by Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians (Ezekiel 23:17-18). While the exact details of Jacob's injury are unclear, his hip separated in a way not intended for a hip to move.

II. The Debate

(Genesis 32:26-29)

A. Dual Demands (v. 26)

26a. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh.

Despite striking a blow to Jacob, the assailant demanded that Jacob *let him go*. That *the day breaketh* gives insight on the duration of the struggle—the night had passed without resolution. Perhaps the assailant was concerned that dawn would reveal his identity, to the detriment of Jacob (compare Exodus 33:20; Judges 13:22).

26b. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Risking further injury, Jacob would *let* his assailant *go* only on one condition. Jacob held on

and made a certain demand—he wanted something he was not entitled to receive (compare Genesis 25:29-34; 27:35-36; see lesson 2).

Jacob's demand does not provide further detail regarding the reason or nature of the request. Perhaps Jacob desired divine blessing as he prepared for his upcoming interaction with his estranged brother. Or perhaps Jacob desired confirmation of the viability of God's promises (see Genesis 28:13-14). The scheming Jacob again sought to swing things in his favor.

What Do You Think?

How would you describe a life that is considered "blessed"?

Digging Deeper

How might the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) inform your perspective on the makeup of a "blessed" life?

B. Different Designation (vv. 27-28)

27. And he said unto him, What is thy name?

And he said, Jacob.

Names in the Bible often reveal insight on a person's character (1 Samuel 25:25; compare Proverbs 22:1) or their characteristics (Genesis 25:25; Luke 8:30). Names can even describe the situations surrounding a person's birth (Genesis 41:51-52; Exodus 2:22; 1 Samuel 1:20; 4:21; 1 Chronicles 4:9). That the mysterious man asked for Jacob's *name* forced Jacob to reveal an insight regarding his nature (see below). In this instance, Jacob answered honestly (contrast Genesis 27:19).

The underlying Hebrew for the name *Jacob* sounds like a Hebrew verb for the act of grasping (see Genesis 25:26, see lesson 2). The pronunciation was also similar to a Hebrew word regarding acts of deception (27:35-36; see Jeremiah 9:4). Both descriptors were fitting for Jacob.

28a. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.

In Scripture, the change of a person's name signaled a personal change for that person (Genesis 17:5, 15; 2 Kings 24:17; Acts 13:9; compare Isaiah 62:2). *No more* would *Jacob* be known as a deceiver who grasped for personal gain. Abra-

ham's descendant, a recipient of God's covenant promises, received a new name.

The meaning of Jacob's new name, *Israel*, reflects his life of struggle. The *el* syllable found in the Hebrew language is often used as a referent to the Hebrew word *Elohim*, a name for the God of Israel. (This is the underlying word for God in Genesis 1.) When that syllable is found in Hebrew names, it speaks to something regarding God. For example, the name "Bethel" (Genesis 35:15) means "house of God"; the name "Elimelech" (Ruth 1:1-2) means "God is my king"; the name "Ishmael" means "heard by God" (Genesis 16:11).

Jacob's renaming also gives us insight into the poetic passages where both names are used. Such dual usage indicates parallelism, where one thought is expressed in two ways (examples: Psalms 22:23; 78:21; Isaiah 10:20; Jeremiah 2:4; Micah 3:1).

What Do You Think?

How does being called a Christian affect your behavior and interactions with others?

Digging Deeper

How might names like disciple, sister/brother, or believer indicate a different aspect of your identity in Christ?

28b. For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

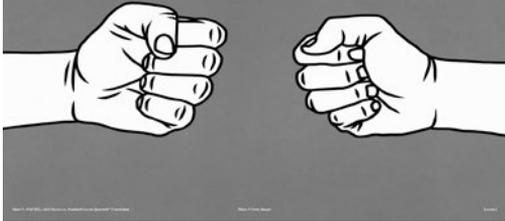
The Hebrew word used to indicate a struggle of *power* (see also Hosea 12:3-4) sounds very similar to the first two syllables of Jacob's new name. Jacob's new name reflected his struggles in life—*with God and with men*. Like a powerful *prince*, Jacob had found and would find success in both contexts. Even so, the proclamation did not condone his methods (see Genesis 27:23-33).

The declaration that Jacob *prevailed* serves as a bit of foreshadowing. Jacob had not yet found favor in his brother's eyes. The success that Jacob found in this wrestling match was the preface to a successful reunion with his brother.

What's in a Name?

Your family name may give insight into the possible occupation of a distant relative who had

CHOOSE YOUR OPPONENTS WISELY!



Visual for Lesson 3. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “Was Jacob in the right to ask his opponent for a blessing?”

the same name. A person named Smith may have a blacksmith in their ancestry. Or a person named Cooper may have descended from a person who repaired wooden casks or barrels. However, names are not always indicative of present realities. For example, I may be named Boatman, but I have never owned a boat!

Jacob was known as a trickster who took advantage of others through deception. His name was appropriate (see lesson 2). However, Jacob was given a new name and the possibility of a new legacy. Would he be known for his scheming ways or for his relationship with the Lord? What legacy would you like future generations to recall when they consider your name? —C. R. B.

C. Divine Delight (v. 29)

29. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

Jacob desired a more intimate knowledge of God. However, this was not the time for God to self-disclose more fully (compare Exodus 3:14; 6:3). The mysterious figure scolded Jacob for asking his *name*. Instead, the figure *blessed* Jacob in that moment. This would not be the only time Jacob would experience a blessing from God (see Genesis 35:9; 48:3).

Centuries later, Manoah, the father of Samson, had a similar divine interaction and requested the

name of the mysterious figure (Judges 13:9-17). In response, the figure declared that his name was “secret” (13:18; translated “too wonderful” in Psalm 139:6).

III. The Results

(Genesis 32:30-32)

A. Protected at Peniel (v. 30)

30. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

Jacob recognized the significance of the night’s events. In the struggle, he had encountered and *seen God*. Very few individuals could claim to see God *face to face*. However, this expression did not necessarily indicate a physical face-to-face interaction with God (see Exodus 33:20; compare John 1:18). Instead, the expression was an idiom to speak to the intimacy of the experience (see Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:14; Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10).

The prophet Hosea described this “man” (Genesis 32:24, above) as an “angel” (Hosea 12:4). This interpretation alludes to the sense of mystery experienced during divine interactions. However, Jacob’s declaration indicates that he saw this mysterious assailant as more than a man or an angel.

If a particular location was spiritually meaningful for the people of God, a significant name was provided for that location (see Genesis 22:13-14; 28:18-19; 35:15). The name Jacob gave this location reflected the relational closeness of his experience. The Hebrew word *Peniel* means “the face of God.” The exact location of Peniel is unknown, but it can be assumed to be east of the Jordan River.

This is the only mention of Peniel in the Old Testament. However, the variation “Penuel” (Genesis 32:31, below) likely referred to the same location. In the era of the judges (about 1370–1050 BC), this location served as a critical juncture in the narrative of Gideon (see Judges 8:5-9, 17). Jeroboam I, king of Israel (reigned 921–910 BC), would later rebuild the city (1 Kings 12:25).

Dual meanings are possible regarding Jacob’s declaration on the status of his *life*. On the one

hand, Jacob could have been reflecting on his survival despite believing he had seen the face of God (compare Judges 6:22-23; 13:22).

On the other hand, Jacob could have been proclaiming an answered prayer. Previously, Jacob requested that God rescue him from his brother Esau (Genesis 32:11). The underlying Hebrew root for this request is used again when Jacob proclaimed this his life was *preserved* (compare 33:10). Jacob could trust that the rescue he desired would come to pass because he had been blessed by God.

What Do You Think?

What feelings arise when you think about seeing God face-to-face one day?

Digging Deeper

How might 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 1 John 3:19-24 describe the transformed life of a follower of Jesus?

B. Remembered by Relatives (vv. 31-32)

31. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

The turning of a new day as *the sun rose upon him* marked newness surrounding Jacob: his name and his physical affliction. As Jacob left *Penuel* (see commentary on 32:30, above), his walk was *halted* as he limped. The injury he suffered to *his thigh* during the night continued to affect him. Perhaps the injury stayed with Jacob for the rest of his life, a permanent reminder of his interaction with God.

What Do You Think?

How should believers respond to a mental or physical ailment for which healing doesn't seem to have occurred?

Digging Deeper

How might Psalm 41:3; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 12:6-10; and Revelation 21:4 inform your answer in this regard?

32. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

An editorial comment clarifies the significance of Jacob's injury for future generations of *the children of Israel*. A sinew is a tendon, a connective tissue that joins bone and muscle (see Job 10:11; Ezekiel 37:8). Later Jewish tradition interprets the *sinew which shrank* as the sciatic nerve that runs through the muscles of the hip and into the upper *thigh*. The command *eat not of* this body part is not found elsewhere in Scripture. However, the prohibition is found in later Jewish commentary. The dietary practices of Jacob's descendants bore witness to his encounter that night.

Conclusion

A. The Clenched Hand of Prayer

English poet Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894) used the example of Jacob's struggle in her poem "Alas My Lord." Rossetti interpreted Jacob's struggle as a demonstration of "the clenched hand of prayer" that she desired her readers to practice. The poem concludes with a petition to the Lord "to hold Thee fast, until we hear Thy Voice" and "see Thy Face."

We may be tempted to judge Jacob's stubbornness because of our familiarity with his story. However, we can admit that we need "the clenched hand of prayer" to sustain us during our struggles. God is present—we only need to open our eyes.

Jacob's struggle humbled him and gave him a new identity before God and man. When we struggle—spiritually or physically—our faithfulness to God will point others to Him. He is the one who can give true rest (see Matthew 11:28).

B. Prayer

O God of Jacob, You are present in our struggles. We ask that You use those moments to reveal yourself to us in a unique way. We want to better understand Your will and direction and follow it in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Despite the darkness and amid our struggles,
God is present.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Ask for volunteers to participate in a thumb wrestling contest. Set clear rules. For example, before the match begins, both contestants must chant “one, two, three four, I declare a thumb war.” A contest is over when one contestant’s thumb is pinned by the other contestant’s thumb. Match up men against men and women against women. Pair the winners of the first round with other winners, continuing until a class champion is declared.

Alternative. Ask volunteers to share a decision or situation they have “wrestled with” during the past week. Invite them to share how they held on to God in the middle of the struggle.

After either activity, say, “We all struggle with difficult thoughts, feelings, and actions. Through today’s Scripture text, we will consider our struggles, who or what we struggle against, and what we stand to lose or gain in the struggle.”

Into the Word

Explain the background for today’s lesson using material from the Lesson Context section. If possible, recruit a class member ahead of time to present a three-minute lecture based on this material to set the stage for today’s Bible study.

Announce a Bible-marking activity. Provide copies of Genesis 32:22-32 for those who do not want to write in their own Bibles. Provide hand-outs (you create) with these instructions:

- Underline each statement of Jacob.
- Double-underline every descriptor of Jacob and his situation.
- Draw a circle around every mention of the names Jacob, Israel, and Peniel/Penuel.
- Draw a question mark above any word or phrase that you find difficult to understand.

Read the Scripture aloud slowly (or ask volunteers to do so) at least twice and as many as four times. As the Scripture is read, class members are to mark their copies in the ways noted.

After the final reading, divide class members into three groups for class discussion. Have groups answer the following questions that you will write on the board: 1—What do these verses tell us about who Jacob is? 2—Why do you think Jacob demanded a blessing? 3—What is the meaning and significance of the names Jacob, Israel, and Peniel/Penuel? (Students might need to access lesson commentary, study Bible notes, or online resources to answer adequately.)

After 10 minutes, have a representative from each group provide a response to each question. Finally, ask volunteers to share what they found helpful, challenging, or confusing from the text.

Option. Distribute copies of the “What’s in a Name?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After 10 minutes, provide the correct answers for the class and ask volunteers to share their answers to the final three questions.

Into Life

Place students in pairs and ask them to share a struggle they have experienced, how they dealt with the struggle, and how they experienced God’s presence in the struggle. Have each pair list Jacob’s attitudes and actions as described in the lesson and whether those should be emulated or avoided. Have each student consider how the experience of their own struggle might differ if they were to follow Jacob’s actions.

Encourage pairs to consider how to apply Jacob’s imitation-worthy actions to a struggle they are currently facing. Ask pairs to pray together, praising God for His presence and asking Him for perseverance, faithfulness, and submission through current struggles.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Count Your Blessings” exercise from the activity page as a take-home. To encourage completion, promise to discuss the results at the beginning of the next class.

The Scepter Given to Judah

Devotional Reading: Numbers 24:2-9, 15-17

Background Scripture: Genesis 35:22b-26; 38:12-19, 24-26; 49:8-12

Genesis 35:22b-26

22b Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's first-born, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun:

24 The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:

25 And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's hand-maid; Dan, and Naphtali.

26 And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's hand-maid; Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram.

Genesis 38:24-26

24 And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

25 When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.

26 And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

Key Text

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. —Genesis 49:10

Genesis 49:10-12

10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:

12 His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.



God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 1: God Call's Abraham's Family

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the structure of Jacob's family.
2. Explain the connections among the three sections of the lesson text.
3. State a way to overcome a family dysfunction for increased service to the Lord.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Royal House
- B. Lesson Context

I. Jacob's Family (Genesis 35:22b-26)

- A. Twelve Sons (vv. 22b)
- B. Four Mothers (vv. 23-26a)
- C. One Father (v. 26b)

Judging Ancestors

II. Judah's Humbling (Genesis 38:24-26)

- A. Tamar's Situation (v. 24)
- B. Tamar's Revelation (v. 25)
- C. Tamar's Righteousness (v. 26)

III. Judah's Ruler (Genesis 49:10-12)

- A. The King's Reign (v. 10)
- B. The King's Abundance (vv. 11-12)

A Vision Fulfilled

Conclusion

- A. Wrecks into Royals
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Royal House

Eight European monarchs trace their lineage back to one man: George II (1683–1760), king of Great Britain and Ireland. Over the course of 300 years, his descendants intermarried with other European royals, and a complicated web of family relations resulted. Now the monarchs of eight European countries—the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Monaco, and Luxembourg—claim a common ancestor.

In the modern era, a monarch's power is largely ceremonial. However, this week's lesson introduces a common ancestor to a royal genealogy, who still reigns in power and has forever changed the course of history.

B. Lesson Context

At the beginning of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, God promised to make Abraham "a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). From these descendants God declared that "kings shall come" (17:6; see 17:16, 20).

However, situations regarding offspring (see Genesis 16:1; 18:13; 30:1) and family conflict (see 16:4-5; 25:19-34; 27:1-41) arose. These situations might have led Abraham's family to doubt God's promises. Yet God remained faithful, even repeating His promises (see 35:11).

Abraham's grandson Jacob fathered 12 sons; the descendants of these sons became the tribes of Israel. Scripture provides two primary methods of counting the tribes. The first method lists tribes with an inheritance of land (see Numbers 1:5-15; 2:3-32; Joshua 13-19). Under this method, Joseph's sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) were counted as tribes. The descendants of Levi were not included in this numbering of the 12 tribes since they were not to receive an inheritance of land (13:33).

The second method lists tribes by the name of each tribe's patriarch (Genesis 46:8-25; 49:3-27; Deuteronomy 27:12-14; 1 Chronicles 2:2). Under this method, the descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim were instead listed as the tribe of Joseph.

Through Jacob's family, God's promise of roy-

alty would come. He would choose neither Jacob's oldest son (Reuben) nor his favorite son (Benjamin) to be the ancestor of the royal line. Rather, out of Judah would come an eternal kingdom.

I. Jacob's Family

(Genesis 35:22b-26)

A. Twelve Sons (vv. 22b)

22b. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.

God had promised *Jacob* (also known as Israel; lesson 3) that his descendants would be like "the dust of the earth" (Genesis 28:14) and "the sand of the sea" (32:12). The existence of Jacob's *twelve* sons (and their offspring) displayed God's faithfulness to fulfill these promises.

B. Four Mothers (vv. 23-26a)

23. The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun.

The listing of Jacob's 12 sons here is not in overall birth order. Instead, the sons are listed from oldest to youngest according to their respective mothers.

Although *Leah* was Jacob's first wife, he had not intended to marry her (Genesis 29:23-26). Despite her numerous *sons*, Leah never experienced the love from Jacob that her sister received (29:30).

The scandalous behavior of *Reuben* (Genesis 35:22) caused him to lose the *firstborn* privilege (49:3-4). His descendants would never rise to the same level of importance as would the descendants of his brothers.

Simeon and *Levi* fell out of their father's favor because of their violence (Genesis 49:5). Upon hearing of profane treatment toward their sister, the brothers had responded with violence (34:25). Jacob was concerned that their actions would cause him to experience poor treatment by the surrounding nations (34:30).

Judah would rise to a position of leadership among his brothers (Genesis 37:25-28; 44:14-18; 46:28). While Judah acted unrighteously at times (see Genesis 38), he was uniquely blessed (49:8-12).

Issachar was conceived during a unique situation involving the use of mandrakes (see Genesis 30:15-18), a plant with seemingly aphrodisiac properties.

Warriors of the tribe of *Zebulun* fought valiantly in the days of the judges (see Judges 4:6; 6:35).

24. The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin.

Jacob's love for *Rachel* was unparalleled (Genesis 29:30). God miraculously worked to allow her to conceive *Joseph* (30:22-24).

The favor that Joseph experienced from his father led his brothers to hate him (Genesis 37:3-4). They would sell him for 20 pieces of silver (37:28). Due to the wisdom God granted him, Joseph rose to a position of leadership in Egypt (41:39-41). In this situation, he was prepared to deal with a famine—for the good of the whole known world, including his family (42:1-2).

Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own (Genesis 48:5). The descendants of these sons would later be counted as tribes of Israel (Numbers 1:32-35, see Lesson Context).

As the youngest son of Rachel, *Benjamin* received extra concern from his father (see Genesis 42:4). Though Benjamin's descendants were relatively few in number (see Numbers 1:36), Israel's first king came from them (1 Samuel 9:21).

25. And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali.

When Rachel was unable to conceive, she gave *Bilhah* to Jacob to bear him children (Genesis 30:4). Rachel named Bilhah's first child *Dan* (30:6). His descendants, though many in number (see Numbers 1:39; 2:26), were not powerful militarily (see Joshua 19:47; Judges 1:34-35).

Descendants of *Naphtali* were lauded for their valor (Judges 5:18). They joined with descendants

How to Say It

Bilhah	<i>Bill</i> -ha.
Ephraim	<i>Ee</i> -fray-im.
Ephrath	<i>Ef</i> -rath.
Gad	<i>Gad</i> (a as in <i>bad</i>).
Issachar	<i>Izz</i> -uh-kar.
Manasseh	<i>Muh</i> -nass-uh.
Naphtali	<i>Naf</i> -tuh-lye.
Shiloh	<i>Shy</i> -low.
Tamar	<i>Tay</i> -mer.
Zebulun	<i>Zeb</i> -you-lun.
Zilpah	<i>Zil</i> -pa.

of Asher and Manasseh to drive the Midianites from the land (7:23-25).

26a. And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid; Gad, and Asher.

When Leah was unable to conceive, she allowed Jacob to continue fathering children, through *Zilpah* (Genesis 30:9).

The descendants of *Gad* settled east of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:1-33; Joshua 13:8). This land was well suited for raising livestock.

Jacob proclaimed the richness of the food produced by *Asher* (Genesis 49:20). Perhaps this declaration foreshadowed the tribe's settlement of the fertile regions of Canaan (Joshua 19:24-31).

What Do You Think?

How have previous generations of believers informed and influenced your spiritual growth?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to influence future generations of believers so that they might spiritually grow and mature?

C. One Father (v. 26b)

26b. These are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram.

Not all *sons of Jacob* were *born* in *Padanaram*; Benjamin was born in Ephrath, which is Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16-19). Perhaps the inclusion of *Padanaram* referred to the location where Benjamin was conceived (compare 35:9).

Judging Ancestors

Through DNA testing and online records, exploring one's ancestry has become quite accessible. One family member traced our family's ancestry back to slave owners in the American South. Despite my disgust, I am unable to change who my ancestors are.

Scripture's genealogies always list people who erred—look at Jacob's family! We would not consider many of their actions to be admirable. God still used them for His plan. Their lives are evidence of God's faithfulness. Will future generations see that *you* were following God? —C. R. B.

II. Judah's Humbling

(Genesis 38:24-26)

The oldest of Judah's sons, Er, married Tamar. However, Er acted wickedly and was struck dead (Genesis 38:6-7). Judah directed his second son to father children with Tamar (38:8). But that son refused and was also killed (38:10).

With two sons dead, Judah sent Tamar to live with her father while waiting for Judah's third son to reach the age of marriage. This placed the marginalized widow in a grievous situation. She had no husband or son to care for her. Years passed, but Judah did not allow his daughter-in-law to marry his third son (Genesis 38:14b).

Tamar took matters into her own hands: she would have a child with her father-in-law. Tamar disguised herself and went to a location where Judah would see her. Judah failed to recognize her and considered her to be a prostitute (Genesis 38:13-16). Before they had intercourse, she requested from him a pledge to confirm his promised payment (38:17a). After he provided these things, Tamar became pregnant by him (38:17b-18).

A. Tamar's Situation (v. 24)

24a. And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom.

Judah had sent a friend to take back his pledge (see above), but the woman could not be found (Genesis 38:22). *Three months* would *pass* before Judah would discover her identity.

Though *Tamar* lived in her father's household, *Judah* still claimed her as a part of his family. As long as his third son was alive, Judah would take an interest in her well-being, even if from a distance. Since she was widowed and lived in her father's house, there was no other way she could be *with child* except through immorality.

24b. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

Judah's judgment was striking and harsh. The Law of Moses did not exist during the time of Judah. It would later prescribe being *burnt* as a form of punishment (see Leviticus 20:14; 21:9).

Judah's declaration highlighted the horrific irony of the situation. He demanded capital punishment for his daughter-in-law because of her presumed prostitution. However, he was the one who had impregnated Tamar. Further, Judah might have considered Tamar's act to be one of unfaithfulness to his son Shelah, who was still next in line to be given as her husband (Genesis 38:11).

What Do You Think?

How can people respond fairly and in good time to an unjust situation?

Digging Deeper

How would your response differ if you or someone you loved was experiencing the unjust situation?

B. Tamar's Revelation (v. 25)

25. When she was brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.

Tamar did not have to state publicly the extent of Judah's involvement. Instead, she forced *her father in law* to confront his hypocrisy and consider how he had failed to provide for her (see Genesis 38:14b). Tamar had no need to state the obvious. The personal items left behind would reveal *the man* who caused her to be *with child* (38:18).

A *signet* was an engraved stone that would leave a unique imprint when pressed on a surface (see Exodus 28:11). Signets were worn as rings (see Jeremiah 22:24; Daniel 6:17) or could have been on *bracelets* or chains around Jacob's neck. A *staff* was a necessary tool when working with herds. A staff's owner would sometimes be identified by an inscription on it (Numbers 17:2). Tamar's shrewdness revealed her intentions. She had requested and retained these items not because of their financial value, but because of their identifying capabilities.

C. Tamar's Righteousness (v. 26)

26. And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I;

because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

The revealing of the personal items would have brought great shame on *Judah*. To his credit, he *acknowledged* the items and their implications regarding his own failures. Whether because of his own shame or to hide his immoral act, Judah turned the discussion to Tamar.

His statement that *she hath been more righteous than I* did not fully justify her. Rather, the statement indicated that Judah's behavior was relatively worse. He had acted unfaithfully and unjustly toward Tamar by preventing his son *Shelah* from marrying her (Genesis 38:1-14). He failed to care for his widowed daughter-in-law. Tamar was in the right to want Judah to honor his obligations. She desired just treatment and forced Judah's hand so that she would receive it. But that doesn't mean that the end justified the means.

That Judah *knew* Tamar *again no more* indicates that he had no further sexual relations with her. Tamar gave birth to sons (Genesis 38:29-30) who would continue the line of Judah (Ruth 4:12). Both Judah and Tamar were counted in a later genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:3).

What Do You Think?

How should a person respond when confronted with their unrighteous or sinful decisions?

Digging Deeper

How might confrontation differ when with believers (see Matthew 18:15-20)?

III. Judah's Ruler

(Genesis 49:10-12)

At the end of his life, Jacob called together his sons and described their future (Genesis 49:1-2). Much of what he stated would unfold when the descendants of his sons settled in the promised land centuries later.

Jacob's lengthy speech regarding Judah spoke to that son's preeminence. Judah's brothers would someday praise him and bow down to him (Genesis 49:8). Judah would become like a lion, bringing fear to those "who shall rouse him up"



Promised to Judah. Fulfilled by Jesus.

Visual for Lesson 4. Have this visual displayed prominently as a backdrop as you discuss the Scripture passages in the Conclusion.

(49:9). Jacob's words began by addressing Judah directly, but shifted to talk *about* Judah and his descendants.

A. The King's Reign (v. 10)

10. The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

Jacob's dying proclamation demonstrated his trust in the Lord's promise that kings would come from his descendants. A *sceptre* symbolized the presence of royalty and authority (see Esther 4:11; 5:2; Isaiah 14:5; Zechariah 10:11; Hebrews 1:8).

The declaration described Jacob's hope: a ruler would come from his descendants (see also Numbers 24:17, 19). Specifically, this ruler would come *from Judah* (1 Chronicles 5:2; compare Psalm 60:7). The ruler and His kingdom would be permanent and would *not depart*.

This prophesied individual would be in a position of leadership and authority—a *lawgiver* for the people. He would be so because God himself is the ultimate "lawgiver" (Isaiah 33:22; James 4:12).

The underlying Hebrew word translated here as *feet* is used elsewhere to refer indirectly to genitalia (Ezekiel 16:25) or the womb (Deuteronomy 28:57). The royal authority would come from Judah's offspring.

The phrase *until Shiloh come* provides unique translation challenges. A major reason for this

comes from the fact that the original Hebrew text was written without vowels. Later scribes added notation in the text to indicate vowel sounds. Different vowel notations can result in different readings of the text.

One possible reading of the text includes a mention of the city Shiloh. The city was the location of the tabernacle (Joshua 18:1; contrast Psalm 78:60) and the place for key administrative decisions (Joshua 18:9-10; 19:51). Shiloh did not maintain importance during the era of the kings when the tribe of Judah would exhibit prominence.

However, a different vowel notation (and word break) leads to a different possible translation. The text could refer to the timing of the arrival of the royalty. The prophet Ezekiel alludes to this translation when proclaiming the rightful heir, following the destruction and exile of the tribe of Judah. The prophet proclaimed that the crown "shall be no more, until he come whose right it is" (Ezekiel 21:27).

Despite the translation difficulties, Jacob's prophetic intention is evident. *The people* of the nations would be impacted by Judah's descendant. This individual will gather people under His rule and require their obedience (compare Psalms 2:8-11; 72:8; Isaiah 11:10-12; Zechariah 9:10).

B. The King's Abundance (vv. 11-12)

11a. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine.

The king's abundance is on display through the imagery of grape *vine* and livestock (compare Deuteronomy 8:7-8). One can imagine that the king's abundance was so much that he would allow his *foal* and *colt* to be tied to the vine. Even if the animals ate some of the fruit of the vine, the loss would not have been an issue because of the king's bountiful and fertile crops.

11b. He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.

The king's wealth would be on display because *wine* would be as common as laundry water for *his garments*. His winepresses would be full so that *his clothes* would be saturated in freshly pressed grape juice (compare Isaiah 63:2), *the blood of grapes* (compare Deuteronomy 32:14).

12. His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

Prosperity is further evident on the king's face. Some writers of Scripture attribute shades of *red*, like those seen in *wine* or rubies, to a person's physical vigor (example: Lamentations 4:7). *White* and straight *teeth* were a desirable physical trait (see Song of Solomon 4:2; 6:6).

What Do You Think?

How has God's abundance been demonstrated in your life?

Digging Deeper

What spiritual blessings have you experienced?

A Vision Fulfilled

Early in my career I felt called to lead a small Bible college. The college had an aging campus, a shrinking donor base, and a dated curriculum model. If the college could not attract new students, it would not survive. I spent five years leading the college, but found little success. I left the position convinced that someone else was needed for the college to flourish.

Years later the college had relocated, enrollment had increased, and a new curriculum had been established. My successor informed me that the plans made during my tenure had become the blueprint for his administration. The vision that God had given my administration had been fulfilled—just later than I had anticipated.

Generations after Jacob, God fulfilled His promise of a king. We may never understand in this life how God accomplishes His plans. We may sometimes doubt that they'll come to fruition when we don't see immediate results. Which of God's promises provide encouragement during moments of doubt?
—C. R. B.

Conclusion

A. Wrecks into Royals

Promises regarding the royal descendant of Judah were fulfilled in two ways. First, they were fulfilled through the Davidic monarchy. David, a

descendant of Judah, ruled Israel in power given by God (see 2 Samuel 7:5-15).

David partially fulfilled the prophecy; his rule was a shadow of the royalty to come. The second way Judah's promises were fulfilled was through the promised eternal king (2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Jeremiah 33:17; see Psalm 45:6). The Old Testament prophets looked for "a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1) who would gather all people (11:10-16). His rule would be one of peace and righteousness from the throne of David (9:7) and the tribe of Judah (Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2).

The New Testament writers interpreted these promises to apply to Jesus (see Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 1:32; Hebrews 7:14). As king, Jesus would bring salvation to the world (Luke 2:29-32). His kingdom, inaugurated at His first coming, would be fulfilled in His second coming to earth (see Revelation 2:26-27; 5:5; 19:15).

Judah and his family were by no means ideal ancestors for royalty—they were marked by rivalry, strife, and dysfunction. Judah's life, in particular, was filled with unrighteous acts. He was a wreck and an unlikely choice to be the ancestor of royalty.

However, God's plan of redemption is transformative. He led a dysfunctional family to become the nation of Israel. From this family would emerge the Savior of the world. He turns wrecks into royals!

What Do You Think?

In what ways are this lesson's Scripture texts applicable to modern audiences?

Digging Deeper

How do the other lessons of this unit reinforce the main idea of this lesson's Scripture text?

B. Prayer

God of Jacob and Judah, we praise You for Your kingdom in Christ Jesus. Thank You for inviting us to partake in Your kingdom, despite our failures. Show us how we might live as citizens of Your kingdom. In the name of King Jesus we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God transforms wrecks into royals!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

In the week before class, ask three volunteers to bring an object to the next class. Tell volunteers that the object should be unique and meaningful to them and should represent something about their family identity.

At the beginning of class, have each volunteer showcase their object. They should explain it, how they attained it, and why it represents them.

After the volunteers share, say, “In today’s lesson, Judah’s possessions are used to bring shame—and honor—to him and his family.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 35:22b-26. Divide the class into four groups: **Leah Group**, **Rachel Group**, **Bilhah Group**, and **Zilpah Group**. Have each group prepare a three-minute presentation regarding their group’s namesake and her children. Have each group include details about the mother and her children, even details not mentioned in the lesson. Students can use study Bible notes and online resources to prepare.

After 10 minutes, have each group present their findings. Ask the groups to notice which sons they knew more about than the others.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Jacob’s Family” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

In the same groups, have each student read Genesis 38:1-30 silently. Then ask a volunteer to reread aloud Genesis 38:24-26.

Have groups summarize the events of the chapter, then answer the following questions (which you will write on the board): 1–What actions of Judah were considered unjust? 2–Why was Tamar considered to be “more righteous” (Genesis 38:26)? 3–What are possible interpretations and applications of this story for modern audiences?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 49:10-12.

Divide the class into three groups: **Scepter Group (49:10)** / **Vine Group (49:11)** / **Physical Traits Group (49:12)**.

Have each group interpret the imagery in their assigned verse. Ask the groups to answer the following questions that you will write on the board: 1–To what could your group’s verse be referring? 2–Have these things already been fulfilled? 3–How do the other verses inform your interpretation?

After five minutes, ask a volunteer to share their answers and respond to other groups in order to get a more complete understanding of Jacob’s words.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Family Tree” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it as indicated, in small groups. After no more than five minutes, ask for volunteers to share their group’s insights from the discussion questions.

Into Life

Write these words on the board: *hide*, *deny*, *resign*, and *ignore*. Have students work in pairs to consider how these words might describe a family’s response to conflict or dysfunction. (Encourage pairs to use anonymous examples.)

After five minutes, have students each write on a index card (you provide) a family conflict where peace and reconciliation are needed. Inform students to keep the index cards private.

After one minute, have pairs discuss how to respond to family conflict and dysfunction in a God-honoring manner. After three minutes, have students call out words that are opposite of the words on the board. Write those words on the board.

Have students each use one of the new words to write a response to the conflict or dysfunction written on their index card.

Invite students to use their cards during their prayer time in the coming week. Have students ask God to guide how they might work to overcome the family conflict written on their card.

The Birth of Moses

Devotional Reading: Acts 7:17-29
Background Scripture: Exodus 1:15–2:10

Exodus 2:1-10

1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.

2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.

4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

5 And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.

6 And when she had opened it, she saw the

child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?

8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.

9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Key Text

The woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. —Exodus 2:2

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Retell the account of Moses' infancy.
2. Explain how an injustice was avoided.
3. Make a concrete plan to act in response to an identified or potential injustice.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Operation Varsity Blues
- B. Lesson Context

I. Unique Response (Exodus 2:1-4)

- A. Hidden at Home (vv. 1-2)
- B. Sheltered in the Stream (vv. 3-4)

II. Unexpected Rescue (Exodus 2:5-10)

- A. Daughter's Discovery (vv. 5-6)
The Power of Papyrus
- B. Sister's Suggestion (vv. 7-9)
A Fish Out of Water
- C. Son's Significance (v. 10)

Conclusion

- A. Aggressive Compassion
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Operation Varsity Blues

For many teenagers, the college admission process is the culmination of their many years of hard work. High school students spend years preparing in hopes of being accepted into their dream college or university. Entrance exams, scholarship essays, amateur athletic camps, and local community service all factor into the process, on top of a student's course load and GPA.

However, for other teenagers, the college admissions experience is all about their family's money and connections. In 2019, a scandal rocked the college admission world, revealing the ways that people were unjustly and illegally working the college admission process for their children. An FBI investigation—named Operation Varsity Blues—revealed that dozens of parents conspired to lie, bribe, and cheat in order to get their children into elite colleges and universities. By doing so, other students who had worked hard and earned their spot would be denied admission.

Evidence of life's injustices is all around us. When faced with these realities, the people of God are to respond with boldness and trust in the God who will, in His time, set injustices right

B. Lesson Context

Centuries before the events of this lesson's Scripture text, God had promised Abraham, a nomadic herdsman from Mesopotamia, that his descendants would be numerous (Genesis 15:5, see lesson 1). One such descendant, Joseph (25:24), was removed from his ancestral land and taken to Egypt. Through God's power and directives, Joseph ended up in a position of high regard in service to the Egyptian pharaoh (41:41-57).

Ultimately, Joseph brought his extended family to live with him in Egypt (Genesis 50:22; Exodus 1:1-5). His descendants would become the Israelites. Centuries later, they "were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied . . . and the land was filled with them" (1:7). God's promise of numerous descendants had become a reality.

Jacob's descendants would be in the land of Egypt for a total of 430 years (see Exodus 12:40).

Eventually, a new pharaoh came to power and was concerned regarding the growth of the Israelite population (1:8-10).

The exact identity of the pharaoh in question is unknown. The construction of cities “Pithom and Raamses” (Exodus 1:11) has led some scholars to estimate that the pharaoh in question was Rameses II (approx. 1290–1224 BC). He oversaw vast construction projects and kept numerous slaves, realities that align with the first chapters of Exodus.

However, Scripture describes how Solomon began construction on the temple 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt (1 Kings 6:1). This timing would place the exodus at approximately 1447 BC, outside of the reign of Rameses II (compare Exodus 12:40-41; Galatians 3:17). Specific details regarding the exact timing of the exodus and the pharaoh involved may never be recovered.

The pharaoh in question saw the growing presence of Israelites as a threat. To suppress their increase in number and to exert power over them, the pharaoh established hard labor for the Israelites and placed slave masters over them (Exodus 1:11-14). The pharaoh’s oppressive treatment intensified in his declaration that “every son that is born ye shall cast into the river” (1:22).

Despite this oppression, God blessed Jacob’s descendants. Because of the shrewdness of Hebrew women (see Exodus 1:15-20), more Hebrew boys survived infancy than the pharaoh intended. Today’s Scripture text highlights the response of several women to the pharaoh’s unjust declaration. A seemingly small event—the birth of a child and his upbringing—served as the way by which God provided a just response to an unjust situation.

I. Unique Response

(Exodus 2:1-4)

A. Hidden at Home (vv. 1-2)

1. And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.

A later genealogical account provides the names this *man* and his *wife*: Amram and Jochebed (Exodus 6:20). Both were from the lineage of *Levi* (see Numbers 26:57-59).



Visual for Lesson 5. *Conclude the lesson by asking the class how Moses was both protected and a protector for God’s people.*

After the people left Egypt, descendants of Levi would become priests (Exodus 28–30) and religious leaders (Deuteronomy 10:8-9) for the Israelites. This child would be in that same lineage.

2. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

The survival of the woman’s *son* would be in doubt, considering the cruel decree from the pharaoh (Exodus 1:22; see Lesson Context). The text before us does not speak to the birth order of this child. Later texts indicate the presence of an older brother, Aaron (7:7), and an older sister (2:4, below).

The description of the *child* as *goodly* could speak to a variety of attributes. The underlying Hebrew word is elsewhere translated as “good”—a descriptor of God’s intentions in His creation (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, etc.). In this sense, the word could be describing how this child fulfilled God’s plans. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates that same Hebrew word into a Greek word that is used in the New Testament to describe the child as “fair” (Acts 7:20) and “proper” (Hebrews 11:23).

Furthermore, the word could also be speaking of the health of the child (compare 1 Samuel 9:2). However, physical appeal or beauty is not a measure for God’s call on a person (16:7, see lesson 9).

The child faced the infanticide of Pharaoh’s tyrannical declaration of Exodus 1:16. The fact that a nursing mother could hide her child for

three months implied her ability to avoid long hours of outdoor labor described in Exodus 1:13-14. The author of Hebrews reflects on the actions of the child's parents: "By faith Moses . . . was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid" (Hebrews 11:23).

What Do You Think?

How should believers respond to human laws that contradict God's moral law?

Digging Deeper

How do Exodus 1:15-21; Esther 3:12-4:17; Daniel 3; 6; Romans 13:1-7; and Titus 3:1 inform a believer's response to civil obedience or disobedience?

B. Sheltered in the Stream (vv. 3-4)

3. And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.

After three months, the baby could *no longer* stay hidden. The time had come for his parents to deal with the unjust realities of the pharaoh's command.

Ironically, the child's mother did follow the letter of the law of the pharaoh: she *did* cast her son into the river (compare Exodus 1:22). However, she did so in a manner that allowed for the child's survival, thus going against the *spirit* of the pharaoh's law.

The underlying Hebrew word translated as *ark* appears in one other Old Testament narrative: the ark of Noah (Genesis 6-9). In this verse, the ark was built to hold a small child; it was like a basket. In both instances, God provided for His people through an ark. Just as an ark saved Noah and his family from the waters of a flood, this ark would save a child from waters of the river.

The child's mother built the basket using common materials found in the region of the Nile River delta. *Bulrushes* of papyrus would have been obtained from the marshy wetlands of the river delta (compare Job 8:11). These were also

used in the construction of seafaring vessels (Isaiah 18:2).

In order to seal the basket, the child's mother *daubed* the basket *with slime*—a sticky substance used in construction (see Genesis 11:3). Here, the substance served to bind the papyrus reeds together to form the vessel. *Pitch* was added as a waterproofing agent, fit to keep the interior of water-borne vessels and their passengers dry (compare 6:14).

In the harsh desert climate, the Nile River served as a key component of daily Egyptian life. The river provided water for drinking (Jeremiah 2:18), bathing (Exodus 2:5), irrigating (Isaiah 19:7), and livestock (Genesis 41:1-4). The river provided sustenance for daily life in general, and God would use the Nile to provide for Moses' life specifically.

Amid the slow moving, marshy waters of the *brink* of this river, *she laid* the papyrus basket. She would have to trust that God would protect her son.

Along the *river's* shore would have grown *flags* of reeds. By placing the basket here, the reeds provided protection and concealed the basket.

4. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

We learn that the child had a *sister* (Miriam; Numbers 26:59). At this point in the narrative, specific details about her life are unknown. In this instance, she *stood afar* of the basket to keep an eye on her brother and take note of his eventual outcome: survival or death.

What Do You Think?

When, if ever, might it be better for a believer to wait and see God's provision before addressing a situation?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does this absolve a believer from action? In what ways does it not?

II. Unexpected Rescue

(Exodus 2:5-10)

A. Daughter's Discovery (vv. 5-6)

5. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens

walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.

The pharaoh would have had many partners, “wives,” and children. The relative power of any one child in the pharaoh’s kingdom would have depended on the importance of that child’s mother to the pharaoh. This *daughter of Pharaoh* may or may not have been a powerful woman in her father’s kingdom (see Lesson Context). In any case, she was far more powerful than Moses’ family—for better or worse.

Surely a royal princess would have more appropriate locations *to wash herself*—including royal bathhouses. Her motivations for bathing *at the river* are not obvious. Perhaps she was following the example of her father (see Exodus 7:15).

Most importantly, she noticed *the ark* floating among the flags of papyrus. Whether the child’s mother and sister intended for him to be found by Egyptian royalty is unknown. The pharaoh’s daughter was faced with a problem: abide by her father’s commands regarding the treatment of Hebrew sons, or not.

The Power of Papyrus

Have you considered the importance of papyrus? The plant flourishes in marshy areas like the lands surrounding the Nile River. On first glance, the tall, reed-like plant may not seem to be a valuable natural resource. However, the ancient Egyptians maximized the plant’s use.

The plant’s husk would be peeled, and the remaining parts would be cut into thin strips. The strips were flattened and left to dry under the sun. The resulting sheets, similar to modern paper, were used for writing. But the use of papyrus was not limited to the creation of paper. Ancient texts speak to its use in making shoes, in decorating buildings, and even during the mummification process.

If not for the papyrus basket and the papyrus rushes, the baby might have been killed. This insignificant plant protected this child through God’s saving plan. What “insignificant” part of your daily life has God used to advance His plan? Are your eyes open to noticing it? —T. Z. S.

6. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children.

Given that the previous verse refers to both the pharaoh’s daughter and “her maid,” the antecedent of *she* who *had opened* the basket is unclear. Even if the pharaoh’s daughter was not the specific individual who opened the basket, she would have been aware of the resulting interaction. Like any other 3-month-old child, *the babe wept*—perhaps he was startled, fearful, or even hungry.

Despite the ethnic and cultural differences between the child and the princess, a natural response to a vulnerable child is evident. Her privilege and position of power did not diminish her sense of *compassion* for the child. She recognized the child’s ethnicity, whether because of his circumcision (see Genesis 17:10-13) or assumed heritage based on his abandonment. The recognition of their cultural differences did not prevent her from helping the child.

Throughout the Old Testament, calling an individual a Hebrew often came from a Gentile person (Genesis 39:14, 17; 41:12; Exodus 1:15-16; 1 Samuel 14:11, 21). Other times, the title was used in regard to the people’s experience of slavery (Deuteronomy 15:12; Jeremiah 34:9, 14).

What Do You Think?

What apparent need in your community fills you with a sense of compassion to respond?

Digging Deeper

What is one action step that you can take to help address this need?

B. Sister’s Suggestion (vv. 7-9)

7. Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?

From her outpost, the child’s *sister* appeared. Her appearance presented a conundrum: why would *Pharaoh’s daughter* listen to this strange girl? Further, why choose *a nurse of the Hebrew*

women when Egyptian nurses were available for the pharaoh's daughter?

In ancient cultures a mother did not always have the ability to nurse and care for her child. In this case, a nurse was chosen to help both the child and the mother (compare Genesis 24:59). Powerful women might acquire a nurse to avoid the inconveniences of motherhood. However, the precise motives of the pharaoh's daughter desiring a nurse is unknown. In any case, if she was not recently pregnant, she could not have nursed the child.

This interaction linked the child's sister and mother with the Hebrew midwives—women who saved vulnerable babies (Exodus 1:15-17). Further, this text speaks to the resilience of the child's family as they made efforts to survive under hostile and unjust conditions.

By asking whether a Hebrew *may nurse the child*, the pharaoh's daughter was placed in a difficult position. Would she resist the pharaoh's tyranny and take pity on the child and the Hebrew woman who stood before her? Or, instead, would she follow the dehumanizing practices of her powerful father?

8. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.

The irony of *the child's mother* sending him away, and then having the chance to nurse him would not have escaped the text's audiences. The vulnerable slave woman outwitted the imperial, death-bent system that desired the death of her son. Even more ironic was that this was achieved through the daughter of the very man who instituted the death decree. Audiences of all eras can appreciate the cleverness of the Hebrew women in this narrative.

9. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

The attention of *Pharaoh's daughter* turned to the mother of *this child*. Whether the pharaoh's daughter suspected the true identity of this woman is unknown. By telling the baby's mother to *take* him could indicate that the pharaoh's daughter was filled with compassion and desired that the baby boy return to his people.

Because Moses' mother trusted God, she was

rewarded. Not only would she raise her own *child*, but she would be given *wages* to care for him, paid out of the royal coffers. She would provide for her family, all while she preserved her son's life.

What Do You Think?

What needs do you see in your community that are too challenging for you to tackle alone?

Digging Deeper

Who will you recruit to assist you in this regard?

C. Son's Significance (v. 10a-b)

10a. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.

Not only did Jochebed provide for his emotional well-being, but *the child* also *grew*—in a physical sense, and perhaps in understanding of the God of his ancestors. This same God would one day appear to him and direct him (see Exodus 3:4–4:17).

However, the child's time with his mother had a limit. At a prescribed time, unstated by the text, his mother *brought him* to the royal house. The text does not explain the means by which *Pharaoh's daughter* adopted the child. The fact that no one else is mentioned as *he became her son* highlights the moral courage of these two women in the midst of an oppressive system.

As young Moses grew, he would live in the house of the pharaoh, away from his own people (see Exodus 2:11; Acts 7:23). The longer he remained in the pharaoh's household, the more familiar he became with the cultural mores of the Egyptians. At times he was assumed to be an Egyptian (see Exodus 2:19).

What Do You Think?

How might you "adopt" a young person from your community with the intention of listening to their possible plight?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take regarding the appropriate action in response to your active listening?

A Fish Out of Water

Have you ever had a “fish out of water” experience? I sure did when I moved to California. Before the move, I had lived my entire life in the Midwestern United States. I had a certain perspective on life—all based on the Midwestern culture.

After the move, I was ill-prepared for the cultural change. The West Coast culture felt faster and more tense than I was familiar with. After some time, the differences were too much for me to handle. I was ready to move back to a more comfortable culture. I wondered whether my discomfort was based on biblical principles or was a matter of preference.

Moses lived among three different cultures: the Israelites, the Egyptians, and the Midianites (see Exodus 2:11-25). God used each culture to shape him for future work. Are you attentive to how God might use different cultural contexts—even ones that you feel ill-prepared to handle—to shape you to better serve Him? —C. R. B.

10b. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

At last, the name of this child is revealed. Undoubtedly the child’s birth mother had given him a name. The text only tells us the *name* he was *called* by the pharaoh’s daughter: *Moses*. The meaning and history of the name is unclear.

As he was given this name by an Egyptian, we can assume connections to the Egyptian language. The Egyptian word for “son” sounds similar to his name. (This name can be seen in the endings of other Egyptian names like Ahmose and Thutmose.)

The name could have connections to the Hebrew language. A Hebrew word indicating being drawn *out of* and rescued from *the water* also sounds like the name (see 2 Samuel 22:17; Psalm 18:16).

Despite these uncertainties, the child’s name provides theological significance. Moses was rescued from certain death, and with God’s guidance, he would rescue his people from future dangers (see Exodus 6:1; 13:3).

Conclusion

A. Aggressive Compassion

The story surrounding Moses’ birth and

upbringing triggers more questions than answers. One of the biggest unknowns concerns the motives of the pharaoh’s daughter and her desire to help. Scripture does not indicate whether she feared God or not.

Despite her connection to the governing power, she was not overcome by its brutal demands. She was a beneficiary of the same system that allowed the pharaoh to act oppressively. But she managed to defy her upbringing and provided a just response to an unjust situation.

However, the real heroines of this story are the child’s mother and sister. They took great risk to protect Moses. They trusted that God would see their response to the injustice and provide a way out. Their bold actions gave way to the bold actions from the daughter of Egyptian royalty.

God provides justice where injustice reigns. He invites His people to reflect His character by taking bold (and sometimes risky) steps to protect and care for vulnerable individuals. The justice that God requires of His people is not hypothetical—it is active and embodied.

B. Prayer

God of justice, we ask that You strengthen our compassion to respond to the vulnerable members of our community. Show us how we might be instruments of Your justice and peace to those who experience injustice. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Reflect God’s just character by responding to your most vulnerable neighbors.

How to Say It

Ahmose	Ah-mohs.
Amram	Am-ram.
Jochebed	Jock-eh-bed.
Mesopotamia	Mes-uh-puh-tay-me-uh.
Miriam	Meer-ee-um.
Midianites	Mid-ee-un-ites.
Pithom	Py-thum.
Rameses	Ram-ih-seez.
Thutmose	Thut-mo-se.
Pharaoh	Fair-o or Fay-roe.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, write the following continuum on the board:

Easy 0 1 2 3 4 5 Difficult

Explain that you will give the class several decisions, and students will decide the level of difficulty to make the decision. Students will indicate the decision's difficulty by holding a piece of paper with the corresponding number from the continuum.

Ask the class to consider the following decisions: 1—Your neighbor needs some flour. 2—A friend requests your help for their move. 3—Your church wants you to oversee a special offering for a local charity. 4—Your pastor asks you to go on an overseas mission trip. 5—You have been nominated to lead a local citizens' group to address a neighborhood concern.

After the activity, ask volunteers to share what factors made making the decision easy or difficult. Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today we will look at the story of a family that was faced with a difficult decision. God used their response to accomplish great things for a whole nation."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 2:1-10. Divide the class into three groups, designating them: **Jochebed Group**, **Miriam Group**, and **Pharaoh's Daughter Group**. Distribute handouts (you prepare) to each group with the following questions for small-group discussion:

Jochebed Group: 1—How did Jochebed deal with the danger of having a son? 2—Why do you think she created an "ark of bulrushes" (Exodus 2:3) for her son? 3—What do her actions teach us about justice and compassion?

Miriam Group: 1—What dangers were possible for Miriam as she approached the pharaoh's daughter? 2—How did Miriam help ensure that her brother would continue to live instead of

dying as the pharaoh had decreed? 3—What do her actions teach us about justice and compassion?

Pharaoh's Daughter Group: 1—In what ways did the actions of the pharaoh's daughter oppose her father? 2—How did her adoption of Moses show God's plan to deliver His people? 3—What do her actions teach us about justice and compassion?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "An Unforgettable Day" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After calling time for either exercise, have groups present their findings for whole-class discussion.

Into Life

Transition by saying, "Moses' mother, his sister, and the pharaoh's daughter were all faced with complex and unjust situations. In their own way, they each responded with justice and compassion. As God's people, we are to honor Him and be used to enact His justice in the world."

Write on the board: *Situations That Require Justice and Compassion*. Ask the class to work in pairs to determine possible answers to the header. Challenge pairs to include individual and global injustices that they believe God wants His people to address. After no more than five minutes of discussion, ask pairs to state their answer(s). Write responses on the board.

Based on the responses, discern one situation of particular concern for the class. Through whole-class discussion, ask what steps your students can take to address the perceived injustice. (You might appoint a group of students to provide an all-class response for the next class period. If you do so, allow time in the next class session to discuss and make a plan based on the presented suggestion.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Decisions, Decisions" activity from the activity page. Because of the personal nature of the activity, students may wish to complete this as a take-home.

Song of Moses

Devotional Reading: Exodus 14:21-31
Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:30–32:47

Deuteronomy 32:3-6, 10-14, 18

3 Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

5 They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.

6 Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

10 He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

11 As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings:

12 So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

13 He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock;

14 Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.

18 Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.

Key Text

He said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. —Deuteronomy 32:46

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall ways that the Lord had blessed His people.
2. Determine the identity of “they” in Deuteronomy 32:5.
3. Compose a personal song of thankfulness to the Lord.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Sing and Remember
- B. Lesson Context

I. God's Faithfulness (Deuteronomy 32:3-6)

- A. Because of His Greatness (vv. 3-4)
- B. Despite a Crooked Generation (vv. 5-6)

II. God's Goodness (Deuteronomy 32:10-14)

- A. Through Protection (vv. 10-12)
Apple of His Eye
- B. By Provision (vv. 13-14)

III. People's Apostasy (Deuteronomy 32:18)

- A. Disregarding Their Rock (v. 18a)
Maternal Care
- B. Forgetting Their Birth (v. 18b)

Conclusion

- A. Creative Praise
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Sing and Remember

A friend spent years caring for his mother as she experienced the debilitating effects of Alzheimer's. Over time she lost her recollection of events and decades-old relationships—even relationships with her own children.

Despite the loss of certain memories, my friend's mother retained some ability to sing. As a devoutly religious woman, she had sung hymns all her life. Those hymns were deeply embedded; so even as she experienced the dramatic symptoms of Alzheimer's, she could still sing of her comfort and hope in God. Her faith—and the faith of her children—was strengthened by hymns and songs of worship. The destructive nature of Alzheimer's could not dismiss the eternal truths found in hymns, deeply instilled through years of singing and recitation.

Worship, lament, praise, and joy are reflected through the songs of Scripture. These songs give voice for people of God to express complex feelings about life and the nature of following God. In the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were taught a song for their future.

B. Lesson Context

As the book of Deuteronomy comes to a close, Israel's leader, Moses, was on the verge of death. As a result of the impending change of leadership, Moses spoke publicly for the final time. The result is several smaller speeches and songs (found in Deuteronomy 29:2–33:29) that serve as the dramatic conclusion to Moses' ministry.

At first Moses reminded the Israelites to remember and accept the stipulations of God's covenant (Deuteronomy 29–30). This covenant was based on God's love for His people and their responding love and commitment to Him (see 4:37-40; 5:2-3; 6:5-6; 7:9; 11:1; 13:4). A failure to adhere to God's requirements would result in dramatic negative consequences for Israel (see 28:15-68). In addition, Moses' speech included a statement on his successor (31:1-8), a recitation of the law (31:9-13), and a prediction of the future (31:14-29).

In the midst of Moses' speeches, he presented a

song for the people (Deuteronomy 31:30–32:43). The song is reminiscent of psalms that celebrate the people’s relationship with God (examples: Psalms 78; 105; 106). Just as the psalms were meant for singing, so was this song of Moses (Deuteronomy 31:19, 21-22).

The three divisions of the song speak to the scope of the Israelites’ relationship with God. God’s loyalty is contrasted with their sinfulness (Deuteronomy 32:1-14). As a result, negative consequences are certain (32:15-35). However, forgiveness, healing, and protection can still be attained (32:36-43).

I. God’s Faithfulness

(Deuteronomy 32:3-6)

The song begins by calling the heavens and the earth as witnesses to the unfolding word of warning from God (Deuteronomy 32:1-2).

A. Because of His Greatness (vv. 3-4)

3. Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

The object that all creation should bear witness to was the proclamation of God’s holy name. For the people of God, the centrality of *the name of the Lord* was crucial for their worship (Deuteronomy 12:5-6). God’s name reflected the very nature of His being (see Exodus 33:19). To misappropriate His name brought great consequences (Deuteronomy 5:11).

As God’s name was proclaimed, His *greatness* would be celebrated. God’s greatness is not an abstract principle, but is a specific reality. The people of Israel experienced divine greatness firsthand as they saw how *God* treated them during their most vulnerable moments (Deuteronomy 3:24; 9:26; see Psalm 150:2). Even the angels in Heaven will sing of God’s greatness upon seeing His victory over evil (Revelation 15:1-4).

4a. He is the Rock.

Because of God’s greatness, He is the anchor for His people—the one and only *Rock*, the Savior and ruler of His people (see Deuteronomy 32:15, 18; 2 Samuel 22:3).

Other biblical texts describe God a “R/rock,”

referring to His stability and unchanging nature (see 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:3, 32, 47; Psalms 18:2, 31; 28:1; 62:2, 6-7). Later parts of this song contrast the Rock of Israel with the weak gods of Israel’s enemies (Deuteronomy 32:31, 37). The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was “the stone of Israel” (Genesis 49:24), steadfast for His people.

4b. His work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment.

The people of God can take refuge in God as their Rock because His *work* in the world is *perfect* (see 2 Samuel 22:31). Even when humans act unfairly and unjustly, God is flawless. His law “is perfect, converting the soul” of humans to walk in His ways of righteousness (Psalm 19:7; see 23:3).

Even when humans question, God’s acts of *judgment* are just and right (see Job 34:12; 37:23; Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 5:16). As a result, God requires that His covenant people live with the same high regard for just living in the world (see Deuteronomy 16:19; 24:17; Isaiah 1:17; 56:1; etc.).

4c. A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

The song continues to laud the greatness of *God*. The *truth* of His name is fulfilled in His faithfulness to His people (Isaiah 25:1; see Psalm 33:4). His true faithfulness is demonstrated as He is holy, *without iniquity*, in all that He does (Zephaniah 3:5).

This song makes clear that God is worthy to be worshipped because of His holiness and perfection. These attributes are displayed through His *just and right* ways. His ways are to be imitated by His people (Hosea 14:9; see Exodus 23:1-9).

What Do You Think?

What are some attributes of God’s greatness that you can discern?

Digging Deeper

How might Psalms 90:1-2; 147:5; Isaiah 66:1-2; Jeremiah 10:10; Mark 4:35-41; John 4:24; 5:26; Acts 17:24-25; and Revelation 21:6 inform your answer?

B. Despite a Crooked Generation (vv. 5-6)

5. They have corrupted themselves, their

spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation.

God's people would be noticed for their lack of spiritual blemish (see Leviticus 21:17-23 for a physical reality). This implied that God desired that they live upright and righteous lives. This would include their relationships with each other and the land, and their worship of the one true God.

Certain livestock without spot were required by Israel for sacrifices (Numbers 19:2; 28:3, 9, 11; 29:17, 26). These livestock were considered to be without corruption and were set aside.

However, as the people of God *corrupted themselves* with unholy influences (Exodus 32:7; Deuteronomy 4:16, 25; 9:12), *they* took on the *spot* of corruption. As a result, they ran the risk of being excluded as *children* of God.

The opposite of God's just ways are the *perverse and crooked* ways of humans. When a person is unable to make sense of the way he or she should go, wickedness thrives (see Proverbs 2:12-15). Israel had placed itself in a self-destructive position from which it could not easily escape. Despite all of Israel's experiences of God's divine redemption, the people of Israel had abandoned their redeemer (compare Jeremiah 32:30).

While this song refers to a specific *generation*, the song's truths are timeless and applicable to God's children in all eras. Jesus used a similar phrase to describe the unbelieving nature of some people in His audience (Matthew 17:17).

Ultimately, the children of God are tasked with living in an upright manner—obedient to the commands of God. Believers can do so as they are redeemed by the blood of Christ, the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). As a result, their lives can shine in the dark, crooked ways of the world (Philippians 2:14-16).

6. Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

The relationship between *the Lord* and Israel was based on Israel's loyalty and trust (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6-16). However, the *people* of Israel would betray the relationship by their reliance on foreign gods (31:16). The people would

be *foolish* and *unwise* when they disregarded God's faithfulness. As a result of their foolishness, this song described how God would respond with a harsh warning and disastrous consequences (32:21-27, not in our printed text).

God cared for Israel as a father would care for his child (Deuteronomy 1:31; Hosea 11:1-2). The song's tenderness at this point contrasts the monstrous nature of Israel's ingratitude to God's covenant love.

Israel's whole identity came into existence because of the Father's love as He *bought* them into His inheritance (Exodus 15:16). He *made* and *established* Israel to be His own covenanted people (Genesis 17:7-8; Exodus 6:7-8). The song reminded Israel of the source of their high value: the God who established His covenant with them.

What Do You Think?

How do believers disregard God's commands and live foolishly and unwisely?

Digging Deeper

How should your response to sin in others differ depending on whether the person is a Christian or a non-Christian?

II. God's Goodness

(Deuteronomy 32:10-14)

The intervening verses describe how God would “set the bounds” of His people (Deuteronomy 32:8). God brought His people—“the lot of his inheritance” (32:9)—into safety.

A. Through Protection (vv. 10-12)

10a. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him.

This song depicts God's people—referred collectively as *him*—as being lost in an inhospitable, barren *land*. In a metaphorical sense, the Israelites' slavery in Egypt served as a *desert*, an inconducive place for their flourishing. Following their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites wandered in an actual *wilderness*.

Yet in these trying places, God was always present for His people. He *led* them to places of care

and rest (see Hosea 13:4-5; Jeremiah 31:2). The deserts in the Sinai peninsula, south of Judah, are quite inhospitable to travelers. The ancient singer knew the dangers to someone lost in the desert.

10b. He kept him as the apple of his eye.

The eye is one of the smallest and most sensitive parts of the human body. Yet it is also one of the most important parts of the body. Eyelashes, eyelids, eyebrows, blinking reflexes, nearly invisible membranes, and the eye socket all serve to protect the sensitive organ. Israel's importance is reflected in the way the song describes God protecting His people as though protecting *the apple of his eye*.

The phrase addresses a certain level of intimacy and care between God and His people (see Psalm 17:8-9; Zechariah 2:8-9). God gave attention to Israel's needs and took the necessary steps to protect and provide for them, all out of His love for them. Though Israel was like a wandering traveler, they would no longer fear—because God provided through the inhospitable wildernesses of life.

Apple of His Eye

If there is adequate lighting, clear vision, and appropriate proximity, I might see my reflection in the eyes of another person. By no means is this reflection clear—it's only a glimmer. Some details in the reflection may be lacking, and clarity may linger for only a few seconds.

Rarely do I stand close enough to another person to see my reflection in their eyes. My children, however, are among the few people whose eyes I get close enough to gaze into. I wonder if they see their reflection in my eyes—for they are the apple of my eye.

The intimate relationship between God and His people leads the songwriter to speak of God's people as the apple of God's eye. God's people reflect a sliver of God's character to the world. In order for that to occur, God's people must be close to Him. What prevents you from being close to God? You are the apple of His eye! —L. M. W.

11. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.

The second metaphor relates God's care for

His people to an *eagle* caring for its *young*. As the eaglets grow up, the parent eagle will protect them with the expanse of its *wings* over the *nest*. By describing God's care and protection of His people in this manner, this song reflects the sentiment of the psalmist regarding God's protection (Psalm 91:4).

Further, when eaglets learn to fly, they glide behind their mother's wings as she *beareth them* in flight. The young birds learn as they express their own autonomy with the safety of the mother's wings to catch and carry them should they fail.

By using this imagery, not only does the song highlight God's protection but also His guidance for His people. God brought them out of Egypt and brought them to a place where they might flourish (see Exodus 19:4). They were "flying solo," but their hope for survival was in relying heavily on the Lord God (Isaiah 40:31).

What Do You Think?

How might analogies and metaphors help readers better understand God?

Digging Deeper

What are some weaknesses or dangers of using analogies and metaphors to describe God?

12. So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

The identity of the Israelites was based in their core confession (Deuteronomy 6:4), their covenant, and the stipulations for life that resulted (5:1-10; see Exodus 20:1-6). This song celebrates the Israelites' unique identity and relationship with *the Lord*; they were like a flock of sheep that their shepherd *did lead*.

As a part of this unique identity, Israel was not to follow any *strange* (that is, foreign) *god*. As the people followed the one true God, they maintained their freedom. However, they would not always stay on this path (see Deuteronomy 31:16).

B. By Provision (vv. 13-14)

13a. He made him ride on the high places of the earth.

The song transitions to refer to Israel's hope for



Visual for Lessons 6 & 9. *Allow learners one minute to silently reflect on situations when they have not given God first place in their hearts.*

their future and the many blessings that followed. If the people followed God, they would experience safety from destructive forces. They would dwell *on the high places*, safe from an enemy's invasion.

Other texts describe high places as being significant locations where an interaction with God occurred (see 1 Samuel 9:12-13, 19; 1 Kings 3:2-3). However, many of these so-called high places became locations of improper worship for Israel (see Leviticus 26:30; Numbers 33:52; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:19; Psalm 78:58; Hosea 10:8; etc.).

13b. That he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.

From this advantageous location, the people of God could be positioned above good farmland. The *increase* of crops from *the fields* would be so fruitful, they would never experience famine (see Ezekiel 36:30).

God had promised the Israelites that they would live in “a land flowing with milk and *honey*” (Exodus 13:5), a land of agricultural blessing (Deuteronomy 8:7-9). That *oil* and honey flowed *out of the rock* implied abundance and satisfaction, even in inhospitable terrain (see Psalm 81:16).

14. Butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape.

The land and the people's livestock would provide sustenance. The livestock would provide

enough extra *milk* to produce *butter* and perhaps cheese for the people (see 2 Samuel 17:29).

A certain *breed of rams* from the *Bashan* region was highly prized. This region was likely located northeast of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 4:47). During the time of Moses, the region consisted of 60 cities (see 3:4-6). In addition, the region was known for its other livestock (Ezekiel 39:18) and oak trees (Isaiah 2:13; Ezekiel 27:6; Zechariah 11:2).

The song returns to celebrate the agricultural blessing of the land (compare Deuteronomy 32:13b, above). The best quality of wheat—indicated by the idiom *the fat of kidneys of wheat*—would be accessible. Further, the vines would produce *pure blood*: unfermented *grape* juice. The land would produce abundant blessing, beyond the bare necessities needed. This section of the song describes God's care for His people. Provision and sustenance were celebrated.

What Do You Think?

How can God's people honor God as the source of all provisions?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take in the coming week to share God's provision with your neighbors?

III. People's Apostasy

(Deuteronomy 32:18)

A. Disregarding Their Rock (v. 18a)

18a. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful.

Despite the promises of vast blessing and numerous provisions, the song details how Israel would grow comfortable and careless. Their prosperity would lead them to a state of “waxed fat, . . . grown thick, . . . [and] covered with fatness” (Deuteronomy 32:15). In their complacency, they ignored God as the source of their blessing. Their comfort and willful ignorance would lead them to worship false gods instead of the one true God who provided for them and blessed them (32:16-17).

The song refers again to two previously used metaphors: God as a *Rock* (see commentary on

Deuteronomy 32:4, above) and God as a parent who *begat* children (see commentary on 32:5, 11, above). This verse is a mixed metaphor—rocks do not have children! The resulting point is the scope of God’s relationship with Israel. He was their source of life and their sustainer.

What Do You Think?

How can believers ensure that they do not disregard God as their Rock, the source of salvation and blessing?

Digging Deeper

Who will you invite to provide accountability in this regard?

Maternal Care

As children, my sister and I had a cat named Fluffy. Some of my fondest childhood memories revolve around Fluffy and her kittens. I remember watching her care for her kittens by protecting, cleaning, and nursing them.

One afternoon a stray kitten wandered into our yard. I wanted to keep the kitten, but my parents reminded me that Fluffy would often chase away other cats—even stray kittens. Albeit with warnings, my parents agreed to let the stray cat stay. The next morning we found Fluffy sprawled out, nursing and caring for the kitten. Fluffy’s maternal instincts had replaced her territorial tendencies.

Scripture describes how God cares for His people like a mother’s comfort (see Isaiah 66:13). What steps are you taking to remember the one who has promised to never forget you (49:15)? —L. M. W.

B. Forgetting Their Birth (v. 18b)

18b. And hast forgotten God that formed thee.

Corporate memory can create a community identity as it allows the group members to recollect, rehearse, and codify their most important experiences together. From the remembrance the community can draw conclusions regarding how its members should act, think, and feel in the future.

Throughout Deuteronomy, the Israelites are told to remember their history and how God brought them out of slavery (Deuteronomy 5:15;

7:18; 8:2; 15:15; 16:12). The people were to go to great lengths to not forget their history. This would ensure that future generations would not have forgotten the ways God formed and maintained them (see 11:2-7; 18-21).

Conclusion

A. Creative Praise

Throughout church history, believers have expressed their joys, doubts, fears, and hopes in songs. These songs of worship have shaped believers into spiritually mature disciples of Jesus. Singing should not be a kind of sedative that numbs us. Rather, our singing should include repentance with praise and self-examination with satisfaction. Only in that way can singing shape us as people of God.

On the surface, the nature of the song in today’s text is rather cynical; it highlights the failure of the people of Israel. Yet the song’s pointed nature leads to a declaration of hope. God’s salvation will transform and sustain, if only people remember His steadfast commitment to them. As a result, God’s people can sing of His mighty deeds, all while confessing our their own failure to appreciate them.

That same sort of forgetfulness can plague Christians today when we forget that our salvation is a gift from God as He draws us into His kingdom. We did not earn that citizenship; it was given to us freely. God sustains us when we recite the story of our faith and live out its implications in our lives.

B. Prayer

God, You are the Rock in whom we can find provision and protection. Lead us in Your ways so that we will not turn away from You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God’s people sing of His provision and protection!

How to Say It

Bashan	<i>Bay-shan.</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</i>
Zephaniah	<i>Zef-uh-nye-uh.</i>

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, prepare a set of five index cards for each anticipated small group. (Each group should consist of no more than five students.) Each set of five index cards should show the following prompts, one per index card:

My earliest memory is . . .

A person I'll always remember is . . .

A past experience that still affects me is . . .

What I'd like others to remember about me is . . .

A moment that I want to always remember is . . .

As the class convenes, put students in small groups. Give a set of the premade index cards to each group, but tell the group members not to look at the prompts on the index cards.

Once you have distributed all the sets of index cards, say, "Each person in your group should choose one of the index cards at random and give an answer to the prompt." After no more than five minutes, allow volunteers to share their responses.

Alternative. Write on the board, "What role does memory play in the Christian life?" Allow for whole-class discussion.

Lead into the lesson by saying, "Today's lesson is about the importance of memory and remembrance. Let's see how Moses told the entire congregation of Israel what they must never forget."

Into the Word

Help students understand the setting for today's Bible study by briefly summarizing material found under the Lesson Context for this lesson. (You may want to recruit a class member ahead of time to prepare this two-minute lecture.)

Before class prepare handouts with the following questions, each as a header of a column: 1—What God's people were supposed to remember. 2—Signs of the people's disobedience. 3—Evidence of God's faithfulness.

Have students stay in the original groups from

the Into the Lesson portion. Have each group read Deuteronomy 32:3-6, 10-14, 18. Then, have each group work together to write down the answers to the prompts on the handout. Allow 10 minutes to complete the activity before reconvening the class for discussion.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Goodness and Rebellion" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have groups work together to complete the activity as indicated before discussing their findings with the whole class.

Into Life

Write on the board the following questions that will serve as headers to three columns: 1—What are we supposed to remember? 2—What signs of disobedience do we see in our world? 3—What evidence do we have of God's faithfulness? (You may point out that each of the questions corresponds to the questions used earlier during Into the Word.)

Invite class members to work in their original groups to answer the three questions. As they work, encourage the groups to consider how the scriptural truths of the lesson text compel us to live in faithful action today.

After no more than 10 minutes, ask for a volunteer from each group to report their answers to the whole class. Write each group's answers on the board under the corresponding questions.

Then say, "Now try writing new words to a familiar hymn melody. The new words should contain ideas from these lists. Let's compose our own songs of praise to God."

After no more than 10 minutes, reconvene the class and encourage the groups to sing their new songs for the whole class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Images of Praise" activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated. After five minutes, have volunteers give their answer to the third prompt on the activity.

The Call of Gideon

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Background Scripture: Judges 6:1-27

Judges 6:1-2, 7-16a

1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

8 That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

9 And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;

10 And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and

sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

16a And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee.

Key Text

The LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. —Judges 6:23

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the historical context of Israel's oppression.
2. Articulate the presupposition behind Gideon's first question.
3. Determine one or more ways to avoid false thinking regarding whether God is *with* or *not with* him or her.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Getting into Action
- B. Lesson Context

I. Midianite Oppression (Judges 6:1-2)

- A. Punishment (v. 1)
- B. Hiding (v. 2)

Fight, Flight, or Freeze?

II. Divine Deliverance (Judges 6:7-16a)

- A. Prophetic Warning (vv. 7-10)
- B. Angelic Assurance (vv. 11-12)
- C. Gideon's Response (v. 13)
- D. God's Clarification (vv. 14-16a)

An Unexpected Christmas Sermon

Conclusion

- A. From Why to What's Next
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Getting into Action

Rather than sitting at home and worrying during the pandemic of 2020, retirees Ted and Ellen decided to act. Many families in their community had been unemployed or underemployed as a result of the pandemic, so Ted and Ellen “adopted” seven families and brought them food each week. Some of the food was from a local food bank and some from their own kitchen.

This couple took the initiative to do something for others. While food matters, human connection matters more. Their work and presence brought a bit of God's deliverance to those who needed it.

When we read the “big” stories of the Bible, we may be tempted to imagine that God works only or primarily through dramatic events. But countless “small” stories of generosity and faith have occurred through the centuries as God has worked through the hands and feet of believers (compare Mark 9:41; 12:42). When people of faith answer God's call, the blessings of unexpected opportunities to serve follow.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Judges features accounts of a series of leaders (“judges”) who arose to rescue Israel from foreign oppressions during the era 1380 to 1050 BC. These stories fit together to paint a picture of a dreary pattern: the Israelites sinned, God punished them with foreign oppression, the Israelites repented, a deliverer came, and peace followed. Gideon, the deliverer-judge of today's lesson, was the fifth of perhaps 14 judges; he served in that capacity during the first half of the twelfth century BC. The Midianites, the oppressors whom Gideon was to confront in today's text, came from what is now northern Saudi Arabia or southeastern Jordan. They had created a sophisticated society based on trade across the Arabian Peninsula with the cultures around its perimeter (Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia; compare Genesis 37:28). They were not barbarians. The Midianites shared a history with Israel (see Exodus 18:1; etc.), a history that included conflict (see Numbers 25:14-18; Psalm 83:9-12).

I. Midianite Oppression

(Judges 6:1-2)

A. Punishment (v. 1)

1. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

The book of Judges often begins the accounts of deliverer-judges by referring to the *evil* that the nation of Israel had engaged in (Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). Their evil actions are the first part of a pattern of sin → servitude → supplication → salvation that structures most of the book of Judges. The length of the suffering of *seven years* is relatively short when compared to oppressions lasting 8 (3:8), 18 (3:14; 10:8), 20 (4:3); and 40 years (13:1).

The nature of the evil that *the children of Israel did* is not specified. But in other instances where the phrase “evil in the sight of the Lord” occurs, the evil is idol worship (Judges 2:11-13; 3:7; 10:6).

What Do You Think?

How can you tell whether hard times are God’s judgment for sin or simply the result of living in a fallen world?

Digging Deeper

How will your reactions differ between the two?

B. Hiding (v. 2)

2. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

The land of Israel features large and small *caves*, both natural and man-made. When people felt vulnerable, they might flee to one of them for refuge (see 1 Samuel 13:6; 1 Kings 18:4; compare Revelation 6:15; compare the nonbiblical 2 Maccabees 6:11). *Strong holds* are fortresses with difficult access (1 Samuel 23:14, 19; Ezekiel 33:27).

Fight, Flight, or Freeze?

I saw my sister’s hair spread on the pillow behind her on the couch. I was angry because

of an insult she had hurled at me, so I grabbed a handful of hair and pulled. Incensed, she jumped up and lunged at my own hair, pulling a handful. I screamed, and a fight ensued. This was a rare occurrence since we usually got along well. For some reason, we overreacted, and we had the biggest fight of our lives.

The fight did not last long. I knew if I told my parents about the fight, we would both get in trouble. I did not want to be in trouble myself, and deep down I did not want her to get punished. So, confronted with the options of fight, flight, or freeze, I chose the middle option—running away and hiding in the other room.

We may struggle to know whether fight, flight, or freeze is best; the Scriptures offer many right and wrong examples of all three choices (compare and contrast Genesis 19:17, 26; 27:43; Exodus 14:13; Psalm 46:10; John 18:10-11; Hebrews 6:18; etc.). One thing we know: God’s Word guides us in these choices (Matthew 10:23; etc.). But one other issue comes before all that: How do we ensure that the opposition we face is not God’s response to our own sin? —L. M. W.

II. Divine Deliverance

(Judges 6:7-16a)

A. Prophetic Warning (vv. 7-10)

7. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites.

The pattern of deliverance involved Israel pleading for help. The prayers may have resembled the

How to Say It

Abiezrite	A-by- ez -rite.
Amorites	Am-uh-rites.
Gilead	Gil-ee-ud (G as in <i>get</i>).
Habakkuk	Huh- back -kuk.
Maccabees	Mack-uh-bees.
Manasseh	Muh- nass -uh.
Ophrah	Ahf-ruh.
Sivan	See- vahn .
Zechariah	Zek-uh- rye -uh.
Zephaniah	Zef-uh- nye -uh.



Visual for Lesson 7. Show this image and discuss how being in God's will allows believers to live without fear.

petitions found elsewhere in Scripture (see Psalm 44; Lamentations 5). In such compositions, the writers both complained to God about their situations and asked for help in relieving them.

8. That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage.

The 17 prophetic books of the Old Testament do not always state the precise occasion that prompted their prophetic oracles. However, some texts do speak of prophets appearing on the scene in order to warn their audience or to call them to action (examples: 1 Samuel 2:27-36; 1 Kings 13:1-10).

The unnamed *prophet* in the verse before us, however, brings a word of challenge that will ultimately bring about the people's deliverance. Prophets were not all that unusual in the life of Israel. God had spoken through Moses regarding His will that the people listen to His prophet (Deuteronomy 18:14-22). God used both men and women (see Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14) to serve as prophets and declare His directives for His people.

This prophet's message is grounded in Israel's core story: the story of the exodus. The phrase *house of bondage* always shows up in stories about Israel's departure *from Egypt* (Exodus 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10; Joshua 24:17; etc.). By the time of the events of

today's text, the exodus was more than 250 years in the past. Generations had come and gone. But the Israelites did not need a reminder of what it was like to be oppressed—they were being oppressed by the Midianites at the time! Rather, the prophet was reminding the people of Israel of the one who had delivered their ancestors.

9. And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land.

The deliverance had two parts: exodus and settlement. God's gift of the *land* (Exodus 23:31; etc.) had made it possible for the people to enjoy their relationship with God in the rhythms of holy life.

Appeal to the story of the settlement appears also in Amos 2:9-11. According to that prophet, God had driven out the pagan population in order to make possible the delivered people's place in their land. The Israelites, however, ultimately imitated the people they had displaced by engaging in idol worship, thereby disowning their redeemer (see commentary on Judges 6:1, above).

10. And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

The foundational story of the exodus always should have pointed the Israelites toward loyalty to *the Lord*. His displacement of *the Amorites* to make room for the Israelites should have done so as well. Amorites are mentioned dozens of times in the Old Testament, along with numerous other “-ites” whose lands were given to Israel. The Amorites seemed to have been particularly sinful, in light of Genesis 15:16 (compare 2 Kings 21:11). Whether the writer is referring to Amorites specifically or just using that designation to refer to all the dispossessed “-ites” in general is uncertain.

Since the Lord had demonstrated His power in forming and settling Israel as a nation, it made no sense to *fear* other gods. But for ancient peoples, worship was less about matters of pro and con arguments than it was about not leaving any gods accidentally unworshipped (examples: 2 Kings 17:24-41; Acts 17:23). The idea of worshipping one and only one God, no matter where one lived, was

highly unusual. This outlook is reflected in the fact that the plural word *gods* occurs more than 200 times in the Old Testament.

But commonly accepted cultural practices do not necessarily have God's approval. Idolatry was an act of disloyalty. When Israel adopted pagan cultural practices, they abandoned the religion that Moses had led them in decades earlier.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to warn people of God's judgment while "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)?

Digging Deeper

What do you do if people then dismiss you as being judgmental?

B. Angelic Assurance (vv. 11-12)

11a. And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah.

The second scene in this story involves a different sort of messenger, a heavenly being, who appears near a certain *oak* tree. Large trees—whether solitary or in a grove—were often used as landmarks and significant places for the people (Genesis 12:6; 18:1; 35:4; Joshua 19:33; Judges 4:11; etc.). They also served as shade and so places of rest and conversation for people who had worked all day and wanted a break. For various references to oak trees specifically, see Joshua 24:26; 2 Samuel 18:9-10; 1 Kings 13:14; Ezekiel 6:13.

There are two biblical towns named Ophrah. One was located in the tribal territory of Benjamin, about a dozen miles north-northeast of the city later known as Jerusalem (Joshua 18:21-24). The other *Ophrah*, the one under consideration here, was in the tribal territory of Manasseh; some students propose that the name is another designation for the town of Gilead mentioned in Judges 10:17. In any case, this is "Ophrah of the Abiezrites" (Judges 6:24; also see 6:11b, next).

11b. That pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

This half verse reveals that the oak tree under which the heavenly messenger was sitting was on

the property of father *Joash* which would pass to son *Gideon*. To be an *Abiezrite* was to be of the tribe Manasseh (see Joshua 17:2). For Gideon to be threshing *wheat* is a time indicator: the wheat harvest in this region occurs in the month of Sivan, which is late May or early June. *The winepress* won't be used for its intended purpose until the grapes ripen later in the summer months.

Gideon could have been threshing either by striking sheaves with a flail or by having oxen pull a threshing sledge on a hard outdoor surface (compare 1 Chronicles 21:20-23). Threshing is different from winnowing, the latter occurring after the former, although they occur in the same place (compare Ruth 3:2; Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17). That Gideon felt the need to *hide* the wheat indicates the oppressive treatment from *the Midianites* regarding Israel's crops (Judges 6:3-6).

12. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

The heavenly messenger greeted Gideon not on the basis of his past achievements (as far as we know), but as a foreshadowing of what he was to become: a *mighty man of valour*. The statement that *the Lord is with thee* is not a cliché; it occurs rather rarely in the Bible. The only other place a heavenly messenger uttered this phrase unconditionally is in Luke 1:28, to Mary. The phrase was used presumptively by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7:3). The longer, conditional use of the phrase is found in 2 Chronicles 15:2: "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."

More common is the assurance that "God is with thee" (Genesis 21:22; 1 Samuel 10:7; 1 Chronicles 17:2). Combining the words *God* and *Lord* in such an assurance occurs elsewhere (see 22:18; 28:20; Zephaniah 3:17).

C. Gideon's Response (v. 13)

13. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? But now the

LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

Gideon's cynical response reflected a sense of despair as he pointed out the gap between his then-current experience and the age-old stories of deliverance. The reader knows that the Midianite oppression was the due punishment brought on by Israel's sins (see Judges 6:1, above). Did Gideon not realize this?

This sort of protest appears often in the Bible as various people wonder about God's apparent lack of involvement or concern (examples: Joshua 7:7; Lamentations 2; Habakkuk 1:2-3). Gideon's question should not strike us as rude, much less unfaithful, but as a heartfelt attempt to make sense of his experiences.

Questions about the message of predecessors seem especially important. Moses encouraged parents to teach their children about the experiences of deliverance (Exodus 13:14-16). Israel's poetic literature proclaimed the importance of remembering God's deeds (Psalm 78:1-8). Gideon has trusted the message of his ancestors. At the time, however, he could not resolve the apparent disconnect between "then" and his "now."

D. God's Clarification (vv. 14-16a)

14. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

Gideon's call to become the deliverer bears similarities to those of Moses (Exodus 3:1-4:17) and Joshua (Joshua 1:1-9).

The reference to *this thy might* seems strange. What so-called might did Gideon have? The text says nothing of his political intelligence or past military experience. His skills as a farmer might have prepared him for the physical rigors of warfare, but little else.

Perhaps the answer lies in the previous verse. Gideon knew the ancient story of Israel's deliverance as told in the exodus story. He dared to question God as to why his present realities seemed so different. The strength that Gideon desired would fill him as he went where God *sent* him (see Judges 6:34).

An Unexpected Christmas Sermon

I like shaking people out of long-held and complacent expectations. One time when I did so was in using Judges 6:14 as a text for a Christmas sermon. For those who expected a sermon from Matthew 1, 2, or Luke 2, the shock was rather total!

My impetus for using Judges 6:14 at Christmas was the oft-heard lament that Christ was being taken out of Christmas. The greeting "Merry Christmas" was being replaced with "Happy Holidays." Stores stocked increasing numbers of lawn displays of Santa Claus and decreasing numbers of Nativity scenes. Christmas was ever more becoming commercialized. It seemed as if the truth of Emmanuel, meaning "God with us" (Matthew 1:23; compare Judges 6:12), was disappearing by means of secular commercialism.

My answer and challenge to the problem was an extended application of Judges 6:14: Go in your might and save your Christmas! Begin first at home: prioritize the placement of Nativity scenes. Replace expectations of receiving things with gratitude of having already received. Identify and avoid provocations that cause the season of love to become a season of shove.

The challenge of Judges 6:14 can apply to many areas of Christian life. The most important area right now is the one where you need to set aside the complaint of "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Judges 6:13). Otherwise, you won't be able to hear God's declaration "Go in this thy might" and solve the problem. —R. L. N.

What Do You Think?

What unused spiritual gifts has God given you that you can begin to use this week?

Digging Deeper

Would you seek the counsel of a fellow Christian before doing so? Why, or why not?

15. And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

Gideon objected to the call on the basis of insig-

nificant lineage (compare Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 1:6). A leader in antiquity needed family connections and alliances with other families. When Gideon pointed to the insignificance of his *family*, he was not simply being modest. He knew that political leaders needed a power base of connections.

What Do You Think?

What task is God giving you today that will stretch you beyond your comfort zone?

Digging Deeper

When was a time that service to God caused you to place more trust in Him than in yourself?

16a. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee.

The explicit promise *I will be with thee* is the strongest assurance Gideon can receive! This promise is all the more striking given the phrase's rarity in the Old Testament (see Genesis 26:3; 31:3; Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:5; 1 Kings 11:38; Isaiah 43:2). These can be contrasted with the opposite, the Lord's promise elsewhere to *not* be present (see Deuteronomy 1:42; Numbers 14:43; Joshua 7:12).

What Do You Think?

When sensing a call to action, how can you know that the calling is really from God?

Digging Deeper

Which Scripture passages help you most to answer that question?

Conclusion

A. From Why to What's Next

Today's text begins an account of how Israel experienced deliverance from an oppression. It draws on the most important Israelite story—the exodus—by pointing out the gap between the memory of the story and the present experience. God had delivered in the past, but He seemed no longer willing to do so. As with many stories of the call of prophets or kings, the hero here (Gideon)

gets to express the confusion that the readers must also feel and that we may still feel when our beliefs and our experiences seem to clash.

When that happens, we can get stuck brooding in an endless cycle of asking why, as Gideon did (compare Jeremiah 5:19; 13:22; 16:10; etc.). In that regard, it is important to note what is missing in Judges 6:14: the Lord did not answer Gideon's why question of Judges 6:13. We are answerable to the Lord, not He to us (compare Job 38–41). Our why questions will not always be answered; sometimes the Lord will only tell us what's next. Sometimes trouble can result when we try to run ahead of the Lord by assuming we know what's next (examples: Numbers 14:39–45; Joshua 7:1–12). Gideon also seems to have allowed himself to fall into this trap later (Judges 8:24–28).

Yet on balance Gideon was attentive to the Lord's will. He refused to become king, insisting that God alone should rule Israel (Judges 8:22–23). Like all of us, Gideon experienced both successes and failures. When he heard the call to act, he stated his doubts openly, asking God for answers. But when God did not answer those questions, Gideon wanted miraculous signs (see 6:17–22, 36–40).

It's been said that there are two ways to learn things: by wisdom and by experience. Wisdom is when we learn from the mistakes of others; experience is when we learn from our own mistakes. The life of Gideon is recorded that we might learn from his successes and failures (compare Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:16). While his call differs from that of Christians, Gideon's life still has much to teach us. The Lord still calls us to serve. He still says that He is with us (Matthew 28:19–20). But are *we* with *Him*?

B. Prayer

Oh God who warns and challenges, raise us up to be Your hands and feet in Your saving work. May our questions reflect direction as You remind us of Your presence. We pray in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let God work through your faith.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Distribute in random order 10 sheets of paper (you prepare), each displaying one letter of the word *insecurity*. Ask recipients to stand before the class and display their letters. Encourage other class members to voice suggestions regarding the order of the letters. (Smaller classes can distribute two sheets to each participant, who hold one in each hand.)

After the correct order of letters is established, write the letters on the board in correct order in a vertical column. Ask the class to work with you to create an acrostic, where letters of horizontally written words intersect with the letters in the vertical column.

Take a poll by asking: “How many of you remember a time when you felt insecure?” Ask for a show of hands. Then ask, “How many of you experienced a situation when insecurity made the problem worse?” Ask for another show of hands.

Lead to Bible study by saying, “Today we’ll look at a Bible story showing how God called someone who may have been characterized by one or more of the words in our acrostic—or maybe not!”

Into the Word

Divide the class into four groups, designating them **Israelites Group / Prophet Group / Angel Group / Gideon Group**. Ask all groups to listen as today’s text is read-aloud to discover and take notes on what the namesake(s) of their groups said and did. After the reading, have participants work within their groups to write a monologue spoken by a representative of each group that retells what their namesakes said and did. Instruct that in the retelling, groups can use their “sanctified imaginations” to fill in gaps with additional material that is consistent with the nature of the character(s) they will be portraying.

After several minutes, call for monologues to be delivered to the whole class. After each monologue, allow the rest of the class to ask questions.

Write *Surprised by God* on the board as a stimulus for whole-class discussion as you ask, “How does that phrase make a good title for the story of Gideon?”

Into Life

Distribute copies of a handout (you prepare) that features these three column headings:

Tough Situation! / God’s Work? / God’s Silence?

Have the following instructions printed on the handout: “Jot down a word or phrase under each heading to describe a situation when you prayed for God to intervene. Note whether you saw how God worked or that He seemed silent.” State that they have a maximum of one minute to finish, and no one will be put on the spot to reveal what they’ve written. After the minute, allow sharing within groups for those who desire to do so.

Then pose this question for whole-class discussion: “When we as Christians go into action to help resolve tough situations of our country, how do we know whether God is *with* or *not with* us?” (If you think the question will cause the discussion to turn political, rephrase it to minimize that possibility.) After responses, ask, “What about tough situations we are facing as a congregation?” Following the ensuing discussion, ask members to return to their groups to discuss personal situations. As they ponder various courses of action or inaction, how do they determine whether God is *with* or *not with* them?

Option. Close the class by distributing copies of the “Help!” exercise on the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute for participants to complete as indicated individually before voluntary sharing. Or use this activity as a take-home prayer prompt for the week ahead.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Called to Rescue” crossword puzzle on the activity page as a take-home.

Who Is King?

Devotional Reading: Psalm 93

Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 10:17-26

1 Samuel 8:4-7

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

5 And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

1 Samuel 10:17-24

17 And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh;

18 And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you:

19 And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adver-

sities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.

20 And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.

21 When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found.

22 Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.

23 And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

24 And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

Key Text

Ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. —1 Samuel 10:19a

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List circumstances that caused the nation of Israel to demand a king.
2. Explain why Israel's wanting a king was a rejection of the Lord.
3. Identify one item that represents a rejection of the Lord in his or her life and write a plan for changing this.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Ultimate Authority
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Call for a King (1 Samuel 8:4-7)

- A. Rejection of Samuel (vv. 4-5a)
Wayward Sons
- B. Rejection of the Lord (vv. 5b-7)

II. The Acclamation of a King

(1 Samuel 10:17-24)

- A. Gathering the Tribes (vv. 17-19a)
"The Ultimate Fulfillment"
- B. Choosing Benjamin (vv. 19b-20)
- C. Choosing Saul (vv. 21-24)

Conclusion

- A. Planning in the Priesthood
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Ultimate Authority

Parents wear many hats. One of these requires rendering judgment between siblings on the basis of parental authority in the household. When siblings disagree, they can seek a word straight from the top that might fall in their favor.

For instance, in the case of two daughters, their mother might have to decide whether the older had the right to donate a hoodie from her ex-boyfriend, even though the younger desired to keep it for herself. The older daughter would argue that it was hers to do with as she pleased; and furthermore, she had a right not to see it in her own home as a reminder of her former boyfriend. The younger would counter, saying it was still a good hoodie, no matter where it came from. Their mother would rule to decide the fate of the hoodie.

When Samuel gathered the people together, the fate of an entire nation was at stake. But would the people recognize his authority? And would they recognize the authority *behind* Samuel—the Lord himself?

B. Lesson Context

In the Christian arrangement of the books of the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel are included with the 12 historical books (Joshua–Esther). They record the transition from theocracy (being governed by the Lord) to monarchy (being governed by an earthly king). The books of 1 and 2 Samuel can be divided into these sections:

- I. End of judges' period (1 Samuel 1–8)
- II. God's selection and rejection of Saul (1 Samuel 9–15)
- III. God's selection of David and Saul's fall (1 Samuel 16–31)
- IV. Establishment of David's throne (2 Samuel 1–10)
- V. David's sin and flight from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11–18)
- VI. Reestablishment of David in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 19–20)
- VII. David's legacy (2 Samuel 21–24)

The period of the judges lasted more than 300 years, from 1380 to 1050 BC (see lesson 7 Les-

son Context). The judges administered justice and served as God's chosen military leaders when the people were oppressed by foreign invaders. This is told briefly in Judges 2:6-19 and recorded in detail in the rest of that book (see lesson 7). Samuel's prophetic ministry began during the latter part of those deplorable years, in 1067 BC; this was a time when Israel had no king (Judges 18:1; 19:1). This was also a time when moral conditions among the people were chaotic: "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25).

In his transitional role, Samuel is sometimes referred to as the last of the judges (1 Samuel 7:6, 15-17) and the first of the prophets (3:20; Acts 3:24; 13:20). Samuel was one of the greatest of Israel's judges. After freeing the country from oppressors, he established a circuit court to administer justice (1 Samuel 7:16). His decisions were respected, for they were according to the law.

I. The Call for a King

(1 Samuel 8:4-7)

The events recounted in this section were precipitated by the desire to avoid a crisis of leadership in Israel, such as was often seen following the death of a judge (example: Judges 3:7-4:7).

A. Rejection of Samuel (vv. 4-5a)

4. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah.

Ramah was a village in the hill country belonging to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:20b, 25). Its exact location is unknown, though it was likely 5-12 miles north of Jerusalem, which was still a Jebusite stronghold (15:8, 63). Ramah was Samuel's birthplace and served as one of his primary sites for judging (1 Samuel 1:19-20; 7:16-17). He offered sacrifices on behalf of Israel (7:9) and served as a "seer," one who received words from the Lord directly (9:19).

It's unclear whether *the elders of Israel* went straight to Ramah or met elsewhere and traveled together after an initial meeting about their shared concerns. As their title suggests, these men were the heads of families and leaders in their clans

and so were older, seen as having gained wisdom throughout their lives. They formed the councils that governed day-to-day life in the tribes of Israel. Describing this group as *all* the elders suggests there were representatives from each of the 12 tribes (Exodus 3:16-18; Numbers 11:16-30; Joshua 8:33). Though we frequently think of a united Israel, in many ways the tribes operated independently, making their uniform desire all the more remarkable (see 1 Samuel 8:5a-b, below).

5a. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways.

Samuel's age caused the elders (rather ironically) to worry about the future following his death. Perhaps they knew the stories of how Israel repeatedly fell into sin and was overtaken by enemies following a judge's death (example: Judges 2:6-19). Maybe they simply wanted to be sure, before Samuel died, of the leadership they would inherit.

Or the elders could have been primarily concerned for their children and grandchildren, not wanting to see them under the leadership of Samuel's *sons*. These two, Joel and Abiah, were acting as judges. But they failed spectacularly in their roles because of their greed (1 Samuel 8:1-3, not in our printed text; compare 3:11-14). They did not follow in their father Samuel's *ways* and could not be trusted to guide with righteousness and justice.

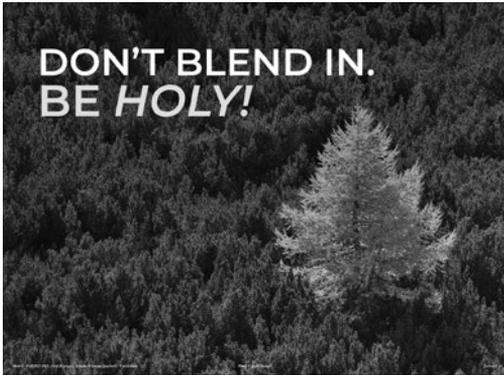
Wayward Sons

King George III (1738-1820) reigned in England during the American Revolution. For all his flaws, King George III led a pious life and took his role as king seriously. After all, he believed God had put him in his position.

In contrast, his son George IV (1762-1830) proved an immoral and vain ruler. He fathered numerous illegitimate children with multiple women. He was a heavy drinker and threw lavish, expensive parties. King George IV was known as a cavorting, wasteful ruler who cared more about himself than his people.

Like George IV, Samuel's sons were immoral men. Their ungodly leadership led the elders to ask for a king, which led to the division of Israel and finally to becoming exiles in Assyria and Babylon.

Think of the leaders in your life. Do they show



Visual for Lesson 8. *While discussing the questions associated with verses 5b-6a, ask how identity in Christ is connected to holiness.*

the fruit of the Spirit, growing in relationship with God and leading in a Christlike manner? Or are they grasping for power, money, and influence? Who you follow determines where you're going. Choose wisely. —L. M. W.

B. Rejection of the Lord (vv. 5b-7)

5b-6a. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us.

Even before Israel's entry into the land of Canaan, the Lord knew there would be a time when the people would desire a king. This was foreseen by Moses, who warned Israel of the consequences (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). To have a king made the nation more like their neighbors instead of less (1 Samuel 8:20, not in our printed text). The elders' stated desire to be *like all the nations* disturbs the reader. God specifically chose Israel and made the nation holy so that it *wouldn't* be like the nations (Exodus 19:5-6)! Trying to blend in by having *a king* as other peoples was a faithless response (see 1 Samuel 8:7, below).

In the time of the judges, Israel functioned as a theocracy (see Lesson Context). But the eldership was not interested in waiting for God to raise up another judge as He had been doing for many generations. Their demand to Samuel can very well be seen as one of grave disrespect toward the prophet. They needed him to act because no one else in Israel had the gravitas of Samuel and hope to unify

the nation behind a new king. But they did not want the benefit of his wisdom regarding whether or not to have a king, having come to him with a solution already in mind. *Samuel* was understandably *displeased* by this, as he saw the elders' desire as a rejection of the Lord's intentions for them.

What Do You Think?

What situations tempt you to embrace cultural norms that contradict your identity in Christ?

Digging Deeper

How can you strengthen your sense of identity in Christ in order to resist the temptations you named?

6b. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

Rather than engage with the elders in a shouting match or shut his door in disgust, *Samuel prayed unto the Lord*. This was a pause with purpose rather than an avoidance of conflict. Samuel's displeasure and anger would not get the best of him. We do well to follow his example—not avoiding conflict or simply giving in to demands, nor responding in the heat of the moment, but seeking the Lord and His will.

What Do You Think?

What strategies can you employ to go to the Lord with your anger and frustrations instead of losing your temper in the moment?

Digging Deeper

How do you ensure that these strategies are not simply ways to avoid needed confrontation?

7a. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee.

This was not the first time God adjusted His plan to accommodate the actions or desires of His chosen people (example: Genesis 21:13). Even so, God had never chosen a king for Israel (compare Judges 9), so the Lord's command to *harken unto the voice of the people* represented a break from their entire history of governance. The Law of Moses

had included guidelines for an eventual king, assuming a monarchy one day would be formed (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; contrast 28:15, 26-27).

7b. For they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

This rejection may have felt like a referendum on how Samuel raised his sons, if not also on how he had led Israel. Such personal affront is easy to understand. But the Lord set the prophet straight: the people's demanding a king was primarily about rejecting God's reign as it had been carried out to that point (compare Judges 8:22-23; 1 Samuel 8:8, not in our printed text).

Then as now, trusting in God's governance requires great faith in the face of all that sin has wrought in the world. It is much easier to look to a king or president for direction than to wait on the Lord. Even the apostles feared what would happen when Jesus was no longer physically with them (see John 14-17). Resting in the uncertainty of when and how God will choose to act is not for the faint of heart (Isaiah 40:28-31; 2 Timothy 1:7).

What follows in 1 Samuel 8:10-20 reveals the elders' lack of comprehension concerning what it would mean to be ruled by a monarch. They failed to consider that a king or dynasty was likely to become tyrannical. They thought a king would give the nation more stability, especially in terms of military might—forgetting that the only source of true strength is the Lord (Exodus 14:12-31; Isaiah 12:2). Although God had delivered Israel from Egypt, He would not hear their cry when the king they wanted oppressed them. With these warnings, the men went back to their homes.

What Do You Think?

What implications does Israel's rejection of God in favor of a king have for your attitudes toward national leaders?

Digging Deeper

What other biblical texts inform your thinking about your responsibility as a citizen of an earthly nation and possible tensions with your citizenship in the kingdom of Heaven?

II. The Acclamation of a King

(1 Samuel 10:17-24)

After Israel's elders expressed their desire for a king, Samuel met Saul, whom God had revealed to be His choice for their first king (1 Samuel 9:15-19a). Samuel secretly anointed Saul (10:1-16, not in our printed text).

A. Gathering the Tribes (vv. 17-19a)

17. And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh.

How much time passed between the meeting with the elders and this one with *the people* is unclear, though the events did not happen back-to-back (see 1 Samuel 8:8-10:16). Perhaps several thousand people would be expected to come. *Mizpeh* was where Samuel had orchestrated a victory over the Philistines that solidified his leadership role as the judge of Israel (7:6). Specifying that the meeting was *unto the Lord* suggests that *Samuel* did not call this gathering of his own volition.

18. And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you.

Samuel's address echoed Moses' own farewell speech, giving *the children of Israel* insight and instruction for a future without Samuel (compare Deuteronomy 1:1-5; 7:12-24). The people were not vulnerable without a king; look at all that God had done without one! Not only had He *brought up Israel out of Egypt* (compare Numbers 21:1-3, 21-26); He had protected them from *all kingdoms* since then that had threatened His people (examples: Joshua 10; Judges 3:12-30).

What Do You Think?

What memories of God's goodness have encouraged you in times when trusting the Lord was especially difficult?

Digging Deeper

How does sharing these stories with others strengthen both their trust in the Lord and your own?

19a. And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us.

Israel would receive what they asked of God, but it wasn't ideal. So why didn't the Lord stop Israel from this folly? The answer comes back to how we understand God's working out His will. There are events that the Lord desires and works to establish (we think especially of Jesus' incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection); that He desires and calls people to accomplish with Him; and that people desire and God chooses to work through. Giving Israel a king falls in the latter category, and we see that God used it to pave the way for Christ (2 Samuel 7:5-16; Luke 1:30-33; Acts 13:21-23).

Samuel could not in good conscience proceed without reminding the nation of God's great deeds and of their rejection of Him. This was likely a call to repentance. At the very least, Samuel would have hoped the people would not forget the Lord, even when they had an earthly king.

"The Ultimate Fulfillment"

"If you asked me, my life was hijacked by the lottery," Donna Mikkin wrote in her article "How Winning the Lottery Led to Emotional Bankruptcy." Before she won the New York State Lottery—then worth \$34.5 million—she was basically a happy person. When she won, she believed the money was "the ultimate fulfillment." Donna did not realize how winning would affect her emotional health. She became preoccupied with others' perception of her and felt guilty for winning out over others.

The Israelites believed a king would be their ultimate fulfillment. God told Samuel to give the people what they wanted, knowing it was not what they really needed. How many times do we get what we want in life, only to realize it does not satisfy us? The dream job, relationship, or possessions can't take the place of God in our lives. Don't be fooled! Ultimate fulfillment is found only in the Lord.

—L. M. W.

B. Choosing Benjamin (vv. 19b-20)

19b-20. Now therefore present yourselves

before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.

Casting lots was a way of recognizing that God was making His choice (see 1 Samuel 10:20-21 and compare 10:22-23, below; Joshua 7:14; Jonah 1:7; Acts 1:26). Proverbs 16:33 gives the view that it is the Lord who controls the outcome. In such a situation, one marked object was placed in a container with other items that were similar. The marked item identified God's choice.

Benjamin was an unexpected choice, for it was the smallest and least influential of Israel's *tribes*—Saul himself said as much (1 Samuel 9:21). Furthermore, Benjamin had been punished and ostracized by the rest of the nation in its recent history for a particularly notorious episode of savagery (Judges 19–21). From our vantage point, however, Saul's connection to this tribe might be the first twinge of foreboding we experience.

C. Choosing Saul (vv. 21-24)

21. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found.

Nothing more is known of *the family of Matri*, lending credence to Saul's protest of being from an insignificant family. But *Kish* was "a mighty man of power," which could be understood to mean he was wealthy (1 Samuel 9:1), especially as he had both livestock and servants (9:3). Still, the choice of *the tribe of Benjamin* was strange due to its small size and checkered history (Judges 20–21).

22. Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff.

If Saul had simply not come to Mizpeh, he potentially would have retained some measure of dignity. Instead, Saul was hiding *among the stuff*, likely luggage the visitors brought with them for their stay. The text does not tell us why, leaving us to wonder—was he feeling great humility and the weight of responsibility falling on him (consider

1 Samuel 9:21)? Or was he afraid of the challenge before him, unsure that God would guide him (17:1-11)? It could be a mix of both. Whatever the reason, it was a strange place to begin his reign.

23. And they ran and fetched him thence; and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

Despite this inauspicious beginning, Saul's stature would have been a reassuring sight for people hoping for a military leader. Judging by the outside, Saul was literally "head and *shoulders*" the best candidate for the job (contrast 1 Samuel 16:7; see lesson 9).

24a. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?

Samuel's words can be taken as praise and delight in Saul, or they can be taken simply as a statement of fact regarding Saul's imposing physical stature. Samuel probably intended this ambiguity, not speaking out directly against God's chosen man but not giving him a glowing endorsement either.

What Do You Think?

What ratio of your compliments are in regard to a person's outward appearance versus his or her inward qualities?

Digging Deeper

What benefits can you anticipate in shifting this ratio to favor inward qualities? Do these benefits change based on the age of the recipient?

24b. And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

God save the king is a prayer to the Lord. Though the people's desire was at its heart a rejection of the Lord, they did not desire to lose the Lord's blessings and protection. We may be tempted to judge the people for these mixed and seemingly opposing desires. But we need only observe our own mixed motives to realize how infrequently we act from totally righteous or totally flawed motivations. At such times, we do well to still cry out to God, who sees our hearts

and can work to cleanse us of desires that are counter to the life of faith.

Conclusion

A. Planning in the Priesthood

Despite having been rejected by the people, the Lord chose not to abandon them. He sometimes punished them (2 Chronicles 36:15-21), but He continued to love His people and work through them (see Genesis 12:1-3). The same goes for us. Though we make decisions that grieve God, He does not abandon us or stop working through the church. He has the power to use even our worst decisions for His glory (Romans 8:28).

Samuel and the elders were concerned for Israel's future, though they had very different plans to alleviate that worry. In the same way, leadership in churches—whether ministers, elders, or other leaders—do well to look to the future of their congregations and of the worldwide church. When considering our plans, however, we must not discount the warnings of godly people who do not share a majority opinion. We have an ally in this endeavor that Israel did not: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer (Acts 2:17-21). May we seek clarity from the Lord in every decision, resisting worldly wisdom so that we can continue to live out our calling as the priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:4-12).

B. Prayer

Lord God, forgive us when we value our judgment over Yours. Help us examine our hearts and overcome those motivations that are a rejection of You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

There is room for only one King in our hearts.

How to Say It

Kish	<i>Kyesh.</i>
Matri	<i>May-try.</i>
Mizpeh	<i>Miz-peh.</i>
theocracy	<i>thee-ah-cruh-see</i> (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write on the board *Things Are Not What They Seem to Be*. Divide your class into groups of five members or fewer. Ask each group to think of at least one example from current events, from history, or from a personal experience. After five or six minutes, ask each group to share one example. As a whole class, talk about what perspective and choices keep people from seeing something as it really is.

Say, “Today we will look at a pivotal incident from Israel’s history, when outside influences and perspectives led God’s people to make a decision that didn’t honor God.”

Into the Word

Ask the class what they already know about Samuel. Write their answers on the board, consulting the Lesson Context to fill in any gaps.

Divide the class into small groups. Have the groups study today’s text, from 1 Samuel 8:4-7; 10:17-24, and decide whether each statement below is true or false. If the statement is false, they should rewrite it to make it true. (Note: every statement is false.) Distribute a handout (you create) with the following nine statements:

1. The elders knew that Samuel’s sons, although competent, were not available.
2. Samuel wanted to be king, but the people didn’t want him.
3. The Lord was happy to be the heavenly King while the people also had an earthly monarch.
4. God didn’t want to give them a king, but Samuel talked Him into doing so.
5. The Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt would have happened sooner if only they’d had a king.
6. Samuel didn’t want to tell the people how God really felt about their desire for a king.
7. Saul seemed to all the people to be the obvious choice for king.
8. Saul was as eager to be king as the people were eager to make him king.

9. The people couldn’t accept such a little man to be their king, and they rejected Samuel’s choice.

Give groups several minutes to work; then review as a whole class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Diary of an Old Man” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work together to complete as indicated. After a few minutes, invite volunteers to read what they’ve written.

After completing either activity, have the class draw conclusions about how Israel’s choices reflected their relationship with God and His standards.

Into Life

Distribute handouts (you prepare) of the following list of principles:

- God loves us in spite of our bad decisions.
- External appearances may not indicate God’s preferences.
- The will of the people or majority rule is not a clear indicator of God’s will.
- God works through government when the governed give first allegiance to Him.
- God allows us to go our own way, even when it leads to disaster.
- God uses imperfect people to do His work on earth.

In their groups, students choose at least two of the statements. Ask them to discuss how today’s lesson illustrates the statements or principles. After several minutes, allow each group to report.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “What Do You Say?” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it in pairs before discussing conclusions as a whole class.

Have students identify one item in today’s lesson that represents a rejection of the Lord in his or her life and take one minute to plan how to change this behavior or thought pattern. End class with prayer.

David Anointed as King

Devotional Reading: Acts 13:21-31
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

1 Samuel 16:1-13

1 And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

2 And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD.

3 And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.

4 And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

5 And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.

7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not

on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Key Text

The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart —1 Samuel 16:7b

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the selection process of David as king.
2. Compare and contrast that process with that of the choosing of Saul as king.
3. Write a prayer asking God for a clean heart and eyes of faith.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Unlikely President
- B. Lesson Context

I. God Chooses a New King (1 Samuel 16:1-3)

- A. Rejection (v. 1)
Pity Party for One
- B. Direction (vv. 2-3)

II. God Chooses David (1 Samuel 16:4-13)

- A. Coming to Bethlehem (vv. 4-5)
- B. Rejecting Older Sons (vv. 6-10)
- C. Selecting the Shepherd Son (vv. 11-13)
Picture Perfect

Conclusion

- A. Walking by Faith
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Unlikely President

Abraham Lincoln's birth in 1809 in a Kentucky log cabin was a sign of his family's nineteenth-century situation. His education was unimpressive. As an adult, Lincoln did not attend college but studied on his own to pass the bar exam and become a lawyer. Drawn to politics, he was defeated for election to the Illinois state legislature in 1832 but then elected to four terms beginning in 1834. Looking to the serve in Congress, he lost his first attempt at gaining his party's nomination to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1843. Running again, he was elected in 1846 but limited himself to one term in that office. He then twice lost in his quest to be elected a senator from Illinois—first in 1855, then again in 1858. He became his party's surprise nominee for the 1860 presidential election, and he changed the course of the nation.

Did all that happen by random chance, or was it by providential intervention? Only God knows! But the Lord always reserves the right to intervene in matters involving human leadership, as today's text affirms.

B. Lesson Context

Much of the context for this lesson is shared with that of lesson 8. Israel's first king, Saul, was identified by the Lord and anointed by Samuel. But Saul overstepped his role and failed to obey the Lord (1 Samuel 13:7b-14; 15:2-33). Saul increasingly demonstrated the downfalls of having a king at all. As a result the Lord regretted choosing Saul and decided to find another king (15:35).

The events in this lesson occurred sometime during Saul's 40-year reign, which lasted from 1050 to 1010 BC. David's reign would not begin until 1010 BC, but it was known to Saul and his family long before then that they were not the start of a dynasty in Israel (1 Samuel 23:16-17).

I. God Chooses a New King

(1 Samuel 16:1-3)

A. Rejection (v. 1)

1a. And the LORD said unto Samuel, How

long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?

Samuel's mourning over Saul's failures and rejection was not inappropriate. After all, Saul's success would have been success on behalf of Israel. And the last time Samuel would ever meet Saul was to tell him that God had rejected him as king (1 Samuel 15:20-23, 35). But Saul demonstrated that he looked the part (9:2) without being able to carry out the office of king in the manner desired by the Lord (15:1-11). God's word to *Samuel* was that the time for mourning was past (compare Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4).

What Do You Think?

How do you discern when you have moved from healthy mourning into unhealthy over-focusing?

Digging Deeper

What cautions do you employ to ensure that you do not assume someone else is unhealthily dwelling on pain because he or she does not mourn like you do?

1b. Fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.

The *horn* is likely that of a ram (see Genesis 22:13). Though horns were often used to produce sound (example: Joshua 6:5), they could also make excellent containers for *oil* (compare 1 Kings 1:39; Psalm 92:10).

Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:21-22). Jesse and his family made their living as shepherds (see 1 Samuel 16:11, below). Their hometown, Bethlehem, was located in Judah, south-southeast of Samuel's home in Ramah in the territory of Ephraim (compare 7:17). There are perhaps five towns named Ramah in the Old Testament, so we take care not to get them mixed up. The journey of more than 20 miles to Bethlehem required crossing through the territory of Benjamin. The New Testament village of Arimathaea is likely this same place renamed (John 19:38).

Pity Party for One

"I'm going to my room and I'm never com-

ing out!" The bedroom door slammed shut. That agony-filled hyperbole came from our 15-year-old daughter, who had asked to go to a concert with her friends and then stay the night in a hotel. While she thought that was a perfectly reasonable request, her father and I knew it was asking for trouble.

We wondered how long it would take her to resume the normalcy of life; it was during dinner the next evening. A friend called and asked her to the movies, and we gladly gave the OK. While she still wasn't happy with our decision about the concert, she was moving on.

God's rejection of Saul as king was valid, but Samuel mourned that decision deeply. But God stood fast and told Samuel it was time to move on. How long will you sit and mourn when God tells you no? —P. M.

B. Direction (vv. 2-3)

2a. And Samuel said, How can I go: if Saul hear it, he will kill me.

The most likely road to Bethlehem went through Gibeah, the hometown of *Saul* (1 Samuel 15:34). The odds were high that Saul or his family might realize what Samuel was doing, which could prove to be a grave danger. Without an innocuous reason to travel, suspicion or curiosity could be aroused.

What Do You Think?

How can you discern when an unpopular course of action is in keeping with God's will?

Digging Deeper

What fears prevent you from acting when you feel it is right to do so?

2b. And the LORD said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD.

Samuel was known for offering sacrifices while traveling (1 Samuel 7:9; 9:12-13; 10:8; etc.). While this was not the primary reason for Samuel to be traveling this time, it was a legitimate reason—and quite an appropriate one when anointing a king chosen by God.

A *heifer* is a young female cow. Heifers were not typically sacrificed, although precedent and instruction existed (Genesis 15:9; Numbers 19:2-10; Deuteronomy 21:3-6). Generally male animals were sacrificed (Leviticus 1:5; 4:3-21; Numbers 8:8; Deuteronomy 18:3; etc.). This may have been in recognition that female animals were more valuable for reproduction. While one male could significantly increase an entire herd, one female was unlikely to be so fruitful.

The Law of Moses specified several types of animal sacrifices (examples: Leviticus 12:6-8; 16:3-28). Samuel's sacrifice was not connected to any specific festival, so it should likely be considered a peace offering. The beast could be male or female so long as it was "without blemish" (3:1). A key difference in this case is that neither the tabernacle nor priests play a part. But Samuel had been instructed by the Lord himself to make this sacrifice as part of his errand to Bethlehem, so these absences are no cause for concern.

3. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee.

The Lord did not give Samuel detailed instructions at this point, though Samuel might have appreciated a step-by-step guide in advance. All he needed to know to proceed was to take a *sacrifice* and to invite *Jesse* to be present for it. Samuel would walk by faith, eager for God's next instruction (compare Romans 1:17).

II. God Chooses David

(1 Samuel 16:4-13)

A. Coming to Bethlehem (vv. 4-5)

4-5a. And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably.

It's unclear why *the elders* immediately *trembled* at Samuel's approach. Their reaction may be evidence that Samuel had a reputation for bringing punishment and bad news—a reputation that many prophets later earned (1 Kings 18:17-19; Jeremiah 38:1-4; Amos 7:10-17; etc.). The Hebrew

word translated *peaceably* has more to do with positive connotations of peace—like wholeness and well-being—than simply an absence of violence. Regarding their question *Comest thou peaceably?* compare 1 Kings 2:13 and 2 Kings 9:17-29.

5b. I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

Israel did not yet have a temple (1 Kings 6:1), and the ark of the covenant was located in Kirjathjearim (1 Samuel 7:1-2). Though in later generations, sacrifices offered outside Jerusalem and the temple where the ark was housed were often associated with idolatry (examples: 1 Kings 13:32-33; 14:23; 15:14), at this time it was the norm (example: 1 Samuel 9:11-25). Sacrifices such as Samuel's could be given on an altar that was built to God's specifications (Exodus 20:24-26).

Sanctification was an act of preparation that involved ceremonial washing to remove any ritual uncleanness and the donning of freshly washed clothes (example: Exodus 19:14-15; compare Numbers 6:1-21). The ritual of cleaning oneself for a sacrifice was an acknowledgment that ultimately no gift could be given to God that was "good enough," but He would accept what came from a clean heart (contrast Leviticus 26:41).

B. Rejecting Older Sons (vv. 6-10)

6. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.

Eliab was Jesse's oldest son (1 Chronicles 2:13). Being the firstborn son entitled him to high honor. He could expect to inherit double what his brothers would receive when Jesse died (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Possibly Samuel noticed markers of Eliab's favored status, though this is by no means a necessary conclusion. More likely Jesse brought his firstborn in front of Samuel first, assuming this was another honor for the oldest son (see 1 Samuel 16:8-10, below). For whatever reason, Samuel jumped to the conclusion that his search was done.

7a. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him.

Eliab was apparently tall and handsome, reason enough for Samuel to be impressed at first glance. But such outward measures had already failed as valid criteria regarding whether Saul was up for the job (1 Samuel 10:23-24; see lesson 8).

7b. For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

The Lord would later tell Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). The evidence supporting this truth is overwhelming, present from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Here God cites the key difference in the way He sees things. Society often judges a person based on his or her appearance (example: Esther 2:17-18; compare Isaiah 53:2-3), and Christians are not immune to making the same assessments (James 2:1-4). But *the Lord* looks past this—is not even distracted by *appearance*—and seeks out the deepest recesses of our hearts (Psalm 139).

Samuel could not possibly be expected to know Eliab’s character on sight. But God’s knowledge went beyond sight. We catch a glimpse of Eliab’s heart when he fails to stand up to Goliath *and* chastises David (see 1 Samuel 17:28). That encounter gives us a clue as to why Eliab was not God’s next choice for king (contrast 17:32-37a).

8-9. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

Jesse called his second- and third-born sons,

How to Say It

Abimelech	Uh- <i>bim</i> -eh-lek.
Abinadab	Uh- <i>bin</i> -uh-dab.
Eliab	Ee- <i>lye</i> -ab.
Gibeah	<i>Gib</i> -ee-uh (<i>G</i> as in <i>get</i>).
Kirjathjearim	<i>Kir</i> -jath- <i>jee</i> -uh-rim or <i>jee</i> -a-rim.
Ramah	<i>Ray</i> -muh.
Shammah	Shuh- <i>muh</i> .

Abinadab and *Shammah*, respectively. Little more is known about these brothers beyond that they were in Saul’s military facing Goliath and the Philistines (1 Samuel 17:13).

10. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

Only *seven* of Jesse’s *sons* (and both of his daughters) are named in 1 Chronicles 2:13-15. But David was the eighth son (see 1 Samuel 16:11, below; 17:12). The likeliest explanation for this difference is that Jesse had another son who unfortunately died before reaching adulthood. Because a genealogy documented lineage, especially from father to son, a son who died before marrying and without heirs might not be named.

What Do You Think?

What do you learn from situations in which you have been passed over for a promotion or other position of authority?

Digging Deeper

How do you serve effectively when you have not been called to be a leader?

C. Selecting the Shepherd Son (vv. 11-13)

11a. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep.

Jesse apparently considered his *youngest* too insignificant to be called home. Or maybe there was no one to relieve that son from his work watching *the sheep* (contrast 1 Samuel 17:20), and he seemed an unlikely choice regardless. *Jesse*’s description of the missing son as the *youngest* could also be understood as the “smallest,” suggesting that *Jesse* hadn’t called this son home because he wasn’t a grown man (compare 17:42). Exclusion for this reason clearly contradicts the Lord’s admonition to Samuel that the physical qualities of a candidate were of no consequence (see 16:7, above).

Though shepherding was not a profession of great esteem, the imagery of a shepherd was used

to describe the caliber of a leader. When a priest or king was unfaithful, the people were like defenseless, directionless sheep (Jeremiah 10:21; 23:1-2; Matthew 9:36). When the people were led well, it was like having a good shepherd guiding them (Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; John 10:1-18). The man God chose would be in the latter category (Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24).

11b. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

Jesse and all his sons but one had been sanctified for the sacrifice (1 Samuel 16:5b, above). Still, Samuel insisted that the remaining son arrive before they sat down to eat the sacrifice (see 16:2b, above). Samuel needed to see the youngest son before his task was finished.

Picture Perfect

My husband is a part-time photographer with a very good eye. After one particular wedding shoot, he edited the proofs and picked out a few for the album. He left others out, thinking they would have little sentimental meaning to the bride and groom. When he met with the couple, they asked him if any pictures were missing and requested to see the ones he hadn't included. One of those missing photos became the main cover of their wedding album. My husband realized he was not the best judge of what others would find valuable in his photographs.

Like my husband, Jesse and Samuel both tried to make a decision that was better left to another—in their case, the Lord. But you have never done that, have you? —P. M.

12a. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.

Even though the Lord does not look at the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7, above; compare 2 Corinthians 10:7), the youngest was a good-looking young man. Just as we cannot assume that an attractive person is also a good person, neither can we assume that the opposite must be true (example: Isaiah 53:2b). Truly the outside is no measure, one way or the other.

Ruddy is a rare word in Hebrew for physical description that implies the color red. Elsewhere it described Esau's appearance at birth (Genesis 25:25; see lesson 2). This has been interpreted to mean Esau looked healthy and robust or, alternatively, that he had red hair and rosy cheeks. We cannot be sure of this, but if David had red hair, he would have been a conspicuous sight. Red hair is found among most of the peoples of the earth, but is rare in all.

12b. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

Though David had not been sanctified with his father and brothers for the sacrifice, the Lord indicated that not only would David participate, but he was to be anointed as Israel's next king (see 1 Samuel 16:13a, next).

13a. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.

Here all David's brothers stood, freshly washed and in their best clothes, ready for a feast. In from the fields came this youngster, unwashed, smelling like sheep . . . and *he* was the honored one! While this might be puzzling or even troubling to the brothers or other onlookers, we know that God had chosen David based on the state of the man's heart. Though he hadn't cleaned the outward dirt, inside David had a heart turned to God and ready to do His will.

Jesus later said to the scribes and Pharisees, "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:25-26). We can conclude here that God considered David clean on the inside already; an outer washing would just have been for appearances.

Before the anointing of Saul and then David as kings in Israel, the act had been used primarily for ordaining priests or sanctifying an object as holy to the Lord (examples: Exodus 28:41; 30:22-33; Numbers 7:1; 35:25). From Abimelech's attempt to become king (Judges 9), anointing shifted to focusing more often on a king than a priest.

Significantly, *David* was not *anointed* only with *oil* but also with *the Spirit of the Lord* (compare 1 Samuel 10:6, 9-10; contrast 16:14, not in our printed text). This image reminds us of Jesus' own baptism in water and the Spirit's coming to Him "like a dove" (Luke 3:22; compare 4:18; Acts 10:38). Echoes of David are appropriate and even intentional in Jesus' life. After all, Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to David of an eternal throne (2 Samuel 7:11b-16; Hebrew 1:8-9). And if David was an imperfect, fallen example of a man after God's own heart, Jesus is the perfect example, the very image of God (Colossians 1:15-20).



Visual for Lessons 6 & 9. Ask the class to consider how they answered this question in lesson 6 and how it may have shifted since then.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit?

Digging Deeper

What you intentionally do this week to help you follow the Spirit's lead more closely (see Galatians 5:25)?

13b. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

The saga ends with no drama. The next king was anointed, so *Samuel* simply left to continue his usual work in *Ramah* (see 1 Samuel 7:17).

Conclusion

A. Walking by Faith

God's choice transcended human expectations of royalty and testifies to the Lord's knowledge of the human heart. We are at a disadvantage when we make decisions based on what we see. And sight may not be limited to what we sense right before our eyes. We fear that war and persecution may come to us, that violence is blossoming all around; we dread the next hurricane or tornado or earthquake. We mourn the moral failings of our secular leaders and, especially, of Christian leaders.

But like David, we have been anointed with the Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). And this Spirit leads us not into fear of what we see but with confidence in what we cannot see, hope in what we know by faith (5:7). Like Samuel, we do not often know the whole story or what we are meant to do

many (or even a few) steps into the future. For the prophet, as for us, the Lord gives the information needed in order to be able to act in faith. We can work confidently when we are focused on becoming more like Jesus and calling others to love Him as we do.

When you look at the world, do not trust only your senses. Ask God for the heart to see what He sees, to see past all the terror and sin to His redeeming work and desire for the hearts of all people. May we pray as David did, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10).

What Do You Think?

What takeaways from lessons 8 and 9 are most challenging to you?

Digging Deeper

What changes do these insights require of you in thought, speech, and action?

B. Prayer

Lord God, teach us to value the heart over the outward appearance of a person. Purify our own hearts so that when others see us, they will see that You have chosen us and are forming us in the image of Jesus. It is in His name that we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

What does God see in your heart?

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Give participants time to talk about how it worked during the past week to make choices by leaning on godly principles.

Distribute a handout (you prepare) with each of the following statements. Put the continuum at the top of the page or on the board.

Not at all important *Extremely Important*

0 1 2 3 4 5

1. My reputation among my coworkers
2. The way I look when I go out to run errands
3. How clean and neat my clothes are
4. Whether my outfits reflect current styles
5. What my family members think of me
6. My ability to be “the best” in at least one area
7. The style reflected by the car I drive

Give students one minute to jot their answer beside each statement. Then ask volunteers to tell which statements they rated 4 or 5 and which they rated 1. Talk as a whole class about why people often rely on outward appearances.

Alternative. In groups of three, class members should search media for evidence of our culture’s emphasis on outward appearances. If they find contrasting examples—an emphasis on internal character—they should note those also. Allow at least five minutes for group study before asking them to share examples with the whole class.

After either activity, lead into the Bible lesson by saying, “Samuel listened to what God was telling him—despite wanting to depend on appearances.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of three. Ask half the groups to skim 1 Samuel chapters 10–11 and 13–15 to understand why Saul (the subject of last week’s lesson) was rejected as king by God. The other groups should use study Bibles

or online Bible reference tools to prepare a brief report on Bethlehem. Allow six to eight minutes for research. Have groups report their findings to the whole class.

Send class members back to their groups to look at 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Write *God’s sight is not human sight* on your board and ask class members to list how today’s text shows that statement to be true.

After calling time, compare the lists as a whole class. Ask a volunteer to read Acts 13:22. Discuss how their findings agree with what Paul says about David.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Samuel’s Tough Assignment” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs or small groups to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Draw a large outline of a heart on your board or on a piece of newsprint taped to the wall. Distribute self-stick notes to class members, and ask them to write descriptions, each on a note, of the heart of God—what He values most. Invite them to attach their notes inside the heart you’ve drawn. Distribute sheets of paper. Ask each class member to draw a heart in the center of their sheet and write, in the center of it, one or two of the qualities on display inside the heart on the wall.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Leaders You Know” exercise from the activity page. Have learners work independently for one minute before working with others in their groups of three to complete the activity.

After either activity, end with sentence prayers from class members asking God to help them develop a clean heart and eyes of faith, as well as the specific qualities they wrote down. You may ask students to jot down their prayers on their sheets. Plan time next week to talk about how God is working to develop godly leadership qualities in your learners.

God Picked You!

Devotional Reading: Esther 4:5-17

Background Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 1:1-14; Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Key Text

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. —Ephesians 1:3

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List spiritual blessings mentioned by Paul.
2. Compare and contrast physical adoption with spiritual adoption.
3. Make a plan to change one area of his or her lifestyle in light of adoption in Christ.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Love of the Father
- B. Lesson Context

I. Greetings (Ephesians 1:1-2)

- A. From Paul (v. 1a)
- B. To the Faithful (vv. 1b-2)

II. Unbridled Blessing (Ephesians 1:3-14)

- A. Of God (v. 3)
- B. Through Christ (vv. 4-12)
To the Praise of His Glory?
- C. In the Spirit (vv. 13-14)
Inheriting Well

Conclusion

- A. Praise Him!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Love of the Father

Completing the paperwork for an international adoption is a grueling process. The prospective parents must assemble birth certificates, medical affidavits, financial statements, etc. The family doctor and social worker must include copies of their licenses. Every signature must be notarized, and the county courthouse must verify the authenticity of the notary stamps. The county seal is “apostilled” at the state capital, a fancy way of describing another level of certification. The whole portfolio then goes overseas to be translated, with a new series of stamps added to verify the translation.

Now imagine if it were possible instead for just one person of great authority to look at the portfolio and put one stamp on the whole thing to approve the adoption. God himself has already placed His seal of adoption on us. Our text today celebrates our Father and His great love for us.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Ephesians is one of what we often call Paul’s prison letters. As in Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, Paul presented himself as “the prisoner” (Ephesians 3:1; compare 2 Timothy 1:8). It is reasonable to conclude that he wrote this letter while he was a prisoner in Rome (see Acts 22–28) in about AD 63.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians has many of the features of his other letters. But unlike the others, Ephesians does not clearly address a problem or issues that arose in a particular church. Rather, it reads as a general reminder and instruction in the nature of the gospel and the Christian life. This is one reason some believe it was a circular letter that was sent to the city of Ephesus (in present-day Turkey) to be read and then shared in the surrounding region (see Ephesians 1:1b, below; see lesson 11 for more information about Ephesus).

Ephesians includes challenging language and ideas. Our scripture text mentions many concepts that long have been debated. But when we remember the challenges that Christians of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds faced, we can reframe those difficult concepts.

I. Greetings

(Ephesians 1:1-2)

A. From Paul (v. 1a)

1a. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

A Roman apostle was an official messenger who conveyed messages from authority figures to the public. On the road to Damascus, *Jesus* claimed *Paul* as His own messenger (Acts 26:12-16). Paul's zeal, previously misdirected toward murderous ends (9:1-2; Galatians 1:13-14), was put to use *for* the making of disciples for *Christ*. All this happened according to *the will of God* (1:15-24).

The word *Christ* is a translation of the Hebrew word *messiah*. Both designations refer to the anointed one, associated since David's days with God's chosen kings in Israel (1 Samuel 16:1, 12-13; 2 Samuel 7:8-16; compare John 1:41; 4:25). Before that, the term was not used but could have been appropriately applied to priests, who were anointed for their service in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:41; etc.). Jesus fulfills the roles of both priest and king (Hebrews 8:1-6; Revelation 17:14), making Him uniquely positioned to be *the Christ*.

B. To the Faithful (vv. 1b-2)

1b. To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

This greeting is descriptive but generic. Since Paul's greetings are often very specific, this is one piece of evidence that the letter was meant for circulation instead of intended only to address those in *Ephesus*. Paul seemed intent to explain his doctrine succinctly, looking to what it means to be part of those who are *the faithful in Christ Jesus*. *Saints* simply means "holy ones," affirming that these people were set apart from others because they belonged to God. This word had referred only to Israel until Jesus' time (Deuteronomy 28:9; Isaiah 62:12; etc.). Paul used the word to emphasize that Gentiles were welcomed into faith in Jesus, on equal standing with their Jewish brothers and sisters who had also accepted Christ. It was not enough or even necessary to claim heritage in Abraham, because faith was and is the primary condition for determining whether one is a saint. The lives of saints are dif-

ferent, even out of place in the world, because our identity is found in Christ, not in human families, clans, or nations (Galatians 3:27-29).

What Do You Think?

What tensions do you feel living as a saint while engaging with unbelievers?

Digging Deeper

What texts guide you when deciding whether to continue witnessing about Christ or needing to disengage from an unhelpful situation?

2a. Grace be to you, and peace.

The greeting *grace* plays on the more typical Greek greeting *rejoice*. The words sound similar in Greek. Paul's choice emphasizes the Christian nature of this letter (compare 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; Revelation 1:4). *Peace* was a typical greeting in Hebrew, a prayer for God's blessing to fall on His people. Far from the mere absence of violence or discord, the word has the much more positive connotation of wholeness and wellness. Grace acknowledges that asking for peace is totally based on God's good desires, not on anything a person or people have done to earn His favor. Together grace and peace turned an otherwise unremarkable greeting into an expectant expression of God's blessing.

2b. From God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Naming *God our Father* in parallel with *the Lord Jesus Christ* highlights the Christian revelation of the Son's equality with the Father. Unbelieving Jews considered this new Christian belief a sin against the command to love the Lord alone (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). However, naming Jesus Christ as Lord makes clear that Paul and other Christians understood that Jesus was well worthy of love and praise, just as God the Father is (Galatians 2:8-11).

II. Unbridled Blessing

(Ephesians 1:3-14)

A. Of God (v. 3)

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

We sense Paul's joy conveyed in the length of this sentence—in the Greek it doesn't end until verse 14! This is the longest sentence in the New Testament at just over 200 words in the Greek. We can imagine his scribe (likely Tychicus; see Ephesians 6:21) frantically taking down Paul's breathless praise.

Paul's presentation of God as the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (compare 2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3) is in keeping with Jesus' emphasis on God "our Father" (Matthew 6:9). The Jews of Paul's day had many ways to describe God, but God as Father is not found very often. Yet God as Father is an understanding that runs throughout Jesus' teachings (examples: 23:9; John 4:23; compare Romans 1:7; 8:15; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

Paul's repetition conveys his overwhelming awe. He was a scholar in the Hebrew Scriptures, and his writings' content and style both show Hebrew influences. One way Hebrew poetry strengthens a statement is by repeating it, either with the same phrase (example: Psalm 136) or with synonyms and other slight changes (examples: 1:1; 5:3). Paul's multiple use of forms of *bless* suggests (by word and by repetition) the greatness of our *God* and our *blessings*. To call God *blessed* is to acknowledge that He is praiseworthy and exalted. To call His people *blessed* is to acknowledge the reality that God gives us good gifts (James 1:17) and works out all things for our good (Romans 8:28).

In heavenly places refers to the throne room of God (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). Because we are already part of God's family, we experience blessing in His presence now, though we still suffer because of the fallen world around us.

What Do You Think?

What blessings will you praise God for today?

Digging Deeper

What is your current ratio of praise to petition in prayer? What benefit do you see in shifting toward more praise?

B. Through Christ (vv. 4-12)

4. According as he hath chosen us in him

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

Before the foundation of the world focuses on God's plan before creation (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Though God's choosing *us* may seem like a statement of predestination (see Ephesians 1:5, below), it is actually a much broader statement of God's loving intent for all people. We were all meant to *be holy and without blame before him*. The fall threw all people into a sinful tailspin outside of God's good plan (Genesis 3:16-24; 6:5-6, 11; etc.).

But God was unwilling to let sin take its natural course and condemn all people to death. So God set in motion the plan that would call us back to him *in love*. Jesus was that plan. And through His death He conquered both sin and death, doing what we could not accomplish for ourselves. Our status changes as a result. We are counted as being holy (set apart in a godly way) and without blame (having our sins forgiven). We gain these attributes because of God's efforts through Christ.

5. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

This verse implies that Paul's audience is primarily Gentile, as they would identify with being adopted into the "natural" family Israel. The practice of adoption goes back thousands of years. Properly motivated, adoption is an act of grace toward orphans or children whose parents are unable to care for them. In the Roman world of Paul's day, there was another important consideration when it came to adoption: a father who had no sons might adopt someone to be his heir. This allowed the father's assets to be distributed according to his will—and for his family line and name to continue.

Predestinated echoes God's pre-creation choice for people (see Ephesians 1:4, above; also 1:11, below). Some scholars believe this means that everyone's eternal status was decided by God before anyone was born. However, we should not fall into fatalism—the belief that free will does not exist, that we can make no choices that influence the outcome. God has chosen us by His grace; we must choose Him through our faith (John 1:12).

The emphasis here is not on predestination but on *adoption*. God’s plan to adopt humans as His *children* in holiness was fulfilled only in *Jesus Christ*. Nothing that happened around Christ’s coming or in His ministry, death, and resurrection was haphazard, a fluke, or a mistake. This act of loving mercy is described as coming from *the good pleasure of his will*. Our adoption is not done grudgingly or under compulsion. God’s desire is for us to be reconciled to Him, to be included among His people. Inclusion into God’s family is a marvelous demonstration of God’s love (see 1 John 3:1).

6. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

God’s pre-creation plan, when put into action, produces worship. Believers of all nations worship the God who made them His people (Revelation 15:4). Angels worship the God whose plan has been fulfilled (5:11-12). In Heaven and on earth, through both time and space, we are one congregation glorifying God (compare 5:13-14).

This blessed acceptance cannot be separated from the grand act of love that characterizes God’s work in Jesus Christ. He is referred to here as *the beloved* (compare Matthew 3:17). Christ is the Son of God in a unique way, but God’s love is extended to all who believe and are adopted as sons and daughters in Christ (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). Our adoption results in full acceptance as children of God, with all the rights of an heir (4:7).

To the Praise of His Glory?

“Your daughter has no heartbeat.” Eleven and a half minutes with no heartbeat post-birth would leave my daughter with severe brain injuries—if she lived. Was this God’s plan, leading “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Ephesians 1:6)?

Three days later, with few answers, I wrote one of the most difficult prayers of my life: “I want her to be able to run and sing and laugh. But I entrust her into Your care and infinite wisdom. If she dies tomorrow, or if she can’t play or eat or breathe on her own, I trust that her life still will result in many people loving You. Be glorified, Lord. Amen.”

Six years later, my daughter requires extensive

care. She can’t walk or eat on her own, but she laughs and plays in her own way. And many people have shared how my daughter has strengthened their faith in God. He has indeed glorified himself through my daughter—and how I thank Him for doing so! What have you thanked God for today?
—N. G.

7-8a. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us.

Redemption and forgiveness are both terms used to speak of the liberation of slaves. The Ephesian believers were familiar with both words as they related to slavery in the Roman world. Redemption means to be “bought back,” as a slave might be repurchased. Forgiveness means “letting go” and can refer to the release of a slave. Paul drew on this cultural example to describe the passage from a sinful life into one of *forgiveness* in Christ (compare Colossians 1:14, 20).

The word translated *sins* is translated “trespasses” in Jesus’ explanation of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:14-15). The idea behind the word is “to stray from the correct path while traveling.” We are reminded of the common biblical depiction of life as a journey made up of choices (see Deuteronomy 30:15-18). Through the *blood* of Jesus, we have the means to be delivered from wrong choices and be put back on the path of God’s choosing (Romans 2:4; 3:24-25). *The riches of his grace* (also Ephesians 2:7) are truly marvelous!

What Do You Think?

In light of the fact that God has forgiven you for *all* your sins, who do you need to forgive for sinning against you?

Digging Deeper

How can you forgive a person when reconciliation is either impossible or unwise?

8b-9. In all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

All wisdom and prudence describes God's way of dealing with His wayward children. Wisdom conveys the sense of knowing the difference between right and wrong and making the choice to do the right thing (compare Proverbs 1:10). In this context, prudence refers to correct thinking.

In the Bible there are various ways that God makes His will known to humans. One is that of a mystery being revealed, something initially hidden from human understanding but now being shown (Ephesians 3:9). We understand God as a self-revealing God, for we cannot unravel the deep things of God by our own deep thinking (Romans 16:25). A god that people can fully comprehend is more likely made in their *own* image rather than the other way around (Genesis 1:27).

10. That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

God's fulfilled plan restores and unites *all* of creation (Romans 8:19-22). Everything God created suffers because of the effects of sin. And because God loves all of His creation—from people created in His image to deep-sea creatures we will never see to mountains we can't miss—He will *gather together in one all things in Christ* (Colossians 1:20). A key part of this is the reunification of humanity, which is divided into hostile groups. The barrier between Jews and Gentiles is broken down through Christ (Ephesians 2:14); these groups can be brought together in Christ according to God's will and purpose (3:4-6).

All this is according to God's plan, for it takes place at *the fulness of times* (see Galatians 4:4). Bringing everything together in Jesus will not be fully realized until He returns. But let us not miss how Christ is already accomplishing this promised future. Whenever by God's mercy a sinner becomes a saint, whenever through the gospel the estranged are reconciled, whenever through their lives of loving service Christians bring a greater measure of justice to the world, we see God's plan already being fulfilled (Mark 1:15; Romans 5:6).

11-12. In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things

after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Once again Paul reassures the reader that nothing happens without God's allowing it (Romans 8:28; see Ephesians 1:5, above). Regardless of believers' physical circumstances, we are experiencing already the blessings of God. The proper response following redemption is giving *praise* and *glory* to God. This concept is once again couched in adoption language. Our adoption results in the *inheritance* (Romans 8:29-30; Hebrews 6:17-20). We do not inherit money or property, though, but the spiritual treasures of God (Ephesians 1:18-21).

What Do You Think?

How can you better demonstrate the unity you have with fellow Christians?

Digging Deeper

How does your answer apply to Christians who hold doctrinal beliefs that differ from your own?

C. In the Spirit (vv. 13-14)

13. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.

Roman officials affixed wax seals to documents to indicate their authenticity and authority. Paul used this image to help us understand the nature of the gift of God's Spirit to the believer. After we accept *the word of truth, the gospel*, we are in line for a marvelous inheritance (Colossians 1:5). We do not wait to begin to enjoy the blessings of this inheritance, for we are *sealed* by God through the gift of the *holy Spirit* (Ephesians 4:30).

Paul pictures this spiritual sealing as a *promise* (compare Acts 2:16-18). This gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed *after* faith (John 14:16-17). While the Holy Spirit plays a role in drawing people to faith, the Spirit's presence in the heart is a gift promised to believers (Acts 2:38-39).

14. Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is not our full inheritance, but is *the earnest of our inheritance*. The key word *earnest* is a legal term that refers to a down payment in a transaction. The idea is that of a “first installment” (compare 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). The Spirit is a gift promising more gifts to come. Through the Holy Spirit, believers experience God’s presence and power now, a taste of what we will experience in full when Christ returns. The future holds not only the final defeat of sin and its effects but also spiritual fulfillment and completion.

Paul finished this long, complex, Greek sentence (which began in verse 3 of our text) with an observation regarding praise. Praise of God is our recognition of His mighty works and person. When Paul said that God acts for *the praise of his glory* (see Ephesians 1:6, 12, above), the apostle was not implying that God somehow needs human approval. Humans should praise God because it is good, proper, and part of our created nature.

What Do You Think?

What prevents you from wholly trusting the Holy Spirit?

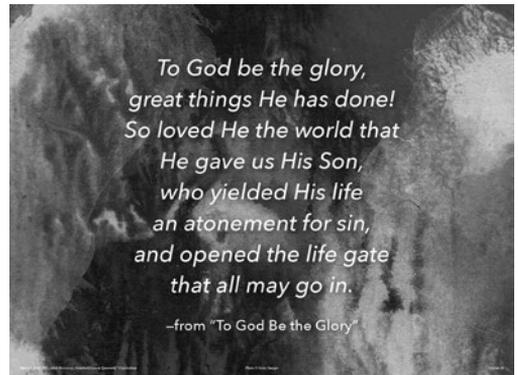
Digging Deeper

Who are believers you trust to mentor you in deepening your dependence on the Spirit?

Inheriting Well

After 45 years of marriage, George’s wife passed away, leaving him alone and lonely. One day he decided to do something special for his daughter and two daughters-in-law. He carefully divided his late wife’s jewelry into three piles, then wrote notes explaining how much his wife had loved them. George packaged and mailed the gifts. But his daughter was furious. How *dare* her father give her mother’s jewelry to her brothers’ wives? The conflict left George even more heartbroken than before.

Such squabbles certainly don’t honor the giver. Response to the inheritance that Paul describes should be different. God grants this inheritance both to Jewish and Gentile believers, to “the praise



Visual for Lesson 10. Consider singing or playing a recording of “To God Be the Glory” as your students enter the classroom.

of his glory.” How will you honor your Father’s decision in celebrating the inheritance He leaves for you *and* your brothers and sisters? —N. G. G.

Conclusion

A. Praise Him!

The ability to praise and worship God freely and properly is indeed a part of our inheritance and a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives. While all His works offer opportunity to worship, our adoption into God’s own family is an especially joyful reason for praise. May we, who have been brought into the Father’s family through His loving Son and His trustworthy Spirit, erupt in praise for our salvation.

B. Prayer

Glorious Father, we are in awe of Your grace! Remind us always of our standing before You, even as we wait for Your Son to return in glory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Rejoice in God’s plan for your salvation.

How to Say It

Ephesus	<i>Ef-uh-sus.</i>
Messiah	<i>Meh-sigh-uh.</i>
Tychicus	<i>Tick-ih-cuss.</i>

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, collect magazines related to business, sports, and entertainment. Have students form pairs (or groups of three), and distribute the magazines. Instruct participants to look through the magazines for articles and advertisements that suggest criteria for success, like ads for expensive cars or an article about winning a lifetime achievement award. *Option.* Instead of using magazines, give each group a few minutes to create a list for success.

Invite them to call out words, phrases, and images as you write them on the board. After five minutes, stop building the list and label it “Worldly Lens.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Winning Qualities” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow three minutes for pairs to complete the activity.

After either activity, discuss how our criteria for choosing a winner or determining success affects how we see ourselves and how we interact with others. Consider pressures as well as possible positive outcomes of a culture focused on winning awards. Wrap up by saying, “Today’s lesson allows us to expand beyond a popular worldview and think about who we are in Christ.”

Into the Word

Distribute an index card and a pen to each participant. Invite volunteers to take turns slowly reading aloud Ephesians 1:1-14. Learners should listen closely to Paul’s statements and write down any words describing who they are in Christ like *holy, without blame, chosen, redemption, adoption as God’s children, and forgiven*. Compile these words in a list on the board next to the “Worldly Lens” list from the previous activity. Label the new list “Godly Lens.” Take a few minutes as a whole class to compare and contrast the lists.

Instruct participants to flip over their index

cards and take one minute to jot down how any of the words, from either list, impact their daily lives. Then ask: “How can understanding the differences between the world’s expectations and God’s truth affect how you see yourself?”

Alternative. Participants might have children or other loved ones who also need to hear Paul’s message. Invite them to consider this secondary audience and write a modern-day letter to that person, using the passage from Ephesians as a model.

Into Life

Ask participants to consider what criteria they would use for success in their spiritual lives. Extend the discussion by asking: “What is your identity in Christ?”

Allow time for reflection on challenges participants anticipate in the week ahead. Encourage note-taking. Then ask learners to consider what type of outcomes they’d like to have for their challenges. Ask these questions to help their brainstorming: 1–How can you create a successful outcome? 2–Why does our understanding of our identity in Jesus Christ affect how we approach day-to-day life?

Encourage students to make connections about themselves as part of God’s family and how this impacts the way they approach relationships and goals for their lives. Allow one minute for silent reflection on one change that each student could make in light of his or her adoption in Christ.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Adopted in Christ” exercise from the activity page. Allow a minute for students to work individually; then let them work together to complete the puzzle. Discuss ideas for how to implement this message into their lives this week when they are faced with challenges.

Plan time during next week’s lesson to see how learners are dealing with their challenges from the perspective of being God’s children. Close with a prayer of praise for adoption into Christ’s family.

Christ Is Wisdom

Devotional Reading: Psalm 16

Background Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 1:15-23; Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesians 1:15-23

15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is

named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.



Key Text

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. —Ephesians 1:18

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List things for which Paul prayed.
2. Explain the meaning and significance of the “eyes of your” statement.
3. Make a list of people he or she will promise to pray for as Paul did.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Everything Looks So Different!
- B. Lesson Context

I. Prayer for the Present (Ephesians 1:15-16)

- A. Because of Faith and Love (v. 15)
- B. Of Thanksgiving (v. 16)
A Gracious Cycle

II. Prayer for Growth (Ephesians 1:17-19)

- A. To Know Him (v. 17)
- B. To Be Enlightened (vv. 18-19)
Rags or Riches?

III. Praise of God's Power (Ephesians 1:20-23)

- A. Glorified Christ (vv. 20-21)
- B. Body of Christ (vv. 22-23)

Conclusion

- A. Live a Full Life
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Everything Looks So Different!

When my father was in grade school, he was perpetually cutting up in class, distracting other students, and generally causing a ruckus. While looking for solutions to the issues, it was discovered that his eyesight was very poor. His whole world changed after receiving his first pair of glasses! He could see so clearly, and his lifelong love of reading was born. The once rambunctious troublemaker could now sit quietly for hours with his books, enjoying a wider perspective thanks to the sharpness of his sight.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience, either literally or figuratively. The world that seemed normal to you became somehow different when finally the right “glasses” corrected your sight. In Christ, everything looks so different!

B. Lesson Context

Ephesus was a leading city of the Roman Empire. It was a large administrative center, perhaps 200,000 in population. Its Jewish population was substantial (some estimate more than 10,000), with many synagogues. Ephesus was a bustling seaport at the time, the point of contact for trade from the eastern and the western parts of the empire. Its harbor eventually filled with silt and became unusable, however, so the site was abandoned within a few hundred years. Ephesus was home to the Temple of Diana (the goddess's Roman name; Artemis in Greek), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (Acts 19:35).

Paul's first contact with the Ephesians was on his second missionary journey (AD 52–54). After his lengthy ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:11), Paul, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, set sail for Ephesus. He remained there only a short time and then departed for Jerusalem, leaving Priscilla and Aquila behind (18:18-21).

Paul's second visit to Ephesus was on his third missionary journey, the account of which is recorded in Acts 18:23–21:6 (about AD 54–58). He spent about two and a half years in that city (compare the chronological references in 19:8, 10 and 20:31). Those converted under Paul's min-

istry gave up their magic practices and burned their magic books—worth 50,000 pieces of silver, which is estimated to be equal to the yearly income of more than 130 men (19:18-19). The impact of his ministry had such an effect in the city that Demetrius, a leader of the local silversmiths, incited a mob at the theater against Christian teaching (19:23-41).

Demetrius's motive was less religious than economic. The problem was that, due to Paul's ministry, widespread conversion to Christianity occurred. This meant that people were not purchasing the cultic paraphernalia of Diana, and this created a significant income loss for the silversmiths. So Demetrius persuaded the crowds that Christianity was not only detrimental to their business but also brought disrepute to the goddess Diana, who was worshipped throughout "Asia and the world" (Acts 19:27).

The message of Christianity was making inroads in a great trade city of the Roman Empire, upsetting the status quo in the process. Paul's message reached both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10, 17; 20:21). After leaving Ephesus, he ministered in Macedonia and Achaia. And on his return Paul visited the Ephesian elders at Miletus, where he reminded them of his ministry, warned them about false teachers, and prayed with them before his departure (20:15-38). The letter we call Ephesians came about some five years later, while Paul was imprisoned (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

Our text picks up exactly where lesson 10 (Ephesians 1:1-14) left off. Most letters in Paul's time offered a brief word of thanks to whatever god the writer worshipped. Paul followed this practice in most of his letters in the New Testament, praising only the true God. And he used the thanksgiving not just as a formality—part of good letter writing—but as a way to introduce ideas that he would develop later in the letter.

I. Prayer for the Present

(Ephesians 1:15-16)

A. Because of Faith and Love (v. 15)

15a. Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus.

Wherefore signals that the new thought beginning here is a result of what Paul has already written (Ephesians 1:1-14; see lesson 10). Paul was present with Priscilla and Aquila when the Ephesian church was planted (see Lesson Context). Despite cultural pressures, the Ephesians had maintained their *faith in the Lord Jesus*. Receiving this report from messengers or other missionaries put Paul's mind at ease to some degree (compare 2 Corinthians 11:28-29).

15b. And love unto all the saints.

The greatest expression of faith in Christ is loving one another (Matthew 22:37-40; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 2:10-11). Christians are called to love others because Christ has loved them at the cost of His own life (4:9-10). The love of Christ knows no boundaries.

Despite popular usage today, the word *saints* in the Bible refers not to a select number of believers but to all those who put their faith in Christ. Loving every saint meant the Ephesians saw through the past divisions to cherish each believer they met (Galatians 3:26-28).

B. Of Thanksgiving (v. 16)

16. Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

Paul practiced what he preached: "Pray without ceasing. In every thing *give thanks*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). His time in prison likely afforded Paul time to spend in extended prayer. Even so, the phrase *cease not* does not mean he was praying 100 percent of the time. Instead, prayer was Paul's faithful habit (compare Romans 1:9-10; 12:12; Philippians 1:4; etc.).

Though Jesus warned about heaping up words

How to Say It

Achaia	Uh-kay-uh.
Aquila	Ack-wih-luh.
Demetrius	De-mee-tree-us.
Miletus	My-lee-tus.
Oraul	Oh-roo-awl.
Pax Romana (<i>Latin</i>)	Pahks Ro-mah-nah.
Priscilla	Prih-sil-uh.
Psyche	Sigh-kee.

when we pray (Matthew 6:7-8), what Paul models here certainly is a positive example. Indeed, in many aspects Paul's habitual prayers for churches and believers (example: Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2) fulfilled Jesus' own model of prayer, beginning with the expectation that God would be glorified and that His kingdom would come and His will would be done "in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Prayers that come from sincere faith and love are never inappropriate and bear repeating regularly. God always deserves our praise, and giving Him praise affirms that we treasure Him above all else (compare 6:21).

What Do You Think?

How do you incorporate thanks for fellow believers into your prayer life?

Digging Deeper

How does the state of your relationship with those believers—whether friends, "competitors," or strangers—affect your thanksgiving for them?

A Gracious Cycle

My wife and I thank God every time we remember the refugees who lived by us in northern Africa. At night next to the campfire, they patiently taught us their language. We worshipped with the small group of believers in their hand-built church building. They paged through the Arabic and English Bibles, trying to understand the truth presented in their second or third languages. Even their non-Christian neighbors were excited about the first Scripture portions in their own language.

The small refugee church kept growing. Our missionary teammates launched discipleship groups, a Bible translation team, and a literacy program. In 2020 the native believers numbered over 1,000 and led their congregations—planting more and discipling everywhere.

We already thanked God every time we remembered these believers, and we still with very great reason! This thanks naturally led us into even more prayer for them. I've heard of a *vicious* cycle, but this was a *gracious* cycle. Who ignites your heart in a gracious cycle?
—N. G.

II. Prayer for Growth

(Ephesians 1:17-19)

A. To Know Him (v. 17)

17. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

Paul has already spoken repeatedly of *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ* and expounded on the Father's *glory* (see Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; lesson 10). This inspires believers to praise.

The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the original Greek can be taken, grammatically, to refer to the human spirit. In other words, Paul asked God to give each person wisdom and revelation *in the knowledge of God* in his or her own spirit. Elsewhere the Holy Ghost, or the Spirit, is associated with wisdom (Acts 6:3) and spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:4, 13). Ultimately the Holy Spirit gives wisdom (knowledge of how to live rightly applied to living) and revelation (the uncovering of knowledge that cannot be achieved by humans, no matter how hard we think or meditate, without the Spirit's intervention).

Paul did not pray that the Ephesian believers receive the Holy Spirit for the first time. They were sealed already with the Holy Spirit as their guarantee of a future inheritance from God (Ephesians 1:13-14; see lesson 10). But the Holy Spirit has a role in applying the truth of the gospel to the life of the believer (1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Colossians 1:9-10).

The Bible itself is a Spirit-directed revelation of God (2 Timothy 3:16). Jesus is the most direct revelation of God that we have—God in the flesh (John 14:6-9). The Spirit is given to believers so that we can continue to grow in our knowledge of the Lord, and thus love Him and follow in His paths (14:23-27).

The wise person does not simply know the truth but lives it out (examples: Proverbs 3:7; Matthew 7:24-27). True wisdom and revelation come through knowledge of what God in Christ has done (1 Corinthians 1:20-25). No true wisdom, knowledge, or revelation contradicts the Lord's.

What Do You Think?

What blessings do you pray to see in the lives of your fellow believers?

Digging Deeper

How do you see those blessings benefiting the body of Christ?

B. To Be Enlightened (vv. 18-19)

18a. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened.

The result of receiving “wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:17, above) is godly enlightenment. Our physical senses allow us to make sense of the physical world around us. Our *eyes* can be similarly attuned to spiritual reality. This metaphor reminds us of Jesus’ words about those who have eyes that see or don’t see (Matthew 13:14-17; see Isaiah 6:10). Having our eyes wide open gives us a different perspective from which to interpret the world. What once seemed most important is now placed below seeking God’s kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

18b. That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

Christian *hope* is more than a wish for the future, because it is based on the actions of our trustworthy God. Specifically, our expectant hopes are based on Jesus’ ministry and especially His death and resurrection. Because of this work, the penalty for our sins is paid and we receive eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 20-28). These are part of *the riches of the glory of his inheritance* for us (Ephesians 1:14; see lesson 10). We have confidence that no matter what happens in the short term, we will experience the fullness of God’s blessings.

The biblical concept of calling can be specific (like the call of a prophet to ministry; example: 1 Samuel 3:10) or general (like the call of Israel to be God’s holy people; example: Joshua 24:1-18). The *calling* here is general, issued to all people to believe the gospel and put their hope in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). Responding to this call results in some immediate blessings, such as forgiveness and reconciliation with God (John 3:16-21) as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit

(Romans 5:5). Continuing in faithfulness to the call results in growth in the Spirit toward greater godliness (examples: 2 Corinthians 4:16; Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25). No matter where we are in our spiritual walk, we can always be encouraged by the hope we have and continue to appreciate the fullness of the life we have in Christ (John 10:10).

What Do You Think?

Is hope in the Lord contagious? Why, or why not?

Digging Deeper

What is one practical way you can prepare yourself to grow stronger in hope?

Rags or Riches?

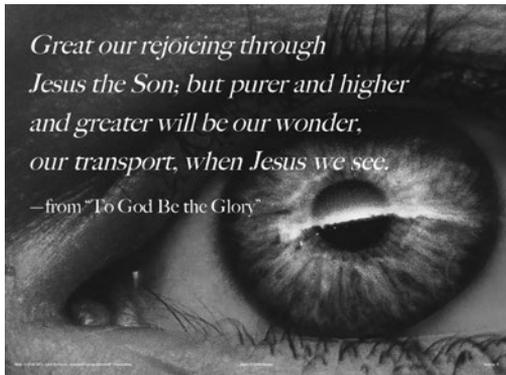
C. S. Lewis’s novel *Till We Have Faces* is a creative retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche. The woman Psyche was spirited away to a mountain to be wedded to the god Cupid. But her sudden and unexplained disappearance caused her family to believe Psyche was dead. Yet her sister Orual found her alive. When Psyche gave Orual a handful of berries and a palmful of water, claiming they were fine food and wine, Orual began to worry. Psyche also thought that her rags were elegant clothes and saw her palace in place of the desolate mountains her sister perceived. Despite the rags Orual saw, Psyche really *was* surrounded by the riches Cupid had given her, his bride.

Lewis retold this myth as an allegory of what life is like for Christians. Like Psyche, we see spiritual blessing where others see only physical circumstance. Paul prayed for the Ephesians to see the hidden, glorious reality of life in Christ. Do you see it? Are you echoing Paul’s prayer for those around you to see it too?

—N. G.

19. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.

In this verse Paul used several Greek words that can indicate *power* as a way of emphasizing *the exceeding greatness of God’s own power*. The greatest examples of God’s power are found in Christ’s resurrection (see Ephesians 1:20, below), in the



Great our rejoicing through
Jesus the Son; but purer and higher
and greater will be our wonder,
our transport, when Jesus we see.
—from “To God Be the Glory”

Visual for Lesson 11. *Play a recording of this hymn or ask the class to sing this verse together before ending the class with prayer.*

Father’s giving us new life in the Spirit now (see 1:17, above), and in our hope for our own future resurrection (1:13-14; see lesson 10). No force—not even sin and death—can stand against our Lord!

III. Praise of God’s Power

(Ephesians 1:20-23)

A. Glorified Christ (vv. 20-21)

20. Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.

Power throughout the ages is often expressed as military might, political domination, and the unchecked use of wealth and privilege for one’s own ends. But the power of God (see Ephesians 1:19, above) is seen in the cross and empty tomb of Christ. No amount of earthly power or wealth can restore life to the dead.

When David was king in Israel (1010–970 BC), he wrote, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psalm 110:1). This poem celebrated (in anticipation of) God’s rule that would come through the king He had promised to David. Jesus referred to this verse when He asked the Pharisees who the Messiah is (Matthew 22:41-46) and again when on trial before the Jewish leaders (Luke 22:66-70). At Pentecost, Peter explained David’s words as they referred to Jesus (Acts 2:29-36). Now Paul affirms that Jesus is indeed at the

Father’s *right hand in the heavenly places*, a clear sign that Jesus is *Christ*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *messiah* (John 1:41).

What Do You Think?

How do you experience Jesus’ rule as a current reality?

Digging Deeper

How does the knowledge that Jesus has already defeated evil empower you in situations for which Jesus’ rule has not yet been made complete?

21a. Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.

Listing *principality, and power, and might, and dominion* is not meant to be an exhaustive list of every possibility but, instead, a list that covers all possibilities succinctly in a few phrases. These terms have slightly different connotations—but taken altogether—indicate that Jesus’ reign and power are *far above* any competing entity. A *name* was considered another mark of power; invoking a name was thought to imbue a person with the power of the name they spoke (example: Acts 19:13-16). Jesus’ name and power and dominion are above all spiritual and physical powers that are opposed to His reign (compare Ephesians 6:12; see lesson 13).

When considering powers or names that stood against Christ, Ephesian believers would likely have had two entities in mind: Rome and the goddess Diana. Roman emperors had not always claimed to be deities, but when they started to do so, they were loathe to give up their god-like status. Terms like *lord* or *savior* were titles the Roman emperors used in reference to themselves. The Pax Romana—when many peoples and nations were forced into peace, or at least a cessation of hostilities (mostly)—seemed to the emperors reason enough to be hailed as saving the people. This caused issues for Christians who refused to call the emperors by these titles. Though the emperors liked to think they had brought peace throughout the Roman Empire, what they had actually done was conquer in the same way that every other empire has ever done: with violence.

Christ the Savior, however, brings a kingdom that spreads by and with peace (Isaiah 9:7; contrast Matthew 10:34). Though the emperor might claim to be the ultimate authority on earth and to be a son of a god, only Christ is *the* Son of God.

Especially in Ephesus, the mythical goddess Diana was named as a power opposed to Christ (see Lesson Context). Paul could have listed Diana or Rome specifically, but kept his list general and therefore all-encompassing. We do well today to recognize those powers or entities—whether objectively real (like a government) or real only in terms of consequences (like a false god/false teaching)—that still try to exert power opposed to Christ’s own.

21b. Not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

This phrase speaks to two realities. Certainly we understand that after Christ returns, His authority will be recognized as supreme (Philippians 2:10-11). But Paul first insists that the same is true *in this world* right now. Those who seem to have ultimate power in our world in fact only have whatever power God allows them to exert (see John 19:10-11).

B. Body of Christ (vv. 22-23)

22-23. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Once again Jesus’ power is emphasized. *All things* are *under his* control, though this present reality is best seen in the church. Only believers willingly submit to Christ at this time and accept His leadership in all things. In Paul’s day some thinkers like the Stoic philosophers sought fullness through a complete, direct experience of the creator. By connecting to the god who created all (so they thought), they would gain fullness in their lives. Against this, Paul asserted that *fulness* is found in the church and God is experienced through His Son.

This is the first time in Ephesians that Paul refers to *the church* as Christ’s *body*, a metaphor he uses frequently in his writing (Romans 12:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 1:18-24; etc.).

Growing in unity in faith and knowledge of Jesus causes the church—Jesus’ body—to grow toward “the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). As Jesus’ body, the church expresses *the fulness of him that filleth all in all*. As Jesus revealed the Father (John 14:9-10), so we the church are to reveal Christ. Growing to spiritual maturity together yields a healthy body (Ephesians 4:15-16) that is equipped not only to reveal Christ but also to act in place of His physical presence on earth.

What Do You Think?

How has your experience in the church led you to a fuller understanding of who Christ is?

Digging Deeper

How can you address failures of fellow believers while still loving the worldwide church as the body of Christ?

Conclusion

A. Live a Full Life

Even the best of times can be very challenging. Paul’s thanksgiving prayer in today’s lesson is a reminder that in Christ we have an eternal reality, already begun, that transforms our lives. We can experience the fullness of living because Jesus gives that fullness to His body, the church.

The call to action for this lesson is quite simple—but quite difficult: rest in the truth of what Paul has taught. We do nothing to create the reality: that the Father has chosen to reveal himself in the Son and bring us to greater knowledge of Him through the Spirit. All we can do is give thanks for this reality and constantly strive to live worthy of the calling. Our Lord is the Lord of the universe, and He gives us life to the fullest.

B. Prayer

Thank You, Father, that You have chosen to show the fullness of Your love through Jesus. We ask that Your Spirit continue to enlighten and guide us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Nothing can stand against Christ our Lord.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Ask students to recall a time when they were part of a group that had a clearly defined mission and purpose. Be prepared with an example of your own to get them started. As a whole class, reflect on how the mission and/or purpose impacted the energy and unity of the groups being discussed: 1—In what ways did the group’s actions align with its words and its stated mission? 2—How did a lack of a well-communicated mission statement impact people’s commitment levels? 3—In contrast, how did a well-communicated mission statement impact the commitment of the members? 4—What is the connection between a group’s actions and its mission statement? Encourage discussion about both positive and negative experiences.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Mission Accomplished?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After several minutes of work time, invite volunteers to share what they’ve discovered.

After calling time for either activity, say, “Today we’ll look at how Paul encourages Christians to do God’s work.”

Into the Word

Divide the class in half, designating one half as the **Ephesus Church Group** and the other half as the **Ephesian Group**. Distribute handouts of the questions below for in-group discussions.

Ephesus Church Group: Read Acts 19:1-10. 1—What picture do you have of the church in Ephesus? 2—How did the Holy Spirit work through Paul? Read Ephesians 1:15-23. 3—What is Paul saying about Jesus and the Ephesian church? 4—Reread Ephesians 1:15-16. Think about our church. What are some examples of faith in Jesus Christ and love for others that are hallmarks of our congregation? 5—How does applying Christ’s wisdom help us as a church?

Ephesian Group: Read Acts 19:11-20. 1—What picture do you have of Ephesus? 2—How did the word of God spread throughout Ephesus? Read Ephesians 1:15-23. 3—What is Paul saying about Jesus and the Ephesian church? 4—Reread Ephesians 1:15-16. Think about our church. What are some examples of faith in Jesus Christ and love for others that are hallmarks of our congregation? 5—How does applying Christ’s wisdom help our church reach out to our community?

Be prepared with examples in case participants struggle to come up with examples on the spot. After several minutes of small group discussion, allow time for the whole group to discuss the last question.

Into Life

Allow a couple of minutes for learners to think about people they know who have different prayer needs. Encourage each of them to choose one of those people (or a group) whose needs resonate with them. Then encourage participants to pray for those people. Distribute inexpensive note cards with envelopes. Allow approximately five minutes for learners to write encouraging notes to the people they prayed for. Close with a time of praise and thanks to God for His care for your church. Commit to God’s care the people who have been lifted up in prayer. Encourage everyone to send or deliver their cards

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Show Me the Love” activity from the activity page. Have students work in pairs to complete the chart and action plan. It is important to follow up on this activity next week. Make a plan to discuss (at that time) ways they saw God at work through their initiatives. Remind students to be prepared for this discussion. Then remember to praise and thank God together for the blessings—and to commit to God’s care anything that did not turn out as expected.

We Are God's Handiwork

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-8
Background Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 2; Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath

quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.



Key Text

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:10

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the basis of salvation.
2. Contrast salvation by works with salvation by grace.
3. Write a prayer of gratitude for the salvation available through grace.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Leaving Hospice
- B. Lesson Context

I. Dead in Sin (Ephesians 2:1-3)

- A. Living for the Enemy (vv. 1-2)
- B. Ensnared by Selfishness (v. 3)
From Condemnation to Comfort

II. Alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-10)

- A. Loved by God (vv. 4-7)
- B. Saved by Grace (vv. 8-9)
- C. Prepared for Work (v. 10)

Write Your Story

Conclusion

- A. Reacting to the Call
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Leaving Hospice

A hospice is a wonderful but sobering place. For terminally ill patients, today's hospice facilities provide care that brings comfort for the patient and the patient's family and friends. But no ill person looks forward to going to hospice, for few patients leave the hospice alive.

Because hospice patients expect death, the few who are discharged describe the experience with amazement and words like, "I was ready to die, but here I am alive. It is like I *was* dead and now I'm resurrected or something. I guess God has more for me to do."

"From death to life" is how in our text Paul describes becoming a Christian. The old life was really death, but the new life is real life, a fundamentally different existence. And it is really true that God made us alive in Him because He has work for us to do.

B. Lesson Context

Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians as a prisoner of the Roman Empire (see Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; also Lesson Context of lesson 10). If he wrote during his imprisonment in Rome mentioned in Acts 28:30-31, then he was living in his own rented house and could receive visitors, both his fellow Christian workers and those interested in hearing about Jesus. He was not in a dark dungeon, as we might imagine a prisoner to be.

However, his situation still was not pleasant. Being a prisoner meant he could not move about as he pleased. It meant that he faced the threat of a judgment against him that could even mean his execution. Confinement, worry, shame—these were his experience.

But Paul's prison letters do not suggest that the misery of Paul's condition dictated his outlook. Even as a prisoner, Paul repeatedly emphasized that Christians have an exalted place in God's plan. Being a prisoner might seem like death, but Paul could only speak of being *raised* from the dead.

Paul's readers, though not prisoners, were also in a difficult position. Their new faith put them at

odds with the world around them. Many of their familiar relationships had been cut off: Christians of Jewish background were sometimes no longer welcome in the synagogue; Christians of Gentile background were no longer to participate in the worship rites of paganism. Each group was under additional scorn for associating with the other. Christians were suspected of wanting to undermine the foundations of their communities.

Paul's message to the Ephesians emphasizes a different perspective, the perspective of God. From God's throne, Christians are not downtrodden but victorious. They are not rebels against the community but God's agents of renewal for the world. Despite rejection by neighbors or even those in authority, Christians—then and now—are the grateful recipients of everything God has done. We're already experiencing God's eternal blessings and anticipating a still greater future when Christ returns. We live together as God's temple (Ephesians 2:11-22). And Paul himself, proclaiming the gospel despite his confinement, exemplified what the lives of his audience were truly like (3:1-19).

But this status was not something they deserved or had earned. The work was all God's. They needed God's work in Christ to rescue them from the helpless state of death and make them alive to all that God had for them.

I. Dead in Sin

(Ephesians 2:1-3)

A. Living for the Enemy (vv. 1-2)

1. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Ephesians 1:18-23 (see lesson 11) spoke forcefully of Jesus' resurrection. With the opening *and you* here, Paul moves from God's display of power in Christ to the results for humanity. God has also given us a resurrection from death. This is summarized with the older word *quicken* (compare Colossians 2:13).

The immediate result of this transaction is not immunity to physical death (such death is overcome later; see 1 Corinthians 15). Rather, the new life at issue in the passage before us is spiritual



Visual for Lesson 12. Follow up the final set of discussion questions by asking how growing in grace blesses the Lord.

in nature. Spiritual death is a consequence of our *trespasses and sins*.

Only here and in Romans 5:20-21 do the Greek nouns behind this phrase occur in such proximity to one another (there as "offence" and "sin"). It's as if Paul was making sure the Ephesians didn't miss the point: they were guilty of rebellion against God, deserving of death. Death is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23).

To be a sinner is to be spiritually dead: without true life, without connection to God, without hope. And to die in one's sins is to be eternally separated from the Lord, with no hope of life following death. We may not want to admit it, but we are committing spiritual suicide when we sin. Those having been made alive in Christ should entertain no longing for that previous state.

2. Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Before coming to faith in Christ, Paul's readers lived under the sway of the trends and influences of a world in rebellion against God. Though this might have felt like freedom, it certainly was not. Before Christ they actually were in bondage to three closely related influences.

Before they came to love and submit to Christ, Paul's readers may have believed themselves to be free. But such was not the case. First, they had lived *according to the course of this world*. That

means they had acted as if God's standards for living were not valid. Today we still hear voices that call us to selfish sin, to moral failure, and to dishonesty. The world wants to direct us by its standards. If we let it, we are neither free nor godly.

Second, Paul connected this with serving *the prince of the power of the air*. Paul and his readers were acutely aware of the evil influences that attacked them. The prince of these spiritual forces of evil is unnamed here but corresponds with "the devil" later (Ephesians 6:11-12). The spiritual beings who are in rebellion against God are not our friends, but seek to destroy us and keep us far from fellowship with the Lord. The phrase *of the air* does not refer to a specific location, but to the spiritual nature of this evil. The letter to the Ephesians addresses this reality more than any other writing of Paul.

Even so, Paul was confident that Jesus has authority (and therefore victory) over all the spiritual forces that are in rebellion against God (see Ephesians 1:21; lesson 11). But this is an ongoing battle (see 6:12). This leads to Paul's third element.

B. Ensnared by Selfishness (v. 3)

3a. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

The third element that promotes sin lies within us. *We all* (Paul includes himself) had been driven *in times past* by personal *lusts of our flesh*. (*Conversation* in this older sense refers to one's conduct.) Paul clarifies by indicating that such behavior includes both *desires of the flesh and of the mind*. If one's body indicates that something feels good, the person may do it despite moral consequences. We can blame our sinfulness on our bodily desires. But the problem begins deep inside us, in how we think and what we want.

3b. And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Paul's summary of that former life includes the fact that he and his readers had been *even as others*. That *children of wrath* characterization of unbelievers is quite striking (compare Ephesians 5:6). We should note that the word *others* is inclusive.

It is not just pagan Gentiles who deserve God's wrath. Jews outside of Christ do not get a pass. Without Christ they too are children of wrath.

Paul's use of the word *nature* indicates something fundamental about us. As a result of our inherent tendency to sin, "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). We need not debate the possibility of living a perfect life and thereby earning our salvation. Although that is the standard (Matthew 5:48), it does not happen. It *will not* happen.

Such was our former life: infatuated by the sinful world, beset by temptations from the evil one, and controlled by out-of-control passion for the forbidden fruits desired by body and mind. When drawn to the influences of the world and the devil, people mired in sinful desires think themselves to be in control, but they are not. They are slaves to passion and lust.

What Do You Think?

How can reflecting on the sinful patterns of your past contrasted with your grace-filled present encourage you as you face uncertain times?

Digging Deeper

Who can you share your personal testimony with to encourage that person's own faith journey?

From Condemnation to Comfort

One Christmas I offered to spend a Saturday making cookies with my friend and her two toddlers. She is a single mom, and I love making cookies—so the fact that I'd also be helping her out was a bonus. After a few hours, the boys got bored "helping," which gave us two moms time to chat.

The conversation turned to parenting, and I found myself confessing my shortcomings. My friend admitted the same, with relief in her voice and demeanor. In my days as a young mother, I hadn't had friends to whom I could admit such mistakes in a loving environment. I was so happy to be that sort of friend to her.

We've all fallen short—sometimes sinfully—in

every role we fill. Paul included himself as a sinner, no better than anyone else by nature. As Paul did, we all lived under condemnation until Christ. When the opportunity arises, will you offer comfort rather than condemnation? —P. M.

II. Alive in Christ

(Ephesians 2:4-10)

A. Loved by God (vv. 4-7)

4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.

Having characterized one's pre-Christian past as consisting of infatuation with worldly influences, devil-driven disobedience, and indulgence in sinful passions, Paul moved the discussion to his readers' future life. This shift is signaled by movement from the "and you" (Ephesians 2:1, above) to the *but God* of the verse before us.

If God had no wrath, the world would have no justice. But if God had no mercy, the world would have no hope. Left to ourselves, we are rebels deserving of ruin and judgment, of death and all that it entails. But thanks be to God, we are not left to ourselves. God is not merely merciful, but *is rich in mercy*, just as He is rich in grace (Ephesians 1:7; see lesson 10). Because of God's infinite wisdom, utter righteousness, and richness of grace, His eternal plan is to be merciful through the self-sacrificial work of Christ. God's justice is satisfied by Christ's righteous life and self-sacrificial death, the innocent Lord himself willingly taking the place of the guilty. By this amazing means, God can be both righteous and gracious, both just and merciful (Romans 3:25-26).

Any hope for us must begin with God's mercy and love. Even while deserving God's wrath, people still bear His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). God has gone to great effort to save His lost image-bearers (Luke 19:10; etc.).

Paul is given to large statements when it comes to the nature of God. We see a great example in the description here of God's attribute of being rich in mercy (compare Romans 2:4; also Ephesians 2:7, below). Paul expands on this imagery by describing God's mercy as a *great love wherewith he loved us*. Paul used repetition for emphasis.

He was barely able to contain his excitement! God spends His inexhaustible supply of mercy on us freely and lovingly. "His mercy endureth for ever" is the repeated refrain of Psalms 118 and 136.

5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).

Life before Christ was one of being *dead in sins*. But as Christ has been raised from death to resurrected life, so too are we *quickened* (also Colossians 2:13). When through faith we are joined with Christ, we are joined in His resurrection. That means we are already transferred from death to life. But it also promises a resurrection to come (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). Resurrection life is both present and future. Salvation is both present and future.

The parentheses around the statement *by grace ye are saved* may lead us to believe that this affirmation is somehow secondary to the thought at hand. But what is mentioned so briefly here serves two purposes: (1) it anticipates a fuller explanation of salvation by grace a bit later; and (2) it helps paint the larger picture of God's attitude toward His wayward children as His grace is considered alongside His mercy and love.

6. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Our spiritual resurrection from the death of sin is followed by an "ascension." Christ's story is now our story; Christ's life is our life. Christ ascended to Heaven after His resurrection (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:1-9; etc.); and following our resurrection from spiritual death, we are positioned *in heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (compare Colossians 3:1-3). By God's grace we share Christ's victory and are agents of Christ's rule. Having front-row seats in the glorious light of the presence of Christ and His victories means we no longer fear the spiritual darkness.

7. That in the ages to come he might shew

How to Say It

Ephesians Ee-fee-zhunz.
Gentiles Jen-tiles.

the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Paul gives an eternal reason for God's rescue of sinners from spiritual death: that we might serve as a demonstration of His marvelous grace forever. The era that begins with salvation through faith in Christ is not an intermediate stage in God's plan. Rather, it is for all time, a plan for *the ages to come*. Again, Paul pictures God's grace as inexhaustible *riches*. To this is added the element of God's kindness, a word that implies essential goodness (compare Romans 2:4). *His grace in his kindness* is not God's response to anything meritorious we have done; rather, it is an offer that should draw a response from us.

What Do You Think?

Would you describe yourself as being "rich in mercy"? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper

How can meditating on God's character—including His mercy—encourage you to seek growth in that area in your own life?

B. Saved by Grace (vv. 8-9)

8a. For by grace are ye saved through faith.

The concept of *by grace are ye saved*, introduced in Ephesians 2:5 (above), is now explored in greater depth. Salvation by grace expects and requires a response. The salvation God offers is of no effect unless accepted *through faith* on the part of the one who is dead in sins. Faith is often defined as "assent plus trust." In other words, assent is accepting the gospel facts as true. Trust, on the other hand, is surrendering control of one's life to Jesus on the basis of who He is and what He has done (John 3:16; Acts 10:43; 16:31; 1 Timothy 1:16).

8b. And that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

A technical issue of the original Greek must be considered, an issue that is not apparent in our English translation. Every Greek noun and pronoun has a grammatical gender: either masculine, feminine, or neuter. So the gender of one or both

pronouns *that* and *it* in verse 8b here must match the gender of one or both nouns *grace* and *faith* in verse 8a to determine the antecedent.

But there is no match. The nouns are both feminine, while the pronoun *that* is neuter. The pronoun *it* does not actually exist in the Greek text; it has been supplied in English for smooth reading.

We conclude, then, *that not of yourselves* is not referring to any one particular element of verse 8a, but to God's system of salvation as a whole. Salvation is a gift; it cannot be earned. We are not partners with God in bringing salvation. We are recipients of this rich *gift of God*.

What Do You Think?

Who in your life would benefit from receiving grace from you as a taste of God's willingness to extend grace?

Digging Deeper

What prevents you from extending grace (which is undeserved) to that person?

9. Not of works, lest any man should boast.

If salvation resulted from our own efforts, we could be justifiably proud. Paul knows well the danger here. Before he met Christ, Paul's seemingly spotless life was a source of pride to him, evidence of his moral superiority (see Philippians 3:4-6).

But there are no *works*, no actions we can take, that make us worthy of being self-excused from our sins. The best among us still have lapses and failures; we still yield to self-centeredness and gratification of lusts. We have no room for boasting, only for humility.

C. Prepared for Work (v. 10)

10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

In the spiritual world of righteousness, there is no such thing as a self-made woman or man. Our spiritual resurrection is God's *workmanship*. We are the very people whom God has made—His deliberate, artful product.

Our new life has purpose, and this is part of

God's design. We have been rescued from spiritual destruction so that we might be instruments of *good works*. Yet we must realize that living the life that pleases God is not how we are saved. Good works are not a payment for our salvation, nor are they the condition of our receiving the gift. The gift is free. But the effect of the gift is transformation. Though the struggle against "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2, above) will continue, in Christ we have new motivation to serve and obey. And through God's Holy Spirit, we have new power to do so. As our sin made the old creation spin toward destruction, so by God's grace our new creation sets us on a course to do God's will on earth "as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Our aim becomes bringing our lives into line with the gift we have received, so that we reflect our new identity as God's people (Ephesians 4:1).

What Do You Think?

What biblical texts reveal the good works that God has prepared for *all* Christians to do?

Digging Deeper

How do you discern what good works God has prepared in advance for *you* to do?

Write Your Story

I always knew I wanted to be a writer when I grew up. I wrote my first book at 13 (it's cringe-worthy to think about now!) and spent my young adult years honing my skills and learning the craft. I began to have success by the time I was married with children.

At the same time, my heart was yearning to be closer to God. The closer I got to Him, the clearer it became that writing was a talent He gave me. I had a choice to make: Do I continue the path I'm on, publishing more stories and establishing myself with worldly success, or do I focus the talent God gave me to bring others closer to Him? God was asking me to tell people about Him. What will your choice be, when you're faced with how to use the gifts that God gave you? —P. M.

Conclusion

A. Reacting to the Call

If we are new to faith, we may feel overmatched by our calling. How can we measure up to expectations? How can we possibly overcome all the wrong in our lives? Paul reminds us to put our focus not on our inadequacy but on Christ's abundance. In Christ God has done everything for us. Forgiveness is full, and His power is sufficient. We need only continue to receive and trust, doing moment by moment what the Spirit directs and enables.

If we have followed Christ for a long time, we may fall into a habit of thinking we deserve any good things or benefits we have. Paul reminds us that our best was never good enough; that we stand with Christ by *His* action, not ours; and that whatever is good in our lives is now the result of freely receiving God's gift.

And if we are still considering faith in Christ, Paul gives us a powerful introduction to what God offers us. God has done all for us. But as we receive His gift, we will be forever different, set on a path to become what God, the good God of grace and mercy, has intended for us since before the beginning.

What Do You Think?

What truth from this text challenges one of your patterns of thinking, speaking, or acting?

Digging Deeper

What truth encourages you to continue in your faithful efforts and habits?

B. Prayer

O God, Your mercy is everlasting, and Your truth endures through the ages. May we receive Your gracious gift afresh. And may we, as Your handiwork, live lives that fit the richness of Your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We live now and forever by accepting God's gift through Christ's victory.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Option. If group members did the “Show Me the Love” take-home exercise (from the last class), discuss and give thanks for what they experienced.

Have participants form four teams: **Kindness Team**, **Goodness Team**, **Gentleness Team**, and **Self-Control Team**. Each team will need a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil; teams should assign the role of scribe to one person. Explain that teams will have three minutes to create a list of ways they showed God’s love to others in the past week. These should be specific actions they took. Avoid referring to this activity as a competition, although it’s fine to let the forming of teams serve to imply it as such. Use a stopwatch and have teams begin.

At the end of three minutes, call time. Invite teams to share several examples from their lists. Ask for their total number of listed actions. Write each team’s name and total number on the board. Then ask, “So, which team won?” Naturally, the team with the most “points” will declare themselves the winner. Act confused and look around for a set of “rules” or “goals” of the activity, finding none. Say, “Today we’ll look Ephesians 2 and discover that showing God’s love to others isn’t a competition, and God isn’t keeping score.”

Into the Word

Have participants close their eyes and visualize their own life in Christ as you slowly read aloud today’s Scripture passage, Ephesians 2:1-10.

Distribute paper and colored pencils; include additional art supplies if you’d like. Give the learners one minute to sketch how they imagine their lives in Christ based on Ephesians 2. Ask them to continue sketching or jotting down thoughts, pictures, or words that stand out as you read the text once more.

Have learners continue the contemplative activity as they reflect on the following: 1–Take inven-

tory of the gifts of God at work in you: mercy, love, life, grace, being raised with Christ, faith. What difference do these gifts of God make in your life? 2–How do you show these gifts daily?

Ask learners to define *initiative* (example: a procedure that starts with one’s discretion without any outside influence). Have learners contemplate the initiative God takes for His people: 1–Why does God take this initiative? 2–What is our response to God’s work in our lives? 3–How about in our world?

Option. Consider playing instrumental music as adults draw and write. (Check your church’s library or licensing rights to online music.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Rich in Mercy” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. Allow time for group discussion before continuing with the next part of the lesson.

Into Life

Distribute paper and pens or pencils. Divide the group into pairs. Have them discuss the following as they jot down notes: 1–What are the gifts God has given you? 2–How could you use them to show gratitude to God that He gives us salvation by grace—not salvation by works?

After a couple of minutes, ask for volunteers to share their ideas for the second question. Allow one minute for learners to express that gratitude as they write a prayer of thanks for salvation through grace.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Pass It On” exercise on the activity page. Allow one minute for the quick brainstorming exercise. Have individuals share their commitments with a partner for accountability.

After calling time for either activity, end the lesson with a prayer time, praising God for the love and grace experienced in being God’s workmanship.

God Gives Tools for Our Protection

Devotional Reading: Psalm 91

Background Scripture: Acts 19; Ephesians 6:10-24; Revelation 2:1-7

Ephesians 6:10-18

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.



12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Key Text

Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. —Ephesians 6:13

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 3: We Are God's Artwork

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List elements of the armor of God.
2. Distinguish between offensive and defensive elements of that armor.
3. Make a plan to use one of those elements more effectively.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. All the Toys
- B. Lesson Context

I. Empowered by God (Ephesians 6:10-12)

- A. Divine Protection (vv. 10-11)
- B. Unseen Enemies (v. 12)
The True Enemy

II. Outfitted by God (Ephesians 6:13-18)

- A. Fully Equipped (vv. 13-17)
Reflect, Create, Share
- B. Faithful Prayer (v. 18)

Conclusion

- A. Strong in the Lord
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. All the Toys

Though we probably hope to have a car that is reliable and safe, we are drawn to the extra features that the manufacturers build in to keep us buying their products. New styles, new colors, new electronics . . . these options get us into the showroom and thinking about a new or new-to-me automobile.

People who sell cars have their own term for those options: toys. A car with lots of optional features is, to the sales force, a car with “all the toys.” And such a car is usually the first car you see when you enter the dealership.

There is little about the Christian faith that is like shopping for a car. But our text today does have a list of equipment. Unlike a car's optional features, though, these are not toys but standard tools, the means God supplies for a victorious life in Christ. The Lord gives these to every follower of Jesus at no cost and with no exceptions.

B. Lesson Context

Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians when he was especially conscious of the stakes in the battle between good and evil. Most of his letters addressed specific issues within a congregation. Ephesians is unique, however, in presenting the gospel more generally, without taking on any specific problems this church faced. This may be due in part to Paul's intention that this letter begin circulating from Ephesus into the wider territory, what is now Turkey.

Having planted churches across the Roman world over the course of more than two decades, the apostle had been arrested in Jerusalem during a riot (Acts 21:26-35). A corrupt governor refused to resolve his case (24:27); so after sitting in jail for two years, Paul appealed to Caesar. This appeal resulted in a trip to Rome to stand trial (25:1-12).

Paul then spent two years under house arrest in Rome, waiting for a hearing before the emperor (Acts 28:30). During this time (about AD 61–63) Paul wrote letters to his churches in cities back east, including the one in Ephesus. Doubtless the

circumstances of his arrest and the daily frustrations of his imprisonment led Paul to greater awareness of Satan's schemes and the preparation necessary for defeating them.

I. Empowered by God

(Ephesians 6:10-12)

A. Divine Protection (vv. 10-11)

10. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

The last two chapters of the book of Ephesians focus on ways that true faith in Christ expresses itself in daily living. This includes pursuing unity among believers (Ephesians 4:3-4), speaking truthfully and dealing with people honestly (4:25, 28), extending forgiveness (4:32), avoiding sexual sin (5:3), being a good spouse and parent (5:22-33; 6:4), and demonstrating a strong work ethic (6:5-9). These imperatives are not always easy to carry out, so Paul reminded the reader of the true source of power to be able to do so: *the Lord*.

It may seem impossible to remain consistently faithful to Christ in every (or even any) area of life. From a human perspective, this is indeed the case. Left to our own devices, we cannot become the people God has called us to be. But God has not left us to our own devices. In commanding us to live rightly, He also provides us with the resources to do so. *The power of his might* is available to us in the battle against evil.

11. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Paul's illustration has prophetic precedent: Isaiah said that "righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (Isaiah 11:5)—referring to the Messiah, who is of course Jesus (see 59:17). His treatment emphasizes the thoroughness with which *God* has equipped His people for spiritual protection. In full equipment for battle, a Roman soldier was an imposing figure. Legions of these soldiers were a common sight throughout the Roman Empire. Even more than any earthly leader, God does not leave us defenseless or send us into situations where we are unequipped for success.

Paul did not describe Christians' duty as conquering territory or taking prisoners, though these have been the objectives of many an earthly military, especially Rome. The enemy we face is not other human beings but Satan, the spiritual accuser and adversary who tempts and torments humanity (2 Corinthians 2:11; 1 Peter 5:8; etc.). Only by relying on God are we *able to stand against the wiles of the devil*. The false ideas that might move us from steadfast faith have their origins not in humans but with the spiritual being who inspires those ideas. The main question is whether we will avail ourselves of what God provides.

B. Unseen Enemies (v. 12)

12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Judaism and other ancient religions taught that good *and* evil spirits all live in the heavens above the physical world, with human beings living in the bottom layer of a massive cosmic hierarchy. (Sheol—the place of the dead—was thought of as below the earth [example: Ezekiel 32:27].) Elsewhere, Paul describes a visionary experience of his own as a trip to "the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2), the place where God himself dwells beyond the sky (the first heaven) and the stars (the second heaven).

A similar outlook is reflected in the verse before us, which envisions Satan and other evil spirits living skyward (*in high places*; compare "heavenly places" in Ephesians 3:10), between the earth and God's abode. From the vantage point we're picturing, demons can descend to move quickly among humans to threaten and tempt us in various ways

How to Say It

Judaism	Joo-duh-izz-um or Joo-day-izz-um.
<i>Pax Romana</i> (Latin)	Pahks Ro-mah-nah.
<i>scutum</i> (Latin)	skyoo-tuhm.
Sheol	She-ol.

(Job 1:7). As “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2; compare John 14:30), Satan’s influence extends from certain high places to the world in which we live.

As a result *flesh and blood* people, including some who have influence over our lives and livelihoods, can serve as tools of Satan to bring the powers of darkness to bear in concrete ways. But they are not our true adversaries. Such people are not always even aware that their actions are serving the devil’s purposes, and many do not even believe in Satan at all. This does not change the fact that their actions can present serious challenges to us as believers, challenges that we must be prepared to face. These challenges can take the form of outright threats, persecution, ridicule, and rejection, but also (and more often) of more indirect temptations to join in their sin.

Even so, people are never the real enemy. Every person—no matter how their lives have been twisted by sin—was created in the image of God. These image-bearers of the Father are victims of the real enemy: Satan, along with the *principalities and powers* and *rulers* that willingly follow his lead. Against these spiritual forces is our struggle.

What Do You Think?

How would you interact with others differently if you paused to remember that Satan and his demons—and not other people—are the true enemy?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does this insight make it easier for you to obey Jesus’ command to love your enemies (Matthew 5:44)?

The True Enemy

Anger burned in my gut as I drove. I imagined myself throwing log after log onto a fire as I recalled everything my fellow missionaries had done. *How could they be my fellow Christians?* It didn’t occur to me to pray for them.

Anger flared up again recently, fueled by heated political exchanges with friends and family alike. For several weeks it became an obsession, rob-

bing me of all joy and peace. *How could they be so wrongheaded?*

Then I remembered the lesson I’d learned on the mission field: we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. I asked a friend to pray for me. And then everything changed for me. The obsessive anger cooled down as the fruit of the Spirit began to emerge again in my heart. Who is the “they” you think is your enemy? Pray for “they” now, and remember who your real enemy is. —N. G.

II. Outfitted by God

(Ephesians 6:13-18)

A. Fully Equipped (vv. 13-17)

13. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

This statement expands on what Paul already said (see Ephesians 6:11, above), thus emphasizing its importance. Because we cannot predict when, where, or how the enemy will strike, we must be dressed and ready for conflict at any moment. The goal of such preparation is repeated in the phrases *that ye may be able to withstand* and *having done all, to stand*. No matter what comes our way, we must be prepared to stand against every challenge. The ground on which we stand firm is our faith in the Lord and faithfulness to a godly lifestyle.

The armor that God provides—“the armour of light” (Romans 13:12)—will protect us *in the evil day* from assaults on our beliefs and from temptations to sin. This is an end-times term that anticipates a time when evil forces mount a terrible assault on God’s people just before God vanquishes them entirely, ushering in the fullness of His promised reign.

With Christ’s death and resurrection, the promises of God are being fulfilled. God’s kingdom is breaking into the world, and so we can appropriately say that the end times have begun (note the phrase “in these last days” in Hebrews 1:2). This means that Paul’s first-century audience was already facing the evil day; we still face it today. We do not put on the armor of God out of para-

noia but to stand firm against the very real forces that already assail us.

14a. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.

The word *truth* emphasizes both the content of our faith (the propositions of the true gospel message) and the way we live out that faith (our lifestyle). God has provided His people with the foundational gift of truth, a right understanding of reality (John 14:6; 2 Timothy 3:16; etc.). The gospel shows us our true selves: rebels against God in desperate need of His mercy. And it shows us that mercy is ours through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. Truth is our defense against Satan's lies (compare John 8:44). By thinking and living in ways consistent with God's truth, we prepare ourselves for periods of trial that would take us along false paths.

What Do You Think?

In what specific areas of your life may you be vulnerable to shame-based attacks? What in your past, present, or future causes you to doubt the gift of righteousness given to you by God?

Digging Deeper

How can putting greater trust in Jesus help you overcome feelings of shame?

14b. And having on the breastplate of righteousness.

Roman armor included a *breastplate*, a large leather or metal covering that protected the torso from frontal assault. Paul connected this piece of equipment with *righteousness* (compare Isaiah 59:17), the quality of living correctly in God's eyes. We protect ourselves from Satan's assaults by living rightly with the help of the Spirit. Being in the habit of living in the Spirit and growing in righteousness forms our character. In turn, that character serves as a defense against temptations of any kind.

15. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Travel of any kind instantly becomes more treacherous without the proper footwear. We note that the spiritual footwear of which Paul speaks is

not *the gospel of peace* itself, but *the preparation of that gospel*. The meaning of this phrase as structured in the original language is not easy to interpret. What exactly is this *preparation of*? There are several suggestions, but probably the best one is that the word *of* should be taken to mean something like "that results from." In this case, it is the gospel itself that prepares our feet for the day of spiritual battle (compare Psalm 37:31; Romans 16:20).

The Roman Empire claimed that it brought peace to all its subjects, referred to as the *Pax Romana*. But this peace was oftentimes merely a cessation of hostility with the possibility of violence never far off. The good news of Jesus' reign is that He brings perfect and lasting peace. Strife is replaced with goodwill among the subjects of the kingdom, wholeness of life for all who live under Christ's rule. But most of all, it's peace with God.

What Do You Think?

What are the key truths of the gospel?

Digging Deeper

What might be the effects of sharing this simple gospel with people without expanding with other doctrinal concerns?

16. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

This verse evokes images from ancient warfare to describe our conflict with Satan. *The shield* to which Paul referred was the large, semicylindrical *scutum* (Latin for "shield") of the frontline Roman soldier. These shields were locked together by soldiers standing shoulder-to-shoulder, which formed a protective wall of wood and leather.

Paul's application of this imagery makes two key points. First, *faith* is our protective shield. Faith is more than mere agreement to a creed or a statement about who Jesus is. It's more than how we were raised. It is the trusting commitment of our lives to the truth of that statement, placing our lives in God's all-mighty hands to provide,

protect, and direct. Obedient faith shields us from temptations and difficulties, symbolized as *the fiery darts* of Satan. Second, the typical Roman use of the *scutum* reminded Paul's readers that there is strength in numbers. As God's faithful people stand together, we become better able to protect ourselves.

What Do You Think?

How can you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith against the fiery attacks of the evil one?

Digging Deeper

If an arrow of doubt hits its mark in your life, what is your plan for recovering from this lapse of faith? Consider Ecclesiastes 4:12 and 1 John 1:9.

17a. And take the helmet of salvation.

Salvation in our thinking is sometimes reduced to the assurance of life after death. But salvation is not just future, but present. It's not just overcoming death, but restoration to a life of meaning, purpose, joy, and love in everyday experience. Paul also called this *helmet* "the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

The helmet also proclaims our allegiance to Christ. Roman soldiers' helmets were fashioned to declare their nationality wordlessly but vividly. So too the hope of our salvation should shine in our lives, making clear to those who have eyes to

see that we are under the Lord's command (Matthew 13:16-17).

Reflect, Create, Share

I recently wrote some poems inspired by the description of the armor of God in Ephesians 6. I began with the helmet of salvation:

let Accuser's voice grow weary
let it tear and crack with strain
while I, heedless, never tarry
poisoned thoughts to entertain.
filled instead with grateful wonder
has'tning to my Father's call
gracious to myself and others
showing love to Him and all.

This poem helps me remember that our true enemy is an accuser. If I find myself entertaining too many accusatory thoughts about myself or others, then I am poisoning myself and those around me. But realizing that I possess the helmet of salvation—knowing that I am saved by grace—helps me repel such thoughts when they arise.

Creating art is a wonderful way to reflect on Scripture and apply its truths. If you're not a poet, maybe you enjoy woodworking, knitting, baking, or some other craft. How can your hobbies help you meditate on the gospel and create something that inspires others as well? —N. G.

17b. And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Paul's audience did not have the entire collection we call the Bible. Instead they relied on Israel's sacred Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. And they did have this letter of Paul and perhaps a few others that had been copied and shared by other churches. They had learned the story of Jesus through the testimony of Paul and others, and they remembered and repeated those stories. For them *the word of God* was primarily the oral message of how God had acted in history through Israel to bring about fulfillment in Jesus.

The sword of the Spirit is the only armament that can be used offensively as well as defensively. But we must be careful not to use biblical knowledge



Visual for Lesson 13. Discuss with the class how a kingdom that spreads in peace (Isaiah 9:7) offers a different perspective on spiritual armor.

as a weapon against the lost and hopeless. When we remember that we are not fighting against people (see Ephesians 6:12, above), we are reminded that our knowledge and love of the Lord protects us but is not intended to harm the lost and hopeless. Following the nudges of the Spirit will guide us as we actively proclaim the gospel.

What Do You Think?

How does the Word of God function as more than a book to be studied? How is it a living and active part of your life?

Digging Deeper

What specific steps of obedience do you need to take in response to your knowledge of the Word of God (James 1:22-25)?

B. Faithful Prayer (v. 18)

18. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

The armament illustrations above emphasize ways that Christians are equipped for spiritual battle. Success in spiritual battle requires a unified effort. One manifestation of Christian unity is found in prayer. Believers should be *praying always* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Our prayers are to include *supplications*, requests for aid against spiritual dangers. The context suggests that Paul was not thinking of prayers for personal desires, but rather of requests for endurance and assistance against trials and temptations—like a soldier would call for supplies, reinforcements, and support. We will be much more successful at resisting the powers of evil when we have the assistance of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. By praying for one another, we ask God to supply all of us with what we need to keep fighting.

Prayer *in the Spirit* does not refer to speaking in some mystical language but rather to the channel by whom we communicate with God. Paul here portrays the Holy Spirit as a sort of messenger, carrying requests from the front lines. And because we pray in the Spirit, we should find our-

selves more and more often asking for God's will to be done, not our own, as Jesus demonstrated (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44).

Conclusion

A. Strong in the Lord

God's people are always under attack from the adversary. Made new in Christ, our lives are at odds with the world around us, the world that Satan steadfastly tries to align with his evil ways. We always feel the tension of living in a world battered by evil forces; we feel the pressure that the forces of evil press on us. It is easy and natural to feel weak when it seems that darkness surrounds us.

But by God's provision we are strong. There are no flaws in His armor, no gaps in the protection it supplies. Reviewing all that God has provided, we have renewed strength to stand firm in every circumstance. Though the spiritual battle may often seem bleak, we know that God holds victory in His hand. He will choose the moment to overturn all that opposes Him and His people. What seems slow to us is the patience of our Lord, giving each person time to accept the gospel and turn from the darkness of their previous lives.

So put on your armor! And remember who the real enemy is. Then, knowing your enemy, do no harm to anyone who is not your enemy—namely every creature that bears the image of God. Instead, recruit those who need God's armor. Offer them the protection that comes from accepting the truth about Jesus. Pray for those who join you in the fight. And keep praying for all who choose to remain defenseless against the devil's attacks.

B. Prayer

O God, You have met our every need through Christ. By Your power may we stand faithfully and firmly as Your people, no matter what we may encounter. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Outfitted with God's armor, we overcome every attack of Satan.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Option. Begin with participants sharing about how they have experienced God's grace and mercy during the last week.

Divide the class into pairs or trios and have them choose a scribe for the group. Distribute paper and pens or pencils to the scribes. Ask the groups to brainstorm a list of valuables we protect; the scribes should write down the ideas. While groups are working, create a column on the board labeled "Valuables." After two minutes, write suggestions from the groups in this column.

Create a second column called "Protection." Have groups brainstorm methods for protecting each of these valuables. After a couple of minutes, again gather ideas from the groups, writing them in the second column.

If no one included "heart and soul" in their list of valuables, add that to the board and gather a bit of feedback. Allow the whole group a minute or two to talk about why it is important to protect something valuable.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Seeking Security" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. Allow time for group discussion.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "The apostle Paul uses the imagery of a suit of armor to show how God protects believers from evil."

Into the Word

Distribute paper and pens. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 6:10-18. Then allow five minutes for participants to write about two issues: 1—ways they personally feel a sense of spiritual warfare in their lives, and 2—ways they sense that spiritual warfare is affecting society at large (given that Satan is a liar, deceiver, accuser, etc.). Let people know when half the time has passed; give another alert with one minute remaining.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18 aloud again slowly. This time, have group members list on their papers each of the elements of the armor of God. Ask: 1—Which of the elements are weapons for offense? 2—Which are for defense? (Note: only the Word of God is an offensive weapon; all others are defensive.)

Form three or four groups, making sure each group has at least one mobile phone or tablet. *Alternative.* Distribute current newspapers and magazines to each group.

Instruct groups to search for stories about some of the societal issues they wrote about. Allow up to 10 minutes for groups to research and choose one issue to present. Ask them to consider these: 1—the worldly challenges, 2—the world's protections, and 3—the ways the armor of God can lift the burdens of the situation. Give each group two minutes to present their results to the group.

Into Life

Brainstorm actions the class can take to defend against at least one of the examples of oppression, injustice, and evil presented in the previous activity. Select one activity for your group to battle Satan's agenda in your community.

Then turn to individual concerns. Ask, "Which of the pieces of armor from Ephesians can most help you defend against this pressure?" Allow a minute for reflection on how we overcome every attack of Satan when outfitted with God's armor. Repeat Ephesians 6:10-18 as a closing prayer, replacing verse 12 with "We bring you our individual struggles, Lord. Hear them now," and pause for students to silently share their hearts with God. Then read verses 13-18 to finish the prayer.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Dress Me in Armor" activity from the activity page. Allow one minute for participants to complete the exercise.



DISCOVER | REFLECT | DISCUSS

Standard LESSON® Study Bible

With study notes derived from 60 years of the best-selling Standard Lesson Commentary®, this Bible is the perfect complement to enhance your study of Scripture. Whether you're in Sunday school, with a small group, or doing your own personal study—this Bible will help you discover, reflect on, and discuss Scripture in new and powerful ways. Bible students will find depth, relevance, and real-life application.

“Great reference Bible, love the side-by-side commentary.”

Ramona Kellam, Sunday School Teacher, TX

NIV® Standard Lesson® Study Bible
978-0-7847-7686-5 • \$49.99
Hardcover

NIV® Standard Lesson® Study Bible
978-0-7847-7685-8 • \$59.99
DuoTone



KJV Standard Lesson® Study Bible
978-0-7847-7478-6 • \$49.99
Hardcover

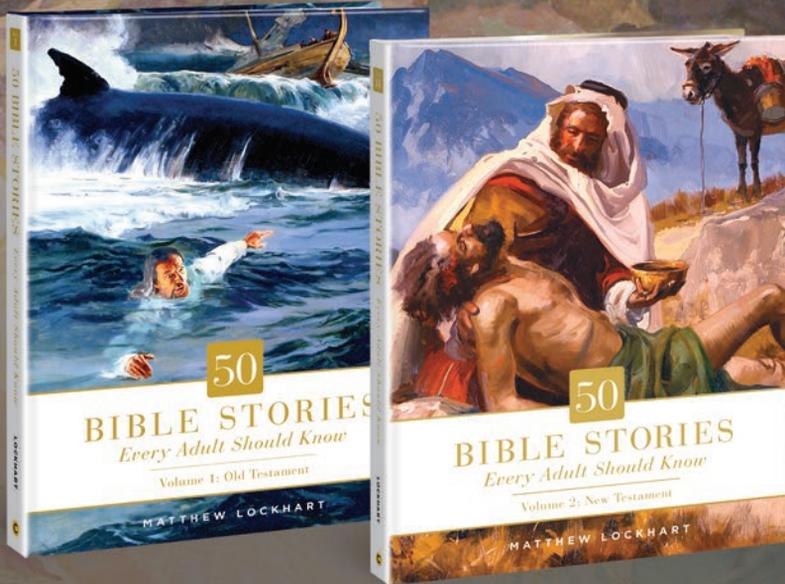
KJV Standard Lesson® Study Bible
978-0-7847-7477-9 • \$59.99
DuoTone

GET YOURS TODAY.

DAVID C COOK™

transforming lives together

800.323.7543 | StandardLesson.com | Available from your Christian retailer



WAIT ... *That's* in the Bible?

Chances are there are stories in the Bible you've never heard or have forgotten. This visually rich collection—curated especially for adults—will surprise, entertain, and inform as you journey through some of the most important stories in the Old and New Testament. Discover and see the Bible in a fresh way with classic Bible art featured in this two-volume set.

Available from David C Cook
and everywhere books are sold

DAVID COOK
transforming lives together

Standard[®]
PUBLISHING
part of the David C Cook family

A Adult
KJV Bible Teacher
No. 6290

1629022